

Reading Questions for first class on Tuesday 9/15

Use these to guide your reading. You do not have to submit answers, but we will discuss them in class.

1. The *Norton* editors points out on page 5 that we can consider literature a *medium* of expression, as Euro-Americans did prior to the late 1700s, or as a *kind* of expression, as Euro-Americans did thereafter. Which definition is more common in the Chinese/Taiwanese tradition? Do you consider these travelogue letters we're reading this week to be literature? Why or Why not?
2. Give me a Chinese/Taiwanese analogy for the European "explorer" figure like Columbus, Cabeza de Vaca, and Champlain. What are similarities and differences in their activities and/or attitudes?
3. Read the second sentence of Columbus' letter to Santangel carefully. What are his legal explanations of his "possession" of the West Indies? What is strange about this formulation? (You might compare to Champlain's claim that the northern aboriginals have "no law.")
4. We can attribute Columbus' poetic description of the topography and biology of the islands at the end of the letter to a range of motives. Do you feel that he is more likely expressing his wonder or amazement at the scenery, or attempting to characterize his expedition as potentially lucrative?
5. What kind of picture of Spanish politics do we get in these writings of Columbus and Cabeza de Vaca? What new challenges will American colonies pose for Spanish politics? (You might compare to the brief description of the pre-American colonization given at the start of the Cabeza de Vaca biography.)
6. Does it seem strange to you that the *Norton* editors use English names that date later in history to describe American lands visited by the Spanish, as on page 29? Who is the primary audience for this anthology? Is it nonetheless accessible to other audiences (i.e. you)?
7. What kind of rhetorical techniques ("truth claims") do Cabeza de Vaca and Champlain use to assert the reliability of their accounts? Why do they feel this is necessary?
8. Which aboriginal practices described by Cabeza de Vaca do you find the most strange, and why? Which does it seem *he* found the most strange, and why?
9. Look up the word "savage" in an etymological dictionary. (You can look it up in English because it's almost identical to the word Champlain actually uses in French - "sauvage.") What does the etymology of this word tell you about the relationship between his view of North American people and his view of North American land?
10. This edition of Champlain's *Voyages* was translated by a U.S. American named Charles Otis in 1880. One of the interesting choices Otis has made is to translate the words of the Algonquin Chief (page 8) so that the language the Algonquin God uses in his story is very similar to the language that the Judeo-Christian God uses in the King James translation of the Bible. Note for instance the antiquated verb forms like "shalt" and "hast." What might motivate this choice, and how might it clash with Champlain's motivation in writing the scene?