

# “Une Exploration des Déserts de Ma Mémoire”: Pastoral Aspects of Lévi-Strauss’s *Tristes Tropiques*

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... I cherish the reflection, however fleeting it may have now become, of an era when the human species was in proportion to the world it occupied, and when there was still a valid relationship between the enjoyment of freedom and the symbols denoting it.<sup>1</sup>

The anthropologist Sir James G. Frazer declared that his writings would live as a “panorama of the vanished life of primitive man . . . groping and stumbling through the mists of ignorance and superstition in the eternal search after goodness and truth.” *The Golden Bough* recorded “a dark, a tragic chronicle of human error and folly, of fruitless endeavor, wasted time, and blighted hopes. At the best the chronicle may serve as a warning . . . to help the forlorn wayfarer to shun some of the snares and pitfalls into which his fellows have fallen before him in the labyrinth of life.”<sup>2</sup> Though Claude Lévi-Strauss is a social anthropologist in the tradition of Frazer and greatly admires his research, *Tristes Tropiques* implicitly attacks these conclusions about primitive man. Lévi-Strauss argues that the dark and tragic chronicle of man is not to be found in the so-called primitive societies but in the great civilizations of Europe and Asia. In this study I intend to show that the admiration of Lévi-Strauss for the vanishing or vanished life of primitive man is expressed in a pattern characteristic of many pastoral works. While not in itself a pastoral, *Tristes Tropiques* affirms values and assumes literary patterns commonly associated with the pastoral tradition.

*Tristes Tropiques* properly belongs in the confessional genre, and its primary formal and aesthetic affinities are to such works as the classic confessions of Augustine, Bunyan, Rousseau, and Henry Adams. Northrop Frye defines the genre:

Most autobiographies are inspired by a creative, and therefore fictional, impulse to select only those events and experiences in the writer’s life that go to build up an integrated pattern. This pattern may be some-

thing larger than himself with which he has come to identify himself. . . . Nearly always some theoretical and intellectual interest in religion, politics, or art plays a leading role in the confession. It is his success in integrating his mind on such subjects that makes the author of a confession feel his life is worth writing about. . . . The confession is also introverted, but intellectualized in content.<sup>3</sup>

The integrated pattern which informs *Tristes Tropiques* is the movement of its hero from a complex society ravaged by accelerating historical forces to a supposedly static, crystalline society. After achieving a degree of intellectual, emotional, and spiritual growth by virtue of his experience in that new world, the hero returns to his own society and becomes, despite his fears and assertions of resistance, reconciled to it. In significant respects this pattern recapitulates the development of pastoral heroes in works as diverse as Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe*, Melville's *Typee*, and Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

The successful hero's social and spiritual reconciliation with his own society is typical of that found in both pastoral and confessional works. As Stephen Spender has noted, all confessions are "from the individual to the community or creed. Even the most shamelessly revealed inner life yet pleads its cause before the moral system of an outer, objective life. . . . the essence of the confession is that the one who feels outcast pleads with humanity to relate his isolation to its wholeness. He pleads to be . . . brought back into the wholeness of people and of things."<sup>4</sup> As Augustine's and Bunyan's conversions are to be seen as exemplary, Lévi-Strauss makes his retreat and return representative of his vocation. He considers anthropology "one of the few genuine vocations" (55) and *Tristes Tropiques* attempts to determine the hero's moral standing on the basis of his fulfillment of this vocation.<sup>5</sup>

Frye describes the confessional impulse as creative, and therefore fictional; *Tristes Tropiques* is to be treated as a literary work. In this essay I am not concerned to establish the truth of any given observation in the work on science, philosophy, history, or psychology. The quality of Lévi-Strauss's anthropological research is still in great dispute; Edmund Leach, an anthropologist himself, remarks that "the critics among his professional colleagues still greatly outnumber his disciples." Leach is dismayed that from 1934 to 1939, the period recorded in his confession, Lévi-Strauss spent no more than one calendar year doing field studies. He finds the book's chronology con-

fusing and believes that Lévi-Strauss misleads the reader about the extent of his practical anthropological experience. Leach argues that Lévi-Strauss's "ultimate concern is to establish facts which are true about the 'human mind' rather than about the organization of any particular society or class of society." Frequently he is "an advocate defending a cause rather than a scientist searching for ultimate truth."<sup>6</sup>

