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Contrées sans culture: 'Nature' Across the Anthropological Rift

Abstract I: Questo saggio cerca di mettere in luce la differenza tra l'idea "umanista" di natura – in riferimento sia agli individui che alle immaginarie origini delle comunità umane – tra tardo Medioevo e prima modernità, e quella "antropologica" inaugurata a metà Seicento, tra gli altri, dal *Leviatano* di Hobbes. Lungi dal costituire uno dei termini di un'opposizione binaria la cui componente antonimica sarebbe variamente identificabile come civiltà, cultura, evoluzione, sviluppo, e così via, il concetto umanista incorporava largamente quelli che sarebbero poi divenuti i suoi contrari: conformarsi ai dettami della natura equivaleva ad acquisire ed esercitare quelle abilità comportamentali, morali e sociali che rendevano felice e pacifica l'esistenza collettiva.

Abstract II: This paper attempts to highlight the difference between the "humanist" – late-medieval and early-modern – idea of nature as applied to both human individuals and the putative original condition of human communities, and the "anthropological" one, inaugurated in the mid-17th century, among others, by Hobbes' *Leviathan*. Far from constituting a term in a binary opposition whose antonymic component would be variously identifiable as civilization, culture, evolution, development, and so forth, the humanist concept largely incorporated its later contraries: abiding by the dictates of nature amounted to acquiring and exercising those behavioural, moral and social skills which made collective existence happy and peaceful.

The duality of nature and culture, after being one of the most ideologically powerful master-tropes of ethnographic, anthropological and even psychoanalytical discourses between the 18th and the 20th century, still surfaces as a commonplace in small talk and relatively unsophisticated communicational contexts. It tends to take the form of an antithesis, with the two states posited as phylo- and ontogenetically inevitable, chronologically distanced and mutually exclusive. A fundamental threshold – such as those dividing, for example, gathering/hunting from cultivation, or the raw from the cooked¹ – is imagined to separate the two irrevocably, making a community's transition from one to the other into a fateful event by which its History is inaugurated.

The whole setup is obviously no less mythical than the ancient narratives which placed

¹ On the former, see Harris 1991: 3-46; on the latter, Lévi-Strauss 1969.

the original inhabitants of the earth in the perpetual bliss of the garden of Eden or invested them with the flawless bonhomie of the Golden Age. Firstly, the original condition referred to as 'natural' can only be told – not to say conceived – from the vantage point of 'culture', in the form of a hypothetical 're'construction. For any attempt to tell, or even know, such a condition from within would inevitably result in a move out of it and the generation of an at least embryonic cultural context. Absolute 'nature' would not even be knowable as such, since knowledge requires instruments, categories and strategies which are eminently 'cultural'. Secondly, and more pragmatically, as is obvious no human or even animal group may exist without some form or degree of culture – meaningful sounds and gestures, codes, interdictions, symbolic systems, etc. A 'state of nature' characterized by the utter lack and absence of all this is a fiction, useful, if at all, as an admittedly unrealistic *terminus a quo* for comparing modes and directions of cultural development in different societies.

In fact, the nature/culture antithesis is a relatively recent invention. In the first place, the anthropological inflection of the notion of culture does not antedate the work of E. B. Tylor and Franz Boas from the 1870s onwards, or that of J. G. Herder one century earlier at the most². More importantly, the fundamental shift in the idea of nature that was the precondition of the dichotomy only began to surface in the mid-17th century. Not accidentally, this was the same phase in which, according to Michel Foucault, "a kind of rift in the order of things" brought into existence a new conceptual entity, a hitherto unheard-of object of science – something called "man". For the latter "is only a recent invention, a figure not yet two centuries old, a new wrinkle in our knowledge", and "he will disappear again as soon as that knowledge has discovered a new form"³. The "man" referred to by Foucault is manifestly the creature, and construct, of the episteme that was establishing itself in this early modern phase when the 'human' sciences were dawning. It was in the interregnum between humanism – whose "man" was a remarkably different entity – and anthropology that a pivotal text like Shakespeare's *Tempest* was generated; it bears the marks of its transitional situation.

