On the properties of wild men: the bestiary men of *De proprietatibus rerum* and Shakespeare's Caliban

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This short article observes that while the figure of Caliban in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* satisfies colonial and postcolonial readings of the play which see him as the 'colonial other', Bartholomaeus Anglicus' encyclopaedia *De proprietatibus rerum*, or *On the Properties of Things* (1245)[1] in John Trevisa's translation (1398), can be seen to provide a more detailed analysis of his form and function. It is all too easy violently to break the surface tension of medieval bestiaries with current literary theory, which 'reveals' hidden meanings apparently available only to a modern, sophisticated, readership. The 'wild men' of the *DPR* certainly support the validity of colonial readings, but in a similar *mode* reveal Caliban's 'animal otherness' and his kinship with the fantastical hybrids associated with the medieval paradigm. The purpose of this article is therefore to draw attention to the wild men and hybrids of the *DPR* less as unobserved analogues for the figure of Caliban but as types of figurative and illustrative beings, and thus to contextualise him in their mode of 'animal other'.[2]

The earliest critical claim for the impact of English translations of the *DPR* on the works of Shakespeare is 1897 when R. Steel notes its influence.[3] Matrod's statement of 1912 that 'without the *DPR* the works of Shakespeare would not have existed' is a notorious overemphasis, moderated by Boyer in 1919. Boyer recognises the importance of the *DPR* but delimits its influence to 'a source of scientific knowledge for Elizabethan writers' which subsequently offers a hermeneutic by which to explain 'difficult' passages in Shakespeare's work.[4] More recently, D. C. Greetham notes that the *DPR* has been tagged with the sobriquet of 'Shakespeare's encyclopaedia.'[5] John Hankins saw Batman's edition[6] as *the* analogue to Shakespeare's thought on endless matters from the soul to the effect of the humours on the body.[7] However, Batman's efforts to revive interest in the medieval encyclopaedia were not successful enough to call for a second edition, and current thought is that the version most readily available

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[1] Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *On the Properties of Things a Critical Text: John Trevisa's Translation of De proprietatibus rerum of Bartholomaeus Anglicus*, 2 Vol. ed. by M. C. Seymour (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1975), hereafter *DPR.* As Trevisa's version is best known and most used by English writers I work from this translation.

[2] I am aware that this argument is akin to post-structuralist assertions that reason has often been used to exclude, denigrate or silence opinions that differ from the dominant view: the 'other' side is always irrational. A recent edition of essays which look at animals from such perspectives, including animals in Nietzsche's philosophy, and 'animal being' in Heidegger's thought, is *Animal Others: On Ethics, Ontology, and Animal Life*, ed. by H. Peter Steeves (New York: State University of New York, 1999). It is not my intention to follow this line of thought here, my study being primarily pedagogic, and concerned with the relationship between medieval and Early Modern bestiary representations.

[3] R. Steele, ed., *Medieval Lore: an epitome of the science, geography, animal and plant folk-lore and myth of the middle age; being classified gleanings from the encyclopedia of Bartholomew Anglicus*. (London: William Morris & Stock, 1893), 3.

[4] H. Matrod, 'Roger Bacon et Bartholomaeus Anglicus,' in *Etudes Franciscaines*, 28 (1912), 478 - 79.

[5] D. C. Greetham, 'The Concept of Nature in Bartholomaeus Anglicus (Fl 1230)' in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 41 (London: 1980), 663 - 677.

[6] *Batman vppon Bartholome his booke De proprietatibus rerum,* (London: East, 1582, British Museum)

[7] See John Erskin Hankins, *Backgrounds of Shakespeare's Thought* (London: The Harvester Press, 1978).

to Shakespeare may indeed have been the Trevisa translation, of which there were several printed editions (Wynkyn de Worde 1491, 1495, 1496?).[8]

The strangeness of Caliban in *The Tempest* and the natural setting of the distant location, informs readings of the discourse of discover in Early Modern literature. This, though, can be seen to have very established origins in the fantastical half-men of the medieval bestiary as illustrated in the *DPR*, who always retain an intimation of metaphoricity, underpinned by the generic geographical 'othering' of the East. In the *DPR* Fauns, for example, are from Scythia: 'also in sicia beþ bestes wiþ schappe of men and feet of hors' (18: 48). When the home of the fantastical is not specified as India, Ethiopia too is a place of origin. In this sense, the monstrous exists at a distant location, though never here.

There is nothing new in the observation that the young nobles or 'buds of nobler race' in *The Tempest* are set against a 'natural' man in such a location. In courtly mode, digression to the natural is to be forestalled by the rehearsal of courtly values if these young aristocrats are to rehearse and establish their nobility. To demonstrate what they should not be, placed in an Edenic setting to evoke the site of man's fall from grace, is the embodiment of post-lapsarian digression, Caliban. However, the figure of Caliban can be seen to reflect in allegory the state of fallenness of *all* men, in order to privilege spiritual and courtly ideals over uncomfortable physical realities and innate animal tendencies. In these terms the prescribed courtly ideal finds as its main binary opposition mankind's fallen animal nature, embodied in the natural man.

