

MONTAIGNE'S CANNIBALS:

A Discursive Feast For All

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There is both name, and the thing : the name, is a voice which noteth, and signifieth the thing : the name, is neither part of thing nor of substance : it is a stranger-piece joynd to the thing, and from it.

-Montaigne, "Of Glory" (II, xvi) (c. 1580)

For the artist, the object is a focal point for heteroglot voices among which his own voice must also sound; these voices create the background necessary for his own voice, outside of which his artistic...nuances cannot be perceived, and without which they "do not sound."

-Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel" (c. 1930)

According to Bakhtin, the task of describing a given object necessarily entails choosing from a limited number of cultural "voices" which have previously attempted to define it. Thus, when an artist speaks/writes to a certain audience about this object, s/he is obliged to use signifiers which the intended audience has already learned to associate with the signified object, *vis-à-vis* previous texts/discourses. Bakhtin labels this process "internal dialogism," for language must ultimately (and paradoxically) refer to itself in order to find an adequate description of the object.

Yet this dialogic relationship between artist and audience—which from a Bakhtinian perspective can be seen informing the internal construction of all rhetorical discourse—is itself mediated by the complex web of social and economic relationships in which both speaker/writer and listener/reader are inextricably situated.

The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. (276-277)

In other words, both the artist and the signifiers that constitute his/her enunciation issue from a social environment circumscribed by political and ideological forces that have previously influenced the ways in which (and the purposes for which) the object in question has been described. In effect, the dialogic process by which signification is transmitted exercises a certain discursive power over the articulation of any utterance (or text); "[l]anguage is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others" (294). In this light, the literary text can be analyzed as a product of the tension between, on the one hand, the specific purposes for which the author (or "author-function") appropriates a given

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signifier, and on the other, the "fixed," culturally-determined meanings previously assigned to it.

Many contemporary scholars have interpreted the writings of Michel de Montaigne as the work of a thinker who was deeply engaged with these questions three and a half centuries before Bakhtin elucidated them. According to Michel de Certeau,

Montaigne...is only aware of [social utterances] as 'fictions' that derive from a place. For him, the statements are only 'stories' related to their particular places of utterance...they signify not the reality of which they speak, but the reality from which they depart, and which they disguise, the place of their enunciation. (123)

Consequently, in his *Essays*, Montaigne adopts as a rhetorical strategy a "hermeneutics of suspicion" aimed at reconceptualizing the very idea of literary production. In attempting to illuminate (and thus transgress) the ideological/discursive power of language, he criticizes the privileged role of the "symbolic" in European culture, which grants to the written text an *authority* that he finds problematic. Simultaneously however, by endlessly citing Plato, Cicero, and the rest of the Western literary/philosophical tradition, he nevertheless refers to written discourse throughout his *Essays*. Thus, there is a certain tension articulated in Montaigne's work between his mistrust of received language and the fact that he was obliged to utilize this language in order to write—and more profoundly, between a cultural/linguistic relativism and a monolithic universalism.

This tension is nowhere, perhaps, as explicitly played out as in the most well-known and thoroughly-studied of his essays, "Des Cannibales" ('Of Cannibals'), in which Montaigne purports to give his readers an ethnographic description of the life and culture of the Tupinambas, a Native American society in the "newly-discovered" territory of Brazil. In this (written) text, he attempts to make a metaphorical journey outside the realm of the "symbolic" and in the process launches a polemical critique against what he perceives to be the tyrannical authority of written discourse in European culture. In order to challenge the type of symbolic representation that undergirds the "sacrificial structure" (Derrida) of the Catholic Church—in which the bread of Holy Communion becomes a *signifier* of the flesh of the sacrificial victim—Montaigne celebrates an (oral) culture in which the *actual* flesh of captured enemies is consumed in ritualized sacrifice.

