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Céline ROLLAND*

RÉSUMÉ

Il s'agit de proposer, à partir de plusieurs points de comparaison entre le Caliban de Shakespeare et Brown Dog (Chien Brun), un personnage de la fiction de Jim Harrison, quelques idées autour de l'esthétique développée par l'auteur américain dans la saga éponyme retraçant les pérégrinations d'un protagoniste foncièrement libre. C'est, d'abord, le symbolisme géographique du territoire occupé par Chien Brun et Caliban qui permet de rapprocher les deux personnages : la forêt sur une île et une péninsule perçues comme des sanctuaires du sauvage. Ensuite, selon la perspective postcoloniale, les deux personnages s'insurgent contre un envahisseur venu opprimer et asservir les autochtones. En outre, Caliban et Brown Dog sont deux figures primitives, a priori pas ou peu civilisées : ce sont deux personnages pulsionnels obéissant à des instincts prédateurs. Ce point commun explique la tonalité comique présente dans les deux œuvres. Pourtant, Caliban et Chien Brun savent aussi exprimer, d'une voix humble, sensations et sentiments avec justesse, créativité et même poésie. Cependant, la bestialité parfois menaçante et violente de Caliban ne se retrouve que fortement atténuée chez Chien Brun qui apparaît comme une version adoucie, pacifique et hédoniste. Plus proche de Falstaff, autre figure shakespearienne de la transgression, Chien Brun est sympathique : il fait souvent rire le lecteur. Shakespeare et Harrison ont ainsi créé deux figures d'intermédiaires entre les catégories de l'humain et de l'animal qui reconfigurent l'opposition entre le sauvage et le civilisé et reflètent le goût des auteurs pour une écriture hybride, mêlée, une poétique de l'impur.

Keywords: animality/bestiality, savagism/civility, reconfigurations, transgression, hybridity, bastardy, predation, burlesque, messiness.

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According to Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan, in *Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History*, many playwrights and artists have successfully revisited the figure of the wild savage named Caliban staged in *The Tempest* thanks to its strong symbolical power as the embodiment of rebellion and difference; artists have thus been able to use Caliban's shadows or avatars to their own purpose and in different contexts:

Because Caliban has repeatedly been represented as a figure opposed to dominant ideologies, whatever those ideologies may be, he provides a spectrum of interpretation seldom matched in the history of western literature.[...] We see Shakespeare's monster as an important "expressive symbol," a cultural signifier that changes through space and time, geography and chronology. (Vaughan & Mason 51)

This essay intends to suggest if not a clear cut and straightforward filiation at least some common points between Caliban and Brown Dog, one of the favored protagonists of the contemporary American author Jim Harrison. An outdoorsman to the core, Harrison's character spends his life in cabins owned by hunters in Michigan's woodland. Until the sixth and last story in the saga which this essay intends to study, he is utterly satisfied with his lot. He is a nomad, moving from one cabin to the next, paying his rent by doing some repair work on them. He is never given his "original" first or last name in the text and is merely called "Brown Dog," possibly as in a reminder of the Arabic etymology of "Caliban" which means *wild* or *vile dog*.¹ The reader is invited to track him in the course of his peregrinations throughout a series of episodic stories that are not always consistent nor realistic. With a loose progression, the series follows Brown Dog along a set of six novellas that were gathered and published together under the title *Brown Dog* in December 2013. Although the first five stories had previously been peppered through different collections, the last story, "He Dog," is a new text, added as an epilogue rather neatly closing the cycle.

Wildness and Hybridity: Brown Dog as a Modern Avatar of Caliban

The eponymous main character, in turn narrator and focalizer depending on the novella, is a civilized man who has chosen a nomadic life, at the turn of the twenty-first century, somehow like James Fenimore Cooper's Natty

¹ T. Alden Vaughan, & Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 51: "J.S.Phillpotts preferred the arabic *kalebôn*, vile dog as the likely origin of Caliban's name and posited as well an African Genesis."

Bumppo: both of them refuse to compromise with materialist values and share the same lifestyle. Brown Dog appears almost as a wild savage haunting the woodland of Michigan's Upper Peninsula. His home, the swampy forest, is described as geographically and symbolically set apart, at once inside and outside the American territory, not quite like Caliban's island but still a peninsula whose remote location and wilderness in the landscape and the inhabitants turn it likewise into a blank space of freedom.

