

**Beholding a ‘Brave New World’: Sir Walter Raleigh’s *The Discovery of Guiana* and William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest***

For centuries, despite some courageous, avant-garde theories surfacing here and there, what prevailed, as we know, was an ancestral notion of immutability, firmly rooted in a theocentric, geocentric, rigid, harmonic cosmic order. Every being occupied a specific place, according to a view that was also deeply anchored in the theory of correspondences, so powerfully synthesised by Hermes Trismegistus in *The Emerald Tablet* of his *Hermetica* – “as above, so below”.

When the sea voyages started as a planned enterprise during the 15th and 16th centuries, profound changes occurred regarding the notions of distance, remoteness and time. The idea of the world was thus broadened on an unprecedented scale, while the research carried out at the advent of the scientific age by men such as Copernicus, Galileo, da Vinci, Brahe and Kepler clearly contributed towards a different conception of both the universe and the worldview. The ancient cosmological architecture was gradually shattered by the studies based on new paradigms which were, however, steadily congregating multifarious knowledges. The arrival of Portuguese sailors in Madeira and Porto Santo in 1418-19 may be seen as a symbolic landmark in such an enterprise. From then on, fragile vessels kept moving forward through the oceans, gradually disclosing a whole new reality after having arrived in unknown territories inhabited by living species never seen before. European crews experienced controversial feelings of wonder, attraction, fascination, perplexity and repulsion when they met human beings who were not white, whose bodies were tattooed, who wore no clothes, had feathers, bones, teeth, human scalps or human organs as ornaments, and even practiced anthropophagy. Similarly, a great number of animals and plants were so

extraordinary that they seemed the materialisation of fantastic creatures of mythology and lore.

By and large, the crucial, effective impact on common people should be attributed primarily to the news told by all those who sailed away, arrived in unknown lands and managed to return, rather than caused by the influence of scientific works. A curious interactive process was thus set in motion. In fact, the actual voyages across the oceans soon gave origin to other forms of voyages and voyagers. Sailors, merchants and adventurers wished, in one way or another, to share experiences and bear witness to what they had seen. As a result, what they had beheld and wandered at later materialised as oral reports, as first-hand<sup>1</sup> and second-hand<sup>2</sup> written accounts, as various forms of visual arts (frequently based on those accounts and reports<sup>3</sup>) and as fictional texts.<sup>4</sup> Listeners, viewers and readers were, in a way and in a sense, transported to those faraway places which were thus rebuilt or recreated in their minds.

The many iconographic and written works, exhibiting heterogenous standards of quality and/or accuracy, constitute therefore precious data for the understanding not only of the Discoveries, in particular, but also of the general context of an age when *praxis* supplanted *gnosis*, and a new learning so wisely managed to amalgamate various knowledges, as I mentioned above. Elaborate descriptive and narrative processes were developed on new bases for the first time, while the imagination proved to play an important role in the art of reproducing – through image or word – what had been beheld, although they lacked plausible references. How could the real shape of a rhinoceros, of an armadillo, of a pineapple be described or depicted? How could some human physiognomies be apprehended and some of their habits explained? The interactive process certainly shaped the Europeans' own perception of themselves and of their relation with God. The mystery of creation, particularly the biblical verses “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Genesis: 1, 27) had therefore to be reinterpreted, revised and rethought.

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<sup>1</sup> Examples: Hans Staden's *Wahrhaftige Historia* (1557); Sir Walter Raleigh's *The Discovery of Guiana* (1595).

<sup>2</sup> Example: Richard Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations* (1589).

<sup>3</sup> The iconographic works were mostly carried out by German and Flemish authors – Theodor de Bry, Levinus Hulsius, Albrecht Dürer, Konrad Gesner, Hans Burgkmair and Hans Staden.

<sup>4</sup> Examples: Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516); William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (c. 1600); Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1627).

