

THE BARON DE LAHONTAN

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ABSTRACT

This study on the Baron de Lahontan endeavours to present an up-to-date account of his life, the highlights of his literary achievements and studies the fortunes and influence his works enjoyed during the eighteenth century. An attempt has also been made to present evidence identifying Lahontan as an important precursor of the philosophe movement in eighteenth-century France.

Almost all of the biographical information available on Lahontan is found only in his own writings, and this study has consequently drawn heavily on his original volumes, published in 1703.

The Lahontan bibliography, published in 1905 by Paltsits, along with its subsequent recension in 1954 by Greenly, remains the principal bibliographical source available. A definitive bibliography of Lahontan is not yet fully established, however. The recent discovery of several unpublished manuscripts by Lahontan suggests that more may yet come to light.

No attempt has been made in this study to discuss Lahontan's rôle as an historian or geographer, although it has become evident that some of the more important eighteenth-century chroniclers used his works as a source of information for their own accounts of New France.

Finally, this study endeavours to confirm Lahontan's rôle as

a precursor of the philosophe movement in France and it examines the extent to which the great writers of that period may have drawn on his observations.

Although there is considerable evidence in support of the claim that Lahontan probably influenced such great figures as Montesquieu, Voltaire, Diderot, and Rousseau, it would be erroneous to assume too much in this regard. It is more the less certain, however, that Lahontan's writings did constitute an essential contribution to the diffusion of philosophical ideas at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

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PREFACE

Of all the men who have written about Canada since the mid-seventeenth century, the Baron de Lahontan must surely remain one of the most controversial. He was a Frenchman of noble birth who served in Canada as an officer in the French army from 1683 to 1693. During that time he crossed the Atlantic between the 'old' and the New World at least six times. The young officer served under three Governors-General during his brief sojourn in New France and, during Frontenac's term of office, the baron was a frequent guest at the chateau in Quebec. Lahontan fraternised and hunted with the Indians and became proficient in the Algonquin language. During his turn of duty in far-flung western outposts the young adventurer probably explored regions which make him, in a limited sense, a rival of La Salle. Lahontan also distinguished himself in several major encounters with hostile English forces, including the defence of Quebec against Admiral Phipps in 1690.

It seems that the unusual qualities which made Lahontan an apparently outstanding officer also contributed to his early downfall. His refusal to conform to conditions imposed upon him by the Governor of Newfoundland caused the baron's untimely departure from New France, and his subsequent exile from his homeland.

This failure of Lahontan's military career was only the beginning of his reputation as an historian and writer. While in Canada, the baron had maintained a regular correspondence with an old relative who lived in France. The letters, together with a carefully-kept journal of flora and fauna in the New World, which he called Mémoires, were published in The Hague in 1703 under the title Nouveaux Voyages. The work was subsequently translated into English, German, Dutch, and Italian, and appeared in several editions during the first half of the eighteenth century.

The work for which Lahontan is best remembered, however, is his Dialogues, an account of a highly unorthodox conversation he had with a remarkable Huron chief named Adario. Embittered by his experiences with the French administration during his vain attempts to regain an expropriated inheritance, and saddened by his exile from New France, whose freedom he so dearly cherished, Lahontan, in his Dialogues, delivers a daring attack upon European civilisation which makes him one of the most important precursors of the great thinkers of the Revolutionary period in France. Our aventurier-philosophe is largely responsible, moreover, for the creation of the "Noble Savage", whose philosophical abstraction dominated a good deal of eighteenth-century philosophical literature.

The enthusiasm with which the general public received Lahontan's works was tempered, however, by the criticism they received from the Church and from those aligned with the monarchy. Lahontan was sharply reproved by religious traditionalists, who dismissed his writings as libertinous pamphlets and described the author as a misanthropist and a liar. It was claimed, furthermore, that he attacked only those

instances of injustice with which he personally had been afflicted. His greatest mistake, according to his critics, was to have ascribed refined ideas and subtle feelings to the sauvages.

Lahontan's spirit we see was not that of his own stable and serene age which accepted the divine right of Louis XIV, and, almost without question, the authority vested in the Church. By nature, Lahontan was an investigator and a critic. He refused to accept any institution or custom or mode of thought on faith or by tradition alone. He made each show its true worth in the light of cold rationalism. In many ways his contempt for the current ecclesiasticism and despotism anticipated Rousseau; his cynical criticism of existing institutions announced Voltaire, and finally, his eulogy of the savage state prepared the way for Diderot and the Encyclopedists.

Chapter 1

BIOGRAPHY

Louis-Armand de Lom d'Arce, better known as the Baron de Lahontan, was the son of the second baron of that name, a distinguished engineer who died leaving an estate encumbered with debts. Fatherless at the age of eight, Louis-Armand completed his education and then joined the régiment de Bourbon. In 1681, aspiring to quicker promotion, he was transferred with the rank of garde de marine to one of the companies of soldiers serving under the department of Marine. This assured him of service in the colonies, for these were under the administration of the Ministry of Marine at that time.

In 1683, when he was only seventeen, Lahontan went to Canada. He was with three companies of troops which had been requested by the Governor, de la Barre. When he arrived at Quebec in November, Lahontan went into quarters at Beaupré and spent the winter hunting with the Algonquin Indians. The following spring, the young officer spent his time visiting the neighbouring communities and the capital of the

colony, Quebec. In June, Lahontan set off for Ville-Marie (now Montreal), where he arrived in time to accompany de la Barre on an expedition against the Iroquois. Due to the Governor's unfitness for the task the expedition failed, and de la Barre was recalled to France.

Lahontan spent the winter of 1684-85 at Montreal, where he dispelled his boredom by again hunting with the Algonquins. He was learning to speak their language and gaining an increasing knowledge of their way of life. After he had passed the spring and summer of 1685 in garrison at Fort Chambly, Lahontan received the order to proceed to Boucherville, where he was to remain until the spring of 1687. The solitude of the forests or the calm of the countryside were, for Lahontan, preferable to the urban life of Montreal. He divided his time between hunting and fishing and reading the classical authors, Anacreon, Homer and Lucian.

A letter from the Minister granted Lahontan permission to return to France to settle some family business, but the new Governor, Denonville, delayed Lahontan's departure, and took him on another expedition against the Iroquois. When the campaign was completed, successfully this time, the Governor sent Lahontan and a detachment of soldiers and Indians to man Fort Saint-Joseph. The fort had been built the previous year by du Luth on the Saint Clair River between Lake Huron and Lake Erie, the present site of the city of Port Huron.

Leaving Fort Niagara in August, Lahontan travelled by canoe with Greysolon du Luth and Henri de Tonty, and arrived at Fort Saint-Joseph in September. A severe winter limited Lahontan's activities

considerably, and he was unable to hunt as he would have liked. A shortage of provisions resulted, and Lahontan set off with a few of his men for Michillimakinac, on the pretext of seeking food. While there, Lahontan met the survivors of an expedition to Louisiana, in which La Salle had perished. Lahontan's taste for adventure urged him to visit Sault Ste. Marie, whence he participated in a fruitless raid on the neighbouring Iroquois. During this sojourn, Lahontan met the Huron chief Kondiaronk, whom he later probably portrayed in his Dialogues under the name of Adario.

When Lahontan returned to Fort Saint-Joseph, he learned that Fort Niagara had been abandoned and that the campaign against the Iroquois had been renewed. The reason for Lahontan's subsequent action is in doubt, for he burned his fort and took his men back to Michillimakinac. When he arrived, he found that he had been recalled to Quebec with his detachment. The weather was already deteriorating, however, and he was forced to remain where he was for another winter. It was during the following months--from September to May--that Lahontan allegedly carried out a journey of exploration that led him to discover the Rivière Longue. This "discovery" remained unknown until 1703, the date of the publication of Lahontan's Voyages. It was questioned from its first appearance by cartographers and geographers alike. Today, historians consider it the invention of a writer whose aim was to rival the discoveries of La Salle and others of that time.

When Lahontan returned to Montreal in the summer of 1689 no mention was apparently made of Fort Saint-Joseph. Denonville was about

to be replaced by Frontenac and Lahontan went to Quebec with the intention of returning to France to claim his inheritance there. His leave was again cancelled, however, and Frontenac granted him the hospitality of his home. The following spring, the Governor, who knew of Lahontan's familiarity with the Indians and their habits, wanted to send Lahontan to seek a treaty with the Iroquois. Lahontan hastily declined the offer, preferring to accompany Frontenac on his journeys. During such a journey to Montreal, the English naval expedition under Admiral Phipps made its appearance in the St. Lawrence. The Governor hurried back to Quebec, taking Lahontan with him, and the latter proudly took part in the heroic defence of the city and the subsequent defeat of the English.

After the victory, Frontenac entrusted Lahontan with the conveyance of the news to the Court. He embarked at Quebec on November 16, and landed at La Rochelle on January 12, 1691. Lahontan also had a letter for M. de Seignelay, the Minister of Marine, in which the Governor had written glowingly of the baron's role in the affairs of the colony. Unfortunately for Lahontan, however, de Seignelay had died and his successor, Pontchartrain, was not interested in Lahontan. The new Minister granted Lahontan leave to settle his business affairs, with the condition that he re-embark for Quebec before the season's end. In May, the King decorated Lahontan with l'ordre de Saint-Lazare and granted him a captain's commission in a company of the troops of the Marine. By September 18, 1691, Lahontan was back in Quebec, where he was again invited to stay at the Governor's residence. During the

winter of 1691-1692, Frontenac tried to marry Lahontan to Genevieve Damours, the Governor's god-daughter. Lahontan, however, had no intention of forfeiting his bachelor freedom, for he claimed not to believe in love and he vilified all women.

It was Lahontan's intention to return to France as soon as possible and, with this in mind, he suggested to Frontenac that a series of forts be built to protect the western settlers. The Governor decided to send Lahontan to submit his plan to the Minister in person, and he embarked once more at Quebec. The frigate which was to take him to France had to put in to Plaisance (now Placentia), the little capital of the French colony of Newfoundland, where M. de Brouillan was Governor. During this call Placentia was attacked, and Lahontan again took an active part in an engagement against the English. In commending his officers to the Minister, de Brouillan made special mention of Lahontan, to whom he entrusted the task of conveying the news of the defeat of the English. When he arrived in France, Lahontan found that his plans for the western territories could not be entertained due to their prohibitive cost. In recognition of his conduct at Placentia, however, Lahontan was named King's Lieutenant at that town, with the retention of a company of a hundred men.

When he arrived back at Placentia on June 20, 1693, Lahontan's new title of second-in-command was an unpleasant surprise for de Brouillan. A stormy relationship ensued, for de Brouillan's unsatisfactory dealings with the inhabitants had not previously met with any opposition. Lahontan, however, found himself pleading their case, and

the Governor proceeded to draw up an indictment against his new "lieutenant". Lahontan learning of this new threat to his liberty, and not relishing the thought of the Bastille, deserted his post and fled December 14, 1693, on a boat whose captain he had bought over for a thousand crowns.

Lahontan did not dare return to France, for the King had given orders for his arrest on the receipt of a despatch from de Brouillan. On January 31, 1694, Lahontan landed at Viana, Portugal. He then proceeded to Lisbon, whence he embarked on a boat which took him to Amsterdam, for, at that time, Holland was a great refuge for exiles from every country. From there he proceeded to Rotterdam and thence to Hamburg. It was in Hamburg that Lahontan claimed to have met two survivors of La Salle's Louisiana expedition, for, in a letter of June 19, 1694, he offered to provide the French government with information on that adventure. An ensuing investigation failed to substantiate Lahontan's claims, and his letter was ignored.

Shortly afterwards, Lahontan arrived in Copenhagen, where he aroused the sympathy of the French ambassador, M. de Bonrepaus, who provided him with a safe-conduct to France so that he might try to enter the King's service again. Louis XIV remained unyielding, however, and Lahontan, desperate for money, journeyed to his former barony in Béarn, where he managed to collect a few crowns from the tenants. An order for his arrest was soon on the way, and the hapless Lahontan fled across the Spanish frontier, arriving at Saragossa in October, 1695.

During the years immediately following, Lahontan's movements are difficult to trace. He was at The Hague in 1698, for, on September 18, he made an offer (through his protector, M. de Bonrepaus, now Ambassador to Holland) to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Marquis de Torcy, to serve in Spain as a spy for France. So low were Lahontan's funds, and so eager was he to return to favour, that he asked only four hundred crowns for his services. Again, his offer seems to have been overlooked, for there is no record of a reply to this letter.

The baron's wanderings after this time are open to conjecture. He probably visited Copenhagen again, for he dedicated his first book to the King of Denmark. He no doubt lived in Holland for a time, for it was at The Hague that he published, in 1703, the three works for which he is famous. He also spent some time in England, for it was in London that he negotiated a translation of his works into English.

His first volume, Nouveaux Voyages, contains the account of his travels and of his sojourn in Canada between 1683 and 1693. The second, Mémoires, is in the nature of a journal containing Lahontan's observations on New France--the geography, institutions, industry and resources--with special reference to the Indian population. The third work, Dialogues, is in the form of conversations which supposedly took place between Lahontan and a Huron by the name of Adario. It is this volume which contains his indictment of the Christian civilisation and of its injustices and abuses, which he contrasts with the blessings of the primitive state in which the Indians live.

In Europe at the time when Lahontan's works appeared, there was a thirst for information on foreign countries and adventures in the colonies. His three volumes were overflowing with new and detailed information, written in a lively style, scattered throughout with piquant reflections and animated by a liberal philosophy. They met with enormous success and Lahontan's earlier obscurity quickly changed to distinction. He was well received wherever he went, and frequently stayed at the court of the Elector of Hanover, becoming a personal friend there of the great philosopher Leibnitz.

It is believed that Lahontan died in 1715, but the popularity of his writings continued. Although they were read ostensibly for the information they contained on the New World and the Indians, they also helped to provide a basis for the philosophe movement which was beginning to show itself. The criticism and condemnation of religion and society which his works contained were partly responsible for the creation of that philosophical abstraction the "Noble Savage" which is so frequently encountered in eighteenth-century literature.

Contemporary thought in Europe was unquestionably influenced by Lahontan's writings. It is our hope to show that he is a thinker who can still interest the twentieth century, though today the question of human values is no longer a matter of choosing between civilisation and nature--the extremes of the problem in Lahontan's time--but rather between the survival of the human species and its annihilation.

Chapter 2

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

It was in 1703, at The Hague, that Lahontan published his three volumes. The first includes the account of his sojourn in Canada in the form of twenty-five numbered letters, addressed to one of his old relatives in France. There is also one other letter, addressed to Mr. de Seignelai. The title of this first volume, long and involved, as was the custom of that period, gives no indication of the format employed by the author:

NOUVEAUX

VOYAGES

DE

Mr. LE BARON DE LAHONTAN

DANS

L'AMERIQUE

SEPTENTRIONALE

Qui contiennent une Relation des differens Peuples
 qui y habitent; la nature de leur Gouvernement; leur
 Commerce, leurs Coûtumes, leur Religion, &
 leur manière de faire la Guerre.
 L'intérêt des François & des Anglois dans le Com-
 merce qu'ils font avec ces Nations; l'avantage que
 l'Angleterre peut retirer dans ce Païs, étant
 en Guerre avec la France.
 Le tout enrichi de Cartes & de Figures.

