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**The Dialectic of Self and Other in Montaigne, Proust and  
Woolf**

**by**

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Comparative Literature

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**Figure 1:** Permutations of the self-other relation, I: sameness

**Figure 2:** Permutations of the self-other relation, II: difference

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I am also very grateful to the friends and family whose interest and support has sustained me over the last three-and-a-half years; in particular to Karen, Deborah, Sally, Nicola and my parents. Thanks above all to God: 'For from him and through him and to him are all things /To him be the glory for ever! Amen' (Romans 11. 31).

## **DECLARATION**

This thesis is my own work, and contains nothing based on collaborative research. It has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the construction of identity in relation to an other. It considers three writers who, working at moments when the nature of selfhood was an urgent issue, conduct profound and original enquiries into the question of self-construction, and seeks both to reassess their contributions to this debate, and, in bringing their preoccupations and methods to bear upon each other, to open up new ways of approaching and reading their work. Considering a range of socio-cultural and religious forms of otherness -- the cannibal, the witch, the Jew, the aristocrat, the woman, the divine -- it embraces material from a number of important modern critical fields, and suggests how these topics might be combined to offer a coherent statement about the enduring issue of self-fashioning.

The thesis seeks to map out a trajectory of decreasing investment in external communities, and an increasing perception of the self as a source and agent in the construction of identity. Looking in turn at the work of Montaigne, Proust and Woolf, it argues that where the *Essais* construct complex orders which appropriate the other to reinforce the identity of the self, Proust and Woolf increasingly, although gradually, and by no means always successfully, attempt to negotiate a less precisely-engaged relationship between other and self, and to assign the other a less constitutive role in the realization and expression of identity. The thesis also considers more briefly contexts in which this trajectory is reversed. To the extent that they examine modernist subjectivity, Proust and Woolf articulate an anxiety about the separation of self and world which leads to an attempted recuperation of the integrated orders depicted by Montaigne.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>BSAM</i>	<i>Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Montaigne</i>
<i>BSAMPAC</i>	<i>Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Marcel Proust et des Amis de Combray</i>
<i>ELH</i>	<i>English Literary History</i>
<i>ELN</i>	<i>English Language Notes</i>
<i>MD</i>	<i>Mrs Dalloway</i>
<i>MLN</i>	<i>Modern Language Notes</i>
<i>MLQ</i>	<i>Modern Language Quarterly</i>
<i>MLR</i>	<i>Modern Language Review</i>
<i>NLH</i>	<i>New Literary History</i>
<i>PMLA</i>	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</i>
<i>TL</i>	<i>To the Lighthouse</i>

## INTRODUCTION

Ever since Burckhardt's famous analysis of Renaissance individuality, critics have claimed that the Renaissance witnessed a decisive shift in the perception and expression of selfhood.

Formerly 'dreaming', in Burckhardt's terms, 'beneath a veil of faith and illusion', the individual gradually emerged, over the course of the Renaissance, as a self-conscious and independent category.<sup>1</sup> More recently, Greenblatt (among others) has sought to modify this claim, arguing for a more dynamic and problematic model of Renaissance subjectivity.

Where Burckhardt depicts the uncontested growth and autonomous expression of individual self-consciousness, Greenblatt describes a 'resolutely dialectical' relation between the self and the social and political structures which surround it; according to which the subject's heightened awareness and articulation of its individual selfhood is set against a renewed commitment, on the part of external collectivities, to the government and control of identity.

If there is a new social mobility in the Renaissance, and an increasing sense of individual agency, there are also new measures to restrict and determine all movement, and to circumscribe and delimit the individual will.<sup>2</sup> According to this interpretation, the self is no longer an independent category, but is forged instead in relation, and specifically in opposition, to an external other. Elsewhere in Greenblatt, this other is not a social or political order, but rather an 'alien': the savage, heretic, traitor or witch.

Central to the debate about Renaissance selfhood are Montaigne's *Essais*, which explore in depth and detail the role of the other in the construction of the self. The Montaignean self is

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<sup>1</sup> Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. by S. G. C. Middlemore (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 98.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). See in particular the opening section of his introduction, pp. 1-2. For another account of the relationship between Renaissance self and other which seeks to challenge Burckhardt's interpretation, see Natalie Zemon Davis, 'Boundaries and the Sense of Self in Sixteenth-Century France', in *Reconstructing Individualism: Autonomy, Individuality and the Self in Western Thought*, ed. by Thomas C. Heller, Morton Sosna and David E. Wellbery (Stanford University Press, 1986), pp. 53-63.



intensely aware of, and continually in dialogue with, a wide variety of others: writers and philosophers from antiquity; Protestantism; witches and the divine; his social others (peasants and princes) and the social order; the cultural otherness of the cannibal, and the unfamiliar customs of foreign lands. Like Greenblatt, he perceives self and other as inextricably linked. '[A] Ce grand monde', he observes, 'c'est le miroüer où il nous faut regarder pour nous connoistre de bon biais'.<sup>3</sup> It is by looking in the mirror of the other that the self can know and see itself; in relation to the other that identity is assumed and sustained. However, the dynamics of this relationship in Montaigne are not always as simple as Greenblatt suggests. While there are many instances in the *Essais* where tensions clearly do emerge between self and other -- the self often discovers that the other threatens, rather than enabling, the appropriation of a coherent identity, or circumscribes, rather than providing a context for, its self-articulation -- this is not always the case. In the extract above, self-fashioning is no longer perceived as a problematic affair. The looking-glass of the world, revealing the enormity and majesty of nature, provides a context and perspective which do not curtail the self, but rather enable it to elucidate its coordinates and dimensions within a larger whole. In Montaigne, the self may be defined through participation in, as well as in opposition to, a wider order; through identification with, rather than differentiation from, the other. Even when self and other do stand in a conflictual relation, the opposition between the two is rarely as absolute as Greenblatt suggests. I shall seek in what follows to elaborate a more complex model for the relationship between other and self, in which dependence and fascination pull against hostility, and complicate and problematize the process of negotiation between the two.

Just as Renaissance criticism has identified a decisive break in the organization and expression of selfhood in the early modern period, so too critics of modernist literature have

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<sup>3</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Albert Thibaudet and Maurice Rat (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), I: 26; p. 157.

identified an important transition in the perception of the self at the start of the twentieth century. As Virginia Woolf herself observed, ‘In or about December, 1910, human character changed.’<sup>4</sup> As the modernist movement began, the self, along with many other conceptual and cultural categories, underwent a ‘cataclysmic upheaval’; one of those ‘overwhelming dislocations’ which seem to topple ‘even the most solid and substantial of our beliefs and assumptions’.<sup>5</sup> Central to this ‘upheaval’ was the dissolution of the self as a stable and integrated centre of thought and consciousness. Important too, however, was the relationship between self and world. Modernist writing envisages a reality in which self and other have become remote; in which shared meanings and languages have disintegrated, and in which an isolated self is left either to withdraw from external reality, or to negotiate as best it can a precarious and partial communication with the world.<sup>6</sup>

There are significant parallels between modernist and Renaissance discussions of selfhood, therefore. Both closely examine the question of the self and its relation with the other; both are aware that tensions and dynamic exchanges accompany the decisive shifts which they depict in this relationship, and both envisage that negotiation with the other is fundamental to the appropriation of a coherent or stable identity. They invite, therefore, comparative study.

If modernist subjectivity is to be compared with Renaissance identity, then Proust, like Montaigne, stands out as a figure through whom discussion might be focussed.

Computational scholarship has found the word ‘moi’ on average 1.1996 times per page in *A la recherche du temps perdu*, and this statistic is an accurate reflection of the important

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown’ (1924), in *The Captain’s Death Bed and Other Essays* (London: Hogarth, 1950), pp. 90-111 (p. 91).

<sup>5</sup> Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, ‘The Name and Nature of Modernism’, in *Modernism, 1890-1930*, ed. by Bradbury and McFarlane (London: Penguin, 1976), p. 19. This sense of radical change is explored in relation to the self on p. 27.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Levenson emphasizes the problematic relationship of the self both with itself and with the world beyond. The modernist self ‘discovered enemies within and enemies without; walls within, mirrors without; it no longer perched securely on the throne of the self; it no longer sat confidently at

position occupied by the text. As Malcolm Bowie suggests, 'The modern, secular, psychological *moi*' discovers in Proust 'a moment of extraordinary power and authority': 'For a moment, indeed, the human self and its vicissitudes become the essential subject-matter of art'.<sup>7</sup> The comparison of Proust with Montaigne is a fruitful one; generating in particular new ways of approaching *A la recherche*. The themes of Jewishness, class-consciousness and selfhood are conventionally perceived as separate critical issues in Proust,<sup>8</sup> but the example of Montaigne forces one to draw them together. Montaigne's self-conscious dialogues with the social, religious, cultural and philosophical orders and others of his time suggest that political and social themes are inextricably bound up with questions of self-fashioning, and I shall argue below that this is very much the case in *A la recherche*. Operating in the text as expressions of the self-other relation, these topics open up important dimensions of, and offer important insights into, Proustian subjectivity, and together they provide access to patterns in the self's response to the other which enable a provisional sketch of Proustian self-fashioning.

Since self and other stand in such an inextricable relation, a discussion of their relationship demands not only an exploration of the subject's self-construction, but also of the selfhood of the other. This second form of subjectivity is expressed most clearly in the early twentieth century in the self-consciousness of the female writer, and is focussed above all in the intensely self-reflexive novels and critical work of Virginia Woolf. It is clear that Woolf felt alienated from patriarchal culture -- as a woman, and in particular as a woman writer -- at a number of levels. She stood in a precarious relation first of all, as an uneducated woman, to

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the center of the social world'. *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality: Character and Novelistic Form from Conrad to Woolf* (Cambridge: CUP, 1991), p. xi.