The book is not a full, straightforward account of anthropological studies in Brazil and its basic principle of selection is aesthetic rather than scientific. The opening sections of *Tristes Tropiques* present the complex world its hero is leaving, the first stage in the pastoral pattern. The narrative of the hero's flight from Occupied France in 1941 dramatizes the moral and political chaos of Europe. His escape is told from the perspective of 1955; looking back Lévi-Strauss can see that such experiences as he had "were starting to ooze out like some insidious leakage from contemporary mankind, which had become saturated with its own numbers and with the ever-increasing complexity of its problems . . ." (29). By 1955 no release from this complexity is possible, for the "perfumes of the tropics and the pristine freshness of human beings have been corrupted by a busyness with dubious implications, which mortifies our desires and dooms us to acquire only contaminated memories." The world has "opted for monoculture" (37-38).

The entire first third of the book focuses the reader's interest on the plight of Western civilization, on the world the hero is leaving rather than on the Brazilian Indians he professes to investigate. He quotes Chateaubriand, who argues that each explorer is carrying "within him a world which is composed of all that he has seen and loved, and to which he constantly returns, even when he is travelling through, and seems to be living in, some different world" (44). We read the rest of the book with one eye always on what is being forsaken. The dichotomy between the Old World and the New exists primarily to heighten the awareness of the Old. That there may be no doubt of his intention, Lévi-Strauss, before narrating his encounters with Indian tribes, devotes three chapters to a macrocosmic view of world history. In despair he sees the West on an historical continuum midway between the New World's tribal societies and the overpopulated, decadent, ancient Eastern civilizations. He concludes, "What frightens me in Asia is the vision of our own future which it is already experiencing" (150).

Lévi-Strauss first chose his profession to satisfy his own psychological needs: "we had difficulty in adapting ourselves to the social milieu into

which we were born."<sup>7</sup> He long felt and cultivated the alienation his occupation necessitates. One can discover the vocation of anthropologist "in oneself, even though one may have been taught nothing about it" (55). Despite his professional detachment, he has already begun to project his neolithic ideal, if not his character, on the native. For example, he draws an analogy between the native's agricultural techniques and his own mental processes; he has a neolithic slash-and-burn intelligence (53). The study of primitive civilizations enables him to appease his "restless and destructive appetite" for new knowledge by constantly providing a plethora of new material. Anthropology reconciles his character and his life (58-59). Alienation from his own society, chronic rootlessness, the feeling of being "psychologically maimed" (55) precede as well as emerge from his choice of a vocation.

The second stage of the hero's pastoral pattern, his actual contact with primitive societies, constitutes the greater part of the book. It has three sub-parts: first, he imagines, and momentarily feels, the simplicity of the pastoral land; second, he describes the complexity of two of its tribal societies, the Caduveo and the Bororo; and third, he perceives both the simplicity *and* complexity of the Nambikwara.

Initially Lévi-Strauss believes "exotic countries to be the exact opposite of ours, and the term 'antipodes' had a richer and more naïve significance for me than its merely literal meaning" (47). The perception of Edenic beauty and simplicity comes very briefly at the start of his Brazilian travels. He is attempting to recover the emotion of his first sighting of the New World in 1934 and, as he does at so many other points in the work, parallel it to an earlier stratum of time, in this instance to the vision of Columbus, who was "certain of having rediscovered the earthly paradise." Four hundred years could not wipe out completely the vision of an Eden before its Fall into the commotions of history. Both Columbus and Lévi-Strauss recall "the spectacle of a purer, happier race of men." But Lévi-Strauss immediately eviscerates the ideal; writing twenty years later he knows that the natives "were not really purer or happier, although a deep-seated remorse made them appear so" (74). He ends the scene gazing out on a "single, awe-inspiring presence: the New World" (80).

