



## Taming Montaigne In A Savage Era

### Domesticando Montaigne em uma Era Selvagem

Deborah N. Losse<sup>1</sup>  
dlosse@asu.edu

**Abstract:** This paper will focus on the circumstances and cultural phenomena which led to the very particular way — economic and behavioral — in which the French interacted with the indigenous peoples of Brazil. A confluence of two conditions made it possible for the Normans and Amerindians to cooperate. First, not being able to count on steady support from the French Crown, the Normans had to deal directly with the Amerindian populations, and to do so, became familiar with their cultures and languages. Second, the Tupinambá recognized that strength could accrue from trading beyond one's ethnic group. This essay will reflect on common views of valor in warfare espoused by the Brazilians and apparent in Montaigne's *Essais*. Montaigne opposes valor to cruelty and shows how France, through the excesses of the Wars of Religion, had lost touch with the concept of courage, so basic to natural law as viewed by the Tupinambá.

**Keywords:** Montaigne, *Essais*, Norman and Breton sailors, Tupinambá, French Wars of Religion, cannibalism, mercantilism.

**Resumo:** O presente artigo tratará das circunstâncias e fenômenos culturais que levaram à forma muito particular - econômica e comportamental - segundo a qual os franceses interagiram com os povos indígenas do Brasil. Uma confluência de duas condições tornou possível a cooperação entre os normandos e os ameríndios. Primeiramente, não podendo contar com o apoio constante da coroa francesa, os normandos tiveram que lidar diretamente com as populações ameríndias, e para isso, familiarizaram-se com suas culturas e línguas. Em segundo lugar, os tupinambá reconheceram que a força podia se acumular do comércio para além do grupo étnico. Esse ensaio vai refletir sobre as visões comuns de valor na guerra, defendidas pelos brasileiros e aparentes nos *Essais* de Montaigne. Montaigne opõe o valor à crueldade, e mostra como a França, mediante os excessos das Guerras de religião, havia perdido o contato com o conceito de coragem, tão básico para o direito natural tal como visto pelos tupinambá.

**Palavras-chave:** Montaigne, *Essais*, marinheiros normandos e bretões, Tupinambá, Guerras de religião na França, canibalismo, mercantilismo.

1 Dean of Humanities and Professor emerita at Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona, USA.

In *Le Huguenot et le Sauvage*, Frank Lestringant puts to rest the myth that Villegagnon's mission to colonize Brazil was a "colonisation douce" — a seeming oxymoron in our post-colonial era (Lestringant 2004, 33). Coastal destruction and internal conflicts indicate the contrary.<sup>2</sup> Yet it would be a mistake to say that the French approach to exploring new lands in which to trade with indigenous peoples was not distinct from the efforts pursued by the Spanish, Portuguese, or English. Neither the Iberian manner of overwhelming the Amerindian population and pillaging their cultural patrimony nor the English method of seizing land for cultivation while driving off the indigenous population was followed by the French for both political and economic reasons (Lestringant 2004, 33; Chaunu 1969, 135). This paper will focus on the circumstances and the cultural phenomena which led to the very particular way — economic and behavioral — in which the French interacted with the indigenous peoples of Brazil and the cultural circumstances that gave rise to the image of the "bon sauvage" that so captivated French writers, cartographers, and artists for centuries. While other French literary artists will be mentioned, Montaigne will be the focus of the discussion.

Much has been said about the plight of Norman and Breton merchant ship-owners, eager to pursue commerce in the New World but hindered by François I's penchant for favoring diplomatic treaties with Portugal in order to provide a buffer with Spain (Tomlinson 1970, 59-75; Dickason 1984, 23-24; Davies 2012, 317-19; Anthiaume 1916, II, 194-95). A confluence of two conditions made it possible for the Normans and the Amerindians to cooperate: 1) the necessity of Norman sailors to deal directly with the Amerindian populations including their willingness to adapt to indigenous customs; 2) a distinctive aspect of Amerindian trading partnerships: a recognition that trading beyond one's ethnic group and making alliances for the purpose of exchanging goods strengthen the group's position. There was a belief that "trade goods acquired from even non-indigenous partners or friends may have little intrinsic use or exchange value" but "may be endowed with dangerous powers," equivalent to a sort of "symbolic capital." Fernando Santos-Granero describes these trading partnerships as "exclusive, non-kin relationships" in which "visits are highly ritualized" and include "ceremonial dialogue between trading friends," (Santos-Granero 2007, 4). It was the combination of these two conditions — the willingness of the Normans to adapt to Amerindian modes of exchange and the indigenous Brazilian belief in strengthening the clan by reaching out to non-indigenous trading partners — that allowed partnerships to flourish in the sixteenth century in spite of the Iberian opposition.

