SELF-IDENTITY AND ALTERITY IN RENAISSANCE HUMANISM BETWEEN ELITE AND POPULAR DISCOURSES

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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There are two parallel discourses on humanism nowadays. One conceives of humanism as a worldview and a philosophical position. The other takes it to be a cultural phenomenon typical of the European Renaissance. The critics interested in considering humanism conceptually, as a rule, are not Renaissance scholars. Operating from either a postmodern or a postcolonial perspective, they often speak of humanism as the backbone of Western thought or the mainstay of European modernity and, in any case, as a bankrupt ideology of the West. Conversely, the Renaissance scholars are more concerned with the task of making sense of the idea of humanism in its original historical context than with considering it in relation to its other, later developments and remain, for the most part, unwilling to address the broader questions posed by humanism.

This dissertation purports to bring the philosophical and the historical discourses on humanism together. I focus specifically on Renaissance humanism and ground my reflection firmly in textual analyses of late XV and XVI century sources. More concretely, I put forward a reading of two groups of texts. The first group includes three works exploring the arch-theme of the Renaissance, *dignitas hominis*, from the perspective of a relational concept of identity formation. These are: Pico della Mirandola's *Oratio* (1486),

Bovelles's *De sapiente* (1511) and Vives's *Fabula de homine* (1518). The second group of texts contains three works which fall into the category of Renaissance Americanist literature: Cabeza de Vaca's *Naufragios* (1542), Galeotto Cei's *Viaggio e relazione delle Indie* (written after 1553) and Jean de Léry's *Histoire d'un voyage faict en la terre du Brésil* (1578).

The bridge between these two bodies of texts is the idea, found in Pico, Bovelles and Vives, that arriving at a sense of self always involves a detour through otherness, as experienced in one's community, Nature and God. The encounter narratives, in illustrating the impact of America on the Renaissance European traveler, bring to life what philosophers theorized in the peace and quiet of their studies – the essential indefiniteness of the self unless inhabited by meanings drawn from without.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There are two parallel discourses on humanism nowadays. One conceives of humanism as a worldview and a philosophical position. The other takes it to be a cultural phenomenon typical of the European Renaissance. The critics interested in considering humanism conceptually, as a rule, are not Renaissance scholars. Operating from either a postmodern or a postcolonial perspective, they often speak of humanism as the backbone of Western thought or the mainstay of European modernity, and in any case, as a bankrupt ideology of the West. Conversely, the Renaissance scholars are more concerned with the task of making sense of the idea of humanism in its original historical context than with considering it in relation to its other, later developments and remain, for the most part, unwilling to address the broader questions posed by humanism. Yet the Renaissance, as the historical moment that brought about the crystallization of the Western notion of *humanitas*, deserves to be considered more fully in relation to the philosophically defined humanism.

In recent years, two interesting attempts have been made to speak philosophically about humanism in terms that seem to recapture some of its original XIV and XV century meanings. Edward Said, one of the foremost postcolonial theorists and a fierce critic of Eurocentrism, in his 2004 *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* pledged his ongoing allegiance to the ideals of humanism. Said, in the spirit of the early humanists always in

search of new books, believed in redeeming the humanities by expanding the canon of a humanistic education and insisting that a true humanist ethos is always inclusive rather than exclusive:

> "I […[still] believe, that it is possible to be critical of humanism in the name of humanism and that, schooled in its abuses by the experience of Eurocentrism and empire, one could fashion a different kind of humanism that was cosmopolitan and text-and-language-bound in ways that absorbed the great lessons of the past […] and still remain attuned to the emergent voices and currents of the present".[1]

Said believes that an extension and not an abolition of the canon harbors the solution to the problem of Eurocentrism as implicit in the Western humanities curriculum. We cannot forget "the great lessons of the past", but we must also remain willing to hear the voices of the present: proud heirs to the legacy of the past, yet open towards our multicultural future. Educated according to a humanities program inclusive of canonical and emergent, metropolitan and peripheral, hegemonic and subaltern discourses, students will be a new brand of humanists, equipped with moral tools to pursue political justice and equality. It is perhaps that characterization of humanism in the twin terms of literary studies and ethical engagement that is most reminiscent of the attitudes of the Italian humanists.

The second voice I would like to bring in belongs to Stephan Toulmin. In his 1990 *Cosmopolis*, Toulmin associated the passage to Modernity with what he called "the XVII century Counter-Renaissance". According to this scholar, in that period Europe's intellectual attention was diverted from the humane and concrete preoccupations typical of

[1] Edward Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 11.

the Renaissance humanists towards more abstract and universal ones. This virtual rejection of Renaissance values (in the name of a new philosophy and a new science) lasted until recently, but nowadays is "wearing out its welcome":

> "Since 1945, the problems that have challenged reflective thinkers on a deep philosophical level, with the same urgency that cosmology and cosmopolis had in the 17th century, are matters of practice: including matters of life and death. [...] All the "changes of mind" that were characteristic of the 17th century's turn from humanism to rationalism are, as a result, being reversed. The "modern" focus on the written, the universal, the general, and the timeless – which monopolized the work of most philosophers after 1630 – is being broadened to include once again the oral, the particular, the local, and the timely."[2]

Toulmin thinks that Modernity has finished its cycle and advocates a return to humanism, which, for him, is composed of four elements: a return to the oral (by which he seems to mean "to the rhetoric"[3]), a return to the particular, a return to the local, and a return to the timely. Even though Toulmin's idea of Renaissance humanism sometimes appears sketchy,[4] his characterization of humanist thought as concerned more with the domain of human experience than with the realm of objectivity is a valuable contribution

[2] Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis. The hidden agenda of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 187.

[3] Cf. Toulmin, 186-188.

[4] My main objection is against his almost exclusive focus on the French and Northern humanists.

to a discussion dominated by the notion of humanism as exemplifying Europe's "objectifying" or "totalizing" impulse.[5]

As previously pointed out, Said and Toulmin's take on humanism is quite unique in that they do not shun the idea of speaking about Humanism philosophically and yet they try to advance an understanding of it which has its roots in Renaissance thought. My own contribution purports to continue this tradition of bringing the philosophical and the historical discourses on humanism together. At the same time, I differ from Said and Toulmin in focusing specifically on Renaissance humanism and in grounding my reflection firmly in textual analyses of late XV and XVI century sources. More concretely, I put forward a reading of two groups of texts. The first group includes three works exploring that arch-theme of the Renaissance, *dignitas hominis*, from the perspective of a relational concept of identity formation. These are: Pico della Mirandola's *Oratio* (1486), Bovelles's *De sapiente* (1511) and Vives's *Fabula de homine* (1518). The second group of texts which I will analyze contains three works which fall into the category of Renaissance Americanist literature: Cabeza de Vaca's *Naufragios* (1542), Galeotto Cei's *Viaggio e relazione delle Indie* (written after 1553) and Léry's *Histoire d'un voyage faict en la terre du Brésil* (1578).

The inclusion of the latter group of works in a thesis concerned with the notion of humanism might be considered problematic and requires explanation. In what sense can they help us understand the phenomenon of Renaissance humanism and what exactly is

[5] A similar thesis concerning discontinuity between Renaissance humanism and Modernity is advanced by Donald Verene in *Philosophy and the Return to Self-Knowledge* (Cf. "As modern philosophy is built, the mind is disconnected from human wisdom, and it is disconnected from the divine in order that it be fully connected to the object. The mind ceases to be *nous* or the soul and becomes the Understanding. The concern with of the Understanding is not with itself but with the object."(Donald Phillip Verene, *Philosophy and the Return to Self-Knowledge* (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 1997), 132)

their relationship with the "humanistic culture" of their time? In rejecting the notion that only elite discourses can be considered "humanistic", I follow the lead of Joan-Pau Rubiés who in "Travel writing and Humanistic Culture: A Blunter Impact?" posits the existence of a *popular humanism*, "many of whose expressions can be linked to urban culture and sometimes also to court culture."[6] Addressing more specifically the problem of humanist writing about the New World, Rubiés further explains:

> 'popular' writers (or the authors of oral reports who dictated to someone else) were often subtly influenced by the concepts and strategies formulated by intellectual elites, and, to that extent, there is never a purely 'popular' discourse; many of the writers who were also observers, and quite a few who acted as editors or compilers like Columbus, Vespucci, Varthema, Pigafetta and Cortés, for example, albeit not having full-blown humanistic education […] in fact operated at the crossroads between popular and elite discourses. That is, they had a limited access to formal education and especially to Latin and Greek, but nevertheless were capable of reading and interested in vernacular translations of ancient authors."[7]

The three travel writers at the center of this project: Cabeza de Vaca, Cei and Léry, considered next to Pico, Bovelles and Vives or even next to humanists writing on the New World like Pietro Martire d'Anghiera, Montaigne or even Oviedo, must be viewed as "popular writers". However, quite apart from their actual acquaintance with "vernacular translations" of the classics or even from their familiarity with vernacular literary

[6] Rubiés, "Travel Writing and Humanistic Culture: A Blunted Impact?" in *Bringing the World to Early Modern Europe. Travel Accounts and Their Audiences*, ed. Peter Mancall (Boston: Brill, 2007), 141.

[7] Ibid.

traditions, the very existence of their accounts testifies to their membership in a culture which placed a very high value on the written word. In fact, their narratives only make sense in the context of a European, humanistic environment that produced the conditions for the emergence of travel literature readership.

There is however, an even more important reason for including travel writers in this project. As I will illustrate more fully in the introductory chapter, the chief grievance advanced against humanism is its supposed focus on the self and its consequent blindness to the other. It seems to me that under the rubric of this general objection to the humanist ethos, we can subsume practically all of the particular criticisms, be they made from a purely philosophical perspective (like Heidegger's for instance), or more historically grounded (like those advanced by post-colonial critics). In the chapters dedicated to the highly abstract works by Pico della Mirandola, Bovelles and Vives, I will inevitably be in an implicit dialogue with those criticisms of humanist thought which themselves operate on a purely conceptual level. I will map the ways of thinking about identity and alterity in Pico, Bovelles and Vives while at the same time keeping in mind the question of their relationship to modernity as the cradle of the new concept of selfhood. I will try to show that in all three cases we are dealing with a conception of the self cast in terms of a project. It is a weak self which has to be made/shaped/fashioned through its contact with alterity. In other words, it is not the meaning-giving ego, but an ego in search of its own meaning via alterity. It is precisely this understanding of alterity as foundational for the emergence of selfhood embraced by the Renaissance elite thinkers that convinced me of the importance of exploring the idea of otherness as possibly constitutive of the Renaissance traveler's sense of identity.

It has been argued that humanism began with the realization of a rupture between the Ancients and the medievals and moderns, in other words, that the recognition of alterity was its founding moment. The point was made by Garin[8] and is still in wide circulation. Philippe de Lajarte in his work on French Humanism[9] takes up this idea, but connects it with the further transformations of humanism as the awareness of alterity grew to encompass the newly encountered difference of the New World inhabitants. Lajarte draws attention to the fact that, after discovering the Ancients as "others", there came the second and even more radical explosion of the context in which Europeans had to think of their own identities. It became necessary to find ways to relate to the American Other. The Encounter forced the Europeans to think themselves not just in relation to God, Nature and their own societies, but also in their face-to-face with alterity which, in many ways, was much more disturbing.

And yet, the Renaissance author, writing on America is usually portrayed as performing, within the realm of literature, the same appropriating gesture as the conquistador in the political sphere. While the European man of arms strived to dominate the New World physically, the European author is said to have conspired to subjugate it through language – imposing his own understanding and value system on the reality he wrote about. According to this line of interpretation, language, just as much as weapons,

[8] Cf. "Antiquity, therefore, came to be defined as something that confronted the humanists. Its discovery was the discovery of an object which had to be placed into a valid relationship with the people who discovered it. The humanists thus found themselves vis-à-vis a historical past that was very different from their own world. […] There was a detachment; and as a result of this detachment a classical author ceased to be part of me and I began to define my own identity by discovering his." (Eugenio Garin, "Interpretations of the Renaissance," in *Science and civic life in the Italian Renaissance*, trans. Peter Munz (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1969), 18-19)

[9] Cf. Philippe de Lajarte, *L'Humanisme en France au XVIe siècle* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2009).

was an instrument of appropriation, beginning with the seemingly innocent practice of giving Christian names to geographical locations and culminating in the usurpation by the European author of the role of the historian of the "peoples without history". The European writer is thus believed to have been trapped by his tendency to subdue the American Other on the literary level (by the imposition of his "authority") in a process parallel to that of the material conquest.

In my reading of the travel narratives of Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, Cei and Léry I will not be interested in analyzing textual practices by the means of which European authors mastered the New World, rather I will try to name those narrative elements which betray the extent to which they themselves were shaped by their travel experiences. In fact, I will be looking at the various ways they imagined themselves in relation to the very concrete alterity of the Americas within the framework of recorded life experience. Why the choice of autobiographies rather than histories of the New World? In the chapters on Pico, Bovelles and Vives I will have illustrated how the early modern humanistic subject never completely thinks himself as impermeable with respect to the world. In contemplating alterity, he always considers himself a part of a larger picture.[10] Autobiography as a genre captures this fundamental feature of the humanist understanding of selfhood. The exercise of writing an autobiography is very dialogic in nature – at the most basic level it presupposes an other who will listen and maybe even respond.

Moreover, since autobiography is a form of writing in which the process of self-construction can be witnessed *in actu*, a careful reading of the autobiographic narratives of

[10] Cf. Cassirer's "captor" and "captive" in the introductory chapter.

Nuñez, Cei and Léry will help us put to the test the presupposition as to the unfailingly rock-solid stability of the European self writing on America. In fact, the works telling both about the New World and about their own authors cannot be read as operating a one-way appropriation of the other by the European self. The self-possession of a New World traveler-writer as the source of his mastery of the other will reveal itself as rather problematic, especially when the story told happens to be that of a failure. The Renaissance "Americanists" writing from personal experience will emerge from the pages of this dissertation as destabilized subjects, undergoing a process of hybridization, which profoundly compromises their ability to draw the exact coordinates of "home" and "away". Although their cases are unique, they illustrate a more general truth that each encounter with otherness produces self-estrangement. Consequently, it would be a mistake not to recognize that in the process of subduing their American others, the Europeans were forced to "discover" new dimensions of themselves.

CHAPTER II

SETTING THE STAGE: HUMANISM AND THE QUESTION OF ALTERITY

The Difficulty of Defining Humanism

In a series of lectures given in 1954 one of the greatest and most influential Renaissance scholars of the 20th century, Paul Oskar Kristeller, spoke with some urgency about the need to counteract the tendency to apply the label of *humanism* indiscriminately to any philosophical outlook marked by concern for the dignity of human person and/or with the well-being of humanity:

> "The term 'Humanism' has been associated with the Renaissance and its classical studies for more than a hundred years, but in recent times it has become the source of much philosophical and historical confusion. In present discourse, almost any kind of concern with human values is called 'humanistic', and consequently a great variety of thinkers, religious and antireligious, scientific or antiscientific, lay claim to what has become a rather elusive label of praise."[11]

These censures were part of his long-standing campaign against the use of the term "in a fashion that defies any definition and seems to have little or nothing left of the basic classicist meaning of Renaissance humanism".[12] Kristeller was particularly displeased with

[11] Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought. The Classic, Scholastic, and Humanist Strains* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 8.

[12] Ibid.

what he perceived to be a tendency of the Renaissance scholars to apply vague modern notions of humanism to the phenomena of the past. In his view such careless use of the term was sure to compromise any possibility of recapturing the original meaning of Renaissance humanism. Kristeller's antidote was to insist on humanism's historical roots in philology and broadly defined literary studies, while rejecting the idea that it incarnates the philosophical position(s) implied by the modern use of the term. To put it bluntly, humanism for Kristeller was not to be confused with the essence of modern Western culture, or rather, with what his contemporaries considered to be its most noble and enduring legacy.

We are no longer inclined to use the term *humanism* as a fit-all label of praise. In fact, Kristeller's censures seem almost incomprehensible in the context of contemporary discourse on humanism, dominated as it is, by the melancholy recognition that "civilization of humanism is bankrupt or on its death-throes".[13] Humanism, for the most part, has lost its allure of the highest and most noble expression of the European spirit, but it has preserved its status as the quintessential expression of it. As a result of its previous

[13] Cf. Jean Luc Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity*, trans. Bettina Bergo, Gabriel Malenfant and Michael B. Smith (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 2. Although the death of humanism is considered almost a *fait accompli* in academic circles, humanism continues to have its adherents. The most visible contemporary advocates of humanism are the secular humanists represented by organizations such as International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) or the American Humanist Association (AHA). These institutions promote humanism as a secular, human-centered and, above all, humanitarian philosophy of life (Cf. Humanist Manifesto III: http://www.americanhumanist.org/Who_We_Are/About_Humanism/Humanist_Manifesto_III) aimed at improving the quality of human experience, both physically and spiritually. Their ideological standpoint is well, if somewhat unsympathetically, characterized by James Hankins as an "odd brew of Enlightenment rationalism, utilitarianism, scientific positivism, evolutionary biology, and pragmatism" (James Hankins, "Humanism, scholasticism, and Renaissance philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. James Hankins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 31). Building upon the idea of a general commonality of human experience and perfectibility of human nature, these present-day secular humanists propose an optimistic vision of the future of humanity, which is, in its main traits, essentially modern.

glorification, it was subsequently targeted by a number of thinkers who in the second half of the past century undertook the task of re-thinking the European legacy. This questioning of Europe was operated from the double although not always disjunctive standpoint of its philosophy and its ethics, and in both cases the basic conclusion was that "humanism opens onto inhumanity".[14] Interestingly, this contemporary critical appraisal of humanism was genealogically connected to a strain of criticism advanced around the same time Kristeller offered his censures, yet from a very different perspective. While the Renaissance scholar, speaking from the standpoint of his own discipline and in the name of historical accuracy, advocated a narrowing down of the definition of humanism, other thinkers embraced or even broadened its meaning to include a number of philosophical and ethical attitudes which they considered paradigmatically European.

The first strides towards a radical reappraisal of *humanism* were made by Heidegger who, in his "*Letter on Humanism*", presented it as the backbone of the entire Western metaphysical tradition.[15] Humanism thus understood, was then stigmatized as essentially "forgetful of Being", i.e. distorting the proper relationship between human beings and

[14] Nancy, 30.

[15] Cf. "Every humanism is founded on a metaphysics or makes itself that foundation. Every determination of the essence of man which already presupposes, consciously or not, the interpretation of beings without raising the question concerning the truth of Being, is metaphysical. This is why, if we consider the manner in which the essence of man is determined, the characteristic of every metaphysics is revealed in that it is "humanistic."" (Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993), 225. Although Heidegger seems to have offered the most systematic challenge to humanism-as-philosophy, the ground for his radical de-emphasizing of the subject was prepared by the XIX century masters of the "school of suspicion" (to borrow Paul Ricoeur's famous label): Nietzsche, Marx and Freud. (Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 32. Cf. also: "The philosopher trained in the school of Descartes knows that things are doubtful, that they are not such as they appear; but he does not doubt that consciousness is such as it appears to itself; in consciousness meaning and consciousness of meaning coincide. Since Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud this too has become doubtful. After the doubt about things, we have started to doubt consciousness." (Ricoeur, 33))

Being. While recognizing the plurality of humanism's historical incarnations, Heidegger, viewed it in monolithic terms, as a quintessential philosophical dead-end:

> "However different these forms of humanism may be in purpose and in principle, in the mode and means of their respective realizations, and in the form of their teaching, they nonetheless all agree in this that the '*humanitas*' or '*homo humanus*' is determined with regard to an already established interpretation of nature, history, world, and the ground of the world, that is, of beings, as a whole."[16]

In Heidegger's opinion philosophical language since Plato has been constantly shifting away from its role as the means for the thinking of Being. In particular, the anthropocentrism inherent in all humanistic and metaphysical thought is, according to the philosopher, forever falsifying the true essence of humanity. Instead of humanistically envisaging man as presiding over the rest of creation, Heidegger suggests that it is possible to conceive of human dignity as a derivative of his ministry to Being:

> "Man is not the lord of beings. Man is the shepherd of Being. Man loses nothing in this "less"; rather he gains in that he attains the truth of Being. He gains the essential poverty of the shepherd, whose dignity consists in being called by Being itself into the preservation of Being's truth"[17]

It is clear that by denouncing humanism the philosopher did not intend to make himself an apostle of the "inhumane". Rather, he was trying to state the special status of

[16] Heidegger, 225.

[17] Heidegger, 245.

men in different, non-humanistic terms. According to Heidegger, man is an extraordinary creature in virtue of his special relation to Being: he is the only being which questions his/her being. In fact, it seems that Heidegger's philosophy wanted to surpass humanism, but at the same time strived to reclaim some forgotten sense of it:

> "Does it not think '*humanitas'* in a decisive sense, as no metaphysics has thought it or can think it? Is this not 'humanism' in the extreme sense? Certainly. It is a humanism that thinks the humanity of man from nearness to Being"[18]

Heidegger's "*Letter on humanism*", as is well-know, was a response to Sartre's inclusion of his name in the ranks of existentialists. The German philosopher wanted to distance himself from the existentialist movement and from Sartre's type of humanism which, while critical of the tendency to glorify man (as exemplified in Auguste Comte's positivism) was, in his eyes, still too naively anthropocentric.[19] Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas were both greatly influenced by Heidegger's idea that humanism is essentially metaphysics.[20] However, these two thinkers were much more aware of the ethical corollaries built into a humanistic metaphysics thus understood. While for Heidegger humanism was objectionable for it prevented the thinking of humanity "from nearness" to Being, for Levinas it prevented the thought of humanity from "nearness to the Other". For Levinas, humanism was not just bad philosophy: it became a moral vice.

[18] Heidegger, 245.

[19] Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'existentialisme est un Humanisme* (Paris: Éditions Nagel 1946).

[20] Cf. Jacques Derrida, "The Ends of Man," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 30.1 (1969): 31-57; Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanism of the Other* (Urbana – Chicago: Illinois University Press, 2006).

Levinas' position was very close in that respect to Michel Foucault's who saw humanism in all its diverse historical incarnations as a general moral attitude of European societies, characterized invariably by some discriminatory practices:

> "un ensemble de thèmes qui ont réapparu à plusieurs reprises à travers le temps, dans les sociétés européennes; [...] toujours liés à des jugements de valeur, [...] toujours beaucoup varié dans leur contenu, ainsi que dans les valeurs qu'ils ont retenues"[21]

For him humanism, in its many guises, amounted always to some dogmatic and oppressive ideology of exclusion. Derrida, Levinas, Foucault and other post-modern thinkers following in their footsteps are mostly invested in exploring the ethical implications of humanism viewed as the mainstay of the philosophical convictions of the West. Somewhat different is the perspective of the post-colonial critics whose discussions of humanistic ethics are primarily nourished by political, sociological, cultural and literary analyses.

The founding figure of this brand of criticism was Frantz Fanon, who in his 1961 *The Wretched of the Earth* famously denounced Europe as the place "where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them, at the corner of every one of their own streets, in all the corners of the globe."[22] For Fanon there was no doubt as

[21] Michel Foucault, "Qu'est-ce que les Lumières," in *Dits et écrits 1956-1988*, 4 vols, ed. Daniel Defert and Francois Ewald (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 339.

[22] Cf. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 251. Fanon thinks of colonialism as a corollary of humanism because of the narrowness of its definition of humanity. By the same logic, Holocaust is sometimes considered as an ugly result of a "humanist" project of redefining the human. (concerning this last point cf. Hannah Arendt *Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt, Inc., 1973). In fact, Aimé Césaire links colonialism and Holocaust in his celebrated "Discourse on colonialism": "[I]t would be worthwhile to study clinically, in detail, the steps taken by

to the essential complicity between European humanism and the violence of colonialism. Sartre, in his Preface to *The Wretched of the Earth* said that the book forced the Europeans to face an embarrassing "striptease of humanism". The ugliness of "humanism" unveiled by Fanon was its pretense to ground the supposedly universal concept of "the human" in the European (i.e. local) values and its consequent predication of "humanity" on the exclusion of the "Other".

Post-colonial critics generally identify humanism with the aggressive and objectifying tendencies typical of the European ways of thinking and acting.[23] A good illustration of this approach is Robert Young's explanation of the anti-humanist[24] position contained in his *White Mythologies*:

Hitler and Hitlerism and to reveal to the very distinguished, very humanistic, very Christian bourgeois of the twentieth century that without his being aware of it, he has a Hitler inside him, that Hitler *inhabits* him, that Hitler is his *demon*, that if he rails against him, he is being inconsistent and that, at bottom, what he cannot forgive Hitler for is not *the crime* in itself, *the crime against man*, it is not *the humiliation of man as such*, it is the crime against the white man, the humiliation of the white man, and the fact that he applied to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the 'coolies' of India, and the 'niggers' of Africa. And that is the great thing I hold against pseudo-humanism: that for too long it has diminished the rights of man, that its concept of those rights has been - and still is - narrow and fragmentary, incomplete and biased and, all things considered, sordidly racist." (Cf. Aimé Césiare, "Discourse on Colonialism," trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 36-37.)

[23] Cf. for instance: "humanism […] often validates amongst the highest values of European civilization, was deeply complicit with the violent negativity of colonialism, and played a crucial part in its ideology. The formation of the ideas of human nature, humanity and the universal qualities of the human mind as the common good of an ethical civilization occurred at the same time as those particularly violent centuries in the history of the world know as the era of Western colonialism" (Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West,* 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 2004), 160.)

[24] There seems to have been a rather significant shift in meaning between the term "anti-humanism" as it is used at present and the way it was understood by Louis Althusser, who first coined the term in 1963/64. Althusser applied the term "anti-humanism" to what he considered an orthodox form of Marxism, rejecting the more recent tendencies of some Marxist critics to overemphasize the human aspect in Marx's social theory. (Cf. Louis Althusser, "The Humanist Controversy," in *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings (1966-67),* ed. François Matheron, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London – New York: Verso, 2003), 221 – 306.

> "*To criticize humanism […] does not mean that you do not like human beings and have no ethics* – the gist of certain attacks on 'anti-humanism' - *but rather the reverse*. It questions the use of the human as an explanatory category that purports to provide a rational understanding of 'man' – an assumed universal predicated on the exclusion and marginalization of his Others, such as 'woman' or 'the native'."[25]

Similar concerns are shared by theoreticians invested in the issues of class, race, gender, and sexual identities, who define their critical standpoint in opposition to the previous modes of literary studies rooted in the so-called "liberal humanist"[26] approaches to literature. These would include as much Paul Elmer More and Irving Babbitt's New Humanism (rooted in the "phantasy" of a universal human nature) as John Crowe Ransom and Allen Tate's New Criticism (overly fetishizing the written word and, consequently, depriving it of any political relevance). The rejection of logocentrism, fallocentrism, eurocentrism, normative discourses and essentialism spells out the refusal to think humanity along the lines of the traditional conceptions of what it means to be human. Significantly, this is done in the name of human values, such as freedom, dignity, tolerance and respect.

Another kind of redefinition of the meaning of humanity seems to be at the core of post-humanism, as traced by Robert Pepperell in his provocative (yet somewhat

[25] Young, 161. (italics mine) The understanding of *humanism* as an ideology aimed at universally imposing an image of man modeled on the Modern European White Male and thus an instrument of oppression informed another one of Fanon's epoch-making books, "Black Skins, White Masks" (Cf. Franz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967))

[26] For a definition of "liberal humanism" cf. Terry Eagleton, "Conclusion: Political Criticism," in *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 169-189.

contradictory and chaotic) "Post-humanist manifesto". Pepperell advances a vision of a new world order in which humans are no longer central and machines become new deities.[27] At the same time, he propounds a very vast conception of human beings, as coextensive with Nature.[28] A post-humanist blurring of boundaries between nature, humans and machines informs also Donna Haraway's "ironic dream" of the cyborg as a new Adam/Eve, who "would not recognize the Garden of Eden" because it would be free from the myths of origin dominating "Western humanism".[29] However, some scholars understand "post-humanism" to be largely synonymous with "anti-humanism", as is evident from the following explanation offered by Ian Chambers:

> "*To be post-humanist does not mean to renounce the human; on the contrary, it announces something that is more human* precisely through its attempt to exit from the abstract confines and controls of a universal subject who believes that all commences and concludes with such a self. To accept the idea of the post-

[27] Cf, "1. 1. It is now clear that Humans are no longer the most important things in the Universe. This is something the Humanists have yet to accept. 1.2. All technological progress of Human society is geared towards the redundancy of the Human species, as we currently know it. 1.3. In the Posthuman era many beliefs become redundant - not least the belief in Human Being. 1.4. Human Beings, like Gods, only exist in as much as we believe them to exist. […] 1.7. In the Posthuman era machines will be Gods. […]1.13. Complex machines are an emergent life form. 1.14. A complex machine is a machine whose workings we do not fully understand or control." (cf. http://www.robertpepperell.com/Posthum/cont.htm)

[28] Cf. "2.7. Human bodies have no boundaries. 2.8. No finite division can be drawn between the environment, the body and the brain. The human is identifiable, but not definable. […] 2.12. First we had God, Humans and Nature. The Rationalists dispensed with God leaving Humans in perpetual conflict with Nature. The Post-Humanists dispense with Humans leaving only Nature. The distinction between God, Nature and Humanity does not represent any eternal truth about the human condition. It merely reflects the prejudices of the societies which maintained the distinction, etc." (Ibid.)

[29] Cf. Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 149-181.

humanism means to register limits; limits that are inscribed in the locality of the body, of the history, the power and the knowledge that speaks."[30]

Now, both anti-humanism and post-humanism (according to Chambers' definition of it) seem to strive to overcome traditional humanism in the name of a kind of "super-humanism". Let me explain this by returning briefly to the opening of this chapter and Kristeller's objections against calling humanistic "any kind of concern with human values". It seems to me that, at present the temptation is to do the opposite, and call such concerns "anti-" or "post-humanistic". In the wake of colonialism and Holocaust we are no longer comfortable thinking of ourselves as heirs to the legacy of humanism. If humanism was not able to protect us from slipping into bestiality, the suspicion arises that it itself must have been the very cause of inhumanity.

Are we then morally obliged to discard it or is there a possibility of redemption? The most basic question that must be answered before we can weigh our chances of preserving some positive notion of humanism is what we mean by it. Answering this fundamental query, will involve addressing a number of related problems. Is there really such a thing as Humanism, or just various humanisms? Also, is there such a thing as a "humanistic outlook", a basic nucleus of ideas shared by all the multiple incarnations of humanism? Finally, what is the nature of the relationship between Renaissance humanism and that postulated "humanistic outlook"? I suggest we begin by looking at the history of the term itself.

[30] Iain Chambers, *Culture after Humanism. History, Culture, Subjectivity* (London-New York: Routledge, 2001), 26. (italics mine)

The Double Genealogy of Humanism

James Hankins in his essay on "*Humanism, scholasticism, and Renaissance philosophy*" makes a useful distinction between the two basic "families of meaning" coexisting in the term *humanism*. One set of meanings points to classical education, i.e. the study of ancient texts in original languages, whereas the other associates it with a certain philosophical outlook.[31] This dichotomy is likely due to the word's double origin. As the oft-repeated narrative has it, the term *humanism* first materialized as *Humanismus* in Germany in 1808. It was originally used by F. J. Niethammer to refer to a type of education emphasizing Greek and Latin classics as opposed to more practically and scientifically oriented training.[32]

The German *Humanismus* was derived from the Renaissance term *humanista* (Lat.), meaning a professor or a student of the classics. The word "humanist" in turn, comes from an even older notion of *studia humanitatis*, which in the writings of the Roman authors, Cicero and Aulus Gellius, and, subsequently, in those of the XIV and XV century

[31] Cf. Hankins, 30-31.

[32] Cf. Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought. The Classic, Scholastic, and Humanist Strains*, 9. Niethammer's focus on "humanistic education" struck a chord in the souls of educated Germans, many of whom were disturbed by the exclusively scientific-materialistic *weltanschauung* which threatened to engulf Europe. This felt-need for a robust humanism was expressed by one gymnasium director at Nuremberg, whom Niethammer had appointed in the same 1808. "If this humanistic training is done right, however, young people enter their profession with an indestructible sanctuary in their souls. In our modern world of practical specializations and complexities it is more necessary than ever that we have a concrete comprehension of life as organic whole." (from a graduation day speech by G. W. F. Hegel; taken from: Gustav E. Mueller, *Hegel. The man, his vision and work* (New York: Pageant Press, Inc., 1968), 269.)

Italian scholars, denoted broadly understood literary studies.[33] The label of *Humanismus/humanism* was then retrospectively applied to the scholarly pursuits of the Italian *umanisti* first, by Karl Hagen in "Deutschlands literarische und religiöse Verhältnisse im Reformationszeitalter" (1841) and then by Georg Voigt in "Die Wiederbelebung des Klassischen Altertums, oder das erste Jahrhundert des Humanismus" (1859).[34]

The lesser-known part of the story is that about the time *Humanismus* was born in Germany, his French twin *Humanisme* had already begun teething. Unlike the German term, the French *humanisme* was originally used in a philosophical sense. It seems to have appeared for the first time in 1765 in the review *Ephémérides du citoyen, ou Bibliothèque raisonnée des sciences morales et politiques*, where it was suggested as a suitable name for "*l'amour général de l'humanité*".[35] In the first half of the XIX century it was used by Proudhon in the sense of "*culte, déification de l'humanité*" and by Renan, who expressed his conviction that *humanism* will be the religion of the future.[36]

The term *humanisme* was officially recognized as a part of the French vocabulary in 1882 when it appeared in the Supplement to *Littré*. By this stage, its original philosophical denotation was supplemented by the "philological" one linked to its German

[33] *Studia humanitatis* were articulated into 5 scholarly disciplines: grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry and moral philosophy, all of which were taught on the corpus of standard Latin, and some Greek texts.

[34] Cf. Vito R. Giustiniani, "Homo, Humanus and the Meanings of 'Humanism'," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 46.2 (1985): 172.

[35] Cf. Giustiniani, 175 n.38. It is interesting to note that in the *Encyclopédie* the similar idea ("*un sentiment de bienveillance pour tous les hommes*") is given as the definition of *humanité*.

[36] Cf. Ibid.

equivalent. As a result, *humanisme* was defined as both the culture of humanities and as a philosophical theory "*qui rattache les développements historiques de l'humanité à l'humanité elle-même*".[37] Meanwhile, analogous, if inverted, process of semantic extension took place in Germany, where since 1840-ties the term *Humanismus* started acquiring philosophical connotations. It appeared in the philosophical sense in the writings of Arnold Ruge, in Karl Marx's "Manuscripts of 1844"[38], and, above all, in Ludwig Feuerbach's coinage of of the term "humanistic realism"/"real humanism".[39]

The confluence of the literary and philosophical themes in the use of the term *humanism* is already present in Voigt's "*Die Wiederbelebung des Klassischen Altertums*" (1859) for he portrays the humanists as not only a new brand of scholars, but also as a new breed of men, harbingers of a new, modern ethos. This is true also of Jacob Burckhardt's "*Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*" (1860), where the humanists are described as embodying the moral and philosophical outlook of the Renaissance period, including its unbridled individualism as well as of Jules Michelet's "*Histoire de France au seizième siècle: Renaissance*" (1855) where the period is famously characterized as marked by the discovery of the world and the individual.

From our historical vantage point we can safely claim that the interpretation of Renaissance humanism offered by the founders of Renaissance studies was deeply influenced by the philosophical attitudes of their own times. Jules Michelet, Georg Voigt

[37] Cf. Pierre Magnard, "Nietzsche et l'humanisme," *Noesis* 10 (2006): 19-27.

[38] Cf. Giustiniani, 175.

[39] Cf. Sydney Hook, "Marx and Feuerbach," *New International* 3.2 (1936): 47.

and Jacob Burckhardt published their works respectively in 1855, 1859 and 1860, around the time when the philosophical content associated with the notion of humanism was imbued with anthropological reflections elaborated by the young Hegelians lead by Feuerbach with his reductionist humanism and positivists presided by Auguste Comte with his project of the *religion de l'Humanité.*[40]

When Hankins distinguishes between two families of meaning associated with the term "humanism", he locates the birth of "humanistic philosophy" at the beginnings of XIX century and associates it with the themes developed originally by Feuerbach.[41] Hankins further argues that, although philosophical humanism was taken in a number of different directions by its successive proponents, the essential cluster of foundational ideas remained unchanged:

> "[It] reduced the divine to the human, was opposed to any sort of religious dogma or revelation, and based philosophical reflection on a conception of the human

[40] Michelet's positivist creed finds a very eloquent expression in his *Bible de l'Humanité* (Cf. Jules Michelet, *Bible de l'Humanité* (Paris: Chamerot, 1864). Cf. also Nietzsche's comments in "Human all too human" (1878): "The Italian Renaissance contained within it all the positive forces to which we owe modern culture: liberation of thought, disrespect for authorities, victory of education over the arrogance of ancestry, enthusiasm for science and the scientific past of mankind, unfettering of the individual, a passion for truthfulness and an aversion to appearance and mere effect" (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human. A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, intr. Richard Schacht (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 113.)

[41] Cf. "The philosophical sense of humanism begins essentially with the "humanistic realism" of Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-72), but later included Marxist humanism (Antonio Gramsci), existentialist humanism (Jean-Paul Sartre), humanist pragmatism (F.C.S. Schiller, following William James), ethical humanism (Irving Babbitt), as well as "the odd brew of Enlightenment rationalism, utilitarianism, scientific positivism, evolutionary biology, and pragmatism" concocted by the American Humanist Association. (Cf. Hankins, 31)

being as a purely biological entity formed as the result of an evolutionary process, without an immaterial spiritual nature".[42]

As Jean-Luc Nancy puts it in "Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity": "Humanism was atheism. It was its truth, its breadth, its expression, and its function". But for Nancy it is a broad metaphysical point, inasmuch as he argues that Christianity was the religion which "offered exit from religions". Humanism whether Christian or atheistic is always spelled out in terms of ontology/metaphysics, so the XIX century rejection of religious faith was simply about replacing one idol with another and it changed nothing in the way European philosophers thought of the world:

> "Because it turned the essence of god into the essence of man, it merely imprinted on the premise a pivoting or rotation on itself (a revolution?). Thus, on the one hand it modified nothing in the onto-(a)-theological construction, nor could it situate, on the other hand, its own form as principle in a place worthy of it: 'humanism does not think high enough the *humanitas* of man writes Heidegger'."[43]

Hence, we are back with Heidegger and humanism as the defining trait of Western thought. Heidegger, as we remember, equated "humanism" and the entirety of Western philosophy starting with Plato. Yet, it seems that for an average educated person a more natural association is that between "Western thought" and "Modern" thought: Descartes' meaning-giving *cogito* and Bacon's knowledge as power. Consequently, humanism as the

[42] Hankins, 30.

[43] Nancy, 19.

paradigmatic expression of "Western spirit" is itself usually associated with the Modern Era. Tzvetan Todorov for example, rather than identifying humanism with the entirety of the Western tradition, leans towards equating it with European Modernity.[44] In fact, the author stresses continuity between the Renaissance "centrality of man", the French Revolution's motto of Liberté-fraternité-égalité, Kant's man-grounded ethics and liberal democracy. In his eyes, throughout this genealogy there transpires the concept of humankind as at one the source, the goal and the framework of every individual's actions:

> "The distinctive feature of modernity is constitutive of humanism: man also (and not only nature or God) decides his fate. In addition, it implies that the ultimate end of these acts is a human being, not superhuman entities (God, goodness, justice) or infrahuman ones (pleasures, money, power). Humanism, finally, marks the space in which the agents of these acts evolve: the space of all human beings and of them alone."[45]

[44] Tzvetan Todorov, *Imperfect Garden: The Legacy of Humanism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

[45] Todorov, *Imperfect Garden*, 30. Todorov's definition of humanism as grounded in the "autonomy of the I", the "finality of the you", and the "universality of the they" appears to be mostly informed by its Enlightenment component and seems to be implicitly responding to the criticisms advanced by Adorno and Horkheimer in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Cf. Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002). While Horkheimer and Adorno claimed that instead of liberating man from nature, the process of enlightenment imprisons him, Todorov (like Habermas) tries to distinguish between the ideological content of Enlightenment and its failure to deliver its own promises. He sees Enlightenment as still a valid project and considers its previous shortcomings (including the Holocaust) as a simple "deflection." (Cf. "It is not only possible, but necessary to criticize modern ideology by means of an ideal which is not foreign to it and does not imply rejecting it out of hand. In order to denounce scientism, nationalism, and egocentrism, we are not obliged to renounce the principles that make up the humanist ideal and are inherent in the idea of democracy. Our present governments are far from being a perfect embodiment of the latter. Too often, they have allowed themselves to be guided by principles profoundly incompatible with it. If only for this reason, the humanist ideal still has a very promising future ahead of it." (Tzvetan Todorov, *The Deflection of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford Humanities Center, 1989), 13)

Todorov's approach towards the question of *humanism* is helpful in that it betrays some of the common habits of thought that render our understanding of humanism difficult. Todorov, while relying unquestioningly on the association between humanism and Modernity, defines the former with concepts drawn from the Enlightenment. Then, he assumes that humanism thus defined is identical with the Renaissance humanism. But, if the question of humanism is really the question of modernity, then we must look at the stereotypically modern notions of individuality, interiority and subjectivity[46] as they were understood in the Renaissance.

Individuality, Interiority and Subjectivity

One of the most memorable (and most contested) claims of Jacob Burckhardt's monumental "*Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*" (1860) was that it was the epoch which made the "discovery of man" as an individual.[47]

> "In the Middle Ages both sides of human consciousness - that which was turned within as that which was turned without – lay dreaming or half awake beneath a common veil . The veil was woven of faith, illusion, and childish prepossession,

[46] In singling these three out for closer scrutiny I am following the lead of Robert C. Solomon, who in a somewhat unorthodox way begins his retelling of the story of the "rise and fall of the Self" with Rousseau's discovery "of the self that he shared with all men and women the world over". Cf. "What Rousseau discovered […] was the transcendental pretence. It appeared as innocence and common sense, but it embodied a profound arrogance that promoted self-righteousness, prohibited mutual understanding, and belied human diversity. Fully developed, the transcendental pretence has two central components: first, the remarkable inner riches and expanse of the self, ultimately encompassing everything; and secondly, the consequent right to project from the subjective structures of one's own mind, and ascertain the nature of humanity as such." (Robert C. Solomon, *Continental Philosophy since 1750. The Rise and Fall of the Self* (Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 1-2)

[47] That claim was contemporaneously advanced in yet another book which became a classic, Michelet's *Renaissance*.

through which the world and history were seen clad in strange hues. Man was conscious of himself only as member of a race, people, party, family, or corporation – only through some general category. In Italy this veil first melted into air; an *objective* treatment and consideration of the State and of all the things of this world became possible. The *subjective* side at the same time asserted itself with corresponding emphasis; man became spiritual *individual*, and recognized himself as such."[48]

For Burckhardt, the Renaissance Italians were the "first-born among the sons of Modern Europe"[49] and the leading intellectuals of the time, the humanists, were characterized by "an unbridled subjectivity".[50]

Appealing though Burckhardt's vision was,[51] a dissident opinion was soon to emerge with scholars such as Ernest Renan, Henry Thode and Émile Gebhart linking the emergence of individuality with the spiritual movements of the Late Middle Ages.[52] The idea that individuality was born in the XII rather than XIV or XV century gained wider

[48] Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, 2 vols, trans. S.G.C. Middlemore (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), 143.

[49] Burckhardt, 143.

[50] Burckhardt, 274.

[51] As Cesare Vasoli observes: "L'immagine del Rinascimento delineata da Burckhardt era troppo suggestiva, esteticamente compiuta nella sua dimensione mitica, per non influenzare a lungo il lavoro degli storici e dei critici. […] I vari tentativi d'interpretazione generale del Rinascimento che furono elaborati dopo il 1860, si mossero sempre nella sfera delle idee e delle immagini burckhardiane, accentuando magari questo o quel particolare, questa o quella personalità, quando addirittura non esasperarono fino all'estremo quei caratteri della civiltà rinascimentale già tracciati con assi maggior maestria ed equilibrio estético." (Cesare Vasoli, *Umanesimo e Rinascimento* (Palermo: Palumbo 1969), 131.)

[52] Cf. Henry Thode, *Franz von Assisi und die Anfänge der Kunst der Renaissance in Italien* (Berlin: G. Grotesche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1904); Ernest Renan, *Joachim de Flore et l'évangile éternel* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1884); Émile Gebhart, *L'Italie mystique. Histoire de la Renaissance religieuse au Moyen Âge* (Paris : Librairie Hachette, 1890).

currency in the period between the two World Wars thanks to the works of a group of distinguished medievalists among whom Charles Homer Haskins[53], Johan Huizinga[54] and Étienne Gilson[55] and it was restated more recently in Colin Morris' "*The Discovery of the Individual, 1050-1200*" (1972).[56]

And yet, even though the idea of the "Renaissance individual" lost a lot of its original vitality with the demise of its shadowy double (that of the cowed and insipid "Medieval man"), the prevalent opinion seems to be that there indeed was something new about the self-consciousness of the XV century man of culture. As Federico Chabod rightly put it, the question is not so much whether the Medieval and the Renaissance people shared similar emotions and acted in comparable ways, but whether, on a meta-level, they also reflected on their life situations in an analogous fashion.[57] The answer to this query seems to be that there was a qualitative difference, and even a critic as unsympathetic to any simplistic notions of Renaissance individualism as Greenblatt, agrees that this period is, nonetheless, the founding moment of the modern sense of the self.[58]

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[53] Cf. Charles Homer Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Harvard University Press, 1927).

[54] Cf. Johan Huizinga, *Herfsttij der Middeleeuwen* (Haarlem, H.D. Tjeenk Willink & Zoon, 1928).

[55] Cf. Étienne Gilson, *Humanisme médiéval et Renaissance*, Les Idées et les Lettres (Paris: Vrin, 1932).

[56] Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050-1200* (University of Toronto, 2004).

[57] Cf. Federico Chabod, "Il Rinascimento", *Studi sul Rinascimento* (Torino: Einaudi, 1967), 75-85.

[58] Cf. Greenblatt on the parallels between the "anxieties and contradictions" of the Renaissance and those of our own period: "We continue to see in the Renaissance the shaping of crucial aspects of our sense of self and society and the natural world […] We sense too that we are situated at the close of the cultural movement initiated in the Renaissance and that the places in which our social and psychological world seems to be cracking apart are those structural joints visible when it was first constructed. […] To experience Renaissance culture is to feel what it was like to form our own identity, and we are at once more rooted and more estranged by the experience." (Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning. From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago - London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 174-175).

Petrarca and Montaigne, with their unabashed egocentrism and penchant for self-scrutiny are often viewed as paradigmatic examples of that new, modern self-consciousness. And yet it cannot be claimed that self-analysis was a defining feature of modernity. Introspection was known to humanity well before these two men turned their gaze inwards. Charles Taylor sees important strides towards the modern sense of selfhood first in the Platonic "centering or unification of the moral self"[59] and secondly in Augustine's conceptualization of interiority. Augustine's famous motto "*noli foras ire, in te ipsum redi; in interiore homine habitat veritas*" points to self-scrutiny as prerequisite for the knowledge of what surpasses the individual and even the human. His introspection is not a narcissistic exercise, but an act of piety for it is the pathway towards the divine. Augustine's belief that one has to turn inwards to search for the truth paves the way for the radical epistemological formulations of Descartes.[60]

For Taylor Augustine is *the* crucial link between Plato and Descartes. Yet, Ernst Cassirer sees in the Renaissance philosophy a decisive step towards the XVII century formulations of "subject-object problem".[61] According to him, virtually all the various branches of Renaissance thought contributed to "loosen up [...] the earth out of which will come forth the new, specifically modern view of the relationship of 'subject' and 'object'".[62] That granted, there is a substantial difference between the Renaissance

[59] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Iden*tity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 120.

[60] Cf. "Augustine was the first to make the first-person standpoint fundamental to our search for the truth" (Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 133)

[61] Cf. Ernst Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, trans. Mario Domandi (New York: Harper and Row, 1963).

[62] Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos*, 123-124.

epistemology and the Cartesian *Cogito*. In fact, Cassirer is quite emphatic about the unresolved dialectic inherent in the Renaissance man's relationship with the cosmos:

> "Man, the Ego, appears to the universe, the world, at once as the enclosing and the enclosed. Both determinations are equally indispensable to express his relationship to the cosmos. And thus a continuous mutual reaction and a continuous interaction takes place between them, […] Like Goethe's Ganymede, the man of the Renaissance confronts the divinity and the infinite universe as both 'captor and captive'. The philosophy of the Renaissance never resolved the dialectical antinomy that is enclosed in this double relationship."[63]

A view close to Cassirer's in that it recognizes the novelty of the Renaissance individual's altered stance with respect to the realm "without" while at the same time acknowledging elements of continuity with previous modes of thinking is that of Louis Dupré:

> "The creative impulse of the Renaissance changed the relation to nature. The artist completed and corrected nature, yet he never ceased to consider himself an integral part of it. His attitude, unlike that of later thought, was not that of a subject opposed to a cosmos to which it conveys its entire meaning and value. […] What for early humanists and Renaissance artists had been a constructive dialectical tension turned into an opposition between mind and nature. This

[63] Cassirer, 190-191.

reversal occurred in the philosophy of the seventeenth century when mind alone became the source of meaning."[64]

Cassirer and Dupré both underscore the ambiguity of Renaissance reflection on the relationship between man as a creative and thinking subject and the realm of objectivity, cosmos, Nature. They either see the Renaissance as the birthplace of duality (Cassirer) or as the historical moment that further deepened the original split already present in medieval nominalist thinking (Dupré). While Cassirer's analysis rests on the philosophical investigations into the thoughts of a group of thinkers whom he considers spokesmen of the entire period, Dupré's tries to find a broader base in considering more fully aspects of Renaissance art and literature. Their Renaissance is the harbinger of the new modes of thinking that fully asserted themselves in the XVII century, yet it falls short of embracing a properly modern standpoint, because, as Cassirer puts it, human mind is with relation to the alterity of the world both captor and captive.

Renaissance Humanism and Philosophy

Now, Cassirer's project of finding textual "proofs" for the role of the Renaissance as the source of modern ways of thinking, even though it purports to give substance to the still predominant association between humanism and modernity, is not very popular among Renaissance scholars. In fact, Renaissance specialists still struggle with the very notion of humanism as endowed with a coherent philosophical content. This brings us back, to Paul

[64] Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity. An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 1993), 50.

Oskar Kristeller and his censures. Kristellers' argument for a narrower definition of humanism was based on his conviction that what we came to think of as Renaissance culture, though deeply influenced and transformed by the humanists, was rich also in strands which are hardly reducible to humanism.[65] His refusal to think of *humanism* as a Renaissance weltanschauung *tout court* was clearly linked to his interpretation of it as an education ideal:

> "Renaissance humanism was not as such a philosophical tendency or system, but rather a cultural and educational program which emphasized and developed an important but limited area of studies. This area had for its center a group of subjects that was concerned essentially neither with the classics nor with philosophy, but might be roughly described as literature."[66]

Eugenio Garin, another giant of Renaissance scholarship of the past century and Krsisteller's perennial, if amiable, opponent, dismisses the latter's caution that humanism should not be confused with "the philosophy, the science, or the learning of the period as a whole".[67] The Italian scholar, more in line with the traditional interpretations of the period, argued for humanism's crucial role in shaping the intellectual and cultural panorama of the Renaissance in its entirety:

> "it would be completely erroneous to reduce this development of western civilization to a collection of libraries of ancient texts offered to the thinkers by

[65] Cf. for instance Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic and Humanist Strains*.

[66] Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic and Humanist Strains*, 10.

[67] Ibid.

> "grammarians". The real change was a change in intellectual attitude. […] The expositions of the grammarians about the language of ancient texts began to involve all other texts and all other languages, i.e. institutions, habits, norms, procedures in logic and visions of the world. They developed an unprejudiced method of criticism, which took a variety of forms and affected all fields of human activity […]"[68]

The general outlines of Garin's position were not very different from Cassirer's. The scholar believed, as did Cassirer, Burckhardt and Michelet before him, that the Renaissance had been no more and no less than the first chapter in the history of Modern science and philosophy. Yet Garin's reasons for holding that Renaissance humanism was a departure from previous modes of thinking were very different from Cassirer's. While Cassirer focused on the highly abstract problem of the relationship between subject and object in the Renaissance philosophers; for Garin, it was the philological methods of the *humanists* that rose to the rank of the essence of a new philosophy.[69]

In a way, Kristeller's own position can be considered as occupying a middle ground between Cassirer's focus on systematic thought and Garin's privileging of the "philological method". While he defined humanism in terms of a cultural and literary movement, he did not claim that it had no philosophical import whatsoever. In fact, the German scholar admited that, even though humanism was not philosophical "in its substance", it

[68] Garin, *Science and civic life in the Italian Renaissance*, IX-XI.