Brown Dog often strikes one as a modern avatar of Shakespeare's creature, an American cousin as it were. Starting from the wild life shared by the two figures, the comparison may be extended to several common features. One may also delineate a portrait of this new Caliban as an adaptation of the *Wodewose* from the medieval myth.² This underlying presence of the Man of the Woods, half-man, half-beast and vegetal, seems to become explicit as Brown Dog listens to his father, or rather to the magically preserved corpse he has retrieved from the bottom of Lake Michigan and that he assumes to be his father's. Indeed, the body speaks to him as a dying father to his son. The speech he delivers sounds like an eerie legacy, both advice and warning:

'Someday branches and leaves will grow out of you and you'll understand how fish, birds and animals talk and I don't mean in chirps and growls. You'll be a *green man* (*my emphasis*) is what I mean, with leaves coming out of your ears [...] Sneak up on animals and just say hello'. (*Brown Dog*, 51)

This puzzling image of a *green man* corresponds to some sort of ideal for Harrison. Indeed, the same phrasing is to be found in the poem "The Theory and Practice of Rivers" in a stanza celebrating a dream-journey whose destination

² N.J.G.Pounds, *The Culture of the English People: Iron Age to the industrial revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 398: "He is alternately seen as kindly and sinister, as wise and stupid, as an embodiment of freedom and strength and as cowardly and cunning. [...] But above all the green man, or 'wodewose', responds to a persistent psychological urge ... to give external expression and symbolically valid form to the impulses of reckless self-assertion which are hidden in all of us... projected outward as the image of a man who is as free as the beasts, able and ready to try his strength without regard...and therefore able to call up forces which his civilized brother has repressed.[...] The green man served yet another purpose, elucidated by Hayden White. He appears to have been used as a negative statement of the values accepted by society. People could not define culture, morality, civilisation, but they could say what it was not. The wild man was thus a figure antithetical to accepted standards, but nevertheless one to whom people would on occasion long to revert. He epitomized 'man's uneasiness in his civilization'."

seems to be a spiritual vision:

Off they went on a river, not on any map, uncharted, wanting to see the Great Mother of Snakes; a truncated version of our voyage of seventy years—actual average. To see green and live green, moving on water sometimes clouded often clear. (*The Theory and Practice of Rivers*, 13)

The reference to the "man of the woods" is both veiled and unveiled by the use of the terms "green man" which turns the "man of the wood's" metonymic proximity with the forest into the "green man's" metaphoric analogy with plants: as the metonymy turns into a metaphor, the vision of the animal-like man of the woods turns into an even more fantastical hybrid of animal, plant and human shape, which shares both the shape of plants and the voice of animals.

The shift from metonymy (being close to animals, working with animals) to metaphor (being similar then assimilated to an animal) is a key to the (self) perception of Brown Dog as a hybrid between human being and animal being. The notion of bastardy and hybridity is as crucial to the definition of Brown Dog as it is to Shakespeare's Caliban. For instance, Brown Dog wonders if he might be descended from a bear rather than an ape (228). Besides, in keeping with the protagonist's name, there is a series of half-wild bastard dogs, all alter egos for Brown Dog, which suggests that Harrison may be paying an oblique tribute to Faulkner: he creates powerful dog-characters who seem to revisit Faulkner's wild bear dog, "Lion," the dog who eventually kills the mythic bear Big Ben in *Go Down, Moses*.

Brown Dog's first attempt at a long-time job, at fifty-four and at the end of the saga, is *Animal Control Officer*. The reader feels at once that Brown Dog is ill-prepared for it. Indeed, he had previously appeared, on the contrary, as the man who was able to deal with the wilderness without taming or controlling animals. Brown Dog soon resigns for he refuses to control his fellow creatures, especially his dog-cousins:

He couldn't kill dogs because they were his spirit animal, or so he had been told at age ten by his closest friend David Four Feet whose uncle was a traditional Midewiwin who lived far back in the woods and had nothing to do with white people. ("He Dog" in *Brown Dog*, 428)

Far from being a *controller*, Brown Dog works as a mediator, a meddler between the realm of wild animals and civilized men, Indians and Wasps (like Dalva in the eponymous novel: she is a bridge between Lakota Indians and whites thanks to her mixed origins but also because she is able to reconcile reality and Michael, the confused history scholar).