---

2 «Rien n'indique que les capitaines huguenots, Villegagnon au temps de son luthéranisme, Ribault et Laudonnière, se fussent acheminés, en cas de réussite, vers une colonisation 'douce' de l'Amérique. Les conflits qui surgirent dès les premiers mois de l'implantation au Brésil et en Floride, les spoliations systématiques et répétées auxquelles se livrèrent, au détriment des tribus alliées, des colons incapables de mettre la terre en culture laissaient mal présager de la suite» (Lestringant 2004, 33).

One of the most lucrative trade exports was brazilwood, used in obtaining the red dye so prized in Europe for tapestries and clothing. Dickason has pointed out that the most effective way for the Norman traders to outwit the Portuguese in the trade for brazilwood or other trade items, such as feathers, parrots, and monkeys, was by developing alliances with the Tupinambá, already disposed toward the French and hostile to the Portuguese. Had the Portuguese been less bent on pushing the French out of competition in the brazilwood trade, the Norman merchants might not have seen the need to send young Norman sailors to learn the language and customs of the indigenous people in order to earn their trust. These same Norman sailors served as interpreters or “truchements,” mentioned by Montaigne in “Des cannibales,” I, 31, 214A (Dickason 1984, 21). So important was the transmission of relevant lexical terms to future trading expeditions that in 1547 a Rouen native, Jean Cordier, published a French-Tupinambá lexicon appended to his navigation manual (Dickason 1984, 25-26).<sup>3</sup> It is by way of the illustrations on Norman maps as well as through the accounts of merchants that we glimpse evidence of fruitful and amicable alliances between the Normans and the Tupinambá. Surekha Davies describes the Rotz Atlas of 1542, by the Dieppoise sea captain and mapmaker Jean Rotz, who shows the Tupinambá engaged in cutting trees, removing bark with metal hatchets and cutlasses, objects they would have received in trade with the Norman sailors and officers. In contrast to the Portuguese maps that more often depict cannibals, Davies comments that what is unusual in Rotz map is “its predominant imagery of peaceful exchange” (Davies 2012, 333-34). The Rotz Atlas is important because it is “the earliest surviving work” — a set of twelve charts — “known to have originated in Normandy.” Since the Portuguese were famous for keeping their charts secret, the Normans were desperate to develop their own cartographers in order to conduct efficient commerce in Brazil, and their charts provide an illustrated record of such commerce (Anthiaume 1916, II, 185). The Vallard Atlas of 1547 shows additional evidence of peaceful trading between the Normans and the Tupinambá. In one illustration Davies notes the presence of a European in hat and breeches bestowing an unclothed Tupinambá women with “a mirror in exchange for a parrot or perhaps a monkey” (Davies 2012, 337).

This “peaceful exchange” is the result of two cultural realities. First, the independent mercantile needs of the French, largely without consistent, reliable support from the crown, and who sought the practical knowledge and labor of the indigenous people. The second involves the cultural norms of the Tupinambá, who valued trading partnerships or friendships with the outsiders in the hope that in so doing they would strengthen their own “social prestige and power” (Santos-Granero

---

3 According to Surekha Davies, there are forty distinct language families in the region of the Amazon and Rio Plato estuaries. The first and most pertinent for our purposes is the Tupi-Guaraní group. The Tupinambá belong to one of the various Tupi-Guaraní language groups living in coastal Brazil (Davies 2012, 320).

2007, 5). That these trading partnerships were dyadic, with individual Frenchmen to the exclusion of the Portuguese, meant that the alliances worked in favor of the entrepreneurial and fiercely independent Norman merchants seeking brazilwood and other valuable trade items along the Brazilian coast. In short, each partner possessed the attributes which the other sought. The uniqueness of the partnerships is visible on the Norman maps in ways that one does not see on the Portuguese maps, more apt to focus on cannibalism. Of eight surviving Portuguese maps from the first half of the sixteenth century mentioned by Davies, four depict cannibalism exclusively, while the other four illustrate either cannibalism or woodcutting or both (Davies 2012, 329).