[69] Cf. "è precisamente quell'attegiamento 'filologico' che, come aveva ben visto una storiografia oggi troppo facilmente disprezzata, costituisce appunto la nuova 'filosofia', ossia il nuovo metodo di prospettarsi i problemi, che non va considerato dunque, come taluno crede, accanto alla filosofia tradizionale, come un aspetto secondario della cultura rinascimentale, ma proprio effettivo filosofare." (Eugenio Garin, *L'umanesimo italiano. Filosofia e vita civile nel rinascimento* (Bari: Editori Laterza, 1986), 11.)

nevertheless had some "important philosophical implications and consequences". The writings of humanists might have lacked systematized philosophical doctrine, but they all expressed a "belief in the value of man and the humanities and in the revival of ancient learning".[70] Indeed, while Kristeller considered the humanists' achievements in speculative philosophy to be negligible[71] (due their self-avowed lack of interest in metaphysics) he nevertheless believed that they all had a considerable interest in ethics.

Let us briefly consider some of the famous "programmatic statements" contained in writings of the early Italian humanists. Petrarca, the eternal school-boy and truth seeker[72] was notorious for his aversion towards the professional philosophers of his times (i.e the late scholastics, especially Latin Averroists) and, like Montaigne after him, doubted that metaphysical questions can be settled on the basis of reason alone. In *On his own ignorance and that of many others* he charges his opponents with impiety and states his preference for the name of a "Christian" over that of a "philosopher".[73] The Aristotelians are mistaken trying to pry the "secrets of nature and the mysteries of God" for such metaphysical

[70] Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic and Humanist Strains*, 22.

[71] That claim is being made of course about literary figures, not professional philosophers such as Ficino, Pico della Mirandola or Pomponazzi. While Kristeller dismissed the philosophical significance of humanism, he did have an interest in Renaissance philosophy, as embodied in Renaissance Platonism and Renaissance Aristotelianism.

[72] Cf. the endearing self-portrayal from the letter to Francesco Bruni (Sen I,6 [5]): "I am a fellow who never quits school, and not even that, but a backwoodsman who is roaming around through the lofty beech trees all alone, humming to himself some silly little tune, and – the very peak of presumption and assurance – dipping his shaky pen into his inkstand while sitting under a bitter laurel tree. I am not so fortunate in what I achieve as passionate in my work, being much more a lover of learning than a man who has got much of it. I am not so very eager to belong to a definite school of thought; I am striving for truth." (taken from: Ernst Cassirer, P.O. Kristeller; John Herman Randall (eds.), *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1948), 34).

[73] Cf. "Let them certainly be philosophers and Aristotelians, though they are neither, but let them be both: I do not envy them these brilliant names of which they boast, and even that wrongly. In return they ought not to envy me the humble and true name of Christian and Catholic." (Petrarca "On his own ignorance and that of many others," in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, 76).

questions are to be accepted on faith and on the authority of Revelation, as handed down by the Church. The essence of philosophy for Petrarca is not metaphysics, but rather *ars bene beateque vivendi*, to use Cicero's expression, i.e. moral philosophy. Furthermore, he believes in the close relationship of that discipline with rhetoric: dry and abstract disquisitions on virtue cannot move hearts to embrace it, and knowledge of morals is useless if it is not translated into practice:

> "What is the use of knowing what virtue is if it is not loved when known? What is the use of knowing sin if it is not abhorred when it is known? […] However, everyone who has become thoroughly familiar with one of our Latin authors knows that they stamp and drive deep into the heart the sharpest and most ardent stings of speech, by which the lazy are startled […] and those who stick to the ground lifted up to the highest thoughts and to honest desire."[74]

Petrarca was persuaded that the study of the classics bore true spiritual benefits. Literary pursuits in Petrarca's eyes were not merely an abstract exercise in erudition, a goal in itself, but rather they were meant to result in the formation of a desirable human being. One finds a very similar conviction in the famous letter of Poggio Bracciolini to Niccolò de' Niccoli:

> "Sed ego mi Nicolae, paulo tepidior factus sum in hac cura perquirendi novos libros. Tempus esset iam de somno surgere ac danda opera, ut aliquid mihi prodessent ad vitam et mores illi quos habemus et quos quotidie legimus. Nam

[74] Petrarca, "On his own ignorance and that of many others", 104.

congregare semper ligna, lapides, coementa, stultissimum videri potest, si nihil eadifices ex illis."[75]

According to Poggio, the study of the classics must be conducive towards the ethical goal of a "good life". It has to be useful, yet not according to some material criteria, as it became later for the Enlightenment *philosophes*.[76] The usefulness of the *studia humanitatis* is measured in terms of moral and spiritual excellence which they are believed to engender. In fact, the role of classical studies is to render man more "humane", i.e. to chisel and form his character. The same idea transpires in the famous letter on the merits of humanist education which Leonardo Bruni addressed to one of his young friends:

"Licet enim iuris civilis studium vendibilius sit, utilitate et dignitate longe ab iustis studiis superatur. Nam studia quidem ista ad faciendum virum bonum tota contendunt, quo nihil utilius excogitari potest."[77]

The complex interplay between the scholarly and the ethical dimensions of the Renaissance humanistic ideal can perhaps best be glimpsed in the letter from Marsilio

[75] "I am however, dear Niccolò, growing a bit weary of that constant search for new books. The time has come for me to wake up and put to some use in my life those principles of which we daily read. Indeed, constant collecting of wood, stones and cement would seem rather silly, if one was not to build anything with all that material."[translation mine] (Eugenio Garin (ed.), *Il Rinascimento italiano* (Milano: Istituto per gli studi di política internazionale, 1941), 70-71.)

[76] Cf. for instance Diderot's discussion of usefulness in the article *Art* in the *Encyclopédie*, where a useful man is defined as one that with his labor produces useful goods. It has been argued however, that there are important links between humanist culture and western pragmatism. Cf. Jerry H. Bentley, "Renaissance Culture and Western Pragmatism in Early Modern Times," in *Humanity and Divinity in Renaissance and Reformation. Essays in honor of Charles Trinkaus*, ed. John W. O'Malley, Thomas M. Izbicki and Gerald Christianson (E. J. Brill: Leiden, 1993), 35-52.

[77] "Although the study of civil law is more marketable, it is by far surpassed in utility and dignity by literary studies. It is so, because the latter aim at making a good man, which is the most useful thing than can be thought." [translation mine] (Leonardo Bruni, "Epistola de studiis humanitatis," in *Il Rinascimento italiano*, 115).

Ficino to Tommaso Minerbetti, in which the word "*humanitas*" appears in its triple meaning to refer to "charity/philanthropy", "human race", and "humanities".[78] The co-existence of all these meanings of the term *humanitas* illustrates how deeply rooted in the language itself was the humanistic belief in the connection between the literary studies, the insight about the fundamental unity of all humankind and the moral uprightness of properly (i.e. humanistically) educated individuals. In fact, the three denotations of Ficino's *humanitas* point towards the ethical dimension of *studium* as the source of charitable deeds:

> "Singuli namque homines sub una idea et in eadem specie sunt unus homo. Ob hanc, ut arbitor, rationem sapientes solam illam ex omni virtutum numero hominis ipsius nomine, id est humanitatem, appellaverunt, que omnes homines quodammodo ceu fratres ex uno quondam patre longo ordine natos diligit atque curat. Ergo vir humanissime, in officis humanitatis persevera: nihil Deo gratius quam charitas, nullum certius aut dementiae inditium aut miseriae portentum quam crudelitas. Persevera etiam in familiaritate Caroli Valgulii Brixiensis nostri: est enim vir humanitate humanitatisque studiis tam Grecis quam Latinis excellens. Vale."[79]

[78] Cf. Stéphane Toussaint, *Humanismes/Antihumanismes. De Ficin à Heidegger. T. 1 Humanitas et rentabilité* (Paris: Les Bellrs Lettres, 2008), 54-55.

[79] Marsilio Ficino, "De humanitate", *Epistolarum familiarum liber 1*, ed. Sebastiano Gentile (Firenze: Olschki, 1990), 107. « Car les hommes individuels sont un seul homme sous une seule idée et dans une même espèce. C'est pourquoi, comme je pense, les sages n'ont nommé d'après l'homme lui-même qu'une seule d'entre toutes les vertus et c'est l'humanité, qui aime et prend soin de tous les hommes comme des frères nés d'un seul père dans une longue descendance. Donc, homme très humain, persévère au service de l'humanité (*in officis humanitatis*): rien n'est plus agréable à Dieu que la charité, il n'y pas de signe plus certain de démence ou de présage de malheur que la cruauté. Persévère aussi dans la familiarité de notre Carlo Valguli de Brescia: c'est un homme qui excelle dans l'humanité comme dans les humanités grecques et latines. Salut. » (French translation of Stéphane Toussaint: Toussaint, *Humanismes/Antihumanismes*, 54 no. 13)

It seems to me that the above examples illustrate some very important aspects of Renaissance humanism's "philosophy". Toussaint spoke of the connection that the humanists drew between literary studies, the feeling of solidarity with other human beings and charity. I suggest organizing the humanist's "platform" under the following rubrics: 1) the belief that there are commonalities to human nature that can be better understood via literacy and reading. 2) the belief that literacy should shape character 3) the belief that human beings are communitarian creatures, whose very condition is to be with the others and for the others.

The readings that the early humanists would recommend to expand their students' understanding of human nature were, what we would call today, classics. From our point of view, this might seem restrictive, but it was not so for the XIV and XV century readers. In fact, the emphasis on the classic was a result of an extension of the canon, so to speak. New books were being discovered and read avidly, opening up new horizons and teaching that while human nature is identical across centuries, human customs and institutions are not. There was no notion of circumscribing the area from which the new books should come – the idea was rather to absorb as many diverse sources as possible, as we witness in the intellectual attitude of one of the protagonists of this dissertation: Giovanni Pico. It must have been the same desire to expand horizons through literacy that inspired Peter Martyr (Pietro Martire), an Italian humanist at the service of the Spanish Crown and one of the first sources of information about America for the European reading public. Yet arguably, the desire to write about the New World produced some mixed results.

Humanism and the Renaissance Travel Literature

According to one important trend in travel writing criticism, the bookish culture of the Renaissance writers was a serious impediment to an accurate perception of the New World:

> "In some respects the Renaissance involved, at least in its earlier stages, a closing rather than an opening of the mind. The veneration of antiquity became more slavish; authority staked fresh claims against experience. Both the boundaries and the content of traditional disciplines such as cosmography or social philosophy had been clearly determined by reference to the texts of classical antiquity, which acquired an extra degree of definitiveness when for the first time they were fixed on the printed page. Fresh information from alien sources was therefore liable to seem at worst incredible, at best irrelevant, when set against the accumulated knowledge of the centuries."[80]

J.H. Elliott, the author of these remarks further states that very often, humanist authors used the narratives about the New World instrumentally: to implicitly criticize the Old one. In order to do that, they were projecting onto America an idyllic picture, for the most part drawn from Greek and Roman Antiquity.[81] As a result, one reads about Indian caciques, who make speeches that seem to have been taken straight from Livy. (Elliott mentions in that context Peréz de Oliva's *Historia de la Invención de las Yndias*, but this

[80] John Huxtable Elliott, *The Old World and the New (1492-1650)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 15-16.

[81] "The humanists […] projected onto America their disappointed dreams. In the *Decades* of Peter Martyr, the first popularizer of America and its myth, the Indies have already undergone their subtle transmutation. […] It was an idyllic picture, and the humanists made the most of it, for it enabled them to express their deep dissatisfaction with European society, and to criticize it by implication. " (Elliott, 26)

remark might as well apply to the famous harangue Peter Martyr puts in the mouth of an old Indian chief in the 3rd book of the First Decade of his *De Orbe Novo*[82]). According to this line of criticism, by thinking "through" the European imagery acquired in the process of reading the classics, the humanists were virtually unable to perceive the radical otherness of American civilization.

Walter Mignolo gives Elliott's basic thesis a different twist, by underscoring the humanist dependence on the classical models not so much for the imagery, as for the "conceptualization of discursive types".[83] He claims that the European historiographers who appointed themselves to write the histories of what they believed to be "nations without history", while trying to "give" the Ameridians their past, in fact, dispossessed them of it. The Argentinean scholar targets above all the humanist authors who undertook to reconfigure the Amerindian non-alphabetic systems of record-keeping to fit European presuppositions as regards historiography's ineluctable ties with alphabetic writing[84].

Moreover, quite apart from reliance on classical models for either content or form, (which arguably, was more predominant in elite authors) all travel writers were subject to the general tendency of the human mind to interpret the new data on the basis of already

[82] Cf. "It is reported to us that you have visited all these countries, which were formerly unknown to you, and have inspired the inhabitants with great fear. Now I tell and warn you, since you should know this, that the soul, when it quits the body, follows one of two courses; the first is dark and dreadful, and is reserved for the enemies and the tyrants of the human race; joyous and delectable is the second, which is reserved for those who during their lives have promoted the peace and tranquility of others. If therefore you are a mortal, and believe that each one will meet the fate he deserves, you will harm no one." (Peter Martyr d'Anghiera, *De Orbe Novo*, trans. Francis MacNutt (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1912), 102) Incidentally, Rubiés proved that this speech has been based on Columbus's own account of that encounter and, consequently, the most one could accuse Matrire of, is to have relied on the classical tradition for the rhetorical flair, not for the content. (Cf. Rubiés, "Travel writing and Humanistic Culture", 161)

[83] Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 140.

[84] Cf. Mignolo, 125-169.

acquired notions. In fact the need to "fall back on the familiar object and the standard image, in order to come to terms with the shock of the unfamiliar"[85] is felt by any outside observer, regardless of how much they have read. Anthony Pagden explains this perceptive disability through the notion of the "principle of attachment":

> "culturally foreign practices are made understandable by supplying them with explanations which would work for similar actions performed by the Europeans. The practice of "attaching" interpretations which make sense for the European observer to otherwise incomprehensible aspects of native culture result in an act of recognition of the Amerindians as fellow human beings. Needless to say, such "reading" of indigenous practices is always performed at the expense of detaching them from their original framework and "re-locating" them "in a context which would have made them unintelligible to their original actors."[86]

Furthermore, the "re-location" into a foreign context is accompanied, according to Pagden, by the act of dispossessing the original holders of the perceived/apprehended cultural practices. "Having made the attachment, we name the unknown for the known. Having named, we have recognized and, having recognized, we have also taken possession"[87] states the author. On a more positive note, such cultural translations allowed

[85] Elliott, 21.

[86] Anthony Pagden, *European Encounters with the New World. From Renaissance to Romanticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 21.

[87] Padgen, 26. In fact, the process of perceiving (which fits the observed reality into a pre-existent conceptual framework) and its immediate corollary: re-naming in the perceiver's language has been linked with aggressive possessiveness also by Stephen Greenblatt: "The founding action of Christian imperialism is a christening. Such a christening entails the cancellation of the native name – the erasure of the alien, perhaps demonic, identity – and hence a kind of making anew; it's at once an exorcism, an appropriation, and a gift [from God]. Christening then is the culminating instance of the marvelous speech act: in the wonder of the proper name, the movement from ignorance to knowledge, the taking of possession, the

the Europeans to recognize the humanity of the natives and were conducive to more humanitarian attitudes. Yet, this partial recognition seems to have stemmed from the same fundamental refusal to acknowledge true difference as gave rise to utter rejection. According to Todorov both attitudes coexisted in Columbus, who either:

> "conceives the Indians (though without using these words) as human beings altogether, having the same rights as himself; but then he sees them not only as equal, but also as identical, and this behavior leads to assimilationism, the projection of his own values on the others. Or else he starts from the difference, but the latter is immediately translated into terms of superiority and inferiority (in his case, obviously, it is the Indians who are inferior). What is denied is the existence of a human substance truly other, something capable of being not merely an imperfect state of oneself."[88]

Todorov asks himself how Columbus could have fathered both the myth of the Indian as noble savage and its apparent opposite, the myth of Indians as "dirty dogs" and concludes that they are two sides of the same coin. According to the author both these myths rest on the same fundamental failure to recognize the radical otherness of the Indians and "the refusal to admit them as a subject having the same rights as oneself, but

conferral of identity are fused in a moment of pure linguistic formalism" (Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 83). Greenblatt's association between the act of naming and taking possession exposes the use of the rhetoric of the marvelous as both failure to respond properly to alterity (even though, at first sight, marvel seems to indicate precisely a recognition of otherness) and as a strategy for appropriation.

[88] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 42.

different."[89] Columbus is torn between his role as the Evangelizer (Cristoforo = the Christ Bearer) of the Indians and that of a man of business[90], but both types of concern seem to leave him blind to the New World alterity.

Some scholars believe that the two discourses coexisting in the Discoverer, later on split into two separate currents of Americanist literature: the humanist/secular and imperial one (of authors like López de Gómara, Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés or Ginés de Sepúlveda) and the religiously-inspired one (of Bartolomé de las Casas or Francisco de Vitoria).[91] Claudia Alvarez considers the second current to be an important subtext of Early Modernity, a true "'counterdiscourse of domination', a self-critical and self-reflexive conscience that questions modernity's totalizing impulse."[92] For Pagden and Todorov the more humanitarian approaches of the missionaries and the scholastic lawyers are only

[89] Todorov, *The Conquest of America*, 49.

[90] This conflict between two systems of values, incarnated in Colombus's often contradictory remarks about the natives epitomizes the entire conflicted nature of Spanish conquest as historically situated in a transitional period between the religiously-oriented Middle Ages and the modern period which places the greatest value on material goods. (Cf. Todorov, *The Conquest of America*, 42)

[91] Cf. Joan-Pau Rubiés, "Travel Writing and Humanistic Culture", 165. This division is however only roughly accurate: it seems to be applicable only to the Spanish authors and even then with some caution. For example, it seems doubtful that this scheme could accommodate narratives such as Cieza de León's or Inca Gracilaso's, who, while accepting the providential dimension of the discovery, praise highly the native cultural achievements and denounce the Spanish atrocities. Rubiés suggests that perhaps these authors could best be described as Christian humanists. (Cf. ibid.)

[92] Claudia Alvarez, *Humanism after Colonialism* (Oxford-Bern-Bruxelles-Frankfurt am Main-New York-Wien: Peter Lang, 2006), 59-60. Alvarez further contrasts the Early Modern uneasy conscience with regard to colonization and slavery with the properly Modern attitudes of the 17th century colonialism: "Spain's preoccupation with justifying its colonization of the Americas on a legal basis, emphasizing the necessity of papal approbation for any step taken in the colonial enterprise, reflected an attempt to incorporate a new, market-oriented system into an existent medieval scholastic conceptual framework of alterity. The fact that no other nation felt subsequently compelled to justify either its bid to colonize or its reliance on slavery reveals a gradual naturalization of the link between skin color and slave status, which was to characterize seventeenth-century racial ideology" (Alvarez, 61)

another aspect of the same agenda: in both cases alterity is subjected to violence (either physical or epistemic).

Personally, I find the most complete and compelling criticism of the role of humanism in colonialism and imperialism the one formulated by Mignolo. As already mentioned, Mignolo blamed the humanist fetishistic approach to alphabetical writing for the tendency to dismiss as irrelevant the alternative means pre-Columbian societies used to foster a sense of their own identity. With the weapon of the written word, the European self-appointed "experts" on the Amerindian peoples overtook control over the native meanings and dispossessed the indigenous of their subjectivity. Literacy, according to Mignolo acted as an instrument of violence and a means of centralization and control at the service of the emerging European empires.

In Mignolo's interpretation, the European man's pretense to be an authority on the New World found a natural extension in the authorship of books that aspired to be "definitive" on the subject of the indigenous cultures as well as in the actual political authority over the subjugated native.[93] In this perspective of a radical distrust towards "the letter", any writing that purported to tell about America according to the "discursive modes" of Europe was a violation of alterity and the humanist dream of expanding the horizons of humanity through writing was distorted into a tool of violence.

[93] The interplay between "authority" in the sense of expertise/knowledge and "authority" in the sense of political governorship is a leading theme in Stephen Greenblatt's *Marvelous Possessions.* Analyzing one of the entries in Columbus' 1492 diary, Greenblatt remarks on the easiness with which its author passes from admitting ignorance to claiming authority. Cf. "I am fascinated by the move, here as elsewhere, from knowing nothing ('they did not understand me nor I them') to imagining an absolute possession ('the whole island was at my command')." (Greenblatt, *Marvelous possessions*, 13)

Mignolo's criticism of Renaissance non-indigenous "Americanist" literature is built on the premise that alphabetical writing was invariably at the service of a self-possessed and self-confident European ego, convinced of being "the measure of all things" to use Protagoras' famous adage. In the following chapters, I will strive to show that the humanist idea of selfhood is essentially relational, always presupposing an Other as the grounding and foundation for one's sense of self-identity. Moreover, I hope to illustrate that the confident self-possession of the humanistic individuals writing on the New World, especially within the genre of autobiography, is a myth fuelled by well-meant, but fundamentally one-sided readings.

CHAPTER III

GIOVANNI PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA: THE SELF AS THE IMAGELESS IMAGE OF GOD

For Burckhardt, Pico della Mirandola's *Oratio* represents the clearest expression of the Renaissance thought of man, indeed "one of the noblest bequests of that great age"[94]. Ernst Cassirer agrees with Burckhardt that "it summarizes with grand simplicity and in pregnant form the whole intent of the Renaissance", claiming moreover that it represents the epoch's "entire concept of knowledge."[95] Eugenio Garin, for his part, not only hails it as the "manifesto of the Renaissance"[96], but believes its significance to be on a par with Bacon's *Novum Organum* and Descartes' *Discourse on Method*[97]. As well as being the most anthologized and the best-known piece of Renaissance writing, it is commonly held to be "characteristic of its author and its time"[98]. In fact, one is sometimes under the

[94] Burckhardt, 351-352.

[95] Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos*, 86.

[96] Eugenio Garin, "Introduzione." in Pico della Mirandola, *De hominis dignitate. Heptaplus. De ente et uno*, ed. Eugenio Garin (Vellecchi: Firenze, 1942), 23.

[97] Cf. "Del resto alla fine del 400, e in uno scritto che può collocarsi accanto al 'Discorso del Metodo' e al 'Novum Organum', Giovanni Pico determinava con molta precisione la portata sovvertitrice della nuova immagine dell'uomo, che faceva consistere appunto nella sua indipendenza da ogni specie e forma predeterminata, quasi sporgente oltre il mondo delle forme, signore non solo della propia forma, ma, attraverso l'opera magica, di tutto il mondo delle forme, che può combinare, trasformare, rinnovare." (Eugenio Garin "Interpretazioni del Rinascimento," in *Medioevo e Rinascimento. Studi e ricerche (*Laterza: Bari, 1965), 99-100.

[98] *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, 217.

impression that the work's standing as the key to our understanding of Renaissance humanism often locks the two into a hermeneutic circle in which one is interpreted in light of the other and vice versa. In accordance with this quasi-metonymic logic, *Oratio* is claimed as a proof of Renaissance modernity[99] while the latter serves as a guide and a starting point underlying many a reading of Pico's text.

In view of *Oratio's* standing as the most perfect incarnation of the Renaissance humanist spirit, it is somewhat ironic that its very credentials as a piece of humanistic writing are somewhat debatable. Notably, William B. Craven draws a parallel between *Oratio* (especially its first part) and Pico's letter to Ermolao Barbaro which is often interpreted as a statement of Pico's preference for philosophy over rhetoric[100]. According to that scholar, in both instances Pico turns his humanistic eloquence to the defense of its very rival: the academic philosophy. Even though *Oratio*, unlike the letter to Barbaro, is not a polemic, "there are grounds for calling it an anti-rhetorical, anti-humanist document."[101] Craven's skepticism as to Pico's humanistic credentials echoes similar

[99] A case in point is the way Garin uses parts of God's celebrated address to man from *Oratio* as the chief support of his interpretation of Renaisance culture as marked by anxiety of indetermination and directionlessness: "[U]n configurarsi tutto nuovo dei rapport fra l'uomo e la realtà ultima, fra l'uomo e le cose, fra l'uomo e le istituzioni umane […] indicano, soprattutto, se si guardi a fondo, la fine di una sicurezza, la nascita di una ricerca tormentata, in una direzione ancora non chiara, proprio perché la rivendicata figura dell'uomo 'libero' si poneva al limite della distruzione di ogni direzione, di ogni forma predeterminata: 'tu che non sei cittadino né del cielo né della terra, che non sei immortale né soggetto alla morte; tu, di te stesso quasi libero e sovrano artefice , plasmati e scolpisciti nella forma che vuoi.'" (Garin, *Interpretazioni del Rinascimento*, 91)

[100] This interpretation of the Letter to Barbaro is by no means conclusive. Suffice it to say that both Eugenio Garin and Paul Oskar Kristeller see in it rather an effort at reconciliation of the two disciplines. For Garin this happens through the "integration" of the scholastic tradition within the generally humanistic framework of Pico's thinking, while for Kristeller they coexist as two separate traditions that both command Pico's allegiance. (Cf. Eugenio Garin, "Le interpretazioni del Pensiero di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola," in *L'Opera e il Pensiero di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola nella Storia dell'Umanesimo. Convegno Internazionale, Mirandola: 15-18 Settembre 1963, vol. 1* (Firenze, 1965), 3-33)

[101] William B. Craven, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: Symbol of His Age. Modern Interpretations of a Renaissance Philosopher* (Genève: Libraire Droz, 1981), 44.

reservations expressed by Lynn Thorndike in volume IV of his imposing "History of Magic and Experimental Science"[102]. Giovanni Gentile who, unlike Thorndike, does not doubt the weight and significance of Pico' thought, nevertheless, does not consider it as paradigmatically humanistic. While Thorndike and Craven view *Oratio* as traditionalist and contained within the scholastic paradigm, Gentile believes it to adhere to an ethos larger than humanism.[103]

Gentile's distinction between humanism as the preparatory stage and the later development of Renaissance thought towards naturalism bears some similarity to Kristeller's division of the Italian Renaissance philosophy into the humanistic, the Neo-Platonic and the Aristotelian currents. Kristeller championed a "narrow" definition of humanism, arguing that it must be understood as a cultural and educational program with only a limited and indirect impact on philosophy outside of the domain of ethics. Clearly, within the parameters of such a scheme, Pico's *Oratio* cannot be considered a typical humanistic text. It is all the more remarkable that even Kristeller believed *Oratio* to reflect

[102] Cf. "One cannot but feel that the importance of Pico della Mirandola in the history of thought has often been grossly exaggerated. […] Why should we today be compelled to assent to loose eulogies of the sublimity of his mind or the many-sidedness of his learning? More of a scholastic disputant than a humanist, and not so good a Hebrew scholar as Raymond Martini or Nicholas of Lyra, he did little but add to medieval scholastic interests the Platonism and mystic theology of Ficino." (Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science. Vol. IV: Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934), 485.)

[103] Vital in this context is Gentile's understanding of humanism as just the preparatory stage for the more mature Renaissance thought. Cf. "L'Umanesimo è la preparazione o, se si vuole, l'inizio del Rinascimento. […] Ma l'orientamento generale del pensiero del Rinascimento propriamente detto è diverso da quello dell'Umanesimo […] C'è di mezzo un mutamento spirituale, che si manifesta principalmente nell'estensione della sfera d'interesse intellettuale e morale, per cui l'umanista pare si ristringa tutto nello studio e nella celebrazione di quello che è strettamente umano, nell'animo suo stesso o nella memoria e nella tradizione, a cui egli ama affacciarsi per ingrandire e rinvigorire il suo animo; laddove l'uomo del Rinascimento gira intorno lo sguardo fuori dell'uomo, e abbraccia con l'intelletto la totalità del mondo a cui l'uomo appartiene e in cui gli tocca di vivere. Il punto di vista umano diventa punto di vista naturale: che è lo stesso punto di vista di prima, ma ampliato, in guisa da ricomprendere nel suo orizzonte la natura." (Giovanni Gentile, *Giordano Bruno e il pensiero del Rinascimento* (Firenze: Vallecchi Editore, 1925), 3-4.)

the "humanistic spirit" inasmuch as it continues and develops the anthropological reflection already pursued by the humanists themselves:

> "When Pico, and Ficino before him, worked out a philosophical theory of the dignity of man in the universe, they were merely giving a more systematic and speculative development to a vague idea that had dominated the thought and aspirations of their Humanist predecessors for several generations."[104]

In fact, he considers the humanists' "thought of man" as an essential component and possibly the only unquestionable contribution of humanism to Renaissance philosophy[105]. Despite the fact that the reflection on human dignity is not particular to the Renaissance – it was a prominent theme in both classical and patristic literature[106] - Kristeller argues that with the advent of Renaissance humanism, "the emphasis on man and his dignity [became] more persistent, more exclusive, and ultimately more systematic than it had ever been during the preceding centuries and even during classical antiquity".[107]

That a concern for man and his dignity should play a central role in the intellectual lives of scholars pursuing *studia humanitatis* or *studia humaniora* comes as no surprise.

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[104] Paul Oskar Kristeller, "Introduction" to Pico's *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, 221. In fact, the key difference that Kristeller perceives between the ideas on human dignity developed by the humanists and the subsequent contributions by a Ficino or a Pico is that the latter's reflection on the subject takes place within "a well-developed metaphysical system of the universe", an aspect absent in the earlier humanists. (Cf. Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Concepts of Man and Other Essays*, *Renaissance Concepts of Man and Other Essays* (Harper & Row: New York, 1972), 9)

[105] "[The] emphasis on man is one of the few ideas – perhaps the only philosophical idea – contained in the program on the early Humanists." (Ibid.)

[106] Cf. Alain Michel, "La dignité humaine chez Cicéron," in *La dignité de l'homme. Actes du Colloque tenu à la Sorbonne-Paris IV en novembre 1992*, ed. Pierre Magnard (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1995), 17-24; Eugenio Garin, Lionello Sozzi, *La dignitas hominis e la letteratura patristica; La dignitas hominis dans la litterature francaise de la Renaissance* (Torino: Giappichelli, 1972).

[107] Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Concepts of Man and Other Essays*, 6.

The grounding factor is of course the humanists' belief in the character-shaping influence of such studies; a conviction which finds copious expressions in their letters, oratory and moral treatises.[108] However, apart from these pedagogically-oriented reflections, human nature - its mystery and excellence - becomes a subject in its own right. As Charles Trinkaus observes in his two-volume work dedicated to the idea of man as the Image of God in the Italian Renaissance:

> "[T]he aspiration among the humanists and other thinkers towards an exaltation of human powers, and certainly of man's ultimate destiny, to the level of the divine was widespread, dramatic and influential."[109]

Petrarch expresses the conviction that human soul is the only matter worthy of intellectual inquiry and wonder in a famous letter describing his ascent of Mount Ventoux. The poet tells us that after reaching the summit and admiring the view for a moment, he randomly opened a copy of Augustine's *Confessions* which he was in the habit of carrying in his pocket. Presently, he was overcome with shame for he stumbled upon the passage in which the author talks about people's admiration of the wonders of nature and neglect of themselves:

[108] Cf. previous chapter.

[109] Cf. Charles Edward Trinkaus, *In our image and likeness: humanity and divinity in Italian humanist thought*, 2 vols (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), XIV.

> "I closed the book and was angry at myself since I was still admiring earthly things although I should have learned long ago from pagan philosophers that nothing is admirable but the soul in comparison with which, if it is great, nothing is great."[110]

Petrarch weaves his ideas on man into his biographical *De secreto conflictu curarum mearum* ('Secret Conflict of my Cares') and *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia* ('On His Own Ignorance and That of Many Others'). Ripe with anthropological reflection are also his treatises on religion and morality *De vita solitaria* ('The life of solitude'), *De otio religioso* ('The Repose of the Religious') and *De remediis utriusque fortunae* ('Remedies for both kinds of Fortune'). Man's condition finds extensive treatment in Coluccio Salutati's *De fato et fortuna* and *De nobilitate legum et medicinae* and Lorenzo Valla's *Dialogus de libero arbitrio* and *De vero falsoque bono*.[111] More explicitly concerned with human dignity as such are Bartolomeo Fazio's 1447/1448 '*De excellentia ac praestantia hominis*'[112] and Giannozzo Manetti's 1452 '*De dignitate et excellentia hominis*'.

It used to be a part of the stereotypical image of the Renaissance (and it still holds sway over the imagination of the general public) that the period's anthropological reflection was buoyantly optimistic and as such was a decisive rupture with its medieval

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[110] Quoted after Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and Its Souces* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 171.

[111] Cf. Trinkaus, *In our image and likeness*.

[112] Fazio portrayed himself as the first one to have attempted a treatise of this sort. He viewed his work as a response to (and a continuation of) Innocent III's 1195 *De contemptu mundi (De miseria conditionis humanae)*. His *De excellentia* was intended as a remedy for the pope's failure to compose the promised volume on human dignity. Yet, Fazio's claim to originality has to be qualified since he wrote on the instigation of Fra Antonio da Braga and following the latter's outline. Braga's blueprint is sometimes treated as a philosophical work in its own right. (Cf. Trinkaus, *In our image and likeness*, 200 – 229.)

predecessor. This view has been demolished in Garin's "*La 'dignitas hominis' e la letteratura patristica*", which demonstrated the indebtedness of the humanistic discourse on human dignity towards patristic and medieval sources[113]. Furthermore, Giovanni di Napoli and Charles Trinkaus, both argued convincingly that the themes of human misery and human dignity, far from being incompatible, were treated as complementary and coexisted within the humanistic treatises on human excellence.[114] In reality, the humanists often struck a darker tone while talking about man. Notable examples include Poggio Bracciolini's "*De miseria humanae conditionis libri II*" (1455) and Leon Battista Alberti's "*Momus*".

However, Pico della Mirandola's *Oratio* is almost universally believed to be an expression as well as an apex of the tendency to glorify man's nature. The scholars, while generally accepting *Oratio*'s anthropological optimism, disagree often on the issue of its metaphysical foundation. Is man a "great miracle" because he is made in the Image of God and capable of being united with his Creator in the beatific vision? Or, is man's special dignity due to the fact that he is free from natural determinism and endowed with the power to shape his own destiny? In other words, is Pico's text an expression of a decidedly modern spirit – or - does it remain within the orbit of the medieval ways of thinking?

Broadly speaking, there seem to be two major lines of interpretation concerning *Oratio*. There are those who consider Pico's work to be ushering in the key concepts and

[113] Cf. Eugenio Garin, Lionello Sozzi, *La dignitas hominis e la letteratura patristica; La dignitas hominis dans la litterature francaise de la Renaissance*.

[114] Cf. Giovanni Di Napoli, "'Contemptus Mundi' e 'Dignitas Hominis' nel Rinascimento," *Rivista di filosofía neoscolastica* XLVIII (1965): 9-41; Charles Trinkaus, *Adversity's noblemen; the Italian humanists on happiness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940).

preoccupations of modernity and those who believe it to be fundamentally in line with the preceding medieval and scholastic tradition. Scholars in the former category tend to consider Pico's views as both radically novel and representative of the Renaissance "thought of man"[115]. This line of interpretation starts with Burckhardt and is characteristic of the main-stream of Renaissance scholarship. Among its advocates one can count Cassirer, Gentile, Garin, Kristeller and many others. It was recently reiterated vigorously by Stéphane Toussaint.[116] All of these authors lean towards the interpretation of *Oratio* as a text concerned chiefly with the idea of man's freedom and its corollaries: the mastery over himself (through will/moral action) and over Nature (through knowledge).[117] Needless to say, such double mastery involves a new (modern) way of conceptualizing one's relationship with God and Nature. As Cassirer puts it:

> "The being of man follows from his doing; and this doing is not only limited to the energy of his will, but rather encompasses the whole of his creative powers. For all

[115] Within this group there exists a minority opinion according to which Pico's views, while new and radical must nevertheless be considered as essentially incompatible with the predominant intellectual tendencies of his times. (Cf. Charles Nauert, *Humanism and the Culture of Renaissance Europ*e, 2nd ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2006): 75-76. ("this view of human nature is Pico's special blend of Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy and must not be equated with 'humanism'. It must be regarded as the opinion of only this one philosopher" (Nauert, 76)).

[116] Cf. Stéphane Toussaint, "*Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494). The Synthetic Reconciliation of All Philosophies*," in *Philosophers of the Renaissance*, ed. Paul Richard Blum (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 69-81. (Cf. especially: "the various recent attempts to reduce Pico's work to a purely humanistic scholarship and rhetoric, or to a Scholastic or even "reactionary" interpretation, must be regarded as a thorough watering down of the Philosophical Renaissance that Pico embodies, and as a gradual philosophical dumbing down of his thinking" (Toussaint, "*Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494). The Synthetic Reconciliation of All Philosophies*", 81.)

[117] The accent shifts slightly from freedom to universalism of thought in Toussaint. Cf. "The basic idea in the discourse about the human person is […] generated by the ability to reshape the history of Western and Eastern thought in accordance with a mental process typical of the new epoch, a process aiming at the unity and infinity of all human knowledge." (Toussaint, "*Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494). The Synthetic Reconciliation of All Philosophies*", 74). Still, Toussaint's insistence on the idea that Pico's Adam is a type for the "new intellectual" is very akin to Cassirer's opinion that Pico's anthropology marks "a new advance" in the understanding of the relationship between man and God and man and Nature.

> true creativity implies more than mere action upon the world. It presupposes that the actor distinguishes himself from that which is acted upon, i.e. that the subject consciously stands opposed to the object. […] What is required of man' will and knowledge is that they be completely *turned towards* the world and yet completely *distinguish* themselves from it."[118]

The second category of scholars rejects this understanding of Pico as anachronistic. They focus rather on the continuities between his work and the medieval reflection on man which considered the essence of humanity to be consummated in the unity with the divine. This school of interpretation was inaugurated by Avery Dulles' famous 1941 Harvard Phi Beta Kappa Prize Essay "*Princeps Concordiae. Pico della Mirandola and the Scholastic Tradition"*[119] and was continued by scholars such as Giovanni Di Napoli and Henri de Lubac.[120] Its more recent supporters include William B. Craven, Brian P. Copenhaver, F. Roulier, and M. V. Dougherty[121]. Craven notoriously deems *Oratio* as one of the most misconstrued documents of the Renaissance. He claims that there is "a wide and sometimes startling disparity between most historical accounts of [Pico's] thought and the texts on

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[118] Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos*, 84-86.

[119] Cf. "Pico did not think of man as a pure spirit forging his own destiny regardless of Providence and of Fortune. His anthropology was in all essentials that of the Christian Middle Ages." (Avery Dulles, *Princeps Concordiae: Pico Della Mirandola and the Scholastic Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941), 127)

[120] Cf. Henri de Lubac, *Pic de la Mirandole, études et discussions* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1974); Giovanni di Napoli, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola e la problematica dottrinale del suo tempo* (Roma: Desclée & Co, 1965).

[121] Cf. Craven, *op. cit.*; Brian P. Copenhaver, "Magic and the Dignity of Man: De-Kating Pico's *Oration*," in *The Italian Renaissance in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Allen J. Grieco et al. (Florence: Olschki, 2002), 295-320; Fernand Roulier, *Jean Pic de la Mirandole (1463-1494), humaniste, philosophe et théologien* (Genève: Slatkine, 1989); M. V. Dougherty, "Three Precursors to Pico della Mirandola's Roman Disputation and the Question of Human Nature in the *Oratio*," in *Pico della Mirandola. New Essays*, ed. M.V. Dougherty (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 114-151.

which they are supposedly based".[122] This is especially true of *Oratio* which, in his opinion, is rarely read in the context of its genre and in conjunction with Pico's other writings. Craven insists that neither the question of human freedom, nor that of human nature were central to Pico's philosophy. His statements on the subject in the *Oratio* are not metaphysical in nature, but rather moral, and "they function as part of an inflated rhetorical argument for the educational effectiveness of philosophy and theology".[123] He stresses the text's envisaged function as the inaugural speech for the projected Roman debate on Pico's 900 theses[124]. Such inaugural speeches were a typical part of medieval academic life and would traditionally consist of two parts, one praising the speaker's discipline and the other, explaining and justifying his method or approach.[125] The *Oratio* seems to adhere to this pattern, pointing to the intellectual life of the Cherubs (the discipline of philosophy) as the model for human perfection.

The deeper reasons for the objections that these scholars raise against the more traditional interpretations of Pico are probably best articulated by Brian Copenhaver. Copenhaver believes that most Pico criticism suffers from the tendency to see in the author of *Oratio* a proto-Kantian bard of man's autonomy. As is well-known, the perception of the conflict between Nature (i.e. necessity) and human freedom was at the basis of the

[122] Craven, 4.

[123] Craven, 45.

[124] Craven's opinion in this regard coincides with S. A. Farmer's as expressed in his "Syncretism in the West". Farmer is yet another scholar, who considers Pico more of an epigone than an innovator. (Cf. Stephen Alan Farmer, *Syncretism in the West: Pico's 900 Theses (1486)* (Tempe, AR: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 167, 1998)

[125] Cf. Brian P. Copenhaver, Charles B. Schmitt, *A History of Western Philosophy 3. Renaissance Philosophy* (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 166.

entire Kantian project. Kant thought it to be his philosophical mission to make a case for human liberty and dignity in the face of the inexorable determinism of Newtonian physics. The post-Kantian interpreters of Pico saw the count of Mirandola as anticipating Kant's duality of nature and freedom. Ernst Cassirer, who is the most eloquent spokesman for this school of interpretation[126], conceived of Pico's exclusion of man from the great chain of being as a proto-Kantian gesture: a separation between the moral law by which humans govern themselves and the natural laws which operate on the rest of Nature. Such distinction would reflect the famous dichotomy of the "starry heavens above" and "moral law within" from the conclusion to Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason.*[127]

Let us turn to *Oratio* and read the crucial passages containing Pico's reflection on human freedom and separateness from Nature. In Pico's famous re-writing of the story of creation, when God is about to crown his work with "*someone to ponder the meaning of so great a work, to love its beauty, and to wonder at its vastness*" he has no more archetypes to use in fashioning this "*new offspring*" nor can he find "*anything which he might bestow on his new son as an inheritance, nor among the seats of the universe any place where the latter might sit to contemplate the universe*." Indeed, all creation is already complete: "*all things had been assigned to the highest, the middle, and the lowest orders*".[128]

[126] It is quite telling that in "*The Individual and The Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*" Cassirer's reflections on Pico's *Oratio* are contained in the chapter on "Freedom and Necessity".

[127] Cf. Copenhaver, "Magic and the Dignity of Man: De-Kating Pico's *Oration*", 305.

[128] Cf. "Sed, opere consumato, desiderabat artifex esse aliquem qui tanti operis rationem perpenderet, pulchritudinem amaret, magnitudinem admiraretur. Idcirco iam rebus omnibus (ut Moses Timeusque testantur) absolutis, de producendo homine postremo cogitavit. Verum nec erat in archetipis unde novam sobolem effingeret nec in thesauris quod novo filio hereditarium largiretur nec in subsellis totius orbis, ubi universi contemplator iste sederet. Iam plena omnia; omnia summis, mediis infimisque ordinibus fuerant distributa." (Pico § 4. 12-15)

It is in this passage, immediately preceding God's famous speech to man that Pico draws the vital divide between Man and Nature. The crucial scene in which we see God short of archetypes *before* the creation of man suggests strongly that God's work is, in some ways, done. In fact, Pico portrays God's intention to create Man almost as an afterthought conceived "*when the work was finished*" and "*when everything was done*".[129] Needless to say, this implies that Nature is complete without man and that there is no place in the great chain of being that must necessarily be filled by his existence. This is a significant departure from the traditional imagery in which man is placed at the center of the universe as the essential link between the lowest and the highest creatures.

That to overcome this idea was in fact Pico's intention we can gather from the opening passages of the *Oratio*. Right at the outset, the prince of Mirandola states that the reasons given traditionally to justify the opinion that man is a great miracle all seem insufficient to him. These reasons, although formulated in a variety of ways, are all centered around the basic notion of man as the link between the lower and the higher order of creation[130]. Pico breaks out of this scheme. His man, rather than being the crucial middle link, remains outside of the great scale of being. As a matter of fact, in his explanation of the wondrous nature of man, the author follows the traditional ecclesiastical understanding

[129] Cf. "But when the work was finished, the Craftsman still longed that there were someone to ponder the meaning of so great a work, to love its beauty, and to wonder at its vastness. Therefore, when everything was done (as Moses and Timaeus testify), He finally bethought himself of bringing forth man." (Pico § 4. 12-13)

[130] "I weighed the reasons for these sayings, the numerous considerations advanced by many men to explain the excellence of human nature did not fully persuade me: that man is the intermediary between creatures, the familiar of the higher beings, the king of the things beneath him; by the acuteness of his senses, by the inquiry of his reason and by the light of his intelligence the interpreter of nature; set midway between fixed eternity and fleeting time and, (as the Persians say) the bond, or rather the wedding-song of the world, on David's testimony, but little lower that angels" (Pico § 2.3)

of miracle as a phenomenon operating outside of the limitations of nature. In reality, Pico tells us that man is a great miracle because, like a miracle, he remains outside of the natural order.[131]

The fact that in Pico's scheme man is created after Nature has already been "completed" excludes him from the bonds of natural necessity. He is separate from Nature which does not seem to need him. His relationship with the realm of natural necessity is loosened, which indeed gives Pico's rewriting of the story of creation a certain proto-Kantian flavor. Nevertheless, for Pico separating man from Nature does not have the same consequences as it did for Kant. Pico's man inhabits a world in which Nature is neither the only, nor the principal Other for human beings. The central point of reference for Pico's man is not physical Nature with its inexorable laws, but God. While Nature's grip on Man might be loose in Pico's eyes, he still rests firmly in the hand of God. Kant separates man from Nature to reassert human autonomy (and dignity) against the mechanistic and materialistic interpretations of man advanced by some Enlightenment thinkers.[132] Nature does not pose the same kind of threat for Pico's Man for the natural law operating within it is the reflection of the divine law. When Pico separates man from Nature, he leaves him all the more emphatically in the hand of God as the Other who is the source of his being and the ultimate goal of his existence as becomes apparent later on in the text.

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[131] "Pico views human being as a 'great miracle' precisely because miracles are traditionally understood to be events that operate outside the limitation of a nature, or collectively, outside the order of nature" (Dougherty, 135-136.)

[132] Julien Offray de La Mettrie's Man-Machine is the most notorious example, but the tendency to offer materialistic explanations of human spiritual and mental processes was more widespread. Cf. for instance Diderot's "D'Alembert's Dream" (Cf. Denis Diderot, *Rameau's Nephew and Other Works*, trans. Jacques Barzun and Ralph H. Bowen, intr. Ralph H. Bowen (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2001), 89 – 176)

God in creating the World has exhausted all the available archetypes, but since his will to engender yet another creature cannot be frustrated, He decides to give man instead of a nature of his own "*whatever belonged to every other being*"[133]. The Creator then places "*this creature of indeterminate image*"[134] in the middle of the world and speaks the following words:

> "We have given you, Adam, no fixed seat nor features proper to yourself nor endowment peculiar to you alone, in order that whatever seat, whatever features, whatever endowment you may responsibly desire, these same you may have and possess according to your desire and judgment. Once defined, the nature of all other beings, is constrained within the laws prescribed by us. Constrained by no limits, you may determine it for yourself, according to your own free will, in whose hand we have placed you. I have placed you at the world's center so that you may thence more easily look around at whatever is in the world. We have made you neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, so that you may, as the free and extraordinary shaper of yourself, fashion yourself in the form you will prefer."[135]

Man is thus a "*creature of indeterminate image*". Pico dwells on the particularity of man's make-up and on his ability to shape his own nature, but nowhere does he speak

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[133] "Statuit tandem optimus artifex, ut cui dari nihil proprium poterat[r] commune esset quicquid privatum singulis fuerat." (Pico § 5.17)

[134]" indiscretae opus imaginis" (Pico § 5.18)

[135] "Nec certam sedem, nec propriam faciem, nec munus ullum peculiare tibi dedimus, o Adam, ut quam sedem, quam faciem, quae munera tute optaveris, ea, pro voto, pro tua sententia, habeas et possideas. Definita caeteris natura intra praescriptas a nobis leges cohercetur. Tu, nullis angustiis cohercitus, pro tuo arbitrio, in cuius manu te posui, tibi illam prefinies. Medium te mundi posui, ut circumspiceres inde commodius quidquid est in mundo. Nec te celestem neque terrenum, neque mortalem neque immortalem fecimus, ut tui ipsius quasi arbitrarius honorariusque plastes in quam malueris tute formam effingas." (Pico § 5. 18-22)

explicitly of him being created in the image of God. Does he abandon this idea as well as that of man as the universal link? It seems that Man's endowment with the "indeterminate image" is for the author the very meaning of his being made in the image of God. To understand this, we need to look at the traditional scholastic notion of "nature" as the limiting principle. In scholastic metaphysics a thing's nature is synonymous with its essence and stands for the defining principle which makes each thing what it is, distinct from all other things. This nature or essence determines and, consequently, limits the existence of each thing, situating it in a fixed position in the hierarchy of beings.[136] At the top of this hierarchy is God, the only being in which the essence does not limit, but rather coincides with existence. In Pico's scheme, man, inasmuch as he is deprived of a "determinate" image (nature) is also free from the limitation that it would impose on him. In fact, he seems to share with God his status of a being beyond limitations. As a result, man's lack of a "fixed image" can be considered as precisely the possession of the Image of God. This interpretation is further substantiated by the fact that the adjective *indicretus* used by Pico in the expression "*indiscretae opus imaginis*" is traditionally referred to God.[137]

Man is like God also in that he possesses "*whatever belong[s] to every other being*". Pico tells us that "*The Father infused in man, at birth, every sort of seed and sprouts of every kind of life*"[138]. This means that, like God, he encloses in himself all the existing

[136] Cf. Dougherty, 135.

[137] Cf. Francesco Bausi, *Nec rhetor neque philosophus: Fonti, lingua e stile nelle prime opere latine di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1484-87)* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1996), 135.

[138] "Nascenti homini omnifaria semina et omnigenae vitae germina indidit Pater" (Pico § 6.28)

natures. However, the difference between the way God possesses all the natures and the way man does is that God has all the natures in actuality, whereas man has them only in potency (i.e. in seminal form). Whereas God *is* everything, man is nothing: he only has the *potential to become*. This fundamental contrast alerts us to the way the Image of God is different from God himself. As in a mirror, the Image is but an inverted version of the Original: while God is the ultimate fullness, man is the ultimate emptiness. His possession of the "seeds" of all things, while seemingly pointing to completeness, really signifies lack[139]. It is due to this ontological insufficiency that man's freedom has to be necessarily directed towards something beyond him.

As we have seen above, Pico's treatment of freedom in the *Oratio* is deeply intertwined with his understanding of human nature. In fact, it has been often argued that the idea of freedom in this text owes its radicalism to the abolition of the notion of human nature. Man, as a creature without "determinate image", is free to choose his own "features". His nature will result from his actions, or to put it in Sartrean terms, his essence will follow his existence.[140] This "moral ontology"[141] at first could strike one as an extreme statement of auto-sufficient autonomy, the uttermost exaltation of human freedom. Nevertheless it seems to me that there is far more ambiguity in Pico's treatment of both the

[139] Pier Cesare Bori points out the correspondence between Pico's idea of man's ontological lack and the figure of Eros in Plato's *Symposion*. Eros' nature is flawed for he is trapped between ignorance and knowledge and always aspiring towards the latter. Pico's man shares moreover the imperfect nature of Epimetheus, as portrayed in *Protagoras*. (Cf. Pier Cesare Bori, *Pluralità delle vie. Alle origini del Discorso sulla dignità umana di Pico della Mirandola* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2000), 38)

[140] Pico's ideas on freedom have been famously compared to Sartre's existentialism by Hiram Haydn. (Cf. Hiram Haydn, *The Counter-Renaissance* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), 349-350.)

[141] Dougherty, 136.

issue of human nature and that of freedom. Let us consider the concept of human nature first.

On the one hand, Pico seems to do away with any such notion when he deems man "*creature of indeterminate image*" and gives man liberty to "*fashion [himself] in the form [he] will prefer*." Nevertheless, the fact that man has no "image" of his own, this very lack of essence, constitutes man's unique condition, i.e. his defining trait, his nature. Is this a glorious condition or a deficient one?[142] It seems to be both: man possesses the God-like dignity of existing beyond limitations but, in virtue of his ontological "lack" is also utterly dependent of what is outside of him. Having nothing properly his, nothing to define him, he depends entirely on the Other as the source of his identity. In fact, Pico's Man has to go beyond himself in order to become himself and as he realizes his potential, he inevitably departs from his original "empty" self. This process could be styled as "acquiring a face", for Pico's man does not have "proper features" ("*nec propriam faciem*"). As man acquires a face (which is not his own to begin with), he moves away from his original sterile autonomy. He lets his void be inscribed by that towards which he opens himself. Let us see how Pico explains this process:

> "If he cultivates his vegetable seeds, he will become a plant. If he cultivates his sensitive seeds, he will become brutish. If he cultivates his rational seeds, he will

[142] This question amounts really to asking whether Pico's understanding of man was Pelagian. Is Pico's man capable of "storming the heavens" without the aid of divine grace? This point will be considered in more detail further on.

become a heavenly animal. If he cultivates his intellectual seeds, he will be an angel and a son of God."[143]

Man can choose among the vegetal, the sensual, the rational or the intellectual life. He thus possesses the freedom to choose which form of life will mark him, inscribe itself on the empty space of his identity and, ultimately, limit him. The meaning of freedom in *Oratio* is hence linked, on the one hand, with the idea that man is not bound by any predetermined nature (negative freedom), but also (and perhaps more importantly) with the idea that he is free to chose which limitations to impose upon himself (positive freedom).[144] And yet, choosing one's own limitations from among the variety of created natures does not exhaust the full array of possibilities open to Pico's man:

> "And if [man] is not contented with the fate of any creature, he will gather himself into the center of his own unity and, become one spirit with God, will join the solitary darkness of the Father, who is above all things, and will stand ahead of all things."[145]

Man must go beyond himself in order to "acquire a face" and become himself, but he is invited to refuse identification with any aspect of the created world. He is to transcend all the particular "natures" in order to attain unity with God. This will be achieved if man chooses to "*gather himself into the center of his own unity*" and to "*become one spirit with*

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[143] "Si vegetalia planta fiet, si sensualia obrutescet, si rationalia caeleste evadet animal, si intellectualia angelus erit et Dei filius." (Pico § 6.30)

[144] For the distinction between positive and negative freedom cf. Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958).