The proto-anthropological concept of nature, in one of its earliest occurrences, provides the prime support to Hobbes's plea for absolutism. Chapter 13 in *Leviathan* takes up two traditional applications of the term "nature" to fashion its dismal new picture of the "Natural Condition of Mankind" – that primeval abyss of irrationality and aggressiveness which is constantly threatening to engulf it again. The Scholastic figure of *natura naturans*, as revisited by Giordano Bruno and Francis Bacon, here infuses the inborn dispositions of humans with eminently antisocial traits:

Nature hath made men so equal in the faculties of the body and mind, as that, though there be found one man sometimes manifestly stronger in body or of quicker mind than another, yet when all is reckoned together the difference between man and man

² The debate over the role of Herder's *Yet Another Philosophy of History* (1774) in the formulation of the anthropological construct of culture is still lively. See for instance Denby 2005. On the idea of culture among British intellectuals from Edmund Burke to George Orwell, see Raymond Williams' influential *Culture and Society* (Williams 1983) and Mulhern 2009: 31-45.

³ Foucault 1973: xxiii.

is not so considerable as that one man can thereupon claim to himself any benefit to which another may not pretend as well as he. [...] So that in *the nature of man* we find three principal causes of quarrel. First, competition; secondly, diffidence; thirdly, glory. The first maketh man invade for gain; the second, for safety; and the third, for reputation. The first use violence, to make themselves masters of other men's persons, wives, children, and cattle; the second, to defend them; the third, for trifles, as a word, a smile, a different opinion, and any other sign of undervalue⁴.

The "natural condition" of humankind thus becomes undistinguishable from "that condition which is called war, and such a war as is of every man against every man" (100). Hobbes pits this chaotic state of unrestrained violence, where even mere survival is virtually impossible, against the organization and repression which a strong central power is solely capable of implementing and which is the very precondition of a reasonably satisfactory social existence. Human nature is fundamentally irrational, and an external, higher authority must supply it with the reason it needs if it is to achieve a barely sufficient degree of "felicity". Seventy-five years later, Swift's Yahoos embody the Hobbesian dystopia, in opposition to the Houyhnhnms, who "are endowed by nature with a general disposition to all virtues, and have no conceptions or ideas of what is evil in a rational creature, so their grand maxim is, to cultivate reason, and to be wholly governed by it"⁵ (Swift 1899: 257-258). Nature and reason, irreparably split in the repulsive anthropomorphic creatures, can only work symbiotically in beings that do not bear any resemblance to humans.

In the same historical phase in which Gulliver discovers the horror of belonging to the genus *homo*, Defoe has Robinson on his island lament his fall into "a meer state of nature" (Defoe 1988: 130), defined by the absence of all the tools (ploughs, spades, shovels) and the technological know-how that his contemporaries rely upon to make their lives comfortable and pleasant. True, a term representing the opposite of this situation – such as, if not 'culture', a predecessor like 'civilization' or 'civility'⁶ – cannot be found in the novel. Yet it is clear that the modern antithesis is at work in its protagonist's strenuous, constant efforts to recapitulate in himself, and later in Friday, what to Defoe and his contemporaries must have already appeared as the likeliest general pattern of human evolution. The state of nature has become an Outside to be fled. And it is only when his ontogenetic development has visibly distanced him from this margin that Robinson becomes able to see the yet-untouched portion of his environment as a miniature paradise:

⁴ Ch. XIII, "Of the Natural Condition of Mankind as Concerning Their Felicity and Misery", in Hobbes 1971: 98-99; italics mine.

⁵ When the protagonist tells his Houyhnhnm master about Europe, the interlocutor comments that "our institutions of government and law were plainly owing to our gross defects in reason, and by consequence in virtue; because reason alone is sufficient to govern a rational creature" (250).

⁶ The adjective "civil" appears three times in the whole novel, twice in reference to behaviour (244, 287) and once in the expression "civil death" indicating the presumed decease of "a person not to be found" (279). According to Emile Benveniste, the earliest written occurrence in English of the term "civilization" in the modern sense dates from 1757 (Benveniste 1971: 289-296).

the country appeared so fresh, so green, so flourishing, every thing being in a constant verdure or flourish of spring, that it looked like a planted garden. I descended a little on the side of that delicious vale, surveying it with a secret kind of pleasure (tho' mixt with my other afflicting thoughts) to think that this was all my own, that I was king and lord of all this country indefeasibly, and had a right of possession (113-114).

