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A Fantasy of Justice

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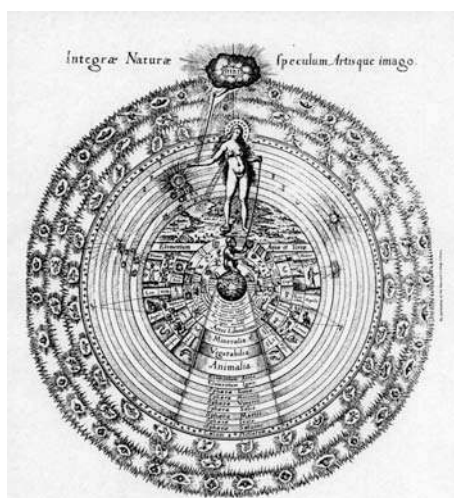
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A FANTASY OF JUSTICE

John O'BRIEN

Montaigne's essay « Des cannibales » contains the well-known passage that Shakespeare incorporated into *The Tempest* via Florio's translation of *The Essays*. The present paper will examine the relationship of this passage, in each of the two writers, to the notion of princely justice with which essay I, xxxi ends and with which the play almost ends. In both cases, questions of princely justice are framed in a setting that is geographically and ideologically distanced. Both writers ask, explicitly and implicitly, what kinds of justice are possible, whether justice is only possible in such settings, and whether justice is itself just a fantasy, given the injustice which Montaigne describes in his essay. Part of the discussion will examine the views of modern-day critics, especially David Quint, *Montaigne and the Quality of Mercy* and Michel de Certeau.

Un fantôme de justice L'essai « Des Cannibales » contient le passage bien connu que Shakespeare incorpora à *La Tempête* à partir de la traduction de Florio. Il s'agira ici d'examiner le lien entre ce passage chez chacun des deux écrivains et la notion de justice du prince posée à la fin de l'essai xxxi du livre I et qui clôt presque la pièce. Dans les deux cas, la question est posée dans un contexte géographique et idéologique permettant une distanciation. Les deux écrivains s'interrogent, explicitement et implicitement, sur les formes possibles de la justice, et se demandent si la justice est seulement possible dans les contextes envisagés et si la justice elle-même est un fantôme, au vu de l'injustice dont Montaigne dessine les traits dans son essai. Pour partie, nous examinerons le point de vue des critiques actuels, notamment ceux de David Quint dans « *Montaigne et la nature de la miséricorde* » et de Michel de Certeau.

In 1550-51, two men engaged in a dispute. The dispute took place in Valladolid and its subject was the native people of the Americas. For one of the disputants, the native peoples were barely human; they were lascivious and idolatrous, and indulged in unnatural practices such as cannibalism and human sacrifice. There was consequently no imperative for the Spanish settlers or the Spanish authorities in general to accord the natives the usual rights that were normal between human beings; for the native peoples were not human; they were little better than animals. The second disputant vigorously opposed this view. He argued that the native peoples had rational souls like the settlers that colonised their land and that consequently they were every bit as human as the colonisers and must be treated as their ethical equals. The Spaniards had, indeed, a moral obligation towards the natives and must discharge this obligation before they incurred the wrath of God.

The two disputants were Sepúlveda and Las Casas respectively. Anthony Pagden, who has carried out extensive recent research into the context and background of this dispute, and the personalities

involved in it, fills in much of the detail.³⁵⁰ The two men probably never actually met, he claims, and their dispute was held over a prolonged period with statements and counter-statements from each side adjudicated by a panel of judges. Las Casas spoke for five days, refuting passionately not only all that Sepúlveda had written, but also everything that had ever been written against the native Americans. Sepúlveda replied with twelve objections; Las Casas countered with twelve refutations. It was only when the president of the panel, Soto, intervened that the debate drew to an inconclusive close.