Brown Dog, like an animal, is bound, body and soul, to a territory and lives by his senses as shows his wistful yearning for the Upper Peninsula's sounds and smells as he travels through Canada:

The ride through western Manitoba into eastern Saskatchewan had increased his homesickness to a quiet frenzy. Creeks, rivers, and lakes were everywhere in the forested landscapes. To a lifelong fisherman even a large mud puddle presents a remote possibility and the water he saw was overwhelming. Once when the bus slowed for a logging truck hauling pulp to make paper he saw an American redstart in a white pine, a wildly colored bird that he often saw near his favorite stretch of the Middle Branch of the Escanaba near Gwinn and seeing the bird enabled him to smell the river and the forest in that area which tingled his skin. (*Brown Dog*, 371)

Erotic, Predatory and Moral Variations

While Brown Dog indulges in sexual yearnings and erotic whims (*pussy trances*, 44) reflecting his freedom and unruly, unbridled (at times ungainly) nature, which makes him appear as a wild Eros, Caliban embodies a far more brutal and bestial form of sexuality. The moral status of Brown Dog is often discussed in connection with his relation to female creatures, but although he lives in an overwhelmingly sexualized world, he displays a fundamental innocence, contrary to Caliban.

The narrative device used in *Brown Dog* alternates from one story to the next between a homodiegetic narrator and an inner focalization on the protagonist, always Brown Dog, aka simply *B.D.* Yet the reader's vision of the protagonist is not exclusively controlled by the narrative voice or the focal character's views: it may be significantly modified depending on other characters' responses to Brown Dog: indeed, the dialogues suggest a great variety of reactions, as if to signal the existence of an almost polyphonic debate within the text concerning the moral status and symbolic significance of the protagonist. For instance, he is just "a kindly fool" (282) according to Red, his teenage adoptive son, or a "wonderful backwoods nitwit" according to his lover Belinda (290), or "a happy-go-lucky pussy chaser" according to the police detective in charge of tracking him after his participation in Indian activism. Some definitions thus put forward the predatory quality of Brown Dog (the detective calls him a "pussy chaser") whereas some others foreground the harmless, *un-predatory* quality of Brown Dog ("kindly," "nitwit"). This might be regarded as a reminder and a distortion of Caliban, whose sexual craving for Miranda is used as a touchstone of his evil nature by intradiegetic commentators in Shakespeare's *Tempest*.

Harrison's Brown Dog is also viewed as a predator but he is hardly an avatar of the lecherous Caliban. Even the representative of law and order views him as a mild and harmless version of the sexual predator and other characters could be said to view him as an avatar of the shakespearean "fool" who is a bawdy talker but a sexually ambiguous or sexless character. Indeed, one of the central aspects of Brown Dog's characterization is his relationship with the many desirable female characters who people his world, and in this the lecherous, predatory Caliban has been turned into a mild, benign and essentially harmless embodiment of sexuality, into a being whose mental world is overwhelmingly sexualized but who is not a dangerous predator.

Brown Dog's world is peopled by ladies—some of them *femmes fatales* while others prove more friendly—and wild creatures of the woods, among them principally trout, bears and dogs, some ravens, coyotes and a few wolves, at times some snakes, deer and horses too. One of Brown Dog's passions and reasons for being is the association with women who are omnipresent through the collection in a series of characters, sometimes mere sketches, often portrayed in more detail. Because he falls the victim of *pussy trances*, he often comically chases then truly loves them.

If he can be seen as a lady chaser, once he has found one, like a good dog, he devotes himself to his mistress. Besides, Brown Dog proves a loving substitute father for a little girl with prenatal alcohol syndrome, Berry. For her sake, he sacrifices his freedom and goes as far as Canada. In the second story, "The Seven-Ounce Man," Brown Dog takes it upon himself to care for her and her brother (their mother is in jail). To become their stepfather then adoptive dad, he renounces a portion of his freedom, which prompts a radical domestication indeed, especially when he prepares the recipes he finds in his new Bible, *Dad's own cookbook*. After a few months' respite during which this happy if *unorthodox*³ family lives in a trailer, the government notifies them that Berry will have to be put in a special centre for mentally impaired children. From then on, a new series of adventures starts, for Brown Dog refuses this injunction and fights against the government to prevent her departure. The family drives to the centre to check the architecture and the feelings it may convey. They come to the conclusion that Berry cannot be happy in such a space of entrapment where, essentially, any physical contact with the surrounding woodland has been severed. Berry is "a woodland creature" (278) as much as Brown Dog. The reader gradually understands that Berry embodies an extreme version of Brown Dog, an undomesticated form of wildness he identifies with and fondly treasures. Being the victim of prenatal alcohol syndrome, she cannot

³ Harrison repeatedly makes use of this adjective, which seems to encapsulate his predilection for transgression and hybridity.

interact much except with animals. Paradoxically, though she is doomed to failure in human society and will never be able to speak, she can imitate any animal up to an incredible degree of verisimilitude, a barely realist level of perfection, "making the cries and voices of birds and animals" (*Brown Dog*, 83), from the owl, the grosbeaks and ravens to the bluejay: so much so that she actually talks to them and they respond in the same language. There is a very striking scene in which she entertains an obviously articulate conversation with a reputed ornithologist, in bird-language however, which represents how contraries may coexist in society and even meet on an equal footing, even a scientist and a mentally impaired child. Harrison seems to choose a very unlikely situation. That such an encounter should turn out so fruitful seems highly improbable. The little girl, endowed with the magical gift to talk to animals, is particularly drawn to bears (her grandmother believes that she has *bear medicine*, *Brown Dog*, 89). When she takes part in a ritual dance at a powwow, she is deemed the best among fifty girls because she does not know that she is not a crow for real!

