

Montaignes constraints: a renaissance view of the noble savage

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The paper " Montaigne's Constraints: A Renaissance View of the Noble Savage" is an outstanding example of an essay on literature. When one reads Montaigne's account of the New World, it is clear he chooses things that contrast directly with life in his own society, using the essay to condemn its defects. He writes with a lot of delight - suggesting that what he describes is done so much better in the New World than it is done in France - to entertain, and to show off his own wit and erudition (education and knowledge), rather than to make an accurate explanation. The way the ' natives' organize themselves is what he likes best: the way they have no formal ways of documenting and none of the modern trappings of contracts and laws. He reasons that because of this they have fewer disagreements. He admires their wooden tools and lack of metal. He likes their temperate ways, which he describes in a Utopian way, and their arrangements of longhouses and hammocks. He likes the way they have no fixed mealtimes, but graze all day on a kind of coriander bread and a lukewarm claret. He delights in the way they carry out their wars, and the ' simple' way they bring home the heads of their enemies, or kill a token enemy and consume the corpse in an act of revenge. He writes of their cheerfulness in the face of adversity, and how happy wives are that their husbands have a number of consorts, to which they happily add their friends. Their priests and prophets live far away but are celebrated when they visit. He admires their way of fighting, and how they never plunder the land of the loser, and finally, he likes their naïve observations and comparisons on the division of wealth in France. ' Valor towards their enemies and love towards their wives,' (Montaigne 1877) is something he portrays with as much enthusiasm as he

describes the wooden instruments played in times of battle. A student must conclude, from this reading, that Montaigne found it impossible, even when trying to describe an exotic tribe, not to impose his own very tight and conservative views of society on his description. Everything is couched in the morals, customs, and perceptions of France in the late 1800s.