Despite the lack of formal pronouncement in his favour, Las Casas emerged as the moral victor. His brief account of the destruction of the Indies became a bestseller and he included in it a record of his debate with Sepúlveda. A French translation of this work was made by Jacques de Migrode and published in Antwerp in 1579 at the behest of the Dutch States General who commissioned the work as a warning against Spanish imperialism.³⁵¹ Las Casas's work, and his committed defence of the native inhabitants of the Americas, raised persistent and thorny problems, of justice particularly: should natives be treated equitably, and if so, how? What rights could they be said to have? And a related issue, not directly raised or contested by Las Casas: in what sense, if any, could European monarchs claim jurisdiction over the New World? What was the basis of their authority apart from the brute exercise of power?

The resonances of this heated debate reverberate elsewhere in the literature of the period that touches on the question of the New World. *The Tempest* is no exception to this rule. In particular, the close of the play throws up issues of special interest that claim our attention,

³⁵⁰ Anthony Pagden, *Peoples and Empires: Europeans and the Rest of the World, from Antiquity to the Present*, London, Phoenix Press, 2001, p. 77-79, to which my discussion here is indebted. The first chapter of Pagden's earlier work, *Spanish Imperialism and the Political Imagination*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1990, "Dispossessing the Barbarian: Rights and Property in Spanish America", p. 13-36 (p. 32-33 for Las Casas), elucidates the larger context of Las Casas's work, detailing the debates that raged over this issue of sovereignty, natural rights and the nature of the New World inhabitants in the years before and after the contest between Las Casas and Sepúlveda. Pagden's *European Encounters with the New World, from Renaissance to Romanticism*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1993, chapter 2, "The Autoptic Imagination", p. 51-87, gives extensive coverage to Las Casas as an instance of the eyewitness account.

³⁵¹ *Tyrannie et cruauté des Espagnols perpetrées es Indes Occidentales, qu'on dit Le Nouveau monde, Brieuement descrites en langue Castellane, par l'Evesque Don Frere BARTHELEMY DE LAS CASAS ... fidelement traduites par IAQUES de MIGGRODE*, Antwerp, Ravelenghien, 1579.

notably in relation to questions of distributive and commutative justice.³⁵² The mood is one of reconciliation and Prospero is prompted to it by Ariel:

Ariel. Your charm so strongly works 'em
That if you now beheld them your affections
Would become tender.
Prospero. Dost thou think so, spirit?
Ariel. Mine would, sir, were I human.
Prospero. And mine shall.
Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling
Of their afflictions, and shall not myself,
One of their kind, that relish all as sharply
Passion as they, be kindlier moved than thou art?
Though with their high wrongs I am struck to th' quick,
Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury
Do I take part. The rarer action is
In virtue than in vengeance. They being penitent,
The sole drift of my purpose doth extend
Not a frown further. Go release them, Ariel.
My charms I'll break, their senses I'll restore.
And they shall be themselves. (v.i.17-32)³⁵³

Prospero's decision is an object lesson in the clemency the Prince was expected to display: the justice by which vengeance could justifiably be exacted is foregone in favour of leniency, commuted into mercy in view of the courtiers' penitence. Prospero will abjure "this rough magic", his "so potent art" (v.i.50). It is a sign that the end of the play approaches and with it the resolution of the drama. Yet resolution will not be reached, forgiveness not bestowed, without a reminder of the wrongs committed. To Alonso, Prospero says: "Most cruelly/Didst thou, Alonso, use me and my daughter./Thy brother was a furtherer in the act. – /Thou art pinched for 't now, Sebastian" (v.i.71-74), while his words to Antonio highlight the tensions that led to the raising of the tempest in the first place:

³⁵² For the definition of justice in the Renaissance and its background in classical and humanist thought, see Ullrich Langer, *Vertu du discours, discours de la vertu: Littérature et philosophie morale au XVI^e siècle en France*, Geneva, Droz, 1999, p. 123-29, and p. 127-29 for the division of particular justice into distributive and commutative and their distinction.