Woodcuts constitute vivid artistic accounts, which were frequently inserted either as illustrations in travellers' works or as visual support in academic texts on fauna and flora. The printed works produced and published according to the new scientific approach and as a result of the emerging disciplines – Botany, Geography, Anatomy, Ethnography – contained a profusion of drawings that intended to show the new specimens under study, as photographic records do nowadays. In early modern times, however, descriptions were more or less faithful to reality depending on the imaginative power of both tellers and listeners, and on their ability to remember what they had seen or been told. The maritime expansion ended up by erasing fears and myths born out of tales, bestiaries and lore: sea voyagers had not, after all, encountered terrific monsters in frightening lairs, or mysterious mermaids, chanting and enchanting alienated sailors, or immaculate white unicorns, or brave centaurs. Curiously and paradoxically, new fears began to spring up when another sort of monstrosities took shape through the report of inexplicable phenomena, through the descriptions of exotic places and odd creatures – some of them indeed similar to the legendary ones – and through the subsequent iconographic representations.

An amalgamation of ancient and new concepts can also be observed in the field of cartography. The early modern tendency towards precision in the elaboration/correction of maps and charts was accompanied by the emphasis on the use of symbolism and allegory. For instance, late in the 16th century, Heinrich Bünting's *Itinerarium Sacrae Scripturae* (1581) contains items that stand out amongst the most curious of the kind – the *Cloverleaf Map* (*Die ganze Welt in einem Kleberblatt*), *Asia in the Form of Pegasus* (*Asia Secunda Pars Terrae in Forma Pegasir*) and *Europe as a Queen* (*Europa Prima Pars Terrae In Forma Virginis*).

In fact, at a time when ancient knowledge was permeated with new concepts and experiences, when old beliefs and new discoveries became intertwined, and when antiquity joined modernity, Aristotle's *The History of Animals* (350 BC), Pliny's (the Elder) *Naturalis Historia* (c. 77-79 AD), Isidore of Seville's *Etimologiae* (late 6th century), together with medieval bestiaries and *mirabilia*, were not dismissed but rediscovered and reread through a new lens. Furthermore, well into the age of Expansion and notwithstanding the scientific spirit of the time, works exploring fantasy and legend kept being written. Two examples are Pierre Boaistuau's *Histoires Prodigieuses* (1560), which was presented to Queen Elizabeth I when the author visited

England, and Ulisse Aldrovandi's *Monstrorum Historia* (1642). Malformations, that had always been connected to legend and fantasy, and had given origin to the type of works mentioned so far, gained widespread fame not only because of the large circulation of printed works initiated at that time but also because they became part of a whole set of new wonders.

Albrecht Dürer's well-known rhinoceros stands out within the enormous amount of rich data that testifies to the process I have mentioned. In the first half of the 16th century, the German painter and engraver came into possession of a letter from a Portuguese correspondent containing a drawing of the rhinoceros that had been brought from India to Lisbon in 1515, as a gift to King Manuel I. The arrival of the animal in Lisbon constituted such a remarkable event that news and descriptions of the amazing creature – known as Ganda, from then on – started circulating all over Europe. Based on both letter and drawing, Dürer produced the famous woodcut that would remain as the standard representation of the rhinoceros until the Darwinian age, and would be largely adopted and adapted by other authors. For instance, Valeriano used it in his *Hieroglyphica* (1556), while Gesner produced a fine copy of it for his *Historiae animalium* (1551-87). Hans Burgkmair's version, although artistically inferior, was probably a more faithful rendering of Ganda's pitiful condition.

Gaspar Corrêa's description of a rhinoceros, in his work *Lendas da Índia*,<sup>5</sup> may also have influenced or complemented the posterior written descriptions and visual representations:<sup>6</sup>

... era alimaria mansa, baixa de corpo, hum pouço comprido, os coiros pés e mãos d'alifante, a cabeça como de porquo comprida, e os olhos junto do focinho, e sobre as ventas tinha hum corno, grosso e curto, e delgado na ponta; comia herua, palha, arroz cozido.<sup>7</sup>

Let us now approach two early modern texts of distinct genres that constitute outstanding examples within the munificent production on sea voyages and the New

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<sup>5</sup> Gaspar Corrêa, *Lendas da Índia*, vol. I, Rodrigo José de Lima Felner (org) (c. 1512-1514; Lisboa: Academia Real das Sciencias de Lisboa, 1858-1863) pp. 373-374.