In addition to the textual passages accompanying the illustrated maps, travelers to Brazil described the exchange of goods between the Tupinambá and Norman sailors in their more extensive accounts of their voyages. In his epic *Histoire d'un voyage faict en la terre du Brésil*, first published in 1578, Jean de Léry observes:

Vray est qu'outre tout cela, nous autres ayans porté dans nos navires grand quantité de frises rouges, vertes, jaunes, et d'autres couleurs, nous leur en faisons faire des robbes et des chausses bigarrées, lesquelles nous leur changions à des vivres, Guenons, Perroquets, Bresil, Cotton, Poivre long, et autres choses de leur pays, de quoy les mariniers chargent ordinairement leurs vaisseaux (Léry 1999, 226).

Léry records another passage in which young indigenous boys beg their French trading friends to give them fish hooks. The anecdote reinforces the concept that the Tupi tribes developed these close trading partnerships or friendships mentioned earlier. Ever the careful witness, Léry includes both the Tupi and French words for friend and ally: “Contoüassat, amabé pinda, c'est à dire, mon amy et mon allié, donne moi des haims à pescher,” (Léry 1999, 233). Illustrations are one means of portraying the “peaceful exchange,” verbal recreation in the native language with translation is another vivid way to bring the Tupinambá to life. It is little wonder that Claude Lévi-Strauss, in his introduction calls our attention to Léry's “capacité de voir” (“Sur Jean de Léry. Entretien avec Claude Lévi-Strauss,” Léry 1999, 9).

The people of Rouen found an even more effective way to illustrate the close trading partnerships between the Tupinambá and the French sailors by orchestrating a royal entry for Henri II, as Michael Wintroub has described, “to lobby the king in support of Normandy's merchant community in their ongoing and long-standing war with Portugal over the right to trade in the New World” (Wintroub 2006, 21). For this purpose, the Rouennais had constructed a Tupinambá village and brought fifty Amerindians from Brazil. As in the map illustrations, the Tupinambá hunt, sleep in hammocks, and cut wood in return for hatchets, fish hooks, and scissors (Wintroub 2001, 481). Less interested in the notion of “peaceful exchange” than in the chivalric values of courage and prowess before the enemy, Henri II delighted

in the staged battle and victory of the Tupinambá over the Tobajaro (allies of the Portuguese) and of the French over the Portuguese. He willingly credits his father, François I as Father of Arts and Letters, while he, Henri II, takes for himself the title of Father of the Nobility — the ancestral nobility or *noblesse d'épée*, of those nobles who held steadfast to military values over letters. Henri's pursuit of military glory and hunting foreshadows the second half of the sixteenth century, when France will become destabilized by civil and religious strife (Wintroub 2006, 39-49).

Whereas the illustrated maps of the Normans, the accounts of life in Brazil, and indeed the tableau vivant highlight the exchange between Amerindians and Normans, Montaigne's account in "Des cannibales" focuses on the customs of the Tupinambá and passes over the mercantile aspect. The acquisition of valuable trade items, particularly those that will further the already booming fashion craze of which he is critical, does not serve his literary or ethical goals. Elsewhere, in «Des loix somptuaires (I, 43), he lists a long inventory of fashion innovations at court that he dislikes and which go «contre la forme de nos peres et la particulière liberté de la noblesse de ce royaume»: elaborate codpieces («cette vilaine chaussure qui montre si à découvert nos membres occultes»), the exaggerated doublet («ce lourd grossissement de pourpains»), and the long hair worn by the men («ces longues tresses de poil effeminées») (Montaigne 1992, I, 43, 269-70). As he states in his liminary «Au lecteur,» his purpose is to show himself «tout nud» in his essays, to the extent propriety permits, and in order to do so, he turns to the example of the Brazilians and their lack of artifice: «Que si j'eusse esté entre ces nations qu'on dict vivre encore sous la douce liberté des premieres loix de nature, je t'asseure que je m'y fusse tres-volontiers peint tout entier, et tout nud» (Montaigne 1992, I, 3).

Mercantilism is about the acquisition of artifacts, but when lives evolve amidst natural bounty and freedom, as the lives of the Amerindians do, there is no need to seek to acquire new land, for plenty abounds: «Ils ne sont pas en debat de la conqueste de nouvelles terres, car ils jouyissent encore de cette uberté naturelle qui fournit sans travail et sans peine de toutes choses necessaires, en telle abondance qu'ils n'ont que faire d'agrandir leurs limites» (Montaigne 1992, I, 31, 210A).<sup>4</sup> If