The ideal he seeks cannot be found easily. During his first intensive field work with the Caduveo and Bororo Indians he is fascinated by the complexity of the social and religious systems he encounters. Because he does not know the language of the tribes he investigates, he must draw conclu-

sions about them from his study of their art, which is highly abstract and sophisticated. The hierarchical structure of Caduveo society aggravates the difficulty of making appropriate marriage choices; this leads to a devaluation of sexual expression and to elaborate taboos. The Caduveos' painting of their bodies reflects the contempt for nature which is evinced in their restrictions against procreation. Facial paintings "ensure the transition from nature to culture, from 'stupid' beast to civilized man" (195). Their art represents an imaginative resolution of the oppositions between castes, a resolution which they cannot achieve in their actual social organization:

. . . in the last resort the graphic art of the Caduveo women is to be interpreted, and its mysterious appeal and seemingly gratuitous complexity to be explained, as the phantasm of a society ardently and insatiably seeking a means of expressing symbolically the institutions it might have, if its interests and superstitions did not stand in the way. In this charming civilization, the female beauties trace the outlines of the collective dream with their make-up; their patterns are hieroglyphics describing an inaccessible golden age, which they extol in their ornamentation, since they have no code in which to express it, and whose mysteries they disclose as they reveal their nudity (197).

The Golden Age is already elsewhere, behind them or ahead of them; it is in a society which does not display these hierarchies, these irresolvable dichotomies.

The Bororo society is organized in an even more complex way than that of the Caduveo. Lévi-Strauss's description of the wheels and dichotomous patterns of the Bororo in *Tristes Tropiques* and in *The Raw and the Cooked* makes the wheels and dichotomies of, say, Yeats's *A Vision* appear a dream of simplicity.<sup>8</sup> There is much in the Bororo society that Lévi-Strauss admires (e.g., the penetration of religious beliefs into everyday life, 230-31) as well as much he cannot understand. Their art, their generosity, their elaborate religious dances, the plan of their village both disguise and reveal a tribe hopelessly divided, each element of which, "without realizing it, will remain forever separate and isolated, each imprisoned in a kind of pride which is concealed even from itself by a smokescreen of institutions, so that each is the unconscious victim of devices, the purpose of which it can no longer discover." The elaborate ritual he describes at the end of his study of the Bororo is "little more than a rather sinister farce. . . every social order

has a similarity with death in that it takes something away and gives nothing in return for it" (244-46). The Bororo show the defects of the West, or "help to explain how its . . . defects had developed" (389). Instead of the simple societies he sought, he first encounters two "learned societies" (274) whose complexities produce a revulsion comparable to that he feels for his own civilization. Each possesses an art, even a history; he finds their social organization destructive of meaningful human relationships.

The experience of Lévi-Strauss with the Nambikwara, the third important tribal group he investigates, is very different. The Nambikwara are presented as the most admirable of the native Brazilian peoples. His admiration for them is based as much on what is absent in the society as on what is present. The tribe takes him "back to what he might easily, but wrongly, consider to be the infancy of the human species" (274). They are a Stone Age people and are closest to the neolithic society Rousseau sought, "of which it is nevertheless essential to form a correct notion in order rightly to judge our present state" (316, 392). Lévi-Strauss's sense that he is rediscovering or clarifying Rousseau's insights seems to relieve him of a certain anxiety: he is, after all, not doing something new, but something traditional, not accelerating history by the knowledge he gains but, in imagination at least, reversing its direction.

The art of the Nambikwara is rudimentary. It is not fixed by sketches or embodied in objects; it is in the simple tale a father tells his children, in dances, and in the music of the bamboo flute. Complex art veils and distorts human relations; it is totalitarian in its effect, rather like writing (as Lévi-Strauss will show). The simplicity of Nambikwara art supposedly reveals the simplicity of their social organization and of their personal relationships.

The social structure of the Nambikwara is "fragile and ephemeral" (307). The chief serves by consent of the governed: "Power both originates in consent and is bounded by it." Reciprocity is "another fundamental attribute of power. The chief has power but he must be generous" (314-15). He does have certain privileges (e.g., polygamy), but the responsibility and burden of leadership must bring its own reward. Unity of consent for the community is of great importance: "primitive societies try, either consciously or unconsciously, to avoid that division between the various members of the community which made possible, or encouraged, the development of Western civilization."<sup>9</sup> In *The Voyage of the Beagle* Charles Darwin argues that the "perfect equality among the individuals composing the Fuegian tribes

must for a long time retard their civilization. . . . At present, even a piece of cloth given to one is torn into shreds and distributed; and no one individual becomes richer than another." The most civilized peoples always have the most artificial governments.<sup>10</sup> Tribal equality and the concomitant check it places on progress and the growth of artificial governments, aspects which Darwin deplures, are praised by Lévi-Strauss, for they are valuable in slowing the destructive force of history.