³⁵³ All references incorporated in the text are to *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard and Katharine Eisamen Maus, New York and London, Norton, 1997. Quotation is by act, scene and line(s).

Flesh and blood,
 You, brother mine, that entertained ambition,
 Expelled remorse and nature, whom, with Sebastian –
 Whose inward pinches therefore are most strong –
 Would have killed your king, I do forgive thee,
 Unnatural though thou art. (v.i.74-78)

Alonso echoes these ideas:

Thy pulse
 Beats as of flesh and blood; [...]
 Thy dukedom I resign, and do entreat
 Thou pardon me my wrongs. (v.i.115-16, 120-21)

Prospero then addresses Antonio:

For you, most wicked sir, whom to call brother
 Would even infect my mouth, I do forgive
 Thy rankst fault, all of them, and require
 My dukedom of thee, which perforce I know
 Thou must restore. (v.i.132-36)

After the distributive justice comes the commutative: Prospero, a little later, goes on to say to Alonso:

My dukedom since you have given me again,
 I will requite you with as good a thing. (v.i.170-71)

And shortly afterwards we learn through Gonzalo what this commutation is to be:

Was Milan thrust from Milan, that his issue
 Should become kings of Naples?
 ...in one voyage
 Did Claribel her husband find in Tunis,
 And Ferdinand her brother found a wife
 Where he himself was lost; Prospero his dukedom
 In a poor isle; and all of us ourselves,
 When no man was his own. (v.i.208-10, 211-16)

The restoration of order depends on equity, the symmetrical alignment of distributive and commutative justice; and we might note that Gonzalo's speech just quoted contains both. The restoration depends further on the recognition and acceptance of political and social place, as well as being once more in one's right mind (one's psychological place); each element reasserts in the process the power and authority

of the magus and provides definitive proof of his ability to bring his magic to successful fruition.

There is, we know, a notable exception to this rule of perfect adequation in the economy of justice. That exception – deferred until after the scene of formal reconciliation, but before Prospero’s address to the audience – is Caliban. To all intents and purposes, a similar discursive pattern is followed: Caliban’s conspiracy had been discovered by Ariel and Prospero underscores the crime:

These three³⁵⁴ have robbed me, and this demi-devil,
For he’s a bastard one, had plotted with them
To take my life. (v.i.275-77)

Despite the gravity of the crime – a crime even more serious than that of Prospero’s brother, Antonio – Caliban and his fellow conspirators are offered clemency. Prospero addresses Caliban:

Go, sirrah, to my cell.
Take with you your companions. As you look
To have my pardon, trim it handsomely. (v.i.295-97)

And Caliban’s reply is seeming acquiescence, an indication that he has come to his senses and returned to his proper social place of subservience:

Ay, that I will; and I’ll be wise hereafter,
And seek for grace. (v.i.298-99)

Distributive justice, then, in the case of Caliban. But where is the commutative justice? It might be argued that in declining to exact vengeance on Caliban, Prospero effectively renounces commutative justice – since vengeance, “an eye for an eye”, was an acknowledged form of commutative justice.³⁵⁵ Yet the issue goes deeper. If Caliban has been a conspirator against Prospero’s life, it is because Prospero has been a usurper of Caliban’s isle: as the creature says at the beginning of the play, “this island’s mine, by Sycorax my mother,/ which thou tak’st from me” (i.ii.334-35). Greenblatt draws the appropriate inference: “..across the vast gulf that divides the triumphant prince and the defeated savage, there is a momentary,

³⁵⁴ Meaning Caliban, Stefano and Trinculo.