Mankind, Aristotle tells us, has quiddity or defining essential characteristics, as an animal and at a biological level. In the *DPR*, the animal is always defined in relation to its highest point, mankind's reason. This dichotomy of the bestial and the reasonable which becomes a doctrinal commonplace in Christian theology, is what Bartholomaeus refers to when he states that the 'animal' part of man (*Humo*) is of 'þe erþe' yet is also '*Antropos*' or 'arered vp' to face his God, plainly glossing Aristotle in *Parts of Animals*.

> oþir bestis lokeþ donward to þe erþe, and God ȝaf to man an hiȝe mouþ and hete hym loke vp and se heven, and he ȝaf to man visagis arerid toward þe stars. Also a man schal seche heven and nouȝt putte his þouȝt in þertþe and be obedient to þe wombe as a best. Isider spekeþ of double maner man, of þe inner man and vtter man (*DPR* 3. 1).[9]

This 'double maner man' of both inner and outer parts has reason or 'vnbodiliche substaunce intellectual'. The soul is anchored to the material: 'ioyned to þe body in twey maners' which defines the soul as mover to the moved, controlling the body by reason 'as a schipman is i-oned to þe ship' (3. 1). But this body - soul duality is clearly metaphorised in the wild men and hybrids of the *DPR*, who seem in part to suggest reasonability, yet appear to be animals. Like Caliban they are too similar to man not to present potential or imagined threats, and must be distanced. For Caliban,

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[8] For a detailed discussion, see Elizabeth Brockhurst, 'Bartholomaeus Anglicus "De Proprietatibus Rerum" ' Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis (University of London, 1952), 52 – 64.

[9] See Aristotle, *Parts of Animals*, 656 a, 15 - 20. The reference to the womb is of particular note. For an explanation see David Moses, 'John Trevisa's translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus' *De proprietatibus rerum*', *N&Q* Vol. L (2003) 1, 11 - 13.

this integration means both enslaving him while revealing him to be a 'thing of darkness', rather than a man aspiring to the light of Christian ascendancy.

As one of these metaphorical figures Caliban can be seen as the mobilisation of a set of pre-existent rhetorical devices concerning Christian belief about the fallenness of the animal and the nobility of the human soul. In another analogue, *The Mirrour of Princely Deedes*, Devil's Island is so named because of the monster Fauno who has ravaged it. Fauno is the son of a wicked princess and a monster from the Atlas Mountains brought to her by the devil. This 'preternatural origin fits Caliban's quasi-symbolic function as the embodiment of sensual grossness and hostility to truth and goodness.'[10] It also emphasises the way in which Caliban's lineage is a travesty of the noble pedigrees of the Milanese. Like Fauno of *The Mirrour*, the faun of the *DPR* and Caliban are subjects of a debate about the identity of the wild man and his desire to reproduce himself: 'certeyn bestes beþ ycleped *fauni* and *satiri* also and beþ bestes wonderliche yschape wiþ likenesse and schappe of men but þay beþ nought ful partyn[er]*s* of resoun of mankynde'. Fauns have bestial wit alone and kill women by the act of rape: 'suche bestes beþ ful lecherous, in so moche þat þey sleeþ wommen in þe dede of leccery if þey takeþ hem walkynge in woodes' (18:48). This reads like a morality lesson about pastoral excursions, in which a courtly separation is the prescribed antidote to a natural world which threatens to infringe its boundaries and impinge upon the human with a version of what is already distinctly, in fact, human. Prospero takes Caliban into his own cell as a reasonable fellow man, but denies his humanity when Caliban 'didst seek to violate / The honour of [his] child' (I. ii., 349-50). Left to his own devices Caliban would have populated his island with others of his race.[11]

The most outstanding analogous material between the two texts concerns language and its transmission. Miranda admonishes Caliban with:

> Abhorred slave,
> Which any print of goodness wilt not take,
> Being capable of all ill! I pitied thee,
> Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour
> One thing or other: when thou didst not, savage,
> Know thine own meaning, but would gabble like
> A thing most brutish, I endow'd thy purposes
> With words that made them known. (I. ii. 355 - 9)

Denying the native subject a legitimate language of his own is, of course, a primary characteristic of the colonial encounter. Long before this discourse of discovery, however, Bartholomaeus makes a striking observation about the way that the human language of fauns is empty:

> Certeyn bestes beþ ycleped *fauni* and *satiri* also and beþ bestes wonderliche yschape *wiþ likeness and schappe of men but þey beþ nought ful partyn[er]s of resoun of*

[10] Geoffrey Bullough ed., *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, Vol. 3. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 253.
[11] See also the *Pilosis*, an incubus whose name has the etymological derivation 'doyng þe dede of generacioun' (18. 84) and the *onocentauro*, which 'feyneþ somdele þe schapp of mannes kynde' (18. 79).