<sup>6</sup> The Portuguese soldier and historiographer, who was Afonso de Albuquerque's secretary, arrived in India around 1512.

<sup>7</sup> My translation: "... it was a beast of sweet disposition, short in height, with a somewhat longish body; hide, feet and legs like an elephant's; the long head like a pig's, and the eyes close to the nuzzle; and over the nose it had a short, thick sharp-pointed horn; it ate grass, straw and boiled rice."

World, without losing sight of the interaction with iconography and the amalgamation of new concepts and old beliefs. One is Sir Walter Raleigh's narrative report *The Discovery of Guiana*, written in 1595, resulting from his actual sea voyage to South America; the other one is William Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*, written around 1610, about fictional events on an invented, nameless island.<sup>8</sup> The broad dichotomy 'Nature *versus* Civilisation' – and, intimately connected to it, 'Art *versus* Nurture' – stands for one of the most relevant problematics raised by both works, as I will try to show.

Walter Raleigh's text is an extremely curious product of its own time because the author's point of view proves unexpected and unpredictable within 16th-century European standards. In fact, the opposition between Nature (meaning the New World) and Civilisation (meaning Old Europe) is established right in the beginning and will be widely expanded when the author elaborately discloses the realities he saw and met on the other side of the Atlantic: rich territories with thriving rainforests, many rivers and amazing inhabitants that, however, were already being extensively explored, plundered and ravaged. Raleigh clearly criticises and exposes the atrocities inflicted upon the native tribes by the Spaniards, as well as his rejection of the Spanish colonial methods. He continuously expresses his admiration for the natives – except for the cannibals, only briefly alluded to – but, in fact, he never hides or masquerades his main purpose in the New World, i.e. the finding and exploration of gold. While in pursuit of Guiana (where he never enters), the author continuously tells of his and his crew's good relationship with the Indian guides and hosts, accurately describing the native tribes, their habits, medicines and cultures, as well as the characteristics and specimens of their nations.

Hulsius would produce an astounding woodcut<sup>9</sup> after Raleigh's description of the Ewaipanomas; Raleigh himself was indebted to Pliny's legendary reference to the Blemmyae, a Nubian tribe believed to be acephalous:

... a nation of people whose heads appear not above their shoulders ... They are called Ewaipanoma; they are reported to have their eyes in their shoulders, and their mouths in

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<sup>8</sup> See notes 1 and 4.

<sup>9</sup> Levinus Hulsius, *Kurze wunderbare Beschreibung des goldreichen Königsreichs Guianae in America* ..., (1599), 22 Oct. 2010.  
<[http://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/index.html?c=autoren\\_index&l=de&ab=Hulsius%2C+Levinus](http://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/index.html?c=autoren_index&l=de&ab=Hulsius%2C+Levinus)>.

the middle of their breasts, and that a long train of hair groweth backward between their shoulders.<sup>10</sup>

On the other hand, Raleigh's description of the armadillo matches Konrad Gesner's iconographic representation of the extraordinary small animal:

... a beast called by the Spaniards armadillo, which they call cassacam, which seemeth to be all barred over with small plates somehow like a rhinoceros, with a white horn growing in his hinder parts as big as a great hunting-horn ...<sup>11</sup>

Hans Staden's *Wahrhaftige Historia*<sup>12</sup> contains the author's own version, although simpler, of the same animal he certainly saw in Brazil. Staden makes use of the Portuguese word "tatu", putting into evidence another aspect of the process here under consideration. As we know, the interaction in the field of language was naturally very dynamic at the time, due to the urgent need to find a name for each one of the new realities. As a consequence, a majority of the words are mere adaptations, either of the native form or of the colonisers' language. Raleigh adopted the word "armadillo" because the part of the New World he explored in pursuit of the "large, rich, and beautiful Empire of Guiana"<sup>13</sup> was then occupied by the Spaniards; the same thing happened with Staden and the Portuguese form "tatu", derived from the Indian vocabulary, because the part of the New World he explored was the Brazilian territory occupied by the Portuguese.