[145] "Et si nulla creaturarum sorte contentus in unitatis centrum suae se receperit, unus cum Deo spiritus factus, in solitaria Patris caligine qui est super omnia constitutus omnibus antestabit." (Pico § 6.31)

God." This itinerary, although not the only path open to Man is the only one worthy of him. As we see then, freedom for Pico is not a value in itself, but it is valued as that which enables man to strive towards God.[146] Consequently, human nature in *Oratio* has to be conceived as the impossible point of convergence between freedom and finality. The Image is meant to become one with its Source. This is the true vocation of man, the true nature of a creature without nature. This is *deificatio* in which man's original emptiness can become fullness.[147]

Significantly, for Pico the mystical union with divinity happens at the center of man's internal cosmos.[148] Man appears to realize his natural vocation when he meets God's limitlessness by embracing his own limitlessness. In both, choosing the cultivation of the seeds implanted in him at creation and in his pining for God, man seems to be reaching within, not outwards. And yet in doing so, he identifies with something different than himself, and in that sense can be said to be reaching towards the Other. This said, man's only proper Other is God. If man is defined by his essential incompleteness, his Other must be characterized by supreme fullness. Man's radical lack can only be fulfilled by God's absolute plenitude. Thus, Man must strive towards the ultimate Otherness of God:

[146] Cf. "La dignità umana non consiste [...] nella libertà come tale. Consiste certo, nella libertà, ma questa può-deve attuarsi in una tensione verticale verso una meta non creaturale" (Pier Cesare Bori, *Pluralità delle vie. Alle origini del Discorso sulla dignità umana di Pico della Mirandola* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2000), 38)

[147] An important observation by Dougherty: "By including divinity in the range of actualizations open to multipotential human beings, Pico appears to escape a particularly thorny metaphysical problem vexing to some medieval thinkers, namely, how the intrinsic limitations of nature are to be overcome in the divinization or deification of human beings when they become one with God." (Dougherty, 144)

[148] Cf. Bori, 37.

> "Yet, what is the reason of all this? It is in order for us to understand that, because we were born with the option to be what we want to be, we must take most care of this; lest people say of us that, being held in honor, we did not realize that we reduced ourselves to brutes and mindless beasts of burden. Let us rather remember the saying of Asaph the prophet: "You are all gods and sons of the most high," unless abusing the most indulgent liberality of the Father, we turn from beneficial to harmful the free choice he bestowed on us. Let a holy ambition pervade our soul, so that, not satisfied with mediocre things, we strive for the loftiest and apply ourselves with all our strength to pursue them (because we can achieve them, if we want). Let us spurn earthly things, disregard the celestial, and reject all that is of this world, in order to fly to the otherworldly court near the most eminent divinity.[149]

Is the invitation to "spurn earthly things" in order to "strive for the loftiest" an incitement to asceticism? It seems that what Pico commends is not so much an escape from the created realm, but rather the refusal to fully immerse oneself in it. Rather than evading creation, Man has to think of it as the pathway towards divinity. The ultimate goal is knowing God immediately in the act of contemplation, but before this can be achieved man has to approach Him indirectly, through the study of His creation. While philosophizing

[149] "Sed quorsum haec? Ut intelligamus, postquam hac nati sumus conditione, ut id simus quod esse volumus, curare hoc potissimum debere nos, ut illud quidem in nos non dicatur, cum in honore essemus non cognovisse similes factos brutis et iumentis insipientibus. Sed illud potius Asaph prophetae: «Dii estis et filii Excelsi omnes», ne, abutentes indulgentissima Patris liberalitate, quam dedit ille liberam optionem, e salutari noxiam faciamus nobis. Invadat animum sacra quaedam ambitio ut mediocribus non contenti anhelemus ad summa, adque illa (quando possumus si volumus) consequenda totis viribus enitamur. Dedignemur terrestria, caelestia contemnamus, et quicquid mundi est denique posthabentes, ultramundanam curiam eminentissimae divinitati proximam advolemus." (Pico § 10.47-51)

according to the grades of Nature, man draws closer to the knowledge of God through analogy, which is the preparatory stage for the more perfect immediate knowledge of Him achieved in deification.[150]

In other words, this itinerary towards God leads Man through the Otherness as instantiated, albeit in a limited form, in Nature. Man is to imitate the life of the Cherubs[151], completing an intellectual journey, in which his intellect is to open itself to the otherness of creation. This itinerary consists of 3 stages.[152] Firstly man has to purify himself, mastering his passions with moral philosophy and perfecting his intellect with dialectic. Secondly he is to study natural philosophy.[153] Finally, he attains the true wisdom and peace of mind through the practice of holy theology in preparation for the union with the Divine. The use of reason is paramount in this journey towards God. The cause for this is that in

[150] Pico here seems to seek agreement between the idea that in this life knowledge of God is possible only through analogy (as held by Thomas Aquinas) and the idea that God can be known immediately (as exemplified for instance by Anselm of Canterbury). Since the former position is Aristotelian in nature and the latter - Platonic, Pico could be said to offer here some preliminary exploration of the theme of the fundamental agreement between Aristotle and Plato, which he addresses more fully in *De Ente et Uno*.

[151] "Hence the Cherub, located in the middle position, prepares us for the Seraphic fire and likewise illuminates us for the judgment of the Thrones. This is the bond of the First Minds, the order of Pallas, the guardian of contemplative philosophy. First we must emulate him, thirst after him and to the same degree understand him in order that we may be raised to the heights of love and descend well taught and prepared to the duties of action." (Pico § 12.68-69)

[152] Cf. Bori, 40.

[153] "We, emulating the Cherubic life on Earth, curbing the drive of the emotions through moral science, dispersing the darkness of reason through dialectic (as if washing away the squalor of ignorance and vices), therefore purge our souls lest our emotions run amok or our reason imprudently run off course at any time. Then well we imbue our purified and prepared soul with the light of natural philosophy so that afterwards we may perfect it with the knowledge of divine things." (Pico § 13. 74-75)

the mystical union man burns with Seraphic love towards God and, according to Pico, it is impossible to love what is not known.[154]

In Pico's thinking being one with God, loving Him and knowing Him are inseparable. The route towards unity with God leads thus through knowing Him, and the route towards the knowledge of God leads through the knowledge of God's creation.[155] Moreover, it is necessary to consider nothing short of its entirety, moving up and down through the complete scale of being in order to be able, at last, to find peace in the perfect knowledge of God in "theological bliss":

> "Once we, inspired by the Cherubic spirit, have reached this point through the art of speaking or of reasoning, that is, philosophizing according to the grades of Nature, penetrating the whole from the center to the center, we will then descend, dashing the one into many with Titanic force like Osiris, and ascend, drawing together with Apollonian force the many into one like Osiris' limbs until at last, resting in the bosom of the Father Who is at the top of the ladder, we will be made perfect in theological bliss."[156]

Pico's ideas on the relationship between Man as the being capable of knowing God's creation and the world as that which is knowable has been famously interpreted by

[154] Cf. Pico § 12.66. In other words love which springs from the will has to be preceeded by knowledge which belongs to the faculty of reason. Cf. the relationship between will and reason in *Oratio* in the pages to follow.

[155] Cf. for example "These things Moses truly commands of us and in commanding instructs, incites and encourages so that through philosophy we may prepare for ourselves, while we are able, the path to the future celestial glory." (Pico § 19.108)

[156] Pico § 15.87.

Cassirer in terms of the subject-object dichotomy. Understood within these parameters, knowledge becomes an act of knowing, a form of activity performed by the human agent on the passive, receiving world.[157] Conceiving of the reason's quest for knowledge as an expression of human agency puts it at the same plane as the operations of the will. Man is a subject which not only knows, but also wills.[158] Will (which often operates within the material sphere), and intellect (with its immaterial operations) are both manifestations of human agency. For Cassirer there seems to be a clear connection between the intellectual knowledge of Nature and the *practical* mastery over it and *physical control* over its workings. Such an association is but a staple of modern ways of thinking, surmised by the maxim "*scientia potentia est*", traditionally ascribed to Francis Bacon.[159] In fact, some of the eminent interpreters of Pico's thought read it in this radically baconian fashion, insisting on Pico's notion of human intellect as divinely creative, i.e. possessing, beyond the mere capacity of shaping its own notions, the faculty of willful "shaping" of the material world around. Exemplary in that sense is Gentile's interpretation:

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[157] Cf. "What is required of man's will and knowledge is that they be completely *turned towards* the world and yet completely *distinguish* themselves from it. Will and knowledge may, or rather, must devote themselves to every part of the universe; for only by going through the entire universe can man traverse the circle of his own possibilities. But this complete *openness* towards the world must never signify *dissolution* in it, a mystical-pantheistic losing of oneself. For the human consciousness possesses itself only inasmuch as it is conscious that no single goal will fulfill it; and human knowledge possesses itself only inasmuch as it knows that no single object of knowledge can suffice for it" (Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos*, 86 (italics original).)

[158] Cf. Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos*, 87.

[159] This said, Cassirer was nevertheless quite explicit about the "unresolved dialectic" between Man and Cosmos in Renaissance thought, about man's status as both "container" and "contained", "captor" and "captive." Cf.:"Man, the Ego, appears to the universe, the world, at once as the enclosing and the enclosed. Both determinations are equally indispensable to express his relationship to the cosmos. And thus a continuous mutual reaction and a continuous interaction takes place between them, […] Like Goethe's Ganymede, the man of the Renaissance confronts the divinity and the infinite universe as both 'captor and captive'. The philosophy of the Renaissance never resolved the dialectical antinomy that is enclosed in this double relationship." (Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos*, 190-191)

> "La mente, in cui Pico non trova la peculiare natura dell'uomo, è l'intelletto astratto, che ha fuori di sé la realtà; l'intelletto aristotelico, quel motore immobile, che non poteva concepirsi creatore del mondo, poiché questo è materia oltre che forma, ed esso è pura forma. La mente invece, che si può attribuire in proprio all'uomo e a Dio, sarebbe attività non contemplatrice, bensì creatrice, realizzatrice dell'essere della sostanza"[160]

The tradition of viewing Pico, after the manner of Gentile, as a "philosopher of the will" is present, to a greater or lesser extent, in the works of all the scholars who insist on Pico's modernity. Of particular interest must be considered Frances Yates' interpretation of Pico's ideas on Magic as the proof of his being the forerunner of the modern scientific/technological mentality. Yates considers *Oratio* to be concerned chiefly with Magic and Cabbala[161] and hails it as "the great charter of Renaissance Magic, of the new type of magic introduced by Ficino and completed by Pico".[162] Yates thinks of the Renaissance magic as characterized by the same striving for manipulative power over Nature that was the distinguishing feature of the XVII century scientific revolution.[163]. She

[160] Gentile, 60-61.

[161] "Pico's oration on the Dignity of Man echoes throughout with the words of Magia and Cabala; these are the basic themes of his whole song. […] The praise of magic and man as Magus in the oration is couched in general rhetorical terms, and only hints at the secrets of magical procedures. But it is certainly in praise of both Magia and Cabala, and it would therefore seem that the complete Renaissance Magus, as he burst upon the world for the first time in Pico's oration in his full power and Dignity, was a practitioner of both natural magic and also of its 'supreme form', practical Cabala." (Frances A. Yates, "Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and magic," in *L'opera e il pensiero di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola nella storia dell'umanesimo*. *Atti del Convegno internazionale (Mirandola, 15-18 settembre 1963)*, 180-181.)

[162] Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), 86.

[163] Notably, by claiming that the Renaissance magic was nourished by Ficino's translation of *Corpus Hermeticum*, Yates draws a direct genealogy between humanism and science. Her narrative runs from Ficino's emblematically humanistic enterprise of recovery of Ancient texts, through the consequent revival of magic only to culminate with the birth of modern science. This interpretation is akin to Eugenio Garin's

admits that perhaps Pico's magic could not yield any concrete scientific results or involve real scientific methods[164], but she insists that it, nevertheless, marks the beginning of the new "technological" attitude towards Nature:

> "Quite apart from the question of whether Renaissance magic could, or could not, lead on to genuinely scientific procedures, the real function of the Renaissance Magus in relation to the modern period […] is that he changed the will. It was now dignified and important for man to operate; it was also religious and not contrary to the will of God that man, the great miracle, should exert his powers. It was this basic psychological reorientation towards a direction of the will which was neither Greek nor medieval in spirit, which made all the difference."[165]

Farmer objects to Yates' reading of Pico's natural magic. He points out that the interpretations which see in Pico a "philosopher of the will" are borne out of the confusion between the pre-modern and XIX and early XX century conceptions of the will. The former

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understanding of humanism as a "new philosophy" intimately connected with the subsequent scientific revolution and in direct conflict with a number of canonical works in the history of science. Cf. for instance Alistair Crombie's comments from the chapter on "The Continuity of Medieval and 17th Century Science": "15th century humanism, which arose in Italy and spread northwards, was an interruption in the development of science. The 'revival of letters' deflected interest from matter to literary style and, in turning back to classical antiquity, its devotees affected to ignore the scientific progress of the previous three centuries." (Alistair Cameron Crombie, "The Continuity of Medieval and 17th Century Science," in *Medieval and Early Modern Science, Vol. 2* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1959), 103.)

[164] Cf. Lynn Thorndike's unsympathetic remarks in his "History of Magic and Experimental Science": "The temper of Pico was indeed far from scientific. […] Natural magic was a conception more palatable to Pico's paradoxical and marvel-mongering mind than was mathematical discipline and scientific method." (Thorndike, 495)

[165] Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 156.

understood will as a faculty of desire/choice whereas the latter along the romantic lines as an "unconditioned creative power".[166]

Farmer embraces a position which is the exact opposite of Gentile's, namely that Pico's reason is a vehicle of contemplation, not of creation. Needless to say, the conflict between the image of man as contemplator and that of man as creator is in reality the same that opposes *vita contemplativa* and *vita activa*, or *sapientia* and *prudentia.* There is no doubt that in the *Oratio* Pico gives preference to the contemplative life and, even though he is not altogheter dismissive of the active life (which is represented by the Thrones and their faculty of judgement), he is most certainly scornful of the notion that knowledge must serve a practical purpose and be "useful".[167] The author praises himself for always having practiced philosophy for philosophy's sake and deplores the contemporary attitudes which treat study as an instrument of personal gain or demand that it have practical application (be marketable):

> "this whole philosophizing is now (and this is the misfortune of our age) considered with contempt and insulted, rather than being occasion for honor and glory. Thus this deadly and monstrous persuasion has much invaded the minds of almost everybody - so that either no one or few persons must philosophize. As if it were a

[166] Cf. Farmer, 105-106. Farmer also points out the irony of considering Pico a voluntarist, given the fact that he seems to lean rather "heavily towards the opposing intellectualist camp." In fact, Pico goes as far as claiming (in one of his Theological Conclusions) that even religious dogmas could not be accepted by the will alone, but had to first past the test of reason. (Ibid.)

[167] It is worth noting that this is an important point of divergence between Pico and some of the leading humanists who held a more positive view of both personal gain and utility. In fact, the rehabilitation of these "questionable" (at least to the medieval mind) aspects of life is often associated with the essence of the new humanistic ethos with its embracing of the earthly aspects of life. Such sentiments can be said to be common to the "civic" strain of humanism and were expressed for instance by Salutati, Bruni, Bracciolini and Palmieri.

> thing of very little worth to have before our eyes and at our hands, with the evidence resulting from the most accurate research, the causes of things, the ways of nature, the reason of the universe, the plans of God, the mysteries of heaven and earth, unless by it one may avidly seek after some favor or procure a profit for oneself. Rather, we lowered ourselves to the point (and it's such a sorrow) that now those only are considered wise who reduce philosophy to a merchandise".[168]

Even though Pico in *Oratio* speaks of man as the "free and extraordinary shaper" of himself, he does not speak of man's creativity beyond the realm of his own substance. Nature in Pico's thought is in the condition of fullness and perfection, unlike man. It does not call for man's creativity, which, instead, he must exercise within, through the pursuit of the Cherubic life. In fact, there is no trace of an "instrumental" approach to reason in Pico. For him, the knowledge of Nature does not lead to mastery over it, but beyond itself, towards God. The soul's ultimate peace is achieved through the study of the "most holy theology" and the contemplation of the Divine, not through active engagement with the world in the *vita activa*.

It has been argued that Pico's vision involves shunning the world.[169] However, I would claim that neither the language of agency and mastery, nor that of escaping the world and ascetism are appropriate. Pico's man does not escape from the world, but opens itself

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[168] Pico § 24. 152-155. Cf. Toussaint's comments about *rentabilité* in Toussaint, H*umanismes/Antihumanismes.*

[169] Cf. [Pico's] "aim, quite literally, is a kind of death, the extinction of the self achieved by the mystic who ascends to union with God. The technique of that ascent is the main content of the *Oration*, whose opening hymn to free choice concludes that one must choose the Cherubic life and rise finally to the Seraphic blaze of divine union, a journey open only to those who abandon the body and flee the world. Not to master nature but to escape from it is Pico's aim." (Copenhaver, "Magic and the Dignity of Man: De-Kating Pico's *Oration.*", 320)

towards it in preparation for his ultimate destiny. That very openness means that he is not intent on leaving his imprint on the created world, but rather he lets himself be inscribed by the variety of God's creation. The study of Nature changes man, makes him more perfect in preparation for the unity with the divine. By contrast, Nature does not suffer change as a result of the fact that man knows it. His knowing does not violate Nature's otherness, because Pico's man (unlike Descartes') is not an arbiter of meanings. Truth for Pico exists eternally and independently from man's endeavors. It is just the question of unveiling it, making it manifest.[170] To put it bluntly, in the economy of knowledge according to Pico, man is at the receiving end. As a result, the relationship between man and Nature cannot be cast in simple terms of (active) subject – (passive) object dichotomy. Moreover, there is textual evidence that Pico did not think of man in purely Promethean terms. His man does not storm heavens, but rather is "drawn", "roused" and "borne" towards Divinity.[171] In fact, there is a turn from more active vocabulary in the first part of *Oratio* towards more frequent passive constructions in the second which deals with the ideal of Cherubic life,

[170] Interestingly, Cassirer recognizes that Pico's thinking itself operates within this conception of truth: "He is convinced that what is true requires no "discovery," no finding out through any personal inquiry of the individual; rather it has existed from time immemorial. What is characteristic for Pico is hence not the way in which he *increased* the store of philosophic truth, but the way in which he made it *manifest*." (Ernst Cassirer, "Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. A Study in the History of Renaissance Ideas," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 3.2 (1942): 124)

[171] Cf. "Then Bacchus, the leader of the Muses, through his mysteries (that is, through the visible signs of nature) will show us, who philosophize, the invisible things of God, and will make us drunk with the abundance of God's house, in which, if we prove entirely faithful, like Moses, most sacred theology shall draw close to us, animating us with redoubled frenzy. For we, raised to her most eminent height, thence comparing to indivisible eternity all things that are and shall be and have been and admiring their primeval beauty, shall be the Phoebean seers; of this beauty we shall become the winged lovers. And at last, roused by ineffable love as if by a sting, and borne outside ourselves like burning Seraphim, filled with the godhead, we shall be no longer ourselves, but He Himself Who made us." (Pico § 20.118-119)

especially in the passages dedicated to the higher stages of mystical ascent towards the plenitude of knowledge/the divine.[172]

Man's itnerary towards himself is also the itinerary away from himself, or rather his original emptiness. He becomes most himself when he is furthest removed from his original self.[173] In fact, the essence of humanity in Pico's system seems to be going beyond what is human in achieving unity with God: "*roused by ineffable love as if by a sting, and borne outside ourselves like burning Seraphim, filled with the godhead, we shall be no longer ourselves, but He Himself Who made us*."[174] It is, doubtless a sort of death, but this death must be understood as a death to nothingness and birth to plenitude. It is also death to facelessness and the acquisition of an image. Yet, this newly acquired face turns out to be the Face of the Other, the incommensurable Other, the ineffable Other, his Other by excellence, God.

The dialectic of freedom in *Oratio* always leads towards alterity. Man, in virtue of his lack of proper nature is free from natural determination. Not owning anything of his own, he cannot be "owned" by his nature either. However, that very freedom from determinism is bought at the expense of a constitutional incompleteness, which renders man utterly dependent on what is beyond him. Yet, the ultimate discovery, the discovery which must be consummated after the entire spectrum of natural knowledge is perused from the top to the bottom, and from the bottom to the top of Jacob's ladder, is the discovery

[172] Cf. Farmer, 112; Dougherty, 146 and Roulier, 559.

[173] Cf. "In Pico's system the soul's *ipseitas* or self-identity is paradoxically *most* preserved when it *loses* that identity in the intellectual nature" (Farmer, 114).

[174] Pico § 20.119.

of the Otherness beyond all speech and all representation. This in *Oratio* is referred to as the "*solitary darkness of the Father*", and in Pico's system it somehow coincides with the "*the center of [man's] own unity*". Pico's man at the end of his mystical journey discovers the Other within.

CHAPTER IV

CHARLES DE BOVELLES: THE SELF AS THE MIRROR OF THE OTHER

In "Individual and Cosmos" Cassirer claims that Charles de Bovelles' *De Sapiente* "constitutes the immediate continuation and the systematic development of the basic ideas in Pico's oration".[175] As we remember, Pico is styled there as a sort of Kantian *avant-la-lettre* and his text is portrayed as concerned chiefly with the idea of man's autonomy and freedom from natural determinism. *De Sapiente,* for its part, is interpreted by the German philosopher as offering an early intuition of the Hegelian distinction between "being-in-itself" and "being-for-itself"[176]. Cassirer was fascinated by Bovelles' work, considering it "the most curious and in some respects the most characteristic creation of Renaissance philosophy", unique in the way it blends "old and new ideas"[177]. In fact, the first German edition of "Individual and Cosmos" (1927) contains in the appendix a critical Latin edition of the *Liber de Sapiente* prepared by Cassirer's student at the time, Raymond Klibansky.

[175] Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos*, 88.

[176] Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos*, 91. Cassirer sees Bovelles also as the precursor of Leibnitz: an observation made already by the XVIII century historian of philosophy, Jacob Brucker in his *Historia critica philosophiae* (Leipzig, 1743-44). For an interesting exploration of the relationship between Bovelles and Leibnitz cf. Jean-Claude Margolin, "Identité et différence(s) dans la pensée de la Renaissance et dans la philosophie de Leibnitz," in J.-C. Margolin, *Philosophies de la Renaissance* (Orléans: Paradigme, 1998), 323- 346.

[177] Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos*, 88.

Cassirer's enthusiasm for Bovelles' thought had all the makings of a "rediscovery" of a philosopher, whose writings, despite early accolades of his person (by Giordano Bruno for example[178]), were quickly forgotten by posterity.[179] And yet, it did not usher in a period of renewed interest in the Picard thinker. Bovelles is a figure of some importance in Bernard Groethuysen's "*Anthropologie philosophique*"[180] (Paris, 1953, p. 190-200), in Albert Rivaud's "*De la scolastique à l'époque classique*" (II volume of « Histoire de la Philosophie », Paris 1950, p. 337-356)[181], and in Eugene F. Rice's "The Renaissance Idea of Wisdom" (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958, p. 106-123). However, Joseph M. Victor's 1978 *Charles de Bovelles (1479-1553). An Intellectual biography* is, to date, the only monograph dedicated to the philosopher after Joseph Dippel's pioneering 1865 work. The fact that it was penned by an American comes as a surprise when one discovers that Bovelles is almost completely absent from the general histories of Renaissance philosophy available in English. He is not included in the volume of portraits of Renaissance thinkers edited by Paul Richard Blum, "Philosophers of the Renaissance"

[178] Cf. Charles de Bovells, *Il libro del sapiente*, ed. Eugenio Garin (Torino: Einaudi, 1987), XXVIII.

[179] The very first one to appreciate Bovelles importance in Germany was Martin Deutinger in "*Das Princip der neueren Philosophie und die Christliche Wissenschaft*" (Regensburg, 1857). This scholar seems to have been also the driving force behind the first thesis ever written on the Picard philosopher, Joseph Dippel's "*Versuch einer systematischen Darstellung des Philosophie des Carolus Bovillus"* (Würzbourg, 1865). (Cf. Emmanuel Faye, *Philosophie et perfection de l'homme. De la Renaissance à Descartes* (Paris: Vrin, 1998), 16 n.1). In France A. Renaudet included Bovelles in his 1916 *"Préréforme et humanisme à Paris pendant les premières guerres d'Italie (1494-1517)* (Paris: Champion, 1916), but portrayed him as a minor and scarcely original thinker.

[180] Rice hails Bovelles as having no pair among the XVI century wisdom writers. Cf. "no sixteenth century thinker has described the encyclopedic capacities and Promethean nature of the wise man more admirably or in more precise detail than Carolus Bovillus." (Eugene Franklin Jr. Rice, *The Renaissance Idea of Wisdom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958, 106)

[181] Rivaud describes him as "peut-être le plus remarquable penseur français du XVe et du début du XVIe siècle." (Albert Rivaud, *Histoire de la Philosophie. Tome II. De la scolastique à l'époque classique* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1950), 339)

(2010).[182] He does not get a single mention in "The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Philosophy" (2007) edited by James Hankins or in Brian Copenhaver and Charles B. Schmitt's "Renaissance Philosophy" (1992). In "The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy" (1988) he is mentioned once in a footnote and in the main body of the text he figures twice, being the protagonist of four sentences altogether[183]. The situation improved significantly with the recent (2011) publication of a special issue of *Intellectual History Review* dedicated to Bovelles' *De sapiente*.[184] Further signs of growing interest in Bovelles' work within English speaking academia include the foundation of an International Charles de Bovelles society in 2009 (with founding members based in the USA and Canada) and an imminent publication of an English translation of *De Sapiente*.

In France, after Groethuysen and Rivaud, Maurice de Gandillac was the one who kept the interest in Bovelles alive with a lecture on "Lefèvre d'Etaples et Charles de Bovelles lecteurs de Nicolas de Cues" at the conference dedicated to "*L'humanisme français au début de la Renaissance*" (Paris, 1973). That interest was further promoted by an International Conference dedicated to Bovelles held in Noyon in 1979 which, among others, saw Gandillac present on "*L'art bovilien des opposés*". Bovelles and his texts were granted a lengthy section in 1987 "*Prosateurs latins en France au XVI siècle*" (p. 93-155) co-edited by Jean Claude Margolin and Pierre Magnard. Magnard apart from being the driving force behind the 1992 conference on "*La dignité de l'homme*" which occasioned Emmanuel Faye's outstanding article "*La dignité de l'homme selon Charles de Bovelles*"

[182] First published in German in 1999, 2010 is the date of the English edition.

[183] There is also a very brief bibliographical note at the end of the volume.

[184] Cf. *Intellectual History Review* 21:3 (2011).

is also the editor of the French translations of Bovelles' *De Sapiente*, *De nihilo* and *Ars Oppositorum*.[185] Jean Claude Margolin, for his part, is the author of a number of excellent articles on Bovelles, including one on "*La vie intérieure selon Charles de Bovelles*".[186] While it is impossible in the present setting to offer a thorough commentary to all of the above-mentioned literature on Bovelles, I would like to look at what seems to me the most crucial, and yet, somewhat problematic recent contribution to Bovillian studies. The scholar whose position I would like to examine is, in my opinion, the third most important Bovelles scholar after Magnard and Margolin: Emmanuel Faye. His work is especially relevant to my own project for two reasons. Firstly, Faye addresses the issue of the relationship between Bovelles and Modern thought. Secondly, he is no less adamant about Bovelles' importance for the history of philosophy than Ernst Cassirer himself.

Emmanuel Faye's "*Philosophie et perfection de l'homme*" constitutes a challenge to the idea, popularized at the beginning of XIX century by Victor Cousin, that there was a decisive break between Renaissance and Modern philosophy as inaugurated in the XVII century by Descartes. Faye insists on the continuities between Descartes and a number of Renaissance thinkers, among whom Bovelles is singled out as the trend-setter:

[185] Cf. Pierre Magnard, *L'homme délivré de son ombre*, traduction du *Livre du sage* de Charles de Bovelles (Paris: Vrin, 1982); ID., *L'étoile matutine*, traduction du *Livre du néant* de Charles de Bovelles (Paris: Vrin, 1983); ID., *Soleil noir*, traduction du *Livre des opposés* de Charles de Bovelles (Paris Vrin, 1984).

[186] There was also some work done in Italy (notably Eugenio Garin's publication of the Italian translation of *De Sapiente* and C. Vasoli's article on the solar themes in that same work). In Poland Bovelles inspired interesting articles by Jan Czerkawski, S. Świerzawski and B.S. Kunda. In Germany, although Bovelles' name appears regularly in works dedicated to the history of Renaissance philosophy, the Picard philosopher does not command attention comparable to what he once instigated in Cassirer. (Cf. Emmanuel Faye, *Philosophie et perfection de l'homme*, 16, n.3).

> "C'est à partir de Charles de Bovelles que se constitue véritablement la philosophie renaissante en France. Bovelles est en effet le premier penseur de la Renaissance à concevoir une philosophie de l'homme ayant sa valeur propre, distincte des 'christologies' qui prévalaient encore au XVe siècle dans les œuvres de Nicolas de Cues ou Jean Pic de la Mirandole […]. La philosophie de Bovelles prend directement appui sur la conscience que l'homme a de soi, de son origine et de la continuité de sa vie intérieure, affranchissant ainsi la pensée du discours théologique traditionnel et toujours ressassé sur la corruption de l'homme pécheur."[187]

Faye's book is quite remarkable in suggesting that the ideal of philosophical life as the quintessence of human perfection is the long-overlooked crucial link between French XVI and XVII century thought, the true bridge between Renaissance thinkers and Descartes[188]. On the other hand, Faye's thesis suffers from the author's somewhat doctrinaire insistence on the incompatibility of the theological and the philosophical discourses – a divide that, as Jean-Claude Margolin points out, is, in Bovelles, rather less obvious than Faye is willing to admit[189]. Faye sees the entire span of XVI century French thought (especially Bovelles, Montaigne and Charron) as working towards a new, properly philosophical conception of man. This new conception involves, in his view, the emancipation of the idea of human perfection from the religious context in which it is

[187] Faye, *Philosophie et perfection de l'homme*, 7-8.

[188] Similar vindications of philosophy can be found also in a number of XIII century Parisian arts masters, notably Siger of Brabant and Boetius of Dacia. (Cf. Faye, *Philosophie et perfection de l'homme*, 25)

[189] Cf. Jean-Claude Margolin, "Reflections on the Nature of the Homo Sapiens and On the Ideal of Wisdom According to Charles de Bovelles," *Intellectual History Review* 21:3 (2011): 283 n. 11.

always footnoted by a consideration of human insufficiency and the need for redemption. Faye further suggests that the question of human perfection as envisaged by XVI century French thinkers (and XIII century Parisian arts masters), should not be confused with the similar idea of human dignity, so powerfully articulated by the Quattrocentro humanists. While human perfection is a self-contained notion, human dignity always presupposes its opposite – human misery[190].

Faye argues that the first steps towards the new understanding of human perfection were taken by the Catalan Raymond Sebond (or Sibiuda), whose "defense" penned by Montaigne gained well-deserved notoriety. However, while Sebond's *Liber Creaturarum* is the battleground between the old and the new anthropology, Bovelles makes the proper transition from thinking man "theologically" to thinking him "philosophically".[191] For the Picard philosopher, Faye says, human perfection is no longer a religious issue: it is a philosophical problem, as it will be later for Descartes as well. Engaging though it is, Faye's thesis relies excessively on what seems to be a rather simplistic understanding of the difference between the theological and the philosophical thought of man.[192] In his zeal

[190] Faye of course is not correct in claiming that the question of human dignity is emblematic of Quattrocento only. In XVI century France Pierre Boaistuau with his diptych "*Le Théâtre du monde*" (1558) and "*Bref discours de l'excellence et dignité de l'homme*" (1559) belongs rather to the "human dignity" tradition. Similarly, in XVI century Spain we find an eloquent representative of this tradition in Fernán Pérez de Oliva, the author of "*Diálogo de la dignidad del hombre"* (1546).

[191] A similar case is made by Eugene F. Rice Jr., who argues that Bovelles secularizes the notion of deification framing it as independent of grace and "the result of a naturally achieved perfection, a passage from potency to act, a willed development of all human potentialities." (Rice, 120) The main difference between Rice and Faye is that while the former views the Bovillian idea of wisdom as purely intellectual and contemplative, Faye insists on its practical and moral dimension.

[192] Cf. "La théologie ne présente aucune connaissance unifiée de l'homme, mais une double représentation de sa grandeur et de sa misère: grandeur de l'homme fait à l'image et à la ressemblance de Dieu, misère de l'homme après la chute. La dignité et la valeur de l'homme ne tiennent pas à ce qu'il est homme, mais à l'idée qu'il soit créé à l'image de Dieu. […] Faute d'être considéré par et pour lui-même, l'être humain est écartelé entre des représentations antithétiques: dignité et misère, vieil homme et homme nouveau, homme pêcheur et homme rédimé, homme pérégrin et homme bienheureux. C'est pourquoi la théologie n'apporte

to distill from Bovelles' works purely "philosophical" content (i.e. those elements which are not "contaminated" by considerations of transcendence), though stopping short of denying the overall importance to the Picard thinker of theological issues, Faye nevertheless ends up compromising the unity of Bovillian thought. Pierre Magnard appears to be closer to the spirit of the author of *De Sapiente* when he states that:

> "Promouvoir l'idéal du sage, c'est dire précisément que […] l'homme lui-même, loin d'être un simple donné naturel, doit, par nature et vertu conjointe, rendre effective une identité de soi à soi, qui ne s'accomplira en plénitude que dans le retour de l'esprit humain à son principe, c'est-à-dire à Dieu. […] Bien que le mot *assurrectio* ne se trouve pas dans le *De Sapiente* les mots sont très nombreux – *subveho, subvectio, scandere,* etc. – qui évoquent une démarche ascensionnelle, comme si l'identité humaine ne se réalisait que dans un mouvement de « transascendance »"[193]

In my opinion, Magnard's superior understanding of the internal dynamics of Bovelles' theory of wisdom might stem from this author's intimacy with the text acquired through the work of edition and translation. *De Sapiente* can be divided into two parts, of which the first one focuses on the figure of the wise (chapters 1-33) and the second (chapters 34-50) – on the nature of wisdom. In the first part the sage is considered primarily

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pas une synthèse de l'homme, mais présuppose toujours une dualité, qui dépossède l'homme de la compréhension qu'il pourrait avoir directement de soi-même. On comprend donc que la définition théologique des deux états de l'homme interdise l'accès à la question philosophique de la perfection de l'homme […] " (Faye, *Philosophie et perfection de l'homme*, 23)

[193] Pierre Magnard, "Le sage dans le 'De sapiente'," in *Charles de Bovelles en son cinquième centenaire 1479-1979. Actes du Colloque International tenu à Noyon les 14-16 septembre 1979* (Paris: G. Trédaniel, 1982), 102. Similar perspective is shared by de Lubac. Cf. Henri de Lubac, *"Le sage selon Charles de Bovelles,"* in *Mélanges offerts à M.D. Chenu* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1967), 385–97.

in relation to himself and the world, whereas in the second part human wisdom is pondered in relation to angelic and divine wisdom.[194] The concluding chapter LI brings together the themes of the first and second part. While Magnard reads the work as an organic whole, Faye tends to privilege the initial chapters over and above the ones where Bovillian reflection becomes more obviously theological in character. And yet, the intimate connection between the opening and the subsequent chapters of *De Sapiente* cannot be denied in light of the final exhortation to the reader, in which Bovelles (much like Pico before him) warns man against the limitations inherent in purely human knowledge (*humana doctrina*):

> "[Ô homme] Par ta sensibilité, tu es porté vers le monde pour y errer. Par ta raison, tu te recueilles en toi-même. À l'aide de celle-ci, sonde sans cesse le ciel, pense toujours aux choses d'en haut, habite en pensée les demeures célestes. […] Attache-toi à Dieu, unis-toi à lui, sois en communion avec lui: la sagesse qui exorcise et dissipe tous les maux te rendra aimable à lui. […] La science humaine nous laisse en effet complètement à jeun et assoiffés. La science divine est cette nourriture qui, selon le mot de Bigi, 'rassasie nos cœurs d'un aliment vivant.'"[195]

In fact, Bovelles defines wisdom in a two-fold manner. In the dedicatory letter to Guillaume Briçonnet, bishop of Lodeve he focuses on the idea that wisdom is self-knowledge. This first understanding of wisdom dominates the first part of the work, in which Bovelles explains how self-knowledge is to be achieved. In the second part, where

[194] Cf. Margolin, "Reflections", 283.

[195] Charles de Bovelles, *Le livre du sage*, ed. and trans. Pierre Magnard (Paris: Vrin, 1982), 309 and 315.

an attempt is made to define wisdom as such, the preferred definition is the one according to which all true knowledge is the knowledge of God.[196] The fact that Bovelles works with two notions of wisdom at the same time should not be treated as a mark of incoherence. The Picard philosopher feels very much at home with such re-doublings, to such an extent in fact, that one could view dichotomies as his trademark. As a result, the attempt to think the paradoxes of sameness and otherness, identity and alterity (already present in Pico's *Oratio*), now in *De Sapiente* achieves almost the rank of a philosophical method. To be sure, this is hardly surprising in an author of two works dedicated to *ars oppositorum*, and an admirer of Cusanus.[197]

In *De Sapiente* the presence of dichotomies is especially felt in the chapters dedicated to the figure of the sage, in which the author elaborates on the parallelisms between the macrocosm and the microcosm. The organizing idea of these pages is that the degrees of human perfection correspond to the degrees of perfection in nature and to the four elements. Along with these correspondences, the reader is introduced to the pairs of opposites: Fortune and Virtue, the ignorant and the sage, the natural man and the man of culture, the external and the internal eye. However, Bovelles, much like Cusanus, does not believe these redoublings and oppositions to be the ultimate organizing principle of reality. The latter, in his eyes, is essentially one, or better even: triune. In fact, in *De Sapiente* many of the initial dichotomies are resolved in some form of Trinitarian arrangement. For instance, the original distinction between the natural man and the man of culture makes

[196] Cf. "Chaque puissance cognitive, dans la mesure de ses moyens, s'efforce vers Dieu, comme vers son objet propre, son vrai soleil, sa fin et son achèvement." (Bovelles, 241)

[197] Cf. Maurice de Gandillac, "Lefèvre d'Étaples et Charles de Bouelles, lecteurs de Nicolas de Cues," in *L'Humanisme français au début de la Renaissance* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1973), 155–71.

way later on for the definition of an accomplished man as the one who is borne out of the coupling of the one with the other, a "three times man" (*homo homo homo*). These Trinitarian arrangements are predominant especially in the chapters dedicated to the nature of wisdom and betray another source of inspiration for Bovelles – the works of Lull[198] and Sibiuda. Following in the footsteps of these authors, convinced as they were that Christian revelation can be "read" from the book of Nature, Bovelles sees Trinitarian patterns in all aspects of the created world, a coded message of the true nature of God available to all rational beings.

De Sapiente shares with *Oratio* the basic idea that humanity must be understood in dynamic terms and man is but a project. Bovelles, like Pico, tells us that humans have no nature particular to them, but participate in the natures of the rest of creation in two ways. Firstly, man contains within him all the degrees of natural perfection. After the manner of rocks and inanimate objects he possesses existence, like plants he has life, with animals he shares sensibility and as a human being he is capable of understanding. And yet, all these degrees of perfection are present in human beings only in potentiality and it is man's task to actualize them. On the one hand, existence, life, sensibility and understanding belong to different stages of human life. A baby in a mother's womb in its immobility possesses only existence; a newborn is attached to her mother's nourishing breast like a plant to the earth and can be said to have life and capacity for growth. A young child can be compared in his mobility to an animal enjoying the faculty of sensibility. Finally, an adult human being has the privilege of reason.[199] Still, even among men who physically reached their full potential

[198] Cf. Jordi Gaya, "Réminiscences lulliennes dans l'anthropologie de Charles de Bovelles," in *Charles de Bovelles en son cinquième centenaire*, 143–56.
[199] Cf. Bovelles, 69-71.

there are degrees of spiritual accomplishment as not all of them make proper use of their rational powers. If a man succumbs to the vice of *acedia* (sloth, spiritual laziness) he thereby abdicates from all his higher faculties and, like a rock, contents himself with pure being. The vice of gluttony turns man into a plant whose basic vital function is nourishment and that of luxury – into an animal. Only the man of culture (*homo studiosus*) leads a life worthy of human beings, turning his capacity for understanding into an on-going actualization of rationality. Furthermore, only the last kind of man is truly human, for wisdom is the only virtue capable "de mettre l'homme sur ses pieds, de le maintenir et de le fixer en son humanité, ou si l'on veut, de lui interdire de sortir des bornes humaines en partageant le destin des êtres inférieurs."[200]

But man participates in the natures of the rest of creation also as the universal contemplator and the site of rational representation of all that is. That second understanding of man's capacity to become everything is rooted in the third book of Aristostle's *De Anima* where the Philosopher argues that in the cognitive process the human soul assumes the form of what it knows.[201] No doubt, the two understandings of man's "naturelessness" are intertwined. However, while Pico's *Oratio* focuses more on the moral dimension of man's unique ontological status (engaging the question of human freedom and his divine vocation), Bovelles seems to privilege somewhat the theme of human "naturelessness" as a prerequisite for the faculty of understanding:

[200] Bovelles, 55.

[201] Cf. Rice, 107.

> "Rien n'est le propre de l'homme mais tout ce qui est le propre des autres êtres lui appartient. Tout ce qui est la particularité de tel ou tel, de celui-ci et de celui-là, individuellement, appartient à l'unité de l'homme. Celui-ci en effet porte en lui la nature de toutes choses, voit tout, reproduit la nature entière. Butinant et absorbant tout ce qui est dans la nature des choses, il devient toute chose. En effet, l'homme n'est pas tel être particulier ou tel autre et sa nature n'est pas telle ou telle, mais il est tout à la fois, le concours, l'aboutissement rationnel et la récapitulation de toutes choses."[202]

Man as the microcosm contains within him the entire world in potentiality. In line with the first understanding of man's indeterminate ontological status, Bovelles distinguishes between man by nature and man by art (virtue). The former possesses only the external characteristics of humanity, but is yet to realize his full potential. If he forgets his natural capacity to reason and uses only his lower faculties – simply existing (*esse*), living (*vivere*), sensing (*sentire*), he descends to the level of minerals, plants or animals. A wise man, a man of culture (by art and virtue) as the one who makes use of the full array of his potentialities is the only one who achieves full humanity. It is so because wisdom is defined in *De Sapiente* as self-knowledge and one must have a knowledge of oneself to realize that one is human (or to use Bovelles' wording he only is man who knows himself to be man: "*qui se novit homo, hic solus homo est*"[203]).

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[202] Bovelles, 171.

[203] Bovelles, 54-55. Based on statements such as this one, Cesare Catà argues that for Bovelles *Sapientia* must be interpreted as man's understanding of his own specificity. (Cf. Cesare Catà, "Viewed Through the Looking- Glass: Human Nature as a Mystical Mirror in Charles de Bovelles' Conception of Sapientia," *Intellectual History Review* 21:3 (2011): 307)

On the other hand, man can be said to contain the entire world in potentiality also in virtue of his ability to grasp the forms of everything in his thought. While *Oratio de hominis dignitate* thematizes man's faculty to "fashion" himself into the form of his choice through a moral decision to opt for a given form of existence (vegetative, sensible or rational and intellectual), *De Sapiente* ties human freedom to the idea of wise man as capable of becoming everything through the actualization in his thought process of the seminal forms of the world already present in him. This particular re-interpretation of Pico's *topos* of man as an *artifex* can be glimpsed in the following passage:

> "[Le sage] comprend tout en son esprit et actualise en lui-même toute chose; comme le plus habile sculpteur, il sculpte en lui-même toute image; comme le mime, qui imite toutes choses, toutes choses lui sont présentes, offertes et sans secret; enfin il est implanté en tout, comme tout est, nous le croyons, à la façon des espèces, implanté en lui."[204]

Man contains everything in two senses: firstly, because all degrees of natural perfection dwell in him and secondly, because in the process of acquiring knowledge of the world, the forms of everything become imprinted in him. All men can be said to be microcosm in the first sense, but only the sage who pursues knowledge is microcosm in the second sense.[205] However not only does Bovelles call man the little world, but he goes

[204] Bovelles, 147. The word "*pantomimus*" should be noted for it is of great importance in Vives' *Fabula de homine* and constitutes a vital link between Bovelles and the Valentian polymath whose anthropology centers around the image of man-as-mime. (Cf. the next chapter)

[205] The language Bovelles uses in the description of this self-fashioning through thinking the world strikes one as very corporeal. Cf. "En tout être du monde en effet se cache quelque chose d'humain. En chacun se loge quelque atome propre à l'homme: l'homme cultivé doit en être composé et formé; […] Cet homme donc […] demande à chaque chose qui est sienne, il extrait de toute substance du monde l'atome constitutif

as far as calling the world the "big" man.[206] This rather radical equation between man (especially wise man) and the world has serious implications for the definition of wisdom as self-knowledge, pointing to interdependence if not synonymy, in Bovelles' system, between knowing oneself and knowing the world.

Here too, as in Pico's *Oratio* we are told that self-awareness or the sense of self-identity is inextricably intertwined with the awareness of something beyond the self. Of course, such interdependence leaves open the question of what is prior. Is humanity what grounds Nature, or the other way round? The relationship envisaged in *De Sapiente* seems to be perfectly symbiotic: the rational man is the product of Nature, but Nature's intelligibility is produced within man. Man is, in fact, is the soul of the world.[207] One needs the other for each is lacking in some respect and over-abundant in another. Man is poor in being, but rich in understanding, while the world is rich in being and devoid of reason.[208] This relationship has all the marks of reciprocity: the world gives man his being and the man confers on the world its meaning. Man in his physical concreteness resides in the physical world, but the world's intelligibility resides within man:

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de sa forme propre. Cet atome il le récolte et se l'incorpore et d'atomes entrant en de nombreuses formes il dégage et produit sa propre forme." (Bovelles, 173)

[206] Cf. "La nature a donc engendré et produit deux homes: le grand que nous dénommons le monde, le petit qui est désigné plus spécialement du nom d'homme. Le grand est toutes choses en acte, le petit toutes choses en puissance. Grâce à l'application, à l'activité, au travail et à l'élan de celui-ci, l'acte est tiré de la puissance et la lumière jaillit des ténèbres […] dans la mesure où le petit homme a embrassé le grand tout entier et où, une fois dissipe la nuée de son ignorance originelle, il connaît tout sans exception, comprend absolument tout et sait tout. De cette manière, le petit parvient à sa perfection. " (Bovelles, 173)

[207] Cf. Bovelles, 161.

[208] Cf. Bovelles, 153.

> "Si le monde embrasse tout, il ne sait ni ne connaît rien. Si l'homme est infime au point de n'être rien, il sait et connaît tout. Celui-ci est aussi grand par la science que celui-là par la substance; l'un est le lieu des raisons, l'autre celui des existences; l'un abrite la similitude, l'autre la vérité. Le monde est l'agent de toute présence, l'homme celui de tout jugement, vision et représentation. Le monde est l'objet dans sa généralité, tenant en soi toute vérité; l'homme est le miroir de toutes choses, embrassant toute image et la réfléchissant. L'homme enfin est l'éclat, la manifestation, la brillance, l'âme du monde, tandis que le monde est comme le corps même de l'homme. L'un comme l'autre sont un maximum et un minimum, le monde maximum d'être et minimum de science ; l'homme maximum de savoir et minimum d'être. Chacun se tient en l'autre, chacun contient l'autre; l'être de l'homme se trouve dans le monde, la science du monde se trouve en l'homme."[209]

Man is, in Bovelles' thought, the means through which Nature comes to know itself.[210] Human reason is indeed "the daughter of Nature and in proximity to her mother, the only one capable of emulating it".[211] Now, the notion that Nature somehow "thinks herself" through man is reminiscent of the Hegelian idea that human reason is the means through which Absolute Spirit thinks itself. In fact, Bovelles' entire scalar ontology is read by Cassirer as representing figuratively the stages on "the path from the object to the

[209] Bovelles, 153.

[210] Cf. "Nous définissons […] la raison comme cette force par laquelle la mère nature fait retour sur elle-même, le cycle de la nature se bouclant et la nature étant rendue à elle-même." (Bovelles, 85)

[211] Cf. "Il est clair que la raison est de toutes les filles de la nature la seule qui soit achevée, elle qui seule peut rencontrer sa mère et […] de lui donner des baisers, seule donc à être présente auprès de sa mère, faite pour la comprendre et l'embrasser." (Bovelles, 83)

subject, from simple 'being' to 'consciousness of self'".[212] Similarly, Bovelles' organization of created reality into various degrees of perfection is interpreted by the German philosopher as standing for the different phases though which "being runs in order that it may arrive at itself, at its own *concept*".[213] Commenting on what indeed appears as an uncanny affinity between Bovelles and Hegel Cassirer affirms that:

> "Bovillus anticipates the Hegelian formula according to which the meaning and aim of the mental process of development consists in the 'subtance' becoming 'subject'. Reason is the power in man by which 'mother nature' returns to herself, i.e. by which she completes her cycle and is led back to herself."[214]

Faye does not like this Hegelian interpretation and accuses Cassirer of glossing over the fact that in Bovelles' philosophy there is no identification between human and divine thought (or Absolute Spirit).[215] Faye's reservation is very justified, but the striking affinity between Hegelian and Bovillian ideas should not be dismissed too nonchalantly. After all, in both systems reason is the means through which "a return to itself" of something greater than man is accomplished. In the case of Bovelles it is Nature and in Hegel's, Spirit.[216] The difference between the two thinkers seems to be twofold. Firstly, while for Hegel there is a certain continuity between Nature and the Absolute (in the sense that Nature is the most

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[212] Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos*, 89.

[213] Ibid.

[214] Ibid.

[215] Cf. "dans la philosophie de Bovelles, la subjectivité de la pensée humaine ne s'identifie pas à l'Esprit Absolu, à la *mens* divine" (Faye, *Philosophie et perfection de l'homme*, 101)

[216] Admittedly, Hegel's Spirit is Nature become conscious of itself, or to use Schellings's felicitous phrase, "Nature is slumbering Spirit". In any case, the parallels are unmistakable.

basic and primitive way the Absolute unfolds itself), for Bovelles Nature is by no means a simple emanation of God. As a result, for the Picard philosopher being the instrument of Nature's self-recognition is in no way to render the same service to God. Secondly, while Hegel's man is capable of reaching the Absolute standpoint, in Bovelles there is always a rift between human and divine knowledge. In other words, while Hegel's Absolute cannot be separated from the human (and hence, must be articulated therein), Bovelles' God does not need to be "thought" by man: He contemplates his own essence in a perfectly self-enclosed manner. Nature, on the other hand, does need the wise man to achieve intelligibility and, as it will be argued in the pages to follow, redemption.

But there is also (and I say this well-aware of the risk of further irritating those who disparage the "old-fashioned" style of doing the history of ideas, i.e. drawing parallels between thinkers distant historically or geographically) a certain correspondence between the Bovillian notion of reason's "proximity" to Nature[217] and Heidegger's definition of human beings from the proximity to Being[218]. Firstly, in Heidegger's thought we discover a similar symbiotic relation between human beings and the world – just as Bovelles' Nature needs man to ground its meaning, so Heidegger's Being relies on humans for the "preservation" of its truth. The proximity between human beings and Being in Heidegger is both what brings humans to their essence and what grounds the truth of Being. Nevertheless, as Hegel's Absolute is more than Bovillian Nature, so is Heidegger's Being. In fact, referring to God as simply "Being" was a rather common practice among the

[217] Cf. "La raison est […] la seule qui jouisse du **voisinage** de sa mère (*matris vicinia gaudeat*) et de la vue de sa taille, elle qui est faite pour **se tenir auprès d**'elle la refléter, et profiter de sa aimable conversation" (Bovelles, 84-85). Emphasis mine.

