

From Imagination to Inquiry: The Discourse of “Discovery” in Early English Writings on India

Pramod K. Nayar
Department of English
The University of Hyderabad, India

Abstract

This article unravels a discourse of discovery in early English writings on India, suggesting that this discourse works through three stages. The first stage constructs a fantasy of discovery about India even before the Englishman’s arrival in the country. This demanded a representation of Indian wonders and the wondrous geographical-physical expansion of England into the distant reaches of the known world. In the second stage a narrative organization of the “discoveries” of Indian wealth and variety was achieved through the deployment of three dominant rhetorical modes—visuality, wonder, and danger. In the final stage the Englishman meticulously documented but also sought to explain the discoveries in the narrative form of the “inquiry.” The “inquiry” shifted the discourse from that of India as a wondrous space to India as knowable and therefore manageable one. The sense of wonder modulates into a more organized negotiation, as a quest for specific information and as means of providing this information.

Keywords: discovery, early modern, English travel writing, India, narrative strategies

Colonial discourse constructed Asia, Africa, South America, Australia, and the Caribbean as objects and spaces to be evaluated, examined, and eventually governed for exploitation and the civilizational mission since the last decades of the eighteenth century. Although early constructions of India or the East may not approximate to the truly “colonial” sense, the

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representational modes deployed in European texts when talking about the East suggest a “proto-orientalist” tendency (Barbour 2003: 17), encoding a “colonizing imagination” (Singh 1996: 2). In the European “framing” of other spaces they emerge as “objects of colonial knowledge” (Raman 2001: 3). This article examines the discourse of discovery in the proto-colonial travel narratives between 1550 and 1700.

The “discovery” of India and the vast, wealthy, and varied Mughal Empire, required investigation rather than imagination, even though its wealth had been the subject of European fantasy for a long time before the first voyages. It required careful documentation of resources, people, wealth, landscape, and geography. What I am proposing, in short, is that the seventeenth-century English traveler set about exploring and “mapping” India’s diversity, variety, and prosperity in various domains including mineral wealth, people, customs, attitudes, plant and animal life, and systems of governance. Though there was no real colonization of India in this period, the English traveler was performing a narrative ordering and colonization of India, “capturing” India in the form of detailed descriptions, tables of data, pencil sketches, and histories.¹ This means, even though governance and domination was not their stated aim, the early English travelers were seeking to understand and know India. India was an object that had to be studied—and studying it required particular methods of analysis and “inquiry.”

This article argues that the “discovery” of India in these travelogues did not stop at the awe of “finding” or encountering a world of difference. Rather, discovery invariably modulated into a more programmatic exploration of this difference and an ordering of the difference into specific categories through which the threat of difference was controlled. Such a programmatic exploration is what this article terms the “inquiry” mode, and was a central feature of early modern travel narratives. While analyses of the “discovery” theme in European writings have noted the conversion of the East into an object of knowledge (Raman 2001; Said [1978] 1994; Singh 1996), the exact process through which this objectification was achieved has not been explicated. All commentators agree that stereotyping seems to have been the dominant mode of “framing” the new lands, but it does not cover the wide variety of engagements that the Europeans had with the East. The article argues that the “inquiry” was the apotheosis of a process, where the engagements with the East incrementally and

sequentially moved from “merely” imagining or fantasizing the East through an experiential engagement with it and finally a process of framing and narrative ordering of it. The narrative organization of discovery, therefore, extended the work of imagining the East when the traveler actually experienced the new lands. The inquiry then moved beyond even this narrative organization of the “discovered” lands and peoples. The article therefore traces the stages through which the “discovery” proceeded. The first stage in the process, imagining, offered a wondrous East. The second, narrative organization, isolated the components of the “wonder” in terms of danger or a rich visual experience, while still emphasizing the wondrousness of the experience. The third stage, inquiry, tones down the wondrous by explicating and explaining the wondrous by casting the East in mundane terms of figures, data, and maps. “Wonder,” this article suggests, functions as a major element in the narrative organization of European discovery by presenting a land and its cultures as offering enormous profits of wealth, pleasure, and a variety of experiences. “Discovery” here is therefore an amalgamation of pleasure and revulsion, both cast within the rhetoric of wonder.

The textual “discovery” and “exploration” of the Orient by Europe, accompanied by trading relations and the circulation of commodities, was underway since antiquity, and had become the anterior moments to the voyages, explorations, and “discoveries” of the post-1550 period. Driven by a wide variety of desires and aims—plunder, profit, pleasure, national pride—the seventeenth-century travel narrative engaged in what Mary Baine Campbell, following Nelson Goodman, terms “worldmaking” (1999). This worldmaking, in the discourses of Englishmen about India, is the subject of this article.

European proto-colonial discourses of travel, exploration, and discovery of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries reveal, as their discursive subtext, a shift from imagination to inquiry.² Inaugurated in fables of danger, pleasure, profit, and expansion, the discourse of discovery then demands a narrative of experience of wonder, and finally organizes that wonder through an inquiry about what the traveler observed. Although this discourse is not necessarily underwritten by colonialist ideologies of dominance, it was a “way of taking possession without subjugation and violence” (Pratt 1995: 57). It was, to phrase it differently, a narrative possession through the tropes of discovery and inquiry.

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The colonizing discourse of discovery in the pre-colonial period had three related components, or stages, and make up the three sections of this article: the imaginative exploration and the fantasy of discovery, the narrative organization of the experience of discovery, and finally the itemized documentation of the “discovered” through a process of inquiry. These components merge messily into each other, thus testifying to the “problem” of representation and narrative organization of new experiences. The “shifts” and stages within the discourse—from “imagination” to “inquiry”—are not chronological across texts or ages. They might work alongside each other as different and differing narrative and rhetorical registers through which an event or experience is being recorded. The allusion to predecessor texts—even fables, at times—for example, suggests the imaginative register of the discovery discourse. Within this same allusion, the narrator might introduce the register of experience and inquiry.