> *mankynde. And so þey beþ nought ytaught to speke by crafte nouþer by kynde, but þey han bestial witte and beþ sterne and cruel wiþ bestial appetite.* And suche bestes beþ ful lecherous,in so moche þat þey sleeþ wommen in þe deed of lechery if þey takeþ hem walkynge in woods. And suche bestes beþ ycleped satiri for þey mowe no*t* haue ynow of lecchery, as Ysidorus seiþ. *And þough suche bestes vsen nou3t resoun of mankynde, 3it þey like to mankind in voice* and in many dedes, as Ysidorus seiþ … and þere he seiþ þat *satiri* beþ somdel like men and han crokede noses, and hornes in þe forhede, and like to gete in here feet. (18.48, my emphasis).

Fauns are 'nought ytaught to speke by crafte nouþer by kynde'. Yet in the same few lines Bartholomaeus contradicts himself when he says that they *do* speak, though only to mimic man: 'þough suche bestes vsen nou3t resoun of mankynde, 3it þey beþ like to mankynde in voice'. As with Caliban, a defining notion about the faun is that is appears to be human but *does not know its own meaning*. Note again the striking antithesis between the noble 'print of goodness' and the natural man who does not possess the meaning of language, when Ferdinand observes: 'My language! Heavens! / I am the best of them that speak this speech' (I. i, 432 - 433). Caliban's native language is, of course, denigrated in that he apparently did not even understand it. However, his acquired language, in the same sense as the mimicking of the faun, is also a poor version made of curses: 'You taught me language; and my profit on't / Is I know how to curse.' (I. ii. 365 - 366). Though in possession of what sounds like English, Caliban's cursing English is mimetic of his fallenness, and alludes to the verbal incoherence of his ancestral, medieval predecessors.

Though fauns and satires have human heads and 'therefore presumably have the capacity for advanced reasoning, their half-animal natures suggest that their behaviour is governed by their baser physical instinct.'[12] This close identification with, yet alienation from reason, can be seen in Bartholomaeus' inclusion of *cenocephali, ciclopes*, *panchios* and men with no head or neck but with recognisable human faces: 'þese wonderful bestes … beþ al hedles and nekeles and he[re] yhen beþ in þe schuldres' (18.48). According to Aristotle mankind is supposed to look upwards to God. But men with no neck or heads could not be categorised as human, thus both changing and fixing the shape of the reasonable man: 'Some beþ in Ethiopia þat goþ stouping, lokynge to þe grounde-ward as bestes and mowe nought rere hem self vpright' (18.48).

This concern about manipulating reason is expressed in the way the sub-plotters Trinculo and Stephano of *The Tempest* intentionally loose their reason in alcohol. They ally themselves with Caliban, highlighting the dichotomy between the 'natural' man and the aspirant noble, comically blending and re-shaping the human form. On finding Caliban and Stephano under a gabardine Trinculo asks of the amalgamated entities: 'What have we here? A man or a fish? Dead or alive? A fish: he smells like a fish; a very ancient and fish-like smell…Legged like a man! and his fins like arms!' (II. ii, 24 - 31). The mode of questioning is, what fixes the definition of the man, and can Caliban make a man? While God made man in his own image, fallen man retains the likeness but has much of the nature of beasts. Ferdinand, on the other hand, is clearly made in God's image, for Miranda observes that she might call him 'A thing

[12] Carmen Brown, 'Animals as Human Exemplars' in Debra Hassig, ed., *The Mark of the Beast: The Medieval Bestiary in Life Art and Literature* (London: Garland Publishing, 1999), 57.

divine; for nothing natural / I ever saw so noble' (I. ii, 420 – 421). Caliban's body however, is more subject to fallenness, like the hybrid he has webbed feet — the mark of Adam's fall.[13] In this way it is uncertain whether fauns, like Caliban, can make a man; they have an uncertain ontology where it is unclear whether a hybrid is a man in the making or unmaking, thus revealing human animality and its apparently transcendable categories.

'Shakespeare's encyclopaedia', despite its claim to be 'literal', presents metaphorical material which expresses contemporary medieval theological values. However, these values are clearly transmitted and expressed in the Early Modern figure of Caliban. The striking contrasts established between 'civilised' and 'natural' men, Caliban's implicit - though unexplained - sexual voracity, his physical hybridity, and the ambiguity as to whether he is a man in the making or unmaking suggest at least that he has much in common with the fantastical beasts of the *DPR*. In particular, the very cognate description of men who babble an English which they do not understand, may be seen to provide convincing enough analogous material, to present the case that a version of Bartholomaeus Anglicus' *De proprietatibus rerum* informs the creation of Caliban, not merely as colonial subject, but as the animal 'other', so unknowably different from what we might aspire to, yet uncomfortably close to what we really are.

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[13] The best discussion of this symbolism is by John Macqueen in *Robert Henryson: A Study of The Major Narrative Poems* (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1967), 199 - 120.