TOME PREMIER

A LA HAYE,

Chez les Frères l'HONORE, Marchands Libraires

M.D C C III

The protection that the king of Denmark had given him is acknowledged in the dedication: A SA MAJESTE FREDERIC IV. ROY DE DANNEMARC, de Norvegue, des Vandales & des Goths &c., "...ce qui montre," writes Gilbert Chinard, "que Lahontan n'avait pas à cette date renoncé à trouver de puissants protecteurs."¹ Indeed, there is no evidence that Lahontan ever relinquished his dependence on persons of status.

In the preface to the Voyages, the editor declares that Lahontan had consented to the publication of his letters only "après avoir perdu tout espoir de voir le roi de France récompenser ses services."² The editor further excused himself for presenting a work whose style "ne paroîtra peut-être pas des plus pûrs ni des plus châtiez; mais cela même doit le rendre moins suspect d'affectation: & d'ailleurs que peut-on attendre d'un jeune Officier de Marine!"³ Lahontan angrily refuted these remarks in a little pamphlet

which he published in London, entitled L'Auteur au Lecteur, in which he castigated les Frères l'Honoré: "...ils débitoient ce Livre imparfait, sans se soucier qu'on me prit pour un sot."⁴

The baron was not able to put into epistolary form everything he wanted to say. According to J.-E. Roy: "...il avait eu le soin de faire un journal très minutieux dans le cours de ses aventures."⁵ Extracts from this journal became the second volume of Lahontan's works entitled:

MEMOIRES

DE

L'AMERIQUE

SEPTENTRIONALE,

OU LA SUITE

DES VOYAGES DE Mr. LE

BARON DE LAHONTAN

Qui contiennent la Description d'une grande étendue de Païs de ce Continent, l'intérêt des François & des Anglois, leurs Commerces, leurs Navigations, les Moeurs & les Coûtumes des Sauvages &c. Avec un petit Dictionnaire de la Langue du Païs. Le tout enrichi de Cartes & de Figures.

TOME SECOND.

A LA HAYE,

Chez les Frères l'HONORE, Marchands Libraires.

This volume comprises two hundred and twenty pages, compared with two hundred and seventy-nine pages in the Voyages. The inclusion of a table of contents at the end of the Mémoires suggests that, with this second volume, Lahontan saw his works as completed. In fact it seems that he left for England without even correcting the proofs.

The first two volumes, although dated 1703, appeared some time before the January 1703 edition of the Journal de la République des lettres, for a lengthy extract from Lahontan's two volumes is to be found there.⁶ Meanwhile, in London, Lahontan was negotiating the translation of his works into English. At the same time, he was acquainting his friends there with the series of conversations which allegedly took place between himself and a Huron named Adario during his sojourn in New France.

With the completion of his negotiations in London, Lahontan greatly increased the scope of his works. The "conversations" with Adario constituted an important addition to Lahontan's previous account of life in New France, an account which had earlier appeared to end with the publication of the Mémoires. Chinard states that the new material, entitled Dialogues, appeared first in English, and that its subsequent translation was done from Lahontan's manuscript and published at The Hague under the author's direction.⁷ The following extract from the preface of the English version is worthy of notice here:

While my book was a Printing in Holland, I was in England; and as soon as it appear'd, several

English Gentlemen of a distinguishing Merit, who understand the French as well as their Mother Tongue, gave me to know, that they would be glad to see a more ample Relation of the Manners and Customs of the People of that Continent, whom we call by the name of Savages. This oblig'd me to communicate to these Gentlemen, the substance of the several Conferences I had in that Country with a certain Huron, whom the French call Rat. While I stay'd at that American's Village, I employ'd my time very agreeably in making a careful Collection of all his Arguments and Opinions; and as soon as I return'd from my Voyage upon the Lakes of Canada, I shew'd my Manuscript to Count Frontenac, who was so pleas'd with it, that he took the pains to assist me in digesting the Dialogues, and bringing them into the order they now appear in: For before that, they were abrupt Conferences without Connexion. Upon the Solicitation of these English Gentlemen, I've put these Dialogues into the hands of the Person who translated my Letters and Memoirs: And if it had not been for their pressing Instances, they had never seen the light; for there are but few in the World that will judge impartially, and without prepossession, of some things contained in 'em.

I have likewise intrusted the same Translator with some Remarks that I made in Portugal, and Denmark, when I fled thither from Newfoundland. There the Reader will meet with a description of Lisbon and Copenhagen, and of the capital City of Arragon.

To the Translation of my first Volume, I have added an exact Map of Newfoundland, which was not in the Original. I have likewise corrected almost all the Cuts of the Holland Impression, for the Dutch Gravers had murder'd 'em, by not understanding their Explications, which were all in French. They have grav'd Women for Men, and Men for Women; naked Persons for those that are cloath'd, and *à Contra*. As for the Maps, the Reader will find 'em very exact; And I have taken care to have the Tracts of my Voyages more nicely delineated, than in the Original.⁸

The English edition, which appeared in two volumes, is dedicated to another of Lahontan's affable aristocratic patrons:

"To His Grace WILLIAM Duke of Devonshire, Lord Stewart of Her Majesties Household, Lord Lieutenant of the County of Derby, &c."⁹

The first volume comprised the twenty-five letters which had already appeared in French under the name of Nouveaux Voyages, and also the first part of the Mémoires. The second volume contained the second part of the Mémoires together with the Dialogues. When the Dialogues were later published in French at The Hague they contained, in addition, a series of letters which Lahontan had composed during his travels in Europe, and the whole was given the following title:

SUPLEMENT

AUX VOYAGES

DU

BARON DE LAHONTAN,

Où l'on trouve des Dialogues curieux
entre

l'Auteur

et

Un Sauvage

De bon sens qui a voyagé.

L'on y voit aussi plusieurs Observations faites par le même
Auteur, dans ses Voyages en Portugal, en Espagne,
en Hollande, & en Dannemarck, &c.

Tome Troisième.

Avec Figures.

A LA HAYE,

Chez les Frères L'HONORE, Marchands Libraires.

Such was the growing popularity throughout Europe of Lahontan's works that a considerable number of new editions followed, the precise details of which still continue to plague bibliographers. M. E. Storer writes in this regard:

So great was the diffusion of Lahontan's works at the beginning of the XVIIIth century that the classification of the multiple editions and fictitious prints constitutes one of the knottiest problems of the bibliographer. It has been only partly solved by the two scholars who have made a study of it: James Constantine Pilling of the Smithsonian Institution and Victor Hugo Paltsits of the New York Public Library.¹⁰

In the introduction to his Bibliography of the Algonquian Languages published in 1891, Pilling stated that his aim was to include everything, printed or in manuscript, relating to the Algonquian languages--books, pamphlets, articles in magazines, tracts, serials etc., and such reviews and announcements of publications as seemed worthy of notice. His interest in Lahontan arose from the inclusion in the Mémoires of un petit Dictionnaire de la Langue du Païs. Pilling's "Bibliography of Lahontan" was apparently the first to appear, and it no doubt provided the incentive for additional research by other scholars. Several bibliographies have subsequently been published, each one claiming to contain further evidence of Lahontan's literary legacy.

In 1905, Paltsits published A bibliography of the writings of baron Lahontan. It was included during the same year in a reprint

of the 1703 English edition of Lahontan's works, edited by Reuben Gold Thwaites. A recension of Paltsits' work was published by A. H. Greenly in 1954 in The Papers of The Bibliographical Society of America, where we find additions to and corrections of Paltsits' work, along with a statement that Paltsits' bibliography was "a wonderful piece of work."¹¹

Paltsits accounted for twelve French editions, (Greenly adds one more), one extract, five English editions plus an abridgement and an extract, one German edition plus an abridgement and an extract, one Dutch edition and two extracts, and, finally, one Italian edition. A total, thus, of twenty-one editions, five extracts and two abridgements, almost all of which appeared between 1703 and 1758. The only exceptions were the abridgment in English, which was published in 1812, and the Italian edition which was published in 1831 in Milan. In addition to these twenty-one editions, we find mention of others which had been listed by previous bibliographers. According to Paltsits these last did not exist, although both editions were believed previously to have originated in 1731. Leclerc, in his Bibliotheca Americana, dated 1867, first recorded the edition of 1731. Paltsits, while listing the edition in his bibliography, states: "I believe no such edition exists, and that the date was mistaken for M. DCC. XXXXI, for the collation agrees with Vol. i and Vol. ii (called Suite) of the 1741 edition. This vagary has misled every bibliographer who has had recourse to Leclerc's title."¹² Subsequently, writing in 1878, Sabin listed a 1731 edition in his Dictionary of Books Relating to America (no.38640). Paltsits declares that it is merely a repetition

of Leclerc's erroneous title, and he offers evidence to support his claim, concluding that this vagary: "has misled every bibliographer who has had recourse to Sabin for this subject."¹³ As long as such vagaries do exist, Chinard's observation on the subject will continue to state the case: "...la bibliographie de Lahontan reste un des problèmes les plus ardues que l'on puisse proposer à un américaniste."¹⁴

A further problem which has plagued scholars in their study of the Dialogues has been the rôle played in their composition by a contemporary of Lahontan, a defrocked monk named Gueudeville. André Lichtenberger, credited with being the first critic to evaluate the Dialogues, attributes them to Gueudeville and gives 1704 as the date of the first edition.¹⁵ Gustave Lanson, in his Bibliographie, repeats this misleading information. There seems to be little doubt that Gueudeville was responsible for at least one edition of the Dialogues, but this was not until some time after the appearance of the original edition. Evidence for the authenticity of Lahontan's authorship of this edition is to be found earlier in this chapter.¹⁶

Gueudeville was an ex-benedictine monk and an avowed libertin. Pierre Bayle described him favourably, and at some length, in a letter written from Rotterdam on March 6, 1702 addressed to M. Marais. Bayle mentions that it was Gueudeville who was publishing, anonymously, l'Esprit des Cours de l'Europe and that he was persuaded to refrain from this by M. D'Avaux, former French minister at The Hague, who contended that a work containing such satire against France must not be published. After D'Avaux' departure, Gueudeville

continued his publication, giving it the revised title of Nouvelles des Cours de l'Europe. His publishers at that time were the frères l'Honoré, and it is probable that Gueudeville and Lahontan became acquainted through their dealings with that establishment.

There is no conclusive evidence that Gueudeville ever did, in fact, edit the Dialogues. Chinard considers, however, that he was probably responsible for the 1705 edition. He bases this belief on the reappearance in the 1705 edition of themes almost identical to those treated in l'Esprit des Cours de l'Europe. The edition, he continues, was more than a revision, it was essentially a new work. The letters, for example, had now lost almost all their spontaneity, and the attacks on the clergy had become more vehement. The account of the voyage to the "Rivière Longue" had been doubled in length although the Mémoires were left as they first appeared in 1703. Finally, the Dialogues had suffered a drastic revision, and Chinard concludes that the new anarchistic mood contained in the edition of 1705 was not Lahontan's.

Gueudeville is scarcely mentioned in any of the periodicals of the time but, like Lahontan, he may nevertheless be considered a precursor of the philosophe movement which was about to dominate French political and religious thought and gain ultimate expression in the Revolution. Few works published at the beginning of the eighteenth century enjoyed, in fact, as much popularity as those of Lahontan, whose outspokenness in matters of religion and government was to please the philosophes immensely.¹⁷

The decline in the popularity of Lahontan's works may be seen from the small number of editions which have appeared since the eighteenth century. The English edition of 1905, edited by Thwaites, was preceded in 1900 by the first edition in French to appear since 1741. The latter contained only the first part of Lahontan's works, in which he relates his voyages and adventures: Un Outre-Mer au XVIIe Siècle. Voyages au Canada du Baron de La Hontan. This was published, with an introduction and notes, by François de Nion.¹⁸

The most recent contribution of scholarly significance has been that of Gilbert Chinard, whose edited version: Dialogues Curieux entre l'auteur et un Sauvage de bon sens qui a voyagé et Mémoires de l'Amérique Septentrionale, is probably the most readily obtainable edition of these works of Lahontan. One English edition has appeared and is especially worthy of mention, for its originator, a staunch defender of Lahontan's cause, stated on several occasions that the real achievements of Lahontan have been belittled, and that his was a "great and courageous name deserving of vindication from historic slander."¹⁹ The editor was Stephen Leacock whose attempt, in 1932, to publish an English edition of Lahontan's Voyages, with an introduction and notes, met with failure. The Friedman copy in the Redpath Library, McGill University, contains the following holograph note by Leacock:

I received, through Dr. Burpee of Ottawa, a contract with the Graphic Co. to do an introduction to Lahontan's Journal with notes ... The company failed and paid nothing ... But I found out long afterwards that some copies of the book had gone through the press, though it was never on the

market. I was never able to get a copy. Lahontan was in my opinion not a liar but a great explorer, the first in upper Minnesota. His opposition to the Church occasioned his exile and defaced his reputation...²⁰

Two manuscripts attributed to Lahontan and edited by Gustave Lanctôt, were published in 1940 under the title: Nouveaux documents de Lahontan sur le Canada et Terre Neuve.²¹ Lanctôt based his belief in their authenticity on similarity of style, handwriting, and on certain biographical details. He concludes that: "...nul lecteur n'en disconviendra après les avoir lus. Le témoignage qui s'en dégage est aussi probant qu'invincible."²²

Storer, however, expresses some doubt as to their authenticity, for to identify the writer of a work by the mere style of the manuscript is rarely convincing. "Lanctôt", he states, "does not take the pains to enumerate the biographical proofs."²³ This problem is of more than passing interest since the second of the two new documents suggests that Lahontan was a traitor to his country. In spite of the reference, in the title of the first volume of his first edition,²⁴ to "l'avantage que l'Angleterre peut retirer dans ce Païs, étant en Guerre avec la France," scarcely two or three pages of the work itself had justified this part of the title. It is true that Lahontan resented the "fâcheuse autorité des ecclésiastes" from which he suffered personally, and that he exposed the corruption of the governor who was more interested in personal gain than in the development of the colony. "But", writes Storer, "this is all quite different from the tone of

the second Lanctôt 'Mémoire', which offers to the English a detailed plan for military operations...".²⁵ Further evidence that Lahontan is not the author of the Lanctôt documents may be seen in the statements regarding the abandonment of Fort du Luth and of Fort Niagara. Abandonment, the author contends, was "...la plus grande folie du monde et en mesme temps la plus grande honte pour la nation françoise."²⁶ Lahontan was, indeed, in command of Fort du Luth (Fort Saint-Joseph) at that time, and it was he who burned it at the end of the summer of 1688. Storer sums up his position in the following terms: "it would seem that the two Lanctôt documents could bear more investigation before their authenticity is firmly established. This question adds but another point in dispute to the already challenging problems connected with the Lahontan bibliography."²⁷

As recently as 1952, the Public Archives of Canada acquired an additional manuscript attributed to Lahontan, consisting of twenty-eight pages in folio, which has not yet been published but bears the title: "Projet d'un fort Anglais dans le Lac Errié". It is believed to have been written about 1696, while Lahontan was living in exile in Europe (probably in Spain), and for the information of the English government. In the second manuscript of the Oakes collection, "Ebauche d'un projet pour enlever Kebec et Plaisance", edited by Lanctôt, the author states: "j'ay desja expliqué dans mes précédents mémoires avec combien de facilité les anglois peuvent faire déchoir et ruiner le comerce des françois par l'establissement d'un fort dans le lac errié".²⁸ The manuscript newly acquired by Canada is evidently

one of the previous memoranda to which Lahontan refers. This manuscript came from the celebrated collection of Sir Thomas Phillips, which was also the source of the first two documents in the Oakes collection. It is believed that all three documents were at one time in the possession of William Blathwayt, the "Secretary-at-War" of William III, and that they later passed to Edward Southwell who had married Blathwayt's daughter. Sir Thomas Phillips purchased a large quantity of manuscript accumulated by Southwell.