By highlighting the alleged anthropophagic practices of the Amerindians, Montaigne mobilizes a discursive construction received from the travel journals (*récits de voyage*) of the European explorers, cosmographers, and missionaries who ventured across the Atlantic in the 1500s. As Carla Freccero points out, during the sixteenth century the image of the cannibal was a dominant trope not only in representations of Amerindians, but also in anti-Semitic portrayals of European Jews. She suggests that the proliferation of cannibalistic imagery be seen as the result of psychic and ideological processes that served to concretize the cultural identity of the (Christian/European) "self" by imagining the

(heathen/American) "other" as precisely "not-self." Since "the myth of New World cannibalism constitutes European identity and undergirds its persistent (neo)colonial discourse" (74), Freccero claims that Montaigne, by drawing upon this imagery in "Of Cannibals," was complicit with a Eurocentric ideology that would later be used to justify the colonial enterprise. She thus criticizes him for this dreadful lapse in his usual hermeneutics of suspicion.

However, a casual reading of the essay reveals that it is not at all a condemnation or demonization of the other. Indeed, throughout the text Montaigne exalts the life and culture of the Tupinambas; he applauds their morals, their culinary arts, their poetry, and their rituals. He seems to believe that their society is much more admirable even than that of his own France, torn by the Wars of Religion. According to David Marchi, Montaigne pays homage to the Tupinambas by incorporating "pieces" of their culture in his essay, and thus by appropriating their cannibalistic practices on a textual level. In reformulating literary production according to a model gleaned from their society, "Montaigne attempts to refuse ethnocentrism and subvert Eurocentric intolerance by counteracting hegemonic ideologies" (35).

How is it that Freccero and Marchi can arrive at such diametrically opposed conclusions? To be sure, literary analysis is always a subjective endeavor, and Montaigne's work in particular seems to confound any attempt at producing coherent interpretations. In the case of the essay at hand, however, the ambiguity that emerges by the end of the text can itself be analyzed (in a Bakhtinian light) as the linguistic tension between competing definitions of two highly-charged signifiers which had previously been used to describe the indigenous peoples of the New World: *sauvage* and *barbare*.

It is my contention that, by articulating and problematizing the various cultural "voices" which described (at his particular historical moment) the "object" of his study, Montaigne attempts to challenge Eurocentric conceptions of Amerindian society. However, this (subversive) heteroglossic project is ultimately undermined, as he returns to the symbolic realm of written discourse by restoring monolithic definitions—informed by ethnocentric notions of European superiority—to the key-words *sauvage* and *barbare*.¹ Before analyzing the text, however, I will first need to historicize briefly the discursive construction of the "New World cannibal," as formulated in the travel journals of the explorers and cosmographers of the sixteenth century.

From the first moment of contact between European and indigenous American cultures, the vast majority of Europeans experienced the landscape and inhabitants of the New World through the mediated form of travel journals and pictorial representations. Stories and images of cannibalism abounded in descriptions of the Natives from the first

¹ It is because of my concentration on the linguistic mutations these words undergo in the essay that I have chosen to use the Florio translation, which (of all the English editions I have encountered) renders most palpable the "plasticity of language" that makes Montaigne's essays what they are.

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expeditions of Christopher Columbus, and they were embedded within a "rhetoric of lack" which defined Amerindian culture according to all the characteristics it did not have (in relation to European culture).

Indeed, the very first impression recorded by Columbus is the nudity of the Natives. After meeting the Arawaks on the island that would later be named Hispaniola, he wrote (November 6, 1492): "They all go naked, men and women, as the day they were born...It seemed to me that all these people were very poor in everything, that they belonged to no religion" (qtd. in Todorov, *Conquest* 35). Their lack of clothing came to signify (for Columbus) a religious and cultural deficiency, as well. As Todorov remarks, "[p]hysically naked, the Indians are also, to Columbus's eyes, deprived of all cultural property: they are characterized...by the *absence* of customs, rites, and religion" (*Conquest* 35).² As Columbus learned more of the Amerindian tribes he encountered, this assumption was further strengthened: they lacked written language, they had no fixed monetary exchange system, and their villages claimed no solid architectural structures (by European standards). Indeed, Native societies were deplete of all the *signifiers* of "civilization" (alphabet, currency, buildings, etc.). In the context of these overdetermined observations, the alleged anthropophagy of the Caribs, "who are regarded in all the islands as very fierce and who eat human flesh" (qtd. in Berkhofer 7), provided Columbus and the readers of his journals with still more evidence that the New World inhabitants lacked a "proper" social (and sacrificial) structure (defined by Christian/Eurocentric notions of "civilization" and "religion").