Having at least in part colonized his habitat, he can now appreciate its beauty. He has had, first and foremost, to write on land – mark, separate and specialize spaces, turning the territory, as it were, into its own map – and to manufacture tangible monuments (castles, fortresses, hutches, fences, walls) to the subjection of this former wilderness to the absolute rule of 'civility'. By such an intervention, he has appropriated even the areas he has not transformed, domesticating them into nature reserves of sorts. Only then, and with the support of the God with whom he has opened up an inner channel of communication, is his aesthetic sense awakened, along with his capitalistic flair.

Humanism had viewed things quite differently. Over the three or four centuries preceding the Hobbesian shift the relation between unrestrained wildness and a sustainable model of communal existence had largely been envisaged almost in reverse terms. The basic assumption was that a process of involution, rather than evolution, had characterised the whole of human history, which had begun with an abrupt descent from unspoiled 'nature' into a state of vicious disorder that demanded the mediation of 'culture'. Along with the biblical account, the Ovidian myth of the fall from the Golden Age probably remained the most eloquent and popular version of this narrative. In the *Metamorphoses* the goddess Ceres emerges as the provider of the material and symbolic means through which human society is able to survive:

Dame Ceres first to breake the Earth with plough the maner found,
She first made corne and stover soft to grow upon the ground,
She first made lawes: for all these things we are to Ceres bound⁷.

In Shakespeare's time, mythographers stressed the connection between these two kinds of culture⁸, positing the former as the precondition of a "civil" modality of existence whose continuance required the formulation and implementation of rules and behavioural codes. Abraham Fraunce, for instance, declares that Ceres

⁷ *Metamorphoses* (Ovid 1567: V. 434-436). In the original, "Prima Ceres unco glaebam dimovit aratro, / prima dedit fruges alimentaue mitia terris, / prima dedit leges; Cereris sunt omnia munus" (Ovid 1994: V. 341-443). The imposition of the Law is in all likelihood coeval with the introduction of agriculture, which Ovid places in the Silver Age (I. 123-124).

⁸ In application to Renaissance writers the use of the term 'culture', though obviously in part anachronistic especially in the figurative sense, may be justified in light of its etymology. The Latin verb whence it originates, *colere*, soon added to its original meanings – "to inhabit" and "to cultivate" – a series of more abstract ones, so that among its derivatives *cultura* was used in both physical and moral senses, and *cultus*, besides being referable to agriculture, signified "education, culture, civilization" (Ernout & Meillet 2001: 132). Another word stemming from the same root, *colonia*, was to acquire a further relevance in connection with the process of appropriation of the New World by European powers, a process which was then in its inaugural phase.

first found and taught the use of corn and grain, and thereby brought men from that wild and savage wandering in woods and eating of acorns to a civil conversing and more orderly diet, and caused them to inhabit towns, to live sociably, to observe certain laws and institutions, and for these causes was herself made a goddess⁹.

Montaigne's essay "Of Cannibals" places at the other end of the world a number of human communities capable of surviving "sans culture". Here, evidently, the immediate reference is to such populations ignoring – i.e. not needing to know – "the use of corn and grain", as is made manifest by John Florio's translation, which speaks of "countries that were never tilled"¹⁰. The absence of agriculture, however, is nothing but the most tangible and immediate aspect of a generalized lack. For these human groups possess none among the innumerable components – institutions, rites, practices, symbols, hierarchies, social differentiations, and so forth – whose operation and interconnection produce what late-19th-century anthropology will come to delineate as culture:

Culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society¹¹.