Occupation and colonisation are therefore viewed by Sir Walter Raleigh in a *sui generis* way, according to the parameters of early modern times. The author's relationship with the various groups results in an alliance against a common enemy, certainly involving tensions on the European side. The old conflict between England and Spain, exacerbated in Europe because of fierce politics of supremacy, is thus transferred to the New World and assumes new angles when the narrator constantly registers the Spaniards' cruelty and rapacity.

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<sup>10</sup> Sir Walter Raleigh, *The Discovery of Guiana* (1595), *Modern History Sourcebook*, 22 Oct. 2010. <<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1595raleigh-guiana.html>>.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Hans Staden, *Wahrhaftige Historia* (1557), 22 Oct. 2010.

<[url:http://www.archive.org/stream/staden/staden\\_1557\\_warhaftige#page/n0/mode/2up](http://www.archive.org/stream/staden/staden_1557_warhaftige#page/n0/mode/2up)>.

<sup>13</sup> *Op cit.*

The dichotomy Nature / Civilisation, as well as the reflection on colonisation, is developed in different ways in *The Tempest*,<sup>14</sup> where the set of dualities is probably even more evident. Shakespeare blends the new fascinating sea voyage imagery with ancient cultural traditions, by combining remote islands with sorcery, rough seas with magic, violent storms with transcendental powers, mysterious fogs with spirits, and odd creatures with refined, educated aristocrats.

As a matter of fact, in Shakespeare's play Nature is, above all, unnatural. Prospero, the master of the island, and Miranda, his daughter, are castaways, brought ashore by a sea storm twelve years earlier. The two indigenous inhabitants exhibit complex characteristics, regarding their existence on the island: Caliban, the son of the witch Sycorax and an incubus, was born there only by accident; Ariel is an airy spirit of a supernatural kind. Then, the tempest that causes the shipwreck and the whole action, by bringing a group of Europeans to the island, is the result of Prospero's magical manipulation of the natural elements. Thus, the newcomers' arrival, among whom are Prospero's main political opponents in Europe (namely his usurping brother Antonio and the King of Naples), ends up by bringing an already existing disorder to the surface and originates other elements of tension. As it happens in *The Discovery of Guiana*, European conflicts are thus transferred to this fictional portion of the New World; but contrary to many of the places Raleigh visited, the physical environment in Shakespeare's play is eventually left untouched by the Europeans, who do not stay there, not even Prospero. The rapacious plans of colonisation engendered with Caliban's aid are not successful, while Gonzalo's depiction of a utopian-like society is but a wishful projection of his kind, noble and honest nature (Act II, Scene 1, lines 148–156). In fact, the majority of the events will later have direct, deep consequences, in the distant city-states, ruled by complex political, social and transactional systems, rather than in the isolated natural microcosm where Caliban was born and Ariel dwells.

Different, subtle forms of exploitation exist, nonetheless, in *The Tempest*. Both Caliban and Ariel are enslaved by Prospero, although their enslavement assumes different forms, depending on their characteristics and on Prospero's purposes. When the Duke arrived in the island, Caliban was living in the wild, like an animal, in a perfect conjunction with the earthy natural elements. He is the embodiment of the brutality, vulgarity and ugliness existing in Nature, and is also seen and described as a

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<sup>14</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* in Stanley Wells *et al.*, (eds) *The Oxford Shakespeare. The Complete Works* (c. 1610; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), pp. 1222-1243.

monster because of his physical features. Ariel, on the other hand, had been imprisoned many years before by one of Sycorax's powerful, dark magic spells that Prospero manages to undo. The airy spirit is the personification of kindness, gentleness and goodness, also existing in the natural world; moreover, his magical skills may constitute a metaphor of the enchanting power of Nature, of what cannot be rationally explained and belongs to the spiritual dimension. Ariel's enslavement means, above all, assistance: he will assist Prospero during the period of his preparation as a mage and will be released after the fulfilment of the Duke's political plans, twelve years later (after the tempest is forged). Ariel is a slave because of his bondage, of the impossibility of freely walking away and because he has no choice but to carry out his master's orders; otherwise, he is an extension of Prospero, and their relationship is permanently based on kindness, civility and friendship.