Imag(in)ing Worlds: The Fantasy of “Discovery”

Early modern representations of places and cultures such as Turkey, notes Richmond Barbour, were calculated to “alarm and to reassure” (2003: 17). Thus Richard Knowles’s *The Generall Historie of the Turkes* (1603) opened with a description of “the glorious Empire of the Turkes, the present *terror* of the world” (cited in Barbour 2003: 17–18; emphasis added). Monsters, wealth, luxuries, strange beasts, inexplicable faiths and customs peopled the early modern imag(in)ings of multiple worlds.³ The first English edition of Marco Polo’s *Il Milione* appeared in 1503. In 1510 Henry VIII and the Earl of Essex appeared in Turkish costume on Shrove Tuesday. The 1552–1553 Christmas revels included musicians dressed as Turks. Mock naval battles on the Thames in the sixteenth century often had warlike Turks. Court masques after 1600 often had Persian characters in them (McJannet 2008). The first English travel publications were translations of foreign travelogues such as Richard Eden’s *The Decades of the New World* (1555), which carried a history of the Columbine voyage and that of his successors. In 1582 Richard Hakluyt published his *Divers Voyages Concerning the Discovery of America*, following it up with *The Principall Navigations, Voiages, and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1589). In 1577 Monardes’s natural history of the Indies appeared in English translation.

Edward Said in his field-defining *Orientalism* noted the negative image of Islam in Dante ([1978] 1994: 69). During the medieval period the geography of the world that had Asia, Europe, and Africa was redrawn to depict the northern parts of the globe as the desirable “West” and the East as a space of excess (Akbari 2000). Texts about the Crusades, such as the Middle English *Richard Cœur de Lyon* (notable for its scene of Richard I consuming human flesh, that of a Saracen) and other cultural texts demonstrate both a nationalism and a racializing discourse (Heng 2000). London’s playhouses regularly staged plays (by Ben Jonson, Christopher Marlowe and, of course, William Shakespeare) and witnessed imperial pageants where exotic Asia and Africa had a particular role (Barbour 2003). Juan González de Menodoza’s account of China was translated into English in 1588. The fascination for witchcraft, devils, and assorted demons, coincided with the voyages for the Northwest Passage (Franklin 2008). French and Italian texts (such as Ottaviano Bon’s *The Sultan’s Seraglio*, translated into English in 1625) offered images of the Arab harem that in turn inspired English works like John Fletcher’s *The Knight of Malta* (1616) and *The Island Princess* (1647, this one ostensibly set in India), William Daborne’s *A Christian Turned Turk* (1612), and Phillip Massinger’s *The Renegado* (1624) eroticized Turkey (Malieckal 2008). The European Renaissance, Walter Mignolo demonstrates, had a “darker side”: with the “rebirth of the classical tradition as a justification of colonial expansion” (2003: vii). Collections such as Hakluyt’s and later Samuel Purchas’s *Hakluytus Posthumus*, or *Purchas His Pilgrimes* ([1625] 1905) organized these texts for popular consumption.

Fantasy writing, ethnographies, exotic travel writing, literary works (oe.g., Said [1978] 1994; Raman 2001; Barbour 2003, Ballaster 2005; Ostovich et al, 2008; and several in between), autobiographical accounts of journeys, cosmography, utopian writing, travelogues, fictions, and natural history enabled the European creation of textual worlds other than about Europe.⁴ The sheer volume of such texts suggests a demand for textual Others (Sherman 2002). This exuberant worldmaking across media and genres furnishes the imaginative impetus to explore, catalog, and eventually dominate other worlds. Two consequences arise from the circulation of textual worlds and apparatuses of worldmaking.

One, the discourse of discovery begins even before the experience of the new world. The Orient was first pro-posed, “posed in advance,” for the traveler to prepare himself for the sights and experiences. Columbus,

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Stephen Greenblatt (1991) notes, read and carried the works of John Mandeville and Marco Polo. Hakluyt had reprinted sections of Mandeville (first English edition of Mandeville had appeared in 1499) in the first edition of *The Principall Navigations*. Sir Thomas Roe traveling to India cites earlier travelogues from Joseph Acosta, James Lancaster and Purchas collections. Thus the eastward-bound traveler has already, in a sense, “discovered” it through this textual apparatus. (However, it was also true that many travel descriptions merely culled such information about places from predecessor texts [see Parker 1995].) Exoticism, danger, adventure, difference, barbarism, evil, and other “characteristics” of the East were therefore already a part of the European cultural imaginary by the sixteenth century, and furnished a vocabulary in advance of the experience.

Two, the rhetoric of imag(in)ing of other worlds—of wonder, monstrosity, excesses, difference—generated a narrative-stylistic repertoire from which the traveler could draw upon when he needed to describe the places he visited and the things he saw. There were two main ingredients in the imaginative construction of places beyond the known: wonder and the monstrous, and the wondrous expansion into the distant reaches of the known world.

Wonder and the Monstrous

The famous John Mandeville (n.d.) makes it clear that there are many wonders that exist outside of his experience and purview: “There be many other divers countries and many other marvels beyond, that I have not seen ... And also in the countries where I have been, be many more diversities of many wonderful things than I make mention of.” The rhetoric of a limited wonder serves to exaggerate the possibilities of wonder: what else lies beyond what Mandeville has seen? The fantasy of discovery is located within this rhetoric of unseen wonders, inviting exploration and experience.