<sup>7</sup> Malcolm Bowie, *Proust Among the Stars* (London: HarperCollins, 1998), pp. 2-3 (italics in original). Bowie notes that the statistical exercise on the self gathered references to 'moi' as a noun or pronoun; to occurrences of 'me' and 'myself', therefore, as well as 'self'.

<sup>8</sup> The social dimension of the novel is explored in relation to selfhood by Leo Bersani, in *Marcel Proust: The Fictions of Life and of Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965). However, he leaves aside the question of race altogether, and the trajectory of withdrawal he describes runs directly counter to the engaged negotiations explored in my own discussion.

her position as a literary critic. Jane Marcus compares her to Walter Benjamin and other Jewish intellectuals in Weimar Germany, 'administering the intellectual property of a people who denied them the right to do so'.<sup>9</sup> She was alienated too from literary history, a stately march of male voices, she felt, that excluded, rather than grounded, her female vision. She even felt restricted by 'the very form of the sentence'; which, like a number of other literary conventions in her view, was designed to accommodate and articulate a specifically male understanding of the world.<sup>10</sup> The result of this alienation is a continual self-articulation from the position of the other. When Woolf relates in *A Room of One's Own* how a Beadle prevents her encroachment upon the male domain of the lawn, or a black-gowned gentleman her access to the manuscripts of *Lycidas* and *Esmond*,<sup>11</sup> she self-consciously constructs herself as the unlettered other of the educated man; comparable to the 'uncivilized' cannibals (who have '[A] nul cognoissance de lettres; nulle science de nombres' I: 31; p. 204) described in Montaigne's account. Her novels perform a sustained and profound examination of the consequences of occupying this second position, examining both the ways in which it affects the range and expression of individual selfhood, and the strategies available to the female self as it seeks to recuperate a voice, and to construct a tradition, of its own.

Neither Proust nor Woolf was entirely unaware of the connections I am seeking to establish. Both were conscious of their predecessors -- Proust reading Montaigne; Woolf, both Proust and Montaigne -- and both had occasion to reflect upon a possible relation between the texts they encountered and their own. The link between Proust and Montaigne is the least well-established of the three: Montaigne is in fact one of 'Les Grands Absents d'*A la recherche*',<sup>12</sup> never alluded or referred to in the course of Proust's giant text. However, it is clear from his

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<sup>9</sup> Jane Marcus, 'Thinking Back Through Our Mothers', in *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), pp. 1-30 (pp. 2-3).

<sup>10</sup> 'Women and Fiction', in *Granite and Rainbow: Essays by Virginia Woolf* (London: Hogarth, 1958), pp. 76-84 (p. 81).

<sup>11</sup> Virginia Woolf, '*A Room of One's Own*' and '*Three Guineas*' (London: Penguin, 1993), pp. 5-7.

<sup>12</sup> Michèle M. Magill, 'Les Grands Absents d'*A la recherche du temps perdu*', *Romance Notes*, 29 (1988-89), 15-20.

letters that Proust was familiar with the *Essais*, and that he greatly admired his Renaissance forebear. Quotations from, and allusions to, the *Essais* are scattered through his *Correspondance*,<sup>13</sup> while letters to Robert de Montesquiou and Alberto Lumbroso demonstrate his pleasure at contemporary critical comparisons between his own work and Montaigne's.<sup>14</sup> Jacques Porel (who relates how Proust would cite the *Essais* at great length) also makes clear that Proust, like the selves I shall discuss below, sharpened and defined his own thought through dialogue with his literary others.<sup>15</sup>

Like Proust, Woolf was a critic as well as a novelist, and she negotiated with the texts she encountered even more self-consciously than her French contemporary. Her dialogue with Montaigne is carried on throughout her writing life; in letters to friends after a visit to his famous tower; in her diaries; in a more engaged fashion in her reading notebooks.<sup>16</sup> She also actively appropriates him as a literary forebear; conceiving him as her starting-point in a projected history of modern literature and thought, and writing an essay for the *TLS* in 1924 which establishes him as a precursor and example.<sup>17</sup> This obvious identification with his work has led to a number of recent studies which, considering his influence upon her work,

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, his letters to Lionel Hauser, in May 1917 and Paul Souday, 1 January 1920. *Correspondance*, ed. by Philip Kolb, 21 vols (Paris: Plon, 1970-93), XVI (1917), p. 133 and XIX (1920), p. 38.

<sup>14</sup> Proust notes in a letter to Montesquiou dated 15 May 1907 that Beaunier 'm'y comparait à Montaigne et diverses autres personnes de qualité', and reflects with evident satisfaction upon 'l'effet que cela avait produit'. He writes to Lumbroso in May 1920 that 'Léon Daudet est revenu à plusieurs reprises dans l'*Action française* où il me nomme le délicieux héritier de Montaigne, l'incomparable (pardon!) Marcel Proust'. *Correspondance*, VII (1907), p. 157; XIX (1920), pp. 266-67.

<sup>15</sup> Jacques Porel, *Fils de Réjane* (Paris: Plon, 1951), I, pp. 321, 328.

<sup>16</sup> Woolf writes to Ethel Smyth, to Vita Sackville-West (twice), and to Vanessa Bell about her visit to Montaigne in April 1931: 'The Tower still stands; and the very door, room, stairs, and windows where, in which – grammar gone – Montaigne wrote his essays; also his saddle and a view precisely the same he saw. Does this excite you?'. See *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Nigel Nicolson, 6 vols (London: Hogarth, 1975-80). IV: *A Reflection of the Other Person, 1929-1931*, pp. 317-19. Woolf's reading notes on Montaigne are gathered in volumes XX, XXIII and XXVI of the Holograph Notes. See Brenda R. Silver, *Virginia Woolf's Reading Notebooks* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 113, 122 and 143.

<sup>17</sup> See *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Andrew McNeillie, 4 vols (London: Hogarth, 1986- ), IV, pp. 71-81.

or her 'reception' of his, draw their thought very close together.<sup>18</sup> I wish to argue instead for a more problematic relationship between their writing and thought. By pitching a reading of Montaigne against a reading of Woolf -- rather than addressing questions of influence or reception -- I wish to propose a more plural and unstable relationship between their work; a relationship marked by tensions as well as affinities.

Woolf also identifies Proust as a possible influence for her work. She began to read *A la recherche* early in 1922, after encouragement from Roger Fry, and her letters and diaries record both a sustained admiration for the novel ('I am in a state of amazement; as if a miracle were being done before my eyes'), and a recognition that Proust's writing and thought might come to shape her own.<sup>19</sup>

I have indicated above some of the ways in which the relationship between other and self may potentially be figured. It may be oppositional, it may be circumscriptive, it may enable or prohibit self-realization or expression. However, it may be helpful, before turning to the texts themselves, to provide a more systematic summary of the ways in which the self-other relation may be formulated or exploited, as well as an outline of the trajectory which I shall seek to trace out as I follow the development of this relation from Montaigne to Proust to Woolf. The diagrams overpage seek to perform the first of these functions; mapping the basic

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<sup>18</sup> See in particular Juliet Dusinberre, *Virginia Woolf's Renaissance: Woman Reader or Common Reader?* (London: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 40-64, and Dudley M. Marchi, *Montaigne Among the Moderns: Receptions of the 'Essais'* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1994), pp. 185-92, 222-77. Dusinberre sees Montaigne as part of an 'alternative' Renaissance to which Woolf could belong; Marchi, Woolf's commitment to personal vision as a refraction of Montaignean scepticism and belief in individual difference. See also Nicola Luckhurst's, 'To Quote my Quotation from Montaigne', in *Virginia Woolf: Reading the Renaissance*, ed. by Sally Greene (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1999), pp. 41-64; which posits the *Essais* as Woolf's source. I shall return to consider these discussions below, none of which, however, explores the idea of the self.

<sup>19</sup> *Letters, II: The Question of Things Happening*, pp. 565-66 (writing to Roger Fry, 3 October 1922); *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Anne Olivier Bell, 5 vols (London: Hogarth, 1977-84), II: 1920-24, p. 234 (10 February 1923). Woolf writes: 'I wonder if this next lap will be influenced by Proust? I think his French language, tradition, &c, prevents that: yet his command of every resource is so extravagant that one can hardly fail to profit, & must not flinch, through cowardice.'