4 The recognition that the Amerindians were, like Europeans, endowed with the capacity to reason, to discern good from evil, is closely aligned with the teachings of Thomas Aquinas, and this reasoning power extends to the "souci du bien commun, justice et paix." As Alain Milhou explains in his introduction to Jacques de Migrode's French translation of Bartolomé Las Casas' work, *Brevisima relación de la destrucción de las Indias*, Las Casas argues the injustice of the Spanish treatment of the Amerindians in depriving them of their land, their minerals, and their lives since they were, like Europeans, reasoning human beings, *La Destruction des Indes de Bartolomé de Las Casas* (1552), translation published in 1579. His argument is based on the Medieval thomistic view of natural law giving infidels and Christians alike the right to their lands. In his prologue to his work, Las Casas posits that the Spanish are not within their rights to deprive the Amerindians of their land and minerals "sans violer la loi naturelle," and he adds divine law as well (Las Casas 1995, 101). Beyond natural law, the actions of the Spanish condemn them to "grands péchés mortels, dignes de terribles et éternels supplices" (101).

the tableaux vivants of 1550 were about convincing Henri II to fully support the mercantile exploits of the Rouen shipowners, Montaigne's essay, thirty years later and in the wake of the Saint Barthélemy Massacre, seeks to point out what has gone wrong with war. Recognizing that war is "une maladie humaine," and as such a part of human endeavor, he undertakes an autopsy of war's corpse to see if there is any intrinsic value in its pursuit. He indeed finds it in the exercise of his Amerindians. For their virtue lies at the heart of inter-tribal rivalry: «Elle [la guerre] n'a autre fondement parmy eux que la jalousie de la vertu» (Montaigne 1992, I, 31, 210A). The only reward in war is glory, to have the upper hand in valor and virtue, «l'acquest du victorieux c'est la gloire, et l'avantage d'estre demeuré maistre en valeur et vertu» (Montaigne 1992, I, 31, 210A).

For the Tupinambá and for the essayist, war has nothing to do with inventions, acquired weapons or equipment. In war, combatants should rely on inborn courage and will, not on borrowed trappings. Reputation is based on internal not external qualities:

L'estimation et le pris d'un homme consiste au cœur et en la volonté; c'est là où gist son vray honneur ; la vaillance, c'est la fermeté, non pas des jambes et des bras, mais du courage et de l'ame; elle ne consiste pas en la valeur de nostre cheval, ny de nos armes, mais en la nostre (Montaigne 1992, I, 31, 211A).

To be killed in war is not the worse thing but to be conquered, to admit to not living up to our reputation for valor and virtue. Looking the enemy in the face, "d'une veuë ferme et desdaigneuse," that is what it means to be killed but not vanquished--"tué, non pas vaincu."

A counter theme to the theme of virtue in war is the theme of cruelty, a necessary means to the end of conquering new lands. The two opposing goals in war: virtue and the acquisition of land correspond to Montaigne's two definitions of cannibalism: the Brazilian who engages an enemy to show extreme vengeance ("pour représenter une extreme vengeance") and the European concept, outlined by the essayist, in which instead of killing the enemy before roasting him, the enemy is tortured progressively and then is pulled to pieces while still alive. The word barbary, as applied to cannibalism, transforms itself progressively into cruelty as the essayist outlines the stages of torture used both by the Portuguese and Spanish conquerors on indigenous and other European interlopers, to use Tomlinson's expression, who dare to challenge the Iberian monopoly on trade in South America:

---

His translator into French, Jacques de Magrode from Flanders, adds his own Protestant perspective, based on the power of Scripture: "Maudit soit celui qui fait l'oeuvre du Seigneur négligemment" (Las Casas 88). In *Le Huguenot et le Sauvage*, Frank Lestringant notes that the persecuted Protestants found it easy to substitute the plight of the Amerindians for their own persecution (Lestringant 2004, 388).

je pense qu'il y a plus de barbarie à manger un homme vivant qu'à le manger mort, à deschirer, par tourmens et par geénes, un corps encore plein de sentiment, le faire rostir par le menu, le faire mordre et meurtrir aux chiens et aux pourceaux (comme nous l'avons, non seulement leu, mais veu de fresche memoire, non entre des ennemis anciens, mais entre des voisins et concitoyens, et, qui pis est, sous pretexte de pieté et de religion), que de le rostir et manger apres qu'il est trespasé (Montaigne 1992, I, 31, 209A).