[218] Cf. Heidegger, *Letter on Humanism*.

medievals, based on Exodus 3:14 where God reveals his name to Moses as "He who is". Bovelles, as already mentioned, is very far from claiming that God somehow needs humans to think Him and yet he clearly holds that Nature does.

But there is an even more fruitful way to pursue the theme of the correspondence between the two thinkers. Even though Heidegger would view himself as challenging the entire Western philosophical tradition after Plato, it seems that his objections target more specifically post-Cartesian thought and that he deems the pre-modern developments questionable inasmuch as they led to the modern standpoint. Being is not something that can be apprehended: it must be revealed, thus man's coming into the "clearing" of Being presupposes both an openness/trust and a willingness to be informed and thus, 'molded'. This attitude is certainly incompatible with Cartesian universal doubt, and yet it presents some affinity to the Ancient and Medieval brands of epistemology in positing the object of knowledge as independent from the knower. Bovelles, despite appearances, is very pre-modern in the way he understands the process of cognition. He relies on the Thomistic version of the Aristotelian notions of passive and active intellect. According to this scheme the forms of things offer themselves to the senses and are inscribed in memory. The passive intellect (called also the 'possible intellect') is the receptive faculty of the spirit, absorbing, so to speak, the intelligible forms from without. The active intellect is the agent of the actual thinking for it actualizes these received forms in the thought process. The domain of the former is potentiality, the domain of the latter - actuality.

Bovelles illustrates the properties and workings of the two faculties of intellect with the image of a mirror. Man, when considered as the locale of passive intellect, is the mirror Nature holds to Herself. This analogy deserves particular attention for it sheds further light

on the meaning of human lack of proper nature/essence. Firstly, as mirror is not part of the reflected image, man-the mirror has to be outside of Nature to be able to reflect it. Secondly, just as any good mirror must have a smooth and flawless surface devoid of pre-existing images, similarly man-the mirror has to be empty and imageless. Standing outside of the order of Nature and the lack of proper image are both required in order that man may reflect Nature.[219]

Yet, the capacity to reflect is of no consequence if there is no eye to perceive the reflected image. Now, man, considered from the point of view of the operations of his active intellect, is equivalent to the eye which contemplates the image in the mirror. In fact, he can be said to be Nature's eye through which She can behold herself. Furthermore, as the eye of Nature man must be understood as her integral part, and, hence will also be part of the image reflected in the mirror. Indeed, as the eye while looking in the mirror is perhaps most struck by the appearance of its own likeness[220], man, as well as being the eye and the mirror of Nature, is also the image reflected in the mirror. Consequently, man sees himself (or: becomes aware of himself) through reflecting his Other, in this case Nature.[221]

[219] Cf. Bovelles, 103.

[220] Cf. "L'œil ne peut rien voir de plus remarquable dans le miroir que son propre simulacre. Aussi la vue véritable et essentielle est celle qui a l'œil même pour objet. Le même œil, qui projette et qui darde son simulacre sure le miroir, se réjouit de se voir dans le reflet offert par le miroir." (Bovelles, 103)

[221] It is important to notice that in *De Sapiente* the capacity to reflect the world never leads to what Vico called "la barbarie delle riflessione". Reflection for Bovelles is not an operation of the intellect "formed as an instrument of desire." (Cf. Donald Phillip Verene, *Philosophy and the Return to Self-Knowledge* (New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 1997), 42.) It is not symptomatic of a misguided love of the object and search for control over it. For Bovelles man's ability to reflect is conceived as both a means of self-knowledge and a sort of ministry to the world. (More on that latter aspect can be found in the following pages). Man-the-mirror is thought in connection to the world, but not as world's manipulator.

The active and passive intellect collaborate in bringing man to himself, a process in which knowing the World and being the World are quasi-synonymous. The "penetration" of external realities into human mind in the passive intellect is necessary for the operations of the intellect agent.[222] The latter uses the received forms of things to produce an intellectual equivalent of the material world and, in the process, to forge human essence.[223] In other words, the "intrusion" of externality is necessary for human beings to realize their own nature. Explaining this dependence on the World for self-knowledge, Bovelles compares man to the soul of the universe and the world is its body. Just as the soul first learns about the body only later to return to itself, so man has to first know the world before he can know himself.[224] In fact, the itinerary of the wise is circular: from the insufficiency of the natural man, through the representation of nature in his intellect, towards full self-recognition. In this scheme, wisdom (or self-knowledge) involves both

[222] Youkovsky in her "Thème plotiniens dans le *De Sapiente* de Charles de Bovelles" insists on the interior operations of the active intellect to underscore Bovelles' indebtedness to the Neo-Platonic epistemology. (Cf. "Comme Plotin et comme Ficin, Bovelles affirme donc que la contemplation est exercée par l'âme dans l'âme. C'est une plongée dans le monde intérieur, à la différence des plus bas degrés de la connaissance, la *Sensatio* et l'*Imaginatio*, dont le domaine est celui de la matière, et qui dépendent du temps. Dana la contemplation, l'âme ne reçoit pas sa connaissance de l'extérieur, comme une empreinte des choses, mais elle la conçoit en elle-même." (Françoise Youkovsky, "Thèmes plotiniens dans le De Sapiente de Charles de Bovelles," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 43:1 (1981): 143.)) While it is true that in the last stage of cognition, i.e. in its contemplative moment the intellect does not receive knowledge from without and works exclusively within the limits of interiority, that moment is preceded and made possible by the "intrusion" of the forms of the world without.

[223] I am well aware that the passive and active terminology has a tangled history of usage. Nonetheless, it should be evident by now, that the transition from Medieval to Renaissance thought involves both continuity and discontinuity in philosophical/theological language.

[224] Cf. "L'apprentissage de cette connaissance de soi s'effectue selon un processus successif; l'âme ne connaît pas le corps en même temps qu'elle se connaît, la connaissance du corps précédant en elle la connaissance de soi" (Bovelles, 163)

knowing the Other and becoming the Other, it is "le passage, la transformation […] de l'homme en toutes choses et de toutes choses en l'homme."[225]

Wisdom, through the transformation of everything into man and of man into all things bears fruit of the discovery of the Other within. Although unorthodox at first glance, such belief is, in some respects, very close to our everyday ways of thinking and speaking. One tends to associate a higher sense of self-awareness with the ability to take a fresh look onto oneself, so to speak. An unreflective person, somebody treating themselves in a simple matter-of-factly way, never experiences the surprise of the face-to-face with oneself. The self can only be experienced as something different than what one pre-reflectively took it to be. And yet, in Bovelles, the Other that reveals to man his own face, is the World (the macrocosm), an idea which disagrees with the modern sense of the inviolable space of interiority. The fact that World is something to be found in the intimacy of the self is a paradox testifying to the complicated interplay between interiority and exteriority in Bovillian thought. The image Bovelles chooses to illustrate the intimate connection between the two poles of this dichotomy is that of the Roman double-faced god Janus.[226] After the manner of Janus, who looks simultaneously in two opposite directions: outwardly and inwardly, the sage must learn to use both his internal and his external eye.[227] True

[225] Bovelles, 165.

[226] Cf. Tamara Albertini, "Charles de Bovelles' Enigmatic *Liber de Sapiente*: A Heroic Notion of Wisdom," *Intellectual History Review* 21:3 (2011): 301-302.

[227] "Est sage en effet non pas celui qui se contente de porter un regard extérieur sur le monde pour en être le spectateur, mais celui qui possède, lucides parce qu'en acte, l'un et l'autre œil, qui peut se voir lui-même aussi bien que le monde, à qui sont connues, accessibles et manifestes comme à un Janus à double visage les réalites du dedans aussi bien que celles du dehors." (Bovelles, 301)

wisdom belongs to *sapiens bifrons* whose one face is turned towards the world and the other towards himself.

It was said that for Bovelles man acquires his true nature though the realization in himself of the image of the Other. What still needs to be clarified is which Other. Namely, how can we reconcile the idea that man recognizes himself as he becomes the image of Nature and man's possession of the image of God? How can we reconcile the notion that man becomes himself (i.e. becomes human) through the contemplation of Nature and the idea that man's finality (the actualization of his human potential or simply: of his humanity) lies in the knowledge of God? In fact, how can we reconcile the two definitions of wisdom at work in *De Sapiente*?

The connection between knowing Nature and knowing God becomes more evident when we consider Bovelles' thoughts on immortality. In fact, the discussion of the passive and active intellect in the context of the image of the mirror must be understood within the framework of a long-standing controversy surrounding the issue of the immortality of the soul. The most celebrated moment of the debate in question was the confrontation between the XIII century Averroists and Aquinas, but in the Renaissance it was reignited by Pietro Pomponazzi. The disputed point concerned the proper locale of the active intellect – is it to be understood as available to all men, but existing outside of particular human beings or is it a part of each individual soul? The answer to this question had serious consequences for the teaching on personal immortality. Active intellect is, as Aristotle taught, by its very nature immortal and incorruptible. If it forms a part of the human soul it guarantees that she possesses the same characteristics. If, on the other hand, it exists independently from individuals, it persists even if the human soul should perish.

Now Bovelles reiterates several times in the chapter we have just analyzed that the "eye" and the "mirror" of the spirit, i.e. the active and passive intellect are inseparable and form one substance[228]. He states it even more forcefully in the passages dedicated explicitly to the discussion of immortality.[229] Since the locale of the passive intellect is human soul, in practice, this amounts to stating that active intellect belongs to individual men and, hence that men are immortal. In this context, tapping into ones' intellective faculty, using ones' intellect agent is tantamount to reclaiming ones' immortal, and hence, divine nature.[230] In fact, the ignorant, due to their ignorance of themselves remain unaware of their own immortality and hence fall into despair, which in turn leads them to indulge in debauched life.[231] In this light the link between the pursuit of wisdom and the realization in oneself of the image of God becomes more obvious as is Bovelles' unorthodox claim that although the image of God is "naturally" available to all man, it is effectively achieved only by the

[228] Cf. "L'œil et le miroir s'approchent tellement l'un à l'autre qu'ils constituent la substance indivise d'une seul esprit, qu'ils sont immédiatement présents l'un à l'autre, qu'aucun écran ne s'interpose entre eux, ni ne contrarie leur face à face." (Bovelles, 103).

[229] Cf. "Entre l'intellect agent et l'intellect possible, il ne peut y avoir […] aucune béance, par laquelle la spéculation de l'agent c'est-à-dire l'action propre de l'âme, et la contemplation seraient disjointes, séparées, écartées l'une de l'autre. L'intellect agent cultive donc avec zèle l'intellect patient, comme la terre soumise à son labour, puissance latente d'une même nature, immatérielle, toujours présente, inséparable, immortelle, consubstantielle enfin à lui-même." (Bovelles, 119-121)

[230] Cf. "L'homme réel et naturel participe de l'âme immortelle et raisonnable: il est pourtant privée de cette lumière et cette illumination du cœur, par laquelle il pourrait connaître les dons qu'il a reçus, avoir le bonheur de savoir qu'il est doué de raison, immortel et image de Dieu. […] Le sage, par contre, est regard lucide, oreille attentive, cœur disposé à s'instruire, ne comprenant, ne saisissant, n'intériorisant que ce qui achemine à l'immortalité." (Bovelles, 91-93)

[231] Cf. "Puisque, en raison de son ignorance de soi, aucun espoir d'immortalité ne l'habite, c'est à bon droit qu'il se déchaîne. […] Abandonné, du fait même de ce malheureux désespoir, aux séductions terrestres et périssables, l'insensé, tandis qu'il cherche à chasser la représentation de d'une mort cruelle et punitive, hâte ce funeste dénouement, ajoute encore au châtiment et « donne tête baissée, comme le dit l'éloquence sacrée, dans la tombe qu'il s'est creusée." (Bovelles, 93)

wise. The origin and destinies of all men are equal, but only the wise man accomplishes his ultimate human vocation:

> "Le sage et l'insensé ne diffèrent ni de nature ni d'être; ils sont l'un et l'autre homme, pour avoir tous deux en partage l'âme et le corps. […] Le commencement de l'un et de l'autre est semblablement Dieu, l'unique fin de même: mais seul celui-là par sa vertu et sa sagesse devient semblable à Dieu, retourne en son principe et accomplit sa fin naturelle."[232]

Man is meant to return, via Nature, to his divine source in God. Bovelles' insistence on the idea that this itinerary belongs to the wise makes for a rather Promethean conception of wisdom[233]. The original man is for Bovelles, like for Pico, no more than just raw material, a creature which is not distinguished by anything belonging particularly to her. In other words, the "natural man" is an unfinished being for the only pathway towards true humanity is wisdom. In fact, the wise man brings wisdom to the natural man in himself just as Prometheus brought fire to the man of clay.

> "Le sage […] imite le célèbre Prométhée qui, […] après avoir visité avec la plus grande attention tous les palais du ciel, ne trouva rien en eux de plus saint, de plus précieux et de plus vivant que le feu. Aussitôt dérobé ce feu […] il l'introduisit sur notre globe pour animer l'homme de limon qu'il avait auparavant modelé. De même le sage […] pénétrant dans le royaume du ciel, après y avoir recueilli au giron immortel de son esprit le feu très clair de la sagesse, le porte au monde d'en bas et

[232] Bovelles, 91.

[233] Cf. Tamara Albertini, *op.cit*. Faye and Rice also privilege the Promethean theme.

cette flamme pure et très vivante vivifie, réchauffe et anime l'homme naturel et terrestre qui est en lui."[234]

However, not only is God the ultimate goal of man's existence, He is also the universal goal of all creation.[235] Into the nature of all created beings a natural yearning for the Supreme Being is inscribed. That natural drive can only be accomplished through the mediation of the wise one who, in his thinking, carries out the elevation of the inferior beings towards the superior ones, and ultimately towards God. Hence, Bovelles' man is heroic also in a Christ-like manner for as Christ reconciled heaven and earth, so the *sapiens* through the operation of his intellect brings Nature back to her Creator.[236] In other words, there is a redemptive quality to man's "cognitive mission" which transcends the more immediate aim of his own perfection and aims at bringing the World to its ultimate resting place in God. In Pseudo-Dionysius wisdom is referred to as the "*conjunctrix*", as she who brings together the knower and the known[237]. Bovelles' *sapientia* weds the wise man to the world and makes them share the same destiny. As Bernard Groethuysen aptly puts it:

"Le monde [sans l'homme] perdrait tout son sens et ne pourrait pas même subsister. Il est lié à lui, comme l'est son corps à son âme. [Le] macrocosme n'est pas tout

[234] Bovelles, 95-97.

[235] Cf. "toute connaissance, intuition et spéculation est une élévation continue des êtres inférieurs vers ceux qui sont supérieurs, c'est-à-dire un effort et une tension naturelle vers Dieu, l'objet suprême universel" (Bovelles, 283)

[236] Cf. "l'homme ne récapitule-t-il l'univers que pour permettre à la création de faire retour à son Créateur. La connaissance, essentiellement réflexive, est retour sur soi, l'œil découvrant sa propre forme dans les formes des choses, mais ce retour sur soi n'est que le prélude du retour de l'univers créé tout entier à son origine, quand l'homme en Dieu s'achève et s'accomplit. Le détour par le monde extérieur a révélé l'homme à lui-même dans sa puissance cognitive et dans sa fonction de miroir universel chargé de ramener toute réalité à son principe divin." (Magnard, Le sage dans le *De Sapiente*, 105)

[237] Cf. Albertini, 301.

simplement un monde qui existe en soi, et dans lequel se trouverait placé l'homme. Il entre dans l'homme, devient en lui vision, pensée, et remplit ainsi sa destination. Si le macrocosme n'avait pas comme complément nécessaire l'homme, si l'homme ne le pensait pas, il n'existerait plus, il serait sans vie, tout comme le corps, une fois que l'âme l'a quitté."[238]

Man in thinking the world "spiritualizes" it – it becomes thought, just as it was thought (in the mind of God) before creation. Therefore, the sage through contemplation brings Nature back to its divine source in an act which rather than being a simple "re-creation" is a creation *à rebours*[239]. He acts as the reconciler between the material world and God who is spirit. That reconciliation/unification is modeled after his own mixed nature as in man converge the material body and the immaterial soul. And yet for Bovelles, the human body-soul compound is not self-contained, it presupposes a third, complementary element: the world. The three are, in Bovelles' thought, inseparable.[240] In fact, in *De Sapiente* man's relationship with the world amounts to the rank of the defining feature of humanity.[241] The Picard philosopher drives this point home by repeatedly insisting on the distinction between man and angel. Man unlike the angel (who is pure spirit), consists of both body and soul. In the worldly existence his body is sustained by the

[238] Bernard Groethuysen, *Anthropologie philosophique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1952), 192-193.

[239] Cf. Groethuysen, 196.

[240] Cf. "L'âme, le corps et le monde forment pour Bovillus une unité indissoluble. Non seulement l'homme retrouvera son corps après la mort, mais aussi le monde, *son* monde lui apparaîtra sous un aspect nouveau. Sans ce monde, il ne serait pas lui-même, aussi peu que l'âme sans le corps serait encore homme, ou que le monde sans l'homme serait encore ce monde" (Groethuysen, 193)

[241] On this point again, the correspondence between Bovelles and Heidegger is quite striking.

natural world, but his relationship with the world transcends the limits of his bodily existence, for as argued before, he is the instrument of the world's redemption.

Indeed, man's connectedness to the world in Bovelles' anthropology cannot be underestimated. Not only does Bovelles argue that in the future, eternal life, soul will be reunited with the body as its natural dwelling, but he goes as far as claiming a similar "resurrection" for the world itself, as the natural abode of the human body!

> "Immortelle est donc la matière, immortel aussi cet acte dont elle est le théâtre, l'âme raisonnable; l'ouvrage même que Dieu a tiré de la matière, nous voulons dire le corps humain, Dieu doit le ressusciter et il serait immortel. Et non seulement le corps humain à cause de l'âme, mais le monde lui-même à cuase du corps humain dont il est véritable séjour."[242]

The human body takes part in the redemptive mission of the sage first and foremost because the senses provide the rational soul with the raw material for her contemplative activity. But that is not all. Together with the soul it is the instrument and venue of the *coincidencia oppositorum* on two levels. In this life it renders possible the process through which in the human soul the sensible world is transmuted into the intelligible world. But in the life to come it brings about the actual "penetration" of the sensible world into the intelligible realm and, consequently, its eternity.

> "En une admirable harmonie, grâce à l'homme est en lui, l'un et l'autre monde se change l'un dans l'autre. En cette vie, le monde intelligible se produit sous le ciel

[242] Bovelles, 127. My emphasis.

grâce à l'esprit de l'homme; dans la vie à venir, c'est le monde sensible qui, grâce au corps de l'homme; pénétrera le royaume de l'intelligible, le matériel l'immatériel, le corporel le spirituel."[243]

On the other hand, the possession of the body poses limits to the heroism of the sage, be it of the Promethean or Christly sort. As already mentioned, for Bovelles, like for Pico, the contemplation of Nature is not a goal in itself, but rather the pathway towards man's ultimate, divine Other[244]. Man strives to know the world in order to come to know himself and that self-knowledge signifies the realization in the person of the wise of the image of God.[245] The image however is different from the object it reflects. In fact, the French humanist is more careful than his Italian predecessor in tracing the human-God divide. While man can know Nature immediately, in virtue of his own intellective powers, he cannot comprehend God in the same fashion. Human intellect does not see God directly, but only through the intermediary of the Angel, who is a sort of a diaphragm separating humanity from divinity.[246] How does the angelic mediation operate in practice? The Angel is the first image of God and the first one to know Him. As he contemplates his Creator, he "passes into God" and is "inserted" into Him.[247] Man, as the second contemplator of

[243] Bovelles, 157.

[244] Cf. "La puissance cognitive s'accomplit dans son véritable objet qui n'est en définitive ni le monde, ni l'œil humain, mais à travers l'ange, Dieu." (Magnard, "Le sage dans le '*De Sapiente*'", 105)

[245] Cf. "Le sage et l'insensé ne diffèrent ni de nature ni d'être; ils sont l'un et l'autre homme, pour avoir tous deux en partage l'âme et le corps. […] Le commencement de l'un et de l'autre est semblablement Dieu, l'unique fin de même: mais seul celui-là par sa vertu et sa sagesse devient semblable à Dieu, retourne en son principe et accomplit sa fin naturelle." (Bovelles, 91)

[246] "L'homme en effet voit Dieu non pas comme il est, purement et simplement à découvert, en vision directe, mais dans une certaine ombre, sous le brouillard et le nuage angélique, en un climat qui en estompe et en tempère l'éclat, bref selon un aspect second." (Bovelles, 247)

[247] "Face à Dieu, placé dans son voisinage immédiat, l'ange le premier puise l'éclat resplendissant de la lumière divine en son regard clair qui ne cille pas et sans intermédiaire passe le premier en Dieu, se

God, perceives Him not in pure and simple form, but through the veil of the angelic intellect.[248] Thus, direct knowledge of God is not possible for human beings. To bridge that gap, man must, as Magnard felicitously puts it, take the detour of the Angel, and before that of Nature-herself.[249]

Indeed, the persistence of the angelic diaphragm between God and man suggests that the Divine Other in *De Sapiente* is the Absolute Other which cannot be conquered by the human power of cognition. On the other hand, for Bovelles, perfect unity with God is still the ultimate goal of human existence - the thing which is not united with God will be barred from achieving unity with the others and with itself[250]. The author resolves this contradiction by arguing that through the contemplation of the Divine, Man, like the Angel before, him is received (*recipi*) and inserted (*inseri*) into God.[251]

Magnard suggests that the question whether the absorption into God is the result of human or divine agency is a false problem.[252] In fact the Latin text has both passive and

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recueille en Dieu même, se fait Dieu, se greffe sur Dieu, s'unit à Dieu et devient le premier voile du soleil divin pour les regards qui viennent après." (Bovelles, 259)

[248] Cf. "Ce que contemple l'entendement de l'homme, ce n'est pas Dieu simplement en lui-même et à découvert, mais […] Dieu auquel s'est joint le greffon de l'entendement angélique. Ce dernier passe en Dieu avant celui de l'homme et lorsqu'il est attaché à Dieu […] il le recouvre, le cache et le voile de son ombre à la vue de l'entendement humain qui vient après lui." (Bovelles, 259)

[249] Cf. "L'objet et la fin de l'homme ne sont connus que par détour, détour par ange, mais détour aussi par la nature elle-même" (Magnard, "Le sage dans le '*De sapiente*'", 106)

[250] "Celle qui n'est pas unie à Dieu, ne pourra réaliser d'unité ni avec aucune autre ni avec elle-même." (Bovelles, 295)

[251] Cf. Bovelles, 260-261. Cf. also "Ce mouvement d'élévation n'est pas désigné ici du terme « *assurrectio* », mais de celui de « *subvectio* ». L'intelligence angélique directement, la raison humaine indirectement sont ravies en Dieu « *subvehitur* »" (Magnard, "Le sage dans le '*De sapiente*'", 107)

[252] Cf. "L'identité du mouvement descendant et du mouvement ascendant, conçus dans leur relativité, permet d'éluder ce qui est faux problème: la puissance – qui est toujours capacité de connaître – tend vers son objet, tandis que l'objet, rayonnant de sa lumière propre sollicite la puissance." (Magnard, "Le sage dans le '*De sapiente*'", 108)

active verbal constructions. Nevertheless, even with the use of verbs in the active mood, man's "passage" into God is still portrayed as the effect of illumination by the divine light:

> "Derrière l'ange, l'homme, à travers la transparence angélique, commence par être frappé par la lumière divine, puis passe en Dieu sous l'effet de cette clarté."[253]

Divine light is what draws man into God. It is also what enables any human vision, including man's perception of Nature and himself for the Mirror and the Eye would be useless in the dark. In fact, the lengthy passages dedicated in the second part of *De Sapiente* to the theme of light as the metaphor for God serve to further illuminate the optical imagery of the first part of the treatise. Moreover, they help one to understand the deep connection, in Bovelles' thought, between wisdom as the knowledge of Nature/oneself and wisdom as the knowledge of God. Even though all wisdom is the knowledge of the same by the same[254], human wisdom can only flourish in the light coming from without, namely the light of Divine Otherness. Indeed, Bovelles, like Pico before him presents us with a conception of the Self which can only come to itself via alterity. Like the Florentine he also depicts the relationship between the two, as one in which Otherness is always more than just an instrument of self-recognition. The Other is found within and yet it always transcends the Self. Nature is what man discovers in the search for his own image: it is intimate and yet entirely separate and in need of redemption. God, as the ultimate resting place towards which all things are drawn is the Other through whom (divine light) and in

[253] Bovelles, 259.

[254] Cf. Bovelles.

whom (deification) Man finds himself. An Other, in fact, who rather than being absorbed by the all-encompassing Ego, bestows upon it its self-identity.

CHAPTER V

JUAN LUIS VIVES: THE SELF BETWEEN DIVINE MIMICRY AND SOCIETAL RESPONSIBILITY

Juan Luis Vives' *Fabula* is the only piece by a non-Italian included in "The Renaissance Philosophy of Man" (1st ed. 1948), a landmark selection of translations from Renaissance authors from Petrarch to Pomponazzi. This book, produced under the triple aegis of Cassirer, Kristeller and John H. Randall Jr. is still the most readily available anthology of Renaissance philosophical works in English translation, rivaled only by Jill Kraye's (ed.) 1997 "Cambridge Translations of Renaissance Philosophical Texts" (2 vols.). Vives' *Fabula* is included in the "Renaissance Philosophy of Man" as an example of "the diffusion of the ideas of humanism and Platonism outside Italy"[255] and in the translator's introduction, it is presented as "directly based on Pico's conception of the dignity of man"[256]. The terms of *Fabula*'s inclusion in this "best-selling textbook"[257] still weigh upon the way Vives' piece is sometimes perceived, namely as an interesting, but modestly original postscript to Pico's *Oratio*.[258] Vives, who is customarily hailed as "Erasmus'

[255] Cf. the cover of *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*.

[256] *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, 385. A similar opinion is advanced also in the general introduction to the volume (16)

[257] Cf. Copenhaver, *Magic and the Dignity of Man*, 309.

[258] In Blum's recent collection of essays on Renaissance philosophers, D. C. Andersson refers to *Fabula* as "the entertaining (and almost card-carryingly humanist) little sketch" (D. C. Andersson, "Juan Luis Vives (1492/93 – 1540) A Pious Eclectic," in *Philosophers of the Renaissance*, ed. Paul Richard Blum (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 141). A similar (i.e. vaguely dismissive)

friend" and a thinker altogether more sympathetic to Aristotle than Plato,[259] in this early work is often thought to be "Pico's imitator" and a starry-eyed glorifier of human nature.[260] On the other hand, some scholars see greater continuity between *Fabula* and the rest of Vives' rich *corpus*, reading it as prefiguring the author's later theories on society, education and psychology.[261]

In fact, before *Fabula*'s appearance in "The Renaissance Philosophy of Man" Vives' main reasons for fame were his contributions to pedagogy, and psychology.[262] The Kristeller-Cassirer-Randall Jr. anthology has drawn attention to Vives' philosophical anthropology, a dimension of his thought heretofore somewhat neglected.[263] Although the

attitude characterizes also Manfred Lentzen's "Il libero arbitrio e la dignità dell'uomo. A proposito dell'*Oratio de hominis dignitate* di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola e della *Fabula de homine* di Juan Luis Vives," in *Il concetto di libertà nel Rinascimento. Atti del Convegno Internazionale (Chianciano-Pienza 17-20 luglio 2006*, ed. Luisa Secchi Tarugi (Firenze: Franco Cesati Editore, 2008), 401-411.

[259] The Swiss philosopher Johannes Thomas Fregius (1543-1583) considered him a "modern Peripatetic". (Cf. D. C. Andersson, 135.)

[260] Cf. for instance: "Vivès passe de l'apothéose de l'homme (contenue dans la *Fabula*) à la condition naturelle, qui ne s'exprime pas seulement dans la pensée, mais encore dans la vie et aussi dans la vie irrationnelle." (Mario Sancipriano, "La pensée anthropologique de J. L. Vives: L'entéléchie," in *Juan Luis Vives. Arbeitsgespräch in der Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel vom. 6 bis 8. November 1980,* ed. August Buck (Hamburg: Dr. Ernst Hauswedell & Co, 1982), 67.

[261] Cf. J. A. Fernández-Santamaría, *The Theater of Man: J. L. Vives on Society. Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, New Series, Vol. 88, No. 2 (1998)*; Valerio del Nero, "L'educazione in Vives," in *Luis Vives y el humanismo europeo*, ed. F. J. Fdez.Nieto, A. Melero and A. Mestre (Universitat de València, 1998), 131- 146; Marcia L. Colish, "The Mime of God: Vives on the Nature of Man," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 23.1 (1962): 3-20.

[262] Cf. "The perspective of Vives as a psychologist and pedagogue, a *precursor* of countless pedagogues of different countries, was centered on a very limited aspect of his intellectual activity, but it put his name in circulation again from the second half of the nineteenth century through the first decades of the twentieth. The theme, which has greatly declined in the last half-century, is far from being forgotten. Entrenched in historical dictionaries and encyclopedias, it is still a standard description, and undoubtedly will remain so for a long time – like every good commonplace – in numerous locations in Europe and America" (Enrique González González, "Fame and oblivion," in *A Companion to Juan Luis Vives*, ed. Charles Fantazzi (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 398)

[263] Cf. Marcia L. Colish, "The Mime of God: Vives on the Nature of Man," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 23.1 (1962): 3. In fact, it is 1950-ties that saw the first among Mario Sancipriano's many contributions to

most fundamental source for Vives' anthropological thought is his *De Anima et vita*, *Fabula de homine* remains the work which is most programmatically concerned with depicting what one might venture to call "the essence of humanity". This notwithstanding, it is usually only marginally mentioned either in the context of its relation to other aspects of Vives' thought or in connection with Pico's *Oratio*. Marcia L. Colish offered in 1962 the first study of Fabula in its own right (and a well-argued rejection of the opinion that it conveys views essentially identical to those voiced in *Oratio*) in her article "The Mime of God: Vives on the Nature of Man".[264] Entirely devoted to *Fabula* is also Erik de Bom's "*Homo ipse Ludus ac Fabula*. Vives' views on the dignity of man as expressed in his *Fabula de homine*".[265] J. A. Fernández-Santamaría dedicates to the *Fabula* the penetrating opening chapter of his book on Vives' views on society. Last, but not least, *Fabula* is placed within the context of post-modern legal studies in Michael FitzGerald's article on "Law, play and the self in Aristotle and Vives".[266]

Although Vives' fame cannot rival Pico's status as the popular icon of the Renaissance, he has never been quite as reduced to oblivion as Bovelles'.[267] His works continued to be widely read and remained influential for the first century after his death. After a period of diminished notoriety, he was studied again in the XIX century by

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the study of Vives' psychology in anthropological rather than pedagogical terms. (Cf. Mario Sancipriano, *Il pensiero psicologico e morale di G. L. Vives* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1957).

[264] Cf. the previous note.

[265] Cf. Erik de Bom, "*Homo ipse Ludus ac Fabula*. Vives' views on the dignity of man as expressed in his *Fabula de homine*," *Humanistica Lovaniensia* 57 (2008): 91 – 114.

[266] Cf. Michael FitzGerald, "Law, play and the self in Aristotle and Vives," *Law Text Culture* 11 (2007): 129-150.

[267] Despite claims to the effect by Vives scholars. Cf. Fernández-Santamaría, *The Theater of Man: J. L. Vives on Society*, VII.

Friedrich Albert Lange (1828–1875), Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945), and José Ortega y Gasset (1883–1955) among others.[268] In Spain, Vives became the subject of endless studies throughout the XIX century and in the first half of the XX. Regrettably, these were for the most part of dubious quality, displaying exuberant nationalistic sentiment, rather than sound scholarship.[269] The recognized exception to this rule is Adolfo Bonilla y San Martin's monumental monograph "Luis Vives y la filosofía del renacimiento" (1929).[270] From the middle of the XIX century a new interest in Vives arose also in Belgium, a country of the humanist's residence. The Belgian scholars focused on the Valentian's rapport with humanist circles in the Low Countries and England. Their archival researches contributed to supplementing what was known of Vives' life and resulted in the retrieval of a number of his previously unknown letters.[271] Germany, from the middle of the XIX century saw the rediscovery of Vives as a pedagogue and psychologist with Lange and Dilthey hailing him as the father of modern empirical psychology (as opposed to the metaphysical psychology of Aristotle and the scholastics).[272]

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[268] Cf. Lorenzo Casini, "Juan Luis Vives [Joannes Ludovicus Vives]," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2012 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, forthcoming URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/vives/>

[269] Cf. González González, 395-406. Vives was adopted as a national hero by both the Catalan scholars of the *Renaixença* movement and by the Spanish nationalists. As an interesting example of the strong nationalistic feelings surrounding the figure of Vives might serve the following words of Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo (1856-1912): "Que Vives es la más elevada personificación de la España científica […] el más prodigioso de los artífices del Renacimiento [… que] renovó el método antes de Bacon y Descartes […] que de él procede la filosofía escocesa […] que el espíritu de la doctrina de Vives informa a toda nuestra civilización […]" (quoted *ibidem* 403). Vives became less suitable for the purposes of nationalistic propaganda only with the 1964 publication by M. de la Pinta y Llorente and José María Palacio of *Procesos inquisitoriales contra la familia judía de Luis Vives* (Madrid: Instituto Arias Montano, 1964).

[270] Cf. Adolfo Bonilla y San Martín, *Luis Vives y la filosofía del renacimiento* (Madrid: L. Rubio, 1929).

[271] Cf. González y González, 406-409.

[272] Cf. Lorenzo Casini, "Self-knowledge, Skepticism and the Quest for a New Method: Juan Luis Vives on Cognition and the Impossibility of Perfect Knowledge," in *Renaissance Scepticisms*, ed. Gianni Paganini, José R. Maia Neto (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009), 34.

Vives – the great pedagogue was introduced to the English-speaking readers by Foster Watson in his many articles and the first (and for many years the only) English-language monograph on the Spaniard "Luis Vives: El Gran Valenciano (1492-1540)".[273] After Watson, The Vivesian studies in English were resumed and brought up-to-date again with Carlos G. Noreña's 1970 biography of Vives and his subsequent monograph on his theory of emotions (1989).[274] Since then, the number of studies dedicated to Vives in English has been on the rise.[275] At the same time, areas other than pedagogy and psychology began receiving increased attention. An excellent example is José A. Fernández Santamaría's exploration of Vives' social thought.[276] The same author studied moreover the issue of Vives' position *vis-à-vis* skeptical tradition, a line of inquiry continued later by Lorenzo Casini.[277] Casini, like Sancipriano is interested in Vives' anthropology. His studies on Vives' understanding of the soul and free will seek to establish Vives' relationship with his explicitly denounced training in scholastic metaphysics, and hence his uneasy rapport with

[273] Cf. Foster Watson, *Luis Vives. El gran valenciano* (Oxford, 1922).

[274] Cf. C. G. Noreña, *Juan Luis Vives* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1970); ID., *Juan Luis Vives and the Emotions* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989).

[275] An invaluable recent addition to Vivesian studies is Brill's *Companion to Juan Luis Vives*, ed. Charles Fantazzi (Leiden: Brill, 2009). The excellent collection *Luis Vives y el humanismo europeo*, ed. F.J. Fernández Nieto, A Melero and A. Mestre (Universitat de Valencia, 1998) contains articles in English, Spanish, Italian and French.

[276] Cf. Fernández Santamaría, *The Theater of Man: J. L. Vives on Society*. An interesting older study of Vives as a social theorist is M. Bataillon, "J. L. Vives réformateur de la bienfaisance," *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et Renaissance* 14 (1952): 141–58. There is also Charles Fantazzi's "Vives and the *emarginati*," in *A Companion to Juan Luis Vives*, 65-113.

[277] Cf. José A. Fernández Santamaría, *Juan Luis Vives: Esceptismo y prudencia en el Renacimiento* (Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 1990); Lorenzo Casini, "Self-knowledge, Skepticism and the Quest for a New Method", 33-60. Vives' skepticism is discussed also in D. C. Andersson, "Juan Luis Vives (1492/93-1540). A Pious Eclectic", 133-147.

medieval philosophical tradition.[278] Cesare Vasoli and Peter Mack, for their part, are concerned with identifying Vives' contributions to the Renaissance re-definition of rhetoric and dialectic.[279]

The reason for *Fabula*'s inclusion in this dissertation is, as in the case of Bovelles' *De Sapiente*, its relation to Pico's *Oratio*. Moreover, as in the case of *De Sapiente* the lead to juxtapose the two texts comes from scholars with neo-Kantian sympathies: Cassirer and Kristeller as the co-editors of "The Renaissance Philosophy of Man".[280] Vives' allegorical story about man, the chameleon-like actor on the stage of the world is presented to us as yet another exaltation of human freedom, an allegory of man's autonomous self-creation. This interpretation is endorsed for example by Mario Sancipriano, who in his study of Vives' anthropology contrasts *Fabula*'s presumed apotheosis of man with the more sober

[278] Cf. Lorenzo Casini, "'*Quid sit anima*': Juan Luis Vives on the soul and its relation to the body," *Renaissance Studies* 24.4 (2010): 496 – 517; ID., "Juan Luis Vives' Conception of Freedom of the Will and Its Scholastic Background," *Vivarium* 44.2-3 (2006): 396-417.

[279] Cf. Cesare Vasoli, "Giovanni Ludovico Vives e la logica come strumento delle 'arti'" in *La dialettica e la retorica dell'Umanesimo. 'Invenzione' e 'Metodo' della cultura del XV e XVI secolo* (Milano, Feltrinelli, 1968), 214-246; Peter Mack, "Vives' *De ratione dicendi*: Structure, Innovations, Problems" *Rhetorica*, 23: 65–92; ID., "Vives' Contributions to Rhetoric and Dialectic" in *A Companion to Juan Luis Vives*, 227-276. Other aspects of Vives' thought recently explored include Vives's reflections on historical study and his theology. Cf. Istvan Bejczy, "'*Historia praestat omnibus disciplinis*': Juan Luis Vives on History and Historical Study," *Renaissance Studies* 17(2003): 69–83; Marcia Colish, "The *De veritate fidei christianae* of Juan Luis Vives," in *Christian Humanism: Essays in Honour of Arjo Vanderjagt*, ed. A. A. MacDonald *et al*. (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 173-197; Miquel Batllori, "Juan Luis Vives: Comentarista del *De civitate Dei* de San Agustín. Apuntes para una lección en torno a la ortodoxia de Vives," in *Luis Vives y el humanismo europeo*, 147-159.

[280] Cf. James Hankins, "Garin and Paul Oskar Kristeller: existentialism, neo-Kantianism, and the post-war interpretation of Renaissance Humanism," in *Eugenio Garin: Dal Rinascimento all'Illuminismo*, ed. Michele Ciliberto (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2011) 490; Brian P. Copenhaven, "Magic and the Dignity of Man", 310. Cf. also K. Schiller, "Paul Oskar Kristeller, Ernst Cassirer and the 'humanistic turn' in American emigration," in *Exile, science and* bildung*: the contested legacies of German intellectual figures* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 125-138.

approach of *De Anima et Vita*[281]. In my reading of Vives' fable I am closer to the perspective of a number of scholars who, notwithstanding *Fabula*'s undeniable kinship with Pico's *Oratio*, allow for a greater intellectual continuity between the young and the mature Vives (Colish, Fernández Santamaría, Del Nero). At the same time, I do not consider Vives a philosopher of one grand idea, be it in the area of education, politics or ethics, a temptation to which many of those writing on Vives seem to succumb.[282] In the following pages, I am striving to achieve balance between the two approaches to Vives' *Fabula* by recognizing it as a text in its own right while remaining mindful of the general context of Vives' intellectual world.

Let us begin with a brief summary of the text. *Fabula*'s action is set during a sumptuous feast held by Juno in celebration of her birthday. Along with refreshments, the birthday guests are treated to a theatrical performance which takes place in an amphitheater

[281] Cf. Mario Sancipriano, "La pensée anthropologique de J. L. Vives : L'entéléchie", 67. For another example of the emphasis on freedom as the leading theme of *Fabula* see D. C. Andersson, 141.

[282] Cf. "Al abordar la obra de Luis Vives, uno cae inmediatamente en la cuenta de la centralidad del problema de la sabiduría en la misma, y, en consonancia con ello, de la figura emblemática del sabio, como aquél que dedica su vida a la prosecución del saber, en cuanto forma superior de existencia. En este sentido, se ha podido afirmar con razón que todo el empeño mostrado por el gran humanista a lo largo de su obra ha consistido en la "búsqueda de la sabiduría"." (Arsenio Ginzo Fernandez, "El problema de la sabiduría en la obra de Luis Vives I," *Revista de Filosofía*, 51 (2005-3): 39); "L'educazione è questione central nel pensiero di Vives. Sarebbe legittimo sostenere che tutta la sua riflessione filosofica manifesta un marcato accento educativo. […] Nell'articolata e variegata produzione di Vives, molte delle sue opere maggiormente significative presentano aspetti e risvolti educativi innegabili." (Valerio del Nero, "Educazione in Vives," in *Luis Vives y el humanismo europeo*, 131); "The one idea that ties together into a single coherent whole the extensive literary production of Juan Luis Vives and informs his thought throughout is the conviction that man has the potential to recover the most important thing lost through the Fall. Man is therefore fully capable, by his own efforts alone, of attaining to that earthly *bonitas* that is the indispensable first step to be taken in the direction of everlasting salvation. But *bonitas* becomes accessible only within the context of a well-ordered society. This explains why there is no thinker during the Spanish Renaissance who applied himself more diligently to the study of the origin, evolution, nature, and reform of society than this humanist" (J. A. Fernández Santamaría, *The Theater of Man*, VIII). My emphases.

created by Jupiter especially for that purpose. World is the stage and Man, along with the rest of creation is an actor in a play directed by the Supreme God himself:

> "The great Jupiter was director of the plays and […] since he was the maker, he ordered everything and explained it to all that they might understand. Lest something be done differently from what he himself liked, he prescribed to the company of actors the entire arrangement and sequence of the plays, from which not even by the breadth of a finger […] should they depart."[283]

Man, although bound to the script like the other performers, is also very different from them in that he alone shows "a great resemblance to Jupiter":

> "Verily, man, peering oft through the mask which hides him, almost ready to burst forth and revealing himself distinctly in many things, is divine and Jupiter-like, participating in the immortality of Jupiter himself, in his wisdom, prudence, memory, sharing so many of his talents that it was easy to know that these gifts had been bestowed upon him by Jupiter from out of his treasury and even from his own person."[284]

Apart from revealing his resemblance to Jupiter through the exercise of wisdom, prudence and memory, Man appears to share his Celestial Progenitor's ability to be "all things". In fact, he is described as *pantomimus*, a word of Greek origin, which literally

[283] Juan Luis Vives, "A Fable about Man," in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, trans. Nancy Lenkeith, 387-388. (from now on: Vives, *Fabula*)

[284] Vives, *Fabula*, 388-389.

translated means imitator of everything.[285] After his initial appearance in the human guise, he wears the mask of a plant, then an animal before finally putting his human costume back on. When he returns to the stage to play his own part, his divine nature reveals itself in his ability to live in society with his fellow men. He is "in every way a political and social being" and his virtues all relate to life in community. Man is "prudent, just, faithful, human, kindly and friendly". He lives "in the cities with others, h[olds] the authority and obeys in turn, [and] car[es] for the public interest and welfare"[286]. At this moment, Man appears to have reached the full measure of his humanity and the gods do not expect to see him in any new roles.

And yet, this is not the end of Man's performance. To the astonishment and admiration of the lesser gods, he is "remade" (a passive construction: "*reformatus*") into their very own form. Consequently, the play is interrupted by the heart-felt applause of the immortals and it is decided that man should be admitted to the celestial company. In fact, Juno is about to obtain that favor from her spouse when, unexpectedly, Man returns to the stage "upholding the great Jupiter, the worthiest of gods and with marvelous and indescribable gestures impersonating his father".[287] After this ultimate proof of the range of his talent, the gods insist that Man be seated among them. Jupiter gladly grants their request which is in accordance with what "he himself, long before, had decided".[288] Man is revoked from the stage, and having deposited his mask, i.e. body, reveals to his

[285] De Bom, 102.

[286] Vives, *Fabula*, 389.

[287] Vives, *Fabula*, 389-390.

[288] Vives, *Fabula*, 390.

commensals the full splendor of his true divine nature. While recognizing their kinship with man, the immortals are all the more intrigued by Man's body, which made his multiple transformations possible. They admire its "harmony and beauty and the whole efficacy".[289] In fact, Man's "mask" is held in such great esteem by the gods that once seated at the banquet table, he puts it back on, a reference, of course, to the doctrine of bodily resurrection.

Even from the above short summary it is clear that although *Fabula*, like Bovelles' *De Sapiente*, finds in Pico's *Oratio* a fruitful source of inspiration, it is nonetheless a very different text. It is enough to consider its formal aspects – the playful tone and a certain premeditated levity contrast with both *Oratio* and *De Sapiente*. Michael FitzGerald suggests that the choice of the literary format of fable is itself an integral part of Vives' conception of man.[290] In fact, the very opening of the *Fabula* seems to state as much:

> "I should like to begin this essay of mine on man by some fables and plays, since man is himself a fable and play."[291]

Vives' lighthearted overture is the first caution against reading *Fabula* as a simple re-statement of Pico's lofty ideas on human dignity. By the same token, *Fabula*'s lighter tone never drifts towards mockery and by no means does it convey any radically different

[289] Vives, *Fabula*, 391.

[290] Cf. "That anthropological truths should be represented in the form of a fable rather than that of a treatise would be apt, because human being itself and in its selfhood is, in Vives' risqué verdict, a play and a fable: *homo ipse ludus ac fabula est*. There is something properly human about play. What the text does, then, 'is to offer a definition of man in which the very form of the definition becomes part of the definition itself" (Michael FitzGerald, 133)

[291] Vives, *Fabula*, 387.

vision of humanity. It will be shown in the pages to follow that Vives shares with Pico and Bovelles some fundamental ideas about human intrinsic incompleteness and built-in orientation towards alterity. Needless to say, they operate within the same Christian framework and imagine the ultimate human destiny in all-but-identical terms. Rather than debunking Pico's grand vision, Vives proposes a number of subtle correctives, in accordance with his own more general understanding of issues such as the meaning of wisdom, the role of philosophy and education in human life, and man's communitarian nature.

In fact, Vives' choice of the playful format of fable might be understood as motivated by these very preoccupations. The work was dedicated to Vives' young 18-year old pupil, Anton van Bergen. Erik de Bom suggests that it was consequently written with a pedagogical goal in mind, namely to stimulate the young nobleman's interest in the question of human dignity. Unlike Pico, whose *Oratio* was addressed to the learned, Vives did not write for theologians and philosophers and thus naturally favored the narrative form as more congenial to his envisaged young audience.[292] While *Oratio* is a very self-consciously constructed piece of rhetoric, as far as persuasiveness goes, *Fabula*'s narrative-embedded mythologizing is no less rhetorically effective.[293] In fact, *Fabula*'s use of

[292] De Bom, 97-98.

[293] In fact Marcia Colish considers it to be more so. Cf. "[The] use of of a narrative rather than a rhetorical style makes the *Fabula* a work with more economy and integrity than the rambling *Oratio.*" (Colish, "The Mime of God", 7)

narrative for the treatment of philosophical subject-matter is in harmony with humanist practice; suffice it to mention the "table-philosophy" of Alberti's "*Intercenales*".[294]

The concern for audience signaled by Vives' choice of a lighter tone is related to his more general (and very humanistic indeed) preoccupation with language and its communicative potential. That reflection on language was an important part of Vives' intellectual life around the time of *Fabula*'s composition is clear when one looks at his 1519 invective "*In pseudodialecticos*". In this work, the Valentian argues, very much in the manner of a Petrarch or a Valla, against the "linguistic barbarism of scholastic discourse" which compromises language's ability to signify. The purity of language must be restored, so that it might become again an effective tool of communication.[295] In the *Fabula* itself language - both spoken and written - features as the noblest invention of human reason:

> "There indeed was a mind full of wisdom, prudence, knowledge, reason, so fertile that by itself it brought forth extraordinary things. Its inventions are: towns and houses, the use of herbs, stones and metals, the designations and names of all things, which foremost among his other inventions have especially caused wise men to wonder. Next and no less important, with a few letters he was able to comprise the immense variety of the sounds of the human voice. With these letters so many doctrines were fixed in writing and transmitted, including religion itself and the knowledge and cult of Jupiter the father and of the other brother-gods. This one

[294] Cf. Leon Battista Alberti "Intercenales", a cura di Franco Bacchelli e Luca d'Ascia, premessa di Alberto Tenenti (Bologna: Edizioni Pendragon, 2003).

[295] Cf. Cesare Vasoli "La concezione filosofica in Vives," *Luis Vives y el humanismo europeo*, 119.

thing, which is found in no other animal but man, shows his relationship to the gods."[296]

Reason produces language which, in its written form, accounts for the creation and transmission of all learning (*doctrina*). Yet Vives, rather than enumerating all the disciplines codified through language, focuses on a single one of them – religion, understood as both the knowledge of God and the expression of that knowledge in human actions – cult.[297] It is striking that the only domain of learning mentioned by name in this passage is religion and that it is spoken of as not merely the religious doctrine, but also practice. This, I think, is very telling of the way Vives thinks of language and learning as necessarily connected with the practical and societal aspects of life. In fact, the source of both, i.e. rationality itself, is, in *Fabula*, linked with the sphere of human activity rather than with any purely speculative exercise. Although language is reason's noblest progeny, the former also produces "towns and houses", and the "use of herbs, stones and metals". Doubtless, *Fabula* exudes a strong sense that rationality for Vives is always somehow expressed in the practical aspects of life. This of course, is a significant departure from Pico and Bovelles. Whereas *Oratio* and *De Sapiente* talk about human rationality in the context of a philosophical quest for knowledge, *Fabula* thematizes man's god-like, i.e. intellectual qualities as applied to human societies.

At the heart of the differences between Vives' fable and the other two texts are the discrepancies in the understanding of philosophy between the Valentian and his Florentine

[296] Vives, *Fabula*, 392.

[297] "*Jovis patris cognitio et cultus*" (J. L. Vives, *Opera Omnia*, 8 vols, ed. Gregorio Mayans y Siscar and Francisco Fabian y Fuero (London: Gregg Press, 1964) t. IV, 7).

and Picard counterparts. To put it bluntly, Vives' conception of philosophy (which in some ways is quintessentially humanistic) is quite far removed from what either Pico or Bovelles would associate with this discipline.[298] While Bovelles and Pico view philosophy as the pursuit of the hidden truths of Nature and God, Vives is a thinker more interested in the question of the good life. *Oratio, De Sapiente* and *Fabula* give very clear indications as to the kinds of philosophical reflection favored by their authors. The "humanizing" potential of disinterested intellectual inquiry, advocated by the first two texts, is a theme virtually absent from Vives' fable. Whereas Pico and Bovelles portray philosophical life as an end in itself (albeit not in absolute, as ultimately it serves as a pathway towards God), *Fabula* is clearly a work of a thinker for whom "the purpose of philosophy is the better to live the human life"[299] (again with the caveat that ethical life for Vives is firmly embedded in the Christian context of man's transcendental destiny).

The Man of the *Fabula* is not a contemplator, but a city-dweller:

> "[Man] went about the cities with the others, held the authority and obeyed in turn, cared for the public interest and welfare, and was finally in every way a political and social being."[300]

The view of man as a societal creature agrees with Vives' life-long interest in the disciplines considered to be vital to "organizing and guiding human life": moral

[298] For the discussion of Pico and Bovelles' relationship to humanism, cf. previous chapters.

[299] D. C. Andersson, 135.

[300] Vives, *Fabula*, 389.

philosophy, history, politics and economy.[301] It also goes hand-in-hand with his well-known concern for educational reform and impatience with certain aspects of philosophical reflection of his own day. In fact, Vives' most rigorously philosophical work "*De prima philosophia*" concludes with a section on the limitations of human understanding and similar sentiments are expressed throughout the entire body of his writings.[302]

Vives' reservations not only as to the power of human understanding, but even as to its relevance[303] contrast diametrically with Bovelles' idea of the sage who "knows and understands everything". Importantly, the realization of man's intellectual inadequacy is not particularly troubling to the Valentian. *Fabula* with its blatant lack of concern for man's vocation to know (so emphatically stated in *Oratio* and *De Sapiente*) proposes a vision of human life in which metaphysical insight is not necessary to the fulfillment of the goal of human existence.

It seems that the difference of perspective between Pico and Bovelles on the one hand and Vives on the other ultimately boils down to their divergent views as to the essence of wisdom. A good idea of Vives' conception of wisdom can be derived from his *"Ad sapientiam introductio"*. Despite agreeing in principle with Bovelles' opinion that wisdom consists in knowing oneself, the Valentian gives a very different interpretation of the notion

[301] Cf. "Giacchè il dovere del filosofo, dopo aver restituito al linguaggio la sua funzione e i suoi compiti, consiste nell'esercitare piuttosto quegli studi che organizzano e guidano la vita degli uomini; e quindi egli indagherà la filosofia morale che adorna i costumi e la mente, la storia madre della cognizione delle cose e della prudenza, la política e l'economia che insegnano a governare rettamente la città e la famiglia" (Cesare Vasoli, "La concezione filosofica in Vives", 122)

[302] Cf. D.C. Andersson, 135-140.