Montaigne's cannibal societies are "encore fort voisines de leur naifveté originelle" (234), "yet neere their originall naturalitie" (72), differently from the rest of humankind, or at least from the Europeans, whose highly civilized and refined lifestyles expose their irreparable degeneration. If one considers the absolute impracticability of a return to that supposed origin, such a deliberately paradoxical demystification may be said to result in a further paradox, whose repercussions will manifest themselves fully some two centuries later. For Montaigne's essay postulates the possibility of a disjunction between the 'human' and the 'natural', thus taking a first step along the itinerary that will eventually lead 'nature' to become a margin or an outside of 'culture'. What Owen Barfield terms participation is beginning to disintegrate¹².

The earlier perspective may be synthesized by means of the words used by Raphael Hythlodæus to outline the philosophical premises of Utopian society: "Uirtutem definiunt,

⁹ *The Countesse of Pembrokes Yvychurch*, 1592: 26-27, cit. in S. Orgel, Introduction to Shakespeare, 1994: 48.

¹⁰ "Des Cannibales", in Montaigne 1958: I, 234; trans. J. Florio, "Of the Caniballes", in Montaigne 1964: 72.

¹¹ Tylor 1920: I, 1.

¹² According to Barfield, participation is a "predominantly perceptual relation between observer and observed, between man and nature [...] which is nearer to unity than to dichotomy" (Barfield 1979: 26) and which characterized many traditional societies. In the West, the last great age of participation ended with the dawn of the early modern worldview. Before the scientific revolution, the "background picture [...] was of man as a microcosm within the macrocosm. It is clear that he did not feel himself isolated by his skin from the world outside him to quite the same extent as we do. He was integrated or mortised into it, each different part of him being united to a different part of it by some invisible thread. In his relation to his environment, the man of the Middle Ages was rather less like an island, rather more like an embryo, than we are" (Barfield 1988: 78). Thus the "universe was a kind of theophany, in which he participated at different levels, in being, in thinking, in speaking or naming, and in knowing", Barfield 1988: 92.

secundum naturam uiuere ad id siquidem a deo institutos esse nos. Eum uero naturae ductum sequi quisquis in appetendis fugiendisque rebus obtemperat rationi". The Utopians, that is, "define virtue as living according to nature since to this end we were created by God. That individual, they say, is following the guidance of nature who, in desiring one thing and avoiding another, obeys the dictates of reason"¹³. For a fully-grown human being, in 1516 as well as one century later, when *The Tempest* was being performed on the Jacobean stage, living in conformity with nature amounted to recognizing, and subjecting oneself to, the supreme authority of Reason – God's "viceroy" within individuals, to put it with John Donne¹⁴. Of course, the emphasis in that context was not on the purely intellectual component of the concept of reason, represented by the (inherently human) potential for understanding and learning, but on the moral function of such a principle, seen as the capacity of distinguishing between good and evil and regulating one's conduct accordingly.

It is precisely because it is so wholly based on reason that a way of life as highly civilized and codified as that of the Utopians is far more 'natural' than those of all other contemporary communities, be they formed by "fearsome, rough and wild" Zapoletans who relish warfare and ignore agriculture¹⁵, or by the refined and corrupt English upper classes which, having forgotten the primacy of reason and surrendered to the folly of covetousness and pride, devastate the environment and make "sheep [...] devour human beings" (24). Both of these opposite aberrations spring from distortions and obstacles impeding the full, linear actualization of the potential contained in human nature; both types of society refuse to invest reason with the leading role to which it is entitled in the human world.

By no means does the nature/nurture pair, in the manner in which it occurs in many early modern texts, constitute an antithetical precedent to the nature/culture opposition; far from that, it hinges on the assumption of a very large amount of complementariness between the two terms. Human nature is endowed with a distinctive propensity for learning, and for changing and developing on the basis of teachings which have a moral and ethical as well as an intellectual import. Acquiring the fundamentals of good conduct requires a remarkably shorter process than that through which a satisfactory stock of knowledge and sufficient mental capabilities may be attained by a growing individual. When Utopia's children reach the age of reason¹⁶, internalizing the values and priorities shared by the society in which they live, they spontaneously abandon the diamonds and rubies they play with in

¹³ Latin text, More n. d.; Eng. trans., More 1964: 92-93.

¹⁴ Holy Sonnet 14, l. 7, in Donne 1896: I, 165.