FIGURE 1: PERMUTATIONS OF THE SELF-OTHER RELATION, I

SAMENESS

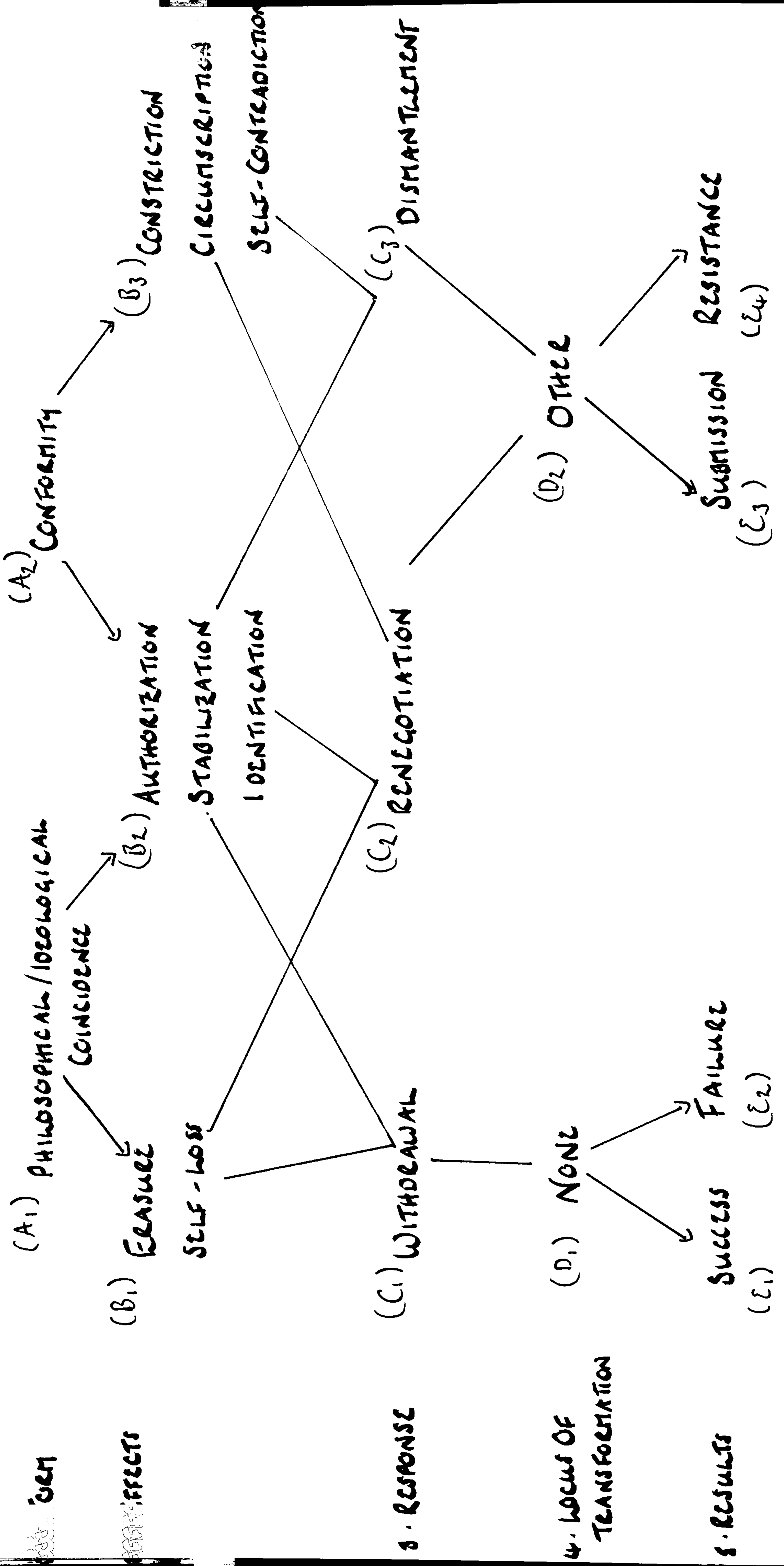
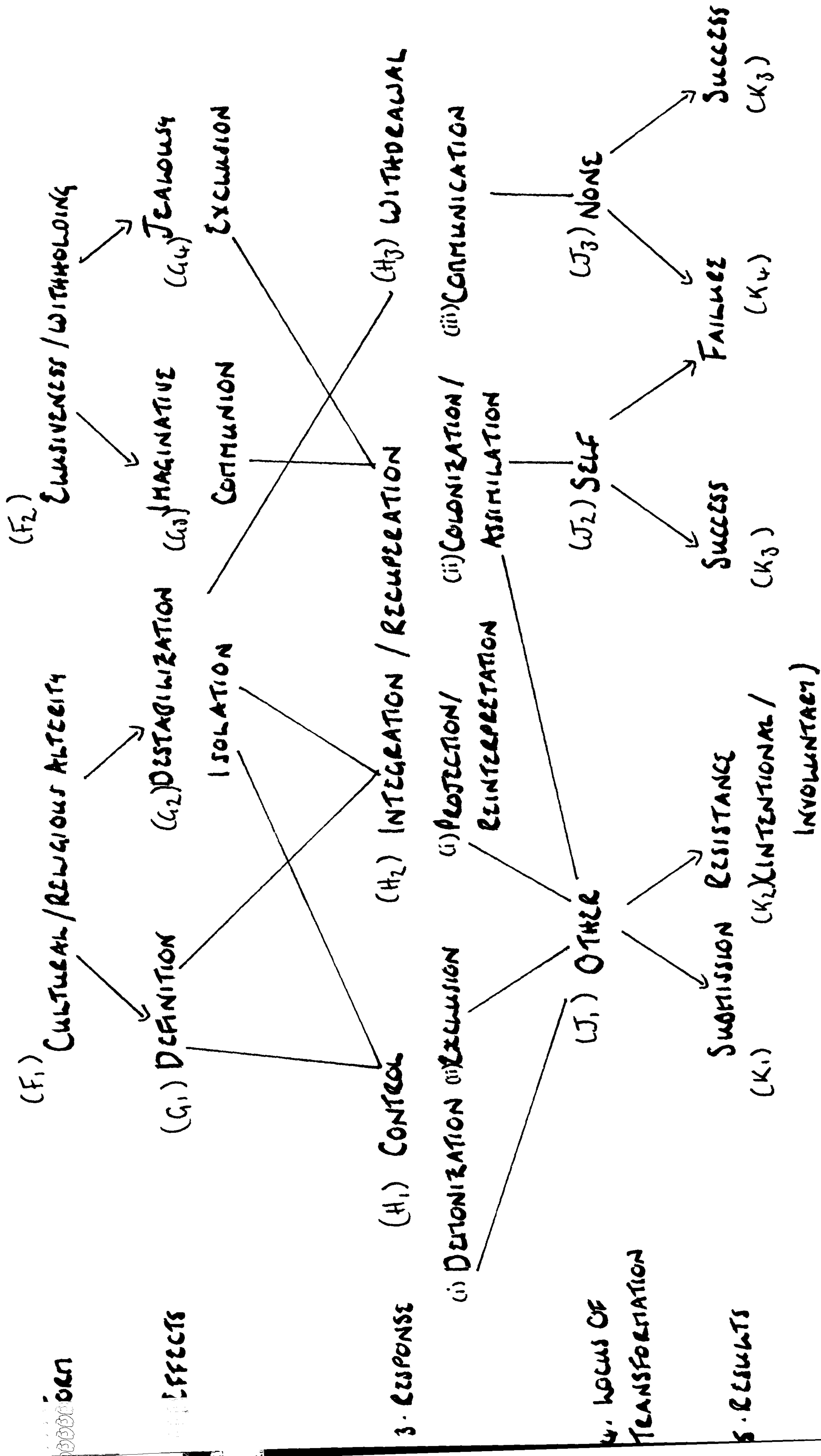


FIGURE 2: PERMUTATIONS OF THE SELF-OTHER RELATION, II:

DIFFERENCE





forms which the encounter takes, the responses available to the self, and the potential results of such negotiations.

The self-other relations depicted in the chapters which follow are characterized in the first instance either by a fundamental sameness, or by a decisive difference. Relationships of sameness are displayed in figure one; of difference, in figure two.

*Form.* Sameness may take the form either of a philosophical or ideological coincidence of self and other -- as, for example, when the self identifies or agrees with a thinker from classical antiquity (A1) -- or of a close integration of the two; as when the self participates in, or conforms to, a wider social or political order or community (A2). The difference of the other most commonly consists in a cultural or religious alterity -- for example that of the cannibal or witch (F1) -- but it may sometimes take a second form. An object of desire, for example, may manifest its otherness principally through its elusiveness; through withholding itself from the subject (F2). In this case its 'difference' consists in a refusal to conform to the aspirations or desires of the self.

*Effects.* In each instance, the sameness or difference of the other may potentially have positive or negative consequences for the self. Both the conformity of the self to a wider order, and the philosophical coincidence of self and other, potentially enable the self to appropriate or reinforce a coherent identity, by providing a framework within which it can identify and articulate its selfhood, and authorize and stabilize its thought (B2). However, each may equally have a negative effect upon the self. When the self locates itself within a wider order, it potentially faces the curtailment or contradiction of its subjectivity, as the external structure imposes a form upon it (B3). When its thought coincides with that of the other, however, it finds that its boundaries begin to dissolve, and that it loses its integrity as an independent entity (B1).

The difference of the other, likewise, may have in both its forms either benefits or drawbacks for the self. Social or cultural alterity may act as a defining other, identifying through its difference the position and boundaries of the self (G1). However, its difference may equally be experienced as a threat: as a subversion of, or challenge to, the perspective of the self (G2). The withholding of the other may in certain circumstances benefit the self; which is able in its absence to construct an imagined ideal relation with it (G3). More commonly, however, such an elusiveness leads to frustration and to a painful sense of exclusion (G4).

*Response.* In the works I have chosen to discuss, the sameness or difference of the other is always experienced either in positive and negative terms at once (most noticeably in Montaigne) or in purely negative terms; never in positive terms alone. As a result, the self is always compelled to modify its relation with the other in order to secure a coherent or stable identity. This modification may take a variety of forms. The self may first of all withdraw; whether from a circumscriptive wider framework (C1), or from the threat of the cannibal or witch (H3). More commonly, however, the self seeks to negotiate with the other, and to redefine its relation with it. When the self-other relation is characterized by sameness, the self most commonly attempts to preserve its position within the wider community, but to negotiate either a degree of difference from the other (if it finds that its boundaries have begun to dissolve), or to secure a degree of autonomy (if it has found itself subject to circumscription) (C2). The self constrained by a wider order may alternatively reject negotiation, and seek instead to dismantle the structures by which it is trapped (C3).

