

John Smith

1. The lists of plants, animals, and minerals drawn up by Smith resemble mercantile catalogs designed to attract buyers. Such detailed lists—by then a convention of **travel and exploration reports**—gratified the appetites of readers hungry for specific details of the New World.

The very length and detail of such a catalog could make an exploration report more believable—an important advantage in a literary genre notorious for its exaggerations.

2. There were many ancient and modern – 16th and 17th century – **travel reports** published before Smith wrote his. Smith differs from the conventional writers of the time in two ways:
 - He pays greater attention to reporting particular details of discontent, enmity, and mutiny—aspects that other English travel writers often suppressed for reasons of prudence and good public relations
 - He places greater emphasis on character portrayal and narratives of dramatic events—such as his Indian capture and rescue by Pocahontas.
3. Smith's reports also follow the pattern of the travel books of the time by reporting barbaric rituals, threats of death, physical suffering, and the eventual triumph of the European hero. Smith's writing employs still **other conventions of the travel literature of the age** by:
 - Describing a difficult ocean passage, a voyage prolonged by the weather, and the strong temptation to turn back with the voyage uncompleted.
 - Reporting the advantages offered by European technology, especially firearms.
 - Describing New World geography—cataloging plants, animals, natural resources—and thereby reporting a profusion of exotic things unknown to Europeans.
 - Mixing practical advice with rhetorical landscape descriptions that emphasized the riches and pleasures of the land.
 - Describing nature and natives as both friendly and ferocious.
 - Revealing how the expedition was plagued by intrigue and disunity.
 - Emphasizing the flaws and virtues of expedition leaders.
 - Contrasting the virtue of life in a strange foreign land to the idleness and corruption prevalent in the Old World.
 - Emphasizing New World plentitude and easy riches and contrasting that superabundance to the privation and poverty of the Old World.
 - Describing initial successes and triumphs followed by defeats and failures.

4. Striking similarities exist between the events of Smith's life and those feats traditionally ascribed to the **heroes of epic literature**. Smith, like the traditional epic hero, struggles to reach a distant goal and:
 - Leads a people to a new land
 - Acts as diplomat and lawgiver
 - Makes orations before foreign kings
 - Quiets dissension among his people
 - Heals the sick
 - Tours a hellish region where he contends with fiends and demonic forces
 - Engages in single combat and is subdued by savage hordes
 - Is recognized, even by his demonic enemies, as a brave and chivalric opponent
 - Suffers from a mysterious wound and withdraws permanently from the scene (Smith's return to England in 1609 followed his injury in a gunpowder explosion, the details of which still remain obscure).

5. The self-portrait that Smith presented to the world shows him as closely resembling the **traditional hero of folk literature**:
 - A man of humble birth, lacking family or descendants
 - One whose character is especially marked by self-confidence and practicality
 - One who, like Robin Hood, triumphs not merely through bravery and strength but through guile and cleverness.