Similar descriptions of Native cannibalism would appear throughout the travel journals published in Europe during the sixteenth century. In his *Mundus Novus* (1504), Amerigo Vespucci wrote:

I knew a [Native] man...who was reputed to have eaten more than three hundred human bodies. And I likewise remained...in a certain city where I saw salted human flesh suspended from beams between the houses, just as with us it is the custom to hang bacon and pork...they themselves wonder why we do not eat our enemies and do not use as food their flesh which they say is most savory. (qtd. in Berkhofer 9)

Here the image of the cannibal serves quite explicitly to distinguish Native "savagery" from European "culture" ("human flesh suspended from beams...just as with us it is the custom to hang bacon and pork"). Reports written by explorers such as Girolamo Benzoni, missionaries like Jean de Léry, and cosmographers like François de Belleforest and André Thévet—which were all translated into French, and which could all be found in Montaigne's personal library—also described the nudity, the orality, and the cannibalism of the Amerindians as marks of their "barbarism" (Chinard, *L'Exotisme* 193-201).³ Represented in negativistic rather than positivistic terms, Amerindian cultures are defined in these discursive configurations not by the individual qualities they possess, but rather by the *absence* of cultural signifiers associated with European civilization.

² All italics in citations are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

³ See also Keen, who analyzes these journals in depth.

As de Certeau has noted, "Of Cannibals" is divided into three parts which correspond to the three stages of a *récit de voyage*. In the first part, which is "the outbound journey, the search for the strange," the narrator departs from the familiar terrain of his native country; in the second he encounters and describes the land and inhabitants of the New World; and in the last part he returns home in order to recount his adventures (de Certeau 121).

The second paragraph of the essay begins a discussion of the possibilities that "cet autre monde qui a esté découvert en nostre siecle" 'that other world, which in our age was lately discovered' (251; 33) could be either Atlantis or the "grande isle fertile" 'great fertile land' peopled at one time by "certain Carthaginois" 'certain Carthaginians' (253; 36). Here a rhetoric of distance ("plus de douze cens lieues" 'more than twelve hundred leagues' [252; 34], "les terres qui sont sous les deux pôles" 'the countries lying under the two Poles' [252; 35], "esloignée de toutes terres fermes" 'farre distant from all land' [253; 36]) accomplishes a "spatializing operation" within the text (de Certeau 119). As a result the essay metaphorically traverses the spatial/cultural boundaries demarcating (internal) self from (external) other.

Despite the fact that this discussion is taken almost *verbatim* from the journals of Benzoni (Chinard, *L'Exotisme* 196-201), Montaigne declines to mention that he derived this information from a written source. In fact, he claims that all the observations he recounts throughout the entire essay come from the oral testimony of his servant, who spent considerable time among the Tupinambas. He justifies his (alleged) disavowal of written sources by describing this man as "homme simple et grossier" 'a simple and rough-hewn fellow,' which he claims is "une condition propre à rendre veritable tesmoignage" 'a condition fit to yield a true testimonie':

...car les fines gens remarquent bien plus curieusement et plus de choses, mais ils les glosent...ils ne vous representent jamais les choses pures, ils les inclinent et masquent selon le visage qu'ils leur ont veu; et, pour donner credit à leur jugement et vous y attirer, prestent volontiers de ce costé là à la matiere, l'alongent et l'amplifient. (253)

For subtle people may indeed mark more curiously, and observe things more exactly, but they amplify and glose them; [...] They never represent things truly, but fashion and maske them according to the visage they saw them in; and to purchase credit to their judgement, and draw you on to beleieve them, they commonly adorn, enlarge, yea, and Hyperbolize the matter. (36-37)

As Montaigne is convinced that he can rely on the oral testimony of his servant, he concludes: "Ainsi je me contente de cette information, sans m'enquerir de ce que les cosmographes en disent" 'So I am pleased with his information, that I will never enquire what Cosmographers say of it' (253; 37). Montaigne thus establishes a "phonocentric supremacy"—according to which "the spoken word is...more authentic and powerful than the written signifier [because] it is less removed from the referent" (Marchi 38-39)—immediately after citing a long passage from the *written* text of an explorer!