Despite the material poverty of the Nambikwara, their family life is described in idyllic terms.<sup>11</sup> For once Lévi-Strauss, while dramatizing his great separation from their sensibility and implying his need, does not distance his emotion by drawing diagrams or formulating systems; he quotes directly from his field notes:

The visitor . . . is filled with anguish and pity at the sight of human beings so totally bereft; some relentless cataclysm seems to have crushed them against the ground in a hostile land, leaving them naked and shivering by their flickering fires. He gropes his way through the scrub, taking care not to knock against the hands, arms or chests that he glimpses as warm reflections in the glow of the flames. But the wretchedness is shot through with whisperings and chuckles. The couples embrace as if seeking to recapture a lost unity, and their caresses continue uninterrupted as he goes by. He can sense in all of them an immense kindness, a profoundly carefree attitude, a naïve and charming animal satisfaction and—binding these various feelings together—something which might be called the most truthful and moving expression of human love (293).

"Making love is nice," Lévi-Strauss translates a Nambikwara phrase, but there are, in this land of scarce resources, many prohibitions against sexual intercourse and even sexual arousal. He seems to find the relationship between male and female attractive because it is not primarily based on the physical act: "During the amorous fondling in which couples indulge so freely and so publicly, and which is often quite uninhibited, I never once noticed even an incipient erection. The pleasure aimed at would seem to relate less to physical satisfaction than to love-play and demonstration of affection." With rare tenderness Lévi-Strauss also presents scenes of affectionate play between children and parents and portraits which show the harmony between human and animal (282-86). This is the pastoral vision

of the Nambikwara Lévi-Strauss has chosen to emphasize, even to celebrate—communal joy and suffering experienced by a tribe which exists somewhere between a mythical state of nature and the “busyness of our self-esteem.”<sup>12</sup>

Yet the Nambikwara society is far from a perfect model for all human relations. Lévi-Strauss mentions, though he does not dwell on, stringent “taboos connected with recent parenthood” (278). Women are excluded from many ceremonies under pain of death and women’s souls are believed to vanish after death (289). Curiously, only in this neolithic society does he fear for his life. Once he fears that he will be killed after he constructs balloons of tissue paper, an innovation which the Nambikwara perceive as threatening (291-92). On several occasions when traveling with the tribe he feels himself threatened: “I might not be the first person to have entered that hostile area, but my predecessors had not returned . . .” (297). The Nambikwara “present one of the most primitive cultural levels now to be found in the world. . . . Yet, instead of the absolute simplicity one would expect from such rudimentary skills and such sketchy organization, Nambikwara culture is full of riddles.”<sup>13</sup> If the simplicity of the Nambikwara society is admirable, its complexity is fearful and puzzling.

Writing is the one activity commonly used to distinguish primitive from civilized peoples. In the most fascinating exploration of the differences between the West and the Brazilian Indians in *Tristes Tropiques*, Lévi-Strauss discusses the consequences of his attempts to get the Nambikwara to draw. Unable to comply, the tribe began to imitate his writing. The chief alone grasped the function of writing and began to hand Lévi-Strauss indecipherable scribbles. The chief’s pretense of writing had been used for a “sociological rather than an intellectual purpose, . . . increasing the authority and prestige of one individual—or function—at the expense of others” (296-98). Historically, Lévi-Strauss argues, writing is used to establish large, hierarchical, exploitive societies. The most important innovations in the history of humanity—agriculture, domestication of animals, weaving, etc.—were made before the discovery of writing.<sup>14</sup> He concludes that “the primary function of written communication is to facilitate slavery. The use of writing for disinterested purposes, and as a source of intellectual and aesthetic pleasure, is a secondary result, and more often than not it may even be turned into a means of strengthening, justifying or concealing the other” (299). Like the complex art of the Caduveo and the elaborate rituals of the Bororo,



writing may serve to conceal painful truths, yielding them only to an observer from another culture.

