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Symbiosis: a Journal of Anglo-American Literary Relations

Volume 1.2

ROCCO CORONATO

*Inducting
Pocahontas*

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PUBLICATION DATA

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First published in SYMBIOSIS Volume 2.1 (April 1998) pp 24–38

2nd electronic edition published in 2007 by Humanities-Ebooks LLP

<http://www.humanities-ebooks.co.uk>

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Essays published in Symbiosis are subsequently digitized for the benefit of the author (80%) and the Journal (20%)

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ISSN: 1362-7902

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ROCCO CORONATO

Inducting Pocahontas

'Monsieur Clements', he asked, with a kind of intimate authority, 'le mythe et la réalité?' ... Eventually, I gave him the only answer I could: that such questions and their appropriate responses no doubt came naturally to French intellectuals, but that since I was a mere pragmatic English novelist, he would get a better interview out of me if he perhaps approached such larger matters by way of smaller, lighter ones.

Julian Barnes, *Cross Channel*

Cannibalism may be considered one of most consuming models of intercultural negotiation. Not only does it visually subsume the other by bringing it closer to oneself: it can also be used to ingestively appropriate one's satirical butt. Thus, pondering the acts of savagery witnessed by European warfare, where living bodies had been tortured, roasted and even bitten to death by dogs and pigs, Montaigne deems actual cannibalism less barbarous. After all, only dead bodies are subjected to roasting and eating, while the logical comparison between abstract terms poignantly claims that 'il y a plus de barbarie a manger un homme vivant qu'a le manger mort'. By the same token of rationality, Montaigne argues that American natives may be considered barbarous only when judged by the universal 'regies de la raison'. A similarly decentralised observation of European barbarity was actually expressed by three Brazilian natives who visited the French Court. The local spectacle of social injustice was considered by these observers 'empremie bien fort estrange', in a cannibalised rendering of their responses as the usual drawback of defective reasoning.¹ Perhaps Montaigne's passage actualises the sort of cannibalism that William Hamlin defines as 'the European characterisation of the non-European interpretation of the foreigners' status', which was accompanied by the 'linguistic apotheosis' of the divine attribution bestowed on the Europeans.² Apart from discourse, was there also a sort of logical apotheosis, attempting to interpret the American natives with respect to the 'regies de la raison'? The inductive assimilation of Pocahontas seems indeed to prove the existence of such logical cannibalism as a debased form of Aristotelian dialectic, in its turn overset by the parody of discovery that Ben Jonson staged in the two masques that Pocahontas witnessed in London.