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This is an extremely crucial moment in the essay, for it is here that Montaigne purports to make a metaphorical voyage *beyond* the realm of the symbolic, a gesture that de Certeau calls "the defection of discourse": "Only an appeal to the senses...and a link to the body...seem capable of bringing closer and guaranteeing...the real that was lost by language" (127). In this first part of the essay, then, Montaigne (rhetorically) opposes himself to the "artifice" of written language and departs for a destination where, according to him, there is no discursive intervention between the speaking subject and the "real."

The second and longest part of the essay, in which Montaigne (as voyager) gives a physical and ethnographic description of Tupinamba society, begins immediately after his renunciation of the cosmographers. Now that Montaigne has claimed to have transcended the ideological/discursive confines of written language, his essay becomes a "battlefield of polysemic signification" (Marchi 42) in which the "accepted" meanings of words can be scrutinized and contested.

At the time Montaigne wrote "Of Cannibals" (c. 1580), *barbare* and *sauvage* both had a deprecatory sense. Derived from the Greek *barbaros* ("stranger"), *barbare* had at one time described a person or a collective of persons who were simply "unfamiliar" or "different." From this relatively neutral signifier of cultural difference, *barbare* came to have pejorative connotations in the sixteenth century, as it was applied to peoples, nations, and languages deemed "cruel," "uncultivated," or "uncivilized" (*Le Robert*). *Sauvage*, derived from the Latin *salvaticus* ("dwelling in forests"), was borrowed by Middle French (c. 1100) in the form *salvage* (or *saulvage*) to describe any living thing "in a natural state." From the middle of the twelfth century onward, however, the word came to have moral associations when applied to non-Christian human beings thought to be in need of cultural or religious "salvation." During the sixteenth century it was used increasingly to qualify the Amerindian cultures encountered by European expeditions to the New World. Though *sauvage* retained a non-pejorative sense ("in a natural state") when applied to plants and animals, it denoted peoples and cultures considered "crude," "unrefined," or "outside of civilization" (*Le Robert*).

In the second part of his essay, Montaigne at once engages in a heteroglossic play with these two words. He states in the first sentence of this section, "Or je trouve...qu'il n'y a rien de barbare et de sauvage en cette nation...sinon que chacun appelle barbarie ce qui n'est pas de son usage" 'Now...I finde...there is nothing in that nation, that is either barbarous or savage, unlesse men call that barbarisme which is not common to them' (254; 37-38). Montaigne here suggests that *barbare* be stripped of its pejorative connotations by restoring to it the meaning of the Greek *barbaros*. "Other" or "unfamiliar" need not imply "backward" or "uncultivated." In attempting to reconceptualize this term, Montaigne espouses a radical cultural relativism that denies the validity of any "hierarchy of civilizations" in which one nation may be considered superior to another. At this early stage of the essay, then, he problematizes the ethnocentric notions informing descriptions of the Amerindian tribes in the *récits de voyage*.

Later in the same paragraph, Montaigne further challenges the way in which *sauvage* is commonly used in relation to people. Referring again to the Tupinambas, he says, "Ils sont sauvages, de mesme que nous appellons sauvages les fruits que nature, de soy et de son progresz ordinaire, a produicts" 'They are even savage, as we call those fruits wilde, which nature of her selfe, and of her ordinarie progresse hath produced' (254; 38). Thus, Montaigne suggests that *sauvage* should describe the Tupinamba tribe only if it is used in the same way as when it is applied to "fruits sauvages" ('wilde fruits')—in other words, as a non-pejorative qualifier of living things "in a natural state." This declaration is followed by a discourse on the beauty and perfection of all things that remain in such a "natural" state, unsullied by the corrupting hand of civilization. According to Montaigne, "le nid du moindre oyselet" 'the nest of the least birdlet' and "la tisseur de la chetive araignée" 'the web of a seely spider' have a perfect form *without the intervention of man* (254-5; 38-39).