In several respects Lévi-Strauss's conclusions about writing strike directly at his own occupation and character, as he is surely aware. First, he is responsible for the Fall of the Nambikwara in the Garden: the natives "felt in some obscure way that writing and deceit had penetrated simultaneously into their midst" (300). The chief who uses his imitation of writing to increase his power is soon abandoned by his followers as a consequence. Lévi-Strauss is acutely conscious of his potential to corrupt native societies (43) and this incident provides the most concrete example of that inadvertent effect.

Second, in his activity as an anthropologist Lévi-Strauss uses writing to reduce, intellectually if not physically, "the spectrum or rainbow of human cultures" (414), which ostensibly he seeks to preserve. He vigorously denies that anthropology is a "sequel to colonialism"<sup>15</sup> and he is correct, for the relationship between colonialism and anthropology is more subtle. Lévi-Strauss's intention is revealed in his methodology, virtually an abstract of the basic technique of structuralism:

The customs of a community, taken as a whole, always have a particular style and are reducible to systems. . . . In their games, dreams or wild imaginings . . . human societies, like individuals, never create absolutely, but merely choose certain combinations from an ideal repertoire that it should be possible to define. By making an inventory of all recorded customs, of all those imagined in myths or suggested in children's games or adult games, or in the dreams of healthy or sick individuals or in psycho-pathological behaviour, one could arrive at a sort of table, like that of the chemical elements, in which all actual or hypothetical customs would be grouped in families, so that one could see at a glance which customs a particular society had in fact adopted (178).

He always carries a chart on which to record these observations, though he sometimes complains that he has not enough time to complete it, to understand and therefore reduce the mystery of the natives to a system, to a structure, for "understanding consists in reducing one type of reality to another" (57). He is attracted to the New World because of the differences he perceives, but he has the scientific purpose of defining similarities. Man's

rainbow of cultures is deceptive; besides, "the true reality is never the most obvious." All men are operating within nature, and there is in fact no opposition between culture and nature.<sup>16</sup> Differences are manifold illusions he must explain and extirpate—not materially, as the imperialist, or spiritually, as the missionary, but intellectually. Lévi-Strauss's psychological and aesthetic purposes are at odds with his scientific intentions. The hero's remorse and the elegiac, melancholy tone of the book are generated in part by the futility and spiritual dryness of this activity: "I had only to succeed in guessing what they were like for them to be deprived of their strangeness: in which case, I might just as well have stayed in my village. Or if, as was the case here, they retained their strangeness, I could make no use of it, since I was incapable of even grasping what it consisted of" (332-34).

If Lévi-Strauss is acutely conscious that his introduction of writing corrupts the Nambikwara and that his own writing reduces their society to an abstract system, he is only dimly aware of one further consequence of his work. His professed detachment, his repeated and often self-contradictory claims that he is writing for disinterested purposes, conceals a deep desire to veil, sometimes even from himself, the degree to which he appropriates the Nambikwara society for his own personal needs and those of the West. In *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*, O. Mannoni writes that the "more remote people are, the more they seem to attract our projections. . . . It is himself a man is looking for when he goes far away, near at hand he is liable to come up against Others."<sup>17</sup> Lévi-Strauss is like the Indian he describes who visits New York only to reserve "all his intellectual curiosity for the dwarfs, giants and bearded ladies who were exhibited in Times Square at the time, for automats, and for the brass balls decorating staircase banisters. . . . All these things challenged his own culture, and it was that culture alone which he was seeking to recognize in certain aspects of ours."<sup>18</sup>

Lévi-Strauss's account of the Nambikwara, which he ends by declaring that their society is so "simple that all I could find in it was individual human beings" (317), and his brief visit to the Mundé Indians, which enforces upon him the realization that he might just as well have stayed in his own village if he is successful in understanding their complexities, prepare for his return. There is in fact no Other to confront but only men like himself, men who are both simple and complex. As Rousseau had noted before him, "The Golden Age, which blind superstition had placed behind [or

ahead of] us, is *in us*" (393). Having experienced this truth, the hero can return transformed to the world he left, for the paradise is within, if anywhere. By 1955, when he writes *Tristes Tropiques*, he had reached "*La Fin des voyages*," the title of the book's opening section, not because the Nambikwara have disappeared but because they are everywhere.