When the other is different from the self, the self may choose either to control, or to eliminate, that difference. If the former, the other may become subject either to demonization (the cannibal interpreted in terms of inferiority and absence, the Protestant/Catholic in terms of heresy) (H1i) or to exclusion (H1ii). If the self chooses to eliminate the difference of the

other, it commonly reinterprets the other's position such that it reinforces, rather than undermining, the beliefs, priorities, or philosophical coordinates of the self (H2i). In this instance, the other is changed only in the mind of the self. Alternatively, the self may seek a more substantive colonization, in which the behaviour of the other, as well as its conceptual significance, is dictated by the self (H2ii). The self may also, more rarely, seek assimilation to its other (H2ii). The self which envies the privileges of a different social category may seek not to convert the other to its own terms, but rather to reinvent itself in the image of that other. The self which encounters an other characterized by difference may finally establish communication with it (H2iii). Less appropriate than the other available responses, this is most frequently the project of a self isolated or separated from a wider social whole.

These responses are not, of course, exclusive. In some instances, the self performs one operation in preparation for another. Thus the demonization or discreditation of the other may be an end in itself, but is often a preliminary step designed to 'legitimate' a subsequent colonization. In other cases, the self may be led by the failure of one response to consider or attempt another. If the other resists an attempted assimilation, the self will generally seek to control through demonization the difference it is unable to eliminate. Some responses may also conflate two or more forms of negotiation. Demonization, for example, is often, but not always, a form of marginalization or exclusion.

*Locus of transformation /Results.* Each of these responses to the problematic self-other relation may meet in the short term with either success or failure. If the other is the projected site of transformation (if it, rather than the self, is to be changed in the process of negotiation) (D2; J1), then the self's success or failure will take the form of submission or resistance by the other (E3, E4; K1, K2). Resistance may be carefully plotted, but it may equally be unconscious, or even involuntary. If the self is the locus of transformation (J2), or if neither the self nor the other is to be changed in the course of negotiation (when the self withdraws,

the relationship between the two terms shifts, but neither is transformed in itself) (D1; J3). then success or failure takes the form of an achievement or failure by the self of its anticipated end (E1, E2; K3, K4). In most instances, the process of negotiation comes to an end at this point. If the self succeeds, it establishes the relationship, and appropriates the identity, for which it has been seeking; if it fails, it returns to the problematic relationship indicated at level B or G. However, in some cases, the situation is more complex than this. It is possible that success may lead to disappointment rather than fulfilment. When the self seeks to colonize a mysterious or exotic other, for example, or to be assimilated into a privileged or desired community, it may find that success leads to demystification and disillusionment rather than self-realization. In these situations, the self may accept the new relation, or it may enter into a new series of projections and negotiations designed to recover the lost allure. In other instances, withdrawal from an other, or the explosion of a framework which circumscribes the self, does achieve the liberation for which the self was looking, but at the same time pitches the subject towards self-loss. Once again, therefore, further negotiation is required. There may also, finally, be unexpected consequences for the self which fails to attain the relationship it seeks. In certain circumstances, the self which fails in its negotiation with the other does not simply return to its former, unsatisfactory relationship, but finds itself subject in addition to self-fragmentation or erasure.

The principal trajectory I shall map out through exploring these negotiations in Montaigne, Proust and Woolf is one of increasing detachment from wider orders and frameworks, and an increasing perception and installation of the self as a source and agent in the construction of its own identity. The self which begins by demanding that self and other be fashioned together into a coherent order that provides the self with a stable set of co-ordinates and identity, ends, after a series of transpositions and shifts, by negotiating a relationship in which the wider community or individual other triggers and enables self-expression, but remains essentially external to the process of self-construction. However, I also wish to insist

upon fundamental continuities between the visions of the writers I am considering. In each of the chapters which follow, the self is determined to protect or to negotiate an identity consistent with its own integrity or ambition. Thus even the self which takes up a place in a wider order or community is careful to construct that order in such a way that it legitimates its own point of view, or makes provision for a degree of personal autonomy. At the same time, however, each writer makes clear that the self remains dependent upon the other. The self which approaches autonomy most closely also tends towards self-loss.

I have also, more briefly, sought to sketch out a counter-trajectory. While at one level Proust and Woolf move away from the situated self elaborated in Montaigne, and pursue his commitment to individual subjectivity in increasingly radical directions, at another they express a longing for the integrated orders and coherent relations which the *Essais* describe, and examine the extent to which it possible to recuperate such a stability and relatedness.

The first of these trajectories is in a broad sense supported by Charles Taylor's discussion of modern inwardness in his monumental work on the development of modern identity.

Beginning with Plato, for whom the self properly governed by reason participates in an inherently-meaningful cosmic order, he traces first the transition to Descartes -- for whom 'ideas' and meanings are located in the mind, and the world is a disenchanted mass of pure matter -- and from Descartes the evolution of the self-responsible modern individual, governed by ideals of freedom and self-mastery.<sup>20</sup> This progressive internalization of ideas and moral sources finds echoes in my own discussion, which at a different level also depicts the (attempted) appropriation by the self of the power to construct and confer, rather than simply to acknowledge, identities and meanings. However, the complete disengagement from the world described by Taylor moves far beyond the partial impulse to self-regulation

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<sup>20</sup> Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: C. U. P., 1989). For Plato, see pp. 115-26 (in particular, pp. 120-24); for Descartes, pp. 143-58 (pp. 143-49); for the self-responsible modern self, pp. 159-60, 167-74, 185.

expressed in the texts I am considering; in which self-articulation always depends upon either the submission, or the inspiration, of an other.

Elsewhere in his account, Taylor explicitly establishes a link between Montaigne and modern subjectivity; identifying him as a crucial figure in the tradition of self-exploration which develops from Augustine's elaboration of a 'radically reflexive' stance (that intimate self-presence in which I am aware of my own awareness, and experience my own experiencing). This tradition, in which identity is mapped through probing the contours of individual interiority, is seen to anticipate the modern commitment to individual particularity and difference,<sup>21</sup> and it clearly would be possible, therefore, to link Montaigne with Proust and Woolf in these terms. However, this tradition of self-exploration excludes, rather than focusses, the self's relation with the other, and it therefore has little in common with the terms of my own discussion. While I shall have occasion in what follows to consider the self's inner depths, in particular the jealousy and desire examined so exhaustively in the later volumes of *A la recherche*, I am concerned only with the ways in which these emotions and desires motivate or generate the self's relationship with its other.

The thesis breaks down into three main chapters; each of which examines a series of self-other dialectics, and each of which concentrates upon one of the writers I have chosen to discuss. The opening chapter considers the *Essais*, and focusses most closely upon two of Montaigne's most famous essays. In 'Des cannibales', the European self is confronted with the cultural difference of the New World native; an otherness which it seeks to interpret and dissolve. I shall suggest, in a different way than other writers of Montaigne's time. In the *Apologie de Raymond Sebond*, Montaigne explores the relationship between man and God,

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<sup>21</sup> Taylor discusses Montaigne, pp. 177-84, and Augustine's radical reflexivity, pp. 127-42 (see especially, pp. 129-31).

and my discussion examines the tensions in the text between a desire to locate the self within the framework of Christian theology, and a counter-impulse to autonomy. Before turning to these two essays, however, the chapter looks in a less detailed way at three other self-other relations in the *Essais*. Two of these dialectics -- between the self and classical antiquity, and between the self and the supernatural other -- feature strongly in other Renaissance discussions of otherness and self-fashioning, but are reinflected, once again, in important ways by Montaigne. The third dialectic, between the self and wider social communities, articulates more openly the sense of curtailment which remains beneath the surface of the *Apologie*, and seeks to negotiate an independent identity for the individual self. The chapter closes with a short discussion of scepticism in the *Essais*; looking at both the ways in which it is exploited in the *Apologie*, and its employment elsewhere in the text to explore alternative ways of responding to the other.

The second chapter, on Proust, examines first of all the extended struggle between a series of bourgeois selves and their aristocratic other in *A la recherche*. Deeply envious of the nobility's social distinction, these characters seek to assume an aristocratic status and identity, and my discussion considers both the extent to which this project is realized, and the consequences for the self of its failure. The second part of the chapter turns to consider the relationship between the antisemitic self and its Jewish other. Various cast in terms of religious, cultural and racial otherness, the Jew is subject in turn to strategies of assimilation, demonization and exclusion, and I have explored the ways in which, and the extent to which, it is successful in resisting these attempted appropriations. The chapter finally examines the relationship between the subject and object of desire. The self is impelled by a compulsive jealousy to seek knowledge and control of the other's movements and thoughts, and my discussion explores the series of paradoxes which first prevent, and then render hollow, such a colonization.

The final chapter begins with a discussion of Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, and the dialogue it stages between the female self and the patriarchal order. Contrasting the cautious negotiations of Mrs Ramsay, who remains largely complicit with the patriarchal regime, with the more radical response of Lily Briscoe, my account considers different forms of social and spiritual community, and the extent to which they make provision for female self-expression. The second half of the chapter turns to examine the plight of the isolated modernist self, first in *Mrs Dalloway* -- which expresses a longing for reintegration, but scepticism about the possibility of achieving such a communion -- and then comparatively in *To the Lighthouse* and *A la recherche*. The latter texts, which treat the question more systematically, both propose that a degree, at least, of resolution may be achieved through art.



## MONTAIGNE

‘[B] Qui que ce soit, ou art ou nature, qui nous imprime cette condition de vivre par la relation à autrui, nous faict beaucoup plus de mal que de bien’.<sup>1</sup> The *Essais* articulate, time and again, the threat which the other poses to the self. The authority of the other constrains the self, its alterity destabilizes the self, its eloquence overshadows the self, and the demands it makes displace the self from itself. In every instance, it appears, the other undermines the integrity, impedes the realization, or challenges the position of the individual subject.