According to Greenly, whose bibliography of Lahontan is the most up-to-date study of its kind,²⁹ the William L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan, possesses another Lahontan document, which also came from the Phillips collection. It consists of twelve pages, folio, and has the title: "Brief Discours qui montre en substance Combien il seroit important de réussir dans deux entreprises proposées et contenues en ce mémoire." The two enterprises pertain to the capture of Port Royal in Acadia, by the British, and to the establishment of trade relations with the Indians in the region about Lakes Erie and Ontario, as well as to the expulsion of the French from that region. It still remains for someone to determine that Lahontan did, in fact, write these manuscripts, for the evidence to date is far from conclusive.

There will no doubt be subsequent editions of Lahontan's works, for the ideas of this early aventurier-philosophe are of perennial interest. If some justification for further study of Lahontan's works is necessary, it is perhaps Gilbert Chinard who provides it most succinctly:

Il semble certain ... que les Dialogues constituent un de ces ouvrages essentiels qui, sans avoir par eux-mêmes une valeur littéraire considérable, permettent de faire le point, de déterminer avec précision la diffusion des idées dites philosophiques à une date déterminée. Ne serait-ce qu' à ce titre Lahontan mérite de retenir l'attention des historiens littéraires et des historiens des idées.³⁰

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Chapter 3

NOUVEAUX VOYAGES

It was not until the twentieth century that the magnitude of seventeenth-century interest in travel literature became known. Chinard,¹ in 1913, and indeed many other scholars of the period since have reported a profusion of exotic works and travel narratives whose existence was not previously suspected. Chapelain, writing in 1663, states "Nostre nation a changé de goust pour les lectures et au lieu des romans qui sont tombés avec la Calprenède, les voyages sont venus en crédit et tiennent le haut bout dans la cour et dans la ville."²

According to Geoffroy Atkinson who has traced the development of the accounts of "voyages" from their origins,³ there were in general two types of authors who wrote such narratives in the seventeenth century. First, there was the soldier, the government official, the mariner, or the business man, who wrote the story of his travels in a clear and forthright fashion, without any literary pretensions whatsoever. This type of writer gave few personal opinions, but

largely concerned himself with details of a military, geographic, or commercial nature. He saw nothing, or almost nothing, noteworthy apart from these details. When writing his account after his return, he would recall few of the attractions he had found in distant lands.

The other class of traveller is more interesting today both from the standpoint of style and, what is more important, the ideas he expressed. He was impressionable, every new sensation moved him; he was ready to discover the beautiful, the useful, and the unknown elements of new lands. Consequently, the works of these writers were read more easily and more widely. In the seventeenth century, these accounts of voyages enjoyed many editions and their authors gained rapid fame. It is to this group of alert and discerning writers that Lahontan may be said to belong.

There was, in fact, a great deal of social comment to be found in the accounts of these seventeenth-century voyages, and the contribution which they made to the later philosophe movement is worthy of careful scrutiny. An acquaintance with the accounts of "voyages" is also apparent in the works of many of the libertins of the seventeenth century. Cyrano de Bergerac, for example, relates his Voyage dans la lune⁴ after taking the reader to Canada; and Bernier, who published Gassendi's Philosophie,⁵ was one of the most famous travellers of his day. Fontenelle's Origine des Fables,⁶ a work of considerable philosophical importance, contains references to many different races, including the Iroquois, the Arabs, and the Chinese. Such details must surely have been inspired by the accounts of foreign

lands which were appearing at that time. Malebranche, too, was directly influenced by the accounts of voyages to China in his Entretiens d'un philosophe Chrétien avec un philosophe Chinois.⁷

In addition to such great masters of the seventeenth century, there were many lesser known writers whose works, though they enjoyed only a fleeting renown, were influenced by contemporary travel accounts. It is in this context, then, that Lahontan's Nouveaux Voyages must be considered. Whether this work was, in fact, a collection of letters written originally to an old relative in France is of little consequence; the epistolary form had long been an established vehicle for the dissemination of ideas. There was at the time a dearth of factual information about the colony, and for this reason the memoirs of explorers and voyagers were much sought after.

In France, the repressive political and religious climate fostered an intellectual ferment that censorship could not stamp out. The period of unrest, so aptly described in Paul Hazard's La Crise de la conscience européenne,⁸ reflected the growing intellectual reaction to the restraint of the seventeenth century. This restraint, and the authority which Louis XIV exercised in matters of state, not to mention his dogmatism in religion which led to the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, all contributed to the intellectual ferment which was in evidence wherever there were exiled Frenchmen.

Lahontan could not return to France, for he knew that the governor of Plaisance, (the French establishment in Newfoundland), had written to the Court to denounce him, and we have already noted

that his works were first published in The Hague. The stringent censorship of literature in France, by royal decree, was intended to maintain the status quo, and to suppress any book whose content was contrary to the teachings of the Church or the edicts of the government.

Lahontan's works, thanks to the inefficiency of French censorship, became nevertheless available in France soon after their publication. This fact is evident from a comment which appeared in 1703 in the Jesuit Journal de Trévoux,⁹ a journal especially directed to the defence of religion and which aimed to discredit the doctrines of the libertins. Of Lahontan's works it stated: "...c'était là le précis de ce que les Déistes et les Sociniens disent de plus fort contre la soumission que nous devons à la foy."¹⁰ This statement by the Jesuit editors possibly did more to promote the circulation of Lahontan's works than their literary value could ever have done. It is understandable that the editors were concerned with what was ostensibly an account of voyages, since Lahontan's title itself purported to be a description of the religion of the inhabitants of "l'Amérique Septentrionale".

At that time, moreover, the Jesuits were struggling hard for a foothold in New France. "Dès leur arrivée au Canada", Chinard writes, "les Jésuites s'étaient trouvés en conflit avec les Récollets, qui faisaient sonner bien haut leurs droits de premiers occupants et qui ne voyaient pas sans crainte de puissants et dangereux rivaux s'établir à côté d'eux."¹¹ As for Lahontan, he saw little merit in either faction, and said as much, for he was, first and foremost, an enemy of priests. Their "misguided zeal" became the plague of his existence in New France,

as he tells us in his work:

On n'y sauroit faire aucune partie de plaisir, ni jouer, ni voir les Dames que le Curé n'en soit informé, & ne le préche publiquement en Chaire. Son zèle indiscret va jusqu'à nommer les gens, & s'il refuse la Communion aux femmes des Nobles pour une simple fontange de couleur, jugez du reste. Vous ne sauriez croire à quel point s'étend l'autorité de ces Seigneurs Ecclésiastiques. J'avoue qu'ils sont ridicules en leurs manières d'agir, ils excommunient tous les masques, & même ils accourent aux lieux où ils s'en trouvent pour les demasquer & les accabler d'injures; ils veillent plus soigneusement à la conduite des filles & des femmes que les peres & les maris. Ils crient après les gens qui ne font pas leurs devotions tous les mois, obligeant à Pâques toutes sortes de personnes de porter les billets à leurs Confesseurs. Ils défendent & font brûler tous les livres qui ne traitent pas de dévotion... Jugez, après cela, Monsieur, l'agrément qu'on peut avoir ici.¹²

This outspoken criticism of the clergy earned Lahontan a place among the precursors of the anti-clerical movement which matured in the eighteenth century in the writings of Voltaire. Although his chiding is frequently salted with humour, Lahontan leaves no doubt as to the measure of his contempt. In his description of the city of Quebec, he mentions the five religious orders to be found there and singles out the Jesuits in the following manner: "Ces Peres ont de beaux jardins, plusieurs allées d'arbres si touffus, qu'il semble en Été qu'on soit dans une glacière plutôt que dans un berceau. A propos de glacière, c'est une précaution qui ne leur manque pas; ils en ont plutôt trois qu'une, & ils ont grand soin de les bien remplir, car ces Reverends tous occupez à éteindre les flammes de la concupiscence,

aiment extrêmement à boire frais en Eté."¹³ Lahontan did not limit his remarks to the priests, for he also found sufficient reason to censure Monseigneur Laval for his complicity with the Jesuits. According to Lahontan, the Bishop had, for ten years, prevented the Récollets from building a convent because, he tells us, "Les Jesuites, craignant que ces derniers venus ne batissent en ruïne leur ancienne direction, & ne leur enlevassent les plus belles dévotes ... gagnèrent l'Evêque, & celui-ci, par une lâche complaisance pour le Loyolisme qui fait trembler les Monarques sur le trône, voulut empêcher l'avancement des Récollets, quoique ses créatures."¹⁴ Frontenac finally interceded on behalf of the Récollets, thereby earning the disdain of the Bishop and the Jesuits. Laval's successor, l'abbé de Saint-Valliers, was named while Lahontan was at Michillimakinac in 1688. When he learned of this appointment, Lahontan was quick to utter another rebuke: "...quelle apparence y a-t-il que ce nouvel Evêque soit traitable; S'il est vrai qu'il ait refusé d'autres bons Evêchez, il faut qu'il soit aussi scrupuleux que le Moine Draconce à qui Anastase reprocha de n'avoir pas accepté celui qu'on lui présentait. Or, s'il est tel, on ne s'accommodera guères de sa rigidité, car on est déjà fort las des excommunications de son Prédécesseur."¹⁵

In spite of his loathing for the priests of New France Lahontan must have depended to a great extent upon their library collections. They maintained a small college at Quebec, to which Lahontan was probably a frequent visitor. We know that his admiration for the ancients could certainly not be satisfied by the few books he was able

to carry with him on his journeys, for he mentions that Aristotle:

"...mourroit d'envie de me suivre, mais mon Canot, n'étant pas assez grand pour le contenir avec son equipage de Sillogismes Peripateciens, il fut contraint de retourner chez les Jesuites qui l'entretiennent fort genereusement."¹⁶

Whether Lahontan was as outspoken in life as he was in his writings is open to speculation. Perhaps his interest in some of the more erotic classical writings caused him to be singled out by the Jesuits for special attention. Whichever was the case, an incident occurred while Lahontan was in Montreal, in 1685, which set him permanently against the clergy:

Ce cruel (curé de cette ville) entrant chez mon hôte & trouvant des livres sur ma table, se jette à corps perdu sur le Roman d'avantures de Petrone, que j'estimois plus que ma vie, parce qu'il n'étoit pas mutilé. Il en arracha presque tous les feuillets avec si peu de raison, que si mon hôte ne m'eut retenu lorsque je vis ce malheureux débris, j'eusse alors accouru chez ce turbulent Pasteur pour arracher aussi tous les poils de sa barbe. Ils ne se contentent pas d'étudier les actions des gens, ils veulent encore fouiller dans leurs pensées.¹⁷

It was probably Petronius' Satyricon which inspired Lahontan to write his realistic account of the arrival of the "filles de joie" in New France. This narrative has probably earned greater notoriety for Lahontan than any other passage throughout his three volumes and has been the focus of the critical attention of French-Canadian historians for almost as long as Lahontan's works have existed.

J.-Edmond Roy declares, for example, that: "Il importe que l'on connaisse plus intimement un homme qui a porté des jugements très sévères sur nos origines, qui a popularisé en Europe l'idée que les colonies françaises furent des lieux de déportation et qui, d'un coeur léger, a voulu infliger un stigmate honteux à toute une race."¹⁸ But, writes Robert Le Blant, the academician Roy "...a dû trouver dans la conduite du baron, un motif particulier susceptible d'entraîner la condamnation de celui qu'il appelle lui-même un inculpé."¹⁹ Benjamin Sulte, a contemporary of Roy and, like him, a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, spent a great deal of time attempting to refute Lahontan's observations. He concluded that Lahontan: "...ignorait l'histoire du Canada entièrement; il en parle comme un aveugle des couleurs; sa prose émoussillée s'accorde avec la vérité lorsqu'il décrit ce qu'il a vu; sur les autres points il bat la campagne."²⁰ On the other hand, Stephen Leacock, always ready to redeem what he felt was the much-maligned Lahontan, writes: "If by an odd accident the chapter on the women,--or rather about five hundred words of it, had been torn out of the book and lost...Lahontan's writing would have impressed all critics and scholars with its marvellous accuracy, truth and honesty."²¹ The passage in question is still included in English Canadian history texts, usually with no other explanation than that Lahontan wrote it:

...on y envoya de France plusieurs Vaisseaux chargez de filles de moyenne vertu, sous la direction de quelque vieilles Beguines qui les diviserent en trois Classes. Ces Vestales étoient pour ainsi dire entassées les unes sur les autres en trois différentes sales, où les époux choisissoient leurs épouses de la manière que

le boucher va choisir les moutons au milieu d'un troupeau. Il y avoit dequoi, contenter les fantasques dans la diversité des filles de ces trois Serrails, car on en voyoit de grandes, de petites, de blondes, de brunes, de grasses & de maigres; enfin chacun y trouvoit chaussure à son pied. Il n'en resta pas une au bout de 15 jours. On m'a dit que les plus grasses furent plutôt enlevées que les autres, parce qu'on s'imaginoit qu'étant moins actives elles auroient plus de peine à quitter leur menage, & qu'elles resisteroient mieux au grand froid de l'hiver, mais ce principe a trompé bien des gens.²²

Male immigrants landing in New France were often single and all the soldier-farmers were bachelors. The King, Colbert and Talon made efforts to provide these bachelors with wives and young women were in fact sent out from the mother country. According to Shortt and Doughty,²³ as many as one hundred arrived at Quebec in 1665 and were quickly married; two hundred more came the following year. It is estimated that a thousand young women left France for the colony between 1665 and 1673. The future mothers of Quebec were no doubt selected with the utmost care as to their moral character. Benjamin Sulte, determined to vindicate the origins of his forebears, writes: "Il y a dans la correspondance manuscrite des gouverneurs de ce temps (déposée à Ottawa) une foule d'explications sur tout cela. Rien de plus paternel, de plus chrétien, de plus digne de respect que les précautions de nos administrateurs dans tout le cours de cette affaire."²⁴ In spite of these precautions some black sheep no doubt did manage to slip on board the ships. Marie de l'Incarnation complains in one of her letters that in 1669: "...beaucoup de canaille de l'un et de l'autre sexe"²⁵ had landed at Quebec. There is, however,

no conclusive evidence to prove that any "filles de moyenne vertu" did, in fact, find their way to New France. Whatever may have been Lahontan's motives for writing as he did, his description is certainly lacking in gallantry. Le Blant explains Lahontan's comments as nothing more than: "une critique formulée par un célibataire mysogine des méthodes de Louis XIV fort expéditif en matière de mariage."²⁶ As if to leave no doubt in the reader's mind as to his attitude towards the state of matrimony, Lahontan describes the marriage ceremony in equally irreverent terms: "l'heureux couple, déclaré mari et femme par le magique 'Conjungo vos' du curé, et le contrat du notaire, recevait, le lendemain, du gouverneur de la colonie, comme gratuité, un boeuf, une vache, deux porcs, un couple de volailles, deux barils de viande salée et onze écus en espèces sonnantes."²⁷