Such a detailed and lurid depiction of torture to the living in his own era creates a link with another chapter, "De la cruauté," in which he describes again in the recent past a "soldat prisonnier" so fearful of "plus cruel supplice" in the violent, vindictive atmosphere of the Wars of Religion that he takes a nail to his throat and chest at an attempted suicide (Montaigne 1992, II, 11, 431C). When the prisoner hears that his fate is decapitation, he finds it infinitely preferable to being drawn and quartered or thrown to the dogs. With this anecdote, the essayist makes clear the real consequences on real people that unusual and inhumane acts of cruelty provoke.<sup>5</sup> He continues to attack French methods of torture: to draw and quarter ("mettre à quartiers"), to throw bodies into boiling water ("les voir bouillir"), or to deprive of a burial place ("priver de sepulture"). Justice, he maintains, requires that we respect souls beyond death:

Quant à moy, en la justice mesme, tout ce qui est au delà de la mort simple, me semble pure cruauté, et notamment à nous qui devrions avoir respect d'en envoyer les ames en bon estat; ce qui ne se peut, les ayant agitées et desesperées par tourmens insupportables (Montaigne 1992, II, 11, 431A).

Montaigne is silent about the violent end of the Protestant judge Jean de Coras whose daring judgment surprises the essayist (Montaigne 1992, III, 11, 1030B), but the modern historian Denis Crouzet describes the St. Bartholomew mob dragging him to be hung from an elm in his judge's gown, while two other Protestants were summarily massacred, undressed, and left nude in the streets for two days (Crouzet 1990, 117). These violent events of the Saint Barthélemy massacre made it difficult for the French to view the Brazilians as the "other." The events from August to November 1572 indeed represent «une histoire de la plongée dans la barbarie,» (Crouzet 1990, 154).

In focusing on cruel measures used to persecute a portion of society in the name of religion or piety, Montaigne is not alone in citing extreme measures of

5 In *Rouen During the Wars of Religion*, Philip Benedict provides an historical anecdote of the difference with which Catholic and Protestant bodies were disposed. He recounts that in the city of Rouen in 1563, two convicted prisoners were dispatched by hanging. The body of the Catholic prisoner who died "reconciled to the Catholic Church" was buried in a cemetery. The Protestant prisoner refused to renounce his faith, was hanged and burned at the stake. "Before he had breathed his last breath, the mob seized him, began to hack his body brutally, and finally dragged what remained of his corpse to the Seine, where it was thrown in and left to float downstream" (Benedict 1981, 111).

torment, including starvation. Few will forget the vivid image furnished by Jean de Léry, in his *Histoire mémorable du siège de Sancerre* (1574), describing the soup kettle in which the Potard family had placed the thighs, legs and feet of their baby daughter along with vinegar and spices to cook: “les deux cuisses, jambes et pieds dans une chaudiere avec vinaigre, especes et sel, prests à cuire et mettre sur le feu” (Nakam 1975, 291). Léry highlights his role as witness to “ce crime prodigieux barbare et inhumain” by repeating his act of witnessing: “Ayant veu....Ayant veu aussi.”<sup>6</sup> Starvation brought on by religious persecution pushes human beings to commit barbarous acts, what Léry terms both monstrous and inhumane. Géralde Nakam has aptly shown how Léry manages to “isoler le phénomène de la faim” not only to emphasize the cruelty of Catholic persecution against the Protestants but in order to establish himself as a reliable witness on the question of starvation, since he had witnessed intense starvation on the ship during the return trip from Brazil (Nakam 1975, 291).<sup>7</sup>

Near the end of his account of the siege of Sancerre, he too, six years in advance of Montaigne, highlights the singular cruelty of the Catholic soldiers in misleading the leader of the Protestants, bailiff Johanneau, into thinking he had a meeting with Claude de La Châtre, the Catholic leader of the siege. En route, the soldiers tell him they are going to kill him. Not giving Johanneau the time he requests to make a full personal confession to God, he is attacked and mutilated “à coups de dagues” (Nakam 1975, 339; Losse 2015, 82). The sincerity and zealousness of Johanneau impresses the soldiers, who witness the inherent steadfastness of the bailiff, as hungry and bereft as he is. Léry underscores the cruelty sanctioned in the name of religion, a cruelty that fails to take into consideration cultural norms and cultural context--in this case the private confession of the bailiff to his maker. The soldiers seem unmoved by the fact that they are dealing with a fellow human being and a compatriot who has demonstrated his courage, strength of character, and his humanity.