However, there is also in the *Essais* -- for all the vocabulary of inwardness and the claims of self-sufficiency -- a consciousness that the self depends upon the other. It is in relation to the other that subjectivity is defined and expressed, through the mirror of the other that self-consciousness is claimed, and through negotiation with the other that beliefs and values are authorized and affirmed. These contradictions are not the result of an unstable subjective perspective: the famous flux of human being. Rather, they express a paradox whereby the self is at the same time both threatened by otherness and dependent upon it. Each other which the subject encounters brings both the promise of self-realization, and the threat of circumscription or self-loss. I wish to suggest in what follows that this paradox is resolved in each instance by binding self and other together into integrated orders which reflect or accommodate the values and ideas of the self. Either the self takes up a place in an existing moral or spiritual order (often reinterpreted to accommodate its own priorities), or it constructs ‘communities of belief’, assigning apparently alien cultural and religious others significances which resonate with its own. Before turning to ‘Des cannibales’ and the *Apologie de Raymond Sebond*, I wish to argue for the wide resonance of this paradox and solution by considering in a less detailed way their articulation elsewhere in the text.

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<sup>1</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Albert Thibaudet and Maurice Rat (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), III: 9; p. 932. All references are to this edition, and are hereafter cited in parentheses after quotations in the text. The letters A, B and C indicate the edition in which the passage quoted first appeared; referring respectively to the editions of 1580, 1588 and 1595.

## Self and classical other

The experience of being dependent upon, yet also threatened by, the other is repeatedly expressed by Renaissance selves in relation to the classical past. Exemplary and authoritative, ancient authors and texts provide on the one hand models for understanding and responding to the world which inspire and ground Renaissance writing and thought. Plato, Plutarch, Cicero and Seneca offer frameworks and contexts within which the Renaissance self can think, and in relation to which it can develop its own ideas. At the same time, however, exemplary classical others often appear to leave no room for the self. Saturating the self's intellectual space,<sup>2</sup> they cast seemingly inescapable shadows which threaten to envelop it.

This anxiety-dependence dichotomy emerges in various configurations over the course of the *Essais*. I wish to consider two of them here; the first at the beginning of 'De l'institution des enfants':

[A] Entreprenant de parler indifferemment de tout ce qui se presente à ma fantasie et n'y employant que mes propres et naturels moyens, s'il m'advient, comme il faict souvent, de rencontrer de fortune dans les bons auteurs ces mesmes lieux que j'ay entrepris de traiter, comme je vien de faire chez Plutarque tout presentement son discours de la force de l'imagination, à me reconnoistre, au prix de ces gens là, si foible et si chetif, si poisant et si endormy, je me fay pitié ou desdain à moy mesmes. Si me gratifie-je de cecy, que mes opinions ont cet honneur de rencontrer souvent aux leurs; et que je vais au moins de loing après, disant que voire. (I: 26; p. 145)

On the one hand, the coincidence between the thought of the classical other and that of the self reinforces and affirms the 'propres et naturels moyens' of the individual subject, which appropriates the authority of the ancient other to legitimate and validate its own thought. At

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Throughout the thesis, French texts are cited in the original; other languages in translation.

<sup>2</sup> The phrase is Jeanneret's; used in his description of the ancients' threat to Montaigne: 'They are omnipresent, they saturate his intellectual space. Their books fill up his library; their mottoes are engraved on the beams of the ceiling; their examples haunt his memory and, when he sets himself to

the same time, however, the superiority of the classical articulation poses a threat. Its eloquence and excellence expose the deficiency of the subject's thought, which appears 'foible', 'chetif', 'poisant' and 'endormy' in comparison. The classical other authorizes and undermines the self at once.

Later in the same essay, different tensions characterize the relation with the classical other:

[A] Qu'il luy face tout passer pas l'estamine et ne loge rien en sa teste par simple autorité et à credit; les principes d'Aristote ne luy soyent principes, non plus que ceux des Stoiciens ou Epicuriens. Qu'on luy propose cette diversité de jugemens: il choisira s'il peut, sinon il en demeurera en doute. [...] S'il embrasse les opinions de Xenophon et de Platon par son propre discours, ce ne seront plus les leurs, ce seront les siennes. [C] Qui suit un autre, il ne suit rien. Il ne trouve rien, voire il ne cherche rien. *Non sumus sub rege; sibi quisque se vindicet.* (p. 150)

Once again, a doubleness becomes apparent in this passage. On the one hand, the encounter with the classical other is seen to enable the formation or realization of individual identity: the child identifies with, and appropriates to himself, values and ideas which are articulated or formulated for him by the classical authors he comes into contact with. Plato and Xenophon hold up a mirror through which he is able to recognize and claim as his own a set of philosophical coordinates and values. His subjectivity is realized, and his identity fashioned and formed, through the internalization of ideas and ideals expressed by the classical other.

However, there is also in this passage an undercurrent of anxiety about the status of subjectivities fashioned in this way. The insistence that 'Qui suit un autre, il ne suit rien' suggests a fear that the presence of these exemplary forbears may lead to the erasure or absorption of the self which identifies with them. Invested with authority and priority, and occupying the same theoretical space as the self, they threaten to obliterate it altogether. A

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write, their words, their ideas flow from his pen.' Michel Jeanneret, 'The Renaissance and its Ancients:

comparable anxiety also hovers around the margins of the first extract above. The self which begins the extract proudly declaring its independence and originality is reduced by the close to a follower-after; murmuring 'hear hear' as it trails in the wake of the exemplary ancient author who has already expressed its ideas. The problem is more acute, however, in this second instance. The commitments of the self are now forged through, rather than prior to, the encounter with the other, and the authenticity of the self which it produces thus begins to be called into question. A fear of self-alienation and absence lurks behind the insistence, throughout 'De l'institution des enfans' that the self which appropriates the thought of another fashions an authentic subjectivity: 'S[i l'enfant] embrasse les opinions de Xenophon et de Platon par son propre discours, ce ne seront plus les leurs, ce seront les siennes.'<sup>3</sup> A related fear is that the classical other may constrain the self, or limit its horizons: '[B] Nostre ame ne branle qu'à credit, liée et contrainte à l'appetit des fantasies d'autrui, serve et captivée sous l'autorité de leur leçon' (p. 150); '[C] *Obest plerumque iis qui discere volunt auctoritas eorum qui docent*' (p. 149).

There are at least two contradictory relationships between self and classical other in the text, therefore. The superior ancient text authorizes the ideas of the self, but the gap between their present expression and the earlier, more eloquent articulation demonstrates the inferiority and weakness of the self. Identification with a classical other, however, while it forges and clarifies subjectivity, also carries a threat of inauthenticity, restriction and the loss of individual integrity.

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Dismembering and Devouring', *MLN*, 110 (1995), 1043-53 (p. 1043).

<sup>3</sup> Similar statements are also scattered through the *Essais* as a whole. See, for example, 'De la præsumption': '[A] Les plus fermes imaginations que j'aye, et generalles, sont celles qui, par maniere de dire, nasquirent avec moy. Elles sont naturelles et toutes miennes. Je les produisis crues et simples, d'une production hardie et forte, mais un peu trouble et imparfaicte; depuis je les ay establies et fortifiées par l'autorité d'autrui, et par les sains discours des anciens, ausquels je me suis rencontré conforme en jugement: ceux-là m'en ont assuré la prinse, et m'en ont donné la jouyssance et possession plus entiere' (II: 17; pp. 641-42).

The text employs various strategies to resolve the difficulties it identifies in each of these two relations, while seeking in each case to preserve the benefits of the relationship with the classical past. The anxieties engendered by the superiority of the classical other are tackled through a reworking of the Renaissance doctrine of dissimulation; according to which the imitator should conceal his borrowings from classical sources, and display only his own refashioning of their ideas: 'This is what our mind should do: it should hide away all the materials by which it has been aided, and bring to light only what it has made of them.'<sup>4</sup> Thus Petrarch, writing of his young secretary, Giovanni Malpighini, writes: 'I am confident that he will strengthen his thought and expression, forging a personal style from his extensive reading, not necessarily avoiding imitation but concealing it so that his work will not resemble anyone else's, and appear to be bringing from the writers of old something new to Latium.'<sup>5</sup> The threat posed by the distinguished ancestor is overcome through the suppression of his presence in or behind the words of the self.

Dissimulation is also discussed in 'Des livres'. It is exploited by Montaigne, however, to a different end:

[B] Ès raisons et inventions que je transplante en mon solage et confons aux miennes, j'ay à escient ommis parfois d'en marquer l'autheur, pour tenir en bride la temerité de ces sentences hastives qui se jettent sur toute sorte d'escrits, notamment jeunes escrits d'hommes encore vivants, et en vulgaire, qui reçoit tout le monde à en parler et qui semble convaincre la conception et le dessein, vulgaire de mesmes. Je veux qu'ils donnent une nazarde à Plutarque sur mon nez, et qu'ils s'eschaudent à injurier Senèque en moy. Il faut musser ma foiblesse souz ces grands credits. (II: 10; pp. 387-88)

Montaigne declares that he practises the dissimulation urged by Seneca, deliberately omitting to signal what material he has borrowed and where he has taken it from. However, in announcing this concealment, he effectively exposes it: where in Seneca and Petrarch the

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<sup>4</sup> Seneca, *Ad Lucilium: epistulae morales*, trans. by Richard M. Gummere, 3 vols (London: Heinemann; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), II, LXXXIV, pp. 277-85 (p. 281).