The loss of his barony in Béarn to avaricious relatives, during his absence in New France, was fresh in Lahontan's memory when he observed the almost class-less society of the colony. Land was available in abundant quantities for those who wished to take advantage of its benefits. Unmarried immigrants arriving as soldiers soon availed themselves of these opportunities. They found wives in the manner already described and in a short time they became farmers. Lahontan's account is tinged with nostalgia: "Les terres ne coulerent rien ni aux uns ni aux autres, non plus qu'aux Officiers de ces Troupes qui choisirent de terres incultes couvertes de bois (car tout ce vaste continent n'est qu'une forêt). Les Gouverneurs Généraux leur donnerent des concessions pour trois ou quatre lieues de front et de la profondeur

à discretion, en même temps ces Officiers accorderent à leurs Soldats autant de terrain qu'ils souhaiterent, moyennant un écu de fief par arpant."²⁸

The farming conditions in New France as described by Lahontan were certainly better than those of their contemporaries, the French peasants, whom La Bruyère sketched in such dark colours--"a hard-worked band, hoeing a land not their own, and starving half the time."²⁹ Lahontan's account, no doubt intended as an indictment of conditions in France rather than as a eulogy of those in New France, illustrates the resentment he felt concerning conditions in his native land:

Les Païsans y vivent sans mentir plus commodément qu'une infinité de Gentils-hommes en France. Quand je dis Païsans je me trompe, il faut dire habitans, car ce titre de Païsan n'est non plus receu ici qu'en Espagne, soit parce qu'ils ne payent ni sel ni taille, qu'ils ont la liberté de la chasse & de la pêche, ou qu'enfin leur vie aisée les met en parallele avec les Nobles.³⁰

The liberty enjoyed by the immigrants, however, was, Lahontan tells us, within the limits set by the Sovereign Council. This body was composed of the Governor General, the Intendant, and twelve Counsellors. According to Lahontan, Frontenac paid little attention to the supposed precedence of the Intendant or, in fact, to any of the Counsellors: "Il agissait avec lui et avec nos vénérables sénateurs aussi cavalièrement que Cromwell agissait avec les parlementaires d'Angleterre."³¹ The administration of justice, however, was in sharp contrast to that of France, which Lahontan always took

great pleasure in deriding. His own sad experiences at the hands of the "hommes de loi" in France were fresh in his memory as he wrote. The corruption of the French Courts of law had not yet reached New France and Lahontan describes its judicial system in the following terms:

Je ne vous dirai point si la Justice est ici plus chaste & plus désintéressée qu'en France; mais au moins, si on vous la vend, c'est à bien meilleur marché. Nous ne passons point par les serres des Avocats, par les ongles des Procureurs, ni par les griffes des Greffiers; cette vermine n'a point encore infecté le Canada. Chacun y plaide sa cause; nôtre Themis est expéditive, elle n'est point hérissée d'épices, de fraix, de dépens. Les Juges n'ont que quatre cens francs de gages, grande tentation pour chercher le bon droit des parties dans le fond de leur bourse; quatre cens francs? Ce n'est pas pour défraier la robe & le bonnet; aussi ces Messieurs sont-ils dispensez d'en porter.³²

Lahontan was well qualified to reflect as well on "les bureaux", for he had suffered numerous indignities at the hands of French ministers and officials during his short lifetime. When Pontchartrain, the Minister of Marine, refused to grant his discharge to enable him to settle his domestic affairs, Lahontan finally lost whatever hopes he had of recovering his barony. In the short time that the Minister allowed him to remain in France, Lahontan went from lawsuit to lawsuit. The money which he was required to pay in fees to his lawyers soon took all his assets, and he was obliged to return to New France, dejected and embittered. On the eve of his departure from La Rochelle he wrote:

Je vous jure, Monsieur, que je pourrois trouver matière à composer un Livre de trois cens pages in Folio, si je voulois faire un ample détail des intrigues des Bureaux, des moyens dont les solliciteurs se servent pour venir à leur fins, des insignes friponneries de certaines gens, & de la patience dont il faut que les Officiers se munissent; du mépris qu'on fait de ceux qui n'ont d'autre recommandation que leur merite & généralement de toutes les injustices qui se font à l'inscû du Roi.³³

It is interesting to note that, throughout his writings, Lahontan only once subjects Louis XIV to the ridicule he heaps unsparingly upon the King's deputies.³⁴ This may be attributed to the fact that up to that time Lahontan had never abandoned the hope that he might one day be permitted to return to France. The untimely death of Pontchartrain's predecessor, M. de Seignelay, robbed Lahontan of the one chance he might have had of returning to favour. In spite of Pontchartrain's indifference to his plight, however, Lahontan saw the appointment of the new minister as only a temporary setback and he decided to stay out of France: "...en attendant qu'il plût à M. de Pontchartrain d'aller en Paradis."³⁵

Prior to his return to New France from a final encounter with "les bureaux", Lahontan became engaged in conversation with a Portuguese doctor on the subject of the origin of savages. It was apparently a veritable battle of wits, of the sort which would be repeated throughout the eighteenth century wherever explorers opposed theologians concerning the hypothesis of a single ancestor for the human species. Lahontan records the conversation in his Dialogues, using the savage, Adario, to replace the Portuguese doctor in the

rôle of interlocutor. The author, in feigned indignation, seeks to sustain a polemic on a problem which at that time was equivalent, at best, to blasphemy.

Here at last we find Lahontan the libertin clearly stating his position: "J'ai déjà vû tant de Relations pleines d'absurditez, quoi que les Auteurs passassent pour des Saints, qu'à present je commence à croire que toute Histoire est un Pyrrhonisme perpétuel."³⁶

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Chapter 4

MEMOIRES

The second volume of the 1703 edition, entitled Mémoires de l'Amerique Septentrionale, ou la Suite des Voyages de Mr. le baron de Lahontan, is composed essentially of a long letter from Lahontan to his old relative, the same correspondent who figured in the first volume, Nouveaux Voyages. This letter is followed by a Petit Dictionnaire de la Langue des Sauvages. The first part actually consists of two quite distinct divisions which received separate titles in the English translation of 1703 and in subsequent French editions. Lahontan had, in fact, wanted to give the reader a "description abregée du Canada" in which, after a lengthy history of the colony, he describes its flora and fauna and repeats the information already given in his first volume on the way of life of the inhabitants. It is not until page ninety, (in the chapter entitled "Habits, Logemens, Complexion et Tempérament des Sauvages"), that he broaches the ideological theme which interests us more particularly.

The origin of the North American savages had been something of a puzzle to Europeans from the time that they were first encountered by explorers and Lahontan launches his discussion of these people with a brief reference to the general problem of origins. In fact he may have been less concerned with this topic than he was with questioning the purity and truth of tradition itself, for he seizes the opportunity here to ridicule historians, particularly those among the Jesuits and the Récollets. According to Lahontan, they were widely mistaken in their accounts of the manners and customs of the savages:

Les Recolets les traitent de gens stupides, grossiers, rustiques incapables de penser & de réfléchir à quoi que ce soit. Les Jesuites tiennent un langage très-different, car ils soutiennent qu'ils ont du bon sens, de la mémoire, de la vivacité d'esprit, mêlée d'un bon jugement. Les premiers disent qu'il est inutile de passer son tems à prêcher l'Evangile à des gens moins éclairés que les Animaux. Les seconds prétendent au contraire, que ces Sauvages se font un plaisir d'écouter la Parole de Dieu, & qu'ils entendent l'Ecriture avec beaucoup de facilité. Je sçai les raisons qui font parler ainsi les uns & les autres; elles sont assez connues aux personnes qui sçavent que ces deux Ordres de Religieux ne s'accordent pas trop bien en Canada.¹

The failure of the Jesuits and the Récollets to agree on such a simple matter as the observable traits of the savages provides Lahontan with a further opportunity to comment on the fruitless efforts of the two religious orders to convert the savages to the Christian faith: "Les Recolets & les Jesuites se sont contentez d'effleurer certaines choses, sans parler de la grande opposition qu'ils ont trouvé de la part de ces Sauvages à leur faire entendre les vérités

du Christianisme."² Hoxie Neale Fairchild notes with interest that Columbus, as the first of a long series of explorers to praise the Indians, had suggested that "they could easily be converted to Christianity, for they are very intelligent."³ Two hundred years later, our author suggests that their high intelligence is their refuge against conversion. He ascribes his understanding of the savages to the opportunities he had to converse with them, adding that if he had not known their language he too might have believed all that was said of them.

In describing the physical attributes of the savages Lahontan frequently alludes to the false portraits of other European chroniclers: "Ceux qui ont peint les Sauvages velus comme des Ours," he observes, "n'en avoient jamais vû, car il ne leur paroît ni poil, ni barbe, en nul endroit du corps, non plus qu'aux femmes, qui n'en ont pas même sous les aisselles, s'il en faut croire les gens qui doivent le sçavoir mieux que moi. Ils sont généralement droits, bien faits, de belle taille, & mieux proportionnez pour les Américaines, que pour les Européennes."⁴

Congenital malformations, which to Lahontan were signs, no doubt, of the degeneracy inherent in Europeans, are rarely seen among the savages: "Il est très-rare d'en voir de boiteux, de borgnes, de bossus, d'aveugles, de muets, &c."⁵ Their health, moreover, leaves little to be desired. Unlike the Europeans, with their foul air, poor diet, and lack of exercise, "les Sauvages", Lahontan writes, "sont fort sains & exemts de quantité de maladies dont nous sommes attaquez

en Europe, comme de Paralisie, d'hidropisie, de goute, d'éthisie, d'asme, de gravelle & de pierre."⁶ The only diseases with which they are afflicted, according to Lahontan, are those caused by the smoky conditions of their cabins, namely small-pox and pleurisy.

The longevity of the savages, which their superior health afforded, provides Lahontan with an opportunity subtly to broach the ungodly subject of self-destruction. Although a savage was considered young if he died at the age of sixty (for they lived, if Lahontan's observation is correct, "ordinairement quatre-vingt jusqu'à cent ans"⁷), there were those who did not live so long, "car ils s'empoisonnent quelquefois."⁸ Lahontan pretends not to condone this practice, for to have done so would have invited criminal proceedings, but he leaves no doubt as to his views when he describes the act of suicide: "il semble qu'ils (les Sauvages) suivent assez bien en cette occasion les maximes de Zenon & des Stoïciens, qui soutiennent qu'il est permis de se donner la mort; d'où je conclus qu'ils sont aussi fous que ces grands Philosophes."⁹

It is interesting to note that, from time to time, unmistakable allusions to Stoic ethics appear in Lahontan's works. According to the monumental work of Lovejoy and Boas,¹⁰ the ethics of stoicism was: "the product of a fusion of the Socratic ideal of self-sufficiency, with the maxim of 'conformity to nature'."¹¹ The logical implications of these premises, when 'nature' was taken in certain of its commonest meanings entailed, in fact, the idea of a primitivistic scheme of values. Without going too deeply into the history of primitivism, it

seems possible to show, in fact, that the savages were complying closely with a code of behaviour which had its beginnings in the third century B. C. At that time, the moral opinions of the Stoics were being formulated by Zeno. In addition to the cult of work, which they so strenuously preached, the Stoics also attached great importance to the employment of reason in ignoring exterior circumstances, such as pain, sickness, and fortune. Concerning the latter, they maintained: "that the use of money should not be regarded as necessary either for exchange or for foreign travel."¹² It is in this connection that a parallel may again be drawn between the Stoics and Lahontan's savages. The latter, we are told, will not touch or so much as look upon silver, giving it the odious name of "le Serpent des François". Some of the savages, however, had been converted, and Lahontan makes exception of these: "Il n'y a que ceux qui sont Chrétiens, & qui demeurent aux portes de nos Villes, chez qui l'argent soit en usage."¹³

Those among the savages who had travelled to France had observed the disorder there which was occasioned, they maintained, by money: "Ils disent qu'on se tuë, qu'on se pille, qu'on se diffame, qu'on se vend, & qu'on se trahit parmi nous pour de l'argent; que les Maris vendent leurs femmes, & les Meres leurs filles pour ce métal."¹⁴ The stratification of French society, apparently based on wealth, was beyond the comprehension of the savages, whose sense of equality is praised by Lahontan: "Les Sauvages ne connoissent ni tien, ni mien, car on peut dire que ce qui est à l'un est à l'autre."¹⁵ It is in

this manner that he begins the chapter entitled "Moeurs et manières des Sauvages".

This supposed "égalité" of the savages was one of the principal themes to be treated in the accounts of "voyages" in the seventeenth century, and a good criticism of its validity has been offered by Geoffroy Atkinson.¹⁶ He suggests that it may be attributed to a mistaken impression among explorers, that "apparences extérieures" were sufficient evidence to prove that the savages had neither kings, nor priests, nor judges. Furthermore, Atkinson writes: "Il n'y avait point de riches, point de pauvres du moins pour les yeux d'un voyageur français, qui ne prisait pas les coquillages, les plumes d'oiseaux, ou les fourrures communes et sans valeur."¹⁷ Such overstatements in the accounts of voyages were, however, to be repeated by the philosophes in the eighteenth century in their idealised conception of "l'homme universel". But, Atkinson writes, neither the voyagers nor the philosophes noticed: "que l'homme est partout le même; que s'il n'a pas de couronne, pas de carrosse, il les remplace par des biens et des distinctions analogues."¹⁸ As has already been noted, however, Lahontan no doubt anticipated arguments of the sort offered by Atkinson, for he writes: "Si je n'avois pas entendu la langue des Sauvages, j'aurois pû croire tout ce qu'on a écrit à leur égard."¹⁹ Furthermore, the degree to which Lahontan must have been accepted by the savages is revealed in a preface to the Dialogues, in which he warns the reader that his detractors have described him as being a savage himself--to which he adds: "ils me donnent, sans y penser, le caractère du plus honnête

homme du monde."²⁰ Lahontan goes on to state, moreover, that the "honnêteté" of the savages is valued more highly by them than any material riches which the Europeans might possess. With the latter, a man is a man only in so far as riches make him so. Among the savages, however, the true qualifications of a man are: "de bien courir, chasser, pêcher, tirer un coup de flèche & de fusil, conduire un Canot, sçavoir faire la guerre, connoître les Forêts, vivre de peu, construire des Cabanes, couper des arbres, & sçavoir faire cent lieux dans les Bois sans autre guide ni provision que son arc & ses flèches."²¹ There is no place in their scheme of things for the Arts and Sciences, and they scoff at the rôle these play among the French. Lahontan tells us that, in the estimation of the savages: "toutes nos Sciences ne valent pas celle de sçavoir passer la vie dans une tranquillité parfaite."²²

At the time when he was writing his Mémoires, Lahontan may well have been aspiring to the "tranquillité parfaite" of the savages. After his untimely departure from New France, under threat of arrest, he became vividly aware of the ephemeral nature of the personal liberty he had enjoyed while he was in the colony. His reflections on the failure of his career in New France centred, no doubt, on the rebuff dealt him by the King in not granting him a pardon. Moreover, as has already been shown, Lahontan would not have found it necessary to publish his letters if he had been returned to favour. His bitterness, then, provided him with a chance to censure monarchy in general, and Louis XIV in particular, by allowing the savages to express themselves on the subject: "(Les Sauvages) nous traitent d'esclaves, ils disent

que nous sommes des misérables dont la vie ne tient à rien, que nous nous dégradons de nôtre condition, en nous réduisant à la servitude d'un seul homme qui peut tout, & qui n'a d'autre loi que sa volonté."²³

These sentiments were being expressed in a variety of ways and with increasing frequency during Lahontan's time: they were the early symptoms of an era of discontent with the status quo in France, a discontent which was to characterise the eighteenth century and find its ultimate expression in the Revolution.