Throughout Montaigne’s *Essais*, from the “Au lecteur” to “De la cruauté” and even beyond to such essays as “De la phisionomie,” the opposition of *naïfveté*, *naïfveté originelle*, to *artifice* plays out. In the address to the reader at the outset, Montaigne contrasts “ma forme naïfve” with “une marche étudiée”; “ma façon simple, naturelle et ordinaire” with “artifice”; the “premieres loix de nature” again with “artifice” (Montaigne 1992, I, 3). He comes back to these same images in “Des cannibales”:

6 Andrea Frisch’s “In a Sacramental mode: Jean de Léry’s Calvinist Ethnography,” illustrates how Léry practices Calvin’s concept of the power of witness in his writings (Frisch 2002, 90; Losse 2015, Ch. 4).

7 Crouzet notes Léry’s horror at witnessing cannibalism in Sancerre. He seems to be inside the phenomenon. While in Brazil, he could distance himself and perceive the act of cannibalism as an outsider--not so in Sancerre, where extreme hunger tempts them to commit acts abhorrent to their cultural and religious norms (Crouzet 1990, 162-3). In his recollection of the siege of Sancerre, Léry recognizes “barbarie” as part of human corruption (163).



A ces nations me semblent donq ainsi barbares, pour avoir receu fort peu de façon de l'esprit humain, et estre encore fort voisines de leur *naïfveté originelle*. Les *loix naturelles* leur commandent encores, fort peu abastardies par les nostres....<sup>8</sup> (Montaigne 1992, I, 206A, emphasis added).

Here, the retired magistrate sets the appeal of nature's laws against the laws of France, corrupted by the current civil strife tearing the country apart. For hunting or waging war, his Brazilians ("tous nuds") take only wooden bows or spears (Montaigne 1992, I, 207A; 208-09A). The essayist regrets that Plato and Licurgus hadn't known the cannibals, so difficult is it to *imagine* "une nayfveté si pure et simple, comme nous la voyons par *expérience*" (Montaigne 1992, I, 206A, emphasis added). Eric McPhail comments that here Montaigne challenges Plato's "imagined" philosopher king and pits the artifice of Plato's image against the lived experience of his own meeting with the Tupinambá (McPhail 2012, 30).

We come to understand the trope of innocence and *naïveté* more clearly if we look first at its application to Montaigne's self-portrait in "De la cruauté". He attributes his innocence not to discipline or acquisition but to his birth: [A]»Ce que j'ay de bien, je l'ay au rebours par le sort de ma naissance. Je ne le tiens ny de loy, ny de precepte, ou autre aprentissage. [B] L'innocence qui est en moy, est une innocence niaise ; peu de vigueur, et point d'art.» (Montaigne 1992, II, 11, 429). This is an echo of the address to the reader at the outset, where he talks about wanting to paint himself in his "forme naïfve" (Montaigne 1992, I, 3). In speaking of his "innocence niaise," the essayist takes a term from hunting with birds: "niais" or "niaise" is applied to a falcon or other raptor stolen from its nest while still young and imbued with the wild instinct to hunt (Losse 2018, 79). Cotgrave refers to "niais": as a young bird removed from the nest, hence a nestling (Losse 2018, 88, n. 9).

Montaigne goes on to say that "Je hay, entre autres vices, cruellement la cruauté, et par nature [it's bred into him] et par jugement [nothing has led him to abandon this belief], comme l'extreme de tous les vices" (Montaigne 1992, II, 11, 429B). He first sets cruelty in the context of cruelty to animals in the practice of hunting:

Mais c'est jusques à mollesse que je ne voy égorger un poulet sans desplaisir, et ois impatientement gemir un lievre sous les dens de mes chiens, quoy que ce soit un plaisir violent que la chasse (Montaigne 1992, II, 11, 429A).

His dogs are proof that Montaigne hunts, a prerogative of noble estate owners whatever his misgivings, and he here notes that there is a certain violent if disorienting pleasure that comes from the pursuit, as in the pursuit of love: «il leur

8 This is the "loi naturelle" evoked by Las Casas and in the translation of his work by Maggrobe in which it is stated that violence done to the Amerindians, "cette gent pacifique, humble et debonnaire," can only be an infraction of natural law (Las Casas 100-101).

semble que le plaisir nous transporte si fort hors de nous que nostre discours ne scauroit lors faire son office, tout perclus et ravi en la volupté» (Montaigne 1992, II, 11, 429A-30A).