Berry is indeed Brown Dog's spiritual daughter: "Berry was a happy child enclosed in her own world, a *woods nymph* (*my emphasis*) whose curiosity made the natural world an endless source of pleasure," (275). She is also a seer, a gift equally shared by prophets, witches and poets: "Berry was a regular fish hawk who could *see* (*my emphasis*) into the water far beyond Brown Dog's capacity or anyone else's for that matter." (276) Berry appears indeed like a witch at times, for instance she is able to befriend a group of feral dogs: "She was sitting on a stump with a half dozen of the normally unapproachable wild dogs milling around her." (288)

Thus, in spite of Brown Dog being partly defined by his sexual yearnings, he is never identified with the figure of the dangerous predator but with a mild, gentle, fundamentally harmless version of sexuality. Thus, the police detective "quickly determined that BD was up to essentially nothing despite the media blarney, and that tailing the man resembled following around a stray dog." (135)

Brown Dog as moralized Falstaff

It seems that although Brown Dog, like Caliban, is a transgressive character not abiding by civilized rules, yet he remains innocuous: a mild, gentle and at times benevolent character who never threatens nor frightens his preys (be they women or animals). Brown Dog could therefore be interpreted as a new version of transgression and predation lying half-way between Caliban and Falstaff. Indeed, Brown Dog and Falstaff are both comic characters whose pranks the reader cannot help but enjoy. However, Brown Dog is neither

immoral nor amoral, contrary to Falstaff whose sole motive seems to be self-preservation at all costs.

Though the life Brown Dog leads may be described as thoroughly simple, he barely casts a simple image: he may at times appear close to the embodiment of Montaigne or Rousseau's noble savage, when the text insists on his mild temper, his dislike for bullies, both in dogs and men, or his respectful regards with women. However, Brown Dog is often assimilated with a stray dog, a mongrel with every feature of the animal: his hair is repeatedly depicted as wild, impossible to comb and tame, a synecdoche for his mode of living. As the epitome of the stray dog, he may also indulge in merry pranks and thus deviate from the good behaviour we would expect of the good savage, for instance when he drops a beer on purpose down a woman's neck merely because she had not responded kindly to his invitation to a dance. He earns his living mostly by cutting wood which he admits desecrates the "primeval forest" he adores (273), "Nothing man does to nature is very pretty, or adds rather than subtracts, and though Brown Dog earned his livelihood cutting pulp the immediate ugly results singed his brainpan." Besides, he does not show any respect for the hunting and fishing regulation calendar, which turns him into a *violator*, to take up Jim Harrison's word for those who transgress the *etiquette of freedom* instead of faithfully (sometimes doggedly one may assume) respecting both the official and tacit codes in sportsmanship.

Despite Brown Dog's proximity with the figure of the good savage or the innocent Wodewose, the woods of the Upper Peninsula are not depicted as an Eden. On the contrary, the setting appears closer to an image of a hellish vortex reminding the reader of Dante's or Gabriel Garcia Marquez's forest; it is a land of dangerous swamps and hostile mosquitoes where the harsh winters almost cover the whole year.

Yet Brown Dog is fundamentally at home in a wilderness that resonates with his own lawlessness: he enjoys the cold to a point when it is likely any other human could not survive, at least not in a realist text. He is at home there, on the one hand for pragmatic reasons as the woods enable him to lead an independent life and on the other he is simply in love with it. Brown Dog's devotion to the woods is expressed in descriptions of sensations triggered by the landscape. Paradoxically, for the main part of the saga, he is away from Michigan, forced from home by authority, be it the police or the government. He is on the run and on the lam for the greater part of the collection.

Like a stray dog, one cannot but like him for all his whimsical behaviour. He proves impossible to tame as is shown when he tries to belong to a hippie community out of love for his girlfriend, a student in anthropology: he fails to abide by the rules of moderation set up by the community and is consequently banished for bad behaviour for he can renounce neither meat nor beers.

