Lafitau Revisited: American "Savages" and Universal History

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Abstract: Like the Victorian anthropologists, Lafitau constructed a comparison between "savages" and "ancients." Specifically, he asserted the universality of three fundamental human institutions: religion, marriage, and government. However, he constructed his arguments in radically different ways for each of these institutions. First, he compiled a generalized account of "pagan" religion amalgamated from classical sources and descriptions of Native American religious practices. Secondly, he compared the Iroquois practices he observed with an absolute template of marriage as a divinely ordained institution. Thirdly, he provided a functional analysis of Iroquois institutions to demonstrate the effectiveness of their form of government.

Keywords: history of anthropology, Iroquois, religion, kinship, government, missionaries

Résumé : Comme les anthropologues victoriens, Lafitau a construit une comparaison entre « les sauvages » et « les anciens ». Spécifiquement, il a affirmé l'universalité de trois institutions humaines : la religion, le mariage et le gouvernement. Il a toutefois construit ses arguments par des chemins radicalement différents pour chacune des institutions. D'abord, il a compilé une description généralisée de la religion « païenne » fusionnée à partir de sources classiques et de comptes-rendus de pratiques religieuses des Indiens nord-américains. En second lieu, il a comparé les pratiques iroquoises qu'il observait avec un modèle absolu du mariage comme une institution de prescription divine. En troisième lieu, il a produit une analyse fonctionnelle des institutions iroquoises pour démontrer l'efficacité de leur forme de gouvernement.

Mots-clés : histoire de l'anthropologie, Iroquois, religion, parenté, gouvernement, missionnaires

A century and a half before Lewis Henry Morgan's *Ancient Society*, the Jesuit Father Joseph-François Lafitau published his huge tome, *Les Moeurs des Sauvages Americains Comparés aux Moeurs des Premiers Temps* (The Customs of American Savages Compared to the Customs of Earliest Times), published in 1724.[1] Indeed, Lafitau has been credited by Radcliffe-Brown with "discovering" the classificatory kinship terminology of the Iroquois before Morgan.[2] However, there are more important bases for comparing Lafitau to Morgan aside from a concern with kinship. Both Lafitau's *Moeurs des Sauvages Américains* and Morgan's *Ancient Society* confront Iroquois ethnography, based on the authors' own researches in the field, with accounts of classical Greek and Roman societies in order to construct a framework for a universal history of humanity.

Lafitau's work, along with that of his fellow Jesuit François Xavier Charlevoix, represented the culmination of a century of Jesuit descriptions of the native peoples of New France,[3] most notably those of Le Jeune and Brébeuf whom he cites abundantly. (The Jesuits had, of course, no monopoly on such descriptions, which were penned both by their rivals, the Recollet friars Sagard and Hennepin, and by secular explorers such as Champlain, Lescarbot, Perrot and Lahontan.) Both Lafitau and Charlevoix departed from their predecessors by incorporating their descriptions into histories. Charlevoix's history of New France, however, was a more conventional form of historical narrative. Lafitau's work was not a narrative at all, but rather a speculative attempt to reconstruct the early history of humanity, especially before the adoption of writing.

Recent reappraisals of Lafitau's contributions to anthropology and to the study of native Americans tend, alternatively, to stress his ethnography, and thus his representation of the "American savages" (Ellingson 2001; Sioui 1992), or his comparative enterprise simultaneously engulfing Americans and Ancients (de Certeau 1985;

Duchet 1985; Hodgen 1971; see also Pagden 1982:199).[4] There is consensus that his depiction of the Iroquois is largely sympathetic, though not all commentators are as enthusiastic as Sioui (1992:47), who asserts that "Lafitau's work provides a solid mass of arguments and evidence that help restore dignity to the people descended from the 'savage' nations Lafitau describes." Analyses of his comparative project have focused on how he constitutes the very terms of comparison—American "savages" and "earliest times"—and of the implications of the ways in which he interconnects them. Duchet (1985) points out that both "American savages" and "earliest times" are entirely constructed by Lafitau, in the first place an amalgam, not only of descriptions of New France, but of Brazil, Virginia, the Caribbean, indeed Mexico and Peru; in the second instance, an equally haphazard selection of material culled from classical sources. De Certeau (1985) goes further to suggest that, for Lafitau, the very act of writing serves to suppress time in the process of making "savage" customs speak for ancient relics, silencing the voices of the Ancients and the Americans in the process, thus inaugurating "l'écriture anthropologique," (anthropological writing).