Montaigne extends this antipathy for cruelty beyond hunting and the suffering it causes animals to the excesses of cruelty he has witnessed “en nos guerres civiles”. «Je vy en une saison en laquelle nous foisonnons en exemples incroyables de ce vice, par la licence de nos guerres civiles.... Mais cela ne m’y a nullement aprivoisé» (Montaigne 1992, II, 11, 432A). He reserves his greatest ire for those who dismember human bodies: “hacher et détrencher les membres d’autrui” (II, 11, 432A). In a subtle reversal of the image of the untamed raptor stolen from the nest, he now refuses to be tamed, to become accustomed to such cruelty (“nullement aprivoisé”). His nature, an inherited childlike innocence that retains the wild instinct with which nature endowed it, resists the barbarous cruelty “des ames si monstrueuses” (Montaigne 1992, II, 11, 432A).

In linking his own innocence to that of the young raptor in the nest (“innocence niaise”) or to that of the young child (“nature si puerile”), the essayist creates a tie between himself and the Brazilians, both characterized by an innocence that brings them close to nature: “Je ne creins point à dire la tendresse de ma nature si puerile que je ne puis pas bien refuser à mon chien la teste qu’il m’offre hors de saison ou qu’il me demande” (Montaigne 1992, II, 11, 435A). Living in harmony with nature, with the animals, and with one’s compatriots is what defines humanity. His Brazilians seek out and show a certain humaneness to the French sailors and officers who come to engage them in trading partnerships, and yet these men from far away are not from their kinship groups or even related ethnic groups. This is more than can be said of the French who are persecuting their compatriots of other religions. Near the end of «De la cruauté» Montaigne provides a definition of humanity--a guiding rule if we are to remain worthy of that distinction: «Quant tout cela en seroit à dire, si il y a un certain respect qui nous attache, et un general devoir d’humanité, non aux bestes seulement qui ont vie et sentiment, mais aux arbres et aux plantes» (Montaigne 1992, II, 11, 435A). If we cannot respect this duty towards plants and animals and to all sentient beings, then we give up our one claim to being superior beings by virtue of our reason and judgment. Reason and judgment should guarantee that we respect natural law. The presumption that claims European superiority over the Amerindians fails to acknowledge their humanity and is misplaced, given the inhumanity the essayist has witnessed “par la licence de nos guerres civiles”. Judith Shklar has pointed out the brilliance of Montaigne’s strategy in “putting cruelty first,” among vices. Absent any “appeal to a higher being”, “there is no appeal than that of actuality”, the events of his time, for which Montaigne provides more than ample evidence of vicious cruelty (Shklar 1982, 18).

The testimony given by the Tupinambá encountered by Montaigne in Rouen reinforces the judgment of European callousness and lack of humanity. The “visiting” Brazilians — assuming they came of their own accord — perceive the distance between rich and poor, “mendians à leurs portes, décharnez de faim et de pauvreté” (Montaigne 1992, I, 31, 214A). The Tupinambá express their astonishment that the poor accept “une telle injustice” and don’t revolt.

The Brazilians had described the rich French who mistreat their less fortunate compatriots as “pleins et gorgez de toutes sortes de commoditez” (Montaigne 1992, I, 31, 214A). Earlier in the essay, Montaigne states that virtue consists of internal qualities: *vaiillance* and *fermeté* (I, 211A) rather than of external acquisitions such as horses and arms. France is a society that values external trappings, commodities over intrinsic qualities. The “haut de chausses” and other fashion innovations (“Des loix somptuaires,” I, 43, 270B) that annoy Montaigne are external signs of the warped morals of the Old World, in which the sanctity of the human body is not respected. With his ironic reference to the absence of breeches on the Brazilians, Montaigne sides with them.

He looks to the Tupinambá who face their opposition with bare bodies and firm courage. Their countenance offers the same “naïfveté et simplicité” that the essayist attributes to Socrates in a later essay “De la phisionomie,” and likely to be overlooked in a world where “les graces pointues, bouffies et enflées d’artifice” are favored (Montaigne 1992, III, 12, 1037). In complicated times of violence and disrespect for human values, Montaigne offers the example of his own countenance, in which one reads “la simplicité de mon intention”, a look with which on at least two occasions he has stared down the opposition and secured his freedom (III, 12, 1062B). If he can’t, like the Tupinambá, revert to “les premieres loix de la nature”, he can at least rely on the “innocence naïve”, that untamed instinct with which he was born, to resist cruelty. This is perhaps the naïfveté originelle”, the “forme naïve” that Montaigne shares with his cannibals, where virtue, not cruelty, and valor, not greed, inspire men to action. In response to Plato’s concept of the philosopher king, the essayist reminds us that a society based on valor and virtue has little need for other institutions to hold it together. Such courage renders both artifice (“artifice”) and human engineering (“soudeure humaine”) unnecessary (I, 31, 206A). In their willingness to engage the Tupinambá and to remain open to learning their cultural norms, the Normans observed and, in some instances acquired, cultural values that could have proved useful in helping France to avoid the civil and religious strife that weakened its very core in the second half of the sixteenth century and on into the future.