¹⁵ If it were not for their enormous aggressiveness and greed, which make them an "abominable and impious people" (124) of proto-Yahoos, they might almost be described as precursors of Montaigne's cannibals: "They are a hard race, capable of enduring heat, cold, and toil, lacking all refinements, engaging in no farming, careless about the houses they live in and the clothes they wear, and occupied only with their flocks and herds. To a great extent they live only by hunting and plundering. They are born for warfare and zealously seek an opportunity for fighting. [...] The only trade they know in life is that by which they seek their death" (123).

¹⁶ Even though the idea is certainly earlier, the *OED* actually ascribes the first occurrence of this expression, in the sense of the "age at which a child is held capable of discerning right from wrong; (more generally) the age at which a person is held to be mature, responsible, etc.", to J. Reynolds' *Flower of Fidelitie* in 1650 (*reason* 1, P1.d.a). Such an age is conventionally identified with the child's seventh year of life.

their early years (86). By so doing, they implicitly accomplish a rite of passage, signalling their having turned into full members of the community. For they have now secured a basic personal grasp of the behavioural code that will enable them to govern themselves adequately without relying on an external authority, thus becoming complete *cives*.

The City – *civitas* – is the anthropic space *par excellence*, the theatre of the collective existence of those to whom nurture has imparted the primacy of reason and the importance of constantly submitting to its control. The evolution from simple *mortales* into *cives* corresponds to the ‘natural’ growth of humans in society, when no negative influences or events interfere in the process; and the ‘natural’ place of men and women is among their likes, not in forests or wastelands¹⁷. Falling out of the City into the Wild due to some fortuitous event implies losing simultaneously, albeit not necessarily in a definitive way, the ‘civil’ acquisitions and the ‘natural’ attributes that identify the human as such.

Just a few years before the publication of *Utopia*, around 1510, Henry Watson translated from the French the prose romance *Valentin et Orson*, which had been printed in 1489 and was in turn based on a lost 14th century *chanson de geste* entitled *Valentin et Sansnom*¹⁸. The legend of the twin brothers lost in the wilderness had been circulating widely all over Europe throughout the late Middle Ages and remained extremely popular at least until the 18th century, providing inspiration, among others, to Edmund Spenser and John Bunyan, and offering fitting material for chapbooks¹⁹. The divarication in the upbringing of the two royal children, Orson, raised by a she-bear, and Valentine, educated at king Pepin’s court, is so radical as to make them embody two apparently irreconcilable models – the feral, lethally aggressive and totally instinctual monster “ledang the life of a wilde beast, without wering of any cloth, or any worde speaking” (38) versus the very incarnation of refinement, courtesy and chivalric virtues. This polar opposition, however, is shown to be insubstantial when the two – who still “knewe not that they were brethren” (69) – come to a confrontation. The fierce duel they engage soon gives way to a lecture delivered by the civilized twin to a very receptive sibling, whose utter ignorance of human language does not prevent him from understanding and complying:

Come on thy way with me & then shalt thou do wysely. I shall make the be baptized, and shall teach the holy faith. And shall geue [...] all maner of thinges that

¹⁷ The ethics and aesthetics of communing with the undomesticated environment are absolutely unknown to the Utopians. Leaving one’s town or farm without official permission is a serious offence any relapse into which is punished with slavery (82).

¹⁸ For a facsimile of the French prose narrative, see *Histoire de Valentin et Orson* XVIII c.; Low- and high-German and Dutch versions in verse and prose dating from the 15th century are collected in *Valentin und Namelos* 1884. For an extensive discussion of sources and variants and an analysis of the differences among the various renderings of the story, see Dickson 1929. Watson’s English translation was first printed in 1550. References here are to Dickson’s 1937 edition of this text (V&O 1971).

¹⁹ See “Valentine and Orson” in *Chap-books* 1882: 110-123. For the influence on Bunyan, see Dickson, Introduction to *V & O* 1971: lxii-lxiii. The account of the birth and education of the twin sisters Amoret and Belphoebe in Book III of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* (III.6.1-29, 51-53) depends directly on the story of Valentine and Orson. The latter had also been used in the pageants for Edward VI’s 1547 coronation ceremony (Bernheimer 1952: 71).

appertayneth vnto a mannes body, and shalt vse thy lyfe honestly *as euery naturall body should doo*. [... Thus,] *after the course of nature that can not lye*, Orson fell downe vpon both his knees, & stretcheth forth his handes towarde his brother Valenttyne, in making hym signe that he woulde forgeue hym, and that he woulde obeye vnto hym in al maner of thynges for the tyme to come²⁰.