<sup>5</sup> Petrarch, *Rerum familiarum libri, XXII - XXIV*, trans. by Aldo S. Bernardo (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), XXIII. 19 (to Giovanni Boccaccio); p. 301.

theory and practice of dissimulation are kept apart, and thus do not compromise the dissimulations they envisage, Montaigne combines the practice and annunciation of concealment; in what appears to be a self-frustrating move. However, it is a manoeuvre which makes sense in the context of, and as a response to, the complex relation of self and classical other he is seeking to resolve. The unacknowledged dissimulation for which Seneca calls only partially responds to this paradox. While it removes the threatening shadow of the imitated text, it also erases the other as a stabilizing force, able to justify and support the thinking of the self. As Pigman observes, in the 'thoroughly dissimulated transformation [...] the relation between text and model disappears'.<sup>6</sup> The benefit is lost with the threat. In the extract above, by contrast, the advantage of the ancient other is preserved, and only the threat disappears. The concealment of the other prevents the exposure of the inferiority of the self, as it does in a conventional dissimulation. At the same time, however, the declaration that classical writers have silently been incorporated into its fabric lends the text the authority of these invisible others, and since the locations of these borrowings are not announced, this authority is effectively extended to every part of the text.

The second paradoxical relation of self and classical other -- according to which the other facilitates the subject's self-constitution as a self-conscious category, but also threatens its authenticity and independence -- demands a different response. The issue is no longer the gap between the thought of the self and that of the classical other, but rather their identity, which leaves the self without an independent space in which to stand, and which raises questions about the authenticity of the identity it appropriates. The self must find a way, if not to depart radically from the classical other, at least to make the ancient's thought its own; to ground it in, and to make it express, its individual subjectivity.

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<sup>6</sup> G. W. Pigman III, 'Versions of Imitation in the Renaissance', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 33 (1980), 1-32 (p. 12).

This appropriation of the thought of the classical other is envisaged by Erasmus's *Bulephorus* in terms of a transformative imitation:

All that you have devoured in a long course of varied reading must be thoroughly digested and by the action of thought incorporated into your deepest mental processes, not your memory or word-list. Then your mind, fattened on fodder of all kinds, will generate out of its own resources not a speech redolent of this or that flower or leaf or herb, but one redolent of your personality, your sensitivities, your feelings, and the reader will hail not snippets abstracted from Cicero, but the manifestation of a mind packed with every kind of knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

The digestive topos mobilized by Erasmus here envisages the other broken down and absorbed by the self, and made to express its own nature and thought.<sup>8</sup> This effectively guarantees the integrity of the self's identity. Where the simple interiorization of the classical other constitutes the adoption of an artificial mask, its transformation through digestion is a natural process through which the self is nourished and fed in preparation for its self-realization through self-expression.<sup>9</sup> The other continues to be a vital source of individual subjectivity, but ceases to formulate, eclipse or constrain it, and the problematic doubleness of the self's relationship with it is thus essentially overcome.

There were apparently times during the composition of the *Essais* when Montaigne was sceptical about the possibility of performing such a naturalization of the exemplary other. The passage in 'De la phisionomie' which reflects upon his transformation of his sources, for example, ends in the 1588 edition with a suggestive comparison, later cut, which questions the possibility of appropriating the other and making it one's own:

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<sup>7</sup> *Collected Works of Erasmus*, XXVIII: *Dialogus Ciceronianus* (1528), trans. by Betty I. Knott, ed. by A. H. T. Levi (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), p. 402.

<sup>8</sup> Pigman, p. 8 lists other examples of this digestive topos (following Seneca) in Quintilian, Macrobius, Petrarch, Poliziano, Erasmus, Calcagnini, Dolet, Florido, Du Bellay, Sidney, and Jonson.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of how the metaphor of digestion is used first (in Quintilian) to envisage 'a process by which alien, external materials may be transformed so that they may re-emerge as a function of "nature", and more specifically of the speaker's nature', and then (in Erasmus) to root the transformed materials more directly in individual subjectivity, see Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 37, 42-43.

[B] Comme ceux qui desrobent les chevaux, je leur peins le crin et la queue, et parfois je les esborgne; si le premier maistre s'en servoit à bestes d'amble, je les mets au trot, et au bast, s'ils servoient à la selle. (III: 12; p. 1667)

A transformation of sorts takes place in the extract here, but it is far from the confident assumption of possession and the subjective reinvention demanded by the Erasmian formulation. There is a measure of redeployment -- saddle-horses are turned into pack animals, and former amblers made to trot -- and a degree of transformation: the appearance, at least, of the horses is changed. However, these changes are dictated primarily by the desire to employ them in a different way from their former master; rather than by the needs or priorities of the self which takes possession of them. In this sense, the change is a self-conscious, reactionary recoil from the practice of the former master, which continues to shape, although by inversion, the ways in which they are employed. The superficiality of this transformation also raises the issue of authenticity once more: the process of dyeing the horses' manes and tails in order 'desrobe[r]' them smacks of an artifice directly opposed to the natural self-expression demanded by Erasmus. And to the extent that the self does transform the horses, it has to deal once again with the issue of inferiority. The poking-out of the horse's eye suggests not subjective reinvention, but deformity: as the self attempts to make the other its own, it succeeds only in exposing its own deficiency.

Elsewhere, however, the notion of transformation is apparently embraced:

[C] Que [l'enfant] sache qu'il sçait, au moins. [A] Il faut qu'il emboive [les] humeurs [des anciens], non qu'il aprenne leurs preceptes. Et qu'il oublie hardiment, s'il veut, d'où il les tient, mais qu'il se les sçache approprier. La verité et la raison sont communes à un chacun, et ne sont non plus à qui les a dites premierement, qu'à qui les dict après. [C] Ce n'est non plus selon Platon que selon moy, puis que luy et moi l'entendons et voyons de mesme. [A] Les abeilles pillotent deçà delà les fleurs, mais elles en font après le miel, qui est tout leur; ce n'est plus thin ny marjolaine: ainsi les pieces empruntées d'autrui, il les transformera et confondera, pour en faire un ouvrage tout sien, à sçavoir son jugement. Son institution, son travail et estude ne vise qu'à le former. (I: 26; pp. 150-51)



Montaigne turns here to the most widely-deployed image of transformation in the Renaissance. As bees collect pollen from different flowers, but ultimately produce honey, which is a different substance entirely, so the child must draw upon the ideas of classical writers, but transform and combine them as he fashions his individual judgement. As in the Erasmian account, the self continues to depend upon the classical other -- which provides the substance from which it fashions its own ideas -- but its authenticity and individual integrity are no longer called into question.

However, the passage above moves beyond Erasmus: seeking to legitimate an identity between other and self. Erasmus assumes that an authentic self will be different from the classical other it follows: 'If you want to express the whole Cicero you cannot express yourself, and if you do not express yourself your speech will be a lying mirror.'<sup>10</sup> The subject must choose between expressing the other and expressing itself. Seneca, likewise, insists that self and other must be distinct: 'we should see to it that whatever we have absorbed should not be allowed to remain unchanged, or it will be no part of us'.<sup>11</sup> Montaigne, by contrast, before he turns to the apian metaphor, claims that 'La verité et la raison sont communes à un chacun, et ne sont non plus à qui les a dites premierement, qu'à qui les dict après. Ce n'est plus selon Platon que selon moy, puis que luy et moi l'entendons et voyons de mesme.' The erasure of the distinction between other and self is validated through the construction of truth as a static and absolute category. If such a truth may be seen to exist -- rather than simply a mass of relative perspectives -- then agreement with Plato represents not an imitation of him, but initiation into a community which has penetrated through to reality. The ideas expressed by the earlier writer are taken from his ownership, and made available to every subject to appropriate for himself according to his own understanding.<sup>12</sup> Identity is stabilized and

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<sup>10</sup> *Ciceronianus*, p. 399.

<sup>11</sup> *Epistulae morales*, LXXXIV, p. 281.

<sup>12</sup> See Rendall in this context: 'Truth and reason are common property. [...] In this domain at least, prior possession is not the relevant criterion of ownership, and Montaigne suggests that all ideas -- even Plato's -- are appropriated from a common fund. In doing so, he firmly locates literary property in the

solidified by its coincidence with the thought of the classical writer, therefore, rather than obliterated by it. And by grounding the 'alien' thought in the self's own judgement -- which expresses subjectivity even as it is itself fashioned in the encounter with the other -- the fear of inauthenticity is likewise overcome.

Each of the contradictory relations between the self and its classical other is resolved, therefore, as the self succeeds in authenticating its position within, or participating in, a community of shared philosophical ideas and beliefs first promulgated by the writers of the classical past. In the first instance, the gap which excluded the self is narrowed or disguised by the acknowledgement of unspecified classical borrowings, which thus authorize, without exposing the deficiency of, the thought and expression of the self. In the second instance, the appropriation by the self of the thought and ideas of the other is legitimated through the negotiation of a category of truth, and the elaboration of a theory of transformation, which naturalize the philosophies of the other in the subjectivity of the self.

### **Self and social other**

A second essay which examines the paradoxical status of otherness is 'De la vanité':

[B] 'Regardez, dict chacun, les branles du ciel, regardez au public, à la querelle de cettuy-là, au pouls d'un tel, au testament de cet autre; somme regardez tousjours haut ou bas, ou à costé, ou devant, ou derriere vous.' C'estoit un commandement paradoxe que nous faisoit anciennement ce Dieu à Delphes: 'Regardez dans vous, reconnoissez vous, tenez vous à vous; vostre esprit et vostre volonté, qui se consomme ailleurs, ramenez la en soy; vous vous escoulez, vous vous respandez; appilez vous, soutenez vous; on vous trahit, on vous dissipe, on vous desrobe à vous. Voy tu pas que ce monde tient toutes ses veues contraintes au dedans et ses yeux ouverts à se contempler soy-mesme?' (III: 9; p. 979)

Living with reference to others is here seen to lead to the loss or dissipation of selfhood.