³⁵⁵ Cf. Langer, *Vertu du discours*, p. 128-29.

enigmatic glimpse of a hidden bond: 'this thing of darkness', Prospero says of Caliban, 'I/Acknowledge mine' (v.i.278-9). The words need only be a claim of ownership, but they seem to hint at a deeper, more disturbing link between father and monster, legitimate ruler and savage, judge and criminal".³⁵⁶

Even before Greenblatt had written those words, critics had not been slow to understand the implications of this situation for colonialism and colonialist discourse. The seminal articles by Francis Barker and Peter Hulme, and by Paul Brown, have offered penetrating assessments of *The Tempest* in terms which illuminate its relationship to modern day colonialist and political theory as well as to Elizabethan and Jacobean conceptualisations of the same.³⁵⁷ The postcolonialist line that these articles adopt has, however, met with strong challenge in recent years. Deborah Willis specifically takes issue with Brown's article in particular, arguing that the play "is more significantly engaged in arousing desire for, and displaying the power of, a ruler at the core who can contain a tendency toward oligarchy and division"³⁵⁸, and that it is Antonio who represents the real threat since his "evil is conceived as an innate quality" and "cannot be banished decisively by retributive justice".³⁵⁹ Other critics offset the postcolonialist argument by an emphasis on "the play's engagement with its own historical moment" and thus the dimension of early seventeenth-century European politics they see the play as embodying.³⁶⁰ It is with this debate in mind that we can situate *The Tempest* in respect of its dispensation of justice. Prospero stands right with Sepúlveda in believing implicitly that native peoples have no claims of legitimacy to their own lands compared with the more substantive claim of

³⁵⁶ *The Norton Shakespeare*, p. 3053.

³⁵⁷ Francis Barker and Peter Hulme, "Nymphs and Reapers Heavily Vanish: The Discursive Con-Texts of *The Tempest*", in *Alternative Shakespeares*, ed. John Drakakis, "New Accents", London and New York, Methuen, 1985, p. 191-205; Paul Brown, "'This Thing of Darkness I Acknowledge Mine': *The Tempest* and the Discourse of Colonialism" in *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1985, p. 48-71.

³⁵⁸ Deborah Willis, "Shakespeare's *Tempest* and the Discourse of Colonialism" in *William Shakespeare: The Tempest; A Case Study in Critical Controversy*, ed. Gerald Graff and James Phelan, Boston and New York, Bedford/St Martin's, 2000, p. 256-68; p. 261. Willis's article originally appeared in *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 29/2 (1989).

³⁵⁹ Willis, "Shakespeare's *Tempest*", p. 264.

³⁶⁰ So David Scott Kastan, "'The Duke of Milan/ And his Brave Son': Old Histories and New in *The Tempest*", in Graff and Phelan, p. 269-86; p. 275.

European monarchy backed by the exercise of God-given power. By contrast, it is Caliban himself who articulates his own right to the island, not through canon law as Las Casas was to attempt to do on the natives' behalf, but through inheritance from his mother; against the distributive justice by which Prospero gives the island to himself, Caliban sets natural justice which he sees Prospero as flouting. And as Meredith Anne Skura justifiably points out, the play allows Caliban the extensive airing of his views and of the injustices he suffers:

Shakespeare was the first to show one of *us* mistreating a native, the first to represent a native from the inside, the first to allow a native to complain on stage, and the first to make that New World encounter problematic enough to generate the current attention to the play.³⁶¹

It can be argued, of course, that some sort of justice, of a rough and ready kind, is enacted in respect of Caliban, inasmuch as Prospero "magnanimously" forbears to punish him for his conspiracy and Caliban presumably does get the island back when all have departed. However, this latter development is an involuntary concomitant of the teleology of justice (and of the drama), not an essential component of it; and he consequently receives nothing in exchange for the wrongs he has suffered because it is not admitted that he has suffered any wrongs. The conclusion of the drama leaves this particular ethical issue inconclusive.