Wonders as objects, Daston and Park demonstrate in their magisterial work, marked the “outermost limits of the natural” (1998: 13). The wondrous was aligned with fantasy, imagination, freakery, and those excluded from the domains of the rational and the credible (15). It indicated the “breaching” of the boundary and the classificatory system (14). Combined with “curiosity,” wonder enabled a process of inquiry, a quest for the rare,

the novel, and the strange. Wonder not only enabled a rewriting of the past, it was “constitutively open ... to the making of new worlds” (Campbell 1999: 3). Wonder is at once, Greenblatt reminds us, “the designation of a material object and the designation of a response to the object,” between “almost phantasmagorical inward states and thoroughly externalized objects that can ... be touched, catalogued, inventoried, possessed” (1991: 22). Wonder, then, transforms the object and the emotion into a project of inquiry preliminary to appropriation.

“Wonder” included related attitudes and classificatory modes—such as the monstrous. The monstrous was a central mode of dealing with the marvelous and the foreign. It started off as a geographical construction, initiating a tradition of locating the monsters in the Eastern periphery of the known world. *Wonders of the East* (1,000 found in the *Beowulf* manuscript of Old English) described women with boars’ tusks, thirteen feet tall and man-donkey hybrids. Walter Raleigh in *The Discovery of Guiana* (1595) provides a vivid account of the Ewaipanoma peoples who are “reported to have their eyes in their shoulders, and their mouths in the middle of their breasts, and that a long train of hair groweth backward between their shoulders” (Raleigh 1595).⁵

In addition to such descriptions of “natural” monsters, early modern narratives were also fables of the cultural monstrous. This version of the monstrous paid attention to what it saw as transgressive bodies, pleasures, habits, and cultural practices. An excellent instance of this early modern cultural monstrous rooted in the sense of excess is available in Mandeville’s account of idol worship by Indians:

there is a great image more than any of the other, that is all covered with fine gold and precious stones and rich pearls ... it sits in a chair of gold, full nobly arrayed, and he hath about his neck large girdles wrought of gold and precious stones and pearls ... And to that idol go men on pilgrimage ... And some ... bear knives in their hands, that be made full keen and sharp; and ... as they go, they smite themselves in their arms and in their legs and in their thighs with many hideous wounds; and so they shed their blood for love of that idol ... And they set this idol upon a car with great reverence, well arrayed with cloths of gold ... And they lead him about the city with great solemnity. And before the car go first in procession all the maidens of the country, two and two together full

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ordinately. And after those maidens go the pilgrims. And some of them fall down under the wheels of the car, and let the car go over them, so that they be dead anon. And some have their arms or their limbs all to-broken, and some the sides. And all this do they for love of their god, in great devotion. (Mandeville n.d.)

The excesses Mandeville so lovingly recounts offers a vision of a culture given over to transgressive excesses, whether of devotion or of ritualistic exhibitions of the same. Greenblatt has argued that these excesses situate the Indian rituals as an “extreme version of Christian practices” (1991: 47). Greenblatt, astonishingly, in my opinion, ignores the power of the rhetoric of excess to suggest complete difference. If Indian rituals embody excess, then Mandeville suggests implicitly, Christianity is marked by sobriety. In the very next paragraph Mandeville (n.d.) writes: “And as men here [Christian Europe] devoutly would write holy saints” lives and their miracles, and sue for their canonizations, right so do they there for them that slay themselves wilfully for love of their idol.”

The Other is marked *by* and *as* excess, even if that excess is in things as mundane as clothing. Julie Crawford (2005) has persuasively argued that monstrous births in early modern England were treated as versions of human “fashion grotesques.” Thus excessive eating, jewelry or even spectacles of pageantry were evaluated as monstrous in the early modern period. Elizabethan sumptuary laws were modes of regulating such excesses that, in Crawford’s analysis, indicate an early modern “ambiguity between materiality and divinity” (Crawford 2005: 55). Philip Stubbes’s *The Anatomy of Abuses* (1583) for instance spoke at length on the sin of excesses of clothing, claiming that fashion was un-Christian (Crawford 2005: 55).

What we see here is a wide variety of objects inscribed within the rhetoric of wondrous monstrosity: human form, natural phenomena, beasts and plants, religious beliefs, fashion. But the rhetoric of wonder in the discourse of discovery does not end with cataloging monsters and excesses, it seeks out the new as well. That is, the discourse of discovery was driven by entirely fictitious monsters and wonders created in the European imagination as well as the wonders the travelers actually encountered “out there.” Together, these constituted the wonder of discovery, from the fantasy of what might be out there, to the engagement with radical otherness.

Expansion and the Farther Worlds

If wonder was an attitude and a rhetoric, it helped locate the foreign at particular distances inviting exploration. Wonder in the early modern period was a property that also drove a related narrative trope: that of expansion. Wonder was, as Daston and Park argue, linked to curiosity and the quest for explanations and thereby expanded the bounds of knowledge. Expansion is a key trope in the early modern worldmaking, and it is to this, a more palpably colonial trope than the earlier ones, that I now turn.

“We will ... make a coasting voyage along the shores of the arts and sciences, not without importing into them some useful things by the way.” Thus declared Francis Bacon in *The Great Instauration* (1620). Continuing with this image of exploration he writes in the *New Atlantis*: “The end of our foundation is the knowledge of causes, and secret motions of things; and the enlarging of the bounds of human empire” (1627). Robert Hooke writing about the endless possibilities opened up by the invention of the microscope in his *Micrographia* (1665) also uses similar exploration-expansion imagery: “By means of the telescope, there is nothing so distant but may be represented to our view; and by the help of the microscope, there is nothing so small, as to escape our inquiry; hence there is a new visible world discovered to understanding.”

John Locke in his introduction to Awnsham and John Churchill’s *A Collection of Voyages and Travels* (1704), citing William Dampier’s travels, declared: “The empire of Europe is now extended to the utmost bounds of the earth ... and the relation of one is an incentive to stir up another to imitate him, whilst the rest of mankind, in their accounts without stirring a foot, compass the earth and seas, in visit all countries, and converse with all nations” (cited in Lamb 2001: 49)

Every traveler in seventeenth-century India sought to impose upon the reader the enormity of distance he traversed—starting with the distance between England and India, and going on to distances covered within the subcontinent. Here is an example, pages picked at random from Thomas Roe’s journal. The first is from the sea journey, the second the journey across India:

July 21—at two in the afternoon we made land NE by N7 leagues off, taking it for Molalia in 12° 57 ...

