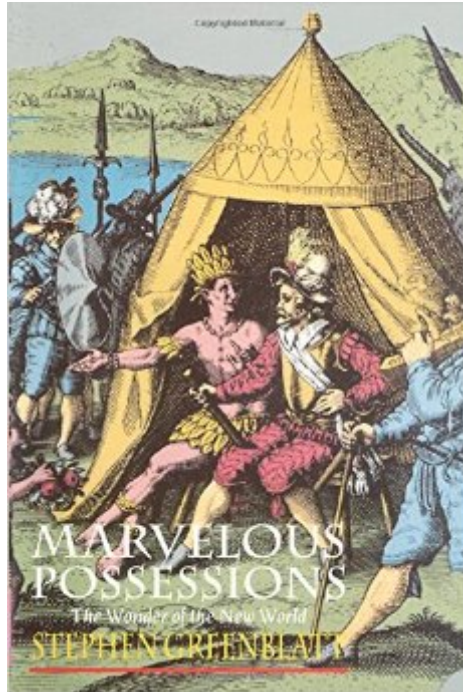


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# Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder Of The New World



## Synopsis

Marvelous Possessions is a study of the ways in which Europeans of the late Middle Ages and the early modern period represented non-European peoples and took possession of their lands, in particular the New World. In a series of innovative readings of travel narratives, judicial documents, and official reports, Stephen Greenblatt shows that the experience of the marvelous, central to both art and philosophy, was cunningly yoked by Columbus and others to the service of colonial appropriation. He argues that the traditional symbolic actions and legal rituals through which European sovereignty was asserted were strained to the breaking point by the unprecedented nature of the discovery of the New World. But the book also shows that the experience of the marvelous is not necessarily an agent of empire: in writers as different as Herodotus, Jean de L ry, and Montaigne – and notably in Mandeville’s Travels, the most popular travel book of the Middle Ages – wonder is a sign of a remarkably tolerant recognition of cultural difference. Marvelous Possession is not only a collection of the odd and exotic through which Stephen Greenblatt powerfully conveys a sense of the marvelous, but also a highly original extension of his thinking on a subject that has occupied him throughout his career. The book reaches back to the ancient Greeks and forward to the present to ask how it is possible, in a time of disorientation, hatred of the other, and possessiveness, to keep the capacity for wonder from being poisoned? "A marvellous book. It is also a compelling and a powerful one. Nothing so original has ever been written on European responses to 'The wonder of the New World.'" – Anthony Pagden, Times Literary Supplement "By far the most intellectually gripping and penetrating discussion of the relationship between intruders and natives is provided by Stephen Greenblatt’s Marvelous Possessions." – Simon Schama, The New Republic "For the most engaging and illuminating perspective of all, read Marvelous Possessions." – Laura Shapiro, Newsweek

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Upon reading the title of Stephen Greenblatt's slim book (it consists of just over two hundred pages, of which nearly a quarter is endnotes) one might be tempted to wonder if Greenblatt has taken up a latent interest in Marxist Studies and strayed from New Historicism, an area for which he arguably has become a figurehead (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991. ISBN: 0-226-30625-6). Of course, there is a neat subtitle which rectifies any confusion: *The Wonder of the New World*. The time period of this project seems right, seeing as the explorations of the Americas occurred roughly at the same time of the beginning and flourish of the Renaissance, which is on par with the preferred time period in which the works in Greenblatt's extensive catalogue tend to discuss; yet, the subject matter seems strikingly different. In the index, there are merely thirteen given page numbers in which Shakespeare or his plays have been mentioned and incorporated into this discussion. This seems scarce, coming from a writer whose other works include *Shakespearean Negotiations*, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, and *Will in the World*, as well as editing *The Norton Shakespeare*. So what then is the Bard's most prominent aficionado and scholar alive today doing in this book? Greenblatt takes his interest in early Modern English legal documents, court briefings, diaries and logs, and other "miscellaneous" literary sources, and casts an observing eye away from Europe proper, the genesis of the travelers whose explorations make up the content of this book; following the explorers, he focuses on what they focused: the new, frightening and inviting (all at once) world.

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