Everything is different with Caliban. According to early modern concepts, exteriority corresponded to interiority. Physical deformities and mental illnesses were seen as signs of association with evil, justifying attitudes of intolerance and subjugation. Concomitantly, the association of dark people with negativity, together with the belief that other societies were inferior because of their ways of living, led to official slavery and to the destruction of many cultures. In the play's *dramatis personae*, Caliban is mentioned as "a salvage and deformed slave"; he is dark like the earth, the rocks and the bushes amidst which he lives. Right from the beginning, he is depicted as an inferior being, whose nature is fit to serve, to do the heavy tasks, because 'salvage' may be understood as 'savage' and/or as 'property rescued from loss at sea'. His name is another relevant aspect in his negative characterisation. Even if we assume that 'Caliban' derives from 'Carib', i.e. from the term referring to the New World and its inhabitants reported by Sir Walter Raleigh, one cannot dismiss or ignore the other obvious association with the term 'cannibal'. And for the Europeans, cannibalism was/is probably the most disrupting, unacceptable habit ever practiced by some indigenous communities.

Michel de Montaigne's view seems therefore unique in his own time. When, in his essay "Des Cannibales",<sup>15</sup> he establishes a correspondence between the New World and a lost golden age or earthly paradise, and between naturalness and goodness, he

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<sup>15</sup> Michel de Montaigne, "Des Cannibales" in Pierre Villey (ed) *Les Essais* (1580; Paris: Quadrige/Presses Universitaires de France, 1965) pp. 202-214.



thus implicitly accepts the habit of anthropophagy. Raleigh and Shakespeare clearly do not. Furthermore, Shakespeare, unlike Montaigne, does not defend the idea that everything in and of Nature is good; nor does he defend that the so-called civilised world is perfect. The more or less realistic iconographic depictions of cannibalism in early modern times, also reveal such duality, as we can see in Theodor de Bry's picture made after Staden's report, which depicts a child joyfully playing with a human head. In his report, Staden tells that he was captured in Brazil by the anthropophagous Tupinambás and taken to their village to be eaten during one of their festivities. Eventually, he managed to escape, after the Portuguese failed negotiations to release him. Despite Staden's poorer ability in the art of drawing when compared to de Bry's, the two different points of view are obvious: de Bry's woodcut would probably be much cruder, had he been in Staden's shoes.

As I have pointed out, Art and Nurture are intimately related to the dichotomy Nature / Civilisation. In *The Tempest*, the island functions as a setting for processes of learning and teaching, implying subsequent elaborate processes of *gnosis* and *praxis*. Prospero is a Neoplatonist devoted to study and meditation. With the aid of his books and through intellectual reflection, he perfects the manipulation of the elements, seeks the essence of knowledge and tries to apprehend the balance within the universe, namely the harmonious correspondence of the celestial with the low spheres. His Ariel functions as a material liaison between macrocosm and microcosm. The Duke's devotion to learning and the consequent neglect of his governmental duties in Milan led to usurpation and exile but enabled him to pursue his studies and to eventually restore some kind of order in his civilised dominions, by bringing his opponents to the island.

Prospero's elaborate learning process is simultaneous with Miranda's education. He is his daughter's schoolmaster, as Roger Ascham was Queen Elizabeth I's tutor. Like in Antiquity, during the Renaissance, virtue and perfection were considered intrinsic to nobility and, therefore, the process of Miranda's education is an extension of her natural, aristocratic condition, in other words, of her essence. Consequently, her *nobilitas*, which is part of her inheritance, is easily nurtured by her father's art, although the play also exposes the other side of the problem (which cannot be developed here), through Antonio's characterisation, actions and choices, summed up by Miranda's remark: "Good wombs have borne bad sons" (Act I, Scene 2, line 119).

Astonishingly, Prospero also seeks to teach Caliban. His intentions and successes with his daughter and his slave are however completely different, as well as

the consequences. Prospero's (and later Miranda's) attempts to teach Caliban are unsuccessful and fail in several ways. It is assumed that his nature cannot be nurtured, because there is no nobility in him. He openly rejects education and says to Miranda (Act I, Scene 2, lines 365-367):

CALIBAN

You taught me language, and my profit on 't  
Is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you  
For learning me your language!