Ultimately, it seems that if Brown Dog transgresses society's rules, it is neither in a conscious nor articulate manner but simply because he does not recognize them for his own. Besides, he resists and resents society's all-encompassing control over an individual's life: "I got upset over the fact that they wrote down every little thing you did wrong. [...] What chance did a fellow have to improve when they had files to pull the rug out from under him?" (*Brown Dog*, 64)

We are to understand that, according to Brown Dog, anyone should be allowed (or should go and grab for) his own space of freedom.

Although partly inspired by Caliban he ultimately seems to be closer to the Shakespearean figure of Falstaff, the mild, benign and fundamentally innocent embodiment of iconoclasm and transgression.

A Sleepy Bear in Disguise

Although Brown Dog often appears as an idler, rambling the woods and refusing any long-time job, the reader hardly feels like condemning him. This nonconformist refusal to partake of the socially established work-system is not denounced as a moral sin; Brown Dog's behavior may rather be interpreted as revealing Harrison's implicit rejection of the Puritanical work-ethic (as in Thoreau's *Walden*). Brown Dog is never depicted as a sloth nor as suffering from the lifestyle he has opted for. In this passage, Brown Dog comments on the schedule of his typical day:

I get up at daylight and take a little stroll in the woods to see what's been happening there overnight. I make coffee and breakfast. I cut and split a cord of wood and sell it to a cottager for twenty-five bucks. I got plenty of orders from hanging out at the bar. Then I have a little lunch followed by a snooze to change my thought patterns. [...] You lay back and think pleasant thoughts, say about birds and animals, like the time I saw a great horned owl blast a red-tailed hawk out of a tree just at daylight, or two deer fucking in late September, or a big raven funeral I watched. [...] After the snooze, I go do a little fishing or hunting depending on the season. Catch a few trout or pot a grouse and woodcock for dinner [...] after dinner I have another snooze, then read for an hour, then go to the bar for an hour or two. Maybe longer. That's it. (*Brown Dog*, 100)

Like Henry D. Thoreau watching his brute neighbours or digging up Native American arrowheads in *Walden*, Brown Dog combines the acutest sensitivity to (and expertise about) his wild environment with the rejection of the dominant work-ethic. Brown Dog proves keenly sensitive to the beauty of nature, which could seem at odd with his unpolished nature: "things I love like all the different kinds of trees and fish in the U.P." (10); or, at dawn by the river side: "All the tree birds were urging themselves forward into a pastel green mist" (414). He is very learned in fact for he was taught all the Anishinabe words for "birds,

animals and plants" (98). Yet in Harrison's texts, Brown Dog's expert knowledge of animals amounts to identification: Brown Dog's lifestyle is in keeping with his repeated self-identification with his other animal-totem, the Bear.

Brown Dog is indeed himself a wild animal, hence the leitmotif of the sleepy bear: "Out popped a big bear that had been hibernating under the tree roots but the bear was still too sleepy to be pissed off." (47)

I was about to pass it by when I noticed a small black hole in the snowbank by the tree roots and I smelled a musty smell in the cold air. I could have jumped for joy but I didn't want to make a racket. What happened is that I found my first bear den blowhole in my life. Grandpa showed me one when I was a kid and I did the same thing I had done years ago. I lay down and smelled the strong scent coming out of the hole which was an inch wide, then I put an ear to it and listened to the slow stretched-out snores. I couldn't remember when I felt luckier. (*Brown Dog*, 123)

Sleepiness and sleep function in the text as the prerequisite for dreams: Brown Dog's identification with animals is only complete in dreams, which seems to follow or imitate the Native American imagery and ritualistic use of dreams in initiation rites.

Recalling Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Harrison's character sometimes seems to physically and spiritually change into an animal, most often a mongrel as is consistent with his totemic name—the name *Brown Dog* has been given to the child in a burlesque baptism when an Indian mother scolded Brown Dog, then a nine year-old, away from her daughter whom he kept doggedly following around—but also into a bear when his dreaming encourages the shift. Besides, this trait is consistent with the use of magic realism in Harrison's text.