Thus, in the eyes of a French explorer of the seventeenth century, the savages lived in a state of perfect equality and were a people whose "natural" state could be contrasted favourably with the serfdom of the ancien régime. Lahontan in general agrees, but his aim extended far beyond the mere presentation of such 'facts'. At every opportunity he attacks the institutions of his homeland, especially the Church. The resistance of the savages to the missionaries' attempts to convert them forms the nucleus of the Mémoires, and Lahontan's anti-clerical attitude leaves no doubt about the purpose of his derision, for he frequently identifies the Jesuits by name.

None of the basic tenets of the Christian dogma are allowed to go uncriticised in the torrent of invective which Lahontan attributes to his savages. The invective is, in fact, a thinly-veiled and highly concentrated disclosure of his personal convictions. He continually implores his correspondent to join with him in bemoaning the deplorable state of these "ignorant wretches"; and, as has already been shown, he also proves himself prepared to abandon "decadent

civilisation" in favour of la vie sauvage. The warrant for his arrest which deterred him from returning to France was of course equally effective in New France. Furthermore, the threat of further charges which the Jesuits would doubtless hasten to bring against him in the colony was sufficiently real to convince Lahontan that his future movements were of necessity very limited. This being the case, he apparently saw no justification for sparing the feelings of his adversaries.

In the chapter entitled "Croyance des Sauvages & les obstacles à leur conversion", Lahontan begins by describing the simple beliefs of the savages, a description which amounts to nothing less than a eulogy of natural religion:

Tous les Sauvages soutiennent qu'il faut qu'il y ait un Dieu, puisqu'on ne voit rien parmi les choses materielles qui subsiste nécessairement & par sa propre Nature. Ils prouvent son Existence par la composition de l'Univers qui fait remonter à un être supérieur & tout puissant; d'où il s'ensuit (disent-ils) que l'homme n'a pas été fait par hasard, & qu'il est l'ouvrage d'un principe supérieur en sagesse & en connoissance, qu'ils appellent le GRAND ESPRIT ou le Maître de la vie, & qu'ils adorent de la manière du Monde la plus abstraite. Voici comment ils s'expliquent sans définition qui puisse contenter. L'Existence de Dieu étant inséparablement unie avec son Essence, il contient tout, il paroît en tout, il agit en tout, & il donne le mouvement à toutes choses. Enfin tout ce qu'on voit, & tout ce qu'on conçoit est ce Dieu, qui subsistant sans bornes, sans limites, & sans corps, ne doit point être représenté sous la figure d'un Vieillard, ni de quelque autre que ce puisse être, quelque belle, vaste ou étendue qu'elle soit.²⁴

By virtue of their naive beliefs, Lahontan continues, the savages adore their "Grand Esprit" in everything they see. When they perceive something that is estimable or curious, and especially when they look at the sun or the stars, they cry out: "O Grand Esprit nous te voyons par tout."²⁵ Even when they come upon the most trifling object they acknowledge a creator under the name of "Grand Esprit" or "Maître de la Vie". This reliance upon their external faculties in such matters made communication between the savages and the priests difficult and particularly frustrating to the latter who, declares J. H. Kennedy in his study of the Jesuits in New France,²⁶ "even where they first failed to perceive any religious propensity...continued to believe that it existed, embedded deep and obscure in the Indian ideas."²⁷

In comparing the savages' religion to the orthodox religion preached by the Jesuits, Lahontan goes to some lengths to ridicule the faith in which he was probably raised in France. He allows the savages' arguments to prevail over his own by the skilful use of irony, and the much maligned Jesuits, whose reaction to Lahontan's works has already been noted, are dealt yet another harsh blow. Lahontan insists, however, that he urged the savages to listen to the priests, since he often found it very difficult to answer some of their naïvely impertinent questions. But, he writes: "ils n'en sçauroient faire d'autres (questions), par raport à la Religion."²⁸

Although the savages believe in the existence of a soul and in its immortality, they have, declares Lahontan, great difficulty in

acknowledging the doctrine of immortality preached to them by the Jesuits. The savages base their own belief on the notion that God would have created all men happy if the soul were not immortal, for it would not be consistent with His nature of perfection and wisdom to create some to be happy and others to be miserable, unless the latter were to be saved in the next world. Furthermore, they claim that nothing comes to pass but by the decrees of that infinitely perfect Being whose conduct cannot be eccentric or capricious: "comme ils pretendent faussement que les Chrétiens le publient."²⁹ Lahontan attributes the "singular madness" of the savages in matters of religious belief to their refusal to acknowledge anything which is not visible or probable. This, he claims, is the true principle of their religion.

The savages further believe, Lahontan continues, that the noblest faculty with which God has enriched them is the power of Reason; and since the Christian religion cannot be tested by reason alone, it appeared absurd to the savages that He should ask them to consult their Reason in order to distinguish Good from Evil. We see that Lahontan's unwitting rôle in this growing eighteenth-century dialogue was not inconsiderable. He further asserted that for the savages an article of faith is merely: "un bruvage que la raison ne doit pas avaler, de peur de s'enyvrer & s'écarter ensuite de son chemin, d'autant que par cette prétendue foi on peut établir le mensonge aussi bien que la vérité, si l'on entend par là une facilité à croire sans rien approfondir."³⁰ Lahontan remonstrates with these falsely

ignorant savages but, as might be expected he does so in vain, for they are unassailable where their cult of Reason is concerned. In fact they see such a great contradiction between the Scriptures and Reason that, in Lahontan's words: "Ce mot de foi les étourdit."³¹ They again assail the trustworthiness of historical writings and heap ridicule upon the doctrine of man's creation and Original Sin which the Jesuits have been expounding to them. They argue that: "Il faut être foû pour croire qu'un Etre tout-puissant soit demeuré dans l'inaction pendant toute une éternité & qu'il ne se soit avisé de produire des Créatures, que depuis cinq ou six mille ans, qu'il ait créé Adam pour le faire tenter par un méchant Esprit à manger d'une Pomme, qui a causé tous les malheurs de sa Postérité, par la transmission prétenduë de son péché."³² They ridicule the dialogue between Eve and the Serpent, alleging that the Christians affront God in supposing that he wrought the miracle of giving this animal the use of speech, with intent to destroy the whole human race.

The bold criticism by the savages of the Christian concept of Creation, and man's subsequent fall, leads to an equally dauntless treatment of the consequences which emanate from the "incarnation" of God. They reject as "inouï" that "Dieu pour satisfaire Dieu, ait fait mourir Dieu."³³ If this was done for the expiation of Adam's sin, they protest, then the sin of the first Father has done more harm than the death of the second has done good "...puis que sa Pomme a perdu tous les Hommes, & que le Sang de Jesus-Christ n'en a pas sauvé la moitié."³⁴ This Christian concept of the Deity is far removed from the "Grand Esprit" of the savages, and Lahontan freely offers their judgement of

the former and of the Christian religion:

...sur l'humanité de ce Dieu les Chrétiens ont bâti une Religion sans principes, & sujette au changement des choses humaines; ...cette Religion étant divisée et subdivisée en tant de Sectes, comme celle des François, des Anglois & des autres Peuples, il faut que ce soit un ouvrage humain, puis que si elle avoit Dieu pour Auteur, sa prévoyance auroit prévenu cette diversité de sentimens par des décisions sans ambiguïté; c'est-à-dire, que si cette Loi Evangelique étoit descenduë du Ciel, l'on n'y trouveroit point les obscuritez, qui sont le sujet de la dissension, & que Dieu prévoyant les choses futures auroit parlé en termes si clairs & si précis, qu'il n'auroit point laissé de matière à la chicane.³⁵

This harsh judgement on Christian dogma is augmented by an exposition of the morality of its devotees. The justification for its inclusion in a chapter on "obstacles to the conversion of the savages" may be seen when it is quoted at length, for it is a scathing rebuke of the conduct of the colonists, all of whom are doubtless considered to be Christians and none of whom adhere to the Commandments:

Ils (les sauvages) diront d'abord que les Chrétiens se moquent des Préceptes de ce Fils de Dieu, qu'ils prennent ses défenses pour un jeu, & qu'ils croient qu'il n'a pas parlé sérieusement puis qu'ils y contre-viennent sans cesse, qu'ils rendent l'adoration qui lui est dûë à l'argent, aux Castors & à l'intérêt, murmurant contre son Ciel & contre lui dès que leurs affaires vont mal; qu'ils travaillent les jours consacrez à la piété, comme le reste du tems, jollant, s'enyvrant, & se battant & se disant des injures; Qu'au lieu de soulager leurs Peres, ils les laissent mourir de faim & de misère; qu'ils se moquent de leurs conseils; qu'ils vont même jusqu'à leur souhaiter la

mort qu'ils attendent avec impatience; qu'à la réserve des Jesuites, tous les autres courent les nuits de Cabane en Cabane pour débaucher les Sauvagesses; qu'ils tuent tous les jours pour des larcins, pour des injures, ou pour des femmes; qu'ils se pillent & se volent, sans aucun égard au sang & à l'amitié, toutes les fois qu'ils trouvent l'occasion de le faire impunément; qu'ils se déchirent & se diffament les uns les autres, par des médisances atroces, mentant sans scrupule dès qu'il s'agit de leur intérêt; Que ne se contentant pas du commerce des filles libres, ils débauchent les femmes mariées, & que ces femmes adulteres font en l'absence de leurs maris, des enfans dont le pere est inconnu; Qu'enfin les Chrétiens après avoir eu assez de docilité pour croire l'humanité de ce Dieu, quoique ce soit la chose du monde la plus contraire à la raison, semblent douter de ses Commandemens & de ses Préceptes, lesquels quoique très-saints & fort raisonnables, ils transgressent continuellement.³⁶

The disparity between the conduct of the French, and the principles of their "prétendue religion" affords Lahontan a seemingly endless opportunity to describe his "Noble Savage". He tells his correspondent that he would never end his letter if he were to reveal all the particulars of the Reasoning powers of the savages; and before proceeding with a discussion of the "Adorations des Sauvages", in the following chapter, Lahontan's final observation, no longer couched in irony, commits him irrevocably to their cause: "Cette Philosophie, qui n'est que trop vraie dans le fond ... doit faire gemir toutes les bonnes ames persuadées de la Vérité du Christianisme."³⁷

If the conclusion, at this juncture, of Lahontan's offensive against orthodox Christianity betrays pessimism for the future of civilisation, then his treatment of the positive aspects of the savages' religion provides a basis for hope to the thinkers who were soon to follow him. In the chapter entitled: "Adorations des

Sauvages" Lahontan includes a prayer which, in the words of Gilbert Chinard: "...aurait réjoui le coeur de tout bon déiste du XVIIIe siècle."³⁸ The prayer, bearing a striking resemblance to Voltaire's "Priere à Dieu" which was not to appear for another sixty years, consists of two parts, the first of which is sung by the old men prior to sunset:

Grand Esprit Maître de nos vies, Grand Esprit
 Maître des choses visibles & invisibles, Grand
 Esprit Maître des autres esprits, bons & mauvais,
 commande aux bons d'être favorables à tes enfans les
 Outaouas ou &c. Commande aux méchants de s'éloigner
 d'eux. O Grand Esprit conserve la force & le courage
 de nos Guerriers pour resister à la fureur de nos
 ennemis. Conserve les Vieillards en qui les corps
 ne sont pas encore tout à fait usez pour donner des
 Conseils à la jeunesse. Conserve nos enfans, aug-
 mentes en le nombre, délivre les des mauvais Esprits,
 & de la main des méchants hommes, afin qu'en nôtre
 vieillesse ils nous fassent vivre & nous rejouissent.
 Conserve nos moissons, & les Animaux, si tu veux que nous
 ne mourions pas de faim. Garde nos Villages, & les
 Chasseurs en leurs Chasses. Delivre nous de funeste
 surprise pendant que tu cesses de nous donner la
 lumiere du Soleil qui nous prêche ta grandeur & ton
 pouvoir: avertis nous par l'Esprit des songes de ce qu'il
 te plaît que nous fassions, ou que nous ne fassions pas.
 Quand il te plaira que nos vies finissent, envoie nous
 (dans le grand Païs des ames) où se trouvent celles de
 nos Pères, de nos Mères, de nos Femmes, de nos enfans,
 & de nos autres Parents. O Grand Esprit, Grand Esprit,
 écoute la voix de la Nation, écoute tous tes enfans, &
 souvient-toi toujours d'eux.³⁹

The second part of the prayer is sung by the warriors, and like the first part its performance precedes the setting of the sun:

Courage le Grand Esprit nous donne un si beau

Soleil, mes freres prenons courage. Que ses ouvrages sont grands où que le jour a parû beau. Il est bon ce Grand Esprit, c'est lui qui fait tout agir. Il est le Maître de tout. Il se plait à nous entendre; mes freres prenons courage; nous vaincrons nos ennemis, nos champs porteront des bleds, nous ferons de grandes Chasses, nous nous porterons tous bien, les Vieillards se réjouiront, leurs enfans augmenteront, la Nation prosperera; mais le grand Esprit nous aime, son Soleil s'est retiré, il a vû les Outaouas ou &c. C'en est fait; olly c'en est fait, le Grand Esprit est content, mes freres prenons courage.⁴⁰

From his penetrating analysis of the religion of the savages, Lahontan turns to more temporal considerations in the remaining chapters of this part of the Mémoires. He discusses the savages' inviolable fidelity with respect to their marriage vows, and is unable to resist an attack on the adulterous practices of the Europeans. He then returns to the physical well-being of the savages and attributes their good health to their abstention from the drugs and spices with which the Europeans overtax their stomachs. French surgeons and medical practitioners have no value whatsoever in the savages' estimation, and they refuse to have anything to do with them.