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August 14—in the morning we saw the coast of Magadiox in 4°N latitude 4 leagues off ...

August 16—NE from 6...

August 19—we saw Abdalacore E by N 3 leagues off ...

November 4—9 mile

November 5—15 mile

November 6—20 miles to Nuderpur

November 7—18 miles to Nimgull

November 8—15 milers to Sinchelly

November 10—18 miles to Chapre. ([1926] 1990: 14–17, 67)

The narration suggests an epic, seemingly interminable, journey, measurable only as numbers. Jonathan Lamb, reading the rhetoric of voyage narratives argues that “the frame of the epic is too closely bound to a destiny and program of national foundation” (2001: 54). The voyager shares the aura of the heroes of chivalric romances, yet departs from it because he does not quest for erotic love, but rather ventures forth on a national project. This was stated in no uncertain terms by John Wolfe in his translation of van Linschoten’s *Itinerario* (1598) into English. Wolfe hopes that the translation would “work in our English nation a further desire and increase of honor over all countries of the world ... for dispersing and planting true religion and civil conversation therein” (cited in Kamps and Singh 2001: 6).

The deliberate notations of distance traveled function as a narrative of epic journeying and clearly serve as markers for the expansion of known boundaries. With this the proto-colonial traveler has been “prepared” to see and experience India. His perceptions are always already mediated by what he has read about India.

The Narrative Organization of Discovery

The experience of moving through and residing in India generated a different order of the discourse of discovery, what we might think of as the narrative organization of the experience of discovery. By narrative organization of discovery I mean the modes of conveying the sights seen and the experiences of encounters with a new culture. The narrative organization

of discovery employs three dominant rhetorical modes of visibility, wonder, and danger.

The Rhetoric of Visuality

The pleasure of travel and discovery was embodied in its key trope: the spectacular difference that was seen through a penetrating gaze that could “observe” all that was necessary and later render into a narrative for the consumption of readers in England. Seeing and recording what they saw was the structural framework from within which the early modern traveler perceived India. It positioned the Englishman as the “seeing eye” and the worlds opening up around him as objects to be seen.

Thomas Herbert in fact complains of the pressure of this demand to observe when he says that “the desire to see took away my sight” (1634). Henry Lord, writing in 1630, describes a pleasurable spectacle notable for its passivity and erotic charge: “A people presented themselves to mine eyes, clothed in linen garments, somewhat low descending, of a gesture and garb as I may say, maidenly and well nigh effeminate” (cited in Singh 1996: 19).

John Ovington in a prefatory letter in *A Voyage to Suratt* (1696) proposes to “penetrate into all that is any where useful” and assures his royal reader that he would find, “all that is divertive in its entertainment.” John Fryer “venture[s] to offer some novelties” that earlier travelers had not “so thoroughly observed” (1698). Edward Terry (1655) hopes to present a “well-form’d picture” of India for the entertainment of the readers back home.

The passivity of the natives “presenting” themselves for exploration combined with the keen eye of the traveler and the framing of the entire scene as a “well-form’d picture” constitute the visual rhetoric of discovery. Terry’s promise to frame the scenes from the Mughal empire, Ovington’s promise to “penetrate” the empire and Fryer’s assurance of previously unseen “novelties” all constitute this discourse of discovery by proposing the quest for newness as their intended goal. A prefatory poem affixed to Thomas Coryate’s *Coryate’s Crudities* ([1611] 1905:76) states:

His eyes on all have set all eyes on him,
Whose observations past, whose present pen
Whose future circlings of this globe, will dimme

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The wondred glory of all other men,
And give the world in one synoptick quill ...

Another poem says: “What thou saw’st with sharpe eyes which did pearce all Sharp tombs, great gates, and manners of the people” (Coryate 1905: 41). Wonder and pleasure are therefore to be captured by the eye and then delivered as a “synoptic” narrative for those back home. India here is a space of prodigious pleasure, of both the erotic and the commodity variety, constructed in a fantasy of appropriation, mainly troped as the visual consumption of difference and novelty.

The Rhetoric of Wonder

“Discovery” and “exploration” narratives, in the seventeenth century, were often cast within the rhetoric of wonder. This rhetoric took two major forms: one, describing the expanse and limitless wealth, prosperity, population, and variety of animal and plant life, the other treating these same expanses as instances of uncontrollable excesses.

“Vastness and Variety,” Thomas Herbert’s prefatory poem (1626), invites the reader to expect variety: “Since then varieties please God and men;/ Thank him whose sweat and cost demonstrates them.” The poem captures a key element in the discourse of pleasurable discovery: variety. Profusion and variety was a feature of the medieval and early modern marvelous (Daston and Park 1998: 33; Nayar 2008: 7–39). The wonder of the new lands was partly due to the enormity of the land and its variety of all things—from wealth to animal life. Mapping India’s plenty, the seventeenth-century travel narrative establishes it as a space of wonder in terms of the objects described but also the observer’s own emotional response, a combination of awe and wonder.

Ralph Fitch, traveling through India in the 1580s, often restricted his observations to purely commercial interests. Thus, his account of Belgaum consists of only one sentence: “one of the first towns we came unto is called Belgaum, where there is a great market kept of Diamonds, rubies, sapphires and many other soft stones” (Locke [1930] 1997: 99).

A petition submitted by Governing Board of the East India Company to the House of Commons in 1628 treated the prospect of travel as a national

necessity because of the profits to be had: “This trade as it is great in itself; so doth it yet further enlarge our traffic and strength” (cited in Singh 1996: 25). It would be a means to “increase our strength, wealth, safety, and treasure” for both “private ends, but for public good” (Singh 26).