The problem is compounded by a further dimension which Greenblatt describes as "two different accounts of the nature of mimetic economy", constituting "a model of unresolved and unresolvable doubleness":

the island in *The Tempest* seems to be an image of the place of pure fantasy, set apart from surrounding discourses; and it seems to be an image of the place of power, the place in which all individual discourses are organized by the half-invisible ruler. [...]. The aesthetic space [...] is constituted by the simultaneous appropriation of and swerving from the discourse of power.³⁶²

That doubleness is likewise written into the justice that power dispenses. On the one hand, justice can be enacted in such a way as to

³⁶¹ Meredith Anne Skura, "Discourse and the Individual: The Case of Colonialism in *The Tempest*", *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40 (1989), p. 42-69; p. 60.

³⁶² Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2001, p. 158-59.

bring about reconciliation between opposing political interests and the preservation of dynastic order before power itself is voluntarily laid down by Prospero. On the other hand, justice is enacted by exclusion from the commutative system of a creature who has rights under natural law and whose *lèse-majesté* is forgiven only on condition that he accepts subservience in a hierarchy that is alien to him. These doublenesses, as Greenblatt also sees, derive from, or at the very least are intimately connected to, the status of art, in particular the status of Prospero's art in *The Tempest*. The manifestations of the magus's power are manifestations of high art: the ability to conjure the storm in the first place, the activity of Ariel who symbolises Prospero's "word in action, the precise, fluent fulfilment of his desires",³⁶³ the deft dovetailing of Prospero's plotting of events and circumstances with the larger structural dynamic of the play itself – all these bear witness to the magician's artifice and the effortless ease with which he organises the *mise en scène* of incident and character in a play that is self-consciously, self-advertisingly proud of its alluring fictionality. By the same token, justice can be indexed as a positive product of this imaginative world which invests fantasy with a value as a philosophical and indeed in this case political ideal, able to bring about the harmonisations on which the play's *dénouement* depends. At the same time, however, what Prospero restores is an order of culture, owing to the supernatural control he wields. The fantasy of justice he creates is itself not a natural product, but an ideological one, premised on the assumption that art and nature can coincide. The self-reflexive nature of the play highlights just how precarious that ideological construct is: it is a dream that rounds off a sleep, an insubstantial pageant on a shadow stage.

Let me summarise the argument to this point. The fantasy of justice in *The Tempest* is a political and social aspiration, best enacted – because most visibly, most potently enacted – in a place set apart from any one particular social order and yet subtending them all; the fantasy of justice is just that – a fantasy, a delusion, only to be enacted in a place set apart because pragmatically incompatible with any actually-instantiated political or social order: between these two poles

³⁶³ Terry Eagleton, *William Shakespeare*, "Re-Reading Literature", Oxford, Blackwell, 1986, p. 94.

lies the complex dialectic that Shakespeare's play figures forth as a problem allowing of no simple solution.

It is not, of course, the only point at which tensions and disturbances come to the surface in this play. Gonzalo's speech on the commonwealth in Act 2 provides an obvious instance:

I' th' commonwealth I would by contraries
Execute all things. For no kind of traffic
Would I admit, no name of magistrate;
Letters should not be known; riches, poverty,
And use of service, none; contract, succession,
Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none;
No occupation, all men idle; all;
And women too – but innocent and pure;
No sovereignty –

(II.i.147-56)

And he continues shortly afterwards:

All things in common nature should produce
Without sweat or endeavour. Treason, felony,
Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine,
Would I not have; but nature should bring forth
Of its own kind all foison, all abundance,
To feed my innocent people.