Of course, Lafitau was hardly the first to compare the practices of non-Europeans with those of Greeks and Romans. Indeed, this was fairly standard practice in much early modern European travel writing, His original contribution, as de Certeau points out, was rather to theorize this comparison in terms of a framework which, like Morgan, writes a universal history while simultaneously negating specific histories. Of course, the frameworks Lafitau and Morgan envisaged were radically different, not least because each author conceptualized a different kind of time. Morgan's timeframe was geological, Lafitau's resolutely theological.

Lafitau's account consequently begins with the Creation, the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, the Flood, and the dispersal of humankind after the collapse of the tower of Babel. There was obviously no space in such a chronology for "prehistory." Lafitau suggested that, before the dispersal, humans were privy to divinely transmitted moral principles, natural religion for all intents and purposes. Given the intrinsic sinfulness of human nature after the Fall, these principles were bound to be violated or distorted in the absence of revealed religion. This said, such an Augustinian perspective hardly qualifies Lafitau as a "degenerationist," as Hodgen (1971:380) and Trigger (1985:23) have alleged. On the contrary, Lafitau's central concern was to demonstrate how traces of the divine teachings were never totally abandoned, and could be found throughout the world's peoples. Jesuits had already described the Chinese literati as exemplary in the way that they had maintained these principles relatively intact over the centuries.[5] But if such traces could be found among the Iroquois, their universality was confirmed. Such an assertion was an essential tenet of Jesuit humanism. Lafitau's account of the Native American migration from Asia was also a flat denial of polygenesis, an assertion of the essential oneness of human nature. The Iroquois, indeed all Native Americans, were moral beings who could and should be converted to Christianity.

Given Lafitau's post-diluvian paradigm, the Iroquois—indeed all Native Americans—had to have their origins in the Old World. In his efforts to uncover the mystery of their origins, Lafitau—very much like his 19th-century successors—focused on the Iroquois system of matrilineal descent, or, in his terms, gynococracy. Lafitau's extensive classical education had in fact prepared him for such a discovery. Herodotus (1899:68) had described such a system among the Lycians of Asia Minor: "they have one peculiar [custom] to themselves, in which they differ from all other nations; for they take their name from their mothers and not from their fathers; so that if any one ask another who he is, he will describe himself by his mother's side, and reckon up his maternal ancestry in the female line." On these grounds, Lafitau speculated that the Iroquois were none other than long lost Lycians, who had migrated across Asia through Siberia to America. (He dismissed the idea that they might be one of the lost tribes of Israel as preposterous [1974:Vol.1, 259-261].[6])

In a short and early chapter where he sketched out a general "Idea of the Character of Savages in General," Lafitau catalogued the virtues and vices of savage existence. Admittedly, at first glance, they appeared to be "coarse, stupid, ignorant, ferocious, without sentiments of religion or humanity, given to all the vices, the natural product of a complete freedom which is troubled neither by any sentiment of the divine or of human laws, nor by principles of reason or education." But such stereotypes, he insisted, were misleading if not flatly wrong. "They have good sense, a vivid imagination, an easy grasp of ideas, and an admirable memory. All possess at least the traces of an ancient and hereditary religion, and of a form of government" (1974:Vol. 1, 90).[7] Indeed, the centerpiece of Lafitau's argument was the assertion of the universality of three fundamental human institutions: religion, marriage and government. Nearly half the book is devoted to a demonstration that American savages in general, and the Iroquois in particular, possessed all three of these institutions in one form or another. However, the way in which he constructed his arguments was radically differ-

ent for each of these three institutions. In the first instance, he constructed a generalized account of "pagan" religion amalgamated from miscellaneous classical sources, his own experience of the Iroquois, and other (mostly but not exclusively Jesuit) descriptions of Native American religious practices. In the second, he (generally favourably) compared the Iroquois practices he observed with an absolute template of marriage as a divinely ordained institution. Thirdly, he provided a sort of functional analysis of Iroquois institutions to demonstrate the effectiveness of their form of government. In short, he provided three radically different analytical and rhetorical strategies for "humanizing" the savages.