Finally, Lahontan deals with the subject of war. Although the savages are not belligerent people, he writes, their fierceness is unequalled when they are confronted with an enemy. Gilbert Chinard describes as "la plus étrange"⁴¹ Lahontan's interpretation of their theory with respect to war, for they claim we are told that animals don't make war among themselves, because they are unable to communicate their feelings to one another. It must therefore be concluded from this: "que la raison des hommes est le plus grand instrument de

leur malheur."⁴² "Et voilà déjà", Chinard writes, "La fameuse phrase tant reprochée à Rousseau: 'l'homme qui pense est un animal dépravé'."⁴³ It should be noted here that many of these topics will again be discussed in the Dialogues, bearing out the theory that the Mémoires were, in fact, conceived as part of a larger work and served essentially as an introduction to the Dialogues.

The primary purpose of these highly successful Mémoires was not to furnish a critique of European civilisation but rather to provide a first-hand report of the true nature of the "Noble Savage", his religion and the difficulties created by his French masters. Later, in the freer form of the Dialogues, we will see Lahontan indicting the radical condemnation of European civilisation: the Huron will triumph over civilised man.

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Chapter 5

DIALOGUES

The third and final volume of Lahontan's works is believed to have made its first appearance in 1703 in English, and, shortly afterwards, was published in French in The Hague, with the following title: Supplément aux voyages du baron de Lahontan, où l'on trouve les dialogues curieux entre l'auteur et un sauvage de bon sens qui a voyagé.¹ Lahontan explains in his preface that his various friends' requests for more information on the manners and customs of the savages prompted him to publish the conversations he had had in New France with a certain Huron Chief whom the French called "Rat", but whose name was in fact Kondiaronk.

It was in 1688, during his sojourn at Michillimakinac, that Lahontan met and conversed with the mighty Kondiaronk. The chief was, Reuben Gold Thwaites tells us,² a Huron of much ability who played a prominent part in Frontenac's War of 1689-97. His skill in diplomacy, and in confederating the tribes, adds Thwaites, makes him a precursor of Pontiac and Tecumseh. The Huron was strongly attached to Frontenac

and frequently accepted the Governor's counsel. Charlevoix,³ asserts, moreover, that Kondiaronk was a Christian convert who often preached at Mackinac; he died in Montreal during an important peace conference in 1701 and was interred there with elaborate rites.

Lahontan's encounter with Kondiaronk at Michillimakinac represents apparently their only meeting. The event is described in a letter addressed by Lahontan to his old relative in France in 1688. He refers to the chief as Adario, the pseudonym by which he is later identified in the Dialogues, and scholars have since endeavoured, perhaps too characteristically to find who "Adario" really was. Geoffroy Atkinson⁴ believes that Lahontan may have borrowed the idea of the Dialogues from the Criticon of Balthasar Gracian, and that the name of Adario was suggested to him by that of Andrenio. Chinard, however, does not concur: "Lucien est bien plus probable, étant donné l'aveu même de Lahontan (whose admiration for the ancients has already been noted⁵); De plus", Chinard adds, "le nom d'Adario...c'est l'anagramme de la partie centrale de Kondiaronk."⁶ The latter view is also shared by Robert Le Blant.⁷ If it is true, however, that Adario is Kondiaronk, he is certainly not the Kondiaronk described above by Charlevoix, for the Adario of the Dialogues is a fervent philosophe. It has been shown too, by Charlevoix,⁸ that the real Kondiaronk had never been out of the colony, whereas Adario is portrayed in the Dialogues as having been a visitor to France. Perhaps his true identity has been determined by Stephen Leacock, who discounts the belief that Adario is Kondiaronk: "Adario is not Kondiaronk", Leacock affirms, "Adario is Lahontan. The

other party to the dialogue, who is honoured with Lahontan's name, merely plays the part of the interlocutor in a Socratic dialogue."⁹

There was nothing new in the idea of having a sauvage converse with a civilisé on their respective ways of life. "Depuis la découverte de l'Amérique", Chinard declares, "il n'est pas une relation qui ne contienne une scène de ce genre."¹⁰ Lahontan's Dialogues, however, were unique; the property which made them so, and which also contributed to their great popularity among the radical thinkers of the eighteenth century, is also noted by Chinard: "Jamais encore, on n'avait mis en scène un sauvage ayant visité la France et connaissant à fond nos institutions, doué d'une pareille éloquence, et qui, libre de choisir entre la sauvagerie et la civilisation, était retourné joyeusement à sa forêt américaine, conservant des années passées en Europe comme le souvenir d'un horrible cauchemar."¹¹

Lahontan, too, was always happy to return to the New World. His own experiences in France had frequently been of nightmare proportions and his account of these experiences, in the Voyages bears a striking resemblance to Adario's.¹² It is not surprising, therefore, that Adario's views invariably overrule those of Lahontan and that the latter's rôle in the Dialogues is simply that of passive interlocutor. Under this disguise Lahontan attacks Christian dogma, and sets the tone for the later philosophes of the "enlightenment". A similar note is heard in the other dialogues in which Adario analyses and denounces the social injustice of civilisation, the cruelty of the law, the evils of private property and the havoc worked by money. He--or rather Lahontan--extols

the simple life of the savage and the equality and liberty of uncivilised man. Adario is always granted the final word in each of the five segments of the Dialogues, and this reluctance on Lahontan's part to oppose the Huron's radical views lends support to Leacock's theory of a conscious Socratic dialogue.

The five dialogues are presented as having taken place over four days and a conversation is completed at the end of each day, whereupon the two speakers take leave of each other. On the fourth day, however, two unrelated dialogues take place. Only the second dialogue is given a special title: Des Loix.

The first dialogue is in fact an amplification of a conversation which Lahontan seems to have had with a Portuguese doctor in 1693, at an inn near Nantes, where Lahontan was awaiting his passage back to New France. On that occasion, they discussed the doctor's assertion that the peoples of the different continents of America, Asia, and Africa, for whom a common ancestor was generally claimed, could not possibly have all descended from Adam. The Portuguese advances a strong case for his belief, and the conflict between science and religion appears in its most elemental form; the doctor's evolutionary theories would of course reappear with increasing frequency during the eighteenth century.

The other problem discussed at Nantes, and subsequently in the Dialogues, was no less controversial, for it dealt with the salvation of the Amériquains to whom the Gospel had never been preached. The Portuguese, repeating this theory of multiple ancestors, proceeds logically to exclude Adam's sin from those who are not descended from

him: "Il est probable que leur premier Pere", the doctor adds, "bien loin de pécher comme nôtre Adam, doit avoir eu l'ame bonne & le coeur droit, puis que ses descendants suivent exactement la loi de l'équité naturelle."¹³ Even if they are descended from Adam, the doctor tells Lahontan, there is no certainty that they are damned for their ignorance of the Christian doctrine: "car enfin", he declares, "Dieu peut leur imputer le sang de Jésus-Christ par des voyes secretes & incomprehensibles."¹⁴ Finally, Lahontan's companion sums up his analysis of the nature of religion: "Sa divine Majesté sans doute a plus dégard aux moeurs qu'au culte & qu'à la créance."¹⁵ This credo bears a striking resemblance to Bayle's view expressed in his Pensées diverses sur la Comète¹⁶ only eleven years earlier, where he asserts that morality is independent of religion, for a man may be an atheist and yet have all the moral virtues. In short, Lahontan's Portuguese doctor is, in 1693, already a recognizable prototype of the Adario of the Dialogues, and characteristically, he too is allowed to make the final judgement.

The theme of deism is, however, elaborated at greater length by Adario at the opening of the first dialogue. Presented in point form by the Huron, the conclusions are not unlike those of his contemporaries, the English deists, or those of Voltaire some sixty years later. The essence of creed, Adario tells us, is the belief in a Supreme Being as the source of finite existence. He is, the savages assume: "dans tout ce qui n'a point de bornes."¹⁷ They further believe that He has endowed them: "d'une raison capable de discerner le bien d'avec le mal",¹⁸ which enables them to follow unerringly: "les véritables Régles de la justice & de la sagesse."¹⁹ They believe in the soul's immortality and that

life is only a dream from which death is the awakening. Adario declares finally that the savages reject categorically the supernatural doctrines of Christianity, for they affirm that: "la portée de nôtre esprit ne pouvant s'étendre un pouce au-dessus de la superficie de la terre, nous ne devons pas le gêner ni le corrompre en essayant de pénétrer les choses invisibles & improbables."²⁰ Only after death, Adario decides, is the soul able to account for the things which are indiscernible during life.

Adario thus concludes his exposition of the Hurons' simple religion whose dictates, he maintains, man can follow unequivocally. The rebuttal by Lahontan on behalf of the civilisé offers, however, a religion based only on what Adario calls "the contradictions, the obscurities, and the visions of the Holy Scriptures."²¹ The Huron adds, furthermore, that Europeans themselves are far from agreement on these so-called truths, and he provides an apt example in the constant conflict in matters of religion between the English and the French. Moreover, it is offensive to Adario that the doctrine of "original sin" should have led to the punishment for one man's crime being heaped upon all who came after him. The subsequent theory of the incarnation of God to expiate this sin is equally paradoxical to Adario, whose articulate arguments when contrasted with Lahontan's feigned inefficacy leave no doubt as to the intended supremacy of the Huron's reasoning.

Whilst his theological premises are seemingly demolished by Adario, Lahontan's clandestine defence of natural religion is manifestly upheld, and he turns next to a discussion of ethics. He informs Adario that if he is to avoid eternal damnation he must observe not only the teachings of the Jesuits but also their law; for upon this law,

Lahontan tells Adario, the stability of civilised society depends. Adario's worldliness, however, has acquainted him with the truth of the matter and he takes the opportunity to assail European civilisation in the very manner which Bayle had done a decade earlier.²² In fact, declares Adario, neither the French nor the English practice the teachings of their religions. They kill one another, whether at war or not, they deceive one another, slander one another and the men go to Mass only "pour voir les Femmes, & celles-ci pour voir les Hommes."²³ The Huron sees the laws of continence disregarded, but at the same time he is mystified that vows of celibacy are required of priests. This is contrary to God's will, Adario tells Lahontan: "Dieu ayant créé autant d'hommes que de femmes, il a voulu que les uns & les autres travaillaient à la propagation du genre humain."²⁴ The failure of any one being to fulfil this task is contrary to natural law, in the Huron's opinion, and he adds that: "Toutes choses multiplient dans la Nature, les Bois, les Plantes, les Oiseaux, les Animaux & les Insectes. C'est une leçon qu'ils nous donnent tous les ans."²⁵ Lahontan was to amplify this theme in his penultimate dialogue, but the foregoing passage has been seen by Chinard²⁶ as foreshadowing the ideas of Diderot and d'Holbach, whose monumental contributions to eighteenth-century French thought were still a generation away.

Adario's views of the contradictory structure of European civilisation are thus more than his interlocutor can effectively oppose. The Huron's conclusion has been seen by Paul Hazard²⁷ as one of the most ardent statements of the case for natural religion:

Croi tout ce que tu voudras, aie tant de foi qu'il te plaira, tu n'iras jamais dans le bon païs des Ames si tu ne te fais Huron. L'innocence de nôtre vie, l'amour que nous avons pour nos freres, la tranquillité d'ame dont nous jouissons par le mépris de l'intérêt, sont trois choses que le grand Esprit exige de tous les hommes en général. Nous les pratiquons naturellement dans nos Villages, pendant que les Européans se déchirent, se volent, se diffament, se tuent dans leurs Villes.²⁸

The debate in defence of reason continues in the second dialogue, Des Loix, a critique of civil law, in which Adario is no less bold or original than before. "Dis-moi", he asks Lahontan, "les Loix n'est-ce pas dire les choses justes & raisonnables?"²⁹ We learn that the savages do not know the word law. After Lahontan replies that this is so, Adario adds quizzically: "il faut que vous preniez ces choses justes & raisonnables dans un autre sens que nous, ou que, si vous les entendez de même, vous ne les suiviez jamais."³⁰ Of course reason is no different for the French than for the Hurons, Lahontan retorts, it is simply that all men do not observe the laws of reason. If they did, he adds, there would be no need for punishments, and judges would have to find another living. Moreover, Lahontan tells Adario: "le bien de la société consiste dans la justice & dans l'observance de ces Lois... sans cela tout le Monde s'égorgeroit, on se pilleroit, on se diffameroit en un mot, nous serions les gens du Monde les plus malheureux."³¹

Lahontan's bitter encounters with judges through his several vain attempts to regain his expropriated inheritance had left him ill-disposed towards French jurisprudence. His recollection of this miscarriage of justice and his enmity towards authority in general leads

to a commentary in this dialogue on legal fanaticism and brutality in France. It foreshadows, too, the rôle of the philosophes in their desire to overthrow the ancient institutions and beliefs which offered obstacles to the effective supremacy of human reason.

To have no other grounds for doing good than the fear of punishment is a principle altogether foreign to a philosophe, and Adario tells Lahontan that the savages' reliance on reason gives them a natural inclination to do good. This makes laws unnecessary, and judges superfluous; by the same token, the savages' refusal to admit money to their society precludes the threat of quarrels. How different from this utopian existence is the French society described to Adario by Coueurs de Bois!--Innocent people are put to death, only to have their innocence proved later; false witnesses are brought against men who are then horribly tortured in order to force a confession from them, and from this practice, Adario says, even women are not exempt. Death is preferable to recovery for these people, the Huron protests, for even if they survive without confessing, what health or life can they enjoy afterwards? "Non non, mon cher Frere", Adario declares ruefully, "les Diables noirs, dont les Jésuites nous parlent tant, ne sont pas dans le Païs où les ames brûlent; ils sont à Québec & en France avec les Loix."³²

The discrediting of the entrenched judiciary, a practice cherished by the philosophes, continues with Lahontan's comment that judges take all imaginable precautions to avoid the passing of an unjust sentence. What do you really think of these judges? Adario asks

Lahontan: "Est-il vrai qu'il y en ait si ignorans comme on dit, & d'autres si méchans, que pour un Ami, pour une Courtisane; pour un grand Seigneur, ou pour l'argent, ils jugent injustement contre leurs consciences?"³³ Adario, however, doesn't await an answer; he substantiates his question, and adds a tirade against the French judiciary which removes any likelihood of a plausible rebuttal from Lahontan:

Que vous êtes à plaindre d'être exposés à des Loix auxquelles vos Juges ignorans, injustes & vicieux contreviennent autant par leur conduite particuliere qu'en l'administration de leurs charges. Ce sont-là ces équitables Juges qui manquent de droiture, qui ne rapportent leur emploi qu'à leurs intérêts, qui n'ont en velle que de s'enrichir, qui ne sont accessibles qu'au démon de l'argent, qui n'administrent la justice que par un principe d'avarice, ou par passion, qui, autorisant le crime, exterminent la justice & la bonne foi, pour donner cours à la tromperie, à la chicane, à la longueur des procez, à l'abus & à la tromperie, à la chicane, à la longueur des procez, à l'abus & à la violation des sermens, & à une infinité d'autre désordres. Voilà ce que font ces grands souteneurs de belles Loix de la Nation Françoisse.³⁴

After such a condemnation of the administrative arm, any further discussion of the laws would seem to be superfluous. But Lahontan answers piously that bad judges are rare, and he attributes the three or four lawsuits he lost in Paris to his unfamiliarity with the laws. At this juncture, Adario cites examples of unjust laws which came to his attention during his visit to France--a peasant sentenced to be whipped for trapping partridges and hares; a man sentenced to the galleys for possessing a small bag of salt. Where, he asks, was the justice in this when, at the same time in France: "un million de

femmes font des enfans en l'absence de leurs Maris...des Médecins font mourir les trois quarts des hommes...les Jolleurs mettent leurs familles à la mendicité"?³⁵ And all this took place, Adario tells Lahontan, without any punishment.