In this part of the essay Montaigne reformulates the meanings of *sauvage* and *barbare* to set up a dichotomy between "Art(ifice)" and "Nature," a dichotomy which he then maps onto his interpretation of Amerindian and European societies.

Ces nations me semblent donq ainsi barbares, pour avoir receu *fort peu* de façon de l'esprit humain, et estre encore *fort voisins* de leur naifveté originelle. Les loix naturelles leur commandent encores, *fort peu* abastardies par les nostres. (255)

Those nations seeme therefore so barbarous unto me, because they have received very little fashion from human wit, and are yet neere their originall naturalitie. The lawes of nature doe yet command them, which are but little bastardized by ours. (39)

The repetition of the word *fort* in this passage serves to highlight the distinction Montaigne elucidates between the *natural* laws that structure "their" society and the *artificial* laws that govern "ours."

This conceptual opposition between European and Tupinamba culture (and between Art and Nature) is further developed by the "rhetoric of lack" that follows:

C'est une nation...en laquelle il n'y a *aucune* espece de trafique; *nul* cognoissance de lettres; *nulle* science de nombres; *nul* nom de magistrat, *ny* de superiorité politique; *nul* usage de service, de richesse ou de pauvreté; *nuls* contrats; *nulles* successions; *nuls* partages; *nulles* occupation qu'oyssives; *nul* respect de parenté que commun; *nuls* vestemens; *nulle* agriculture; *nul* metal; *nul* usage de vin ou de bled. (255)

It is a nation...that hath no kinde of traffike, no knowledge of Letters, no intelligence of numbers, no name of magistrate, nor of politike superiorité; no use of service, of riches or of povertie; no contracts, no successions, no partitions, no occupation but idle; no respect of kinred, but common, no apparell but naturall, no manuring of lands, no use of wine, corne, or mettle. (39-40)

As outlined above, this type of negativistic portrayal was fundamental to the rhetoric developed in the *réçits de voyage* of the sixteenth century. Indeed,

in this passage Montaigne makes numerous observations that appeared repeatedly in the explorers' journals: the Tupinambas have neither a fixed exchange system nor a political structure; they lack written language and advanced agricultural techniques, and they wear "no apparell but naturall."

Yet if Montaigne appropriates such rhetoric of lack from the *récits de voyage*, he deploys it here in a radically different way than it is used in those texts. Whereas Columbus *et al.* provided evidence of the Natives' lack of "civilization" as proof that European intervention was a justifiable enterprise, Montaigne points to the absence of such "artificial inventions" in Tupinamba society as the Natives' most admirable quality. As he states, it is "nostre goust corrompu" 'our corrupted taste' which threatens the purity of the Tupinambas' "utiles et naturelles vertus" 'profitable virtues, and naturall properties' (254; 38). Thus, in the Nature/Artifice dichotomy, he explicitly privileges the former at this point of the essay.

Moreover, as he articulates in the first part of the essay, Montaigne sees written language as the supreme instance of the "fashioning" and "masking" by which Art(ifice) transforms the "real" (i.e., Nature). This, perhaps, explains why he maintains (falsely) that his information has come to him from the oral testimony of a man "si simple qu'il n'ait pas dequoy bastir et donner de la vray-semblance à des inventions fauces" 'so simple, that he may have no invention to build upon, and to give a true likelihood unto false devices' (253; 37). In idealizing the oral culture of the Tupinambas, whose proximity to an imagined state of "natural" purity Montaigne wishes to celebrate, he must assure his readers that his own (written) text has not been mediated or transfigured by the deceptive qualities of Artifice which he criticizes.