Lafitau's chapter on religion is far and away the longest in the book. His composite picture of the religious system which was carried from Europe through Asia to the Americas included examples from classical antiquity, Zoroastrians, Mexico, Peru, Guiana, Brazil, Virginia and of course from New France. This is the only chapter, however, where his own observations played a relatively marginal role. His concern was ultimately to separate the wheat from the chaff, to uncover the core of eternal truth which lay beneath the accretion of superstition and error. The key tenets of this religious system were, minimally, belief in the divinity, in the soul and in life after death. This is hardly to say that Lafitau's discussion limited itself to any such bare minimum. The sun, he suggests, was a "natural" symbol for the divinity; consequently, the worship of fire, "pyrolatry," was a common feature of its cult. Lafitau's use of the comparative method to create a single paradigm out of composite sources taken out of context bears remarkable similarity to later constructs—Tylor's "animism" or Frazer's "homeopathic" and "contagious" magic—even if his creationist message was diametrically opposed to their evolutionary scenarios.

Unlike Tylor and Frazer, however, for whom "animism" and "magic" epitomized the logical confusion of the savage mind, Lafitau expressed considerable sympathy for this ancient-cum-savage religion as he understood it. It is instructive to compare Lafitau's attitude towards self-mortification to that of previous Christian writers. Of course, for Roman Catholics in the 17th century and earlier, self-mortification was both readily comprehensible and potentially praiseworthy. Sir John Mandeville, in the 14th century, was impressed with the readiness of (South Asian) Indians to throw themselves beneath the wheels of the "Juggernaut's" cart (1983:125-126).[8] For him, it was a scandal that idolaters were prepared to go to such lengths for false gods while Christians were unwilling to display the same level of self-sacrifice for the true God. The practices of others were, in this respect, largely a foil for what he considered the egregious inadequacy of his coreligionists. José de Acosta, in the 16th century, saw the religious practices of the Mexicans and Peruvians in a rather different light:

> Because the religious life ... is so acceptable in the eyes of Divine Majesty, and so greatly honors his holy name and beautifies his church, the father of lies has not only tried to imitate that life but in a certain sense tries to compete with it and to make his ministers view with it in austerity and observance. [de Acosta 2002:282]

The monasteries of the virgins of the Sun in Peru, the bloodletting of Mexican priests who would pierce their bodies with spines of maguey, were so many manifestations of the Devil's imitation of religious virtue, a form of satanic parody. Nonetheless, such practices served not only "to demonstrate Satan's accursed pride and shame" but also "to waken the sense of our own lukewarm efforts in the service of Almighty God" (de Acosta 2002:287). It was hard for de Acosta to repress a begrudging sense of admiration.

For Lafitau, however, such self-mortification was in fact divinely inspired rather than a devilish travesty. Lafitau's long discussion begins with a description of the pagan mysteries of classical antiquity, which clearly expressed "the truth of religion" in spite of the later introduction of various "abominations and shameful things" which "were diametrically opposed to their initial spirit which was a spirit of death to oneself, of penance and sanctification":

> In the state of expiation which was truly one of penance, they [the initiates] kept themselves in retreat and silence, they fasted rigorously, abstained from the allowed pleasures of matrimony, made a confession of their sins, passed through many purifications representing the state of a mystical death and regeneration: finally, they underwent penalties which appeared to be a penance and an atonement for past sins. [1974:Vol. 1, 180]

Lafitau insisted on "the conformity of these initiations and mysteries of the ancients with the religions of the East Indies, of Japan and China, or even with those of such highly organized American nations as the Mexicans and the Peruvians" (1974:Vol. 1, 188), and notably:

> in the perfection to which they [the priests of these religions] aspire by the profession of a penitent, austere life, passed in fasts, abstinence, chastity, poverty, mortification [of the flesh] and finally in the practice of virtues, virtues of which they possess in truth only the external appearance, but, in this appearance, they find the claim of an entirely holy origin. [1974:Vol. 1, 189]

Here, Lafitau was careful to resort to an extremely subtle distinction. He could not assert that such practices of self-mortification in other religions were valid in any ultimate sense, for this would have made them equal to Roman Catholic Christianity; rather, these practices, invalid in themselves, nonetheless expressed a valid and holy truth.