After a serious accident, Brown Dog, in the hospital, is upset because "all animals have fled his dreams. [...] How was he supposed to live without ravens and other birds?" (139):

He was staring into the cracks of the floor when last night's dream came to him. He was holding his childhood's teddy bear to his chest. It was missing one leg and the fur was crinkly and singed from the time he put it in the oven to dry it out. The teddy bear started out cold and damp, then got warmer and warmer against his chest, then began to squirm and move of its own accord, wiggling and stretching, coming to life, then stood on its hind legs and looked around, whuffed as bears do, then curled up and went to sleep. What a relief, Brown Dog thought, to have my dreaming back. (145)

Totem and Tutelary Spirit: The Bear Father

A series of bear father figures is scattered through the saga: the preserved corpse retrieved from Lake Michigan carries a driving license indicating its

owner's Indian name: Sleeping Bear. In addition to this, Brown Dog's only parent and whimsical guardian is known as Delmore Short Bear. Elsewhere, Brown Dog is moved by an old man doing a bear dance at a powwow. (129)

After the accident causing a severe knee injury, his uncle and employer Delmore is forced to grant Brown Dog a fixed sum of money each month in compensation. What Brown Dog values most, however, is Delmore's bear skin: "Delmore wrapped him around Brown Dog, tying the arm and leg thongs and fitting the hollowed head over Brown Dog's own. He had become a standing bear on the porch, then a walking bear on crutches as he headed off down the trail toward the cabin."(142-143)

When he receives the bear skin, he kisses the bear's nose in sign of respect and keeps the bear's gallstones *as if they were diamonds*. These respectful gestures convey a mixed image uniting the high and the low, the noble and comedy at once, which illustrates Brown Dog's unique sensitivity in spite of his modest ambitions and acknowledged ordinariness: he lives on a daily basis and on his own terms but never strays too far from the society of his favored animal, ladies on whom he lavishes a good amount of tenderness. This very human capacity for loving and caring makes the reader identify with and smile to Brown Dog's misadventures from Michigan to California, Montana and Manitoba.

One may think that the main similarity between Brown Dog and Caliban is their capacity to stand as allegories of the helpless Native American facing powerful invaders: Robert Cawley discussed at some length the theme of "the White man and the Indian" in *the Tempest* by Shakespeare. Like the Indians, he pointed out, "Caliban initially views the newcomers as gods and befriends them but is repaid with scorn and abuse; he originally owns the land but is soon dispossessed; he is taught a foreign tongue because the colonists find his own unintelligible; he acquires the Europeans' vices rather than their virtues; he is a curio to be kidnapped and displayed in Europe for a few pence a look." (Cawley, 74)

Similarly, Brown Dog may be regarded as an embodiment of the helpless Native American who fails to defeat European supremacy and the gradual erasure of the Native American Culture. This might be the key to the burlesque evocation of Brown Dog's failures: For instance, when Brown Dog intends to keep the preserved corpse of an Indian he found at the bottom of Lake Michigan, "Chief," and to sell it: he orders a pair of glass eyes to put on the Chief's face but they turn out to be blue! On the drive to Chicago, the body starts melting and lets out some gas which scares BD: for a split second, Brown Dog faces a ghost. The corpse is thus unwittingly desecrated, however Brown Dog retains as much respect for the Chief whom he believes to be his father: he eventually buries him in the woods, following the demand uttered by the Chief

to Brown Dog.

As in an echo of Caliban's lament over the loss of his land to the invaders, Harrison's Brown Dog saga also dwells on the theme of deprivation, and on the Indians being dispossessed of the American land as Caliban was deprived of his Island: the controlling of wild environments, the stealing of natives' territory make up the Indian subplots in the Brown Dog series. However, Brown Dog appears to fail as a revolutionary acting on behalf of the Indian cause: Lone Marten (himself a pathetic, hence comic pseudo-revolutionary figure) accuses Brown Dog of being "nothing but a pussy-crazed backwoods rooster" (*Brown Dog*, 154).

Brown Dog as well-read Wodewose

Even if Brown Dog may be seen as a modern version of the medieval wodewose, he is different insofar as he is a literary wild man. The Brown Dog saga blurs indeed the usual dichotomies between civilized and uncivilized.

The stray dog, for all his uncivilized habits, reads *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in his woods cabin. The mention of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's masterpiece is a reminder of magic realism, the use of fantastic details embedded in the midst of a realist setting with no warning to the reader. Thus, the text is suffused with odd elements that may pass unnoticed by the reader. Harrison uses comedy too, which creates a unique style indeed.

Brown Dog also knows Longfellow's poem *Evangeline* by heart and is able to quote it at length to impress lady friends. The romantic lines conjure up an apt image of Brown Dog's favored abode, the woods, though perhaps with an excessively idyllic touch to it: "This is the forest primeval. The murmuring pines and the hemlocks." There is always a discrepancy between Brown Dog and romanticism: often, the space for comedy.