Bengal, discovered Thomas Bowrey ([1905] 1997), had everything in abundance. He “most plentifully does abound with ... calicoes, *rammals* [from the Persian “rūmāl,” or kerchief], raw and wrought silks, opium, musk in cod ... long pepper, and several sort of drugs” (133–134). Bowrey goes on to note:

adorned with many fine structures, and very populous ... well furnished with gardens, fine groves, a very large bazaar or market place, one of the finest chowtries (or free lodging houses for all travelers) ... inhabited with some of the richest merchants of the kingdom; and all sorts of commodities that Orissa, Bengala, and Patna do afford are here daily to be bought and sold in the public bazaar. (167–168)

Edward Terry refers to the “most spacious and fertile land,” where food is “in abundance,” with “many woods and groves” and a “great variety of fairly goodly trees” (1655: 92, 102). Fields have “many hundred acres of corn of diverse kinds ... standing as thick on the ground as the land could well bear it” (100). John Fryer speaking of the agricultural prosperity of the Mughal period praises the land for “obey[ing] the first commandment, increase and multiply” (1698: 179). Wheat, he notes, is “in abundance” (134). Forts in India, Fryer observes, have “many camels of war” and “great stacks of hay and corn” (135). It is, he concludes, “rich in all things necessary” (188). Traveling through the Gujarat region Fryer records the “flourishing fields of corn, and plantations of tobacco” (411). Thomas Best (1934: 230–234) and Anthony Hippon (cited in Purchas [1625] 1905 vol. 3: 83) also catalog the variety of plant and animal life they see in India, capturing the sense of profusion in an enumerative fashion.

Yet this profusion is not always a pleasurable one. The rhetoric of wonder often folds pleasurable surprise at the profusion and variety into emotions of awe and fear. This shift of register within the discovery narrative occurs mainly in the case of the experience of animal life and Indians (*see the Rhetoric of Danger section below*).

Transgressive Spaces

The rhetoric of transgression in early European writings on India exhibits an obsession with customs and traditions that seem taboo, evil, and demonic. India is constructed as a space of bodily, political, and cultural transgressions, even though it was obviously rich, fertile, and beautiful. This supplementing of praise with criticism is what Kenneth Parker refers to as “praising the land, yet dis-praising the people,” a common narrative mode when Europeans wrote about Africa (Parker 1995: 144). India, while being a space of profusion is also a space of transgression and excess. Excess and transgression, therefore, become central themes in the discourse of discovery.

Ralph Fitch, like all other English travelers, objects to the Hindu and Muslim reverence of *sadhus* and *jogis*. “They took him for a great man,” writes Fitch, but sure he was a lazy lubber” (Locke [1930] 1997: 113). Continuing his diatribe against the native holy men Fitch writes: “the people of these countries be much given to such prating and dissembling hypocrites” (Locke [1930] 1997: 113). John Fryer, nearly a century later, would react the same way as Fitch, with revulsion and shock at what he perceives as a transgressive cultural practice. About the *jogis*, Fryer insinuates that the “the whole family is at his beck, as long as he stays to do the wife a kindness” (1698: 179). He describes them as the “dregs of the people ... full of envy and ill designs, who glory in the incantations and charms” (179). They are “vagabonds, and ... the pest of the nation they live in” (95). John Ovington claims these *jogis* when “denied their civil requests” simply “tak[e] by violence” whatever pleases their fancy (1696: 361), thus branding them thieves. Thomas Herbert (1634: 192), Christopher Farewell (1633: 27) and Edward Terry (1655: 281–287, 293–294) also see the transgressive and barbaric nature of Hindu (and occasionally Islamic) beliefs as embodied in the “filthy” fakirs.

The space is also transgressive because of the excesses of the king—a theme that would resonate throughout colonial writing until the twentieth century. Ovington terms the Mughal (and Ottoman rulers) “inhumane,” with a “turbulence of spirit,” and exhibiting a “meaner action” (1696: 171, 202–203). Fryer describes the poverty to which the people have been reduced due to poor governance (1698: 52–53, 146–147, 194). The wealth of the empire, at one point recorded with admiration and envy in a regis-

ter of wonder, now begins to acquire a demonic stature in the eyes of the English beholder. Terry speaks of the Mughal's "covetous heart," which is "unsatiable" and is like "a bottomless purse that can never be filled" (1655: 400, 412, 422). The profusion of food, also once admired in these narratives, is also taken as an illustration of depraved greed and gluttony. John Ovington therefore is contemptuous of the way even Muslims consumed pork when served by the Englishmen (1696: 240–242). The rhetoric of wonder thus tropes the land as one that offers endless pleasure but also uncertainty, a loss of control, and immeasurable profusion. "Wonder" thus presents a land and its cultures as offering a variety of enormous profits.

The Rhetoric of Danger

Uncertainty, difficult topography, obstructionist natives, impenetrable native cultures and customs all prove a hindrance in the Englishman's discovery of the subcontinent. The discourse of discovery therefore, carefully positions discovery as an act of agency performed by the Englishman in the face of hardships. It becomes a means, in other words, of enacting their selves.

Thomas Stevens, perhaps the first Englishman in India, speaks of his departure from England in a 1579 letter: "The setting forth from the port, I need not to tell how solemn it is, with trumpets and shooting of ordnance. You may easily imagine it, considering that they go in the manner of war" (Locke [1930] 1997: 20). A prefatory poem to *Coryate's Crudities* (1611) expresses astonishment at the dangers Thomas Coryate must have faced: "They only force from me praise and wonder/ Who past belief have conquered many dangers." Thomas Herbert, writing of his travels in the 1620s would describe his journey thus: "This journal was taken in danger ... Many storms it has endured for company, but more hot days, which have sun-burnt my lines, as well as face" (1634: 1).