In the face of such testimony, Lahontan's defenses are considerably weakened. Once again he can only resort to an illogical argument whose inefficacy Adario cannot fail to oppose. The Huron's conclusion to the discussion of laws is an affirmation that the only hope for European civilisation is to model itself after Huron society. This precedes by fifty years the principal theme of the Discours sur l'Origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and contains all the essential elements of the Genevan's revolutionary work. "J'espererai", Adario concludes, "que peu à peu vous vous perfectionnerez, que l'égalité de biens pourra venir peu à peu, & qu'à la fin vous détesterez cet intérêt qui cause tous les maux qu'on voit en Europe; ansi n'ayant ni tien ni mien, vous vivrez avec la même félicité des Hurons."³⁶

The third day sees a return to the discussion of the principle of Meum et Tuum, which Adario had mentioned briefly at the conclusion of the previous dialogue. He sees the stratification of a society based on wealth as the source of all discord, not only in Europe but wherever similar situations prevail. It is of course well known that this view, vigorously expounded by Rousseau in his second Discours,³⁷ became increasingly popular as the eighteenth century progressed, and it gained its ultimate expression in the Revolution.

The savages have no use for money and in Adario's words it is: "le Pere de la luxure, de l'impudicité, de l'artifice, de l'intrigue, du mensonge, de la trahison, de la mauvaise foi, & généralement de tous les maux qui sont au monde."³⁸ Lahontan, of course, is in complete agreement, for his own predicament had resulted largely from the pursuit of wealth. Moreover, it is doubtful that he would have had to turn to writing if he had not found himself in extreme financial circumstances. His answer to Adario's statement confirms the Huron's views. Europe couldn't exist without money, he tells Adario, for: "Déjà les Gentils-hommes, les Prêtres, les Marchands & mille autres sortes de gens qui n'ont pas la force de travailler à la terre, mourroient de faim."³⁹ This stratum of society would quickly disappear if the system of equality advocated by Adario were adopted, and all men would be free to pursue the happiness enjoyed by the savages.

But the pursuit of happiness becomes something of a hardship when it involves the forfeiture of other comforts normally associated with civilisation. The abandonment of money, Lahontan discovers, is only a beginning. He observes that the comforts of a home and the enjoyment of good food contribute far more to happiness than does their relinquishment in favour of the life of the savages. Adario, however, has been in France and has seen to what extent these "comforts" exist: "Combien y en a-t-il parmi vous", he asks, "qui couchent sur la paille, sous des toits où des greniers que la pluie traverse de toutes parts, & qui ont de la peine à trouver du pain & de l'eau?"⁴⁰

In sharp contrast to these poor people are those aristocrats

whom Lahontan describes as having the most agreeable and delightful life in the world. With their fine coaches, stately houses, parks stocked with all sorts of animals, and a good store of money, these happy men are adored by all. But their happiness is questioned by Adario: "Ces grands Seigneurs se haïssent intérieurement les uns les autres, ils perdent le sommeil, le boire & le manger pour faire leur cour au Roi."⁴¹

By this time Adario, unlike Lahontan, is no longer concerned with criticism for its own sake. He offers a formula for improving the sorry condition of civilised society which he has witnessed in France. His scornful attitude, at the opening of the Dialogues, changes to one of pity. The solution to the abominable problem of social inequality existing in Europe is no less simple than it was for the problem discussed in the dialogue on law:

Crois-moy, mon cher Frere, songe à te faire
Huron, pour vivre long-tems. Tu boiras, tu mangeras,
tu dormiras, & tu chasseras en repos; tu seras
délivré des passions qui tyrannisent les François; tu
n'auras que faire d'or, ni d'argent, pour être heureux;
tu ne craindras ni voleurs, ni assassins, ni faux té-
moins; & si tu veux devenir le Roi de tout le monde,⁴²
tu n'auras qu'à t'imaginer de l'être, & tu le seras.

In the two final dialogues, Adario's eulogy of la vie sauvage and Lahontan's feigned opposition to the Huron's panegyric reach a state of equilibrium. Not only are the topics which the two men now discuss considerably less controversial from the philosophical standpoint, but they are also more tangible than those previously

debated and Adario triumphs over an interlocutor who is already more than convinced of the validity of his arguments. Up to this point, Adario's main concern has been the pursuit of happiness through natural religion, natural law, and finally through equality of wealth. The fourth dialogue now examines a physical concomitant of the happiness enjoyed by the savages, and here again the inferior characteristics of civilised man are lamented.

Lahontan's motive, in this fourth dialogue, for wanting to censure French physicians is open to speculation. As a group they had certainly suffered untold embarrassment at Molière's hands. Apart from a brief mention in the Voyages, Lahontan limits his odium for the "science" of medicine to his Dialogues. We learn that Adario's ailing grandfather absolutely refuses to call in a French physician; he far prefers to entrust his health to the jongleurs, for they will simply adjust the sick man's diet to effect a cure. The French physician, on the other hand, will prescribe fearful remedies. In fact, Adario tells Lahontan, he has been a mortal enemy of French physicians ever since he saw ten or twelve persons die at their hands through the tyranny of their remedies.

The early demise of the civilisé is contrasted with the longevity of the sauvages. The savages' principal source of health is their characteristic happiness, declares Adario, and the resulting peace of mind contributes to their long life. Their diseases are few and the disorders which afflict Europeans are unknown to them. Moreover, any ailment which besets the savages can usually be dispelled by

means of vapour baths.

At the conclusion of the fourth dialogue, Lahontan capitulates to Adario's arguments against the immoderacy of the Europeans: "Voilà, mon cher Adario", he avers, "la premiere fois que tu as raisonné juste, depuis le tems que nous nous entretenons ensemble. Je conviens que vous êtes exempts d'une infinité de maux dont nous sommes accablés; c'est par la raison que tu me dis l'autre jour, que pour se bien porter, il faut que l'esprit se repose."⁴³

It is questionable whether the troubled and cynical Lahontan ever enjoyed the peace of mind he so avidly admired in the savages. Furthermore, it is curious that he should concern himself with assessing, in the fifth and final dialogue, an institution with which he was personally unacquainted--that of matrimony. He narrowly escaped marriage early in his career in New France, and chose instead to remain a bachelor throughout his life. Nevertheless, he had devoted a considerable part of his Mémoires to a description of courtship practices among the savages. Now, in the Dialogues, he contrasts their marriage customs with what he describes as the absurdity of the Europeans' indissoluble marriage contract.

In spite of a penchant for liberty and an aversion for social convention, the savages, we are told, nevertheless acknowledge the need for establishing a balanced form of marriage. It bears no similarity, however, to the European concept of marriage. Among the savages, for example, there is no control exercised by parents when a girl selects a husband. Furthermore, she is free to break the contract within a

stated period of time. This privilege is seldom exercised, however, for the marriage ceremony is performed only after the principals have made their choice based on a process completely incomprehensible to Lahontan, who claims to be offended by the nudity of the young single men and by their habit of frequenting the cabins of single girls before the marriage is solemnised. This practice, Adario claims, ensures marital fidelity among the savages, for: "chacune peut hardiment juger qu'elle ne sera pas trompée en ce qu'elle attend d'un Mari."⁴⁴

Lahontan's objection to the nudity of the savages evokes a curious reaction from Adario, for he immediately launches a tirade against the tyranny of property. Nudity, he says: "ne doit choquer uniquement que les gens qui ont la propriété des biens."⁴⁵ What other purpose would a Frenchman's wealth serve, Adario asks, if it were not used to buy fine clothes, for men there are valued according to their dress? He then qualifies his statement by alluding subtly to a principal cause of marital infidelity among the French: "N'est-ce pas un grand avantage pour un François de pouvoir cacher quelque défaut de nature sous de beaux habits?"⁴⁶

Adario is exasperated by Lahontan's account of the attentions demanded of the perfect lover by his European mistress. A man must be quite mad to waste his time in that fashion, the Huron declares, but he no longer wishes to sustain his diatribe. The French who behave this way, he concludes, must be as foolish as the savage who, knowing the fate awaiting him in France, consents nevertheless to crossing the ocean to visit that country. Adario has made this error once, but he

swears he will never do it again.

The first edition of the Dialogues ends thus, quite abruptly, without as much as a final farewell from either participant. This unceremonious conduct is modified in subsequent French editions, and a phrase is added to suggest that a sequel to the Dialogues may be forthcoming.

Those critics who have interpreted the Dialogues as a bona fide account of conversations between a Huron chief and Lahontan, have often accused the latter of disregarding Adario's irreverence and impropriety, and of deliberately allowing his impious assertions to pass unchallenged. In the correspondence between Leibnitz and Bierling in 1710,⁴⁷ for example, the latter expresses some doubt about the authenticity of the Dialogues and requests the opinion of the great philosopher. Bierling conjectures that Lahontan, to safeguard his liberty, is using the dialogue form as a subterfuge for expressing heretical religious views; the savage's views are keenly advanced, Bierling writes, and rather coolly dispelled.⁴⁸ Leibnitz, however, was of the view that the Dialogues, though not totally true, were still not totally fictitious. He nevertheless expresses disappointment that Adario does not receive more satisfactory answers in the religious discussions.⁴⁹ A more recent evaluation, that of André Haudricourt in 1961,⁵⁰ also dismisses the idea that Lahontan completely invented the Dialogues: "A première vue on est tenté d'y voir une habileté de l'auteur, un procédé que reprendra Montesquieu dans ses Lettres Persanes. Je pense au contraire qu'il s'agit du souvenir

r  el de conversations; Lahontan connaissait les langues indig  nes puisqu'il en a publi   un lexique."⁵¹

We should add, finally, that it may seem paradoxical today that scholars have been more concerned with the structure of the Dialogues than with their content. They have also sought an explanation, however, for the great success which the Dialogues enjoyed during the first half of the eighteenth century. One may legitimately wonder why Lahontan's works astonished a public accustomed to reading accounts of voyages. His censure of religion in the name of natural reason didn't differ appreciably from that already found in the Pens  es diverses sur la Com  te⁵² or in the Histoire des S  varambes.⁵³ Indeed, Montaigne was one of the first to compare French civilisation with the simplicity of the cannibals' life.⁵⁴ Attacks against private property were also commonplace in the writings of many seventeenth-century missionaries who considered poverty to be one of the principal Christian virtues. As for the Dialogues' satirical portrayal of the political establishment, this could hardly eclipse the works of Boileau or La Fontaine.

Perhaps the most striking facet of Lahontan's Dialogues, and the element which sets them apart from all previous works, is after all the form in which the ideas are expressed. "Tous ces th  mes   taient trait  s dans un style auquel le public n'  tait point habit  ", Gilbert Chinard explains, "c'est en cela que r  side en grande partie l'int  r  t des dialogues de 1703."⁵⁵

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Chapter 6

THE FORTUNES AND INFLUENCE OF LAHONTAN'S WORKS IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Despite Chinard's observation that very few of the ideas expressed by Lahontan were new or original at the beginning of the eighteenth century,¹ the great demand for the latter's works is reflected convincingly by the many editions which appeared after 1703. Perhaps it was even their lack of originality which contributed to the initial success of the three volumes, as we may judge by their description in the Jesuit Mémoires de Trévoux of July, 1703. They were, the editors declare disparagingly: "le précis de ce que les Déistes et les Sociniens disent de plus fort contre la soumission que nous devons à la foy"² This was the first time, perhaps, that the essence of all the previous attacks on society had appeared collected in such a lively, cynical, and caustic form. Furthermore, this new satirical medium, apparently created by Lahontan, did not go unnoticed by others

more polished than he in literary expression. His editors were quick to assess the intrinsic value of his works, and they probably engaged a professional writer to revise Lahontan's text for a new edition.³ Other editions which followed were not only in French, but also in English, German, Dutch, and Italian.⁴ This Lahontan vogue lasted well into the middle of the eighteenth century.

In his recent study of the Jesuit and Savage in New France,⁵ J. H. Kennedy asserts that Lahontan did more than determine the character of the bon sauvage; he also determined the two major rôles the bon sauvage would play in secular literature: passively, as the model of conduct, and actively, as the critic of European society. Yet before he could play either rôle effectively, the savage needed introduction to people "outside his former claue of the devout and the curious--to the vulgar, the sophisticated, and the frivolous."⁶ The widespread success of Lahontan's books began this process. Finally, the savage idealised by Lahontan's Adario would undergo many transformations in the course of the century, with the result that le bon sauvage or le Huron became a typical spokesman for the uncouth but innately noble being who appeared in Europe from the wilds and was amazed by the paradoxes of so-called civilisation.

The extent to which Lahontan may have contributed to the development of related philosophical ideas is difficult to assess. If his own idea were not original, as Chinard suggests,⁷ then any similarity between Lahontan's ideas and those expressed for example by the later philosophes, may be explained by a common source pre-dating Lahontan's

own writings. It is of value, nevertheless, to record the extent to which Lahontan's impressions are reiterated by his more renowned successors such as Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, and Diderot even though his greatest merit, perhaps, lies only in the fact that he appeared on the philosophical scene before they did.

Immediately following the publication in 1703 of Lahontan's first two volumes, an extract appeared in the January edition of the Journal de la République des Lettres.⁸ In the November issue of that year, the same journal published a detailed analysis of the Dialogues in which an anonymous critic berates Lahontan for not opposing more convincingly Adario's arguments against the Christian religion: "On n'en doit pas être surpris", the reviewer states, "il n'est pas théologien de profession et ne suit pas les principes des réformez, mais ceux de la religion qui est la catholique romaine. Aussi voit-on que le sauvage ne se rend pas aux raisons de M. de la Hontan; il paroît toujours le victorieux."⁹

The same objection raised by the aforementioned observer was repeated some time later by Leibnitz.¹⁰ It is clear that the illustrious German philosopher, who became acquainted with Lahontan during the latter's stay at the court of the Elector of Hanover, did hold the author of the Dialogues in high esteem. But his correspondence with the scholar Bierling in November, 1710 reveals a certain dissatisfaction with Lahontan's manipulation of the religious discussions with Adario. Leibnitz in fact finds fault with only that facet of Lahontan's books, and he dispels the doubt expressed by Bierling that

the works were fictitious. To substantiate Lahontan's account of life in the colony, Leibnitz cites Johannes Daniel Kraft, a distinguished geographer who had spent some time in the neighbouring regions and whose account was not inconsistent with Lahontan's.¹¹

Leibnitz adds that works like the Dialogues, confirmed his own view that the American savages lived quietly together in spite of the absence of magistrates. Only among men of different nations or language, he continues, do quarrels, feuds or wars ever occur in the New World. This, the philosopher declares, is a political marvel, unknown to Aristotle, and certainly not observed by Hobbes. Leibnitz then gives a description of the domestic harmony enjoyed by the Americans, and concludes that if in America such gifts of nature could be combined with the European arts, civilised Europeans would be of no account in comparison with these savages.¹²

Bierling, on the other hand, is not so readily convinced that Hobbes is wrong. The English philosopher may have been wrong about the savages, Bierling declares, but he certainly wasn't wrong about the people who wish to be called more cultured. If the reins of the latter were loosened and their laws removed (along with their executioners and magistrates) a state of unlimited strife would arise that could be settled only by slaughter and bloodshed. In Bierling's view, it is thus much better not to know vices than to know virtues; whereupon the German scholar announced to Leibnitz that he intended to write a refutation of Hobbes' views of the natural state, based on experience, and on Lahontan's observations.¹³ There is no evidence, however, that

Bierling undertook this task, and it can only be assumed that he never had the opportunity.