[303] Cf. the often quoted passage from *De Anima et Vita*: "We are not interested in knowing what the soul is, but very much want to know how it is and what its operations are. Nor did the one who exhorted us to know ourselves refer to the essence of the soul, but to the actions that mould our character" (quoted after Lorenzo Casini, "*Quid sit anima*", 498)

of self-knowledge. While for Bovelles knowing oneself is inseparably connected with the knowledge of Nature and God, for Vives it amounts to knowing what constitutes one's good in accordance with his/her Christian calling. In "*Ad sapientiam introductio*" Vives states:

> "learning exists in the very mind itself for this purpose: that we may more easily know sin and avoid it, and know virtue and attain to it, holding all other things to be superfluous. If learning does not accomplish this in him who has it, she leaves her whole duty undone."[304]

In fact, the reason for learning and the very essence of wisdom for Vives is to provide human beings with intellectual tools necessary to live virtuously. More concretely, wisdom is what makes one capable of discerning between good and evil and is a precondition for seeking one and avoiding the other. In other words, wisdom consists of having true opinions (*veras habere opiniones*) and acting in accordance with them (*bene agere*).[305] While Bovelles' *sapiens* is striving to know the immutable essences of things (and in that sense is pursuing what Aristotle would prefer to call *scientia*), *sapientia* in Vives has little to do with "true" knowledge in the Aristotelian sense and everything to do with the moral life.[306] It is simply the foundation for ethics. Consequently, wisdom for

[304] Marian Leona Tobriner, S. N. J. M. (ed.), *Vives' Introduction to Wisdom. A Renaissance Textbook* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 88-89.

[305] Cf. Rice, 156-163.

[306] Strictly speaking, Aristotle admits that moral knowledge exists in the form of, what he calls, *phronesis*, in order to distinguish it from other knowledge types such as *episteme* and *techne*. By denying that moral knowledge is "true knowledge" for Aristotle, I simply draw attention to the fact that Aristotle considered *episteme* a higher or more dignified occupation of the human intellect than a preoccupation with the question of how to live.

Vives has a very concrete application in the active life, and a very strong affinity to the traditional virtue of prudence.[307] Such association of wisdom and prudence is often viewed as emblematically humanist and found in important Renaissance figures such as Salutati, Bruni, Petrarca and Erasmus to name but the most illustrious. At the same time, the prudential conception of wisdom and the concomitant focus on the *vita activa* is not strongly present either in Pico or in Bovelles.[308]

At this point we must ask firstly, how does Vives' interest in education fit with his understanding of philosophy's task and his prudential idea of wisdom; and secondly, whether it finds expression in the *Fabula*.[309] The answer to the first question is simpler – the ability to live virtuously is a skill and must be acquired through study. The second query is harder to address. However, it has been argued that although not explicitly dealing with pedagogy as such, *Fabula*'s tale of the progression of man-the-actor from his initial mimicry of a plant until his final impersonation of divinity must be understood as an allegory of the transformational power of education:

> "[N]ella *Fabula de homine* del 1518, <libellus de mundana scena>, come la definisce l'autore, di chiaro sapore pichiano, la scena dell'uomo che nell'anfiteatro del mondo, in un primo tempo <sub persona plantae>, si trasforma <deformatus in mille species belluarum> […] per tornare nella sua condizione consueta ed

[307] "Vives and Erasmus went about as far in the direction of moralizing wisdom as it was possible to go without actually identifying wisdom and prudence." (Rice, 163)

[308] Cf. previous chapters.

[309] The interest in pedagogy is another quintessentially "humanist" aspect of Vives' thought. Cf. "Si potrebbe […] dire che, in analogía con la posizione di tanti altri umanisti, anche in Vives agisce una premurosa attenzione nei confronti dei risvolti educativi, pratici, utili del sapere." (Del Nero, 131.)

> innalzarsi quindi ad angelo ed infine a divinità, implica un preciso messaggio educativo […] Non a caso il breve scritto si conclude con la descrizione – esaltazione della perfetta proporzionalità delle membra dell'uomo e della sua capacità intellettiva […]: siamo di fronte ad una pagina esemplare, incentrata su un concetto di disciplina che si connota di un robusto taglio educativo […]"[310]

Del Nero sees in *Fabula*'s use of the theme of man's protean nature an allegory of human improvement through education. Although this brings to mind Bovelles' distinction between man by nature (*homo ex natura*) and man by culture (*homo ex arte*), there is an important difference. Bovelles uses the image of man as chameleon as a metaphor for the process of cognition itself, while Vives, if Del Nero is right, uses it to illustrate the process of moral advancement through education. In *De Sapiente* man becomes all things as he embraces all things with his intellect. In *Fabula* the different guises that man can assume stand for different moments on his way towards educational accomplishment.

Del Nero's reading of *Fabula*'s musings on man's chameleonic nature might be tinged by the scholar's more general commitment to studying Vives' pedagogical theories. Still, it is motivated by a very accurate intuition as to an essential difference between *Fabula* and Pico's *Oratio*, namely Vives' far greater attention to the practical side of human affairs. Another striking difference between the way the two authors speak of man's power of self-transformation is the fact that Vives' man, unlike Pico's, is a scripted character. He is an actor following a screenplay devised by Jupiter himself. There is nothing in the text that would suggest that Man, unlike the rest of the performers, is exempt from Jupiter's

[310] Del Nero, 143-144.

hands-on direction.[311] Man's progression through the various degrees of natural perfection is thus somehow written into his role. Must the script which precedes and underlies all man's activities on the stage of the world be understood as man's God-given nature, prior to whatever man's later "transformations" might be? And, importantly, are Vives' ideas about human nature incompatible with Pico's?

It is best to begin this reflection on the question of human nature in *Fabula* by stating the obvious. Vives' man is written by Jupiter, but he is written as an impersonator, a mime. Hence the paradox: he is a *character* in his own right and yet, he almost compulsively assumes identities of all the other *personae* on the stage of the world. This changeability, which puts in question his very essence, is, in fact, a fundamental part of it. Thus Vives' Man shares with the Man of *Oratio* a nature which is both present (Man acting his own part, the image of God) and absent (Man, the self-forging imitator of everything). Fundamentally, the ability of both Pico's and Vives' Man to assume a "shape" which is not "recognizably human" results from their kinship with God. Here is how *Fabula* speaks of it:

> "Then, as he of gods the greatest, embracing all things in his might, is all things, they saw man, Jupiter's mime, be all things also. He would change himself so as to appear under the mask of a plant, acting a simple life without any power of sensation. Soon after, he withdrew and returned on the stage as a moral satirist, brought into the shapes of a thousand wild beasts: namely, the angry and raging

[311] Cf. "The great Jupiter was director of the plays and […] since he was the maker, he ordered everything and explained it to all that they might understand. Lest something be done differently from what he himself liked, he prescribed to the company of actors the entire arrangement and sequence of the plays, from which not even by the breadth of a finger […] should they depart." (Vives, 387-388)

> lion, the rapacious and devouring wolf, the fierce and wild boar, the cunning little fox, the lustful and filthy sow, the timid hare, the envious dog, the stupid donkey. After doing this, he was out of sight for a short time; then the curtain was drawn back and he returned a man […] The gods were not expecting to see him in more shapes when, behold, he was remade into one of their own race, surpassing the nature of man and relying entirely upon a very wise mind. […] "[312]

In the above passage we first witness Man's departure from what makes him "recognizably human" as he imitates creatures of the lower order. Ironically, the capacity to be less than human springs from his very resemblance to "that than which no greater can be conceived" (to use St. Anselm's formula),[313] Jupiter himself: "*ut ipse deorum maximus, virtute sua omnia complecitur, omnia est, sic et hunc ipsius Pantomimum esse videbant*"[314]. But the kinship with the Supreme God presupposes also Man's ability to surpass what constitutes the "recognizably human". Man-the-actor proves himself capable not only of imitating the lesser gods (the angels), but even of impersonating Jupiter himself. Vives does not tell us exactly how Man achieves this other than that he was using "marvelous and indescribable gestures".[315] We are also told that it involved "piercing into that inaccessible light surrounded by darkness where Jupiter dwells".[316] How are we to understand this? It would seem that since Man in his role as a human being already displays

[312] Vives, *Fabula*, 389.

[313] Cf. Anselm's *Proslogion* 2: "*id quo nihil maius cogitari potest*".

[314] Vives, *Opera Omnia*, 4.

[315] Vives, *Fabula*, 390.

[316] Ibid.

the full range of divine attributes, trespassing into the more-than-human realm is just a question of degree. In other words, Man becomes more-than-human when his humane traits exceed or overflow the scope of humanity's domain.

By the same token, we could say that Vives' Man remains within the limits of humanity, when he applies the attributes that betray his divine lineage to the human sphere of operation. He is recognizably human when he uses "wisdom, prudence and memory" in the service of a life in society "*cum allis*". In fact, in the *Fabula*, sociability, after the possession of the image of God, emerges as the second most important distinguishing trait of humanity. Another aspect of human make up which in Vives' fable receives great attention is the human body. In fact, embodiment is within the *Fabula* the third hallmark of humanity after the possession of the image of God and sociability. In his exultation of the beauty and usefulness of Man's body Vives continues the tradition initiated in Cicero's V book of *De finibus*[317] :

> "There was the lofty head, stronghold and court of the divine mind; in it the five senses arranged and placed ornately and usefully. The ears, accordingly, did not droop with soft skin, nor were they firmly fixed with a hard bone, but both were rounded by a sinuous cartilage. Thus they could receive sounds from all directions, and the dust, straw, fluff, gnats which might be flying around would not penetrate into the head but be caught in the folds. The eyes in equal number, two indeed, were high up so that they could observe all things and protected by a fine wall of lashes and eyelids against the same bits of straw and fluff, dust and tiny insects. They were

[317] Cf. Alain Michel, "La dignité humaine chez Cicéron," in *La dignité de l'homme*. *Actes du colloque tenu à la Sorbonne-Paris IV en novembre 1992*, ed. Pierre Magnard (Paris: Champion, 1995), 17.

> the gauge of the soul and the noblest part of the human face. Then came the very attire of the mask or the mask itself, so handsomely shaped, divided into arms and legs which were long and ending with fingers, so good-looking and useful for all purposes. […] All is so well-fitted and interrelated that if one were to withdraw or change or add something, all that harmony and beauty and the whole efficacy would be immediately lost."[318]

The Ciceronian[319] inspiration of this passage notwithstanding, Vives' validation of the human body goes beyond Cicero's in that he imagines its usefulness as transcending the limits of earthly existence. In fact, the Valentian's ideas on the ultimate sublimation of the human body are strikingly similar to those expressed by Bovelles. This comes to the fore in the passages dedicated to man's ultimate feat of mimicry (the imitation of Jupiter) and his subsequent inclusion in the banquet of the immortals. Man's ability to appear as Jupiter is indeed formidable:

> "When the gods first saw him, they were roused and upset at the thought that their master and father stooped to the stage. Soon however, with composed minds, they glanced repeatedly at Jupiter's stall […] Seeing him there, they gazed back again at man and then at Jupiter. With such skill and propriety did he play the Jupiter's part that, up and down, from Jupiter's stall to the stage, they kept glancing, lest they be misled by a likeness or the accurate mimic of an actor. Among other players

[318] Vives, *Fabula*, 391.

[319] Perhaps via Giannozzo Manetti's *De dignitate et excellentia hominis* (1452/53).

there were some who swore that this was not man but Jupiter himself, and they underwent severe punishment for their error."[320]

The gods are not deceived. By frequently glancing at both man and Jupiter they realize that Man is but a skillful impersonator.[321] Rather than achieving a real divinization and becoming Jupiter, he remains what he originally was: Jupiter's mime and image. This is true even after his final apotheosis and invitation to the banquet of the immortals. Even though initially, upon leaving the stage, he "puts off his mask", showing gods "his nature akin to theirs", he eventually puts it back on:

> "Since it had so well met the needs of man, it was deemed worthy of the most sumptuous feast and of the table of the gods. Thus it was given the power of perception and enjoyed the eternal bliss of the banquet."[322]

The fact that the body-mask is not forsaken even as man is seated at the eternal banquet means that although Man shares one Heavenly Progenitor with the immortals, he nevertheless is not one of them. His body is the marker of his human nature, and if man is to be honored, so must be that which ultimately distinguishes him from his divine siblings.

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[320] Vives, *Fabula*, 390.

[321] The other actors (i.e. the plants and animals) do not enjoy the same insight, an error which costs them dearly. Cf. "Among the other players there were some who swore that this was not man but Jupiter himself, and they underwent severe punishment for their error" (Vives, *Fabula*, 390). This reminds one of the passages of *De Sapiente* where Bovelles talks about the "opaqueness" of man's body. Man unlike the Angel is an opaque screen, which "captures" the image of God and thus blocks the lower order of creation (animals) from the vision of true God. Being the closest to divinity thing that the lower creatures will ever know he might be rightly considered "the second god" or "god on earth".

[322] Vives, *Fabula*, 393.

Now, for Vives there are three hallmarks of humanity: the possession of the image of God, sociability and embodiment. They are all part of the profound structure of each human being, a reality one might be inclined to call human nature. Thus, to return to our original question: is Vives making more of the idea of human nature than Pico or Bovelles? In some respects, it seems that Pico's concept of man as virtually "natureless" leaves a greater margin for human freedom. Although Pico presupposes a specific teleology to man's existence, *Oratio* sketches also a very real possibility that he should reject his true vocation and "be content" with the fate of the lower creatures. *Fabula*, on the other hand, speaks of man's transformations as if they were no more than a virtuoso piece by an accomplished actor, keen on proving the range of his histrionic ability. It might seem that while in the *Oratio* man is constantly at risk of falling short of his true destiny, in the *Fabula* he is rather unlikely to prove unworthy of Jupiter's special favor. In fact, Vives' man, inasmuch as he is script-bound to act in complete accordance with his Creator's preexistent plan, seems rather surely headed for the seat of honor at the banquet of the gods.[323]

And yet, Vives is no bard of predestination in any sense of the word and he believes in human freedom of action. The fact that Jupiter's hand is felt in the ultimate shape of Man's destiny indicates simply Vives' heightened concern for the problem of reconciliation between human freedom and God's omnipotence. In the *Fabula* there is Jupiter's script, but Man still needs to play the part. If the script remains unfulfilled by the acting, it is just an idea in the mind of God: it has no reality in the physical, material world.

[323] Cf. Jupiter grants to Man the favor of being admitted to the banquet of the immortals as that "what he himself, long before, had decided" (Vives, *Fabula*, 390)

Hence, if we understand Man's script as his nature, Vives' ideas are not as dissimilar from those voiced by Pico and Bovelles as it might seem at a first glance. Vives' Man, like Pico's Adam and Bovelles' Sage, must actualize through his own activity the possibilities written into his role. Without his active participation on the stage of the world, Jupiter's script remains pure letter, a never-realized potentiality.[324]

As we have seen, for Vives the primary field of human activity is life in society and this is also the area where Man's agency is most properly employed. Although, unlike *Oratio* and *De Sapiente*, *Fabula* thematizes Man's engagement with the world in the active life, it nevertheless imagines his ultimate destiny in very similar terms. Vives, like Pico and Bovelles, sees the human itinerary as leading towards unity with the divine, in the *Fabula* represented as sharing the table of the immortals. Man is ultimately admitted to the celestial company, but Vives never quite speaks of this event in terms of actual "deification".[325] As a matter of fact, he is even more careful than Bovelles in tracing the divide between humanity and divinity (cf. the punishment for those who assume that man is actually god, the re-endorsement of the body). Vives insists both on the non-identity between Man and God (despite the fact that the former is endowed with the qualities of the latter) and on Man's calling to ultimately dwell in the proximity of his Creator. As Man-the-Actor reclines at the eternal banquet, Vives' reader is invited to realize that his ultimate

[324] For a compelling different interpretation of the meaning of Man's script cf. Marcia Colish, "The Mime of God: Vives on the nature of man". (Cf. especially "Man is given a script of the scenario; he may extemporize only within the limits of the stock situations and stock characters he is called upon to represent." (Colish, "The Mime of God", 9).)

[325] In the *Fabula* Man and God are never exactly "co-essential" despite Nancy Lenkeith's claim to that effect in the introduction to her translation of the text. (Cf. Colish, "The Mime of God", 9-10).

resting place, the point where the script ends and human nature reaches its completion is the alterity of the Divine.

Yet, God is not the only kind of otherness which in Vives' anthropology is constitutive of human identity. In the first instance, it is the life in a community with other human beings which functions as the necessary precondition for Man's realizing his humanity on Earth. Recognizing others as fellow human beings and being in turn recognized as such by them is what makes one human. On the eschatological plane, Man's return to himself after his performance on the stage of the world is possible only in virtue of his use of the body-costume to represent and imitate what is other-than-human. In fact, Man is invited to the eternal banquet only after he has proved himself capable of both impersonating the lower creatures and miming the gods. However, he is invited to join the immortals not as another god but as man. After he has been everything, including God, in the theatre of the world, he becomes human again at the eternal banquet. Within the *Fabula* this is the point at which man is most himself - having fulfilled both his earthly and his heavenly destiny, at the banquet of the gods and yet clothed in his own resurrected body, the image of Supreme God, but distinct from Him.

In Pico, Bovelles and Vives alterity is what shapes human identity. There is no struggle, there is no desire to dominate, alterity is not only a stage of subject's way towards self-recognition, it is not just a means towards the double goal of self-possession and dominance of the other, it is always elusive "presence deferred yet imminent". In Pico the human subject opens himself to the alterity of God. In Bovelles, the otherness announces itself firstly as Nature, and in Vives it is articulated initially in the community. All three thinkers represent identity as a project, a becoming. There is a horizon towards which this

becoming is striving, but identity as such is always presented as a lack, rather than a stable given. The humanism of Pico, Bovelles and Vives is not the ego-centered humanism of Modernity. It is the kind of humanism which thinks man as a creature before God, bound to physical Nature in a reciprocal and not technological relationship, connected with his fellow men in ways which define his very mode of existence.

CHAPTER VI

ÁLVAR NÚÑEZ CABEZA DE VACA: THE AMERICANIZED SELF

In the first part of this work, we focused on the Renaissance philosophical thought of Man, particularly on the central idea of an original human incompleteness. The idea that human beings are not born but made runs through much of Renaissance literature. In fact, there is a large body of texts dealing with the practical aspects of fashioning accomplished/consummate human beings. One could mention for instance the pedagogical and religious treatises of the time, such as Vives' *De Institutione feminae cristinae*, Erasmus' *De pueris instituendis* or the same author's *Enchiridion militis christiani*. Another good example are the manuals for rulers continuing the *speculum principis* tradition such as Machiavelli's *Il Principe* and Erasmus' *Institutio principis christiani* and the books of manners such as Castiglione's *Il Libro del Cortegiano*, Giovanni della Casa's *Galateo*, Stefano Guazzo's *La civil conversatione*. These treatises, while dealing with the question of human formation from the diverse perspectives of pedagogy, piety, politics and manners are unanimous in considering "man" as the final product of human endeavor. They are also uniform in considering man's task of self-shaping as related to his/her role in family and society.

In fact, in these works, just as in *Oratio*, *De Sapiente* and *Fabula de homine*, man's original insufficiency is linked to the notion that something external must mediate to make him whole. They recognize, albeit in a more practical fashion, the role of alterity in the

process of self-shaping. But after a man is "accomplished" through education and reaches excellence in his domain of choice in such a way that his life seems worthy of being written down for the edification (or simply pleasure) of others, can he not be considered finally an autonomous self rather than a being caught up in a myriad of relations which constitute his very essence? In fact, biographies and autobiographies (as well as portraiture and self-portraiture) were traditionally the chief supporting evidence in the narrative of Renaissance individualism.[326] It is the premise of this chapter that, contrary to the traditional view of autobiography as the expression of autonomous individuality, this genre poses the question of the relationship between self and other with much urgency. It illustrates perhaps more eloquently than any other type of writing that the search for an "I" (which is its primary object) cannot but bring into the focus otherness in all the multiplicity of its meanings.

There is no doubt that the Renaissance saw a dramatic increase in the number of "ego-documents"[327] from such landmarks as the famous *Vitas* of Benvenuto Cellini[328] and

[326] Needless to say, to the exclusion of some other important sources. As the idea of the "birth of the individual" in the Renaissance was meeting with growing criticism, *ricordanze* and *libri di famiglia* were mined for evidence that the Renaissance "individual's" sense of identity was inextricably intertwined with his sense of belonging to a larger group or collective: a family, a lineage, a particular trade. Following the advent of Michel Foucault's ideas on the emergence of interiority as called into being by external authorities interested mainly in controlling it, Stephen Greenblatt showed that all kinds of literary production could be read as instruments of an author's all but autonomous "self-fashioning". Venetian inquisitorial records were analyzed with the question of Renaissance subjectivity in view by an author critical both of the Burckhardian and the post-modern approaches the question, John Jeffries Martin.

[327] Cf. Martin McLaughlin, 'Biography and autobiography in the Italian Renaissance', in *Mapping Lives: The Uses of Biography*, ed. Peter France and William St. Clair (British Academy, London: Oxford University Press, 2002), 37 – 65. I borrow the term "ego-documents" from Rudolf Dekker. (Cf. Rudolf Dekker, "Egodocuments (Autobiographies, Diaries, Travel Journals) in the Netherlands, 1500-1814," *Dutch Crossing* 39 (1989): 61-71).

[328] For a compelling study of Cellini's autobiography as a document bearing witness to the twin processes of secularization and divinization of the artist in the Renaissance cf. Massimo Lollini, "L'autobiografia del artista 'divino' tra sacro e secolarizzazione," *Annali d'Italianistica* 25 (2007): 275-310.

Gerolamo Cardano[329], through para-autobiographical works such as Petrarca's *Secretum* or Montaigne's *Essais*, to voyage journals and travel narratives. These broadly-defined autobiographical works seem especially suitable for the study of Renaissance self-making in that they frame the issue in the concrete terms of lived human experience. Firstly, on the level of content, they portray selves as gaining coherence as their lives unfold (with all the implications of this process, such as the role of others in contributing to this accumulative self-coherence). Secondly, on the rhetorical level, they can be considered the closest we have to a workshop of the self as the locus wherein the process of self-fashioning can be observed as it is being (verbally) accomplished.[330]

There is one more compelling reason to draw on autobiographical writings in this study of Renaissance subjectivity. For the past 30 years or so there has been an important tendency to view the autobiographical mode of thinking as fundamental for the emergence of self-consciousness. In fact, before we engage the question of autobiography as a form of writing, it seems crucial to address the idea that autobiography, or the act of self-narrating is the deepest structure of self-identity. In *Time, Narrative and History* David Carr argued for a conception of identity as inherently narrative. According to this view, human beings have no access to the raw material of their life experiences otherwise than within the structures of temporality and through narrative modes[331]. Similarly, a number of

[329] Cf. Guido Giglioni, "Autobiography as self-mastery: writing, madness, and method in Girolamo Cardano," *Bruniana & Campanelliana* 7.2 (2001): 331-362; ID., "Fazio and his demons. Girolamo Cardano on the art of storytelling and the science of witnessing," *Bruniana & Campanelliana* 16.2 (2010): 463-472.

[330] On the importance of appreciating rhetoric aspects of biography/autobiography see: Thomas F. Mayer, D. R. Woolf, "Introduction," in *The Rhetorics of Life-Writing in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Thomas F. Mayer and D. R. Woolf (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1995), 1-37.

[331] Cf. David Carr, *Time, Narrative and History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

studies in developmental psychology suggested that the work of self-construction in toddlers goes hand-in-hand with their growing linguistic mastery, understood not merely as the knowledge of the lexicon and grammar, but also as the awareness of the rhetorical conventions governing the construction of narratives.[332] It has been shown that in patients suffering from Alzheimer's dementia the inability to narratively relate the immediate past with the present and future creates a sense of loss of oneself[333]. In short, there are strong arguments supporting the view that the way we experience ourselves is according to narrative structures. In other words, autobiography appears to be the unique mode through which human beings can be present to themselves. In fact, it seems that the only way of "knowing" ourselves is through the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves. There is no original chaos waiting to be organized/emplotted through narratives (as Hayden White would see it[334]) – the narrative is there right from the outset.

This said, beyond the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves, there are the stories we tell others about ourselves, both orally and in writing. No doubt, the written autobiography is a more radical version of the usual internal autobiographical stringing together of our lives or the extemporaneous efforts at self-presentation in our daily dealings with others. In all of these activities we are moved by the same instinct to maintain self-coherence, but in writing autobiography we are attempting something far more comprehensive than the humble task of routine self-construction: we are striving to give

[332] Cf. Katherine Nelson, ed., *Narratives from the crib* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

[333] Cf. Glenn Weaver, "Losing Our Memories and Gaining Our Souls: The Scandal of Alzheimer's Dementia for the Modern or Postmodern Self," in *The Self Beyond the Postmodern Crisis*, ed. Paul C. Vitz and Susan M. Felch (Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2006), 129 – 145.

[334] Cf. Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 1-42.

ourselves a "final" and "permanent" image, or "face". It seems unavoidable that such a gambit for permanence should create a greater distance between the "I" doing the narration and the "I" featured in the story. The intuitive sense of self-coherence resulting from the never-ending process of telling ourselves about ourselves is different from the conscious effort of self-narrating occasioned by autobiographical writing. While in the former identity is a matter of self-presence, in the latter, there is a hiatus between the narrating and the narrated "I".[335] Stepping outside of oneself and speaking of oneself as a character in a story is the condition of writing autobiography. In fact, in autobiographical texts the self is always, up to a point, cast as another.[336] Thus, autobiography as a genre illustrates how the stability and coherence of the self is dependent on the act of self-estrangement, on being able to see oneself as another. In fact, in autobiographical works we observe "in practice" that self must be "othered" to become itself.

[335] On the question of non-identity between the narrating "I" and the narrated "I" cf. Jean Quigley, *The Grammar of Autobiography: A developmental account* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2000), 107. Even though according to the classical definition of autobiography, its author, its narrator and its protagonist are identical (cf. Philippe Lejeune, "The autobiographical pact," in *On Autobiography* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1989), 3-30), there must be at least minimal distancing between the two in order that value judgments might be passed about past experiences. At the very least, the autobiographer must be considered a wiser, more experienced version of his protagonist.

[336] The non-identity between the author and the protagonist in autobiography was probably most forcefully stated in the 1979 essay by Paul de Man, in which it was proposed that autobiography is not a genre, but "a figure of reading and understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts" (Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-Facement," *Modern Language Notes* 94 (1979): 921). De Man then went on to argue (on the basis of his analysis of Wordsworth's *Essays Upon Epitaphs*) that autobiography by calling into being a linguistic representation (a "face") produces a "de-facement" of the author, his effective demise. Linda Anderson explains that according to de Man: "Autobiographies […] produce fictions or figures in place of the self-knowledge they seek. What the author of an autobiography does is to try to endow his inscription within the text with all the attributes of a face in order to mask or conceal his own fictionalization or displacement by writing. Paradoxically, therefore, the giving of a face, prosopopoeia, also names the disfigurement or defacement of the authorial subject through tropes." (Linda Anderson, *Autobiography* (London – New York: Rutledge, 2011), 11- 12).

Furthermore, autobiography (as it is rarely written for one's personal use) creates the paradoxical situation in which the authorial intention to self-create and fashion the image of self for the others to behold unavoidably leads to at least partial loss of control over it. By offering one's life story to the readers, the narrator somehow delegates the question of his personal identity to the public square, as something that ultimately cannot be contained within his authority, as something eminently negotiable.[337] So the very act of taking possession of one's life through narration results in losing control over it as soon as it is read by another[338].

Now, the autobiographer engages in the negotiation of his personal identity within the community of readers which is usually the community with which he feels solidarity, his "group of reference". Writing for the members of this community to be viable must be roughly in harmony with the popular wisdom and the cultural norms embraced by the group. At the same time, it must, to a degree, question and subvert it – if the compliance with the societal norms were complete there would be nothing singular about the life experience recounted and no need for autobiography.[339] So the autobiographer inevitably

[337] Cf. similar remarks in Jerome Brunner's "Self-making and world-making": "Self-making is powerfully affected not only by your own interpretations of yourself, but by the interpretations others offer of your version. One anomaly, of course, is that while Self is regarded (at least in Western ideology) as the most "private" aspect of our being, it turns out on close inspection to be highly negotiable, highly sensitive to bidding on the not so open market of one's own reference group." (Jerome Bruner, "Self-Making and World-Making," *Journal od Aesthetic Education* 25.1 (1991): 76)

[338] Although important for all kinds of autobiographical writing, the presence of the other – the listener/reader is especially paramount in testimonial literature. Without the audience the act of giving testimony cannot happen, the listening other is the necessary prerequisite for testimony to take place. (Cf. Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, *Testimony: crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis and history* (New York – London: Routledge, 1992), especially Chapter II "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening", 57-74)

[339] Cf. "An autobiography serves a dual function. On the one hand, it is an act of "entrenchment", to use Nelson Goodman's term. That is to say, we wish to present ourselves to others (and to ourselves) as typical or characteristic or "culture-confirming" in some way. That is to say, our intentional states and actions are comprehensible in the light of the "folk psychology" that is intrinsic in our culture. In the main, we laugh at

will be lead to portray himself as the same and other with respect to his readers. This notwithstanding, the balance of identity and difference will tend to tip in the direction of the author's identity with his readership, resulting in the possible silencing of certain elements of the story to be told. Needless to say, such life-editing associated with autobiographical writing calls into being another locus of alterity – either instinctively rejected or disingenuously concealed constituents of the self.

Moreover, for the story to be "readable", it must rely on pre-existent models. In his analysis of Western autobiography Jerome Bruner draws attention to the trope of "turning points", i.e. moments which are cast as re-defining the self, often in opposition to its previous configuration. A good illustration of this practice is found in the Bible, wherein practically all the stories of Old Testament patriarchs and prophets, not to mention New Testament figures, are structured according to the "turning points" paradigm. Suffice it to mention Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac, Moses and killing of the Egyptian, Jesus' baptism, the calling of Peter or Paul's conversion on the way to Damascus.[340] It can be said that reliance on the trope of the "turning points" enhances the legibility of texts within the

what is canonically funny, sorrow for what is canonically sad. This is the set of "givens" in a life. But if it is all "givens", then there is no individuality […] To assure individuality (and I am speaking of Western culture only), we focus upon what, in the light of some folk psychology, is exceptional (and, therefore, worthy of telling) in our lives. […] It is the case, then, that a story (to meet the criterion of tellability) must violate the canonical expectancy, but do so in a way that is culturally comprehensible. That is to say, it must be a violation of the folk-psychologically canonical that is itself canonical – that is the breach of convention must itself be conventional" (Jerome Bruner, 71-72)

[340] I am calling attention to the Bible as the most ready point of reference for an average-educated European in XVI century – the time which interests us here. But this seems to be a general rule applicable to the entirety of Western literature. As a matter of fact, we could quote for instance the beginning of Gilgamesh' search for immortality after the death of Enkidu, or the end of "Achilles' wrath" against Agamemnon after the death of Patroclus.

broadly-understood genre of life-writing (biography, autobiography, hagiography, *encomium*, etc.).[341] It makes them appear as sensible and coherent.

Yet the reliance on pre-existent models might amount to more than just recourse to individual literary tropes within a storyline unique in its originality. It can involve modeling the entire story, so that it might fit a ready-made framework. My 2 year old daughter, Natalia, particularly enjoys stories which involve mommies and babies being reunited after a period of separation (e.g. about a kitten who gets lost, but who soon is found by his mom). She feels uncomfortable with tales in which mothers are absent (e.g. *Finding Nemo*) and often "re-writes" these narrations to make them fit her preferred mother – infant paradigm. What is at stake in these "re-tellings" is intelligibility: Natalia understands life and world mainly in terms of mother - infant relationships. It seems that the same principle of intelligibility underlies the instinct to cast one's life-story in terms of the prevalent cultural symbols, such as for instance the tropes of pilgrimage or chivalry in the case of Medieval and Renaissance culture. This urge can be irresistible and destructive as it was in the case of Don Quixote – it might lead to a complete erasure of the individual self in favor of the pre-existent model. But the fabric of real life and the type might also coexist peacefully – as in the case of Dürer's autoportrait of 1550 in which the artist is both himself and Christ.[342] In autobiography the self (as called into being through his individual life-story)

[341] For an inclusive approach towards the various forms of life-writing in the Renaissance cf. *The Rhetorics of Life-Writing in Early Modern Europe*. For an inclusive approach towards the genre of autobiography cf. Georg Misch, *Geschichte der Autobiographie* (Frankfurt am Main: G. Schulte-Bulmke, 1949-1969).

[342] Cf. John Jeffries Martin, "Myths of Renaissance Individualism," in *A Companion to the Worlds of the Renaissance*, ed. Guido Ruggiero (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002), 211.

can be sustained and upheld by alterity (as embodied in the symbolic framework that contributes to its coherence).

Furthermore, autobiography bears witness to the role alterity plays in the shaping of individual selves simply by introducing other characters besides the narrating "I". In telling our life stories we can hardly do it without speaking of our dealings and interactions with others. These encounters are necessary to move the story forward. In fact, they are what gives our story a concrete direction and, even though the autobiographer might choose to exclude some of his experiences from his narration, he cannot do away with the influence of others on the course of his/her life. As the nature of our interactions and relationships with others is not entirely within our control, neither is the shape of our lives, and by extension, our identity. In a way then, the characters in a person's autobiography are its co-writers.[343]

To recapitulate, in autobiographical narratives the *loci* of alterity are as follows: 1) the gesture of appraising oneself as another as the precondition for the writing of autobiography, 2) the recognition of oneself as different from society (a prerequisite for having something to talk about), 3) the suppression of certain elements of one's experience so as not to challenge societal norms in too radical a way (the story must be palatable to the readers) 4) the instability of the written self which is at the mercy of its readers and the implicit recognition of the fact that the self is subject to negotiation within community, 5) the accommodation of alterity as embodied in pre-existing stories: arriving at a vision of oneself as facilitated by the exercise of fitting oneself into an alien mold, 6) the otherness

[343] For the role of others as co-authors of our narrative identities cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (University of Chicago Press, 1992).

of the remaining characters in the story – the encounters with others as the narrated matter and their role as co-authors of the narrated life.

This last dimension, the presence of acting others within the story of the protagonist, although true in all forms of autobiography, is particularly visible in travel narratives. No doubt, it is a matter of degree: these are not the "domesticated" others of the protagonist's own social context, but the incommensurable others from without the cultural framework known to the narrator. These unfamiliar others gain prominence also because of the very nature of travel writing, motivated as it is not only by the urge to tell the story of the narrator, but also to speak of the exotic places and people, a mixture, in fact, of self-writing and world-writing.

Now, there are good reasons to believe that the two are inseparable. Ever since the advent of the theory of indeterminacy in contemporary physics (positing the act of observation as inevitably interfering with the observed phenomena), there has been a growing suspicion that knowledge can never be completely innocent, that it must be understood as "produced" by concrete individuals, shaped for their part, by concrete social and historical circumstances.[344] This has been a problem early recognized by ethnographers, conscious of the difficulties inherent in trying to understand alien cultures on their own terms, leaving aside Eurocentric projections and biases.[345] In fact, ethnography is one of the most self-conscious academic disciplines, preoccupied as it is

[344] In the philosophical world, the suspicion that a detached viewpoint does not sit well with one's subjective standpoint was memorably articulated by Thomas Nagel in his book *The View from Nowhere* (Cf. Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989))

[345] Cf. Bronislaw Malinowski, "Introduction: Subject, Method and Scope," in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (London – New York: Routledge – Dutton, 1932), 1- 25.

with the irresolvable contradiction between its methodology (fieldwork) and the (inevitably disruptive) impact of the presence of European researchers on the structures of societies under study. Famously, Clifford Geertz held that the writing of cultural anthropology inasmuch as it cannot avoid posing the question of authorship is also, up to a point, an exercise in autobiography.[346] In the field of literary studies, the recognition of the role of the personal story of the researcher, and of the historical moment of the study as significant variables at least partially responsible for the results yielded by the study in question are techniques employed for instance by Steven Greenblatt[347] and Walter Mignolo.[348]

The embracing of such a self-conscious perspective would be unimaginable to an academic of the first part of the last century, let alone, to a XVI century author. And yet, in a way, the first-hand stories about the New World preannounce this technique of the post-structuralist scholars in that they put the author of the narration/history "in the picture", so to speak. There is a sense in which this "self-inclusion" makes the authors of travel narratives more honest than the "humanist" historians of the Indies who aspire to authorial invisibility. Of course, some of these first-hand accounts are rather triumphalist in tone, (and perhaps inaccurate in their depictions of the dealings between the Spaniards and the natives), yet they cannot help protagonizing "the others" as "co-makers" of the life stories of their European authors. These are all stories of men "made" by America, even if they are meant to be read as the stories of heroic individuals who came by their success by

[346] Cf. Clifford Geertz, "Being Here: Whose Life Is It Anyway?" in *Works and Lives. The Anthropologist as Author* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 129- 151.

[347] Cf. Stephen Greenblatt, "Preface," in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning, 2nd edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[348] Cf. Walter Mignolo, "Preface," in *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, VII-XXII.

their own effort alone. In a way, the making of Cortés, the vanquisher of Montezuma, was as much his own doing as that of the Aztecs. In other words, regardless of the actual purpose of the narrative, there is a level of the text which, somehow, speaks for the other.

Still, that presence of the Other, is much more felt in the narratives of failure. Failure has a destabilizing effect. The stories our narrators would normally tell themselves about themselves had to be reconsidered: it was necessary to re-imagine the self. Moreover, as people generally have a tendency to blame others when faced with a fiasco, and claim credit for themselves in the case of success, the authors of the narratives of failure were in a better position to recognize their American others' agency. In other words, they were more inclined to see Alterity as a factor in their undoing, and more eager to look at themselves as influenced (or perhaps: hindered) by external factors. In fact, it seems reasonable to claim that ethnographic sensibility in these writers was enabled by the experience of disappointment. The frustration of unfulfilled goals created a situation in which the "Other" had to be seen so that the "I" might reach an insight into itself; observation and introspection had to go hand in hand and complement each other. As a result, the narrators of Cabeza de Vaca's *Ralación*, Cei's *Relazione* and Jean de Léry's *Voyage*, like Bovelles' sage, engaged in two kinds of gaze, one turned inwards and the other: outwards. Moreover, as they attempted to sustain these two kinds of scrutiny simultaneously, they spun narrations in which the two emerged deeply affected by one another[349].

[349] Although in a different context, Massimo Lollini makes a compelling case for a notion of autobiography in which the other is no less important than the narrating self. In an article on Primo Levi he writes: "Levi's autobiographical perspective is focused on a subject inextricably open to the presence of the other […] Levi's works help us appreciate the subject's position in autobiographical text, which is different form that conceived by traditional notions of autobiography. Levi forces us to discover a subject whose memory is

Just as the notion of success conjures up the images of agency, the idea of failure suggests passivity. The experience of failure in drawing attention to passivity not only makes room for the recognition of the agency of other human beings; it also contributes to a perception of the entire environment (including the non-living beings) as endowed with the ability to actively interfere with the plans of the impeded agent. It is no coincidence that in the narratives of failure American Nature is often portrayed as the locus of Alterity, and not simply as "different", but more radically, as foreign, hostile and intractable.[350] Nature's otherness is experienced through the body. The body is weakened by the unhealthy climate, it is affected by the cold, hunger and diseases; it is wounded. It might even become estranged – it becomes the body of another, one belonging to an "Americanized" self which cares not for clothing or a bed to sleep on. Often, it stands in the way of accomplishing what might otherwise be accomplished. All of our protagonists, the would-be conquistador (Cabeza de Vaca), the star-crossed merchant (Cei) and the hapless evangelizer (Léry) experienced in the New World a heightened sense of themselves as corporeal beings. They found themselves in situations in which their bodies became particularly present to them as a result of extreme physical hardships. Their encounter with

driven not by personal remembrance, but by the death of the other." (Massimo Lollini, "Primo Levi and the idea of autobiography," in *Primo Levi. The Austere Humanist*, ed. Joseph Farrell (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004), 77.)

[350] Cf. "In the narrative of failure, the *landscape* disappears altogether as an aesthetic concept or category of perception to be replaced by the *environment*. This includes the geography, climate, flora, and fauna of America, whose qualities, although varying from text to text, are always shown to be negative. The narrator of failure […] always perceives the environment as his worst enemy, relentlessly hostile and threatening." (Beatriz Pastor Bodmer, *The Armature of Conquest. Spanish Accounts of the Discovery of America, 1492-1589* (Standord University Press, 1992), 124)

Otherness in the New World extended thus to what according to Paul Ricoeur amounts to the primary experience of alterity within – the experience of the Alterity of the body.[351]

The choice of *Naufragios* as a *sui generis* introduction to the overall problematic of the second part of this project is motivated by its iconic status within the realm of early Encounter literature. Along with Columbus' diary it possesses within the body of Renaissance Americanist writing a status comparable perhaps to that of *Oratio* within the domain of humanist philosophical reflection.[352] Not only has it been read and re-read countless times by critics (often offering dramatically discordant interpretations), but it was re-written and re-interpreted by several other authors, beginning with a number of early writers on the New World (Las Casas, Oviedo, Gómara, Inca Garcilaso and Antonio de Herrera to name just a few).[353] Cabeza de Vaca's status in popular culture was furthermore consecrated with the production of the eponymous 1991 Mexican film by Nicolás Echevarría.

[351] Cf. Paul Ricoeur, "What ontology in view?" in *Oneself as Another*, 297-356. The second dimension of alterity is "inherent in the relation of intersubjectivity and the third – "in the relation of the self to itself" as embodied in the voice of conscience. (318)

[352] Cf. Margo Glantz, *Notas y comentarios sobre Álvar Núñes Cabeza de Vaca* (México: Conaculta/Grijalbo, 1993). Cf. also Santiago Juan-Navarro, "Constructing Cultural Myths: Cabeza de Vaca in Contemporary Hispanic Criticism, Theater, and Film," in *A Twice-Told Tale: Reinventing the Encounter in Iberian/Iberian American Literature and Film*, ed. Santiago Juan Navarro and Theodore Robert Young (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press, 2001), 67-79; Enrique Pupo-Walker, "Notas para la caracterización de un texto seminal: los *Naufragios* de Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca," *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica* 38.1 (1990): 163-164.

[353] Some aspects of it were transformed within these secondary narrations, notably the aspect of miraculous cures performed by the group of Cabeza de Vaca assumed dimensions never intended by the author. (Cf. Jacques Lafaye, "Los 'milagros' de Álvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca (1527-1536)," in *Mesías, cruzadas, utopías: el judeo-cristianismo en las sociedades ibéricas*, trans. Juan José Utrilla (México City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1984).)

Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's *Relación* is the fruit of the disastrous expedition of Pánfilo de Narváez to Florida undertaken in 1527. Narváez was sent to establish the Spanish Crown's sovereignty over the lands between Pánuco in Northern Mexico and the peninsula of Florida[354], but due to his poor leadership and the incompetence of the expedition's pilot (guilty of underestimating grossly the distances involved), the whole venture turned into an unprecedented fiasco. The *Relación*, known also as *Naufragios* recounts the story of this ill-fated conquest, the hardships of the years the narrator spent among the Indians and his gradual return to the Spanish communities in Mexico.

Nuñez tells us that Narváez' armada which sailed from San Lúcar de Barrameda on June 17, 1527 originally consisted of 5 ships and about 600 men. Of these, more than 140 deserted in Santo Domingo and had to be replaced by others in Cuba. After the loss of two ships and many men in a hurricane, Pánfilo de Narváez decided to winter in Cuba, acquired a pilot and purchased two new vessels to take his now 440 men to Florida. Once in Florida, the disastrous decision was made to abandon the ships and explore the interior of the country. The ships with about a hundred men on board were to sail along the coast in the direction of Pánuco, find a safe port and wait there for the remaining members of the expedition. The meeting never materialized. After searching in vain for a year for Narváez and his men, the ships sailed to New Spain. Meanwhile, the majority of the expedition members explored north-western Florida without finding any of the hoped for riches, facing growing hunger, exhaustion and a creeping sense of futility. Finally, in a desperate effort to leave the inhospitable land by sea 5 makeshift rafts were made and the men headed

[354] "para conquistar y gobernar las provincias que están desde el río de las Palmas hasta el cabo de la Florida, las cuales son en Tierra Firme" (Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, *Naufragios y comentarios* (Mexico, D.F.: Colección Austral, 1985), 15.)

westward in the direction of Pánuco. After initially sailing together, the rafts got dispersed after passing the mouth of the Mississippi. Cabeza de Vaca found himself in charge of one of the rafts, which eventually ran aground on an island in Galveston Bay on November 6, 1528. After a failed attempt to take to sea again, the survivors surrendered themselves to the local Indians, becoming *de facto* their slaves. Once among the Indians they learned of another group of shipwrecks, among whom were Alonso del Castillo, Andrés Dorantes and Estebanico, Núñez's future companions in his trek towards New Spain. The level of mortality due to extreme cold, malnutrition and, in one case, cannibalism (among the Christians themselves) was tremendous. Very soon, out of the total of 80 men coming from two rafts, only 16 were left alive. All of these men, apart from Cabeza de Vaca and two others who were ill at the time, decided to head west in search of New Spain. Our narrator went on living (and trading) among different tribes of the coastal area adjacent to Galveston Island for the next 6 years. At the end of this period, he and one of the other two men who were left behind (the other one died) started on their way towards Pánuco. Confronted with new and fierce natives, Cabeza de Vaca's companion lost heart and decided to return to his original captors. Our narrator, however, was determined to continue his trek, especially having received news of other Spaniards living not far from there. These were the aforementioned Dorantes, del Castillo and Estebanico, who were the only survivors of the original group who left Galveston Island 6 years earlier. From them Cabeza de Vaca learned of the fate of the other expedition members whose rafts were sunk along the coast further west. The stories of their extinction were tales of cold and hunger, but also of cannibalism (again among the Christians) and of execution for trivial reasons by their Indian "owners". After another year and a half among the natives, the four survivors finally

undertake their journey towards Mexico, assuming on the way the role of "holy men" and healers.

The entire *Naufragios* can be read as a narrative of the othering influence of the encounter with otherness. Initially a conquistador-to-be, Núñez was forced to assume a variety of unforeseen roles during his stay among the natives: the slave, the merchant, the healer/shaman. His willingness and ability to adapt to the indigenous ways of life was a crucial factor in his survival and constitutes the leading theme of the narrative. Moreover, these identity adjustments are portrayed towards the end of the *Relación* as enduring even as he finds himself back amidst his own folk. In short, Cabeza de Vaca traces a personal history suggestive in the extreme of a radical discontinuity between the identity of the protagonist as he enters the New World and as he emerges back from it. In fact, many interpreters starting with his early XVI century readers believed it to be a tale of a profound spiritual transformation: a transformation of a ruthless conquistador into a defender of the Indians.[355]

Nevertheless, more recently, many scholars have expressed skepticism as to the authenticity of Núñez's "conversion". These doubts are fed by both textual and biographical evidence, especially Cabeza de Vaca's controversial conduct as the governor of Río de la Plata later on.[356] The *Relación*, according to this alternate reading, is no

[355] Cf. for instance: "A lo largo de ese viaje [...] se producen una serie de inversiones de la realidad comúnmente aceptada según la óptica del lector convencional, bajo el signo general de una progresiva identificación del autor con el mundo indígena que había partido para sojuzgar. Entre otras cosas, los *Naufragios* son el relato de una conversión" (David Lagmanovich, "Los Naufragios de Alvar Núñez como construcción narrativa," *Kentucky Romance Quarterly* 25 (1978): 32). Similar opinions are expressed by Luisa Pranzetti, Sylvia Molloy and Pastor-Bodmer. (Cf. Luisa Pranzetti, "Il naufragio come metafora (a proposito delle relazioni di Cabeza de Vaca)," *Letteratura d'America* 1 (1980): 5-28.)

[356] The most vitriolic criticism of Cabeza de Vaca's integrity was formulated by Juan Maura (Cf. for instance Juan Francisco Maura, "Nuevas aportaciones documentales para la biografía de Álvar Núñez

different from other works of its time and scope. It does not subvert the rhetoric of empire; it simply finds new ways to perpetuate it. Needless to say, Núñez engages in the legitimization of empire in the hope of obtaining kingly recognition and favor.[357] To obtain this favor, one critic argues, the author forges a text which attempts to "relocate" his American experience "from the annals of failure to a space that will allow it to engage a discourse of triumph."[358] Although the *Relación* cannot pretend to speak of any measurable military success, it provides information that can be used to facilitate future conquest.[359] Similar logic governs Nan Goodman's interpretation in which Cabeza de Vaca's famed sensitivity towards cultural difference is read as simply a manifestation of mercantilist ways of thinking[360].

Cabeza de Vaca," *Bulletin Hispanique* 106.2 (2004): 645-685). However, there is a more general tendency to be suspicious of Núñez' story of spiritual rebirth. This tendency is tangible in Enrique Pupo-Walker's "Pesquisas para una nueva lectura de los *Naufragios* de Álvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca" (*Revista Iberoamericana* 53 (1987): 517-539) and quite pronounced in José Rabasa's "Reading Cabeza de Vaca, or How We Perpetuate the Culture of Conquest," in *Writing Violence on the Northern Frontier: The Historiography of Sixteenth Century New Mexico and Florida and the Legacy of Conquest* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000). A number of other authors who share similar views will be named in what follows.

[357] Cf. "un texto que pretende avanzar los intereses de su autor asociándose con la empresa colonial y que a su vez sirve como un instrumento literario para la legitimación del Imperio" (Michael Agnew, "Zarzas, calabazas y cartas de relación: el triple peregrinaje imperialista de Alvar Núñez Cabezade Vaca (Jerusalén, Compostela y Roma)," *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos*, 27.2 (2003): 218)

[358] Claret M. Vargas, "'De muchas y muy bárbaras naciones con quien conversé y viví': Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's *Naufragios* as a War Tactics Manual," *Hispanic Review* 75.1 (2007): 2. The eagerness of Núñez to underscore the "usefulness" of his account for future conquest was noticed already by Robert E. Lewis, the first scholar to talk at length of the author's *Prologue* to his *Relación*. (Cf. Robert E. Lewis, "Los Naufragios de Alvar Núñez: historia y ficción," *Revista lberoamericana* 48 (1982): 681- 694.)

[359] Lee argues that the discourse of triumph is engaged in more direct a fashion: the whole story is really about Núñez' personal success, which proves all the more impressive as it is sketched against the backdrop of the disaster that befell the rest of the expedition members. According to him, Cabeza de Vaca ""translated the official report on the failure of the expedition into a private memoir on the success of a self-ordained saint's missionary pilgrimage" (Kun Jong Lee, "Pauline Typology in Cabeza de Vaca's *Naufragios*," *Early American Literature* 34.3 (1999): 241)

[360] Cf. Nan Goodman, "Mercantilism and Cultural Difference in Cabeza de Vaca's *Relación*," *Early American Literature* 40.2 (2005): 229-250.

One of the main threads of criticism focuses on the literary as opposed to historical value of Cabeza de Vaca's narration.[361] Robert E. Lewis argues that the *Relación* takes on literary characteristics because it purports to be more than just a report on the services rendered to the king. Since there is no material evidence of any such services, the narration itself must become the service: a sort of verbal compensation for the never accomplished conquest.[362] Lewis admits that Núñez' self-interest is what shapes the story, but this does not lead him to dismiss entirely its historical value. Juan Maura, for his part, considers the *Relación* to be largely fictitious, a compelling literary result of an act of cynical dissimulation.[363] Maura's refusal to believe in the image of Cabeza de Vaca as it comes across in his account is grounded in convincing biographical evidence, including facts predating Narváez's expedition.[364] In other words, Maura insists on comparing and contrasting the "real" Núñez and Núñez - the literary creation.

A number of critics tend to be less concerned with the problem of what kind of a person the author "really" was and focus on considering how his "I" is created at the same time as the story of *Naufragios* is told and unfolds. The shortcomings of Cabeza de Vaca,

[361] Cf. Lagmanovich, *op. cit.* and Lewis, *op. cit.* José Rabasa's article "De la *allegoresis* etnográfica en los *Naufragios* de Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca" (*Revista Iberoamericana* 61.170 – 171 (1995): 175-185) is an attempt to overcome this binary opposition.