Unlike those of Caspar Hauser or the other ‘wolf-children’ whose cases received great attention in the 19th and 20th centuries²¹, Orson’s lapse into bestiality cannot therefore be seen in terms of a return to nature, nor as representing the inaugural move in a belated ontogenetic recapitulation of human phylogenesis, from infant wildness to adult civility. Once again, the ‘natural’ state of a grown human coincides with an educated and fully socialized existence, and a desire for such a condition is inscribed in the minds of all those who do not enjoy it. The bear-like brother is rapidly reassimilated by the community, to the point where in the time to come the twins, taking part side by side in a long series of adventures, become absolutely undistinguishable from each other in terms of behavioural and moral qualities, gentility and prowess²². Nature manifests itself again when Valentine feels its “force” on hearing of the misfortunes of the noble lady Bellisant, while he is still unaware that she is his mother (123). Thus, nature does have to do with one’s sense of one’s origin, but not as the hazy intuition of a pre-socialized and pre-subjectivized mode of being; rather, as the exact opposite – the blurred memory of an anterior state of perfect socialization, where the subject’s identity was stable and complete.

Caliban is the product of a peculiar evolutionary process. At the age of twenty-four, he is perfectly educated on the intellectual level – as is suggested by his usually expressing himself in verse, rather than in the prose which connotes the lower-class characters and recurrently conveys the baseness of Antonio and Sebastian. At the same time, he is no more inclined to control his primary instincts than a toddler or a brute. Given that he never manifests any particular desire to taste human flesh and seems far more interested in berries and fish (I.ii.334; II.ii.154-55), the anthropophagic penchant indicated in metathesis by his name should be read symbolically, as a generic aptitude to violate those primary boundaries and to break those taboos that regulate human interaction in societies. The attempted rape of Miranda (I.ii.347-48) constituted precisely one such infringement, and the punishment he received for it corresponds perfectly to that inflicted on criminals in *Utopia* – slavery as forced labour, and as a more lenient, humanist alternative to the death penalty or to perpetual imprisonment²³. The disregard for the fundamental principles of solidarity and empathy for their fellow humans that both Caliban and Utopian offenders have displayed

²⁰ P. 70; emphasis added. In the German poem, likewise, the “force of nature” leads Namelos to surrender to Valentin; see Dickson 1929: 16, 179.

²¹ See Feuerbach 1966: 277-365; Freud 1971: 153-262.

²² A few years after Valentine’s death Orson returns as a hermit to the forest where he was raised and devotes himself to the contemplation of God; when he dies, he is “a saynt canonyzed” (327).

²³ “Generally, the worst offenses are punished by the sentence of slavery since this prospect, they think, is no less formidable to the criminal and more advantageous to the state than [... capital punishment]. Their labor is more profitable than their death, and their example lasts longer to deter others from like crimes” (112).

through their transgressions is thus counterweighed by their being sentenced to perform useful tasks in the service of the community.

Among the Utopians, misbehaviour debases individuals to a less-than-human status, highlighting the (at least temporary) defectiveness of their reason, hence their 'unnaturalness'. Their repentance and good conduct while in slavery entitle them to milder treatments and even to freedom (112). Repentance and a promise of good conduct also precede Caliban's liberation (V.i.294-297), even though no causal link seems to be here established between the two facts. While the other characters almost obsessively stress the unspecified physical deformity that gives this creature the monstrosity of a hybrid abnormally placed at the border between the human and the animal²⁴, Prospero charges him with having been begotten "by the devil himself" (I.ii.319). In other words, he suspects his father of being an incubus – the kind of evil spirit that according to contemporary demonologies took the appearance of a man in order to engender half-devils with a witch²⁵. Thus Caliban would literally be a "demi-devil", a "bastard" crossbreed of natural and supernatural (V.i.72-73); and the protagonist's synthetic – and presumably unrealistic – complaint about his slave's absolute impermeability to moral growth²⁶ should in all likelihood be read literally as a sort of humanist-grounded self-justification for his own educational failure. Nurture has been unable to transform him because he does not possess the plenitude of human nature: "A devil, a born devil, on whose nature / Nurture can never stick; on whom my pains, / Humanely taken, all, all lost, quite lost" (IV.1.188-190).