Looking outwards rather than inwards, the subject pours itself out in various directions, and

thus loses sight of its own frontiers. This is a theme which, in various forms, resurfaces throughout the *Essais*. Earlier in 'De la vanité', it emerges in reverse: interaction with others is seen to constrain or delimit the self: '[B] Je fuis à me submitre à toute sorte d'obligation, mais sur tout à celle qui m'attache par devoir d'honneur. Je ne trouve rien si cher que ce qui m'est donné et ce pourquoy ma volonté demeure hypothequée par tiltre de gratitude, et reçois plus volontiers les offices qui sont à vendre. Je croy bien; pour ceux-cy je ne donne que de l'argent; pour les autres je me donne moy-mesme' (p. 944). Elsewhere, it leads to the falsification of self: '[B] Nous nous defraudons de nos propres utilitez pour former les apparences à l'opinion commune. Il ne nous chaut pas tant quel soit nostre estre en nous et en effaict, comme quel il soit en la cognoissance publique' (p. 932). And in 'De mesnager sa volonté', social ties are perceived as bonds which lead to the dispersal of selfhood rather than relations which ground and support it: '[B] La plus part des reigles et preceptes du monde [...] nous pousse[nt] hors de nous et chasse[nt] en la place, à l'usage de la societé publique. Ils ont pensé faire un bel effect de nous destourner et distraire de nous, presupposans que nous n'y tinsions que trop' (III: 10; p. 983). The wider community invites the self to compromise, pressurize, or dispossess itself, and at times itself performs such a dispossession. As it enters into relations with the social other, the subject finds itself bound by a contract, or a process of exchange, which in some sense circumscribes its agency.

The solution offered to these constraints in the passage itself is a turning-away from the world, and a turning-in upon oneself: 'Regardez dans vous, reconnoissez vous, tenez vous à vous; vostre esprit et vostre volonté, qui se consomme ailleurs, ramenez la en soy; [...] appilez vous, soutenez vous.' To the extent that the subject is able to generate and sustain itself, it can withdraw from the world which threatens to restrain or control it, and live in accordance with itself. This is a philosophy which reverberates right through the final book of the *Essais*: '[B] ne vous tenez pas à leur sentence; [C] tenez vous à la vostre. *Tuo tibi judicio est utendum*' (III: 2; p. 785); '[B] Nous [...] devons avoir estably un patron au dedans,

auquel toucher nos actions, et selon iceluy, nous caresser tantost, tantost nous chastier. J'ay mes loix et ma court pour juger de moy, et m'y adresse plus qu'ailleurs' (p. 785).<sup>13</sup>

However, the same essays which expose the dangers of the social other also articulate a dependence upon it which problematizes such an impulse to autonomy. Subjectivity is realized and fashioned at a number of levels in 'De l'utile et de l'honneste' in relation to the social or public other:

[B] Certes, j'ay eu souvent despit de voir des juges attirer par fraude et fauces esperances de faveur ou pardon le criminel à descouvrir son fait, et y employer la piperie et l'impudence. Il serviroit bien à la justice, et à Platon mesmes, qui favorise cet usage, de me fournir d'autres moyens plus selon moy. C'est une justice malitieuse; et ne l'estime pas moins blessée par soy-mesme que par autruy. Je respondy, n'y a pas long temps, qu'à peine trahirois-je le Prince pour un particulier, qui serois très marry de trahir aucun particulier pour le Prince; et ne hay pas seulement à piper, mais je hay aussi qu'on se pipe en moy. Je n'y veux pas seulement fournir de matiere et d'occasion.

En ce peu que j'ay eu à negotier entre nos Princes, en ces divisions et subdivisions qui nous deschirent aujourd'huy, j'ay curieusement evité qu'ils se mesprinsent en moy et s'enferrassent en mon masque. (III: 1; p. 768)

The dangers of the public realm remain visible in the passage here. The negotiations which take place in both law and royal courts invite, if they do not necessitate, falsification of and by the self, and the demands made upon the self once it enters the public realm are likewise made clear. However, this extract also demonstrates the vital role that the social other has to play in the appropriation and realization of identity. The moral dimension of selfhood, in particular, is validated and tested in the public sphere: the self which wishes to represent 'truth' against 'falsity' secures such an identity through faithfulness in negotiation with Prince and people. It is also clear that identity is not a private possession, but also depends

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<sup>13</sup> The same position is taken up, although less consistently, elsewhere in the *Essais*. See especially 'De la solitude' (I: 39): '[A] Faisons que nostre contentement despende de nous; desprenons nous de toutes les liaisons qui nous attachent à autruy, gagnons sur nous de pouvoir à bon escient vivre seuls et y vivre à nostr'aise' (pp. 234-35); '[A] L'homme d'entendement n'a rien perdu, s'il a soy mesme' (p. 235); '[A] La plus grande chose du monde, c'est de sçavoir estre à soy' (p. 236).

upon the perception of others: the self which elsewhere wishes to withdraw from the sight and interference of the world, here invests energy in seeking to ensure that it is transparent to those who encounter it.

The idea of public negotiation also raises the issue of duty; another theme which recurs throughout the final book of the *Essais*. ‘De l’utile et de l’honneste’ and ‘De mesnager sa volonté’ in particular consider public service, and they demonstrate once again that while such duties clearly involve the constraints discussed above, they also represent an important part of the purpose and calling of the self.<sup>14</sup> Thus while ‘De mesnager sa volonté’ complains that ‘[B] Les hommes se donnent à louage. Leurs facultez ne sont pas pour eux, elles sont pour ceux à qui ils s’asservissent; leurs locataires sont chez eux, ce ne sont pas eux’ (p. 981), it also offers significant counter-statements: the man who knows ‘[B] ce qu’il se doibt, trouve dans son rolle qu’il doibt appliquer à soy l’usage des autres hommes et du monde, et, pour ce faire, contribuer à la société publique les devoirs et offices qui le touchent. [C] Qui ne vit aucunement à autruy, ne vit guere à soy’ (p. 984). Even ‘De la vanité’ sets against its exposition of the dangers of the social other, an acknowledgement of the importance of public service: ‘[B] Je suis de cet avis, que la plus honorable vacation est de servir au public et estre utile à beaucoup’ (p. 929).

Like the relationship between the self and classical other, therefore, that between the self and the wider social whole is marked by clear tensions. On the one hand, it compromises, circumscribes and dissipates the self; delimiting or dispersing it through the demands it places upon it. On the other hand, however, it has an important part to play in the fashioning of subjectivity. The moral dimension of identity is negotiated in the public sphere, and subjectivity is also realized in part through the performance of social and political roles. The

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<sup>14</sup> Margaret McGowan discusses three roles which Montaigne carves out for the nobleman in society: a military role, a courtier’s role, and a political role. All three are clearly governed by the tensions I am

fulfilment of selfhood involves taking up a place in a wider social order, as well as guarding and protecting the boundaries of individual subjectivity.<sup>15</sup>

The self is confronted with the problem, therefore, of finding a way of engaging with, or participating in, the world as a public servant or moral agent, while retaining its integrity and freedom. One solution is proposed in ‘De la coustume et de ne changer aisément une loy receüe’:

[A] Le sage doit au dedans retirer son ame de la presse, et la tenir en liberté et puissance de juger librement des choses; mais, quant au dehors, qu’il doit suivre entierement les façons et formes receues. La société publique n’a que faire de nos pensées; mais le demeurant, comme nos actions, nostre travail, nos fortunes et nostre vie propre, il la faut prêter et abandonner à son service et aux opinions communes. (I: 23; p. 117)

This passage seeks to respond to the duty-integrity dichotomy by splitting the self into public and private layers. Withdrawal from the world is accompanied by a surface conformity to its demands; as the self fashions an external face which performs the roles demanded by the world, and an internal subjectivity which withholds itself, and remains untainted by such contact. As Starobinski puts it, the self seeks to ‘préserver l’intégrité du rapport à soi, tout en interposant, en direction d’autrui, les apparences exigées par les circonstances: on offrira au dehors une image sans vérité’.<sup>16</sup> This apparently has potential for the self faced with public duty, which is able through such a doubling of itself to fulfil its roles within the social or political community, while protecting and preserving its independent integrity as an individual subject. Thus ‘De mesnager sa volonté’ recommends a detached service which

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identifying here. ‘Montaigne: A Social Role for the Nobleman?’, in *Montaigne and his Age*, ed. by Keith Cameron (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1981), pp. 87-96 (pp. 92-95).

<sup>15</sup> Jack I. Abecassis discusses similar ‘antagonistic views’ in his account of the public/private theme in Montaigne. ‘Adherence to custom as a necessary principle of public social practice’ is set against ‘an optional private artistic creation which represents the writer’s subjective free play with tradition, experience and desire’. In this instance, however, the self never ceases to engage with external codes and traditions: the tension Abecassis discusses is between the necessity to conform to, and the desire to exploit or rewrite, these codes. “‘Le Maire et Montaigne ont tousjours esté deux, d’une separation bien claire”’: Public Necessity and Private Freedom in Montaigne’, *MLN*, 110 (1995), 1067-89 (pp. 1067-68).

tends towards such role-play: '[B] Je ne veux pas qu'on refuse aux charges qu'on prend l'attention, les pas, les parolles, et la sueur et le sang au besoing: *non ipse pro charis amicis/ Aut patria timidus perire*. Mais c'est par emprunt et accidentalement, l'esprit se tenant tousjours en repos et en santé, non pas sans action, mais sans vexation, sans passion. [...]