[362] Cf. "El autor así propone otro tipo de 'servicio', uno que no consiste en grandes hechos que se han llevado a cabo, sino en un recuento de lo que se ha visto y sabido en las tierras desconocidas" (Lewis, 684)

[363] Cf. "Es sabido que Cabeza de Vaca, una vez presentada su versión de los hechos, consigue del emperador Carlos V los títulos de Adelantado, Gobernador y Capitán General del Río de la Plata. Habría que plantearse, por lo tanto, si toda la construcción narrativa de su relato no es otra cosa que una cuidada elaboración de situaciones ficticias y sobrenaturales, combinadas magistralmente con hechos y descripciones reales de las tierras por donde anduvo con otros tres compañeros. " (Juan Francisco Maura, "Veracidad en los *Naufragios*: la técnica narrativa de Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca," *Revista Iberoamericana* 61.170-171 (1995): 187)

[364] Cf. Maura, "Nuevas aportaciones", 645-685.

the hidalgo who wanted to make his fortune serving the Spanish monarch in the Americas, are to all effects and purposes, indisputable. Yet, the divergence between what an individual aspires to be or even believes themselves to be and their actions is a common fact of life. The author might have had an image of himself very different from the one contemporary scholars derive from historical documents. On the other hand, it is not impossible that Núñez was bent on deceit and wrote an autobiographical narration which had absolutely nothing to do with his "true" sense of self. In fact, I don't believe that the question of sincerity can very easily be brushed off, by the postmodern gesture of assuming that the self is a creation existing only on the surface. Yet, for the purposes of this study, we need not look beyond what Cabeza de Vaca wanted to tell us. What interests us here is how the author of *Relación* preferred to portray himself or how he was compelled to think of himself, in the context of the network of relations that circumscribed his place in the world.

I find helpful José Rabasa's suggestion not to put too much emphasis "en la figura de un Álvar Núñez que, habiéndose supuestamente convertido en crítico del imperialismo, vendría al final de los *Naufragios* a abogar por una evangelización pacífica a la 'Las Casas'" but instead to "desentrañar un testimonio mucho más radical sobre la temporalidad y la conciencia histórica que se dan en la vivencia de los encuentros coloniales".[365] Rabasa argues that, regardless of whether or not Cabeza de Vaca emerged from his trek a "new man", his account depicted a new kind of colonial encounter. Núñez portrayed the indigenous world with an unprecedented degree of cultural insight and attention to detail

[365] Rabasa, "De la *allegoresis* etonográfica en los *Naufragios*", 181.

and, at the same time, did not hesitate to expose the fragility of the occidental *mores* under duress. These two elements: the disillusionment in the face of the obvious shortcomings of his own men and the unusual perceptiveness with regard to the native cultures are complementary in *Naufargios*. In a way, within the economy of Núñez' narration, the breakdown of the structures of European society (as embodied in Narváez' leadership, loyalty to the king, solidarity among the expedition members) seems to act as a catalyst for the ethnographic discourse. In fact, as the disintegration of the expedition increases (leading ultimately to Narváez' suggestion that all men fend for themselves), so too does Núñez' ability to observe and understand the ways of life and organization of the indigenous societies.

With the description of the initial stages of his stay among the natives of Galveston Island, there coincide the first genuine observations of the indigenous customs. After the original fear of being sacrificed and eaten is overcome, Núñez begins to notice various aspects of the society of which he now is a part. He mentions for instance the natives' extraordinary love for their children and the long periods of mourning observed by them[366]. In fact, the melting away of all the distinctive markers of European culture (horses are eaten, weapons and clothes lost) creates the discursive space in which the natives might appear, at last, as more than just barbarians: they can be seen as endowed with a culture of their own. As Beatriz Pastor Bodmer points out, the clothes, weapons and horses were, in the New World narratives one of the key features that distinguished the Europeans from the natives and thus, the loss of them must be read as an "absolute dispossession of the

[366] Cf. Cabeza de Vaca XIV, 47-48.

cultural and ideological context that had given the image of the conquistador and his enterprise its identity."[367] Especially, the narrator's shedding of clothes reflects his "loss of contact" with the European culture and his return to a pre-civilized state. He is thus symbolically reduced to the most basic level of humanity in which dichotomies such as that between the conquerors and the conquered lose all meaning and a new kind of gaze might be turned towards the native world.[368] This new kind of gaze is much more attentive and perspicacious than that of the initial stages of the narrative where the indigenous were figured "in cluster" so to speak, as the generic object of conquest.

Moreover, with the disintegration of Narváez' expedition the book begins to operate surprising role-reversals between the conquistadors and the natives. Instead of fearful Indians, we are given timid Europeans[369], instead of enslaved and murdered Indians, we are told of Spaniards reduced to slavery and killed "*por pasatiempo*"[370]. Even more shockingly, in Cabeza de Vaca's account, it is the white men who engage in cannibalism and the Amerindians, who are outraged at such an aberration:

[367] Pastor Bodmer, 137.

[368] Cf. "Así desnudo, el yo sería una suerte de espacio despojado (España ha quedado atrás) que se irá llenando con lo desconocido - América […]. De particular interés son las frecuentes descripciones de los distintos indios: ni hiperbólicas ni interesadas, como las de muchos cronistas que informan sobre el otro a distancia, son éstas, descripciones de un otro cotidiano cuyo contacto da forma al yo. Este contacto, cultural y a la vez específicamente personal, se registra a menudo en el texto (Sylvia Molloy, "Alteridad y reconocimiento en los naufragios de Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca," *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica*, 35.2 (1987): 425-449). An interesting counter-argument is offered by Goodman, who perspicaciously points out that Núñez does not speak of any personal relationships he might have had with individual Indians. In fact, only one native is identified by name. (Cf. Nan Goodman, 240-241)

[369] Cf. e. g. Cabeza de Vaca XII, 45.

[370] Cf. Cabeza de Vaca XVI, 53.

> "cinco cristianos que estaban en rancho en la costa llegaron a tal extremo, que se comieron los unos a los otros, hasta que quedó uno solo, que por ser solo no hubo quien comiese. […] De este caso se alteraron tanto los indios, y hobo entre ellos tan gran escándalo, que sin duda si al principio ellos lo vieran, los mataran."[371]

After the collapse of the expedition, the Spaniards slip into savagery, committing atrocities associated previously only with the aboriginal peoples.[372] Meanwhile, the natives emerge as, at least relatively, civilized in their abhorrence of these acts. In fact, Núñez makes no mention of any tribes practicing cannibalism. Furthermore, as the Europeans turn against each other and consume each other's bodies, the native communities emerge in *Relación* as singularly cohesive, united not only by common custom, but also by strong family ties. As a result, the narrator is forced to see both the Europeans and the indigenous in a different way and must undertake the effort of positioning himself with respect to these uneasy realizations. This leads firstly to the discovery of the natives as defined not simply in terms of privation, i.e. of what they lack with respect to Europeans, but also in virtue of their own culture. Secondly, it results in the discovery of himself as a European man in relation to the Amerindian otherness. His growing understanding of the native culture goes hand-in-hand with his pragmatic (and often necessitated by circumstances) adoption of some of its elements, from nakedness, through alimentary habits, to spiritual practices and rites.

[371] Cabeza de Vaca XIV, 46-47. Further on, one more case of cannibalism among the Spaniards is mentioned (Cabeza de Vaca XVII, 56-57).

[372] Although these passages of *Naufragios* are reminiscent of Montaigne's reflections on Europeans as "cannibals" due to their cruelty towards one another (Cf. Montaigne, *Des Cannibales*), the difference is that here we are faced with literal acts of cannibalism.

Moreover, since Cabeza de Vaca comes into contact with various indigenous groups (first in his role as a trader, then as an itinerant healer) he must constantly be ready to rethink his relationship with the encountered communities. Even in his relatively stable role as a shaman, he is constantly witnessing "new customs" accompanying his party's transferals from one indigenous group to another.[373] In other words, the new order of things is variable and does not afford stability: since it is in constant flow, it requires multiple renegotiations of self-identity on the narrator's part. As Sylvia Molloy put it: *Relación* speaks of "el descubrimiento del yo con respecto al otro, el permanente replanteo de un sujeto ante una alteridad cambiante que determina sus distintas instancias."[374]

In fact, in his dealings with the Amerindians our narrator is caught up in a never-ending, liminal moment, having lost his heretofore role/identity and never unproblematically settled into a stable new one.[375] Liminality clearly marks the initial moments after the disintegration of the expedition when the familiar order of things no longer holds and the new one is as yet to be comprehended. His situation does not change dramatically when definitively despoiled of his European garb and rank, Núñez begins to

[373] The four survivors advance towards New Spain accompanied by natives, from one village to the other. Initially, when received, they perform the healings and are presented by the new hosts with gifts, which they give over to the party which accompanied them heretofore. Later on, the gifts are freely offered to the four "pilgrims" before any actual healings take place (these are also immediately transferred to the previous hosts). In the last stages of the trek, the group accompanying the "holy men" sacks the villages receiving the Spaniards and customarily advises the new hosts that they are to do the same when they take their guests to a new settlement. These modifications of the "routine" are implemented without consultation with Cabeza de Vaca's party.

[374] Molloy, 426.

[375] For the concept of liminality cf. Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); Victor Turner, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage," in *The Forest of Symbols. Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), 93 - 111. Silva analyses in terms of liminality only the moment of the narrator's transformation from conquistador into ethnographer. I prefer to think of the entire history of Núñez' dealings with the natives as marked by an unstable dialectic between belonging and not-belonging.

be conversant with local ways and customs. In the period preceding the trek of the four survivors towards New Spain (occupying chapters 20-36)[376] he assumes different roles (with varying degree of independence) but is as yet reluctant to embrace wholeheartedly the part of the awe-inspiring itinerant healer which he will eventually become.[377] He first engages in full-scale medicinal practices after having escaped with his 3 companions from the fearsome and cruel Mariames to the friendly Avavares. This escape marks also their final assumption of shamanic identity and the beginning of their "pilgrimage" towards New Spain.[378] Yet, the decision to play the part of tribal healers is subordinated to the survivors' ulterior goal of homecoming: it is a transitional identity meant to facilitate their journey towards their old selves. From that perspective, the acceptance of the shamanic status cannot be understood as a transition towards a post-liminal phase, but must be viewed as an extension (albeit under changed conditions) of the liminality that characterized the survivors' previous cohabitation with various native groups.

Moreover, this role is inextricably connected with the fact that he is a white man, i.e. an other, set apart from the rest of the community and as such potentially endowed with

[376] E.g., the two instances of cannibalism by Europeans are related in chapters XIV and XVII respectively. There is a correlation between the "point of view" of the protagonist and his narrated circumstances as far as his perception of the native cultures is concerned. The story of Núñez' vicissitudes among the natives is also one of his growing cultural awareness and cultural adaptation. Cf. "the course of the narration itself […] in the story's unfolding reproduces an emerging process of cultural adaptation and, consequently, physical survival" (Rolena Adorno, "The Negotiation of Fear in Cabeza de Vaca's Naufragios," *Representations* 33 (1991): 164-165)

[377] Initially, he is forced to engage in shamanic practices against his will while among the Indians of Galveston Island (called in the *Relación* Isla de Malhado). He finds the idea ludicrous at first, but complies when denied food. (Cf. Cabeza de Vaca XV, 49-50).

[378] Cf. "With the clarity of vision that hindsight provides, Cabeza de Vaca draws a definitive line at this place in the narration into a "before" and "after. Once freed from their Mariames masters, the group reunited seems to step neatly and unequivocally into a world of friendly natives." (Adorno, "The Negotiation of Fear", 172)

special powers. These powers are perceived as both dangerous and propitious, a possible source of both harm and healing. It is very likely that the survivors' shamanic status among the natives can be at least partially attributed to a troubling tale which had some currency among the natives, the legend about the bearded "Mala Cosa" (Bad Thing) which Núñez somewhat incredulously reports:[379]

> "decían que por aquella tierra anduvo un hombre, que ellos llaman Mala Cosa, y que era pequeño de cuerpo, y que tenía barbas, aunque nunca claramente le pudieron ver el rostro, y que cuando venía a la casa donde estaban se les levantaban los cabellos y temblaban, […] y luego aquel hombre entraba y tomaba al que quería de ellos, y dábales tres cuchilladas grades por las ijadas con un pedernal muy agudo […] y metía la mano por aquellas cuchilladas y sacábales las tripas […] y luego le daba tres cuchilladas en un brazo, y la segunda daba por la sangradura y desconcertábaselo, y dende a poco se lo tornaba a concertar y poníale las manos sobre las heridas, y decíannos que luego quedaban sanos"[380]

The narrator does not seem to be aware of the possible connection between the way he himself and his companions are perceived by the natives and the legend of Mala Cosa. While all in all skeptical about the veracity of the tale, he assumes that Mala Cosa, if real, must be the devil and advises the Indians that the only way to be free from the fear of the evil being is to embrace Christianity. The natives take comfort in the fact that Núñez as a

[379] Cf. Daniel T. Reff, "Text and Context: Cures, Miracles, and Fear in the *Relación* of Alvar Núñez Cabeza deVaca," *Journal of the Southwest* 38.2 (1996): 124 – 127; Adorno, "The Negotiation of Fear", 173-175.

[380] Cabeza de Vaca XXII, 68-69.

Christian considers himself immune from the attacks of the Mala Cosa and in his assurances that while the white shamans are among them they are safe from it as well. The presence of the European men acts thus as an antidote against the evil forces – but the logic behind this seems to be the same that governs a modern-day vaccine – a small and controlled dosage of the harmful to prevent a greater harm. To put it in slightly different terms: through their association with the bearded "Mala Cosa", the four survivors are placed by the natives in the category of sacrum/taboo – set apart as both holy and untouchable/outcast.[381] With respect to the native community they are both in and out, both desirable and unwanted. This can be gathered, among other things, from the way, the "pilgrims" are transferred from one group to another. Despite Núñez' descriptions of the warm welcomes he and his companions receive from each new community, one has the impression that the heretofore hosts are usually quite eager to pass on their guests to a new group. The white shamans, it seems, are just as keenly disposed of as they are welcomed.

The success of Núñez' shamanic career can be attributed to both the Europeans and the natives as active agents.[382] One way to look at it is that Cabeza de Vaca embraces the identity of a holy man as a means to manipulate the natives. As a shaman he finally gains the upper hand and instead of fearing can inspire fear. In fact, the narrator mentions an

[381] On the ambiguity of the categories of *sacrum* and *taboo* cf. Mircea Eliade, *Sacrum, mit, historia. Wybór esejów*, ed. Marcin Czerwiński, tł. Anna Tatarkiewicz (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1970).

[382] Cf. "[…] the expectations of the group are a critical element. For Claude Levi- Strauss, the shamanic complex, consisting of the three inseparable elements of shaman, sick person, and the public, is organized around the poles of the intimate experience of the shaman and of group consensus. In Cabeza de Vaca's narration, and in others of the area in this period, the role of social consensus is obvious. He and his fellows no doubt did cure some psychosomatic maladies, yet this point is subordinate to a more fundamental one: it is not that they became great shamans because they performed cures but rather that they performed cures because they were perceived to be great shamans." (Adorno, "The Negotiation of Fear", 173)

occasion on which he consciously made the indigenous believe that he has the power to make them die.[383] And yet, we don't know how his role was understood by the natives – we can only make guesses based on what slips between the lines of Cabeza de Vaca's narration, as we did in the case of the tale of Mala Cosa. The exact meaning of his role among the natives escapes the grasp of the narrator and ours as readers of *Naufragios*. But we would be mistaken to ignore the existence of a parallel story, running alongside the one told by the shipwrecked Spaniard and slipping in through the cracks in the main narration. The Other claims a voice of his own in the *Relación* through some of the statements the narrator "lets drop", as Adorno puts it.[384] The Amerindian perspective can be uncovered if we are willing to acknowledge that the natives are the un-credited and silenced co-writers of Núñez' story, i.e. that they hold the key to fully understanding what happened to the narrator. The survivors' transferals from one native group to another seem one example of an experience which cannot be fully understood by the Europeans involved in it. In these highly ritualized encounters between different native groups, Cabeza de Vaca and his companions, regardless of how it might appear to them, seem to be a bit of a commodity, a good (or a gift) to be exchanged. Despite their powerful shamanic status they are tokens of trade and sometimes peacemaking between the native tribes. They are used and manipulated by the indigenous communities in their dealings with neighbors and enemies, at the same time as they manipulate and use them to achieve their own goal of safely crossing the land in search of other Spaniards.

[383] Cf. Cabeza de Vaca XXX, 87-88.

[384] Cf. Adorno, "The Negotiation of Fear", 165.

In short, while being a fully-fledged and awe-inspiring shaman, Cabeza de Vaca still functions as a gift or an item of exchange between various indigenous communities. He is not an integral part of any one of them, but inhabits the space in-between. Needless to say, this is the continuation of the intermediary role he played when trading in shells, furs and other native commodities in the mainland area adjacent to Galveston Island. Moreover, he will retain this in-between status once his party makes contact with the Spaniards of Nova Galicia, mediating between the latter and the surrounding indigenous tribes. He will also style himself a mediator between the Amerindians and the Spanish King, making the case throughout his *Relación* for the possibility of a peaceful takeover of the territories described.

In arguing for a non-violent expansion he deliberately displays a sense of loyalty not only to the king, but also to the indigenous inhabitants of the lands crossed. He seems to cherish this in-between status.[385] Alan J. Silva approaches what I call here the in-betweennes[386] of Cabeza de Vaca's identity in terms of hybridization as theorized by Bhabha.[387] Along similar lines, Juan Bruce-Novoa sees in Núñez someone who, as a result of his American experience, resides in a space between two cultures and much like a

[385] Of course, some would say, with a view to capitalizing on it. Cf. for instance Maura's many articles on the subject.

[386] I borrow the idea of realm of "the between" (the metaxological sphere) from William Desmond. (Cf. William Desmond, *Being and the Between* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

[387] Cf. Alan J. Silva, "Conquest, Conversion, and the Hybrid Self in Cabeza de Vaca's *Relación*," *Post Identity* 2.1 (1999): 124-125. In direct opposition to Silva's reading of *Naufragios*, Goodman argues that Cabeza de Vaca "remains throughout his narrative divided by the binary of Self and Other, a far cry from the later, nineteenth-century colonial subject that inspired Bhabha's understanding of hybridity" (Nan Goodman, 229). Rebeca Siegel locates hybridity in *Naufragios* inside the text, as an aspect of its protagonist's make-up, and not of the autor's extra-textual identity, speaking of "discurso híbrido/ transcultural que el autor utiliza para hacer partícipe al lector de una transformación narrativa de sí mismo como personaje de su relato; una transformación discursiva" (Rebeca Siegel, "Transculturación, apropiación y el otro: de Cabeza de Vaca al Capitán Cook," *Prolija Memoria* II.1 (2006): 10)

modern-day *chicano* cannot be fitted neatly into binary categories.[388] I agree with both of these scholars that we cannot consider the return of Cabeza de Vaca to "civilization" to be the moment in which he simply regains his old self. Even after he is back among the Spaniards he still carries the marks of his "othering" experience within. His hybridization cannot be overcome, it is an ineradicable fact. He remains in between and for that reason ambiguous about the exercise of colonial power.

This ambiguity sets him apart from his fellow countrymen – makes him unique and his story eminently "tellable". It certainly testifies to the narrator's concern with the question of what mode of conquest would be morally most acceptable. It projects a vision of what the relations with the natives might/should be, even if the author's later conduct as the governor of Río de la Plata does not live up to his own ideals. Paul Riceour argues that one of the most intimate experiences of otherness is through the voice of conscience: the experience of something within which acts as a judge of one's actions and calls one to responsibility.[389] The narrator's awareness of the injustices of conquest can be considered as precisely such an experience of the Other within through the voice of conscience. Now, in experiencing otherness in the form of an uneasy conscience Núñez in reality can be said to be representative of the Spanish collective identity at the time in which the debates about the legitimacy and methods of conquest were hotly debated.[390] From his own perspective

[388] Cf. Juan Bruce-Novoa, "Naufragios en los mares de la significación: De la relación de Cabeza de Vaca a la literatura chicana," *Plural* 221: 12-21.

[389] Cf. Paul Ricoeur, "What ontology in view?"

[390] Cf. Roger Ruston, *Human Rights and the Image of God* (London: SCM Press, 2004).

(and that of some of his early readers such as Las Casas), the author of *Relación* is himself that voice of national conscience.

Narratively, to achieve the status of the voice of national conscience the narrator must distance himself from his fellow countrymen, must become the figure of the Other. This seems to be the reason why in the Proem Cabeza de Vaca represents himself with the quintessential attribute of the Amerindians – as a naked man. In presenting his *Naufragios* to the Spanish monarch, the author frames it in terms of the only service a man who from his American adventure "emerged naked" can offer.[391] While the nakedness while staying among the Indians was not a matter of choice for the narrator, his decision to "stay naked" and present himself naked in the Proem to the king clearly was. This nakedness brings to mind the image of a newborn emerging from his mother's womb, in fact, this choice of words casts Cabeza de Vaca's American experience in terms of a re-birth. It is also reminiscent of the Pauline theme of the death of the Old Man and the birth of the New. [392] In fact, the narrator portrays himself as a new and superior incarnation of the Spanish colonizer, one who believes in the viability of a peaceful and benevolent coexistence with the natives under the Spanish rule.[393] This was an ideal embraced by many in Spain at the time, so in impersonating the other under the guise of the voice of conscience, the narrator

[391] Cf. "a Vuestra Majestad [...] suplico que [..] reciba [mi relación] en nombre del servicio, pues éste solo es el que un hombre que salió desnudo pudo sacar con sigo" (Cabeza de Vaca, *Proemio*)

[392] The relationship between the *Relación* and Pauline texts will be considered in more detail in the pages to follow.

[393] Cf. Rolena Adorno, "Peaceful Conquest and Law in the *Relación* (Account) of Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca," in *Coded Encounters: Writing, Gender, and Ethnicity in Colonial Latin America*, ed. Francisco Javier Cevallos-Candau, Jeffrey A. Cole, Nina M. Scott, and Nicomedes Suárez-Araúz (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 75-86.

is not breaking away from his community of origin, rather he styles himself a better version of the Spanish national self.

The author's gambit to represent himself as the other/voice of conscience is legitimized by the way the natives themselves saw the "pilgrims". We are told that upon their return to civilization, the Indians who accompanied them along the way reject the notion that they might belong to the same nation as the Spaniards whom they know as oppressors. The natives point out that while Alvar Núñez and his companions heal the sick, the other Spaniards kill even those who are healthy, while the survivors are naked and walk barefoot, the other Spaniards wear clothes, ride horses and wield *lanzas*, while the survivors are foreign to greed, the other Spaniards think only of stealing as much as possible:

> "los indios […] unos con otros entre sí platicaban, diciendo que […] nosotros veníamos de donde salía el sol, y ellos donde se pone; y que nosotros sanábamos los enfermos, y ellos mataban los que estaban sanos; y que nosotros veníamos desnudos y descalzos, y ellos vestidos y en caballos y con lanzas; y que nosotros no teníamos cobdicia de ninguna cosa […] y los otros no tenían otro fin sino robar todo cuanto hallaban"[394]

As a result, the Indians are hard to persuade to leave their "healers" among the Spaniards of Nueva Galicia and it takes the greatest effort to convince them to go home. The narrator chooses to recount this episode from the perspective of the Indians: he lets it be their cognitive horizon which decides the issues of identity and difference. He allows

[394] Cabeza de Vaca XXXIV, 99.

this native perspective to be voiced as a means of giving himself legitimacy as a true "other", fit to speak for the natives. Yet, the Spaniards, we are told, also see the survivors as different/other. In fact, Cabeza de Vaca and his companions are not immediately recognized as compatriots by the first Christians they come across:

> "[...] otro día de mañana alcancé cuatro cristianos de caballo, que recebieron gran alteración de verme tan extrañadamente vestido y en compañía de indios. Estuviéronme mirando mucho espacio de tiempo, tan atónitos, que ni me hablaban ni acertaban a preguntarme nada."[395]

This initial lack of recognition on the part of the Spaniards is the second legitimization of Núñez' otherness. The third one stems from within. It finds expression in the difficulty of identifying with their fellow countrymen, of "putting on" Europe again as experienced by the pilgrims themselves:

> "[…] llegados en Compostela, el gobernador nos recebío muy bien, y de lo que tenía nos dío de vestir; lo cual yo por muchos días no pude traer, ni podíamos dormir sino en el suelo […]"[396]

So far, we considered alterity in the *Relación* as embodied in the otherness of the character with respect to himself (liminality, in-betweenness, hybridity), the otherness of the character with respect to his readers (the voice of national conscience). We also talked about the others acting in the story, the natives as the story's co-writers. What remains is

[395] Cabeza de Vaca XXXIII, 97-98.

[396] Cabeza de Vaca XXXVI, 104-105.

to consider the way Núñez deals with the alterity of the literary tradition, how he invites this otherness to inscribe his own story. The fact that literary tradition is so present in *Relación*, the author's all-pervasive reliance on literary models and types makes it ambiguous, in a way that corresponds to the ambiguity experienced by the story's protagonist. In fact, contemporary readers find Núñez' predilection for portraying himself in situations that call to mind a number of iconic protagonists of Western culture highly disconcerting, even compromising. And yet, the fact that we find auto-representations which rely on typology so unreliable is perhaps the best indication of the difference between our understanding of what a "self" means and the one embraced by the renaissance men and women. We immediately tend to think of the use of typology as indicative of falsity because we believe that the essence of selfhood must be found in the uniqueness of personal experience and we place a great value on the idea of "authenticity". Now, since to be "authentic" one must be true to one's uniqueness, we consider all attempts to fit one's life into a pre-existing mold (a type) to be spurious. Yet, if we are to believe Charles Taylor, "authenticity" is a romantic ideal, originating with Rousseau[397] and arguably, for the Renaissance people representing the self as both an individual and a type was not considered to be as irreconcilably dissonant as it is for us.

The case for that sort of twofold thinking was made by Peter Burke in the context of the visual arts in a study of Renaissance portraiture. Commenting on the disconcerting practice of Renaissance printers who used the same engravings to represent various historical individuals, including their own contemporaries (whose faces sometimes were

[397] Cf. Charles Taylor, "The Sources of Authenticity," in *Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 25-30.

otherwise well-known: a notable example being Dürer), Burke offers the following remarks which might as well be applied to the literature of life-writing:

> "At this point the 'otherness' of the sixteenth century becomes particularly clear. […] There seems to have been a kind of coexistence between a realistic (individual-centered) and a symbolic (or type-centered) mentality. In short, and in conclusion, the apparent dilemma of the historian, whether to describe the Renaissance in terms of realism or symbolism, is a false dilemma, like the choice between individualism and collective identity. There is no choice of interpretation to be made. The coexistence of contrasting attitudes and the tension between them were important structural features of Renaissance culture."[398]

The first palimpsest of the *Relación* is the Bible[399] and perhaps the most obvious model for Cabeza de Vaca's self-portrayal is Saint Paul. The arch of personal story Cabeza de Vaca traces in *Naufragios* (from a conquistador to a defender of the Indians) is highly reminiscent of the story of Paul's calling (from a persecutor of Christians to the apostle of nations). Lee claims that Núñez reconstructs his experiences exactly in parallel with major moments of Paul's life and thereby represents himself as the Spanish Paul among American

[398] Cf. Peter Burke, "The Renaissance, Individualism, and the Portrait," *History of European Ideas* 21 (1995): 398.

[399] Pupo-Walker speaks in the context of literary models of hagiography, but refrains from concluding that this modeling was deliberate. Instead he argues that *Relación* "recupera e integra componentes de [la] tradición hagiográfica y legendaria; tradición convocada […] por un registro de asociaciones que son culturalmente inherentes al peregrinaje que Alvar Núñez nos describe." (Pupo-Walker, "Pesquisas para una nueva lectura de los *Naufragios* de Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca", 522)

Gentiles".[400] He offers a careful analysis of how the narrator in Núñez's story re-creates various moments of St. Paul's biography, finding direct parallels between the two texts.[401]

Another Biblical figure on which Cabeza de Vaca's protagonist is modeled is Moses. The narrator styles himself Moses in the episode of the burning shrub in Capítulo XXI which evokes Ex. 3:1-6. Before the four properly begin their trek, they decide to winter with the kindly and welcoming Avavares. One day, Núñez gets separated from his companions and is lost in the wilderness all by himself:

> "aquella noche me perdí y plugo a Dios que hallé un árbol ardiendo, y al fuego de él pasé aquel frío aquella noche, y a la mañana yo me cargue de leña y tomé dos tizones, y volví a buscar [los indios], y anduve de esta manera cinco días, siempre con mi lumbre y carga de leña"[402]

After this episode, he becomes the most efficacious healer and the effective leader of the group of survivors, leading them, as Moses led the Israelites, out of captivity. Núñez' somewhat exceptional status among the four is corroborated by the most memorable feat of faith healing in *Relación*, the story of the raising from the dead, which occurs almost immediately after the episode of the shrub. At first, it is Castillo, who is approached by the natives and asked to perform the healing on a gravely ill patient. However, Castillo is,

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[400] Cf. Kun Jong Lee, "Pauline Typology in Cabeza de Vaca's 'Naufragios'," *Early American Literature* 34.3 (1999): 241-262.

[401] This leads him to believe that Cabeza de Vaca's narration is largely fictitious, but as argued before, this is a *non sequitur* in the case of Renaissance representations of individuality. Also, the account of the expedition given by Oviedo, who used the now lost *Joint Report* prepared while still in the New World by three of the four survivors (to the exclusion of the non-white Estebanico) does not differ substantially from Núñez' *Relación*. In fact, its main departure from Cabeza de Vaca's narration is Oviedo's decision to omit most of the ethnographic details present in *Naufragios*. (Cf. Nan Goodman, 239).

[402] Cabeza de Vaca XXI, 65.

according to the narrator a "timid" healer and is reluctant to undertake this task. Núñez volunteers to do it in his stead, but when he reaches the village of the sick man, the latter is already dead. Despite this, the narrator prays over him and it is later reported that the man rose, walked, talked and ate again – the vital signs that in the Bible would traditionally be reported about the resurrected persons[403].

This episode is modeled on the raisings performed by Ancient Testament prophets Elijah (the widow's son at Zarephath in 1 Kings 17:17-23) and Elisha (the Shunammite woman's son in 2 Kings 4:19-37) as well as those done by the apostles Peter (a woman called Tabitha in Acts 9:36-42) and Paul (a man named Eutychus in Acts 20: 9-12). Its more immediate models are however the resurrections accomplished by Christ: of the daughter of Jairus ((Mark 5:21–43, Matthew 9:18–26, Luke 8:40–56), of a widow's son at Nain (Luke 7:11-17), and especially of Lazarus (John 11:1-46). The parallel between the figure of our protagonist and that of Jesus runs deep and seems very intentional. In the context of deliberate modeling himself on Christ critics often quote the episode in which the narrator compares his sufferings to those of Christ, as a way of comforting himself.[404] Yet, there are more parallels. The Indians accompany them on their way to New Galicia as the Jews followed Jesus and accompanied him into Jerusalem. Núñez, like Jesus performs

[403] Cf. "[…] vinieron a nosotros unos indios de los susolas y rogaron […] que fuese a curar un herido y otros enfermos, y dijeron que entre ellos quedaba uno que estaba muy al cabo. […] y cuando llegué cerca de los ranchos que ellos tenían, yo vi el enfermo que íbamos a curar que estaba muerto, […] y ansí, cuando yo llegué hallé el indio los ojos vueltos y sin nigún pulso, y con todas señales de muerto, según a mí me paresció, y lo mismo dijo Dorantes. Yo le quité una estera que tenía encima, con que estaba cubierto, y lo mejor que pude supliqué a nuestro Señor fuese servido de dar salud a aquél y a todos los otros que de ella tenían necessidad; […] y hecho esto nos volvimos a nuestro Aposento, y nuestros indios […] se quedaron allá; y a la noche se volvieron a sus casas, y dijeron que aquel que estaba muerto y yo había curado en presencia de ellos, se había levantado bueno y se había paseado, y comido, y hablado con ellos, y que todos cuantos había curado quedaban sanos y muy alegres." (Cabeza de Vaca XXII, 67-68)

[404] Cf. Juan Francisco Maura, "Alvar Núñez: Mesías del Nuevo Mundo," *Mundi* 4 (1990): 97-116.

miracles on the way. He engages in messianic activities such as feeding the hungry, healing the sick and, as in the above mentioned episode, raising from the dead. The four men cross the indigenous lands "bringing peace and reconciliation".[405]

Apart from the Bible the whole story is structured around the cultural symbol of pilgrimage, in particular the pilgrimage to Compostela. In fact, the survivors' final destination in New Galicia is Compostela. The first allusion to the symbolism of Compostela and Santiago are the shells in which Núñez is a merchant among the indigenous populations. Shells were considered an attribute of the pilgrims to Compostela. Also, the symbol of shamanic authority wielded by the four, the *calabaza* or gourd, apart from being meaningful for the natives was also immediately associated by Núñez' contemporaries as an attribute of the pilgrims to Compostela.[406] Moreover, Núñez identifies not only with the pilgrims to the Galician sanctuary, but with Santiago himself. Saint Jacob was considered the evangelizer of Iberia and Cabeza de Vaca aspires to the role of the evangelizer of New Spain. In fact, towards the end of the *Relación* in Capítulos XXXV and XXXVI the narrator mentions his role in persuading the natives to erect crosses and build chapels. He also remarks on the ease of evangelization and the receptivity of the

[405] Cf. "Por todas estas tierras, los que tenían guerras con los otros se hacían luego amigos para venirnos a recebir y traernos todo quanto tenían, y de esta manera dejamos toda la tierra en paz" (Cabeza de Vaca XXXI, 93) Here again, we must consider the example of Dürer's autoportrait in which the artist is himself and Christ.

[406] Originally, the attention to Núñez' skillful manipulation of the native symbol of *calabaza* was drawn by Maureen Ahern. (Cf. Maureen Ahern, "The Cross and the Gourd: The Appropriation of Ritual Signs in the Relaciones of Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca and Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo's Illustrations," in *Early Images of the Americas: Transfer and Invention*, ed. Robert E. Lewis and Jerry M. Williams (Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 1993), 215-244. However, only Michael Agnew pointed to its role in the symbolism of Compostela. (Cf. Agnew, *op. cit.*)

Amerindians to "true religion" due to certain similarities between their systems of beliefs and Christianity.[407]

In the previous chapters particular attention was paid to the humanist treatment of the question of the relation between self and other and the various formulations of the idea that alterity is in one way or another foundational for the formation of a human being (and, by extension, for the emergence of human consciousness, a sense of the self). Pico's *Oratio* explored in particular the theme of divine alterity, Bovelles' *De Sapiente* that of the alterity as embodied in Nature, while Vives' *Fabula* focused on the relationship of the individual with his others in society. In this chapter an attempt was made to trace the othering influence of an experience of alterity more radical than that of the familiar alterity of one's own social group, the experience of America. This discussion was further complicated by the nature of the text under study - the autobiography as itself an exercise in othering and an othering experience. The following two chapters explore two more examples of Renaissance biographical/ethnographic writing.

[407] Cabeza de Vaca XXXI, 93.

CHAPETR VII

GALEOTTO CEI: HOMELESSNESS OF THE SELF

Galetto Cei (1513-1579?), a native of Florence and a star-crossed merchant-adventurer to the New World is the author of an as yet unedited memoir entitled *Dell'origine e progressi della famiglia Cei*[408], and of a *Viaggio e relazione delle Indie (1539-1553)*, published only in 1992.[409] The former is a personal biography told in the larger context of family history.[410] The latter is a more detailed account of one particular period in the life of the protagonist: his New World experience. Although in the pages to follow we will not be concerned with *Dell'origine e progressi*, the work is worth mentioning for two reasons. Firstly, the existence of yet another autobiographical document penned by Cei testifies to the strongly self-reflective temperament of our author. Secondly, it bears witness to his sense of personal identity as inseparably intertwined with an allegiance to his family and native city.[411] Although Cei left Florence in early youth, (he

[408] This manuscript is held by Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze (II, IV, 14). A copy of the text is also inserted under the title of *Memorie di Galeotto di Gio Battista Cei*, in a manuscript collection of *Memorie diverse della città di Firenze e di più famiglie e cittadini della medesima città*, also in the possession of Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze (II, IV, 380, cc. 1-20). Cf. Francesco Surdich, "Introduzione," in Galeotto Cei, *Viaggio e relazione delle Indie* (Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 1992), VII, n. 5.

[409] The lack of an earlier edition and the text's consequent unimpressive circulation is the most fundamental difference between the *Viaggio* and *Naufragios*, which from the moment of their first issue in 1542 became one of the classics of travel literature.

[410] Cf. Paolo Malanima, "Galeotto Cei" in Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani - Volume 23 (1979), 329-331.

[411] In fact, in his very enterprise of writing a book of *memorie* he can be said to identify with the Renaissance Florentine culture, in which this type of writing is particularly abundant. (Cf. Angelo Cicchetti, Raul Mordenti, *I libri di famiglia in Italia, vol I* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1985);

was 16) and was not able to return there until the ripe age of 47, he seems to have always considered himself a Florentine. Moreover, our author's biography (the disgrace and execution of his father for political reasons, the confiscation of family assets, the long exile) suggests that he might have felt some urgency to reclaim that identity. In fact, a certain solicitude to make himself and his text as Florentine as possible is felt throughout the *Viaggio*, starting from the dedicatory prologue addressed to another Tuscan merchant, Bartolomeo Del Bene.

In this dedication Cei declares that he took up the task of writing as a result of a streak of jibes, questions and rebukes from both friends and enemies. Among those inquiring about his American experience were some genuinely curious about the "Indies", some keen on finding something to laugh about, some wondering about his reasons to go and his reasons to stay in America for such a long time and - the largest group - those wondering why he came back poor.:

> "Da diverse punture, dimande et riprehensione sono stato trafitto in questa mia tornata d'India, così da amici come nimici et da malivoli, che mai non mancano alcuni per sapere le cose di là, giusto et honesto desiderio; altri per tenere di che ridere, chi per sapere la causa di mia andata, chi di tanta tardanza, et li più perché sono tornato povero come se fussi vituperio a tornare di là sanza un gran thesoro"[412]

Raul Mordenti (ed.), *I libri di famiglia in Italia, vol 2* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2001); Leonida Pandimiglio, "Ricordanze e libri di famiglia: il manifestarsi di una nuova fronte," in *Lettere italiane* 39 (1987): 3-19; Fulvio Pezzarossa, "La tradizione fiorentina della memorialistica. Con un'Appendice: Per un catalogo dei testi memorialistici fiorentini a stampa," in *La "Memoria" dei mercatores. Tendenze ideologiche, ricordanze, artigianato in versi nella Firenze del Quattrocento*, ed. Gian-Mario Anselmi, Fulvio Pezzarossa and Luisa Avellini (Bologna: Patron Editore, 1980), 39-149).

[412] Galeotto Cei, *Viaggio e relazione delle Indie, 1539-1553*, ed. Francesco Surdich (Roma: Bulzoni, 1992), 1.

This careful profiling of the target audience at the outset of the text signals both a certain apologetic impulse and a heightened sense of self-consciousness experienced by the author.[413] Although the title of the *Viaggio e relazione delle Indie* itself promises a tale of exotic people and places, the dedication creates the contrary impression, namely that Cei will be far less invested in representing America than in narrating himself against the backdrop of the New World. As it turns out, *Viaggio* strikes a compromise: apart from the justificatory/autobiographical motivation spelled out in the dedication, it is also very strongly driven by a descriptive passion. As a result, America emerges in Cei's account as a real protagonist, being allotted about the same amount of narrative space as the main character – the merchant himself. This is symbolic of the intimate bond existing between the two: America gives birth to Cei – the protagonist of *Viaggio*, and at the same time, she herself takes shape for the reading community through him.

This interdependence between the autobiographical and the descriptive dimensions in Cei's text is premised on a logic similar to that governing the paradigmatic Florentine autobiographic writings of the time, offering a portrayal of the author as a part of a larger canvass including his family/lineage and his times.[414] From this angle, the life of a man cannot be explained outside of the context of the history of his family, that of other members of his trade/profession, and of the republic itself: the autobiographer's relations

[413] It is worth noting that unlike Núñez, who thought of the king as his paradigmatic reader, Cei feels forced to explain himself to his peers.

[414] I am referring here to the predominant tradition of *ricordanze* and *libri di familia* rather than the more immediate precursors of modern autobiography, such as Petrarch's *Letter to Posterity*, Alberti's *Vita*, Cellini's *Vita* or Cardano's *De vita propria*.

with these "others" make him what he is.[415] Travel narratives, in their even greater reliance on telling of something other than the protagonist in order to make him understandable, take this practice to a whole new level. Otherness weighs more heavily on such narratives first and foremost due to the utter unfamiliarity of the context in which the protagonist is featured. Moreover, in this type of writing, the very existence of the traveler as a literary protagonist depends on the description of the places visited. The travel experience is constitutive of the travel-writing self and as such it paradoxically becomes part of the innermost self. Unwittingly then, the travel accounts upset the categories of "own" and "foreign". As a result, they are inescapably ambiguous about their own locus of enunciation and never can be said to have been written "at home", regardless of where the writing process occurred. In fact, travel literature is an intermediate zone, a place between the Old and the New Worlds, perhaps the only place that the traveler can call his own.

And yet, there is a sense in which all travel writing is meant to facilitate return. The dedication clearly frames Cei's writing as a sort of ritual of home-coming. It is suggestive of the author's gambit to narrate himself back from America, into the fold of his own townsmen, and out of the danger zone of censure and ridicule. America, inasmuch as it is the place of the author's financial fiasco, is a stigma which has to be addressed and Cei's text is meant to do precisely that. In a way, the author is moved by the urge to disown it, as a means of reclaiming his credentials at home, reasserting his sense of belonging with his readers/compatriots and restating his self-identity as a member of the merchant class. And yet, he also somehow realizes that the only way of achieving these goals is through

[415] Cf. Francesco Guicciardini, *Ricordi, diari, memorie*, ed. Mario Spinella (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1981); Lorenzo Ghiberti, *I commentarii*, ed. Lorenzo Bartoli (Firenze: Giunti, 1998).

fully embracing his American experiences and taking possession (narratively) of this troubling portion of his life.

Prima facie, it seems that Cei assumes the position of his critics in choosing to speak of the years spent in the New World in terms of a fiasco. Talking about his participation in the expedition to the province of Venezuela lead by Juan Carvajal, the author expresses a sense of loss and deplores having wasted "oltra alli danari et disagio, [...] el migliore tempo di [...] vita con assai pericoli."[416] And yet, he distances himself from those who judge everything from a myopically economic point of view:

> "ho preso questa fatica di porre scripte quelle cose mi sono accadute in processo di 14 anni, che con Piero Aretino posso dire havere gittati via, secondo al giuditio di quelli che giudicono el tutto dalle riccheze et che senza esse si morrieno di fame in un forno di stiacciate."[417]

In the light of this ambiguous reference to Aretino, one is tempted to believe that while paying lip service to the notion of having squandered a significant portion of his life in futile pursuits, Cei is also attracted to the idea that money is not the ultimate gauge of everything and that there exists a kind of wealth which can hardly be cashed-in. In fact, the author implies that the experience he gained in America is an example of precisely such a kind of non-pecuniary capital. Furthermore, this experience is forged into a story, yet another asset, albeit unquantifiable. In other words, like Cabeza de Vaca, Cei thinks of his narrative as a means of exorcising the experience of personal failure, of turning it into

[416] Cei, 41.

[417] Cei, 1.

something valuable. What is at stake in both cases is personal prestige, for the lack of financial gain is, in the eyes of Cei's target readership, as disconcerting as the failed conquest is in the eyes of the audience of Cabeza de Vaca. Both transgressions can be alleviated if life experience and autobiographical storytelling can be recognized as possessing a value of their own. Núñez claims such value for his account in framing it as potentially instructive for the members of future expeditions to Florida. Cei, although openly eager to cater to his readers' curiosities, even if they should be frivolous (cf. dedication), also includes advice and suggestions useful for those who might wish to invest in the "Indies".

Another kind of "fortune" which Cei's readers might be reluctant to recognize as such is life itself. In fact, the author thinks himself lucky (it. *fortunato*) to have come back alive, even though destitute. Witnessing many a premature death of other Europeans taught him to consider himself wealthy, even if the only possession retained should be that of his own life. [418] The untimely deaths reported by the author are always in one way or another attributable to the nefarious influence of the New World, either as a result of its natural features (unhealthy climate[419], flora and fauna[420]) or as a consequnece of the actions of its

[418] Cf. "mi pare essere tornato ricco poi sono vivo e sano" (Cei, 76). Cf. also "vi affermo che da cento vanno a India se ne perdono novantocto, di modo che mi contento di essere tornato nel numero de dua per cento con la mia povertà" (Cei, 1)

[419] Cf. the harmful influence of climate on European men: "Se vi va un gran mangiatore, o uno di grandissime forze, avanti passi l'anno, ne perde la metà. Li huomini, cioè maschi, vi stanno sempre con pochissime forze, deboli, sdilinquiti per il gran caldo e sudori. […] È paese molto contrario a huomini sanguigni di pelo rosso, et biondi: così gran mangiatori e golosi non vivono molto tempo et sempre infermi." (Cei, 7); "La maggiore parte delle donne vi muoiono è di parto: non è che muoiono sul partorire, o per non potere partorie, ma dopo el parto, di spasimo, perché el caldo vi è si vehemente che non possono sopportarlo et l'humidità et li venti vi sono sottili che, inviscierandosi un poco, subito entra loro nei nervi perché la carne et li pori vi sono sempre più aperti che ne' paesi freddi" (Cei, 8)

[420] This will be discussed more fully in the following pages.

inhabitants, including those of European descent.[421] America in the *Viaggio* is depicted as an Other which, although having claimed and continuing to claim many victims, was nevertheles unable to crush Cei himself. The narrator survived, but to strenghten his grip on life he must go beyond staying physically alive. He must make an effort to remember and tell the story of his narrow escape.[422] If the American experience is not remembered, a part of his life and a significant element of his personal identity is lost to the Otherness of the New World. In order not to be absorbed into that shapeless Alterity, he must instead invite it to become a presence within his own sense of identity and let it be spoken through him. Ironically then, the price for taking possession of the traveller's self, is giving voice also to the American Otherness. Not surprisingly, this results in a conflicted text, a text, in fact, which in some of its aspects seems to contradict its own *raison d'être*.

A striking example of this internal tension of the *Viaggio* is the all-pervasive use of the personal pronoun "we" when talking about the European communities in the New World and exclusively "you" when speaking of the European perceptions thereof.[423]Although the use first person pronouns (either "I" or "we") is unavoidable in an autobiographical text, Cei uses the group designator "we" not only to describe personal

[421] Cf. for instance the arbitrary decisions and lawless conduct of the Spanish governors of the settlement of Toccuyo, especially Carvajal. (Cf. Cei, 46 – 49).

[422] Although Cei's account is, no doubt, a story of survival (perhaps even a way of dealing with the trauma of his American experience), it is not a piece of testimonial literature in the way this genre is normally understood when applied to the literature of the Shoah. Cei does not intend to speak for those who perished and cannot speak for themselves (Cf. Massimo Lollini, "Primo Levi and the Idea of Autobiography", 75-77). He speaks on his own behalf only and as a part of a strategy of survival which extends beyond the moment of safely reaching the native shores.

[423] Cf. "Indi che mangiano carne humana si chiamano Caribes et non Canibali, come dite qua" (Cei, 13); "[…] provincia di Vicaptan, che qua dite al Temistitan" (Cei, 15); "Et di questa ultima sorte facciamo noi Cristiani el vino per bere" (Cei, 17); "Tuna, o comobo, dichiamo noi, in India" (Cei, 31); "I rami di questo albero servono per pietra e fucile, con che l'Indi et noi Cristiani accendiamo el fuoco" (Cei, 33); etc.

events, but also to talk about the ways of life and various practices common in the New World. This could be interpreted as an element of a strategy aimed at reinforcing the credibility of the *Viaggio* as an eyewitness account.[424] Yet, the personal pronoun "we" is also regularly accompanied by the present tense – a feature which is unnecessary in that respect and must be considered a matter of stylistic choice.[425] As a result, even though *Viaggio* is meant to bring its author back into the fold, Cei's use of personal pronouns and verbal tenses does not reflect the narrator's allegiance to his compatriots in Florence, nor even a double allegiance, which could be conveyed by the use of a parallel expression along the lines of "we back home". In fact, this is never done. On the contrary, Cei's persistent use of the pronoun "we" and the present tense when speaking of the ways of life adopted by the Europeans overseas indicates rather a certain lingering sense of belonging to the colonial communities even as he is narratively searching for the way home.

On the other hand, the urge to come home is a pervasive theme throughout the text. It is initially brought up in the context of his friends' insistence that he should take a wife and settle down in Santo Domingo. Ironically, the intention to eventually go back, on this and subsequent occasions, sends him even further from home as he begins to look into

[424] The narrator is quite adamant about the trustworthiness of his account, drawing almost exclusively on his own experience and, forewarning the reader when reporting hearsay. Cf. for instance: "secondo dicono, che io non vi sono stato" (Cei, 21); "creda chi vuole, che io non so se ma la credo" (Cei, 23); "secondo si dice, ancora che io non l'ho visto" (Cei, 23); "ancora che io non li ho visto fare questi miracoli" (Cei, 32); "Se è cosa da credere o no giudichi ciascuno quello li pare: io non lo so se non per udita" (Cei, 80); "Io non ho mai visti et questa cosa ve la vendo come la comperai" (Cei, 120) etc.

[425] Cf. for instance: "Noi altri contrattiamo con loro più per forza che per amore, dando loro di que' paternostrini, sale, uccelli […]" (Cei, 84); "Noi Cristiani costumiamo di armarci, andando alla guerra, simile e cavalli." (Cei, 87); "detti rami […] ci servono tagliati con le foglie a coprire capanne per dormire al coperto" (Cei, 104)

business opportunities beyond the island of Hispaniola.[426] He conjures up a plan to go to Peru, but a vice-royal ordinance prevents him from doing so.[427] Eventually, he is persuaded to join an expedition to the province of Venezuela (1545), chiefly "per non stare in Santo Domingo a spendere et sentire importunazione di mariaggi".[428] Even as he ventures further and further into the American interior as a part of the aforementioned expedition, the protagonist's long-term goal remains the same: collecting enough money to be able to return to Spain with a bit of profit. His prospects of doing so within a reasonable period of time become bleaker once the expedition members establish the village of Toccuio/Toccuyo. There ensue the years of very restricted freedom of movement, during which Cei repeatedly attempts to obtain the successive governors' permission to leave the settlement. These appeals to authority remain unheeded for 5 years and the protagonist remains trapped in the American interior despite his determination to depart. By the time he is finally allowed to leave the village in order to sell his cattle in the province of New Granada (1550), he has accumulated a significant patrimony and some of his friends try to persuade him not to risk it in an uncertain venture.[429] This advice notwithstanding, Cei

[426] Cf. "Come questi si maritorno cominciorno ancora loro a conquidermi perché facessi altanto […] et, perché la vita di detta isola, nè d'India, mai mi contentò, per fuggire queste importunità cominciai a fare viaggi sotto diversi colori" (Cei, 37).

[427] Cf. Cei, 40.

[428] Ibid.

[429] Cf. "non mancorno predicatori in contrario, mostrando con vive ragioni che la fatica era passata et che già nel popolo dove stavamo vi era bestiami assai et che non mi mancava già carne, latte, polli, fructa et grano senza andarlo a rubare et, con l'aumento de' bestiami, potevo comperare alla giornata i mia bisogni e che tenevo 3 cavalli in istalla, 20 Indie et Indi di servizio et ragionevolmente vestito et che non ero delli ultimi del popolo, ma sempre chiamato fra li primi e […] non che fare quello, mi converria andare come vò al presente" (Cei, 55)

chooses freedom over the comfortable life in Toccuyo, where he cannot be a master of himself.[430]

This decision is perhaps the only instance in the whole of Cei's account where the protagonist's concern for his material well-being is overshadowed by other considerations. In fact, throughout the *Viaggio,* the narrator carefully constructs an image of himself as compliant with the values professed at home, primarily those pertinent to responsible money management. The narrator's sense of embarrassment at his financial failure so palpable in the dedication unfolds into an exceptional eagerness to explain to his business-minded compatriots that it should not be attributed to a lack of entrepreneurial abilities. Cei portrays his decision to embark on and then to persevere in his American enterprise as strictly business-related. He is always depicted as driven by some practical and gain-oriented reason, with the notable exception of the aforementioned decision to leave Toccuyo. And yet, in portraying himself as cherishing freedom more than anything else, Cei does not undermine his claims to a Florentine merchant's identity, but rather furthers them by appealing to the value system of the Italian city states. By the same token, disinterested adventurousness not being particularly esteemed among his target audience, the narrator never explicitly refers to any sense of excitement he might have felt at the prospect of exploring heretofore unknown lands.[431]

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[430] Cf. "in quanto a me, mi bastava uscire di quella provincia, andare dove fussi libero" (Ibid.)