Eventually, his contact with some Western ideas leads him to elaborate plans that almost have tragical consequences. In fact, he plots to murder Prospero, rape Miranda and take possession of the island, in association with two of the shipwrecked, while he foolishly becomes intoxicated with their wine and agrees to be their slave. After the plot is known, Prospero defines him in this way, summing up the belief that the exterior traits mirror the interior ones (Act IV, Scene 1, lines 188-192):

PROSPERO

A devil, a born devil, on whose nature  
Nurture can never stick; on whom my pains,  
Humanely taken, all, all lost, quite lost,  
And, as with age his body uglier grows,  
So his mind cankers.

Surprisingly, Caliban's rhetorical eloquence is both superb and ambiguous, once it not only contrasts to his weak capacity of judgement but also to his brutishness and vileness, as evidenced in the following passage (Act I, Scene II, lines 332-344):

CALIBAN

This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother,  
Which thou tak'st from me. When thou cam'st first,  
Thou strok'st me, and made much of me, wouldst give me  
Water with berries in't, and teach me how  
To name the bigger light, and how the less,

That burn by day and night: and then I loved thee,  
And show'd thee all the qualities o' th' isle,  
The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile—  
Cursed be I that did so! All the charms  
Of Sycorax, toads, beetles, bats, light on you;  
For I am all the subjects that you have,  
Which first was mine own King,  
[...]

This speech constitutes one of the most important elements in the play's intellectual reflection on the clash between Nature and Civilisation, especially as far as dominance is concerned. Prospero and Miranda do not understand or accept Caliban's point of view because they strongly believe that, in a way, they had rescued him from a beast-like condition; besides, they do not understand his bond to Nature or his primary instincts, as they do not acknowledge the negativity implicit in their exploitation of him. On the other hand and from another perspective, Caliban's eloquence may function as a new emphatic element in his negative characterisation, which becomes thus masterfully verbalised. Although his condition questions, in an acute and broad way, the influence of Western Civilisation on other parts of the globe, his brutishness, ugliness and savagery, before and after he is taught, are metaphors of universal negative human traits that, somehow, prevent us from seeing him as a victim of slavery or as the universal representative of the native man in his natural environment.

As I have tried to show, *The Discovery of Guiana* and *The Tempest* contain pertinent elements for a thorough understanding of the world during and after the Discoveries. Neither Raleigh nor Shakespeare seem to defend that the pre-Colombian societies were perfect (as we may also see in Mel Gibson's *Apocalypto*<sup>16</sup>), or that slavery was a European invention in Africa; what they both seem to acknowledge is the astounding unbalance originated by ambitious occupiers, whose mentality was based on completely different paradigms and on a so-called superior Civilisation (as it is emphasised in Roland Joffé's *The Mission*<sup>17</sup>). Raleigh's travel report constitutes a literary piece full of rhetorical devices, extremely enlightening in terms of ethnography,

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<sup>16</sup> *Apocalypto*, dir. Mel Gibson, perf. Rudy Youngblood, Dália Hernandez, and Jonathan Brewer, Icon Productions, 2006.

<sup>17</sup> *The Mission*, dir. Roland Joffé, perf. Robert De Niro, Jeremy Irons, and Ray McAnally, Warner Bros., 1986.

geography, history and botanics, where the author simultaneously exposes the pernicious, destructive Western impact on a natural region that had always been respected and wisely explored by the indigenous peoples. Likewise, Shakespeare's play is a rich poetical exercise, an intellectual reflection on that same impact, but it goes still further in the exploration of the complex set of dualities based on the dichotomy Nature / Civilisation, especially in the exploration of Art and Nurture. Above all, both works emphasise the dual nature of everything, existing everywhere, as well as ancestral issues regarding existence – human relationships; human achievements and failures; the relation of humans with their environment.

May Miranda's optimistic words (Act V, Scene 1, 182-185) remind us of something crucial for our survival – then, as now, we are but a tiny part of a microcosm, which, on its turn, is but a small portion within the immensity of a vast universe:

MIRANDA (*coming forward*)

O, wonder!

How many goodly creatures are there here!

How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world

That has such people in 't!

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