Queen Elizabeth's letter to the King of China, dated February 1583, and carried by John Newbery underscores that the traveler had "moved to undertake a thing of so much difficulty ... [and] having entered into so many perils" (Locke [1930] 1997: 33). Edward Terry informs his readers that the voyage often left the sailors in very bad health: "Where our ships companies, when they often times there arrived, with very weak and fee-

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ble bodies, usually by that sea disease, the scurvy” (1655: 14). Even within India, William Hawkins complains that the journeys were unsafe. He is therefore thankful that “after much labour, toil, and many dangers” he arrives safely in Agra in 1609 (Foster 1921: 80). Christopher Farewell records how Thomas Smith, the governor of the East India Company, warned him of the “dangers of the enterprise” (1633: 6).

In the seventeenth century, the discourse of discovery is always entwined with the discourse of danger. The signs are wrong, the navigation uncertain, and the destination unpredictable in its hospitality. The first “sign” of India, appears to have been snakes, as both Thomas Stevens (Locke [1930] 1997: 29–30) and Ovington (1696: 129–30) indicate. Ovington records his first experience of the Indian monsoon as being deeply disturbing:

The whole hemisphere then is most sullenly dark, and the sky over-cast with the thickest weighty clouds, so that the earth seems rather enclosed within a huge ocean of water, than only a few watery clouds, whose black and lowering aspects is so very melancholy, that it gives the fairest representation imaginable of the terrors of a second universal deluge. (1696: 133)

Thomas Stevens indicates that the voyage was essentially “errant,” wandering with hopes of acquiring knowledge.⁶ The sailors, records Stevens, see “crabs swimming on the water that were red as though they had been sodden; but this was no sign of land ... [The fishes] were not sign of land, but rather of deep sea” (Locke [1930] 1997: 28–29). Ralph Fitch mentions how he and his companions were thrown into prison upon arrival in Goa (Locke [1930] 1997: 78). Infighting and betrayal among their own kind also added to their troubles, as the letter of John Newbery of 20 January 1584 makes clear (Locke [1930] 1997: 79–80).

“Danger” in the discourse of discovery is also linked with the inability to navigate the vastness of the. This sense of danger arises mainly in the Englishman’s encounter with the other-than botanical aspects of India. “Discovery” here is the discovery of magnitude, frightening profusion, unnavigable spaces, and incomprehensible numbers.

Crops, forests, and plants give rise to a sense of pleasure and the Englishman is able to deal with this “form” of profusion with considerable equanimity. Mineralogical and botanical marvels in particular, notes Mary

Baine Campbell (1988: 69–71), were preferred over anthropological and animal ones and this aspect of the rhetoric of wonder emerges clearly in the slightly uncomfortable register used by the Englishman in recording the subcontinent’s human and animal life.

John Ovington complains: “the prodigious growth of vermin, and of venomous creatures, at the time of the monsoons, do abundantly likewise demonstrate the malignant corruption of the air” (1696: 144). The land itself, for Ovington is “so large” (1696: 185). John Fryer records the excesses of sounds of “buzzing hornets” (1698: 56), the “roarings of tigers, cries of jackals, and yellings of baloos, or overgrown wolves ... the croaking of frogs” (1698: 141–142). Thomas Roe is in awe of the vast numbers of animals he encounters: “I met in one day 10000 bullocks” ([1926] 1990: 67). Roe notes the great “trains” of important men: “some two hundred, some five hundred, foot-men following them” (91). Edward Terry finds the demographic, anatomical, and physiological excesses of the animal and insect life unbearable. The snakes are overgrown and there are far too many “harmful beasts of prey” that are “most ravenous” (1655: 122, 123–124). More significant, Terry is upset at the numerical excesses of the Mughal army:

First there are one hundred thousand soldiers which always wait about that king ... and all his Grandees have a great train of followers and servants to attend them there. And so have all other men according to their several qualities, and all these carry their wives and children, and whole families with the, which must needs amount to a very exceeding great number. (1655: 419–420)

The king has, observes Terry, “great multitudes of fighting men,” in “huge companies” and he is forever accompanied by “an infinite company of men” (1655: 422–423).

Thus far, then, the discourse of “discovery” has exhibited two significant components—the imaginative conquest and anticipation of discovery, which the travelers “consumed” even before their arrival in India, and the narrative organization of discovery as a wondrous act. It remained for the Englishman to now convert the incomprehensible, excessive, dangerous vastness and variety into a comprehensible form.

The “Inquiry” and the Others

The rhetorics of visibility, wonder, and danger organized the experience of the Englishman into a readable narrative. But there was more to this narrative organization of the experience. It was not enough to offer a sentimental response—such as wonder—to the sights of the new worlds, but to transform the object of wonder into an object of investigation and afterward, documentation. This investigation marks the final stage in the discourse of discovery where the Englishman meticulously documented sights, but also sought to explain them to his countrymen back home. This “inquiry,” as a heuristic, shifts the discourse from that of India as a wondrous space to India as knowable and therefore manageable one. It converts the overwhelming variety, vastness, and difference into a set of figures, maps, and names through things as diverse as topographic accounts, the questionnaire, and the map.

Instructions and “inquiries” for travelers were issued by various people from as early as the sixteenth century. Certain Briefe, and Special Instructions for Gentlemen, Merchants, Students, Soldiers, Mariners, and others Employed in Services Abroad (Anon. 1589) asked the traveler to organize the observations into sections. These sections included cosmography, astronomy, geography, chorography, topography, husbandry, navigation, the political and ecclesiastical states, literature, histories, and chronicles. Francis Bacon, in his 1625 work, “Of Travel,” proposed a detailed list of things the traveler must observe and record. Bacon recommended maintaining a diary to make these “observations.” The Earl of Essex, Philip Sidney, and William Davison published Pleasurable Instructions in 1633. What these instructions reveal is the urgent need to codify what has been seen and experienced and delivered to the readers. Travelers went out with the idea of narrating all that they saw and experienced, in a form that their readers back home would accept and understand. The “inquiry” was such a mode of translating their foreign experiences into a manageable form for consumption.