The protagonist is not only a well-read man, he also embodies the writer figure, though implicitly. Indeed, Harrison uses the themes of diving and rescuing as metaphors of writing and Brown Dog appears as the diver-rescuer. The first novella, "Brown Dog," opens the saga on the barely favorable presentation of Brown Dog as an outlaw: "Mind you, everything we do is against the law as all sunken ship artifacts are the sole ownership of the state of Michigan" ("Brown Dog," 20). Indeed, his job consists in diving to the bottom of Lake Michigan to retrieve objects from shipwrecks in order to sell them. This business is presented as illegal and the forbidden nature of this activity emphasizes the unhallowed or taboo characteristics of this odd job that may be interpreted as daring death, disrupting the repose of the dead, which explains why he is depicted as a *scavenger*. However, his mission is also referred to, on the same page, as *salvaging*: indeed in the same movement, he is rescuing from

forgetfulness what he is robbing. Besides, the verb *preserve* calls forth the idea that the objects at the bottom of the lake were awaiting to be fished as it were, like in a fairy tale when Sleeping Beauty awaits her Prince Charming.

This theme is reinforced, in the same novella, by the mention of mental digging and *probing* that Brown Dog rather reluctantly practices in an attempt to please his hippie girlfriend Shelley. She has prompted him to delve into his thoughts and to write down his *memoirs* in order to achieve inner peace: "so that I can stop lying to myself and others, which from my way of thinking will cut the interesting heart right out of my life" (*Brown Dog*, 4). This might suggest a fundamental analogy between the act of dragging the bottom of lakes and the act of writing: in a way, the illegal activity of Brown Dog's scavenging is presented as both illegal and supremely civilized. Again in the depiction of Brown Dog's transgressive character, the conventional marks of the civilized and the uncivilized are being blurred.

The saga also dwells and plays on the mystery of Brown Dog's origins: there is a full circle from the first to the sixth novella: When, in "Brown Dog," he salvages from the bottom of Lake Michigan the corpse of a dead Indian dressed in full regalia, he gets the feeling, at once, that it might be his unknown father. In "Brown Dog Redux" (this title suggests a link between the Brown Dog saga and John Updike's *Rabbit* series), the last story but one, he meets an old man who tells him of his father fleeing the police on a small canoe on Lake Michigan never to be seen again, which seems to confirm his initial intuition that the rescued body was his father's. Besides, Uncle Delmore is eventually discovered to be Brown Dog's uncle for real and gives his nephew a picture of his parents on their wedding day, a solemn gift granting Brown Dog two faces for his past. This cyclical structure recalls Harrison's *magnus opus Dalva*. At the end of *Dalva*, the long-lost son Dalva had given up for adoption reappears in his mother's life. Their reunion marks the end of Dalva's quest that was also a quest for her Indian origins, a *probing* into the Lakota history. Both the ending scene of *Dalva* and *Brown Dog* stage the protagonist's family final reunion (even if those families are meant to appear oddly formed: they are shown as *unorthodox* compositions.)

Moreover, this suggests an affinity between the hybrid character of Brown Dog and the art of writing in Harrison's work.

Textual Hybridity

In his Brown Dog saga, Harrison shows a predilection for the burlesque as may be perceived in the following passage:

Sitting there in the aura of Fred's bad breath he studied how the first rain pasted the blossoms against the car windows and was thankful that he was in the right

place at the right time which was similar to good fishing or getting laid. (*Brown Dog*, 504)

Generally the text alternates from noble-minded meditations to ribald episodes, slapstick comedy, for instance the face-down in the saloon in which Brown Dog's two arch enemies finally have a fistfight because they were both led to believe that the other one was Brown Dog. The epic and romance are also present.

Like Caliban, Brown Dog is a bawdy character who follows lustful whims and indulges in ribald or vulgar episodes in which he appears thoroughly bestial and debased. In Harrison's novelistic style, he is the ideal trigger for the mock-epic, for the extensive use of the burlesque register: for instance in the yoga session staging Shelley and Tarah: Brown Dog, who is repeatedly the victim of "pussy trances" is asked by two hippie-styled young women to take part in a yoga session whose goal is to reach a "trance state" and become an animal:

She was sitting in what she called "a full locust" and you couldn't help but wonder what was possible with a woman with that much stretch in her limbs. She fixed her green eyes on me: What did you become? I could see your trance state was very deep. I became a big condor from olden times. I was feeding on a dead buffalo I scared off a cliff. I fibbed, remembering a trip to the Field Museum when I was on the bum in Chicago. (*Brown Dog*, 24)

In this passage, the "low" animality of the protagonist is used as a means to debunk the two girls' desire to reach a "high" and noble version of animality. The low character is used to burlesque pretensions to the sublime.