(II.i.159-64)

It is a purposely oppositional speech, and at a number of different levels. It is, for one thing, not a description that should be regarded as co-extensive with the island that the shipwrecked courtiers find on their arrival. The island on which they land seems "to be desert" (II.i.35) – both infertile and uninhabited – whereas Gonzalo calls for a place where "nature should bring forth/Of it own kind all foison, all abundance". Within the space that is demarcated by the staging of the drama, a further conceptual space is thus opened up by Gonzalo's musings. If Prospero's island is at a remove from any contemporary reality or setting, then Gonzalo's commonwealth is at a greater remove still. Indeed, Gonzalo's description of it expressly seeks "T'excel the Golden Age" (II.i.168); it is avowedly Utopian, as Frank Lestringant has shown in this conference.³⁶⁴ And yet it does, despite that, pass comment on issues that prove central to the play. One might note, for example, the way sovereignty is discussed in the very presence of Alonso and Antonio, a prefiguration of the challenge that Caliban

³⁶⁴ "Gonzalo's Books", and his *Le Cannibale. Grandeur et décadence*, Paris, Perrin, 1994, p. 163-69.

constantly presents to the legitimacy of Prospero's power. More insistent is Gonzalo's emphatic dismissal of the legal system – "no name of magistrate" – and with it the legislation that covers contract and succession: justice will not be maintained by distribution and commutation operating under the general name of equity, but regulated by Nature, if regulated at all. This is in striking contrast to the very dispensation that Prospero himself will enact, and a salutary reminder that this dispensation is itself the apogee of a finely tuned art that fantasises a solution to the dramatic and political dilemmas, a solution that it assumes is acceptable to Nature or is indeed indistinguishable from it.

Gonzalo's speech does not mention cannibals or Calibans; Montaigne's essay, from one page of which the speech is adapted, names the cannibals directly, in its title, and indirectly, through the use of the term "sauvage", which enables the essayist to deploy paradoxes and equivocations about who the "sauvages" really are – they who cleave to the state of Nature, or we who have corrupted and abandoned it. The paradoxical eulogy that Montaigne sketches near the beginning of his essay shares with Gonzalo's encomium an oppositional stance: in the immediate context, it is intended as part of an imaginary debate between the essayist and Plato whose conception of the ideal state is, for Montaigne, bettered by native society, not least because the description of Brazilian life is based on experience. It seeks, therefore, not to open up an "ailleurs" that is remoter even than Prospero's island, but rather to import the findings of explorers and adventurers into the ambit of Western society and in so doing to dismantle the claims of that society to cultural superiority. In particular, of course, Montaigne uses the polyvalence of the term "barbarie" in order to highlight the barbarity of the French Wars of Religion – the real cannibals are already in France, not outside it. The parallelism in the terminology at this point underscores the use of Brazilian culture as a form of critique, for the earlier sentence "Les paroles mesmes qui signifient le mensonge, la trahison, la dissimulation, l'avarice, l'envie, la detraction, le pardon, inouies"³⁶⁵ is partly repeated and echoed in the sentence that acts as a commentary on the cannibalism and cruelty of the Civil Wars: "...il ne se trouve jamais aucune opinion si desreglée

³⁶⁵ *Les Essais de Michel de Montaigne*, édités par Pierre Villey, réédités par V.-L. Saulnier, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1965, p. 206-207.

qui excusait la trahison, la desloyauté, la tyrannie, la cruauté, qui sont nos fautes ordinaires” (I, 31, 210).

To these well-known strategic features of Montaigne’s use of the cannibals can be added a third aspect in which the essayist’s aim is, to quote André Tournon, to “précise[r] le partage entre le probable – réalité lointaine, perçue à travers des témoignages – et le contrôlable – le sens de ces témoignages, et notre propre attitude envers les renseignements qu’ils fournissent”.³⁶⁶ It is this dimension of Montaigne’s essay that requires further comment. It may at first sight seem strange to evaluate what he says about the cannibals in terms of justice (the terms Montaigne explicitly proposes are those of valour), especially in “the culture that cannot pardon”, to quote David Quint’s description of cannibal society.³⁶⁷ Nonetheless, elements of cannibalistic customs recall forms of distribution and commutation, but arranged in such a way as to block their easy assessment in standard Western terms. Thus in respect of property and inheritance, Montaigne notes as follows:

[Les vieillards] laissent à leurs héritiers en commun cette pleine possession de biens par indivis, sans autre titre que celui tout pur que nature donne à ses créatures, les produisant au monde. (I, 31, 210)