Simultaneously, however, Montaigne makes unrestrained reference to the wisdom of the ancients—which comes to him, of course, through written discourse. For example, after the digression on the perfection of "natural" things, Montaigne validates his critique of Artifice by citing Plato: "Toutes choses, dict Platon, sont produites par la nature, ou par la fortune, ou par l'art; les plus grandes et plus belles, par l'une ou l'autre des deux premieres; les moindres et imparfaites, par la derniere" 'All things (saith Plato) are produced, either by nature, by fortune, or by art. The greatest and fairest by one or other of the two first, the least and imperfect by the last' (255; 39). This gesture becomes a repeated formula for the remainder of the essay: after describing some aspect of Tupinamba society which he claims to admire, he cites an example gleamed from European history to justify his approval.

The first instance of this formula comes when Montaigne describes the way the Tupinambas treat their "prestres et prophetes" 'Prophets and Priests' (257; 42). As described by Montaigne, the Prophet of the Tupinambas is a sort of seer whose function is to predict future events; if his prognostications prove inaccurate, however, "il est haché en mille pieces" 'he is hewen in a thousand pieces' (257; 43). In order to explain this practice, Montaigne gives the example of the Scythians, who allegedly burned their false prophets, and he says of all people who claim to know more than they actually do: "faut-il pas les punir de ce qu'ils ne maintiennent l'effect de leur promesse, et de la temerité de leur

imposture?" '[they] ought to be double punished; first because they performe not the effect of their promise, then for the rashnesse of their imposture' (257; 44).

When Montaigne describes the anthropophagy of the Tupinambas, he follows this same formula. First he presents the ritualized consumption of captured enemies in explicit detail:

celuy qui en est le maistre, faict une grande assemblée de ses cognoissans; il attache une corde à l'un des bras du prisonnier...et...en presence de toute l'assemblée, l'assomme à coups d'espée. Cela faict, ils le rostissent et en mangent en commun et en envoient des lopins à ceux de leurs amis qui sont absens. (258)

he that is Master of [the prisoners], summoning a great assembly of his acquaintance, tieth a corde to one of the prisoners armes...and...in the presence of all the assembly killeth him with swords: which done, they roast, and then eat him in common, and send some slices of him to such of their friends as are absent. (44)

Montaigne then legitimizes this cannibalism by citing the words of the Greek Stoics Chrysippus and Zeno, who felt that "il n'y avoit aucun mal de se servir de nostre charoigne" 'it was no hurt at all...to make use of our carrion bodies, and to feed upon them' (258; 45).

By employing this formula, Montaigne refers to his own cultural tradition in order to validate the social practices of the Amerindians. But this formula—and the very fact that Montaigne thought it necessary to "justify" the other's society—undermines the cultural relativism he proposes (at the beginning of the essay) by challenging the Eurocentric notions inherent in the pejorative use of *barbare* and *sauvage*.

Accordingly, the manner in which Montaigne employs these terms shifts radically at this point in the text. Immediately after the graphic description of the cannibal feast, he says: "Je ne suis pas marry que nous remerquons l'horreur barbaresque qu'il y a en une telle action, mais ouy bien dequoy, jugeans bien de leurs fautes, nous soyons si aveuglez aux nostres" 'I am not sorie we note the barbarous horror of such an action, but grieved, that prying so narrowly into their faults we are so blinded in ours' (258; 45). With this sentence, Montaigne destroys the neutral sense of *barbare* established earlier in the essay. The cannibals are now indeed "cruel" and "uncivilized." Yet they are still more admirable than the Europeans, for as Montaigne maintains, the Europeans are even more cruel and uncivilized than the Tupinambas: "Nous...pouvons donq bien appeller [les cannibales] barbares, eu esgard aux regles de la raison, mais non pas eu esgard à nous, qui les surpassons en toute sorte de barbarie" 'We may then well call them barbarous, in regard of reasons rules, but not in respect of us that exceed them in all kinde of barbarisme' (259; 46).