It also seems that both Harrison and his unruly alter ego, Brown Dog, indulge a preference for extreme freedom and more generally for what is loosely circumscribed or even messy as is hinted in the following episode at the beginning of "Westward Ho" when Brown Dog, on the lam in California, finds shelter in a botanical garden to spend the night:

[he was] amazed at the flora, none of which he recognized, though he knew the names of hundreds of trees and bushes in the Upper Peninsula. The birds were also a mystery and he wondered idly at God's messiness in inventing so many species, then decided it was the messiness of nature that gave it such beauty. (*Brown Dog*, 174)

Brown Dog has heterogeneous reading tastes, for instance when he explains that he is equally fond of "Popular Mechanics, Outdoor Life, girlie magazines [and] this south-of-the-border novel called One Hundred Years of Solitude" (101).

This is in keeping with Harrison's use of the juxtaposition of the high and the low registers, noble ethics and base instincts, both in the characterization and the use of syntax. These passages seem to have a metatextual purpose and to suggest that the burlesque style of Harrison is being defined as a form of blessed "messiness" in its own right, one that is valued for its hedonistic connotations and not merely for its sheer aesthetic value.

The "messiness" of Harrison's writing style allows him, among other things, to use *Brown Dog* both as a vehicle of the burlesque and as a sensitive observer of natural wonders. *Brown Dog* is not only able to perceive the beauty of natural tableaux but also to articulate his perceptions into poetic metaphors as when he enjoys a "blizzard of chokecherry flowers" (*Brown Dog*, 504). Besides, he pays as much attention to what is commonly deemed an object of beauty (flowers) and to much more trivial ones, as shows this example from "The Seven-Ounce Man":

There was still the fine warm smell of fried chicken in the room, one of his favorite odours, along with a freshly caught trout, lilacs, the fermenting berries in a grouse's crop, the dense sourness of a bear's den, not to speak of a vagina within a few days of a shower. (*Brown Dog*, 84)

This lack of discrimination underscores an egalitarian approach to beauty and reflects Harrison's use of the burlesque to illustrate his aesthetics of bastardy and hybridity.

Thus, the deepest similitude between Shakespeare's Caliban and Harrison's *Brown Dog* lies in the fact that the two animal-like characters (Caliban and *Brown Dog*) are both used by their authors to create discursive and linguistic freedom by allowing sensitivity to be unexpectedly expressed in a humble man's voice, a voice that hovers between shameful baseness and the most acute sensitivity, almost amounting to music in the case of Caliban, as is most famously epitomized in the following monologue:

Be not afeard. The isle is full of noises, / Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not. / Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments / Will hum about mine ears, and sometime voices / That, if I then had waked after long sleep / Will make me sleep again; and then in dreaming. / The clouds methought would open and show riches / Ready to drop upon me, that when I waked / I cried to dream again (*The Tempest*, III, ii, 130–138).

Thus the *Brown Dog* cycle displays Harrison's mastery of *unorthodox* writing, a taste for what is *mean* in the sense of mixed, bastard, hybrid, both in the content, (the themes and characterization) and in the writing style through the

use of a convoluted syntax and of juxtaposed digressions that are loosely attached by the narrative thread of Brown Dog's spatial and spiritual peregrinations.

With this collection of novella, Jim Harrison creates an endearing character who shares more than a few features with Shakespeare's Caliban. First and foremost, both characters are presented as resisting civilization. Though they do not appear refined at first glance, both prove able to combine vulgar tastes, libidinal instincts and an acute sensitivity to the glory of nature and the possibility of poetry. Both are outcasts struggling against the oppression of forces bent on enslaving them, Prospero for Caliban, the government for Brown Dog.

Nevertheless, the contemporary novelist tends to use his animal-like man as an instance of essentially harmless and innocent sexuality, thus strongly diverging from Caliban's predatory quality; moreover, Brown Dog also differs from Caliban in that his portrayal consistently challenges the dichotomies between the civilized and the uncivilized, while the portrayal of Caliban plays with these dichotomies rather than blurring them. However, what strikes one as a potential homage by Harrison to Shakespeare is how a character's fundamental hybridity is used as an echo of some essential hybridity in the writing style: indeed the style of the saga reflects the eponymous protagonist's lifestyle. Harrison offers an original blending of several genres and influences which proves in turn consistent with the leitmotif of hybridity and the underlying aesthetics of messiness: magic realism pervades the text through many details while the setting, the woods, conjures up Keatsian romanticism or Thoreau's transcendentalism. These influences would not be consistent with Brown Dog's lower side if they were not mixed with Rabelaisian strokes and echoes of Falstaff that prevent any stabilization of the text and keep anchoring the stories to the ground: after all, Brown Dog is a very down-to-earth character who cringes at any form of vain sophistication.

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