The knowledge Lévi-Strauss has acquired for his society by virtue of his ordeal is, he feels, of great importance, for "Nothing is settled; everything can still be altered" (393). But his own society is the only one the anthropologist can transform without destroying, "since the changes, being introduced by us, are coming from within the society itself" (392). The anthropologist "introduces an element of moderation and honesty into our evaluation of customs and ways of life very remote from our own, without conferring on them the virtue of absoluteness, which exists in no society. And it removes from our own customs that air of inherent rightness which they so easily have for anyone unacquainted with other customs, or whose knowledge is partial and biased" (389). The anthropologist builds a theoretical model of a better human society and would seek, in his own society at least, Rousseau's *via media* (first discussed in *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*) between "the indolence of the primitive state and the irrepressible busyness of our self-esteem" (391). The ideal pastoral land has all along existed in the works of Rousseau and thus in Lévi-Strauss's memory: the Nambikwara are only approximations of this ideal.

Lévi-Strauss's theoretical social model would unify the appropriate characteristics of the "cold" or primitive societies and the "hot" or civilized ones: "In a word, these societies, which we might define as 'cold' in that their internal environment neighbours on the zero of historical temperature, are, by their limited total manpower and their mechanical mode of functioning, distinguished from the 'hot' societies which appeared in different parts of the world following the Neolithic revolution. In these, differentiations between castes and between classes are urged unceasingly in order to extract social change and energy from them." Indeed, one major thrust of his instruction is that we in the West must resist the forces of history. We ourselves are becoming primitives in relation to our "great-grandchildren, so that we seek to validate ourselves by drawing closer to those who were—and still are, for a brief moment—like a part of us which persists in its existence."<sup>19</sup> The most moving scenes in *Tristes Tropiques* are such moments as the hero's delight that the crickets ate his leather shoes and belt just as they

ate Jean de Léry's four-hundred years earlier, or that a contemporary chief made the same reply to his question as to Montaigne's. Something at least has survived the ravages of history. According to Octavio Paz, past events in Lévi-Strauss coexist after the model of geology in the sense that the invisible stratum "is a 'structure' which determines and gives meaning to the strata which lie above it."<sup>20</sup> In fact, this geological sense of time is the key to his handling of time in the narrative of *Tristes Tropiques*.

Above all Lévi-Strauss has learned the value of community: "In the societies we call primitive, we observe a collective participation in culture, in the form of elaborate religious ceremonies, feasts or dances which occupy a considerable place in the life of the community—as great, and sometimes an even greater place, than those activities concerned with production." If he were able to recommend only one reform, he would advocate decentralization so that "social and economic activities could be carried out on the level of authenticity at which the members of a given group have a concrete knowledge of each other."<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless Lévi-Strauss presents himself as an isolated hero penetrating the Brazilian wastes. He seldom mentions his European companions and his single reference to his wife shocks the reader, who constantly imagines him alone (301). His yearning and his psychological and intellectual separation from the communities he studies are thus dramatized all the more vividly. The whole reductive technique of his science becomes a symbol of his defense against yielding to common emotions, a defense which the Nambikwara overcome. The lowly tribe, raised to the level of royalty by the imagination of Lévi-Strauss, is the pawn that sweeps the board.

The hero himself assumes a position of leadership in the West he had abandoned, his isolation related to his society's wholeness: "through a remarkable paradox, my life of adventure, instead of opening up a new world to me, had the effect rather of bringing me back to the old one, and the world I had been looking for disintegrated in my grasp" (376). Like members of certain tribes of North American Indians, he makes an absurd and desperate attempt to break from his society only to learn that his rebellion had been anticipated and had occurred within its framework (40). Despite Lévi-Strauss's resistance to accepting fully the responsibilities and consequences of this integration, the work's confessional form and its pastoral pattern combine to force the reader to see its hero as saved, converted, exem-

plary. He has come back from the deserts of Brazil and memory with a regenerative message, has made the desert of memory fruitful.