After restoring a pejorative sense to *barbare*, Montaigne then uses it as a rhetorical tool to launch a polemical critique of his own culture. In the passage which has become the most remembered of the entire essay, Montaigne unambiguously denounces the persecutors in the Wars of Religion:

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Je pense qu'il y a plus de barbarie à manger un homme vivant qu'à le manger mort, à deschirer par tourmens et par geènes un corps encore plein de sentiment, le faire rostir par le menu, le faire mordre et meutrir aux chiens et aux pourceaux (comme nous l'avons...veu de fresche memoire...entre des voisins et concitoyens, et, qui pis est, sous pretexte de pieté et de religion), que de le rostir et manger après qu'il est trespasé. (258)

I thinke there is more barbarisme in eating men alive, than to feed upon them being dead; to mangle by tortures and torments a body full of lively sense, to roast him in peeces, to make dogges and swine to gnaw and teare him in mammoakes (as wee have...seene very lately...amongst...our neighbours and fellow citizens; and which is worse, under pretence of pietie and religion) than to roast and eat him after he is dead. (45)

By evoking the idea of surpassing (or exceeding) in relation to the monolithic sense of *barbarie*, Montaigne seems to indicate that there is, after all, a way of imagining a hierarchy of civilizations.

While it is European culture that he explicitly condemns here, he nevertheless continues to appraise Amerindian society according to criteria derived from his own tradition. When he quotes a Tupinamba war chant, he comments, "Invention qui ne sent aucunement la barbarie" 'An invention, that hath no shew of barbarisme' (261; 51). After first celebrating the "naturall properties" of Amerindian culture, he now judges them according to the quality of their "inventions." Montaigne repeats this logic after quoting a Tupinamba love song: "Or j'ay assez de commerce avec la poésie pour juger cecy, que non seulement il n'y a rien de barbarie en cette imagination, mais qu'elle est tout à fait Anacreontique" 'I am so conversant with Poesie, that I may judge, this invention hath no barbarisme at all in it, but is altogether Anacreontike' (262; 52). In other words, this song cannot be described as "coarse" or "unrefined," for it has a style (Montaigne assures us) similar to that of the Greek poet Anacreon.

If Montaigne first questions the ethnocentrism at work in the "accepted" definitions of *savage* and *barbare* by applauding the "natural" state of Tupinamba society, he ultimately disarms his critique by reverting to monolithic conceptions of these words, and by simultaneously coming to privilege the Art(ifice) of European culture. Incidentally, his evaluation of Tupinamba poetry comes at the end of the second part of the essay. Thus, the metaphorical voyage that set out to transcend the confines of written discourse ends by returning to the realm of the symbolic.

In the last part of the essay, "the homecoming of the traveler-narrator" (de Certeau 122), Montaigne uses the perspective of the Amerindians to comment further on the idiosyncrasies of French society. He recounts the observations made by three Tupinambas who were apparently brought to France by some explorers. After having toured the country and meeting the child King Charles IX, they were asked what impressions they had of the country. They responded that they had remarked two "very strange" phenomena: first, that a group of bearded men (the King's guard) "se sous-missent à obeyr à un enfant" 'would submit themselves to obey a bearded child' (263; 53), and secondly, that "il y avoit parmy nous des hommes pleins et gorgez de toutes sortes de commoditez, et que leurs moitez estoient mendiants à leurs portes,

décharnez de faim et de pauvreté" 'there were men amongst us full gorged with all sortes of commodities, and others which hunger-starved, and bare with need and povertie, begged at their gates' (263; 53). The Tupinambas wondered how these needy beggars endured such injustice, and why "ils ne prinsent les autres à la gorge, ou missent le feu à leurs maisons" 'they tooke not the others by the throte, or set fire to their houses' (263; 53-4). The cannibals' observations question not only the laws of the monarchy that would crown a child to run an entire country, but also the foundations of a social inequality maintained by the French ruling class. Montaigne strategically attributes these radical critiques to the cannibals, for as Chinard notes, "he saw in the responses of 'his savages' a remarkable opportunity to mock the values of his contemporaries without their being able to accuse him of blasphemy" (*L'Exotisme* 208, my translation).