A recognisable system of inheritance is invoked, only to be qualified by the remainder of the sentence. Moreover, the cannibals all call each other “freres”, erasing or at the very least blurring as a consequence distinctions of birth and breeding. A more complex example occurs in the case of vengeance which, Montaigne reports, is the object of cannibalistic practice. We know from *The Tempest* that the regulation of vengeance fell squarely into the domain of justice. Yet at just this point Montaigne allows the full otherness of cannibal culture to emerge from his account. As Michel de Certeau has pointed out, the actual aim of cannibal vengeance is to force the captive into an admission of weakness; there is, says de Certeau, an economy of speech in which the body is the price.³⁶⁸ The ritual of cannibalism prescribes a practice that

³⁶⁶ André Tournon, *Montaigne: La glose et l’essai*, édition revue et corrigée, précédée d’un Réexamen, Paris, Champion, 2000, p. 220-21.

³⁶⁷ David Quint, *Montaigne and the Quality of Mercy: Ethical and Political Themes in the Essais*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1998, chapter 3, “The Culture That Cannot Pardon: ‘Des cannibales’ in the Larger Essais”, p. 75-101.

³⁶⁸ Michel de Certeau, “Montaigne’s ‘Of Cannibals’: The Savage ‘I’” in *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, translated by Brian Massumi, “Theory and History of Literature”,

is almost contractually adhered to by its participants. And what is honoured in this contractual ritual is a commutation of bodies: the captors are eating not another essentially, but themselves:

Ces muscles, dit-il, cette chair et ces veines, ce sont les vôtres, pauvres fols que vous estes; vous ne reconnoissez pas que la substance des membres de vos ancestres s'y tient encore: savourez les bien, vous y trouverez le goust de vostre propre chair. (I, 31, 212)

The contract is fulfilled when the avenger almost literally devours himself.

Montaigne's essay shifts, therefore, from ethnographical description that brings into play Utopian elements in a standardised idealising language— a feature it shares with Shakespeare — to the reality of the Other in all its strangeness, a strangeness that the essayist does nothing to domesticate.³⁶⁹ In the process, characteristics that are associated commonly in Western thought with the dispensation of justice are systematically skewed and repositioned in a conceptual framework that accords them a radically different value.

This whole process will be accelerated by the final section of the essay, where Montaigne turns from the accounts of witnesses to his own eye-witness account. At the same time, this closing section represents the climax of the momentum by which the reality of the cannibals is brought home (in more than one sense) to France. These switches in perspective are accompanied by a more overt concentration on questions of justice, and nowhere more obviously than in the second of the reactions that the cannibals give to life in France:

ils avoyent aperceu qu'il y avoit parmy nous des hommes pleins et gorgez de toutes sortes de commoditez, et que leurs moitez estoient mendians à leurs portes, décharnez de faim et de pauvreté; et trouvoient estrange comme ces moitez icy necessiteuses pouvoient souffrir une telle injustice, qu'ils ne prinsent les autres à la gorge, ou missent le feu à leurs maisons. (I, 31, 214)

volume 17, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1986, p. 75. (This essay remains uncollected in French; original published as "Le lieu de l'autre. Montaigne, 'Des cannibales'" in *Pour Léon Poliakov. Le Racisme: mythes et sciences*, ed. M. Olander, Brussels, Complexe, 1981, p. 187-98.)

³⁶⁹ Cf. Pierre Chaunu's remarks in his preface to Lestringant's *Le Cannibale*: "Le Cannibale, ... c'est l'Autre vraiment autre, celui qui se place à l'extrémité de l'altérité, au pied de ce qui est fuite au-delà de l'horizon, de ce qui a cessé d'être un autre, pour se dissoudre dans le néant" (p. 18).