Lafitau's interminable chapter on religion is the one which corresponds most closely to Duchet's and de Certeau's characterization of his use of the comparative method. He draws remarkably sparingly on the ethnography of New France, either from his own observations or those of his predecessors, and instead cites extensively from descriptions of other parts of America, from Virginia to Peru, in order to supplement his classical sources. If anything, it is not his Iroquois ethnography which illuminates the silences of his classical sources, but quite the reverse:

> I have no doubt at all that their initiations and tests were almost like those of the Virginian tribes of which we spoke at first but, whether they had already lost many of their customs when the Europeans began to visit them, or whether they carefully concealed their mysteries ... or, finally, whether the Europeans were not careful enough in questioning them or capable of penetrating adequately the spirit of the rites which they saw performed, we lack any detailed account of them in the old Relations. [1974:Vol. 1, 217]

Lafitau suggests that the "savages" of New France had lost or abandoned their initiation rites—the equivalents of ancient Greek and Roman "mysteries"—relatively recently. Ultimately, Lafitau's purpose is to amalgamate classical and ethnographic sources to reconstruct a sort of ur-paganism, a refraction rather than a reflection of the original divine spark.

Unlike his treatment of religion, Lafitau's discussion of marriage and the family relies very centrally on his own observations. For Lafitau, marriage, like religion, was a divinely-inspired institution. As one might readily imagine, marriage was ideally monogamous, permanent, and between individuals who were not closely related to one another. Lafitau's account of Iroquois kinship terminology was actually part of his argument for the universal applicability of incest prohibitions. Indeed, he resorted to Iroquois kinship in order to explain—or more exactly to explain away—an embarrassing passage in Genesis (20:12) which seemed directly to contradict the entire thrust of Lafitau's universal history. Abraham, who had asked Sarah to pass herself off as his sister rather than his wife in the kindgdom of Gerar, justifies himself to the king, Abimelech, on the grounds that Sarah is indeed his half sister, child of the same father by a different mother. For Lafitau, the Hebrews, as God's Chosen People, were the only ones to keep intact the knowledge of God's commandments, the incest prohibition among them. How could Abraham, apical ancestor of the Hebrews and a holy prophet, flout the incest prohibition so flagrantly? Lafitau's excursus into the intricacies of kinship terminology provided a perfect answer: Sarah was only Abraham's classificatory sister, *à la manière des Iroquois*. In this instance, Lafitau resorts to the comparative method, not in order to fill in the gaps of his knowledge of the past, but rather to cover up its scandals. Iroquois classificatory kinship terminology serves as a convenient fig leaf for Abraham.

Lafitau—and Brébeuf (1996:31) before him—heartily approved the Iroquois avoidance of marriage between relatives on all sides, even distant ones, regulations which seemed to echo those edicted by the Catholic Church (which could, unlike the Iroquois, accord dispensations). The Iroquois were also monogamous, another trait which easily won approval from the missionaries. The one spot on the Iroquois record, in the eyes of the missionaries, was the frequency of divorce and the ease by which it could be obtained. It is hardly surprising that missionaries would find Iroquois marriage somewhat short of perfection. Still, except for the issue of divorce, their overall tone was one of approval. There is not the slightest hint in Lafitau that Iroquois matriliny was a sign of marital laxity. (Le Jeune, in the previous century, had in fact suggested that Montagnais men left their property to their sisters' children because they could never be sure of their own progeny.) In short, Lafitau measured Iroquois institutions of kinship and marriage in terms of what he considered universally valid, divinely decreed standards. If these practices fell short of perfection—a human, rather than a "savage" predicament—they were anything but degenerate.

Finally, Lafitau insisted, the Iroquois savages definitely had a system of government. He named such a system "gynococracy," the rule of women, to underscore its matrilineal basis, though he pointed out that governmental affairs were "in the men's hands only by way of procuration" (1974:Vol. 1, 287). Thus the office of chief always passes from a man to "his aunt's children or his sisters' or his nieces' on the maternal side" (1974:Vol. 1, 292). The successor is chosen by the matron of the group, who confers with the members of her own longhouse (*cabane*). As for the chiefs, "their power does not appear to have any trace of absolutism. It seems that they have no means of coercion to command obedience in case of resistance. They are obeyed, however, and command with authority; their

commands, given as requests, and the obedience paid them, appear entirely free" (1974:Vol. 1, 293). Lafitau reserves the highest praise for their councils:

> After their deliberation on whatever subject it may be, there is almost no reason, for or against, which they have not seen or weighed and, when they want to take account of their decision, they make it so plausible that it is difficult not to interpret it in the way that they do. In general, we may say that they are more patient than we in examining all the consequences and results of a matter. They listen to one another more quietly, show more deference and courtesy than we toward people who express opinions opposed to theirs, not knowing what it is to cut a speaker off short, still less to dispute heatedly: they have more coolness, less passion, at least to all appearances, and bear themselves with more zeal for the public welfare. Also it has been by a most refined policy that they have gained the ascendancy over the other nations, that they have gained the advantage over the most warlike after dividing them, rendered themselves formidable to the most distant, and maintain themselves today in a state of tranquil neutrality between the French and English by which thay have been able to make themselves both feared and sought after. [1974:Vol. 1, 297]

They managed to keep quarrels to a minimum, and to have a system of justice for resolving disputes, including the payment of compensation for homicide.

While Lafitau drew parallels between Iroquois government and examples from classical antiquity—Lycian "gynococracy" is after all an absolutely critical element of his argument concerning the ultimately European origins of the Iroquois—his account differed in striking ways from his treatment of marriage and religion. Specifically, he made no argument that Iroquois government conformed in any degree to some divinely mandated paradigm. Of course, the most theologically oriented political argument, in the 17th if not the 18th century, was the divine right of kings. This would hardly have suited the Iroquois case, where kings were notably absent. In any case, by Lafitau's time, the argument for the divine right of kings was no longer taken very seriously. As a result, this implied that Iroquois government was an entirely human achievement, and that they, rather than God, could take direct credit for its very real successes. All in all, Lafitau's account of the Iroquois moves from chapter to chapter, quietly but inexorably, from Divine Creation towards human achievement, from universally valid templates drawn from an amalgam of classical sources and travel narratives to an increasingly straightforward, first hand account of Iroquois practices.

Critical assessments of Lafitau's contribution to anthropology, by focusing either on his ethnographic representation of the Iroquois or on the nature of his comparative project, have failed to take into consideration the articulation between these two facets of his work, and most particularly, on the different ways in which they articulate with one another in different sections of the book. The section on marriage comes closest to wedding Iroquois ethnography with Lafitau's quest for evidence of traces of the divine plan. Not only are many, if not all, Iroquois practices divinely sanctioned, but they even serve to "rectify" readings of Holy Scripture. As far as religion is concerned, quite to the contrary, Lafitau has abundant recourse to classical sources as well as to descriptions of other "American savages" in order to compensate for real or perceived lacunae in the ethnography of New France. Finally, other than the putative Lycian origins of Iroquois gynococracy, the governmental institutions of the Iroquois do not conform neatly either to a classical paradigm or to the ideal of an absolutist monarchy with which the Jesuits were most comfortable, but nevertheless demonstrate that they could function legitimately.

Ultimately, Morgan was to be far more consistent in his use of his own ethnographic research to suggest that the institutions of Iroquois society in the realms of government, family and property provided a glimpse of the "prehistory" of the Greeks and the Romans. Yet there is a brief passage where, for a moment, Lafitau self-consciously rereads the Greeks in the light of his direct experience of the Iroquois:

> I took particular pleasure in reading Apollonius of Rhodes' poem on the expedition of the Argonauts, because of the perfect resemblance which I find in all the rest of the work between these famous heroes of antiquity, and the present day barbarians, in their voyages and military undertakings. Hercules and Jason, Castor and Pollux, Zetes and Calais, Orpheus and Mopsus, and all those other half-gods, who rendered themselves immortal, and to whom people have burned incense only too readily, are so well represented by a troop of rascals and miserable savages that I seem to see [pass] before my eyes those famous conquerors of the Golden Fleece, but this resemblance lowers the conception which I had formed of the glory [of these heroes], and I am ashamed for the greatest kings and princes in the world that they have thought themselves honoured to be compared to them.
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> The famous ship Argo which has for anchor a ... stone tied to a laurel root cord, to which Hercules' weight alone served as ballast and which the Argonauts carried on their shoulders for twelve days and twelve nights in the Lybian fables, has nothing to distinguish

> it from a dugout or at most from a long-boat [*chaloupe*]. This Hercules himself who chose his place on the benches with the others and took an oar in his hand, who plunged into the woods to make an oar of a little fir tree after breaking his; who, every time that they selected land to camp, lay on the shore, in the open air, on a bed of leaves or branches, is a savage in all ways and is not superior to them [the Indians]. [1974:Vol. 2, 116-117]

In this remarkable passage where Lafitau relates his epiphany, the fleeting impression that the Argonauts were far more like the Iroquois than like the sculptures of the Parthenon, we can catch a glimpse of *The Golden Bough*.