Antonio's previous and present hostility towards his brother and his having "[e]xpelled remorse and nature" to cultivate ambition justify his being defined "[u]nnatural" (V.i.75-79). Shortly thereafter, however, by acknowledging Caliban, the "thing of darkness", as belonging to him (V.i.275-276), Prospero seems to suggest that no fundamental antithesis exists between 'natural' and 'unnatural' – that there is no actual Outside, for even anomalous and deviant deportments ultimately pertain to human nature.

Generally speaking, in sum, the fullness of nature in a pre-Hobbesian adult consists in the perfection and plenitude of his or her nurture. Far from conflicting, the two components are inextricably linked together, to the point where they come, or should come, to form a single unit. In depicting his cannibals Montaigne is less distant from this perspective than one might think. Even though they do not till the land and exist without resorting to the majority of the symbolic objects and practices which will later contribute in forming the anthropological construct of culture, they do not live in "countries without culture" after all. For the happiness and peace of the communities they set up necessarily depend upon their ability to engraft a degree of nurture, however sketchy and primitive, on their instinctual urges, so as to control those which might lead to the destruction of social ties and impede the smooth continuance of their collective existence.

Even Montaigne would certainly not have contended that the only way of following

²⁴ On wildness and monstrosity before the Enlightenment, see White 1985: 150-182.

²⁵ See e.g. Krämer & Sprenger 1928, Part II, Ch. 1; King James VI/I, *Daemonologie*, Bk. III, Ch. 3, 52-70.

²⁶ The lines mentioned above, where Caliban expresses his regret and determination to change his behaviour (V.i.294-297), sound like a refutation of this judgment of Prospero's; perhaps – unlike Antonio and Sebastian, who obdurately refuse to speak words of contrition – the "demi-devil" is capable of some ethical improvement after all.

nature was remaining as close as the cannibals to the hypothetical original state of humankind. The problem of Europeans, in his view, was that their institutions, traditions, customs, social practices and rituals, instead of developing their natural potentials, had gradually taken them astray into the territories of depraved “art” — that kind of human intervention to modify the order of God’s creation which loses its legitimacy when, instead of helping its objects to accomplish their potentials fully, it needlessly alters or distorts them.

While his supposed savages *sans culture* remained close to their pristine perfection, Montaigne’s civilized world had wiped out nature through the abuse of art and thus fallen into corruption and degeneration – real savagery. Here, rather than reversing the assumptions of his contemporary readers, the French philosopher was simply taking them to their extreme consequences. Nature is good, and the more a community abandons it, the worse it becomes. No organisation at all is far preferable to a perverted organisation; lack becomes in itself positive. It is here, in the negation that precedes each item on Montaigne’s list of European essentials – taken up by his disciple Gonzalo in *The Tempest* (II.i.138-64) – that the formal reversal takes place: “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 superioritie; no use of service, of riches or of povertie; no contracts, no successions, no partitions, no occupation but idle; no respect of kindred, but common, no apparell but naturall, no manuring of lands, no use of wine, corne, or mettle” (72).

It is particularly significant of the drastic change in the notion of nature which occurred in the sixty years or so during which late humanism gave way to proto-anthropology that Montaigne’s paradisiacal description should be turned by Hobbes, through the same use of negatives in application to analogous terms, into the picture of a living hell:

Whatsoever [...] is consequent to a time of war where every man is enemy to every man, the same is consequent to the time wherein men live without other security than what their own strength and their own invention shall furnish them withal. In such condition there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain, and consequently no culture of the earth, no navigation nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea, no commodious building, no instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force, no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time, no arts, no letters, no society, and, which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death, and the life of man solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short (100).

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