



Naked and Alone in a Strange New World: Early Modern Captivity and Its Mythos

Benjamin Mark Allen

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'Naked and Alone' compares and contrasts early modern (1500 - 1650) American captivity narratives of, among others, Jeronimo de Aguilar, Gonzalo Guerrero, Juan Ortiz, Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca, Hans Stade of Hesse, Hernando d'Escalante Fontaneda, Francisco de Avila and Francisco Nunez de Pineda y Bascunan. The study argues that, although originally touted as 'true histories,' the narratives are instead highly subjective tales that imitated popular heroic lore that suffused 16th-century Iberia and Europe. The tales served various personal and imperial purposes, and since little to no corroboration exists regarding the actual captivity experiences, the narratives belie an accurate history of events. Rather they are cultural artifacts useful to an understanding of the larger psycho-social dynamics of the transatlantic world. They aid reconstruction of the *histoire des mentalites* that contributes to an understanding of the mythos that defined the captivity experience. Through a textual-contextual analysis premised on structural and post-structural theories of myth, ritual, and literature the study posits that, collectively, the narratives evidence a negotiation of the dichotomous European and Amerindian cultures. Because of the inherent psycho-social dimensions that transcend time and place, the captivity narratives prove as relevant today as they were five centuries ago.

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