The basic organizing pattern of *Tristes Tropiques* is similar to that attributed to "all great pastoral literature" by Richard Hardin in "The Pastoral Moment," though there are aspects of his description which I shall modify below. Discussing Virgil's first eclogue, Hardin declares that the pastoral "begins with the flight from a complex world to one of simplicity, usually . . . rustic simplicity." The fugitive may be the writer himself and clearly in *Tristes Tropiques* it is he who brings the smell of France *entre deux guerres* into the pastoral retreat. He imagines that he is fleeing to the antipodes, for the difference, not the simplicity of this retreat, is what is instructive. As Paz has written, Lévi-Strauss's goal is "to recognize a human being in the other, and to recognize ourselves not in the similarity but in the difference."<sup>22</sup> The essence of a pastoral is a dichotomy and frequently the dichotomy is disguised as that between the complex and the simple. The mind of Lévi-Strauss, admittedly strongly influenced by Marx (57), is particularly attracted to the dialectical pattern inherent in the thought of the Brazilian Indian and in the pastoral. Further, the focus, even when the hero is temporarily immersed in this so-called simple world, is on the complex one he has left. The reader of an anthropologist's confession, like the reader of a pastoral poem, is interested in the light the work casts on his own world and the possibilities for a full life in that world which it suggests and encourages.

Hardin describes the second stage of the pastoral experience as "illumination: in touch with nature, man is instructed in her way, always the true way as opposed to the artificial way of the city or court from which he has fled." In *Tristes Tropiques* this illumination is rather different, for it is dramatized as the hero's implicit recognition that the neolithic society of the Nambikwara is admirable and fearful, simple and complex. The Nambikwara may be closer to nature than the societies of the West, or of the Caduveo and Bororo Indians, in the sense that their defenses against nature are less elaborate, yet the Nambikwara are social beings. Their music (which recalls to the hero Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*), their sexual taboos, their fears of *nandé* distinguish them from nature. The pastoral world comes to resemble the world from which the hero has fled. His encounter with the Nambikwara enables Lévi-Strauss to develop a more de-

finer concept of his own society, a discovery which empowers him to change both his life and his society.

Hardin states that in the final stages of the classic pastoral the hero returns to his own society with the instruction which will "allow the initiate to live well in his complex world after leaving his pastoral retreat. . . . Arcadia having been abandoned or destroyed, its peace and simplicity become embodied within the self." Though there is more in the experience than peace and simplicity, as Hardin elsewhere explains and as I have argued, the hero's immersion in the native society would be meaningless to his original society without his return. As D. H. Lawrence writes in his study of Melville's *Typee*, ". . . we must make a great swerve in our onward-going life-course now, to gather up again the savage mysteries. But this does not mean going back on ourselves." Melville cannot go back and "Gauguin couldn't really go back: and I know now that I could never go back."<sup>23</sup> Lévi-Strauss returns only after achieving a degree of intellectual and moral integration, and this produces a reconciliation with his society from which he long felt himself alienated. But full personal integration takes place only at the time of writing *Tristes Tropiques*: "twenty years of forgetfulness were required before I could establish communion with my earlier experience, which I had sought the world over without understanding its significance or appreciating its essence" (44). The pastoral ideal has long existed inside Lévi-Strauss's society and he is simply rediscovering it for his generation—perhaps more vividly and forcefully than is now being done by any of his contemporaries. His true exploration has been in the deserts of memory and this is why he can say with Rousseau that the Golden Age is in us.

#### NOTES

1. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (New York: Atheneum, 1974), p. 150. Subsequent references to this text will be given in parentheses in the body of the essay. The book was originally published in French as *Tristes tropiques* (Paris: Librarie Plon, 1955).

2. *Aftermath: A Supplement to the Golden Bough* (New York: Macmillan, 1937), pp. v-vi. Charles Darwin is even more harsh than Frazer in his attitude toward the primitive. In *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (New York: Appleton, 1897), pp. 618-19, Darwin asserts that he would sooner acknowledge descent from monkeys and baboons than from the Fuegian savages he observed. He imagines that the savage "delights to torture his enemies, offers up bloody sacrifices, practices infanticide without remorse, treats his wives like slaves, knows no decency, and is haunted by the grossest superstitions." For a different view by another biologist contemporary with Darwin, see Alfred Russel Wallace, *Social Environment and Moral Progress* (London: Cassell, 1913), Part I. Wallace does not consider the savage intellectually or morally inferior to so-called civilized races.

3. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (New York: Atheneum, 1968), pp. 307-08. For a

discussion of the confessional genre see my essay, "T. E. Lawrence and the Confessional Tradition," *Genre*, IX, 2 (Summer 1976), 135-51.

4. "Confessions and Autobiography," *The Making of a Poem* (New York: Norton, 1963), p. 69.