This exchange of views between Leibnitz and Bierling then moves from politics to religion. Bierling declares that he has encountered claims in travel books that there are peoples in America destitute of all sense of God and of religion; in fact, the professor adds, their existence seems to substantiate the arguments so carefully elaborated by Pierre Bayle in his Pensées diverses sur la Comète. Bierling asks Leibnitz if he will verify these claims with Lahontan.¹⁴ In fact Lahontan had, by this time, left Hanover to accompany another of his benefactors, the Governor of Holstein, to the great Kiel fair. Leibnitz, however, replies on behalf of our author and informs his correspondent that the only savages encountered by Lahontan did indeed believe in a Supreme Being; furthermore, the philosopher affirms, some of them believed that the souls of the dead continued to enjoy an after-life beyond the mountains.¹⁵ With the apparent allaying of Bierling's fears, this discussion of Lahontan and his books is concluded. There is no doubt that Leibnitz was to remember subsequently his association with Lahontan. The latter's books contained an arsenal of facts with which the German philosopher could oppose the hated theories of Hobbes. Leibnitz may even have seen in Lahontan's savages the confirmation of his general optimism: man is not forced by his brutish nature to relinquish his liberty and accept laws, either through the need for protection against his fellows, or through the need for personal aggrandizement.

The reception accorded Lahontan's books by contemporary

historians and geographers was equally enthusiastic. Numerous acknowledgements of our author's contributions to knowledge of the New World are to be found in the specialised works of the eighteenth century.¹⁶ As early as 1705, numerous borrowings from Lahontan occur in the Geographical Description of Canada, a work by the English scholar Harris.¹⁷ A description of the Rivière Longue, which Lahontan claimed to have discovered, figures in Gueudeville's Atlas historique, a seven-volume work which appeared in Amsterdam between 1713 and 1721;¹⁸ and Beverley, in his History and Present State of Virginia,¹⁹ also used Lahontan as an authority. In the monumental work by Bernard, entitled: Cérémonies religieuses de tous les peuples,²⁰ numerous borrowings from Lahontan's accounts of New France are to be found. Similarly, the latter's influence is noted in the Grand Dictionnaire géographique et critique et historique of Bruzen de la Martinière.²¹ Prévost, too, cites Lahontan in one of the volumes of the work to which the abbé devoted the last few years of his life: l'Histoire générale des Voyages.²² In the chapters on Canada in d'Orville's Histoire des différens peuples,²³ almost all of the documentation is attributed to Lahontan.

In addition to the many borrowings which occurred, it may be assumed also that Lahontan's books were a source of information on the numerous traits of the Indians for those writers engaged in compiling the many dictionaries and encyclopedias which appeared during the eighteenth century. The second volume of Diderot's Encyclopédie,²⁴ published in 1751, contains, for example, a brief article on "la Philosophie des Canadiens", in which the writer affirms that: "Nous devons la

connaissance des sauvages du Canada au baron de la Hontan, qui a vécu parmi eux environ l'espace de dix ans."²⁵ This is followed by an evaluation of the Dialogues which is signed "C", and which has subsequently provoked some inquiry as to the identity of the contributor. Louis Bredvold, writing in 1932, sees the article in the Encyclopédie as largely a paraphrasing of a chapter entitled De Philosophia Canadensium, in Jacob Brucker's Historia Critica Philosophiae, which is itself derived from Lahontan's Dialogues.²⁶ Bredvold also points out that in the third edition of the Encyclopédie there is an article in two sections entitled: "Amérique". Lahontan is discussed in both sections, but to somewhat contradictory purposes. In the first section, entitled: Recherches géographiques & critiques sur la position des lieux septentrionaux de l'Amérique, written by l'abbé de la Chapelle, an eminent mathematician and a member of the Royal Society of London, Lahontan is defended as a dependable explorer. In the second section, however, another writer, whom Bredvold identifies as de Paw (or de Pauw), warns against the article "Philosophie des Canadiens" and against its sources. He notes that Lahontan was the chief source of information for the article and adds disparagingly: "C'est précisément la Hontan qu'il ne falloit point consulter, parce qu'il prête, on ne sait à quels barbares du Canada, ses propres idées, qui sont encore très-éloignées d'être justes."²⁷

Among Lahontan's bitterest critics, Gilbert Chinard tells us,²⁸ was the Jesuit scholar Lafitau. The latter's monumental study entitled: Moeurs des Sauvages Américains comparées aux mœurs des premiers temps²⁹ was dedicated to the task of demonstrating that there is a kinship between all peoples. This concept was illustrated by the fact that

men everywhere accept religious principles which are essentially similar, moral principles based on universal values, and social laws and customs so related that they could only have issued from the same source. Such a thesis would collapse if Lahontan's account of the savages of New France were substantiated, since there, apparently, was a race living with neither laws nor moral code and whose natural religion was based on no other precept than their reason. But Lafitau repudiates Lahontan's claims, branding him a libertin who "s'étourdissant sur des vérités incommodes voudroient que les autres n'eussent pas plus de religion qu'eux."³⁰

The protest entered by Lafitau no doubt aroused his fellow Jesuits to action and a series of publications resulted which were aimed primarily at condemning Lahontan's treatment of religion. Charlevoix, the noted Jesuit historian whose History and general description of New France³¹ became the source-book for later eighteenth-century writers, treats Lahontan as a systematic liar. Not only does the historian dismiss the latter's religious diatribe as a libertinous harangue, but he also repudiates that part of Lahontan's account which many scholars had earlier substantiated.³²

It is well known that such accounts of voyages were no less appreciated in eighteenth-century England although the influence there of this genre has been studied to a lesser extent. Chinard submits that the English public accepted Lahontan from the outset.³³ It is probable that Steele was in part inspired by the famous aventurier-philosophe in his article for the Tatler in 1710, written on the occasion of a visit

to London of four Indian chiefs.³⁴ Addison too, Chinard maintains, may have used Lahontan's writings for the article published on the same occasion in the Spectator. Addison's and Steele's Indians, like Adario, are quoted as ridiculing the dress of the English, as well as reproving them for not observing their religion.³⁵ Chinard's conjectures in this respect are, however, open to question for there is no conclusive evidence that either English author was, in fact, directly acquainted with Lahontan's works.

A more convincing parallel may possibly be drawn between Lahontan's Dialogues and Swift's powerful satire on man and human institutions which appeared in 1726. Both authors were motivated by misanthropy in their attack on European civilisation, and Swift in Gulliver's Travels no doubt leaned heavily on many currently popular accounts of voyages for his fascinating tale of travels to imaginary lands, including that of Lahontan.

In the fourth part of his book, Swift compares the simplicity and virtue of the Houyhnhnms with the disgusting brutality of the Yahoos; Lahontan, we remember, compares the enviable natural state of his savages with the despicable malignity of European civilisation. There are in fact many similarities between Swift's Houyhnhnms and Lahontan's savages, and it would seem improbable that these can all be attributed to coincidence.

The influence which Lahontan's books exerted in the eighteenth century upon the foremost writers of his native France is somewhat more easily defined. Besides the diffusion of ideas on the American savages,

widely treated in the encyclopedias and dictionaries, referred to earlier in this chapter, there were also direct borrowings from the Mémoires and the Dialogues in several important works. As early as 1721, Parisians attending Delisle's Arlequin Sauvage at the théâtre des Italiens, witnessed the staging of a critique of laws and customs very reminiscent of Lahontan's Dialogues. Like Adario, Arlequin attributes the ills of society to private property, to money, and in particular to the monstrous inequality which makes the poor the slaves of the rich.³⁶

A decade later, in 1732, in the romance entitled: Les Aventures de M. Robert Chevalier, dit de Beauchêne, Alain-René Lesage portrays his rogue in a fashion which reminds Chinard³⁷ of another officer of the King, the Baron de Lahontan. Both men reject categorically all manner of authority in their quest for solitude and adventure in New France. They become inflamed in like fashion at the detestable yoke of civilisation and, without any apparent hesitation, they both desert their posts and spend months on end communing with the Indians whose philosophy both men admired so much.

Joubert de la Rue's Lettres d'un sauvage dépaycé, written in 1738, was probably also inspired by Lahontan's Dialogues. This critique of the principal institutions of civilised society also bears a striking resemblance to Montesquieu's Lettres Persanes, and de la Rue may well have borrowed from both authors for his epistolary attack on European civilisation.³⁸

Whether Montesquieu, too, was acquainted with our author's

works is open to conjecture. Although there are similarities between the Dialogues and the Lettres Persanes, Lahontan is not mentioned anywhere in Montesquieu's notes. It is Chinard's view,³⁹ moreover, that the very fact that the American savages had only a rudimentary form of society would suffice to prevent Montesquieu from being interested in them. Yet Montesquieu's comprehensive examination of the relation between laws and circumstances, in his Esprit des Lois, must have depended in some measure upon commentaries such as Lahontan's. The political philosopher attributes the liberty of the savages, for example, to the richness of their climate; furthermore, their equality is enforced by an apparent unawareness of money. This leads, in turn, to an assurance of their continued liberty, and it may be said that Montesquieu is reiterating Lahontan's view that the clamour for the accumulation of wealth, characterised by European civilisation, leads to the restriction of individual liberty. If Montesquieu was not acquainted with Lahontan's Adario, then the philosopher was certainly influenced by someone of a similar spirit.

Perhaps the most notable successor to Adario is the Huron of Voltaire's l'Ingénu. Several writers of repute have declared that the latter was inspired by Lahontan's savage, and a note in the Moland edition suggests Lahontan's Mémoires as a plausible source; according to Georges Avenel writing in 1869, "il est à croire que, pour toutes les répliques du Huron sur la religion, Voltaire s'est inspiré de la relation du baron de La Hontan sur les sauvages du Canada."⁴⁰ Emile Henriot devotes a chapter of his Courrier Littéraire⁴¹ to the study of Lahontan's

influence on the great writers of the eighteenth century; he proceeds with caution, however, when associating Lahontan with Voltaire. The latter, he writes: "lui doit peut-être l'idée de l'Ingénu."⁴²

P. E. Meyer, on the other hand, goes to considerable lengths to show that Adario was the prototype of l'Ingénu, and offers evidence to show that Voltaire borrowed from Lahontan in describing the savages' religion.⁴³ Voltaire, however, embraced, in one way or another, the ideas of nearly all his contemporaries; it would be imprudent to suggest that the renowned philosopher was specifically influenced here by our author.

Perhaps Lahontan's greatest influence would appear to be reflected in the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The similarities, for example, between the Genevan's principal thesis in his second discourse and the attacks which our author directs against private property in the Dialogues are such that there is a great temptation to identify the latter as one of Rousseau's primary sources. In the notes to the Discours sur l'inégalité, Rousseau does indicate the sources from which he has derived his ideas, and Lahontan is not mentioned. Important among these sources is, however, Lebeau's Voyage au Canada, which Chinard describes as being: "Une sorte de contrefaçon de Lahontan, au moins dans sa partie philosophique."⁴⁴

That Rousseau knew and used the accounts of voyages need not be doubted; their popularity in the eighteenth century has already been indicated. Confirmation of the Genevan's interest, moreover, is found in the Emile, where he affirms, somewhat boastfully perhaps: "J'ai passé

ma vie à lire des relations de voyages."⁴⁵ It was in such accounts that Rousseau discovered the longed-for état naturel, peopled by the savages he idolized. We may be certain that if Rousseau was not directly acquainted with Lahontan's books, he undoubtedly referred to the dictionaries or encyclopedias which had availed themselves of our author's message.

The reference to Lahontan in Diderot's Encyclopédie has already been noted.⁴⁶ In the latter's Pensées Philosophiques there is even a specific reference to the regard in which the celebrated philosopher held Lahontan's Mémoires: "'Ce Dieu, qui fait mourir Dieu pour apaiser dieu', est un mot excellent du baron de Lahontan. Il résulte moins d'évidence de cent volumes in-folio, écrits pour ou contre le christianisme, que du ridicule de ces deux lignes."⁴⁷ The original statement in the Mémoires varies slightly from Diderot's citation, but there is no doubt that we are dealing here with an interpretation of the Incarnation à la Lahontan: "Dieu pour satisfaire Dieu, ait fait mourir Dieu."⁴⁸

Diderot's dependence upon Lahontan's Voyages for the Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville can only be surmised, but the similarity between the protestations of the Tahitian and those of Lahontan's Adario is once more perhaps much too great to be attributed to coincidence alone, even though nearly eighty years separate the two publications. Such similarity of doctrine is further evidence that Lahontan's ideas were influential with the philosophes who came after him and who achieved reputations far greater than his.

We should state in conclusion, that we do not profess to have

indicated, in this study, every aspect of Lahontan's influence upon the philosophical works of the eighteenth century. We have endeavoured, rather, to establish the true place he deserves among the precursors of the philosophe movement in France. The very fact that ideas like those of Lahontan were expressed, even before the death of Louis XIV, is evidence of the revolutionary trend which was growing in France. It is true that accounts of voyages were not new; hundreds, indeed, had appeared since the beginning of the sixteenth century. Their authors had also frequently portrayed the happy state in which primitive peoples of other lands apparently lived. None of these writers, however, had used their observations to condemn civilised society. Lahontan's works, therefore, represent the first systematic attempt made, through the medium of a travel narrative, to demolish the religious and moral basis of European civilisation.

The Dialogues with Adario provided Lahontan with a unique yet popular vehicle for his doctrine. The defense of natural religion and natural law, the core of the Dialogues, represents a landmark in the literature of the eighteenth century. As a result, our author emerges as a principal source of ideas concerning the bon sauvage, that strange creature whose philosophical figure was to dominate the literature of the century. It also fell to Lahontan to formulate the most violent attack on European civilisation which had appeared to that time. His thesis, that nearly all of society's ills may be attributed to the clamour for individual wealth and private property, doubtless endeared him to the numerous advocates of equality who were eventually to make

their feelings known in a still more violent manner during the Revolution.

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