The authority of the traveler proceeds from a dual movement. The first movement is marked by claiming affinity with predecessor narratives. We have already noted how every traveler cites earlier texts. This citation of authorities, as Peter Dear has demonstrated (2004), was a mode of legitimizing one’s own expertise. The second movement consists of a depar-

ture from and extension of predecessor texts. Raleigh's (1595) refers to Mandeville and Herodotus. Thus when Thomas Roe informs us that there are errors in the Mercator maps ([1926] 1990: 91) he not only shows his familiarity with existing geographical knowledge, but also marks his own addition to that knowledge. When he claims to extend the bounds of knowledge, or rectifies "errors" in earlier texts, he has asserted his "travel authority."

Seventeenth-century narratives often set out to "inquire" into the social, cultural, geographical, and political aspects of the countries they visited and traveled through. Rather than coming upon something suddenly the inquiry converted the "discovery" into a predetermined quest for specific goals: wealth, trading rights, and information. In other words, the inquiry transforms the discourse of discovery into a discourse of the quest. Influenced by the injunctions to keep the epistemological aims of travel in mind, as well as by genre of "natural history" and the overall mercantile aims, these texts "organized" the new worlds into objects of such inquiries. We see the beginnings of this form of documenting discoveries in instructions for natural histories.

In his 1666 "General Heads for a Natural History of a Country," eminent scientist Robert Boyle asked the traveler to pay attention to vegetation, customs, religious beliefs, and even the process for making gunpowder (Boyle 1665–1666: 186–189). He followed this with *Inquiries for Surat* (Boyle 1666–1667: 15–19). John Locke, following Boyle's pattern, prepared a list of inquiries to ask Francois Bernier, the French physician (Carey 1996: 264). "Inquiries" were thus encyclopedic. Evaluations and explanations inevitably followed a recital of facts in these inquiries.

The catalog, a key form of "inquiry," recorded facts and figures, converting the vastness of India into something understandable and manageable. It drew distance charts and directions between places, thus offering a guidebook for future travelers. It prepared lists out of the unimaginable complexity and variety. If profusion and novelty evoked wonder, as we have already discussed, then wonder leading to inquiry ordered these objects and varieties into tables, statistics, and descriptive catalogs.⁷

William Hawkins lists ranks of the Mughal's jewels and animals in the army (Purchas [1625] 1905, vol. 3: 29–30, 31–34). Every traveler gives the distance between cities and towns in India. Here is a detail from William Finch:

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From Oudhe to Acbarpur is 30 c[kose], some 30 c whence lies Bonarce, the principal mart for Bengal goods. From Ajoub to Jounpore 30c, seated on a small hill ... Thus much from Agra to Jounpore this way; from thence (returning that way to Agra) to Alabasse is 110c. 30c all which are through a forest. (Purchas [1625] 1905, vol. 3: 66)

Terry provides (1655) a catalogue of trees and woods, textiles and minerals (111–18). Fryer details animal life (35), appends a plan of Madras town (36), identifies trees (178) and diseases (182). Fryer's most fascinating catalogue, constituting no less than eleven pages, is of "coins, weights and precious stones," usual in those places of trade within the charter of the Honourable East India Company (205–217). Thomas Herbert offers a quick dictionary of Malayan language, with English equivalents (202–205).⁸

Listing places, weights and measures, the locations of markets and the language codes needed to negotiate in the form of catalogs, the "inquiry" codified the new worlds. The list relies on the noun, and does not demand any particular syntax (Campbell 1999: 80). It functions as a spectacle, where all items are displayed without apparent interference from the one putting the display together.⁹

The catalog-questionnaire shifts the "project" of discovery, with its sense of wonder, shock, or surprise, into a more organized negotiation, as a quest for specific information and as means of providing this specific information. "Inquiries" sent out by Boyle, Locke, and others sought details about specific matters. Sitting (un)comfortably beside the rhetoric of wonder in the discovery narrative and the fantasy of conquest, as well as enormous wealth and horrors, the inquiry also "converts" the Englishman into a careful recording eye rather than a surprised one.

Campbell argues that "listing genres" such as the invoice, the catalog, and the questionnaire indicates "possessiveness," where "a huge accretion of bjects or fragments [are] held together by their common owner, or by a subjectivity modeled on ownership" (1999: 186). This possessiveness is what can be thought of as an act of appropriation through the discourse of discovery. It is easy to make this argument about lists of coins, weights, measures, and information about mines, but it is less easy to do so for other "objects."

Wonder constructed the space of India as an overwhelming site of the extraordinary, the new, the vast, and the different. Such an "object" that

seemed to transcend the bounds of knowledge and classificatory systems demands new modes of discursive management. It was the age when texts like Hooke's *Micrographia* (1665) turned inward, exploring interiority as never before. Campbell notes how attention was turned to the increasingly small (1999: 196), ignoring the imagined and the transcendent in favor of the particular. It turned, as she puts it, "from the sublime, the transcendent, the celestial, to the concrete, the physiological, the mundane" (Campbell 1999: 202). Itemization was, therefore, the order of the day where particulars would be examined and details accreted.

When Fryer dissects a gorilla to explore its insides, or when other travelers seek to understand diseases in India, what they are performing is this accretion of details. This transforms their role from observer to "investigator." Rather than the explosion of the unmappable wondrous, we now have the explicatory detail. Wonder is a response to the singular, rather than to the "general and categorical" (Campbell 1999: 80). This is precisely what we see happening.

The singularity of Indian harvests, the massive fields of crops, the enormous wealth of the Mughal are elided in favor of the categorization of these ones. When the profusion is itemized, it is also atomized—the sense of wonder modulates into a determined quest to understand the workings of the object that induces wonder.