5. In "Lévi-Strauss and the Science of the Self: An Essay in Philosophical Anthropology," *Journal of European Studies*, I (1971), 32-36, Stavros Deligiorgis concludes that *Tristes Tropiques* is a polyphonic, well-orchestrated credo and briefly compares it to the confessions of Augustine and Bunyan.

6. *Claude Lévi-Strauss* (New York: Viking, 1970), pp. ix-xi and Ch. i.

7. *Conversations with Claude Lévi-Strauss*, ed. Georges Charbonnier, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), p. 17.

8. See the charts and analysis in Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked: Introduction to a Science of Mythology*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (New York: Harper, 1969), I, 39-42.

9. *Conversations*, p. 34.

10. London: J. M. Dent, 1906, p. 219.

11. For a fuller study of the society, see Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La Vie familiale et sociale des Indiens Nambikwara* (Paris: Société des Américanistes, 1948).

12. See Max K. Sutton's definition of the pastoral vision, p. 36 above.

13. *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1963), p. 113.

14. There is a parallel discussion of the function of writing in *Conversations*, pp. 26-31. Lévi-Strauss's concept of the corrupting power of writing is hardly original. As in so many other respects, the anthropologist's view is strongly influenced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, especially his *Essai sur l'origine des langues*. In fact Rousseau goes much further than Lévi-Strauss and speculates about the deeper innocence possible before even a spoken language came into being, a period when man communicated by gesture and inarticulate sounds. In *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1976), pp. 101-40, Jacques Derrida analyzes the influence of Rousseau on Lévi-Strauss's concept of writing. Derrida argues that the anthropologist's view is too narrow; despite his professed anti-ethnocentric position, his radical separation of language from writing is in fact ethnocentric. Writing, in Derrida's special sense of the term, did exist in the Nambikwara tribe before Lévi-Strauss penetrated it. The anthropologist distorts the incident narrated in "A Writing Lesson" to emphasize the alleged differences between the innocent Nambikwara community and the corrupt West. Derrida writes that Lévi-Strauss's critique of ethnocentrism "has most often the sole function of constituting the other as a model of original and natural goodness, of accusing and humiliating oneself, of exhibiting its being-unacceptable in an anti-ethnocentric mirror." Lévi-Strauss says this more eloquently; in an aphorism that summarizes the motive of the hero of *Tristes Tropiques*, he asserts that man must seek "the society of nature in order to mediate there upon the nature of society" (author's emphasis).

15. *The Scope of Anthropology*, trans. Sherry Ortner Paul and Robert A. Paul (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967), pp. 51-52.

16. See the discussion in Octavio Paz, *Claude Lévi-Strauss: An Introduction*, trans. J. S. Bernstein and Maxine Bernstein (New York: Delta Books, 1974), pp. 132-33.

17. Trans. Pamela Powesland (London: Methuen, 1956), p. 111.

18. *The Scope of Anthropology*, p. 44.

19. *The Scope of Anthropology*, pp. 47-48. See also Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, trans. George Weidenfeld (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1966), pp. 233-34.

20. *Claude Lévi-Strauss: An Introduction*, p. 6.

21. *Conversations*, pp. 45, 54.

22. *Claude Lévi-Strauss: An Introduction*, p. 102.

23. *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York: Viking, 1964), pp. 136-38. Most of D. H. Lawrence's heroes do not remain in the pastoral retreat. Oliver Parkin emerges from the woods in *The First Lady Chatterley* (New York: Dial, 1944), interested in Communism. In *The Rainbow* (New York: Viking, 1961), pp. 413-17, Ursula Brangwen rejects Anthony Schofield's explicit proposal to return to the Garden of Eden of her ancestors (pp. 1-6). In "The Man Who Loved Islands," in *The Complete Short Stories*, II (New York: Viking, 1961), the hero does not return from his retreat and ends looking out stupidly "over the waste of the lifeless sea" (746).

Complex twentieth-century Western man who seeks to be absorbed by the pastoral society

he enters will fail. In *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1935), pp. 31-32, T. E. Lawrence finds that "the effort for these years to live in the dress of Arabs, and to imitate their mental foundation, quitted me of my English self, and let me look at the West and its conventions with new eyes: they destroyed it all for me. At the same time I could not sincerely take on the Arab skin: it was an affectation only."