After Montaigne recounts the Tupinambas' comments, the essay ends in a jesting manner as he ironically comments, "Tout cela ne va pas trop mal : mais quoy, ils ne portent point de haut de chausses!" 'All that is not verie ill; but what of that? They wear no kinde of breeches nor hosen!' (263; 54) The very last sentence of the text, then, repeats the very *first* impression recorded by Columbus in that initial moment of contact between European self and Amerindian other: the Natives may have their own perspective, their own way of life, but it cannot be denied that "they all go naked...as the day they were born" (Columbus, November 6, 1492). Thus, the final rhetorical gesture made by Montaigne reinscribes his text firmly in a discursive tradition—inherited from the *récits de voyage*—which Montaigne purports (at the start of the essay) to have thoroughly transcended.

Four centuries have passed since Montaigne wrote "Of Cannibals," and his text continues to confound modern scholars. While some have interpreted it as "an urgent call toward the production of more tolerant attitudes in the interaction of world cultures" (Marchi 49), others have read the essay as a quintessential example of the ways that ethnocentric assumptions are projected onto alien bodies in attempting to conceptualize otherness. As Todorov concludes, "the other is in fact never apprehended, never known" ("L'Etre et l'Autre" 125).

What is entirely clear, however (as I hope to have shown), is that Montaigne understood the central role that received language plays in the construction and reification of ethnic identities. Indeed, his reformulations of the terms *barbare* and *sauvage* indicate that he was well aware of the ideological issues at stake in their meanings. Though Montaigne certainly attempted to illuminate the ethnocentric notions underlying dominant representations of the New World inhabitants during his century, he ultimately undermined this project by validating those very notions in order to criticize the *barbarie* of his own society. As de Certeau remarks, Montaigne "displaces that which founds authority, though in spite of that he continues to repeat known facts and prior discourses, as is always the case" (de Certeau 127).

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Consequently, these "facts" and "discourses" could be appropriated and repeated again, long after 1580. In effect, his essay, having been offered through written language as a "discursive feast for all," could help "feed" the rapidly expanding body of (scientific/ethnographic) "knowledge" about non-Western cultures and terrains described by Pratt as the birth of a Eurocentric "planetary consciousness." For example, the Jesuit missionaries would have found a vast array of images in Montaigne's text with which to justify their own project. Circumscribed by the ideological need to depict the Natives both as inherently deprived of Christian/European civilization (i.e., in need of "salvation"), and simultaneously as potentially receptive to *la mission civilisatrice*, the reports of the Jesuits were informed by ambiguous (and even contradictory) imagery. Though a developed comparison between these reports and Montaigne's essay would evidently require more space than is available here, the equivocal manner in which Montaigne negotiates Amerindian identity in "Of Cannibals" certainly resonates with Jesuit representations of the Natives, such as this example taken from the *Journal d'un voyage* of François-Xavier de Charlevoix (1721): "We perceive in [the Indians] a mixture of ferocity and gentleness, the faults of carnivorous beasts and the virtues and qualities of heart and mind which do great honor to humanity" (qtd. in Healy 167).

Of course, Montaigne's cannibals can also be seen in the figure of *le bon sauvage* developed in the political writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Indeed, in his *Discours sur l'inégalité des hommes* (1754), for example, Rousseau reenacts the types of rhetorical gestures made by Montaigne in order to condemn civilization as the ultimate corruption of "man's natural goodness." In fact, the last sentence of his essay clearly recalls the observations made by the Tupinambas in France (as recorded by Montaigne): "it is manifestly contrary to the law of nature...that a child should govern an old man...and that a handful of people should gorge themselves with superfluities while the hungry multitude goes in want of necessities" (137).

Whether the ideas elucidated in "Of Cannibals" would later be used to mobilize and justify an ideology of religious/cultural imperialism, or to pave the way for social reform within Europe, Montaigne's text remains with us as a testimony not only to the heteroglossic potential of language (in challenging discursive forms of domination), but also to the ever-present danger of succumbing to centripetal linguistic/ideological forces, and in the process reinforcing hegemonic conceptions of otherness.

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