

Peter Martyr and Richard Eden: A Letter*

Dear Editors,

Thank you for your copy of *Connotations* and for your suggestion that I reply to Andrew Hadfield's interesting piece "Peter Martyr, Richard Eden and the New World." I do not, however think that I have very much to add: I certainly have nothing to criticise. Hadfield is surely right—in particular about Martyr—to insist on the poverty of any reading which attempts to understand such texts in terms of simple dichotomies between "good" and "bad", "positive" and "negative," or "savage" and "civilised." Martyr, like most observers anywhere did not carry such formal categories about in his head and his texts were not written to meet the demands of post-colonial *angst*. *De orbe novo* is a text which constantly shifts its own terms of reference, as Martyr shifts both his intended audience and the classical sources on which he is drawing. There is also a problem, which Hadfield does not address (nor, so far as I know does anyone else) of the textual relationship between *De orbe novo* and the *Epistolarum*, since most of the set pieces in the latter began life in the former. One thing that might be said, however, is that although I am sure that Hadfield is right to say that Eden's translation is "as double and contradictory as Peter Martyr's Latin original," it is also the case that Eden's attitudes, and that of nearly all his contemporaries, towards the Spanish and their conquests was at best ambivalent. Spain may have been in a formal sense "the enemy," and the English traded on stories of Spanish atrocities—of the kind which they lacked only the

*Reference: Andrew Hadfield, "Peter Martyr, Richard Eden and the New World: Reading, Experience and Translation," *Connotations* 5.1 (1995/96): 1-22.

opportunity to emulate—but Spain was also, until well into the seventeenth century and the English crown's final renunciation of any attempt at formal conquests in America, a model for all future imperial projects.

Yours sincerely,

Anthony Pagden