If wonder was also driven by a sense of shock and revulsion—at the "immoral" wealth or "barbaric" religious practices—the ethnographic detailing working within the realm of natural history shifted the study of this "other" culture into a study of its constituents. If the Fryer list of currency and the Herbert list of Malayan words clearly served mercantile negotiations between Europeans and natives, the ethnographic detailing atomized the awesome, repulsive, but undeniably wondrous Hindu rituals, Islamic beliefs, and the splendor of the kings into its raw materials. By this I mean to suggest that ethnographic detail of the natural history variety demanded and offered causal explanations and explications of what was singular, inexplicable, and transcendently wondrous. Particularization breaks the mass of the wondrous object into fragments and then arranges the fragments methodically. The ethnographic "inquiry" therefore positioned the Englishman as the observer-inquirer who fragments in order to organize for specific information. It renders the Englishman a "quester" who, by breaking up the object is able to discern the secrets within rather

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than remain awed by the outward. This penetrating gaze—already noted as being central to the discovery narrative—is itself a colonial move.

Knowledge in the early modern period was what was visible. The catalog, whether in the narrative form of natural history or tables, literally converted the mass into itemized spectacle, and presupposed the ability to see. Thus, the Englishman positioned himself as one who could see through into the heart of things, see through the wondrous façade, and offer detailed knowledge.

From imaginative occupation through the experience of wonder to the chorographic, categorical, and mathematized appropriation of the new worlds in the narrative of inquiry, the early modern period announces a shift within the discourse of “discovery.” The discourse of “discovery,” as this article has shown, is composed of various “moments”: the imaginative topoi of the world, the narrative organization of the “discovered” in various rhetorics of wonder and danger, and the incessant and incisive delving into particularities in “inquiry.” The discourse of “discovery” constitutes the early moments of a narrative mapping and organization of a space viewed predominantly as a mercantile source of enormous (wondrous) potential, wealth, and pleasure. However, the wonder of this potential source is then the moment at which a deeper knowledge of the space is sought and actively pursued in the form of the inquiry. Eventually this very “inquiry” will metamorphose into the great colonial surveys and the mysterious India would become the most documented segment of the world’s largest empire.

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Notes

1. Jyotsna Singh therefore refers to this period's narratives as exhibiting a "colonizing imagination" (1996: 2), and Richmond Barbour speaks of this period as "proto-Orientalist" (2003: 17). Mary Louise Pratt notes about the discourse of travel in European natural history writing about new worlds, that it was a "way of taking possession without subjugation and violence" (1995: 57).
2. This is not to be taken to mean that "imagination" and "inquiry" were distinct and had nothing to do with each other. Very often one partook of the other mode.
3. I use the term multiple rather than the Other—the standard binary critics locate in colonial discourses—to indicate that, though the East might have been used as the antagonistic and polar opposite for the construction of the self in European writing, much of the colonial and pre-colonial texts seem to suggest an awareness of the plural and multiple nature of the worlds the voyagers saw (for example, the existence of differences between the "Other" cultures of the Turks, the Jews, the Arabs, the Chinese and the Hindus. The Other was always Others to the Europeans.
4. Ethnographic accounts, Joan Pau Rubiés suggests, were integral to the travel writing genre after the sixteenth century because geography (or cosmography) was a means of "encyclopedic synthesis for the description of the world" (2002: 242). Ethnographic discourses, which are part of almost every early modern as well as later travel, narratives "convert the linear historicity of a foreign culture into a timeless present serving the historicity and narrative identity of the European writer/consumer" (Campbell 1999: 226).
5. The reference to humans with heads beneath their shoulders was picked up by no less than Shakespeare in *Othello* (I.iii: 144–145).
6. "Errare," which gives rise to both "error" and "wander" was seen as a means of knowledge. In Cartesian epistemology of the early modern age the mind wanders in error because the pursuit of falsity, or even incomplete information, ultimately leads one to truth (Van den Abbeele 1992: 45–46, 52). "Chimeric pursuits and erroneous assumptions," writes Antonis Balasopoulos, often led to "world-transformative" discoveries and events (2006: 136).
7. The "inquiry," as can be seen, anticipates the great "surveys" (zoological, botanical, archaeological, geological, and ethnographic) and "collections" (plants, animals, artifacts) from the last decades of the eighteenth century until the early twentieth by the more "secular" scientific projects of Joseph Banks (botany), William Roxburgh (botany), Charles Mackenzie (archaeology), H. H. Risley (anthropology), Duncan Forbes and William Jones (linguistics, law, literature), James Rennell (mapping), Richard Lydekker (game animals) and others.
8. Inventorying was a part of the job description for the sailors and pursers, as well as the treaties signed with the Mughal officers. The bond executed by the pursers (1607–1608), when joining the ship charged them with "inventory[ing] of all such provisions tackle ammunitions victuals and other necessaries which are or shall be during the said voyage brought aboard the said ship or provided for those of the same" (Birdwood 1965: 221–222). Thomas Best account of his voyage (1612, printed in Purchas [1625] 1905) describes the "Articles" agreed upon by the governor of Surat, the governor of Ahmedabad, and the English merchants. One Article insisted that "a just and true inventory, notice, and knowledge be taken, of all such monies,

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goods, jewels, provisions, apparel, and what else to our nation belongs” (Purchas [1625] 1905, vol. 4: 126).

9. It is not to be assumed that cataloging and inventorying were mundane acts demanded by their readership alone. Indeed, as Campbell points out, there was a certain mixing of business with pleasure in the inventorying of commodities (1999: 27). A certain amount of voyeuristic pleasure for the readers of such inventories cannot be ruled out either. It creates in the mind of the readers settings for “imaginary adventures” (29). In other words, our argument comes full circle here: this narrative organization of the experience of discovery fuels the imagination of leisured readers, and furthers the drive to seek out novelties in new places.

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