By the time Lafitau published his work, theologically inspired universal histories were out of fashion, though Montesquieu's *Spirit of Laws* and Voltaire's *Essai sur les Moeurs*, attempts to understand the sweep of human history in purely human terms, had yet to be published. De Lahontan's (1905) description of the Huron and Algonquians[9] was already in print—indeed, Lafitau included objections to Lahontan's account in his book—and was to provide a far more influential portrait of the "savage" than Lafitau. Although French Enlightenment theorists relied heavily on Jesuit narratives (and no doubt took great pleasure in using them in ways absolutely contrary to Jesuit ideas), Lafitau was largely left aside, whether because of his overly theocentric conception of history or his pedantic array of classical references. Voltaire, in particular, lampooned him mercilessly:

> Lafitau claims that the [Native] Americans came from the Ancient Greeks. The Greeks had fables [i.e., myths and legends], some Americans have them too. The earliest Greeks went hunting, so do Americans. The earliest Greeks had oracles, the Americans sorcerers [i.e., shamans]. The danced on Greek holidays, they dance in America too. You have to admit that these reasons are convincing. [1963:Vol. 1, 30, my translation]

Voltaire's merciless critique of Lafitau's diffusionism is on the mark, although he certainly avoids any mention of "gynococracy," a far less trivial (if just as misleading) point of resemblance, and one on which Lafitau places far more theoretical emphasis.

Ultimately, Lafitau made his mark in Scotland. Adam Smith (1978), Adam Ferguson (1995) and John Millar (1773) all drew very heavily on Lafitau for their portrait of "savages," openly acknowledging his work as well as that of his fellow Jesuit, the historian Charlevoix. Paradoxically, it was to the sections of government and warfare that they turned, neglecting his accounts of marriage and especially of religion. Once again, the Jesuit narratives were used against the grain and Lafitau served to buttress universal histories where God was absent and humans alone were the principal actors.

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Notes

1 Fenton and Moore's otherwise excellent translation (Lafitau 1974) unfortunately renders the title as *Customs of American Indians Compared to the Customs of Primitive Times*. Fenton and Moore's deliberate substitution of *American Indians* for *savages* obscures Lafitau's contribution to a whole discourse on "savagery" in early modern Europe. *Primitive* is an anachronism, all the more because the "earliest times" in question include the Greeks and the Romans. The introduction to the translation (Fenton and Moore 1974) remains the most comprehensive account of Lafitau's life, his sources and his contribution.

2 See Tax 1955:445; Radcliffe-Brown 1950:8; see also Harris 1968:17.

3 See Charlevoix 1976. Thwaites 1896-1901 is a comprehensive compilation and translation of the Jesuit Relations upon which both Charlevoix and Lafitau relied.

4 The most notable exception is Sayre (1997). However, Sayre addresses Lafitau's comparative project and his ethnographic representation of Iroquois in different parts of his book, without treating the two enterprises within a single analytical framework.

5 Fellow Jesuit Louis Le Comte (1990:364) went so far as to assert in 1697 that "for over two thousand years, China conserved the knowledge of the true God and practiced the purest moral maxims, while Europe and almost all the rest of the world was in a state of error and corruption." Admittedly, such assertions led to the condemnation of his book by the religious authorities in France.

6 Nevertheless, Harris (1968:17) laments that Lafitau's "view of American Indian cultural processes was completely trammelled by belief in the fall and the Biblical version of the dispersal of the tribes of Israel."

7 Page numbers for Lafitau all refer to Fenton and Moore's translation.

8 Much if not all of Mandeville's account is drawn from other sources, and there is considerable doubt that he ever existed, much less travelled to South Asia or anywhere else. This does not, of course, detract from the text as a window into certain medieval attitudes towards "pagan" religious practices. Such attitudes were not, it is important to stress, in any sense "typical" and certainly not uncontested, but they were not entirely exceptional either.

9 Aside from a relatively conventional (and rather exaggerated) travel narrative and an ethnographic account of the Native Americans of New France, de Lahontan added a highly original imaginary dialogue between himself and Adario, a Huron who formulates a devastating critique of European society and religion, and makes light of the Jesuits in particular.

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