[431] Although adventurousness and curiosity are never portrayed as significant factors in the protagonist's decision making process, Cei recounts an episode in which he decides to investigate for himself an unlikely story about a lake monster reported by one of his friends. Unable to find equally inquisitive (or brave) companions he goes off by himself and spots two strange creatures. Eager to continue his observations the next day, he tries to convince some friends to accompany him, to no avail: "così mi rimasi con questa voglia, nè mai in altri luoghi ne viddi, nè quivi intorno, che vi passai altra volta et mai ne possetti vedere" (Cei, 63)

Autobiographical writing is always, at least to a certain extent, motivated by a need of validation which is expected from the sympathetic readers. This is why the autobiographer cannot portray himself as too radically different from his prospective audience.[432] The readers are a presence of Otherness within the autobiographical text inasmuch as the narrating I can never be truly intimate with the narrated I: the two are never left alone. This seems especially true of Cei's account, for his pining for validation is motivated by a sense of inadequacy or even shame. In the attempt to make himself more like his audience, he strives to explain his financial debacle in the New World as a result of external difficulties rather than personal shortcomings or reckless love of adventure. Apart from depicting himself as governed by the type of rationality typical of the merchant class, his chief strategy consists of debunking the myth of America as the land of plenty. This is done as early as the dedicatory pages and throughout the text:

> "[T]utte le parti et provincie d'India, paese tanto grande [...] invero non sono [... ricche], ma di molte et infinite poverissime, che chi lo sa si maraviglia come vi si viva da que' poveri Cristiani ci si trovano, acciecati et ritenuti da questa vulgare oppinione, et più presto vogliono starsi là a stentare che tornare poveri a casa loro, et così li più vi si conducono per pazia e vi stanno per vergogna."[433]

[432] This point was discussed in the previous chapter.

[433] Cei, 1. The same reasoning (and very similar wording) resurface again well into the main body of the *Viaggio*: "stetti in detta ciptà di Tungia sino in fin di febbraio proximo, che mi partii per andare al porto di mare, quando me ne venni di poi a Spagna, et, perché in fine di questo mio ragionamento dirò di questo viaggio, sendomi ditenuto nel contarvi el successomi sino qui forse troppo, ma, volendo dare risposta a chi m'incolpa di essere tornato povero, mi è convenuto essere più lungo di quello harei pensato et mi pare essere tornato ricco poi sono vivo e sano, poiché mia fortuna mi condusse nella più misera parte di tutta l'India, che di molti ancora pensono tutta la India essere el Perù, o il Perù tutta l'India s'ingannano ch'è il pure come dire Italia in Europa, et che ciascuno non vi possa andare già ho detto essere proibito dal re di Spagna" (Cei, 76) Emphasis mine.

America is not a land of indescribable riches. In fact, most of it is extremely poor and the life of the Europeans who go there has very little of the glamour so often associated with it.[434] The real conditions of life in the New World remain unknown to the European public because only the lucky few who come back rich ("que' pochi che tornono con le miglia") receive attention and the uncountable stories of those who barely survive or die there ("quelli che vivono là stentando et vi si muoiono miseramente"[435]) remain untold. Although not attempting to speak on behalf of other hapless New World adventurers[436], Cei nevertheless reminds his readers of their forgotten existence as a part of his self-justificatory strategy. Producing a more accurate image of the New World and telling about the hard-knock realities of life there is meant to shed a more favorable light on his own difficulties. In fact, not even Peru lives up to its legend:

> "v'è tanti poveri, […] che, se non sono quelli che hanno Indi et ripartimenti, tutti son poveri et questi vivono sempre impegnati perché è costume e leggie, nel Perù e in tutta l'India, che chi è signore di ripartimenti d'Indi tenga casa aperta et, sendo nel Perù sempre guerra et ribellioni, bixogna s'intrattenghino con li soldati et che spendino con loro assai, così in tempo di pace per averli amici nella guerra, per non essere preda di tutti et, valendovi ogni cosa caro, spendono più di quello hanno di entrata e tutto el guadagno se ne portono i mercanti, i quali sono ancora taglieggiati, et quelli che mandano danari a Spagna sono rubati nel camino da'Franzesi, o in

[434] Cf. "sono popoli non vi vorrei stare dipinto, ancora sia stato in simile e peggio" (Cei, 124)

[435] Cei, 1.

[436] Cf. above.

Spagna li toglie el re, et così si semina questo oro per tucto el mondo, contra la volontà delli Spagnioli"[437]

Cei's project of demystification is global. His report, as well as being "a disenchanted epopee of the daily existence in the New World"[438], targets the deepest structures of the colonial mindset in showing the illusory nature of the wealth generated by the conquest. In fact, in questioning the myth/symbol of Peru, it undermines the logic of the colonial enterprise itself. This of course, situates *Viaggio* on the opposite pole with respect to the narratives of success, which are more readily associated with the New World writing, and in which marvel at the novelty of America goes hand in hand with providential explanations of the "discovery" and conquest.[439] In general, Cei is quite indifferent to the grand-narrative of European domination according to which God himself willed, and hence, sanctioned European territorial expansion in the New World. One obvious reason for this is that Cei is not a Spaniard and he observes the colonial mores and institutions with a degree of detachment, often mixed with impatience. He is not keen on glorifying his own share in the "discoveries", nor is he interested in singing the praises of the Spanish

[437] Cei, 76.

[438] Cf. "el florentino no cedía a la tentación de suplir con la fabulación la riqueza material que no había podido alcanzar, sino que elegía contar el viaje en su concreta y escueta realidad, hasta recrear una desencantada epopeya del cotidiano en el Nuevo Mundo." (Amanda Salvioni, "El desencantamiento del Nuevo Mundo. Viaje de un mercante florentino al país de la pobreza. (Galeotto Cei, 1539-1553)," *Revista de Critica Literaria Latinoamericana* 30.60 (2004): 169.)

[439] Cf. "The main paradigm for the appropriation of the New World was […] a language of marvels which would inscribe territorial expansion and profit-seeking within a providential plan" (Joan-Pau Rubiés, "Futility in the New World: Narratives of Travel in Sixteenth-Century America," in *Voyages and visions: towards a cultural history of travel*, ed. Jaś Elsner, Joan-Pau Rubiés (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 77)

Crown's civilizing/Christianizing mission.[440] In fact, the editor of Cei' account, Francesco Surdich, compares it to Benzoni's programmatically anti-Spanish *Historia*.[441] Although there are limitations to this comparison, Cei's sober and often cynical gaze makes of him a similar kind of "anti-Columbus" with his own, very particular vision of the nature of the American "marvelous". In fact, in Cei's text:

> "the nature of the marvelous is transferred from the particular observations of strange peoples and exotic products to the unexpected realization of overall material poverty and moral corruption. The merchant does not become wealthy because the Indies are not what they are supposed to be – and this distorted response to European desires becomes the key marvel, the marvel of unexpected truth."[442]

In other words, the marvel of America for Cei is the discovery that it just is not that marvelous. The sense of excited surprise experienced by Columbus and other earlier explorers, in Cei's text often becomes the sense of a surprise afforded by a cruel joke, a mockery, a *beffa*. "*E così rimanemmo beffati*"[443] remarks Cei as he reports on one of the exploratory expeditions in which the settlers of Toccuyo instead of finding another Peru come across a tribe of Indians barely familiar with gold. Cei does not simply reject the language of marvel – on a few occasions he marvels for instance at the abundance of

[440] Cf. Nathalie Hester, "Bitter Laughter and Colonial *Novellistica* in Galeotto Cei's *Relazione delle Indie*," in *Travel, Discovery, Transformation*, ed. Gabriel R. Ricci (New Brunswick- London: Transaction Publishers, 2014), 244.

[441] Cf. "la relazione di Galeotto Cei rappresenta […] una fonte di primaria importanza rispetto alla quasi totalità della coeva cronachistica iberica, ufficiale o meno, logicamente improntata ad esigenze di natura apologetica e/o giustificatoria, e vada ricollegata in qualche misura a quella di Girolamo Benzoni, con la quale presenta alcuni punti di contatto ed affinità" (Surdich, "Intoduzione", V).

[442] Rubiés, "Futility in the New World", 91-92.

[443] Cei, 53.

American Nature.[444] Nevertheless, the unpleasant surprises by far outnumber the positive ones and range from the mostly unhealthy climate and hostile landscape to weakened and demoralized *criollos*, lecherous women, disreputable mestizos, antagonistic natives and incompetent authorities. The passages dedicated to the human communities, in particular the remarks concerning the colonial society of Santo Domingo, are amongst the bitterest, most scathing, unsympathetic and biased to be found in the text. They are full of generalizations about different categories of people inhabiting the island, none of which can be said to have gained Cei's favor.

In fact, in these initial pages, Cei's tone is that of profound resentment. He has no sympathy for any members of the colonial society with the rare exception of a few of his countrymen. The men of Santo Domingo are the very opposite of good citizens. They are dishonest and unreliable liars who have no respect for law:

> "Li huomini, parlando sempre di Cristiani, vi sono molto vili. […] Quivi non si truova verità, honestà, carità, né virtù alcuna. Chi può rubare non si cura d'essere tenuto ladro, né di mancare parola, né fede, n'è d'essere castigato per giustizia."[445]

The Christian women of that city are lascivious and given to all sorts of vice. They do not obey their husbands, neglect their households and drink excessively:

[444] Cf. "Diverse altre quantità di pesci et di più sorte […] sono in detti fiumi e stagni maxime in que' piani, che è una meraviglia da non lo potere credere chi non lo vedesse" (Cei, 117); "Presso al mare ho visto, in certi tempi dell'anno, passare tanti grilli, o cavellette, o locuste che è una maraviglia" (Cei, 119).

[445] Cei, 9. Cf. also: "li huomini, cioè maschi, vi stanno sempre con pochissime forze, deboli, sdilinquiti per il gran caldo e sudori" (Cei, 7); " li huomini, parlando sempre di Cristiani, vi sono molto vili" (Cei, 9); "erono molto pigri, dati all'ozio, come sono tutti l'Indi [...] pare el paese lo causi, che i Cristiani diventono anche loro così" (Cei, 18)

"Le donne cristiane in questa isola […] dominano li huomini, et sono in una sola cosa dissimili alle Amazone, che, dove queste tenevano un huomo per dieci donne, queste ne vogliono dieci per una […] Sono le venute di Spagna, et le nate quivi, calide, sfacciate, senza vergogna, né honestà, né rispetto […] Vergognonsi di saper cucinare et lavorare, loro studio et passatempo è lisciarsi straordinariamente, andare a spasso et banquectare l'una l'altra et di tale commodità ne risulta el resto et, dove in Ispagna poche sono che beano vino, là se ne trova pochissime beino acqua."[446]

The mestizos are lecherous, prodigal and cowardly:

"[i mestizi sono] dati a ogni vitio di donne, giouco et gola, lascionsi ingannare da tutti et prodighissimi che, ancora sieno lasciati ricchi da' padri loro, in poco tempo consumano ogni cosa, che sono come Indi che non si ricordano mai di quello sarà domani. Hanno poca fermezza, virtù nessuna, vili et dappochi et per ogni piccola adversità si sbigottiscono et piangono come bambini senza vergogna et senza honestà, né rispetto"[447]

It is clear that in these initial passages the inhabitants of the New World are portrayed as utterly *other* and Cei, as the observer situates himself at the opposite pole with regard to them. His sense of allegiance is not yet textually problematized, he speaks from a purely European perspective, as if recalling his first impressions of America. This is the

[446] Cei, 8. Cf. also: "et sono tanto calide, infocate et lussuriose che mi pare impossibile, alle cosec he fanno, che dorma un giovane con una di loro senza innamorarsene, et esse si guastano di lui tanto svisceratamente, che non rispettono mariti, né parenti, ma, senza alcuna vergogna, cercono et pigliono el piacere loro et di molted anno la roba, ma dura questo loro amore tanto quanto durano a trovare un altro che piaccia et in un subito si danno a questo et lasciano quello, come se mai l'havessino conosciuto"; "vivono al loro piacere, sommerse nella lussuria, nella gola et nella superbia del vestire" (Cei, 8)

[447] Cei, 12.

perspective of somebody freshly arrived, somebody who has not yet been affected by the corrupting influence of the country's climate, which within a few years turns the most respectable European men, women and youth into "perfect Indians":

> "vi si vede venire huomini vecchi, giovani, donne et fanciulle costumatissime et quello che in tutte quelle parti si può desiderare in persona nobile et dabbene, et in processo di poco tempo perdere la vergogna et farsi un perfetto Indio in tutti sua modi di vivere"[448]

Becoming a "perfect Indian" is of course shorthand for becoming "othered" or failing at what is expected of a legitimate son or daughter of Europe. The actual "Indians" described in the *Viaggio* cause the narrator far less scandal than the "adoptive" ones, i.e. those who under the influence of the New World embrace disreputable habits. The narrator describes the characteristics of several indigenous groups with little sympathy for the human qualities of the natives, but with some ethnographic detail, a vivid curiosity about their customs and a remarkable attention to linguistic and other differences between various tribes.[449] Moreover, he repeatedly praises one particular indigenous group, the Cacchettii.[450] The indigenous inhabitants of the New World are simply *other*, without

[448] Cei, 9.

[449] Cf. for instance: "L'Indi vi sono di diverse lingua et natione, nimici l'uno dell'altro, chiamati una parte Asciaguas, Bubures, altri Coyones; alcuni ve n'è di nazione Cacchettia e altri Scidabaras, altri chiamati Coibas: così diversi di parlare, come di nome, tutti cattiva et povera gente […]. Mangiono, tutti questi Indi, carne humana, excepto li Cacchetti. Alcuni mangiono li loro morti, altri li loro nimici, maxime li Cristiani, che di un corpo ne fanno cento parte, presentandolo alli loro amici […]; alcuni non mangiono, dell'Indi loro nimici, se non la testa; altri mangiono ogni cosa; mangiono detta carne fritta in certi teghami con il medesimo grasso d'essa; le donne loro non la vogliono lor cuocere, né la cuocono dentro nelle loro case, ma così un poco fuora" (Cei, 45)

[450] Cf. "[I] migliori Indi che sieno in tutto el discoperto [si chiamano] Cacchettios che vuol dire buone persone; non è stata, ne è generazione in India più humana et di migliore condizione che questa: non mangiano carne humana, nè usano sodomia, o poca, servono benissimo et mai feciono tradimento" (Cei 41); "[la] nazione Cacchettia, di buona conditione et, con tutto el male si fa loro, sempre che li Cristiani

violating any reasonable expectations concerning the ways they should be. They can be described just like the other particularities of the New World, without resentment, even though very often with censure.[451] In fact, the virulent tone of the descriptions of the colonial residents of Santo Domingo is considerably mitigated in the more factual descriptions of the indigenous groups[452] and in the passages dedicated to natural aspects of America.

Although Cei blames the climate for the degeneration of Europeans overseas, his portrayal of New World environment is not univocally negative. For instance, he speaks of the city of Nombre de Dios in quasi-infernal terms, but extolls the pleasurable climate of Capo di San Román, in the vicinity of the city of Coro.[453] He reports in great detail the inclement weather and scarcity of food experienced during the expedition into Venezuela and the early stages of the settlement of Toccuyo, as well as during his trek to New Granada. On the other hand, his practical eyes are appreciative of Hispaniola's potential as the perfect land for raising livestock and some types of agriculture.[454]

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vogliono, sono amici" (Cei, 58); "questa lingua cacchettia è la più bella et più agevole di tutte le lingue d'India, con molti derivativi, et lingua che si potria scrivere facilmente" (Cei, 77)

[451] The greatest crimes of the natives apart from cannibalism are, in Cei's eyes, those of a sexual nature. He condemns the Amerindians' supposed penchant for sodomy and their acceptance of incest: "Sono ordinariamante huomini et donne senza vergogna et, fuora di questa generazione Cacchettia, sodomiti tucti, et maxime quelli della provincial di Cubagua, di Santa Marta et di Cartagena, et usono questo vizio alcuni con li huomini et alcuni con le donne […] Non hanno religione, né cosa buona nessuna, né leggie, né civiltà : el padre se giace con la figlia […] simile la madre con il figlio, el fratello con la sorella." (Cei, 79)

[452] Cf. especially Cei, 77 – 100, where the narrator discusses among other things topics such as the native costume, the most common ways of hunting and fishing, the typical weapons and war, the houses and cooking utensils, the musical instruments and dances, the medicinal and religious practices.

[453] Cf. Cei, 39 - 41.

[454] Cf. Cei, 18 – 21.

As already mentioned, in his descriptions of the inhabitants of Santo Domingo, the author positions himself alongside his readers and views the inhabitants of the colonies as utterly *other*. It seems that the more fact-centered and concrete ethnographical and naturalist descriptions of the subsequent portions of the book reflect the author's growing involvement with his project. In reality, every written paragraph represents the narrator's further re-immersion into his American experience through the twin acts of recollection and retelling. As he strives to remember the details of his stay in the New World, the description takes precedence over judgment and Cei finds himself approaching American realities with greater ambiguity.

The author's factual and thus, rather sober attitude towards American nature (and up to a point to its native peoples) can be attributed also to his merchant mentality and the custom of viewing everything from the perspective of monetary gain. Yet, the acquisitive mindset alone does not explain the particular quality of Cei's gaze: calculation and greed mix equally well with the rhetoric of marvel as can be seen in Columbus' first letter.[455] The most obvious difference between the two ways of looking consist in the attentiveness to detail and the ethnographic/naturalist curiosity combined with practical appraisal which in Cei take the place of Columbus' summary aesthetic appreciation of Hispaniola. For Cei, Nature rarely affords aesthetic experiences. It is seen either through the prism of nourishment and fertility or as dangerous and hostile. As already indicated in the previous chapter, Pastor Bodmer speaks of the replacement of the category of *landscape* from the

[455] In Columbus the language of marvel was put to use due to real or affected ignorance along the lines of: I don't know what these trees/shurbs are, but I am sure they are all very precious.

earlier conquest narratives with the category of *environment* in the narratives of failure.[456] The length of Cei's stay in the New World and, above all the difficulties experienced gave him the kind of intimacy with American Nature in which the gaze turns naturally from the generalities (landscape) to the particulars (environment). Without pretense to naturalist expertise, Cei is nevertheless remarkably thorough and precise in his descriptions of animal and botanical species seen.

In fact, Cei emerges in his account as an extremely attentive observer of Nature. He offers methodical descriptions of a myriad of varieties of plants and animals, accompanying many of them with sketches on the margins of his manuscript. Apart from the remarkable thoroughness, his descriptions tend to have a very pronounced practical angle. He talks for instance about all the different uses to which various plants are put by the natives and the "Christians", detailing also the methods involved. Exemplary in that regard are the paragraphs dedicated to yucca, which deal with its two main varieties, their similarities and differences, the different kinds of food and beverages that can be prepared with it, as well as the exact processes required, including their duration.[457]

Along with an undeniable fascination with the various techniques used by the natives to grow, collect and prepare food, goes the author's attention to the methods used in the production of native artifacts and weapons.[458] Major points of interest are also the

[456] Cf. Pastor Bodmer: "In the narrative of failure, the *landscape* disappears altogether as an aesthetic concept or category of perception to be replaced by the *environment*. This includes the geography, climate, flora, and fauna of America, whose qualities, although varying from text to text, are always shown to be negative." (Beatriz Pastor Bodmer, 124)

[457] Cf. Cei, 13 - 15.

[458] Cf. Cei, 77-89.

different ways in which Europeans draw on the local resources. In the pages dedicated to Hispaniola, Cei discusses (very admiringly) the burgeoning sugar industry[459] and offers informative sections on the methods of fishing for pearls.[460] In the mainland, he learns all about the ways of mining and extraction of gold.[461] The narrator seems to enjoy reporting on these practical aspects of life in the New World and in his descriptions achieves a level of precision comparable to that of the articles on crafts in Diderot's *Encyclopédie* (1751-1772). This vivid interest in traditional and emerging "technologies", the constant attention to the possibilities of using America's natural riches is, no doubt, part of a specifically European optic. Yet the author's fixation on the ways of mastering Nature and claiming her resources rises in the shadow of scarcity and his quasi-perpetual fear of hunger. In a way then, focusing on the ways of mastering the New World is a way of coping with the unwelcome truth of man's dependence on that unknown land for survival. America is the *Other* which the colonizer intends to master, but it is also the *Other* which, at a deeper level, presides over the latter's life and death.

Of special interest are the pages dedicated to Cei's life in Toccuyo, where the author speaks unabashedly, even with a certain dose of pride, about physical work he was forced to perform.[462] The experience of physical labor, along with the experiences of hunger, cold and sickness made the narrator conscious of the otherness of his body[463], through the initial

[459] Cf. Cei, 24 – 26.

[460] Cf. Cei, 35 – 37.

[461] Cf. Cei, 70-71.

[462] Cf. Cei, 43 – 46.

[463] Cf. previous chapter for reference to Ricoeur's understanding of this phenomenon.

repulsion he felt before bowing to the necessity of engaging in a number of "lowly" activities.[464] The fact of having been a farmer, of having worked the land and raised livestock certainly contributed to the author's aforementioned sense of intimacy with American nature. In fact, that intimacy seems to be the very result of the experience of Nature's resistance, as felt in and through the body. Moreover, the image the narrator creates of himself in the pages dedicated to his stay in Toccuyo is hardly compatible with that of a stereotypical merchant: apart from farming, our protagonist spends his time mainly on thieving expeditions to the nearby native villages.[465] And yet, the story of his unexpected prowess as a small-scale farmer, the fact that through his industriousness he managed to achieve a measure of comfort and wealth is too an element of Cei's auto-creation, a way of proving that he is in fact a man able to achieve a lot even with limited resources.

Now, Cei's wealth in Toccuyo consisted mainly of having plenty to eat.[466] In fact, one of the prominent features of Cei's account is his attention to food. He meticulously chronicles all the different types of food available in the Indies, including wild animals, fish and fruit. He spends considerable amounts of time talking about the local alternatives to wheat as the staple of bread-making and to grapes as the source of wine. He lists the different bread-like products used by the natives and the bread substitutes embraced by the

[464] Cf. "Le bestie si mi morivono piene di giudaleschi et io, di schifo, non le possevo, nè volevo curare, nè vedere, tanto che mi si morirno dua et cominciai a risentirmi e porvi le mani et imparare a medicarle et caricarle" (Cei, 43)

[465] Cf. Cei, 43 – 51.

[466] Cf. "non mi mancava già carne, latte, polli, fructa et grano senza andarlo a rubare et, con l'aumento de'bestiami, potevo comperare alla giornata i mia bisogni" (Cei, 55)

Europeans. He does the same for wine.[467] While talking about the different local foods, as well as analyzing their taste, he displays concern for the effects they have on the digestive systems of the Europeans:

> "Tutto questo pane, sottile e grosso, è di poca sustanza et presto sciende dallo stomaco, tanto più quando si mangia solo senza carne o pescie, o altri mangiari, che con questi accompagna e diletta al gusto, et a me piaceva assai. Niente di manco, mangiato solo sta poco nello stomaco et manco nel ventre, di sorta che, venendo la voluntà naturale, bisogna tenere le redine preste, altrimenti le calze ne patirieno la pena; et mostra ancora essere di poco nutrimento la gran quantità di escrementi ch'escono per basso, che pare essere più di quello si mangia rispetto al gonfiore che fa."[468]

It is tempting to read these passages dedicated to the effects of American food on the Europeans allegorically. American food may be considered a metonymy of the American experience itself. According to this optic, the ingested food would embody the American otherness as infiltrating the very flesh of the traveler. The New World, like the new and unusual food it has to offer, represents a notable risk. In fact, Cei reports stories of deaths caused by reckless alimentary habits and misguided attempts at self-medication without proper knowledge of local flora and fauna.[469] In one of these stories an ugly-

[467] Cei, 14 – 17.

[468] Cei, 15.

[469] Cf. for instance: "Un albero è […] che li Spagnoli chiamano manzaniglio, che vuol dire meluzzo […] Adoperano li Indi la frutta nella compositione del veleno che fanno per le freccie. […] A necessità si purga con essa, ma prima si prepara, mettendo la frutta a cuocere in un pane, nel forno, o in una batatta, in che rimane la perfidia d'essa. […] Alcuna volta, alla campagna, certi villanacci si purgono senza prepararla,

looking black fish is caught and consumed by a number of sailors, despite Cei's warnings and his own refusal to share their meal. As a result, the majority of the commensals die.[470] Eating of the new kinds of food (just like embarking on the American experience) can prove mortal, but it can also be "purifying". In fact, a number of American plants and fruits are reported by Cei to be potent laxatives and as such are praised by the author.[471] These laxatives are often quite dangerous for those who are ignorant of their proper usage, but they can be a blessing for those who are willing to use them wisely. As in the case of the New World experience itself, they are either lethal or purifying. Cei learned how to use these powerful plants and always carried one of them (*zeiba*) in case of necessity for himself and his friends. He mastered it and used it to cure and strengthen himself and others, just like he managed to learn enough about America as not to succumb to it, but rather turn it into a survival story meant to both heal self and teach others.

The allegory of America as food, as something penetrating into the very core of one's flesh can also be read as the story of the forbidden fruit which causes the inevitable expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Embarking on the American adventure is a gambit for knowledge of something that has the prohibitive aura of the long ocean voyage and the inevitable risks to be encountered after the arrival. Like the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, it holds the promise of enlightenment, but also the consequence of exclusion from the safety of previously known existence. To pursue this allegory we could say that

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mangiandone dua o tre, così crude, et di poi sopra molta carne di vacca e di porco, per evitare che li fiumi non vadino alla testa, et spesse volte con questa pazzia vi lasciono la vita." (Cei, 29-30)

[470] Cei, 23.

[471] Cf. "servonsene Indi et Cristiani per purgarsi" (Cei, 27); "5 o 6 ne pigli, purga benissimo" (Cei, 28); "ne portavo meco quantità per me, Indi et amici per purgare per le necessità" (Cei, 28) ; "a necessità si purga con essa" (Cei, 29).

Cei's narrative as well as being an attempt at homecoming is a ploy to gain re-admittance into the Garden of Eden which, in accordance with the work's demystifying logic, is represented here by the Old World. This of course is another departure from the modalities of earlier literature on Americas, such as Columbus' *First Letter* or Pietro Martire's *Decades*. In these, and some later works (e. g. Montaigne's *Des Cannibals*) the Indies are portrayed as the land of beauty and innocence, where people still live in the Golden Age of humanity, without knowledge of property, laws or money, in other words, as the Earthly Paradise. For Cei the absence of these hallmarks of civilization does not afford an occasion for a wistful meditation on a simpler and more wholesome way of life, but it is a source of scandal:

> "Non hanno religione, né cosa buona nessuna, né leggie, né civiltà […] Non fanno, né tengono giustizia fra loro che castighi delitto o vitio, perché non conoscono vitio, né virtù; né hanno carità, né vergogna,né pietà."[472]

It is clear that for Cei the New World is not the Earthly Paradise, but the very opposite. As already mentioned, it is the treacherous forbidden fruit that cost the naïve traveler his expulsion from the Eden of his previous life and unproblematized identity. It was not without appeal nor entirely unpleasant to eat. (As a matter of fact, the descriptions of the actual American fruit in *Viaggio* are always premised or concluded with a remark of them being "sweet with a touch of sourness".[473]) And yet its consumption condemned the

[472] Cei, 79.

[473] Cf. ad esempio: "Tutte le frutte, ancora che dolce, hanno un poco di agro in tutta l'India" (Cei, 26); "È molto dolce, non mancando dello agretto come tutte le frutte del paese" (Cei, 30); "è cosa molto dolce, pare cotto con rapa, non li mancando l'agretto" (Cei, 31); "hanno sapore dolce, con un poco d'agro" (Cei, 32). This sweet and sour quality of virtually all kinds of American fruit perhaps best reflects the author's internal conflict between the feelings of attraction and rejection experienced vis-à-vis the New World as such. As discussed earlier, the American environment is described as both astonishingly fertile and as

author to a place where often all hope of ever going back seemed lost.[474] In evoking Dante's "lasciate ogni speranza" Cei points to the second, and perhaps more important trope governing his treatment of America: it is a Hell on earth and a place whence return is close to impossible.

Cei speaks of losing hope of ever returning home when in Toccuyo, but the entirety of the mainland is framed as infernal in that it is reluctant to let go of those who dare to venture there. Interestingly, two intensely Dantean descriptions mark the beginning and the end of Cei' lengthy stay in the bowels of America. The description of Nombre de Dios "al quale li saria meglio posto nome del diavolo, o casa, perché è inferno più che terra del mondo"[475] precedes almost immediately Cei's unfortunate decision to join Carvajal on his expedition to Venezuela.[476] It is thus the description of the gateway to hell. The same concentration of infernal images and language characterizes the concluding sections of the *Viaggio* dedicated to Cei's river voyage towards the port of Santa Marta whence he commenced his journey home:

utterly inhospitable depending on the location and season. Above all, Hispaniola strikes as the legendary land of plenty with its extraordinary potential for raising livestock, while the mainland is usually depicted as less propitious. A paradigmatically ambiguous place is Toccuyo as the bitterly resented locus of Cei's quasi-captivity, while at the same time being located in "[una] terra […] sanissima" (Cei, 45).

[474] Cf. Cei, 52-55.

[475] Cei, 39.

[476] In Nombre de Dios the narrator is denied passage to Peru, so he briefly returns to Santo Domingo from where he leaves in the direction of Coro with some merchandise he hopes to sell with profit to "un capitano che tornava da discoprire" from Venezuela. As his trading escapade turns sour and he is forced to sell his goods on credit to the impoverished soldiers, he decides to join the expedition himself in order to claim his due when gold is found.

"Se potessi contare le quantità di moscherini, zanzare et pipistrelli et il tormento et assalto che ci davono, vi farei stupire. Credo nell'inferno non sia maggior pena: bastano per far disperare un santo"[477]

It is as if American Nature, having first swallowed the guileless traveler, now unleashed its most diabolic characteristics to prevent him from leaving. It is remindful of Orpheus' trek back from Hades, with all the monstrosities summoned up to scare him into turning back and be entrapped forever. The hope of riches has been abandoned long ago and the only goal now is to escape, but the way out is full of torment inflicted by blood-sucking insects in the landscape of swamps and grotesquely-looking natives. And yet, staying is out of the question: it would mean becoming completely *othered*: the American life is viscous and sticks to one, trying to keep him bound.[478]

In fact, while in the New World, it is impossible to remain immune to the "othering" influence of the place. Cei dutifully reports all the different modes of behavior he found himself adopting from the Indians such as the habit of sleeping in the hammock and walking naked during heavy rains to keep his clothes dry.[479] He admits to having eaten like the Indians, even things considered "filthy" by European standards.[480] The measure of his adoption of native customs is much greater than the measure of their adoption of European

[477] Cei, 124. Cf. anche: "el luogo molto infermo, caldissimo et molto humido, zanzare, mosche, moscherini, pieno di fango et di botte wt rane, che tutto el giorno et la notte non fanno che gridare che pare proprio uno **inferno**" (Cei, 121); "Cosidetta acqua è di malo odore, con certa spiuma così che mi parve proprio entrare nella palude **Stigia**, con quelli Indi tutti igniudi, dipinti, remando in piedi, mezzi zucconi, che parevano **diavoli**, et noi anime che menassino a tormentare." (Cei, 122) Emphasis mine.

[478] Cf. "quella vita […] è un vischio ne allaccia li più che la pruovono"(Cei, 124)

[479] Cf. Cei, 72.

[480] Cf. "in questa necessità vi si mangiò formiche, serpe, lucertole et ragniateli et mille ribalderie et cani di caccia, che la fame è una mala bestia" (Cei, 75).

mores, in accordance with the maxim that: "sono più li Cristiani si fanno Indi che non l'Indi Cristiani."[481] Now, the author's willingness to speak openly of his own "indianization" seems to contradict his intention to "narrate himself back" to his native Florence. A case in point is Cei's characterization of the discovery missions undertaken from Toccuyo as simple thieving escapades and his frankness as to his own participation in them. Stealing – a grave crime in the eyes of a merchant society and a type of misconduct attributed in the opening passages to the demoralized *criollos*, in the later portions of the book becomes daily practice for the narrator himself. What is even worse, the booty obtained in these raids on the native villages, while at the time critical for the colonists' survival, was nonetheless laughable: a handful of corn, some string or a bit of cotton. In depicting himself as a petty thief, Cei draws an autoportrayal reminiscent of the stereotype of the naïve, compulsively light-fingered Indian.[482] Moreover, in dutifully reporting the complete list of his ill-fated financial schemes he forges a literary image of himself, which is dangerously close to that of a prodigal and careless *mestizo*.

The impression that Cei finds strange delight in depicting himself in situations, which others might have preferred to shroud in silence is even stronger in the passage in which our author describes his failed attempt at capturing an Indian woman. The native, realizing that she cannot wriggle out of Cei's grip, empties her bowels into her hand, smears

[481] Cf. Cei, 99. However, Cei recognizes that the learning happened in two directions. A perfect example of this is the adoption of native hunting and fishing techniques by the Europeans and vice versa. Cei remarks on the incipient use of hunting dogs among the native populations and on the espousal by the "Christians" of a hunting technique consisting in trapping the animals in a patch of land encircled by fire. He also mentions the emerging usage by the indigenous of the fishing methods learned from the Europeans (involving poles and hooks) (Cei, 83)

[482] Interestingly, Cei himself does not strengthen this stereotype. In fact, on the subject of theft, Cei's account operates a complete role reversal. The Europeans are portrayed as indiscriminate thieves, while the Indians, according to our author "hanno li più in odio furto" (Cei, 79)

her captor's face with excrement, and then, taking advantage of his shock and disgust, escapes:

> "m'accadde una cosa da ridere che, stando un giorno in aguato solo, a un laghetto dove solevano venire Indi per acqua, [...] dove io ero, venne una India per acqua et per discoprire ancora se vi eravamo, et era di più di 30 anni: quando fu sul lagho, mi scoprii et la presi et lei si cominciò a difendere e fare forza per non venire meco et, non volendo ammazzarla, nè farli male, andavo agevolandola, infine, quando vedde non potere uscirmi dalle mani, si pose una mano al sedere et, scaricando el ventre, m'impaniò con essa tutto el viso, di modo che, non che lasciarla, per il puzo mi gettai nel laghetto a capo innanzi [...] e la India si fuggì."[483]

Just as in the infernal descriptions of the American landscape we saw the influence of Dante, here we detect traces of Boccaccio. Nathalie Hester suggests that "coming from a culture that celebrates Boccaccian *novelle* replete with women who play jokes on men and with scatological elements, he can only interpret the incident as funny, literary and, therefore, worthy of recounting, even if he must play the role of the *beffato*, the butt of the joke."[484] In fact, Cei's adoption of this Boccaccian optic strengthens the case for his Florentine identity. Regardless of whether it is purely instinctual or deliberate, it forces the author to look at himself not directly, but rather through the prism of a literary tradition which he shares with others. That tradition is another presence of otherness in his account for it disrupts any sense of intimacy the narrating-I might have shared with the I-narrated.

[483] Cei, 44.

[484] Hester, 250.

On the other hand, while it creates a greater distance between Cei-the narrator and Cei-the protagonist, it also provides the *Viaggio*, and consequently also its author, with solid Florentine credentials.[485]

It should be clear from what has been said in this chapter that Cei's way of dealing with the more radical American otherness is far from straightforward. *Viaggio* apart from being an apology to the public has also an important auto therapeutic function. It is meant not only to make its author *appear* as settled firmly within the parameters of his original identity, but also to help him deal with a sense of self-estrangement. Cei strives to portray himself as a worthy, if unlucky merchant conversant with the literary language of his native city. Nevertheless, at the same time, he gives an unabashed account of what we might call the "traces of the *other*" within himself. He wants to avoid being scorned for his lack of success in America, and yet he is not afraid to mock himself. As a result, his writing, although aimed at reclaiming his destabilized sense of identity, creates an ambiguous space in which the homeless self reluctantly comes to terms with its own unwelcome hybridization.

It is quite emblematic that the *relazione* is not concluded. We say goodbye to Cei as he is on his way to the port of Santa Marta, this time determined to set sail for home. The book on the narrative level never takes him there. It remains a question whether the

[485] The presence of the echoes of the literary canon is, according to Theodore Cachey, a distinguishing mark of Italian travel writing. (Cf. Theodore Cachey, "An Italian History of Travel," *Annali d'Italianistica* 14 (1996): 56-64). Cf. also: "For a Florentine merchant, the Italian literary tradition- which is based on Tuscan models – helps to frame, indirectly or directly, the narration of travel. Especially in the more personal or anecdotal moments of the account, Cei reflexively turns to the literary canon in communicating to his fellow Tuscan, Bartolomeo Del Bene" (Hester, 245)

manuscript remained interrupted due to some external factor or following Cei's realization that, despite his best efforts, his book cannot possibly take him back home.

CHAPTER VIII

JEAN DE LÉRY: THE SELF AS THE SPACE OF THE OTHER

Jean de Léry's *Histoire d'un voyage* is not a work of a man steeped in humanist letters. It is not a work of philosophy in which the emergence of self is explored from a philosophical perspective nor is it a work of autobiography in the same sense as Cabeza de Vaca's *Naufragios* and Cei's *Viaggio*. Léry styles himself a bearer of a collective identity - his book is about the expedition to Brazil of a group of Calvinist missionaries, of which he was but one member. When recounting the uneasy cohabitation between the preachers of the Reformed religion and the governor of the colony, he never commands the center of attention. What is even more important, although it contains elements of polemic and apology, it is at its most memorable when speaking of the native Tupinamba among whom the author lived "for about a year".[486] The personal history (chapters 1-6 and 21-22) frames the descriptions of Brazilian nature and people and, arguably, in the authorial intention was of no less importance. Nevertheless, *Histoire d'un voyage* tends to be viewed primarily as a book about the Other. At least so it was read by Léry's two most famous students: the humanist Montaigne, who used Léry's work as a source for his *Des Cannibals* and the

[486] Cf. "My intention and my subject in this history will be simply to declare what I have myself experienced, seen, heard and observed, both on the sea, coming and going, and among the American savages, with whom I visited and lived for about a year." (Jean de Léry, *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil*, trans. Janet Whatley (Barkeley – Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 3). In the Preface, the author explains moreover that his decision to have *Voyage* printed was precipitated by the 1577 publication of Thevet's *Cosmography*, which contained passages slandering the Huguenot missionaries to Brazil. *Voyage* is meant to refute Thevet's report by telling the complete story of the mission, beginning with the motives that led to the departure.

father of structuralism, Claude Lévy-Strauss, who memorably called it the "ethnologist breviary".[487]

It is precisely this particular ability to inspire and captivate both a humanist and a XX century scholar (who concluded his monumental *Mythologiques* in a way reminiscent of Foucault's closure of *Les mots et les choses*, i.e. with an image of humankind as a transient species[488]) that warrants the dedication of these last pages on the humanist thought of the self to Léry.[489] The influence of Lévy-Strauss's structuralism, as is well known, went well beyond ethnology and, in the field of literary studies, contributed to the departure from the so-called "liberal humanism" as its *modus operandi*. Yet, its genealogy should give one pause for it draws vital inspiration from the Renaissance in the sense that Léry's presence is felt throughout Lévy-Strauss's *Tristes tropiques*. Is it a coincidence that a book that speaks from the perspective of Europe's bad post-colonial conscience harkens back to the Renaissance, the time, which "invented" colonialism?

[487] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes tropiques*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (New York: Penguin, 1992), 81.

[488] Cf. "[man] can never at any moment lose sight of the […] certainty that he was not present on earth in former times, that he will not always be here in the future and that, with his inevitable disappearance from the surface of a planet which is itself doomed to die, his labors, his sorrows, his joys, his hopes and his works will be as if they had never existed, since no consciousness will survive to preserve even the memory of these ephemeral phenomena, only a few features of which, soon to be erased from the impassive face of the earth, will remain as already cancelled evidence that they once were, and were as nothing." (Claude Lévy-Strauss, *The Naked Man: Mythologiques, Volume 4*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (University of Chicago Press, 1990), 694-695.)

[489] Frank Lestringant in his "The Philosopher's Breviary: Jean de Léry in the Enlightenment" draws attention to Léry's appeal during the *Lumières* as the source for the figure of the Good Savage. His study however points out also the rational reductionism of the readings done at the time when all the aspects of the text gesturing towards the supernatural be them Christian or non-Christian were explained "according to reason". (Cf. Frank Lestringant, "The Philosopher's Breviary: Jean de Léry in the Enlightenment" *Representations* 33. Special Issue: The New World (1991): 200-211.)

In his inaugural lecture to the Collège de France in January 1960 Lévy-Strauss exhorted this audience to "renew" and at the same time "atone for the Renaissance" by "extend[ing] the humanism to the measure of humanity."[490] Just as Pico's *Oratio*, Bovelles' *De Sapiente* and Vives' *Fabula de homine* spoke to the philosophically framed objections to humanism, Cabeza de Vaca's *Naufragios*, Cei's *Viaggio e relazione* and Léry's *Voyage* help us redress the postcolonial censures. In the second triad, Léry's work stands out as the one depicting the colonial Other most effectively and most sympathetically, while at the same time being most conscious of the limits of the representation of alterity. It is also the work in which the impulse to narrate the self contributes the most to a creation of an autonomous space of the Other, a place which allows for contemplation and nostalgia, but not ownership. It might be, as Lestringant puts it, "the Renaissance in its fullest and most generous dimension".[491]

Jean de Léry was a native of Bourgogne and a shoemaker by trade. Following his conversion to the Reformed religion, he travelled to Geneva to study theology under Calvin. In 1556, at the age of twenty-two he volunteered to join a small missionary group headed for the New World. In sending his followers to the ephemeral "France Antarctique" in today's Brazil, Calvin was responding to a request of the colony's founder, the whimsical Nicolas Durand de Villegagnon. The group arrived at Villegagnon's Fort Coligny, situated on an island in the Bay of Guanabara in March 1557 and received a warm welcome. Soon however, a radical difference of religious opinion between the 14

[490] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology. Volume 2*, trans. Monique Layton (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 32. Quoted after Frank Lestringant, "Léry-Strauss: Jean de Léry's *History of a voyage to the land of Brazil* and Claude Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes tropiques*," *Viator* 32 (2001): 421.

[491] Lestringant, "Léry-Strauss", 421.

Huguenots and the governor became apparent. The cause of disagreement was the interpretation of the Eucharist. Villegagnon objected to the Calvinist teaching according to which Christ is present in the bread and wine only symbolically, causing scandal among the missionaries as the one who not only wanted to eat the body of Jesus Christ, but one who would gladly chew on it and swallow it raw like the most vicious of cannibals.[492] Faced with the leader's growing hostility, the missionaries were forced to withdraw from the colony. From November 1557 until January 1558 they took refuge in the mainland among the Tupi who turned out to be "*plus humains*" towards them than the treacherous and cruel Villegagnon.[493] The group set sail for France at the beginning of January and reached Brittany in the second half of May after a passage plagued by two-near shipwrecks, a gun powder explosion, tempests, the pilot's poor navigational skills, and, above all, extreme famine.

After returning, Léry resumed his theological studies in Geneva and by 1562, he entered ministry. The St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre saw him in La Charité-sur-Loire, from whence he escaped to Sancerre. He remained there during the royal Catholic siege of the city lasting from January until August 1573. In his *Histoire memorable de la ville de Sancerre* published in 1574, Léry claimed that his experience in identifying and preparing unusual comestibles gained on the way back from Brazil helped the besieged survive the

[492] Cf. "mâcher et avaler toute crue" De Léry (VI) 73.

[493] Cf. "We set ourselves up on the seashore on the left side, at the entrance to the Bay of Guanabara […] From there we would come and go, visiting, eating, and drinking among the savages (who were, beyond comparison, more humane to us than he – I do him no injustice – who could not bear to have us with him); and they, for their part, often came to visit us, bringing us food and other things we needed." (Léry, 50) The wording of this passage is significant: the Tupinamba "humane" treatment of Léry's group is contrasted in the next paragraph with Villegagnon's "inhumanity". This is the first of many comparisons between the "savages" and the "civilized men" in which the latter emerge as distinctly more barbarian.

food shortage and prolonged the city's resistance. The book recounting his stay in Brazil, *Histoire d'un voyage faict en la terre du Brésil*, despite having been written as early as 1563, was first printed in 1578, twenty years after his return to France.[494] Léry remained an active minister until his death in 1613. He is also the author of "*La Persécution des fidèles en terre d'Amérique*" which told the story of three Huguenots executed by Villegagnon and was incorporated into Jean Crispin's *L' Histoire des Martyrs*.

L'Histoire mémorable, L'histoire des Martyrs and *L'Histoire d'un voyage* are all marked by Léry's adherence to the Reformation and can be said to represent a distinctively Calvinist perspective. While the former two writings speak of the repressions against the Protestant community perpetrated by French authorities, *Histoire d'un voyage* belongs to what Marcel Bataillon has famously called the "Huguenot corpus on the New World".[495] Along with Léry's voyage, this body of literature would include Benzoni-Chauveton's *Histoire nouvelle du Nouveau Monde* as well as Théodore de Bry's collection of *Grands voyages* (1580-1634) and Montaigne's "Of Cannibals" and "Of Coaches."[496] These writings define their view of the conquest in opposition to the Spanish grand narrative and are

[494] The story of the publication of *Histoire d'un voyage* is rather convoluted. In the Preface, Léry explains that he lost the 1563 manuscript, used the rough draft of that version to prepare a second manuscript, which was also lost, but eventually managed to recover the original document in 1576. After the first publication in 1578, *Histoire* was printed four more times in Léry's lifetime: 1580, 1585, 1599/1600, and 1611, each subsequent edition being corrected and augmented. The second edition of 1580 is considered the best and most legible, the successive ones being overly burdened with polemic and references to contemporary political strife. (Cf. Janet Whatley, "Introduction," in Jean de Léry, *History of a voyage to the land of Brazil, otherwise called America* (Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), XXXVIII.)

[495] Cf. Marcel Bataillon, "L'Amiral et les 'nouveaux horizons' français," in *Actes du colloque* "*L'Admiral de Coligny et son temps*" *24-28 Octobre 1972* (Paris: Société de l'histoire du protestantisme français, 1974), 41-52.

[496] Even though Montaigne himself was not a member of the Huguenot community, his perspective on the American conquest is in line with the one represented by Léry, Chauveton and through the collection of de Bry.

organized around the lead themes of the cruelty of the Spaniards and the innocence and natural goodness of the oppressed native.[497] Although in some respects anticolonial, the main polemical thrust of the Huguenot corpus was anti-Catholic and anti-Spanish. As a result, it further fuelled the emerging imperialist ambitions of the Protestant countries such as England and Holland. Léry himself, fascinated though he is with the Tupinamba culture, is not immune to the allure of the colonial dream. He blames Villegagnon's personal shortcomings for the lost opportunity for a French enclave in Brazil.[498] Doubtless, his vision of that never-realized French colonization of Brazil was premised on a belief in the possibility of reciprocal benevolence and trust between the natives and the colonists, as he experienced it during his stay there. Writing after the eruption of the Wars of Religion (1562-1598) and in view of domestic strife, Léry deplores the failure of Admiral Coligny's idea of creating a Huguenot sanctuary in Brazil, and condemns Villegagnon for having deceived the Protestant leaders with false promises.[499] Nevertheless, the nostalgia of Léry's

[497] Cf. Lestringant, "The Philosopher's Breviary", 201.

[498] Cf. "Villegagnon is the sole cause wherefore the French did not establish themselves in that country. A certain Fariban of Rouen, captain […] told us that had it not been for the revolt of Villegagnon, seven or eight hundred people would have been sent in big Flemish ships to begin populating the place where we were staying. I firmly believe that if Villegagnon had remained true to the faith, there would be at present more than ten thousand Frenchmen over there who, besides staunchly protecting our island and fort against the Portuguese, who then could never have taken it (as they did, after our return), would now possess under allegiance to our King a great country in the land of Brazil, which one could rightfully have continued to call 'Antarctic France'." (Léry, 197)

[499] Cf. "In the year 1555 a certain Villegagnon, Knight of Malta […] let it be known to several distinguished personages of various ranks throughout the realm of France that he had long yearned to withdraw into some distant country, where he might freely and purely serve God according to the reformation of the Gospel, and, moreover, that he desired to prepare a place for all those who might wish to retire there to escape persecution […] And in fact, under this fine pretext, he won the hearts of some of the nobility who were of the Reformed Religion, who, with the same motives that he claimed to have, wished to find such a retreat."(Léry, 3)

récit is not so much about the missed colonial opportunity, as it is about the lost innocence as incarnated in the author's younger self and in the Tupinamba.

Regardless of *Histoire*'s role in the Huguenot corpus, Léry's religious creed has far-reaching consequences for his ideas about writing and for his ideas about the Other.[500] To the subject of writing the author dedicates the following passionate eulogy:

> "Here is a fine subject for anyone who would like to enlarge upon it: both to praise and to exalt the art of writing, and to show how the nations that inhabit these three parts of the world: Europe, Asia, and Africa – have reason to praise God more than do the savages of that fourth part, called "America". For while they can communicate nothing except by the spoken word, we, on the other hand, have this advantage, that without budging from our place, by means of writing and the letters that we send, we can declare our secrets to whomever we choose, even to the ends of the earth. So even aside from the learning that we acquire from books, of which the savages seem likewise completely destitute, this invention of writing, which we

[500] There are a number of studies linking Léry's religious persuasion with his particular way of seeing, and writing about the native, but the most forceful statement to this effect is offered by Andrea Frisch, who in her excellent article "In a Sacramental Mode: Jean de Léry's Calvinist Ethnography", argues that "[i]n Léry's case, ethnology recapitulates theology" (*Representations* 77.1 (2002): 82). Other studies that make a similar point include: Frank Lestringant, *Le Huguenot et le sauvage. L'Amerique et la controverse coloniale en France, au temps des guerres de religion (1555-1589)* (Paris: Amateurs de livres, 1990), the same author's *L'expérience Huguenote au nouveau monde. XVIe siècle* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1996) and "*Une sainte horreur ou le voyage en Eucharistie. XVIe-XVIIIe siècle*" (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1996); Janet Whatley,"Une reverence réciproque: Huguenot Writing on the New World," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 57 (1987– 88): 270–89; Michel Jeanneret, "Léry et Thevet: Comment parler d'un monde nouveau?" in *Mélanges à la mémoire de Franco Simone: France et Italie dans la culture européenne t. IV: Tradition et originalité dans la création littéraire* (Genève: Slatkine, 1983), 227–45; Geoffrey Shullenberger, "Analogies of the Sacrament in Sixteenth-Century French and Spanish Ethnography: Jean de Léry and José de Acosta," *Romance Studies* 28.2 (2010): 84–95.

possess and of which they are just as utterly deprived , must be ranked among the singular gifts which men over here have received from God."[501]

Léry's praise of letters sounds very similar to the typical humanist exultation of literacy. In fact, Léry's particular attention to the power of communication afforded by letter writing brings to mind not only humanist theory, but also practice. It is worth remembering that in defiance not only of space, but also of time, Petrarch, as well as writing to his contemporaries, addressed letters to classical authors and to posterity. However, for Léry, in virtue of his Calvinism, writing is also the instrument of the preservation of eternal truth, the truth of Christian religion. Without it, there is no access to pure, evangelical Christianity, nor is there a means of preserving any truthful account of historical events. The natives' ignorance of writing is, in Léry's view, to blame for their lack of familiarity with the universal history of humankind as recorded in the Bible. That they once had knowledge of the Biblical events is clear from the existence of their own version of the story of the deluge. Corrupted as it is through oral transmission it is nevertheless testimony of their original familiarity with the now long-forgotten biblical narrative of Noah.[502]

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[501] Léry, 135. Frank Lestringant in his "Léry-Strauss", and Michel de Certau before him in the chapter "Ethno-Graphy. Speech, or the Space of the Other: Jean de Léry" of his *Writing of History* talk about the difference between Léry's "writing lesson" contained in this passage and the "writing lesson" of Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques*. (Cf. Michel de Certau,"Ethno-Graphy: Speech, or the Space of the Other: Jean de Léry," in *The Writing of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 209-243.) Although a self-avowed disciple of Léry, Lévy-Strauss disagrees profoundly with the former's evaluation of literacy, arguing that it "seems to favor the exploitation of human beings more than their enlightenment" (Lévy-Strauss, *Tristes tropiques*, 299.) Lévy-Strauss's understanding of writing as an instrument of power and Western domination influenced Certau's reading of Léry's *Histoire d'un voyage* and more recently inspired Mignolo's *The Darker Side of the Renaissance.* (Cf. Mignolo, *op. cit.*)

[502] Cf. "[M]ingled in their songs there was mention of waters that had once swelled so high above their bounds that all the earth was covered, and all the people in the world were drowned, except for their ancestors, who took refuge in the highest trees. This last point, which is the closest they come to the Holy Scriptures, I have heard them reiterate several times since. And, indeed, it is likely that from father to son they have heard something of the universal flood that occurred in the time of Noah. In keeping with the habit of men, which is always to corrupt the truth and turn it into falsehood, together with what we have already seen – that, being

The principal value of writing is the fact that it is the way God communicates with his people. In the Huguenot's eyes, it bridges the distance between two incommensurate realities: the material and transient sphere inhabited by men and the spiritual and eternal dwelling of God. Having abandoned the Catholic doctrine of Christ's "real presence" in the Eucharist, the Calvinists put emphasis on relating to the Divine through prayerful reading of Scripture. The actual presence is replaced by the symbolic – the letters of the Bible substitute for God's speech, which cannot be received directly, for only God's material manifestation would allow for such unhindered communication. The same replacement of the "real" and "presence" with the symbolic is evident in the Calvinist approach to the Eucharist. Bread and wine have only symbolic relationship with Christ's body and blood, so Holy Communion should be understand in purely spiritual, non-material terms:

> "It is certainly the case that the fundamental dissimilarity between the human and the divine, and thus between earthly and spiritual food, is never abolished in Calvin's sacrament of the Eucharist; his analogy of bread to body does not work to convert one into the other. Calvin's Supper is not meant to eliminate the distance between the faithful and God, but rather to *span* it, and this not by positing some sort of resemblance between heaven and earth, but by *putting into communication* two realms that remain not only distinct, but also thoroughly dissimilar."[503]

altogether deprived of writing, it is hard for them to retain things in their purity – they have added this fable (as did the poets), that their ancestors took refuge in the trees." (Léry, 144) Léry is moreover not entirely dismissive of the possibility that there was, in the apostolic times, an evangelizing mission to the New World, the memory of which was subsequently lost for the same reason of the natives' lack of script. (cf. Léry, 147-148)

[503] Frisch, 89.