Instead, they could not see themselves in the mirrors they brought as trade items to the Tupinambá. The mirrors reflected the Tupinambá, but not in such a way that the value or the image could adjust to fit French form. Perhaps, in the end,

the Tupinambá, were right, the trade items had no intrinsic value in themselves.<sup>9</sup> They were baubles with which the French gave emphasis to what was important to them--artifice, external beauty, physical appearance. The mirror was useless in attempting to reflect the most important value of Tupinambá society--valor. Instead, it reflected the Frenchman's own "dive into barbarity" ("plongée dans la barbarie"), into the unspeakable violence and inhumanity of the French Wars of Religion (Crouzet 1990, 154).

## References

- Anthiaume, Abbé A. 1916. *Cartes marines, constructions navales, voyages de découverte chez les normands, 1500-1650*. 2 vols. Paris: Dumont.
- Benedict, Philip. 1981. *Rouen during the Wars of Religion*. Cambridge/London/New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Chaunu, Pierre. 1969. *Conquête et exploitation des nouveaux mondes*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Crouzet, Denis. 1990. *Les Guerriers de Dieu. La Violence au temps des troubles de religion vers 1525--vers 1610*. Paris: Champ Vallon.
- Davies, Surekha. 2012. "Depictions of Brazilians in French Maps 1542-1555." *The Historical Journal* 55, 2: 317-48.
- Dickason, Olive Patricia. "Dyewood to Furs. 1984. The Brazilian Origins of French- Amerindian Trade." *Conference of Latin American Geographers* 10, 19-31.
- Frisch, Andrea. "In a Sacramental Mode: Jean de Léry's Calvinist Ethnography." *Representations* 77, 1: 82-106.
- Las Casas, Bartolomé de. 1995. *La Destruction des Indes de Bartolomé de Las Casas (1552)*. Trans. Jacques de Migrode (1579). Paris: Éditions Chandeigne--Librairie Portugaise.
- Léry, Jean de. 2008. *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil*. Edited by Frank Lestringant. Paris: Livre de Poche.
- Lestringant, Franck. 2004. *Le Huguenot et le Sauvage. L'Amérique et la controverse coloniale, en France, au temps des guerres de Religion (1555-1589)*. Genève: Librairie Droz.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 2008. «Sur Jean de Léry, Entretien avec Claude Lévi-Strauss.» In *L'histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil*. Edited by Frank Lestringant. Paris: Livre de Poche.
- Losse, Deborah N. 2015. *Syphilis. Medicine, Metaphor, and Religious Conflict in the Early Modern France*. Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2018. *Volery and Venery in the French Wars of Religion*. New York, Bern, Berlin: Peter Lang.
- McPhail, Eric. 2012. "Philosophers in the New World Montaigne and the Tradition of Epideictic Rhetoric." *Rhetorica. A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 30, 1: 22- 36.
- Montaigne, Michel de. 1992. *Les Essais*. 3 vols. Edited by Pierre Villey. Paris: Quadrige, Presses Universitaires de France.
- Nakam, Géralde. 1975. *Au lendemain de la Saint-Barthélemy. Guerre civile et famine. Histoire mémorable du siège de Sancerre de Jean de Léry*. Paris: Éditions Anthropos.
- Santos-Granero, Fernando. 2007. "Of Fear and Friendship: Amazonian

- Sociality beyond Kinship and Affinity.” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13, 1: 1-18.
- Shklar, Judith. 1982. “Putting Cruelty First.” *Daedalus* 111, 3: 17-27.
- Tomlinson, Regina Johnson. 1970. *The Struggle for Brazil. Portugal and the “French Interlopers” (1500-1550)*. New York: Las Americas Publishing.
- Wintroub, Michael. 2001. «L’Ordre du rituel et l’ordre des choses: l’entrée royale d’Henri II à Rouen (1550). *Annales. Histoire. Sciences Sociales* 56, 2: 479-505.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2006. *Savage Mirror. Power, Identity, and Knowledge in Early Modern France*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Revista digital: [www.ifch.unicamp.br/ojs/index.php/modernoscontemporaneos](http://www.ifch.unicamp.br/ojs/index.php/modernoscontemporaneos)



This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License.