In retrospect the superabundant fertility of the New World that Montaigne highlights earlier in “Des Cannibales” is not a neutral description of a natural state; rather, it passes judgement on the inequalities of the Old World, in the same way that the lack of division of New World goods condemns Occidental distributions, however secured in the judicial system. The premises of Western equity are thereby questioned and their inadequacies revealed, as De Certeau understands: “their speech, a critique of the injustice that divides our social body, judges us”.³⁷⁰

The first reaction of the natives is, if anything, more telling still:

Ils dirent qu'ils trouvoient en premier lieu fort estrange que tant de grands hommes, portans barbe, forts et armez, qui estoient autour du Roy (il est vray-semblable que ils parloient des Suisses de sa garde), se soubmissent à obeyr à un enfant, et qu'on ne choissoit plus tost quelqu'un d'entr'eux pour commander[.] (I, 31, 213)

It is hard to read this as anything other than a political comment on the current state of the monarchy during the Wars of Religion. It is an observation on kingly and paternal authority that has, in fact, not yet made it as far as the paternal, but has stopped short at adolescence; the boy-king Charles IX is from the Brazilian perspective an “enfant”, unworthy of the honourable name of “frere” that the natives use among themselves. The point can be extended into the closing account that Montaigne gives of his exchange with the Brazilian chieftain and the leadership he displays in war, the following he has, the respect he is shown in peace time. It would have been difficult for many contemporary French readers to claim the same for their own king.

It is usual to think of this section of “Des Cannibales” as providing a relativising standpoint on the issues it contains – France seen through cannibal eyes. And that is true. But the implications of Montaigne’s encounter with the cannibals, as of Shakespeare’s representation of Caliban, go further and deeper. They may perhaps be regarded as exemplifications of what de Certeau termed a heterology,³⁷¹ a description of cultural practices and historical

³⁷⁰ De Certeau, “Montaigne’s ‘Of Cannibals’”, p. 78.

³⁷¹ Michel de Certeau, “Travel Narratives of the French to Brazil: Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries” in *New World Encounters*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1993, p. 323-28, especially p. 325 for the notion of heterology in respect of New World material; Luce Giard, “Epilogue: Michel de Certeau’s Heterology and the New World”, also in *New World Encounters*, p. 313-22.

specificities proper to the Other that resist Western codifications and that create in Western texts disturbances, upheavals, anomalies. No one remains unchanged by his encounter with the Other, says de Certeau.³⁷² Whether Calibans or cannibals, the extent of their writing back is written into the texts of Shakespeare and Montaigne, highlighting – first – that Occidental justice is a fantasy based on class differences that accentuate disparities and inequalities; disputing – secondly – the “natural” right that European princes claim over foreign soil; contesting – thirdly – the very control they purport to exercise over their own subjects since political violence lies restlessly under the surface of apparent social order.

Montaigne gives us one more vision of the cannibals in his *Essais*, this time in the “Apologie de Raymond Sebond”:

Ce qu'on nous dict de ceux du Bresil, qu'ils ne mouroyent que de vieillesse, et qu'on attribue à la serenité et tranquillité de leur air, je l'attribue plustost à la tranquillité et serenité de leur ame, deschargée de toute passion et pensée et occupation tendue ou desplaisante, comme gents qui passoyent leur vie en une admirable simplicité et ignorance, sans lettres, sans loy, sans roy, sans religion quelconque. (II, 12, 491)

It is a typically provocative comment, placed shortly after Montaigne's no less provocative discussion of Pyrrho's pig, who represents for him Sceptical *ataraxia*.³⁷³ Yet it is also a charming comment, a vignette of peace and innocence. In the event, the inhabitants of the New World were not long to enjoy such peace of mind. Nor was the King of France.

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³⁷² Luce Giard, “Epilogue”, p. 317.

³⁷³ John O'Brien, “Si avons nous une tres-douce medecine que la philosophie”, in *L'écriture du scepticisme chez Montaigne*, ed. Marie-Luce Demonet (forthcoming).