Just as Scripture can only bridge the gap between man and God, but does not abolish the distance between them, so does the Eucharist put the two realms into communication, but does not result in their convergence. Because of God's absolute otherness, the Eucharistic symbol allows for togetherness, but only in a limited sense. God's actual presence is forever elusive, at least during one's earthly existence. Frisch argues that Calvinist Eucharistic theology, inasmuch as it is "a model for knowing and representing the Other", is a direct source of Léry's ethnographic discourse.[504] In fact, Léry perceives the same incommensurability between the symbolic and the real in his own attempt at "bringing" the Tupinamba to his readers by means of language. Neither linguistic nor pictorial representation can do justice to the richness of the first-hand impression of the native:

> "[T]heir gestures and expressions are so completely different from ours, that it is difficult, I confess, to represent them well by writing or by pictures. To have the pleasure of it, then, you will have to go see and visit them in their own country."[505]

Léry does not believe that his writing can effectively replace the actual experience of beholding the Tupinamba in person. Language is capable of giving the reader some idea of what they are like, but it cannot represent them adequately. In a way, in admitting that there are aspects of his experience that cannot be said, moments and impressions irreducible to representation, Léry appears singularly postmodern. However, his

[504] Cf. "the Christian sacrament of the Eucharist (in all denominations) provides both an epistemology and a semiotics of the divine. In other words, the Eucharist constitutes a model for knowing and for representing the Other; Eucharistic theology thus lends itself especially well to adaptation as an ethnographic discourse." (Frisch, 83)

[505] Léry, 67.

acknowledgement of a certain ineffability of things past comes hand-in-hand with a rather powerful compulsion to communicate. Defective as it might be, profane writing still partakes in the promise of salvation inherent in Holy Scripture. It is simply the only way of coping with the loss that inevitably comes with the passage of time; it is the sole defense against the silence and aridity of history that is not remembered.

The symbolic realm is inferior to the domain of actuality, but it is probably the next best thing and as such must be embraced. This seems to be the logic of Calvin's teaching on the Eucharist – while the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation is rejected, the sacrament itself is not. Apart from Bible study, it is the only way to put the human and the divine into communication. Léry's *Histoire* seems to be premised on a similar reasoning. Its representation of the Tupinamba and their natural environment cannot compare to the actual experience of it, but it will have to do for those unable or unwilling to undertake a New World expedition.

In fact, just as the "real" body and blood of Christ of the Catholic Eucharist are replaced with God's "symbolic" presence in its Calvinist equivalent, so are the Tupinamba bodies replaced with the letters of Léry's *Histoire*. That substitution of letters for the real presence and voice of the indigenous Other is, in the eyes of scholars such as Michel de Certau or Walter Mignolo, an usurpation, a reduction or even suppression of the uniqueness of the native to make him fit a master narrative of a European self-appointed historian/memoirist. Similar suspicion towards the synthesizing and unifying power of letters is foreign to Léry's thinking. He embraces the literary mode wholeheartedly, including claims to authority, which he quite typically justifies with his eyewitness

status.[506] Léry envisages his task as consisting, at least partly, of rectifying other writers' errors.[507] Moreover, the recognition of the confines of his own writing does not prevent him from laboring to convey, if only in a very limited way, the visual, auditory and olfactory aspects of the New World.

In his analysis of Léry's *Voyage* Michel de Certau holds that the Tupi speech is a phenomenon forever resisting its own conversion into writing.[508] Yet, Léry makes a very conscious effort of preserving it, through the inclusion between the last chapter dedicated to the description of Tupi customs (XIX) and the first of the two chapters recounting the voyage home (XXI), of a *Colloquy upon Entry or Arrival in the Land of Brazil among the People of the Country Called Tupinamba and Tupinenquin: in the Savage Language and in French.* Even though probably a work of several hands,[509] this conversation is meant to recapture the spirit of a possible actual interaction between a Tupi and Léry himself. Furthermore, Léry's overall commitment to the preservation of the native speech is attested by his scrupulous recording of the native names of animals and plants.[510]

[506] Cf. "I am speaking out of my own knowledge, that is, from my own seeing and experience; indeed, I will speak of things that very likely no one before me has even seen, much less written about. I mean this, however, not about all of America in general, but only about the place where I lived for about a year: that is under the tropic of Capricorn among the savages called the *Tupinamba*." (Léry, LXI)

[507] His foremost opponent is Thevet, whom he criticizes mercilessly in the Preface as an impostor and ignoramus. (Cf. Léry, XIV – LXII)

[508] Cf. Michel de Certau "something still remains over there, which the words of the text cannot convey, namely the speech of the Tupis. It is that part of the other that cannot be retrieved – it is an evanescent act that writing cannot convey" (De Certau, 213)

[509] Léry, 253, n. 1.

[510] Cf. Wes Williams, "*Out of the frying pan…*: Curiosity, danger and the poetics of witness in the Renaissance traveler's tale," in *Curiosity and Wonder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment,* ed. Robert John Weston Evans and Alexander Marr (Aldershot – Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 36.

The author's careful descriptions of American nature and its inhabitants are similarly a proof of his great care to provide a substitute for the visual record of the land that was never accomplished on the spot by a competent artist. Indeed, Léry bemoans the fact that Jean Gardien, one of his companions who happened to be a talented sketcher disregarded his urgings to make drawings of America's "singularities".[511] In expressing this regret, he seems to place more faith in the immediacy of the image over the power of description, a notion somewhat surprising in a Calvinist.[512] Be that as it may, the second edition of *Voyage*, which appeared in 1580, included a series of eight engravings by an anonymous author.[513]

Léry's attempt to convey the olfactory aspect of the New World by relating it to a more familiar fragrance can be glimpsed from the following passage in which he speaks of the scent of freshly grated manioc flour:

> "This raw flour, like the white juice that comes out of it […] has the fragrance of starch made of pure wheat, soaked a long time in water, when it is still fresh and liquid. After I came back over here, whenever I happened to be in a place where

[511] Cf. "Since all these animals are strangely defective with respect to those of our Europe, I would often ask a certain Jean Gardien, of our company, who was expert in the art of portraiture, to draw this one, as well as many others that are not only rare but even completely unknown over here; to my regret, however, he was never willing to set himself to it." (Léry, 85)

[512] Cf. Lestringant's comparative analysis of the importance of the visual in Léry and Lévy-Strauss in: Lestringant, "Léry-Strauss", 426-428.

[513] Cf. Jean-Paul Duviols, "Théodore de Bry et ses modèles français," *Caravelle* 58. L'image de l'Amérique Latine en France depuis cinq cents ans (1992): 10.

> starch was being made, the scent of it made me remember the odor one usually picks up in the savages' houses when they are making root flour."[514]

Even more evanescent than the smell is the sound of Tupi music and singing. In a memorable passage, Léry reminisces about the feeling of ravishment experienced as he listened to an ancestral cantilena performed by the natives during a religious ceremony. The power of this impression was so great, that the author still can hear the sounds of that music in his ears:

> "[S]uch was their melody that – although they do not know what music is – those who have not heard them would never believe that they could make such harmony. […] I received […] such joy, hearing the measured harmonies of such a multitude, and especially in the cadence and refrain of the song, when at every verse all of them would let their voices trail, saying *Heu, heuaure, heura, heuraure, heura, heura, oueh* – I stood there transported with delight. Whenever I remember it, my heart trembles, and it seems their voices are still in my ears."[515]

In his commentary to this passage, Certau suggests that the recollection of the Tupi song, which imposes itself on Léry's memory, is, just as the Native speech, untranslatable into the author's historical narrative. In his view, moments such as this one "rend holes in the fabric of the traveler's time, as if the Tupis' festive organizations were beyond all economy of history."[516] And yet, Léry does make an attempt at overcoming the elusiveness

[514] Léry, 69.

[515] Léry, 142-144.

[516] De Certau, 227.

of music as bound by constraints of time and place: the third (1585) edition of *Histoire* adds five musical staves "so that the sonorous expanse of a lost world could resonate in the ears of French and Swiss readers."[517]

Are all these well-intentioned efforts on Léry's part to be understood as assaults on Tupi otherness, which to be genuinely respected, should remain within the realm of the unrepresented/unspoken? At a more general level, the question to consider is whether writing must invariably betray otherness.[518] It seems to me that the answer to this question must be: no. In their flawed attempts at bringing about proximity, the letters also make clear the existence of an original distance, which it is their task to bridge. In other words, letters are also the instrument by means of which one gains an awareness of difference. This recognition of distance, and in fact, of a certain incommunicability between the self and other is at the heart of the humanistic ethos. Eugenio Garin argued that humanism begins with the recognition of alterity – in realization of a discontinuity between the Ancients and the medievals and moderns.[519] The same consciousness of otherness and attention to the importance of historical circumstances as paramount in the process of formation of authors and their works (which in today's lingo we might as well refer to as "personal positioning") guided the renewed zeal for Biblical studies so characteristic of the

[517] Léstringant, "Léry-Strauss", 428.

[518] This question lies at the center of the chapter on "The Immemorial: a task of narrative" of Richard Kearney's excellent book *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters.* (Cf. Richard Kearney, *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters. Interpreting otherness* (London-New York: Routledge, 2003)

[519] "Antiquity, therefore, came to be defined as something that confronted the humanists. Its discovery was the discovery of an object which had to be placed into a valid relationship with the people who discovered it. The humanists thus found themselves vis-à-vis a historical past that was very different from their own world. […] There was a detachment; and as a result of this detachment a classical author ceased to be part of me and I began to define my own identity by discovering his." (Eugenio Garin, *Interpretations of the Renaissance*, 18-19)

Northern Renaissance. The alertness to difference prompted by the exceptional passion for literature as practiced by the humanists, seems to me the oft forgotten "brighter side of the Renaissance". Letters, as well as being the vehicle of knowledge, and thus power (in accordance with the famous Baconian adage[520]), have also the effect of fostering the awareness of distance through the all-to-obvious illusion of proximity. In that sense, they are a suitable analogy of the Calvinist understanding of the Eucharist, which both bridges the unbridgeable expanse between heaven and earth and yet, falls short of uniting them.

Though a lot has already been said about the way the Huguenot Eucharistic theology informs Léry's ethnological writing, allow me to add one more very important observation. The symbolic understanding of the Eucharist as advocated by Calvin permits for the change of the material signs used in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. In fact, the Huguenot non-essentialist approach to the relationship between the signifier and the signified in Holy Communion is especially evident in the controversy over the legitimacy of using local products as substitutes for bread and wine, which shook the Protestant community at Fort Coligny.[521] The Huguenots eventually concluded that since Jesus instituted the Eucharistic signs using the typical foodstuffs of his own culture, the root flour

[520] Cf, "Human knowledge and human power meet in one, for where the cause is not known the effect cannot be produced." (Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum* in: *The Works of Francis Bacon*, Volume 4, ed. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis and Douglas Denon Heath (New York: Garrett Press, 1968), 47.

[521] Cf. "After the last Lord's Supper that we had in that country, there remained only about a glassful of all the wine that we had brought from France, and since we had no way of replenishing our supply, the question arose among us whether, for lack of wine, we could celebrate Communion with other kinds of drink. Some […] were of the opinion that when wine was lacking, it would be better to abstain from the sign than to change it. Others said, on the contrary, that when Christ instituted the Lord's Supper, being in the land of Judaea, he had spoken of the ordinary drink of that region, and that if he had been in the land of the savages it is probable that he would have made mention not only of the drink that they use instead of wine, but also of the root flour that they eat instead of bread; they concluded that while they would not change the signs of the bread and the wine as long as they could be obtained, nonetheless if they were not to be had, there would be no obstacle to celebrating Lord's Supper with the commonest things for human nourishment that took the place of bread and wine in the land where they were." (Léry, 49)

bread and *caouin* as the local staples could be used when European bread and wine run out. In other words, it was decided that the material aspect of the symbol did not matter, for the spiritual content of it remained unaffected.

Lestringant argues that it is precisely this belief in the arbitrariness of the Eucharistic sign that conditions Léry's way of looking at the Tupinamba.[522] Frisch, for her part, maintains that it is the middle course between the Catholic essentialism and complete arbitrariness steered by Calvin in his teaching on the Eucharist that informs Léry's approach to the native custom. Recognizing the universality of the human (fallen for him) condition, Léry is nevertheless receptive to the diversity of possible cultural manifestations of it.[523] This, in turn allows him to see the Tupinamba as no different in their humanity from the rest of mankind, sharing in other peoples' limitations as well as abilities.[524] It helps him avoid the double extremes of either idealizing the native as the "good savage" (a

[522] Cf. Lestringant, "*Une sainte horreur*", 106. Frisch disagrees with Lestringant on the issue of Calvinist devaluation of Eucharistic sign and Léry's consequent appropriation of the idea of absolute arbitrariness of the sign. (Cf. Frisch, 84) She points out that Calvin's teaching on the Eucharist is still based on analogy. (Cf. "Despite his insistence on the thoroughly symbolic nature of the eucharistic sign, however, Calvin makes abundantly clear in the *Institutes* that the fact that the bread never undergoes an ontological conversion into the body of Christ does not mean that just anything could occupy the place of bread in the sacrament. Quite the contrary: Calvin's sacramental semiotics depend upon a very specific type of relationship between the sacramental sign and the divine reality that it signifies. [… B]orrowing from Augustine, Calvin calls this relation ''*similitude''* or ''*analogie*,'' and explicitly anticipates and defends against the charge of arbitrariness: ''the name 'body' has been given to the bread, not in a bare, empty manner that aims to please the ear, but because of an especially appropriate similitude.'" (Frisch, 85)). Hence, the opinion of the majority of the missionaries in Fort Coligny: the material signs of the Eucharist are changeable, but only as long as they can be said to preserve the analogical relationship with the body and blood of Christ as would be the case with *caouin* and the manioc bread.

[523] Cf. "Calvin's Eucharistic analogy makes it possible for the Huguenots of Guanabara to see their own cultural preference as just that, and not as an inviolable absolute. Thus, Léry's willingness as a Calvinist to accept Tupi *caouin* and manioc mush as potential analogues to the blood and body of Christ grants him the capacity to recognize a certain parity between European and Tupi customs. Léry's ethnography of the Tupinamba will constitute a generalized application of this relativizing perspective." (Frisch, 87)

[524] Cf. for instance: "[T]ese nations of America […] as far as the natural quality of man is concerned […] hold forth better than most of our peasants, and indeed than some others back over here who think they are very clever fellows." (Léry, 150)

temptation which Montaigne was unable to resist) or condemning him as an uncouth barbarian or a childlike creature not yet in possession of his/her rational powers. An oft-quoted example of Léry's ability to distance himself from his own cultural preconceptions, including those crucial ones regarding the notions of the dirty and the disgusting are his reflections regarding the native preparation of *caouin*:

> "I have no doubt that some of those who have heard what I have said concerning the chewing and twisting around of the roots and millet in the mouths of the savage women when they concoct their *caouin*, will have been nauseated, and will have spit. To allay this disgust, I entreat them to remember what we do when we make wine over here. Let them consider merely this: in the very places where the good wines grow, at the time of grape-harvest the winemakers get into tubs and vats, and with their bare feet and sometimes with their shoes, they tread the grapes; as I have seen, they crush them again the same way on the wine presses. Many things go on which are hardly more pleasing than this custom of chewing among the American women. If thereupon someone says ''Yes, but as it ferments in the vats the wine expels all that filth,'' I reply that our *caouin* is purged the same way, and that therefore on this point the one custom is as good as the other."[525]

In a similar manner, Léry refuses to accept the traditional interpretation of native nakedness as an indication of lasciviousness and a trope for the indigenous incorrigible lack of sexual restraint. Modesty is a virtue that has nothing to do with clothing or the lack

[525] Léry, 77.

thereof, the author tells us. It can be just as well transgressed against when one's attire is overly sumptuous or excessively adorned. In fact, the lavish outfits of the European women are more of an incitement to lust that the unpretentious simplicity of the indigenous naked body:

> "[The] crude nakedness […] is much less alluring than one might expect. And I maintain that the elaborate attire, paint, wigs, curled hair, great ruffs, farthingales, robes upon robes, and all the infinity of trifles with which the women and girls over here disguise themselves and of which they never have enough, are beyond comparison the cause of more ills than the ordinary nakedness of the savage women – whose natural beauty is by no means inferior to that of the others. […W]hile we condemn them so austerely for going about shamelessly with their bodies entirely uncovered, we ourselves, in the sumptuous display, superfluity, and excess of our own costume, are hardly more laudable. […] I would to God that each of us dressed modestly, and more for decency and necessity than for glory and wordliness."[526]

In accordance with his belief in the universality of the human condition,[527] and in a manner that gives evidence to his ability to perceive native culture as an organic whole, Léry organizes his descriptions of the native customs under the general labels of: exterior appearance and attire, alimentary habits, laws of war and ways of combat, their treatment of the prisoners of war (chapter dealing with cannibalism), religious convictions, marriage and family life, social order and laws of civility, medicinal practices and customs pertaining

[526] Léry, 67.

[527] Cf. "I take it as resolved that these are poor people issued from the corrupt race of Adam." (Léry, 151) and "[T]he savages of America […] are not taller, fatter, or smaller in statue than we Europeans are; their bodies are neither monstrous nor prodigious with respect to ours." (Léry, 56)

to burial. This holistic approach to the Tupi culture allows him to see meaning in modes of behavior and gestures that otherwise would have to be unquestionably condemned as violating the natural order and God's law. Without justifying the practice itself, Léry endorses a remarkably open-minded perspective with regard to the vexed question of cannibalism.[528] Rather than portraying it simplistically as an act of inexcusable savagery, the author depicts it as an element of a complex cultural phenomenon, an act invested with a symbolic value that serves, among other things as a way of binding the native society together.[529] It is not the hunger for human flesh that drives the Tupinamba in their cannibalistic feasts, but rather the thirst for revenge and the imperative to bond with their friends and allies.[530]

Moreover, the Tupinamba, while exceedingly cruel towards their enemies, are also extraordinarily loyal towards their own kinsmen – a trait as praiseworthy, as almost forgotten in France of the author's lifetime. Firstly, the author's homeland is replete with the usurers who, metaphorically speaking, suck "blood and marrow" and eat "everyone alive – widows, orphans, and other poor people, whose throats it would be better to cut

[528] I find unconvincing the thesis that the early European reports concerning native cannibalism must be regarded as fictional, formulated originally by William Arens in his *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979) and still informing some critics' interpretations of Léry's account of Tupi cannibalism. (Cf. Sara Castro-Klarén, "Corpo-rización tupi: Léry y el 'Manifesto Antropofago'," *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* 23.45 (1997): 193-210.)

[529] Cf. "the act which signals the utter breakdown of community in Europe is, in the context of Tupi culture, *the* gesture of solidarity" (Cf. Janet Whatley, "Food and the Limits of Civility: The Testimony of Jean de Lery," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 15.4 (1984): 387-400).

[530] The sense of communal sharing of the prisoner of war's flesh can be glimpsed from the following passage of *Histoire*: "However many of them there are, each of them will, if possible, have his morsel. Not however (as far as one can judge) that they regard this as nourishment; for although all of them confess human flesh to be wonderfully good and delicate, nonetheless it is more out of vengeance than for the taste […]; their chief intention is that by pursuing the dead and gnawing them right down to the bone, they will strike fear and terror into the hearts of the living." (Léry, 127)

once and for all, than to make them linger in misery"[531]. Secondly, there are also those who in the context of recent religious animosities "not content with having cruelly put to death their enemies, have been unable to slake their bloodthirst except by eating their livers and their hearts".[532] Léry's lesson is that cannibalism is not a distant reality which can be condemned in others from the high ground of European superiority, but it is a way of thinking about one's fellow men, which transcends the territorial designations of here (good) and there (evil). Cannibalism is for Léry "a moveable sign, a signifier which can carry the most diverse signifieds"[533] - a shorthand for the sin of cruelty. As such, it can be predicated also of the author's fellow Frenchmen:

> "So let us henceforth no longer abhor so very greatly the cruelty of the anthropophagous – that is, man-eating – savages. For since there are some here in our midst even worse and more detestable than those who, as we have seen, attack only enemy nations, while the ones over here have plunged into the blood of their kinsmen , neighbors, and compatriots, one need not go beyond one's own country, nor as far as America, to see such monstrous and prodigious things."[534]

Overall, the author of *Histoire* displays a remarkable willingness to juxtapose on a level plane the Tupi and the European societies. Although the Tupinamba seem to be a

[531] Léry, 132.

[532] Ibid.

[533] Frank Lestringant, *Cannibals: The Discovery and Representation of the Cannibal from Columbus to Jules Verne* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 73.

[534] Léry, 133.

nation particularly wretched because of their ignorance of the Christian religion,[535] the Calvinist opinion holds that the nature of all men is fallen and that none can be sure of their salvation.[536] In a way, despite the disturbing tendency to oppose those who are "chosen" and those who are not, the Huguenot doctrine of intrinsic corruption of humankind and redemption by grace alone favors an egalitarian view of postlapsarian humanity. It is in the light of the belief that no human institution can claim divine credentials, that we must read Léry's assertion (when comparing the ways of preparing wine and *caouin*) that "one custom is as good as another", the suggestion that both the Europeans and the natives would be better advised to seek greater modesty in their dress, and finally this equation between native cannibalism and the violence perpetrated daily by the Europeans. The occurrence of these juxtapositions puts into perspective Michel Jeanneret's influential thesis concerning the fundamental epistemological difference between Thevet's *Singularitez de la France Antarctique* (1557) and Léry's *Histoire*.[537] Jeanneret argued, not without reason, that while the former emphasizes correspondences between America and the Ancient World, the latter focuses on differences.

It seems that even though the predominant trope of Léry's *récit* is dissimilarity between the Europeans and the Tupi,[538] our author does not eschew analogy altogether.

[535] Cf. "As for blessedness and eternal bliss (which we believe in and hope for through Jesus Christ alone), in spite of the glimpse and the intimation of it that I have said they have, this is a people accursed and abandoned by God, if there be any such under the heavens." (Léry, 150)

[536] Cf. "Le résultat pratique de la doctrine calvinienne du péché, c'est [chez Léry] la tolérance at le sentiment d'une fondamentale égalité parmi les homes — égalité dans la réprobation et dans l'incertitude du salut" (Michel Jeanneret, "Léry et Thevet: Comment parler d'un monde nouveau?", 233)

[537] Cf. Michel Jeanneret, 227–45.

[538] In fact, the author considers the name of "New World" as particularly suitable to the land of Brazil on account of its utter dissimilarity with respect to Europe. Cf. "[I]n this land of America […] everything to be seen – the way of life of its inhabitants, the form of the animals, what the earth produces – is so unlike what

Firstly, because, as Tinguley points out, "l'analogie ne constitue pas toujours une négation de la diversité ou de la différence: elle peut parfois […] se fonder presque exclusivement sur des rapports de dissimilitude".[539] Very often Léry's Tupinamba are related to the Europeans as their exact opposites: the indigenous world seems to be Europe in perpetual Carnival mode.[540] Yet, Léry also practices analogy based on similarity, the most striking example of which is the recurring comparison between the cannibals and the Catholics. Shullenberger suggests that Léry uses the parallel between Catholic Eucharistic practice and Tupi cannibalism to exonerate the latter.[541] In his account, the Catholics emerge as even greater sinners than the Brazilian anthropophagi for they are guilty of idolatry[542] in believing that God might be contained in material objects such as bread and wine. Moreover, in attempting to "eat" Christ, they commit a kind of spiritual cannibalism, which is more abominable than the material cannibalism of the Tupi.[543] Finally, even the religious rituals of the cannibals are similar to the Catholic superstitions, especially as regards the

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we have in Europe, Asia, and Africa that it may very well be called a 'New World' with respect to us" (Léry, LX-LXI)

[539] Cf. Frédéric Tinguely, "Jean de Léry et les vestiges de la pensée analogique," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 57.1 (1995): 41.

[540] Cf. Tinguely, 36.

[541] Cf. Geoffrey Shullenberger, "Analogies of the Sacrament in Sixteenth-Century French and Spanish Ethnography: Jean de Léry and José de Acosta," *Romance Studies* 28.2 (2010): 88.

[542] Cf. Shullenberger, 88.

[543] Cf. "the crypto-Papist Villegagnon has revealed himself to be worse than the cannibal tribes that Léry will shortly describe, who at least kill and cook their human meat: Villegagnon would symbolically devour the living flesh of Christ. To escape from his domination and join *les sauvages* on the coast is to trade the proximity of spiritual cannibalism for that of the merely physical." (Janet Whatley, "Food and the Limits of Civility," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 15.4 (1984): 389) Cf. also: "Léry elaborates a mode of cross-cultural interpretation in which Tupinamba ritual cannibalism compares favorably to the Catholic Mass and shares certain epistemological assumptions with the Reformed practice of the Lord's Supper." (Shullenberger, 85)

resemblance between the deception practiced by the caraïbes (the native shamans) and the frauds of the Catholic clergy.[544]

Léry's practice of "limited analogy",[545] his tendency to juxtapose, yet not identify the disparate realities of the New and the Old Worlds has one more consequence that is important. It makes room for the realization that alterity is reciprocal. In fact, there are a few crucial moment in the *Histoire* where the author seems to assume the perspective of the other only to mock himself and his own ignorance of the Tupi customs and ways of life. This assumption of the native cognitive horizon, possible only from hindsight, at the moment of recollection of past events, is detectable in Léry's accounts of the situations in which he misunderstood the natives' intentions. One such misunderstanding took place when he and his companions tried to save from drowning a number of natives whose canoe capsized. The Tupi, who turned out to be excellent swimmers, considered the Europeans' misguided efforts to help them hilarious and a proof of their allies' laughable ingenuousness.[546] Léry, for his part, reports this occurrence with self-irony reminiscent of

[544] Cf. "there are among them certain false prophets that they call *caraïbes*, who, going and coming from village to village like popish indulgence-bearers, would have it believed that by their communication with spirits they can give to anyone they please the strength to vanquish enemies in war, and, what is more, can make grow the big roots and the fruits […] produced by this land of Brazil" (Léry, 140). Furthermore, the caraïbes, who during religious ceremonies dance and play the maracas, are compared by Léry to "the bell-ringers that accompany those impostors who, exploiting the credulity of our simple folk over here, carry from place to place the reliquaries of Saint Anthony or Saint Bernard, and other such instruments of idolatry." (Léry, 142)

[545] Cf. Shullenberger, 86.

[546] Cf. "While we were strolling around on a bulwark of our fort, we saw a bark boat […] turn over in the sea; in it were more than thirty savages, adults and children, who were coming to see us. Thinking to rescue them, we made toward them with great speed in a boat. We found them all swimming and laughing on the water; one of them said to us, 'And where are you going in such haste, you *Mairs*" (for so they call the French.) "We are coming," we said, "to save you and to pull you from the water." "Indeed," he said, "we are very grateful to you; but do you think that just because we fell in the sea we are in danger of drowning? Without putting foot to ground, or touching land, we could remain a week on the surface, just as you see us now. So," he said, "we are much more afraid of some big fish pulling us to the bottom than we fear sinking." Thereupon the others, who were, indeed, all swimming as easily as fishes, having been alerted by

the tone of self-deprecation of Cei's accounts of the New World *beffe*. A similar tone is employed in Léry's description of one of the first nights he spent among the natives, when he mistook the Tupi displays of hospitality for threats and prepared himself to be eaten the next morning.[547]

In these two episodes, Léry portrays himself as vulnerable with respect to the natives' superior competence in the matters of meaning in the New World. He enters a universe of cultural signs whose control rests firmly in the hands of the indigenous and learns to let go of his habit of authority (only natural in somebody training to be a preacher). Whatley links Léry's willingness to give up control to the experience of the ocean voyage, as a moment in which, on a rocking ship, one quite literally "loses footing".[548] Importantly, once he begins his dealings with the Tupinamba he gives up his French name – he calls

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their companion to the cause of our swift approach, made sport of us, and began to laugh so hard that we could hear them puffing and snorting on the water like a school of porpoises." (Léry, 97)

[547] Cf. "[A]fter eating a little root flour and other food they had offered us, I, weary and asking only for rest, lay down in the cotton bed I had been sitting on. Not only was I kept awake by the noise that the savages made, dancing and whistling all night while eating their prisoner; but, what is more, one of them approached me with the victim's foot in hand, cooked and *boucané*, asking me (as I learned later, for I didn't understand at the time) if I wanted to eat some of it. His countenance filled me with such terror that you need hardly ask if I lost all desire to sleep. Indeed, I thought that by brandishing the human flesh he was eating, he was threatening me and wanted to make me understand that I was about to be similarly dealt with. As one doubt begets another, I suspected straight away that the interpreter, deliberately betraying me, had abandoned me and delivered me into the hands of these barbarians. […S]eeing myself surrounded on all sides by those whose intentions I failed to understand […] I firmly expected shortly to be eaten, and all that night I called on God in my heart. […] At daybreak my interpreter (who had been off carousing with those rascals of savages all night long in other village house) came to find me. Seeing me, as he said, not only ashen-faced and haggard but also feverish, he asked me whether I was sick, or if I hadn't rested well. Distraught, I answered wrathfully that they had well and truly kept me from sleeping, and that he was a scoundrel to have left me among these people whom I couldn't understand at all; […] he told me that I should have no fear, and that it wasn't us they were after. When he recounted the whole business to the savages – who, rejoicing at my coming, and thinking to show me affection, had not budged from my side all night – they said that they had sensed that I had been somewhat frightened of them, for which they were very sorry. My one consolation was the hoot of laughter they sent up – for they are great jokers – at having (without meaning to) given me such a scare". (Léry, 163-164)

[548] Cf. Janet Whatley, "Impression and Initiation: Jean de Lery's Brazil Voyage," *Modern Language Studies* 19.3 (1989): 16-17.

himself Léry-oussou (big oyster) to accommodate the sounds of the native tongue.[549] In other words, Léry is willing to "be translated" and incorporated into the oral universe of Tupi speech. Moreover, he speaks of this translation as a real metamorphosis, evoking the myth of the enchantress Circe.[550]

Lestringant interpreted the assumption of this new name, as signaling a re-birth, or the birth of "*Léry brésilien*".[551] In fact, in accepting a new name, a name sounding wonderfully familiar to the Tupi, he lets them become his adoptive parents and the New World itself - a birth mother and the source of his new identity. He is willing to become a passive receiver of the New World sights, smells, sounds and tastes, just as a newborn receives from his mother. Needless to say, these new birth metaphors are reminiscent of Cabeza de Vaca's re-birth, as he re-enters America naked after his last attempt at an escape.

Whatley explains the exceptional appeal of Léry's narrative by the sobriety of his disinterested gaze. Expelled from Villegagnon's colony and forced to accept the failure of his mission, he is free of the typical agenda of a European in America. He does not have to think of the Tupi as *tabulae rasae* waiting to be inscribed with the meanings of his culture: awaiting a ship to take him back home he knows that time is not on his side. Yet, he also refuses to idealize the native, to turn him into a moral lesson for the corrupt European

[549] Cf. "The interpreter had warned me that they wanted above all to know my name; but if I had said to them Pierre, Guillaume, or Jean, they would have been able neither to retain it nor to pronounce it (in fact, instead of saying "Jean," they would say "Nian"). So I had to accommodate by naming something that was known to them. Since by a lucky chance my surname, "Léry,", means "oyster" in their language, I told them that my name was "Léry-oussou," that is, a big oyster. This pleased them greatly […]." (Léry, 162)

[550] Cf. "[I]ndeed, I can say with assurance that never did Circe metamorphose a man into such a fine oyster" (Ibid.)

[551] Cf. "Léry est donc né une deuxième fois, « rené ». C'est comme une nouvelle naissance à la mode brésilienne, un avatar, une métamorphose" (Frank Lestringant, *Jean de Léry ou l'invention du sauvage. Essai sur l'* Histoire d'un voyage faict en la terre du Brésil (Paris: Champion, 2005), 31)

reader. In fact, as Whatley points out, he neither impresses nor idealizes the native.[552] Instead, he opens himself to "receive the imprint" of American alterity. As a result, even back in France he still can hear the sounds of Tupi singing in his ears[553] and the image of the native is forever engraved on his memory:

> "During that year or so when I lived in that country, I took such care in observing all of them, great and small, that even now it seems to me that I have them before my eyes, and I will forever have the idea and image of them in my mind."[554]

To take further the metaphor of America as mother, we should consider it as a source of nourishment. Léry, like everyone in his position, had to be, quite literally, nourished by American nature. Now, in order to accept it as a source of sustenance, he had to overcome the culinary inhibitions brought over from Europe. Apart from overcoming his original disgust of *caouin* and developing a taste for manioc mush, he also learned to eat things that, on the first contact, seemed inedible, like lizards.[555] Having eaten "of" America, he absorbed it within his own flesh and was changed. Certau says that:

> "[Léry's] *Histoire* casts the movement of departure that had gone from over here (in France), to over there (among the Tupis), into circular form. It transforms the voyage into a cycle. From over there it brings back a literary object, the Savage,

[552] Cf. Whatley, "Impression and Initiation: Jean de Lery's Brazil Voyage", 15-16.

[553] Cf. above.

[554] Léry, 67.

[555] Cf. "It is true that at the beginning I was horrified at the notion [of eating a lizard], but after I tasted it, as far as meat was concerned, I sang the praises of nothing but lizards." (Léry, 82)

that allows him to turn back to his point of departure. The story effects his return to himself through the mediation of the other."[556]

It seems to me that, as in the case of Cabeza de Vaca and Cei, Léry's chances of tracing a full circle and returning to himself were very slim. Léry returns home, not as a conqueror carrying a trophy of the Savage as a literary object but as a pilgrim, marked by an experience of failure and profoundly inscribed by American alterity. Obviously, there are limits to this inscription. In no sense did Léry "go native". His overcoming of inhibitions did not extend to the sphere of sexual relations with the native women or cannibalism. The author of *Histoire*, while eager to absorb the visual, olfactory and auditory aspects of the New World, never forgot the core of his identity: his Calvinist Christianity. The result of his Huguenot "personal positioning" was a perception of a divide between himself and the Tupinamba, a chiasm, which ironically, facilitated reciprocal respect. With the pressure of "converting" the natives fading after expulsion from Fort Coligny, he could put to rest hope of erasing the difference between himself and the Tupi. The rift between the two worlds was a fact, as much as the failure of his mission. Lestringant argues that Léry can be as sympathetic an observer as he is, because he sees the Tupinamba as beyond hope of salvation.[557]

Lestringant's analysis brings to mind Charles Taylor's remarks on the "disciplined" or "buffered" self of Reformed Christianity (and Modernity) and the porous self of earlier

[556] De Certau, 213.

[557] Cf. "L'enthousiasme dont Léry saura faire preuve dans son tableau du peuple des Tropiques, l'évidente générosité de la peinture qu'il donne du Brésilien soumis à son seul 'sens', représentent l'envers paradoxal d'une condamnation sans appel" (Frank Lestringant, "Calvinistes et Cannibales," *Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire du protestantisme français* 1 and 2 (1980): 21.

eras.[558] To use Taylor's terminology we could say that Léry is a comfortable observer because he is a "buffered self". In other words, despite a measure of appropriation of America, he is nevertheless, immune from the risk of *becoming* the other. His internal discipline prevents him from being unsettled in his most basic beliefs. A certain stern, unforgiving quality of Léry's gaze comes to the fore when he speaks, with overt disgust, about the Norman interpreters who engaged in sexual intercourse with Tupi women, had children by them and, possibly, even ate human flesh.[559] In the Huguenot's eyes, such conduct is unacceptable – the boundaries between the Christians and the pagans must be kept. Yet, one has the impression that protecting the integrity of this "buffered-self" did not come to our author without a struggle. In fact, Léry's reasons for not having lost his faith while confronted with Tupi obliviousness with regard to the Divine sound as if he was trying to persuade himself:

> "[H]aving considered them thus void and deprived of any right sense of God, my faith has by no means been in the least shaken on that account. Even less have I concluded from all this, with the atheists and Epicureans, either that there is no God, or that He does not concern Himself in human affairs; on the contrary, having clearly recognized in their persons the difference between those who are illuminated by the Holy Spirit and the Holy Scripture, and those who are abandoned

[558] Cf. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard University Press, 2007), 37-42.

[559] Cf. "[T]o my great regret I am compelled to recount here that some Norman interpreters, who had lived eight or nine years in that country, accommodating themselves to the natives and leading the lives of atheists, not only polluted themselves by all sorts of lewd and base behavior among the women and girls (by whom one of them had a boy about three years old when I was there), but some of them, surpassing the savages in inhumanity, even boasted in my hearing of having killed and eaten prisoners." (Léry, 128)

to their own faculties and left in their blindness, I have been greatly confirmed in the assurance of the truth of God."[560]

Léry went through the process of initiation into America, accepting a measure of inscription, yet without losing a sense of self-definition at the most fundamental level. He preserved his sense of otherness with respect to the Tupinamba, while acknowledging that he himself is as much other with regard to them, as they are with regard to him. Arguably, his ability to assume the indigenous perspective and imagine himself as the locus of alterity was fostered by the situation of the Protestants in France at the time: as a Huguenot, Léry was *the* Other in his own country. After his return to France, he experienced first-hand the growing hostility of the Catholic majority, the beginning of his service as a Calvinist minister coincided with the outbreak of the French Wars of Religion in 1562. He narrowly escaped the violence of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in August 1572. The awareness of being perceived as *other* must have been always a strong feature of Léry's way of thinking. Obviously, in *Histoire d'un voyage* and *Histoire mémorable du siège et de la famine de Sancerre*, both narrated from a Huguenot point of view, it was the Catholics who were delegated to the sphere of aberrant alterity. Yet, it seems that Léry was nevertheless capable of transgressing the demarcations of identity and alterity accepted in his own Reformed circles. This, in fact, happened in the IV edition of *Histoire* when, in an added chapter on European cruelty ("*Des cruautez exercées par les Turcs, et autres peuples: et nommément par les Espagnols, beaucoup plus barbares que les Sauvages*

[560] Léry, 151.

mesmes") he refused identification with those of his Huguenot brethren who had defiled themselves with acts of barbarous violence.[561]

Juall points out that in mentioning these brutalities, Léry was breaking the law, disobeying, indeed, the edict of Nantes (1598), which stipulated that cruelties perpetrated during the recent domestic wars were not to be mentioned in speech or in writing.[562] Léry, for his part, seems to operate from the presupposition that testimony must be borne so that atrocities, such as the ones he describes, never happen again. Henry IV in the edict of Nantes delegates the atrocities of the religious wars to "time immemorial", as Lyotard would call it,[563] but not as a token of recognition of the fact that reconciliation would inevitably victimize one of the sides of the conflict. The strategy of the King is rather to promote reconciliation through forgetfulness. Léry does not endorse that forgetfulness, rather he wants to heal the wounds of the past through remembering.[564] In fact, his enterprise is therapeutic, for as Richard Kearney observes:

[561] Cf. "In the 1599-1600 edition, Léry declares that because of their savage acts Calvinists are now placed among all of the other *barbares*—a number of Turkish emperors and warriors, Vlad III Tepes, and French, Italian, and Spanish Catholics—which Léry indicates through a lexicon of the diabolical that sustains the entire chapter." (Scott D. Juall, "'Beaucoup plus barbares que les Sauvages mesmes': Cannibalism, Savagery, and Religious Alterity in Jean de Léry's *Histoire d'un voyage faict en la terre du Brésil* (1599-1600)," *L'Esprit Créateur* 48.1 (2008): 65). Cf. also: "Léry thus conceives of otherness as an unstable, slippery category: those engaging in unfounded war because of religious difference unequivocally transform into savage Others who are even more barbarous than the cannibals whom he encountered in Brazil." (Ibid, 69)

[562] Cf. Scott D. Juall, "Draculean Dimensions of Early Modern French Politics and Religion: Vlad III Ţepeş "the Impaler" and Jean de Léry's Political Project in *Histoire d'un voyage faict en la terre du Brésil* (1599/1600)," *Exemplaria* 21.2 (2009): 218-220.

[563] Cf. Jean-François Lyotard, *Political Writings* (London: University College London Press, 1993), 64.

[564] Cf. Scott D. Juall, "Draculean Dimensions", 218-222.

> "narrative imagination – in the guise of historical or literary testimony – may help prevent past traumas from becoming fixated in pathological forms of melancholy, amnesia or repetition."[565]

With each subsequent edition, the auto-reflexive element of the book augments, but it is a reflection about the nation, not about the self. Publishing the book in 1578, not only does he reconnect with his personal past, but he is also striving to communicate with his fellow Frenchmen. As already mentioned in the chapter dedicated to Cabeza de Vaca, the autobiographical gesture is always an act of reaching out to the other, as it is meant to be heard/read. Kearney says that both the autobiographical and the historical narrative (inasmuch as they both require a certain personal investment on the part of the author) occasion two kinds of connectedness with the other. They enhance communication with the readers and they foster a sense of belonging to the subject of representation:

> "Genuine narrative is always 'on its way to the other'. […] This narrative calling out to the other is related to what Habermas terms our 'interest for communication'- an interest which goes beyond a mere interest for facts or information. To engage in narrative history – as opposed to a purely statistical record – is to enlarge our sphere of communication and connection with others. And this is what makes every true historian someone who 'belongs' to the field that he/she studies."[566]

[565] Kearney, 182.

[566] Ibid.

In conclusion, I would like to ponder briefly Lestringant's suggestion that *Histoire* is a work of nostalgia/mourning that "struggles to restore a lost presence".[567] It is hard to deny a note of nostalgia in Léry's voice when he remembers smells, sounds and sights of the New World. It is even more evident in the following wistful passage:

> "I confess for myself that although I have always loved my country and do so even now, still, seeing the little – next to none at all – of fidelity that is left here, and, what is worse, the disloyalties of people toward each other – in short, since our whole situation is Italianized, and consists only in dissimulation and words without effect- I often regret that I am not among the savages, in whom (as I have amply shown in this narrative) I have known more frankness that in many over here, who, for their condemnation, bear the title of 'Christian'."[568]

Such nostalgia is understandable in the light of the hardship of domestic wars the author of *Histoire* had to live through upon his return home. One could say that it is a nostalgia for both the American other and the self as it used to be, for the act of remembering the Tupi reconnects Léry with his younger self. Yet there seems to be more to it. In remembering Brazil, our author goes back to himself – as he was in the relationship with his American others. This version of himself symbolizes the possibility of a coexistence, a community of life despite an irreconcilable difference of religious opinion. This ability to live peacefully side by side with people of radically different views seems all but lost in the France of Léry's days and as such is an object of mourning.

[567] Lestringant, "Léry-Strauss", 118.

[568] Léry, 198.

Lastly, a word about the title of this chapter. The self becomes a space of the other through memory. In remembrance, the voices and images of the Tupi impressed on Léry's mind come to life. The author of *Histoire* did not become the other, yet received their impression, becoming the space where alterity is continually present. It is even more significant now, when the Tupi culture as Léry knew it is long-gone – his narrative is the space where the Other still dwells.

CHAPER IX

CONCLUSION

As we are coming to the end of this project, we must take stock of what we have learned about Renaissance humanism. In what way did the analyses of the previous chapters help us refine our understanding of humanism? Did the reading of Pico, Bovelles, Vives, Cabeza de Vaca, Cei and Léry help us find our way amidst the "historical and philosophical" confusion surrounding the term humanism? The main purpose of this dissertation was to disentangle the notion of humanism from that of modernity, with a focus on the modern *ego* as the supposed source of meaning in the world. If we were to assume that the Renaissance humanistic self indeed regarded itself as a final and ultimate foundation of truth, it is hard not to read all the early New World literature as an attempt, by that self, to impose its own understanding on the alterity of Americas. Yet, some of the paradigmatically humanistic texts of the late XV and early XVI century show that, as Agamben put it in *The Open*: "The humanist discovery of man is the discovery that he lacks himself".[569] Moreover, they illustrate the way man's original incompleteness is then gradually inscribed, while at the same time demonstrating clearly that the source of that inscription is not reducible to the self.

[569] Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 30. Agamben further links the discovery of that original insufficiency with the "discovery of [man's] irremediable lack of *dignitas*" (Ibid.) While I share the author's original observation, I disagree with him as to the conclusions he draws from it.

Envisaging man as a shapeless self that is destined to forge its own form, is very different from imagining him as the creator of forms in the world. In that sense, my reading of Pico's *Oratio de hominis dignitate* goes against a still influential line of interpretation of this text which considers it to be a prefiguration of the modern scientific/technological relationship with reality.[570] At the very outset of this dissertation I undertook to confront such interpretations, arguing that alterity emerges in *Oratio* as something both very intimate and yet forever escaping human mastery. Moreover, I insisted on a contemplative rather than manipulative relationship between Pico's man and Nature. Interestingly, the Biblical: "*and God said unto them: be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth*"[571] has no equivalent in Pico's re-telling of creation. Pico's God places Adam at the center of the world, so that he might contemplate whatever is in the world (*quidquid est in mundo*) as a first step towards self-formation.

In fact, in Pico's tale, Nature can be simply contemplated because from the very outset it is complete and perfect, while man is born a creature marked by an original deficiency. Lacking a nature of his own, he is a space that must be claimed by another to become itself. Prepared and molded by the pursuit of philosophy, he eventually becomes a dwelling place of Divinity, as he finally meets himself in the discovery that he has become

[570] As we remember, some of the eminent interpreters of Pico's thought insisted on his notion of human intellect as divinely creative, i.e. possessing, beyond the mere capacity of fashioning its own notions, the faculty of willful "shaping" of the material world around. Exemplary in that sense was Giovanni Gentile's interpretation, but the tradition of viewing Pico as a "philosopher of the will" is present, to a greater or lesser extent, in the works of all the scholars who lean towards interpreting Pico as paving the way of modernity, notably in Cassirer's *Individual and Cosmos* and Frances Yates' *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*.

[571] Genesis 1:28 (King James Bible)

one with that incommensurable Other who is the source of everything. In a similar way, in Bovelles' *De Sapiente*, man finds his essence through "mirroring" Nature, becoming a means of Nature's redemption and ultimately being "absorbed" into Divinity. Finally, in Vives' *Fabula de homine*, the man-*pantominus* must prove capable of becoming everything like his maker, before he can assume human shape through the pursuit of civic virtues. His relations with his mortal others are the source of his humanity while on the earthly scene, even though his proper place and the reward for a successful impersonation of Jove, is at the eternal banquet.

In the works of Pico, Bovelles and Vives that were at the center of this project, we read about the role of alterity in the process of the self-shaping of human beings. In reality, all three authors conceived of humanity as acquired through engagement with otherness, offering a conception of the self, which we could call relational. Moreover, there is a sense in which we could claim that Heidegger's call for a "new humanism" which "thinks the humanity of man from nearness to Being" can be realized *via* a return to the all-too-forgotten humanism of Pico and Bovelles.[572] At the same time Vives, like Levinas, reminds us that we must think humanity also from the nearness to our fellow human beings. Indeed, Pico, Bovelles and Vives can hardly be accused of holding an idea of "a universal subject who believes that all commences and concludes with […the] self".[573]

In the broadest outlines, the conclusion of the first part of my dissertation is that the Renaissance idea of selfhood was very different from the idea of selfhood that we normally

[572] Cf. my reflections regarding similarities between Heidegger and Bovelles in the chapter dedicated to the latter.

[573] Chambers, 26.

associate with modernity. For Descartes man is the starting point of the process of cognition, for Pico, Bovelles and Vives he is the final product. Renaissance self-identity is the result of the "othering" of the self, which originally is undefined and empty. The original self cannot claim self-presence – it cannot possess or know itself. Man, in order to arrive at a sense of self-identity, must take a roundabout route: he has to pass through alterity as present in the community, Nature and God.

I began my inquiry into the humanist ideas regarding self-identity with Pico's *Oratio* and two other works by Renaissance authors, clearly inspired by the thought of the prince of Mirandola. Arguably, it would be difficult to find a more suitable beginning. Pico's never delivered speech on human dignity is probably the first text non-specialists would mention if asked to name a work of a Renaissance humanist. The text's emblematic status is an advantage when one hopes to speak about Renaissance humanism to audiences that might be more interested in considering humanism conceptually rather than historically, as is the case with critics preoccupied with the "consequences" of Europe's reputed allegiance to humanistic ideas.

The bridge between the two bodies of texts considered in this dissertation is the idea, found in Pico, Bovelles and Vives that arriving at a sense of self always involves a detour in which one comes face to face with otherness. The encounter with alterity of one's community, Nature and God is constitutive of one's humanity and individuality. The reading of the autobiographic travel narratives of Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, Cei and Léry afforded us an opportunity to consider the process of self-construction and discovery of the self in the context of the very concrete detour of overseas travel and the consequent face to face with New World alterity.

More concretely, in the second part of the dissertation, I focused on the "othering" influence of the European travel-writer's clash with American otherness. That "othering" dimension of American experience was analyzed in three accounts, which can safely be said to belong to the category of narratives described by Joan-Pau Rubiés as tales of "the discovery of futility" and by Beatriz Pastor Bodmer as the "narrative discourses of failure". In the accounts of Cabeza de Vaca, Cei and Léry the triumphalist tone, characteristic of the early reports on the discovery and conquest is entirely abandoned in favor of a new, less self-assured and more faltering voice. The fundamental feature of these accounts is the recognition that America and its inhabitants are resistant to the European subject's will. These narratives portray the Europeans in the New World as devastated by misfortunes and overcome with disappointment. Their 1st person narrators no longer envision themselves in the proud role of agents of their own destiny. Instead of subduing the new lands and their natives, they portray themselves as led by or dependent on the Amerindians. In acknowledging their own weakness Cabeza de Vaca, Cei and Léry create a literary space, in which America breaks free of the objectifying schemes present in the more self-congratulatory discourses, such as those of Columbus or Hernán Cortés.

A factor contributing to the different quality of our author's gaze was certainly the fact, that all three of the analyzed texts feature narrators whose position within the colonial power structure is somewhat ambiguous and who do not fit into the strict dichotomy between the all-powerful conquistador and the disempowered Amerindian. Cei – both in virtue of his being Italian (and thus free of any national allegiance to the Spanish colonial

enterprise[574]) and because of his personal failure in the New World. Léry - due to his Calvinism and the consequent precarious position at home as well as the failure of his missionary efforts at Fort Coligny. Cabeza de Vaca, as a result of his extraordinary experience of captivity and faith healing among the Indians. In all of these authors we witnessed a remarkable departure from the rhetoric of mastery as a result of the recognition of one's powerlessness in the face of the American environment and its inhabitants. Moreover, all three of them, at various moments of their American adventure and to a greater or lesser extent, lost their bearings of home as the place guaranteeing the stability of the self. As a result, their homecoming, even after it is accomplished, preserves the aura of an ever-elusive longing.

It was not my intention to claim that voices such as those of Cabeza de Vaca, Cei and Léry should be considered more representative of the European writing on America, than those of Columbus, Cortés, Oviedo or Gómara. Yet, their existence is reason enough to ponder the possibility that Renaissance humanism, rather than invariably producing selves incapable of recognizing alterity, also bore individuals receptive to difference and prepared to morally acknowledge it. Furthermore, I would like to suggest that perhaps the travel narratives studied in the pages of this dissertation remain closer in spirit to the actual humanist reflection on self-identity and alterity than those writing on the New World which focus on representing the other, while recoiling from questioning the self. In illustrating

[574] Cf. Theodore J. Cachey on the unique qualities of Italian travel writing: "That Italy never did achieve national political unification during the early modern period gives its contributions to Americanist literature a distinctive character, both in the "incunabular" or cradle stage of European encounter with the New World when it is particularly formative for Europe, but also later when it will express a perspective different from that of the "national" political-colonial subject developed by the literatures of France, England, and Spain." (Theodore J. Cachey, "Italy and the Invention of America," *The New Centennial Review: Early Modernities* 2.1 (2002): 20)

the impact of America on the Renaissance European traveler, the narratives of Cabeza de Vaca, Cei and Léry bring to life what Pico, Bovelles and Vives theorized in the peace and quiet of their studies – the essential indefiniteness of the self unless inhabited by meanings which must be drawn from without.

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