J'ay peu me mesler des charges publiques sans me despartir de moy de la largeur d'une ongle, [C] et me donner à autruy sans m'oster à moy' (pp. 984-85).

However, such a resolution also presents dangers for the self. There is firstly the question of how far detachment from oneself is compatible with self-realization. If the self performs its external roles without emotional or moral identification, can it be said to fulfil or work out its subjectivity through them? Equally, at what point does self-detachment disintegrate into self-fragmentation or disjuncture? A further potential problem is described by Starobinski, who suggests that the interposition of a mask between subject and world may finally lead to a false self-image: 'Si mon être et ma forme deviennent inconcevables hors de la "relation à autruy", le mensonge n'est pas seulement une déloyauté coupable envers notre prochain; il est, pour nous-mêmes, une catastrophe ontologique.'<sup>17</sup> The mask may stick, and selfhood may thus be compromised through an unwitting appropriation of the projected identity. Even as it warns us to separate role and self ('[B] du masque et de l'apparence il n'en faut pas faire une essence réelle, ny de l'estranger le propre'), 'De mesnager sa volonté' acknowledges the difficulty of doing so: 'nous ne sçavons distinguer la peau de la chemise' (p. 989).

While the division of self into public and private layers does provide a way of fulfilling external duties and protecting the integrity of the self, therefore, it is not an unproblematic solution. It is also unable to respond to the different set of issues raised in 'De l'utile et de l'honneste'. When the self is engaging with the world in order to appropriate a moral identity

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<sup>16</sup> Jean Starobinski, *Montaigne en mouvement* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), p. 116.

<sup>17</sup> Starobinski, p. 123.

-- by aligning itself with truth and defining itself against falsehood and deceit -- and when it construes 'identity' in terms of the other's perception of it, as well as its own self-image, it clearly cannot undertake the artifice and dissimulation recommended in 'De la coustume'.

This second essay offers instead a simpler solution:

[B] Les gens du mestier se tiennent les plus couverts et se presentent et contrefont les plus moyens et les plus voisins qu'ils peuvent. Moy, je m'offre par mes opinions les plus vives et par la forme plus mienne. Tendre negociateur et novice, qui ayme mieux faillir à l'affaire qu'à moy! C'a esté pourtant jusques à cette heure avec tel heur (car certes la fortune y a principale part) que peu ont passé de main à autre avec moins de soubçon, plus de faveur et de privauté. (pp. 768-69)

The artifice and dissimulation recommended in 'De la coustume' are here transformed into the deceitful practice of others; rejected by the 'truthful' self. Instead, the self lives itself out before the other: 'je m'y offre par mes opinions les plus vives et par la forme plus mienne'.

The paradox it confronted is thus resolved: the self is able to appropriate a moral identity without betraying itself. However, once again, the resulting self-other relation continues to manifest tensions. While the openness of the self has so far led to favour and success, the passage makes clear that this is not an inevitable outcome. The commitment to personal integrity on the part of the self threatens its negotiations with the other, which are characterized as precarious and unstable. Only fortune preserves the equilibrium which exists between the two.

These contradictory moral impulses -- to withdrawal from, and engagement with, the wider community -- are never completely resolved in the final book of the *Essais*, therefore.

Whether the self seeks to identify layers of subjectivity, and to direct the most external -- the realm of action and speech -- towards the world, while protecting the interior self, or whether it preserves its own integrity by performing itself unreservedly before the other it encounters, the individual subject finds that difficulties and tensions remain. The self which seeks to participate outwardly in the world, and to withhold its inner self, loses the benefits of



engagement through its detachment, and still risks distorting the internal self it hoped to protect. The self which presents itself without reserve or compromise to the other also fails to negotiate with the world in any meaningful way, and this time finds that its relationship with that order stands continually on the brink of rupture.

### **Self and supernatural other**

The third other which I wish to discuss -- the witch -- is a classic locus of debate in the Renaissance, and one onto which the paradox I have been describing can easily be mapped. Contracted to the Devil, the witch embodies the threat of the fearsome powers of darkness: 'It is undeniable that the devil lives, yes, rules, in all the world. Therefore witchcraft and sorcery are works of the devil, by which he not only injures people but sometimes, with God's permission, destroys them.'<sup>18</sup> At the same time, however, this concretization of the notion of absolute evil becomes a powerful symbol against which goodness and godliness may be defined.

This traditional reading is first re-rehearsed, and then transposed, in Montaigne's 'Des boyteux':

[B] Il y a quelques années, que je passay par les terres d'un prince souverain, lequel, en ma faveur et pour rabatre mon incredulité, me fit cette grace de me faire voir en sa presence, en lieu particulier, dix ou douze prisonniers de cette nature, et une vieille entre autres, vrayment bien sorciere en laideur et deformité, très-fameuse de longue main en cette profession. Je vis et preuves et libres confessions et je ne sçay quelle marque insensible sur cette miserable vieille; et m'enquis et parlay tout mon saoul, y apportant la plus saine attention que je puisse; et ne suis pas homme qui me laisse guiere garroter le jugement par preoccupation. En fin et en conscience, je leur eusse plustost ordonné de l'ellobore que de la cicue. [C] *Captisque res magis mentibus, quám consceleratis similis visa.* (III: 11; p. 1010)

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<sup>18</sup> *Luther's Works, XXVI: Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4*, trans. and ed. by Jaroslav Pelikan (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1963), p. 190.

There are two accounts of witchcraft in play in the extract here. The prince who allows Montaigne to visit the witch clearly accepts her self-definition as an instrument of darkness; since he seeks to overcome through her the scepticism of his guest. The threat which she offers is controlled, however, through imprisonment. She remains on display, and is thus able to function as a defining other for the controlling self, but her power is curtailed: where she was formerly an agent, she is now reduced to a symbol, of spiritual otherness. This is (structurally) similar to the process which takes place in the accounts of witchcraft provided by contemporary theology. Both Luther and Calvin, having emphasized the reality of the enemy, turn to those Scriptures which affirm the victory of the powers of good over those of darkness.<sup>19</sup> The quotation from Luther above already anticipates such an affirmation; emphasizing that the devil -- and by implication the witches he empowers -- operates only by the permission of God.

The Montaignean self responds to the threat of the witch in a different way. Rather than affirming then controlling the witch's supernatural power, he disallows it, in a parodic reversal of the inquisitorial interrogation. Taking up the role of the inquisitor -- 'Je [...] m'enquis et parlay tout mon saoul' -- he assembles the evidence -- a 'marque insensible', 'libres confessions' -- and reaches his verdict; a verdict which reverses, however, the accusation of the witch-hunter by refusing, rather than imposing, a witch's identity. Where the prince disempowers the witch by containing her supernatural power, the Montaignean self eliminates her threat by dissolving it into a fiction. This delusion remains, however, as a defining other for the self, which negotiates its own stability and sanity as it diagnoses madness: 'je leur eusse plustost ordonné de l'ellebore que de la cicue'.

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<sup>19</sup> Luther (p. 193) turns to 1 John 4. 4: "'He is greater that is in us, than he that is in the world'"; while Calvin, after an extended survey of the power accorded to the forces of darkness ('our most powerful foes') in the Bible, provides a section on the assurance of victory through God and Christ. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. by Ford Lewis Battles, ed. by John T. McNeill, Library of Christian Classics, 20-21, 2 vols (London: S. C. M. Press, 1961), I, I: 14; pp. 172-73, 176.

This complete elimination of oppositional otherness is unusual in the context of witchcraft. Even sceptical writers, while they seek to cast doubt upon the supernatural acts apparently performed by witches, acknowledge the existence of evil powers. Thus Reginald Scot, for example, writing in 1584, declares that ‘witches neither seeke nor beleeve to have salvation at the hands of divels, but by them they are onlie deceived; the instruments of their phantasie being corrupted, and so infatuated, that they suppose, confesse, and saie they can doo that, which is [...] farre beyond their power and nature to doo’.<sup>20</sup> While the delusions and false confessions of ‘Des boyteux’ reappear in Scot’s account, along with a decisive rejection of witches’ supernatural powers, the existence of an evil supernatural dimension is recovered at a different level: the delusions to which the ‘witches’ are subject are themselves inspired by devils. In the same way Johann Weyer’s important account of witchcraft, *De praestigiis daemonum*, argues that ‘witches’ are the product of demonic deception and mental instability: ‘virtually all of the actions hitherto attributed to the Lamia [‘dulled by age, or inconstant by reason of her sex, or unsteady because of her weak-mindedness’] -- actions to which the crazed woman even confesses, because her powers of imagination have been corrupted by the Deceiver -- proceed not from the Lamia but from Satan himself’.<sup>21</sup> In each case, there is an ongoing opposition between supernatural evil and its opponents.

Montaigne, by contrast, eliminates the witch as a supernatural phenomenon without recuperating her power and significance at a higher level. The witch is simply deluded, and

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<sup>20</sup> Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, ed. by Brinsley Nicholson (Wakefield: EP Publishing, 1973), III: 19 pp. 55-56. Scot also quotes ‘certeine generall counsels’ which rule that ‘wicked women following sathan’s provocations, being seduced by the illusions of divels’, profess that they possess supernatural powers. *Discoverie*, III: 16; p. 51.

<sup>21</sup> *De praestigiis daemonum* (1583), trans. by John Shea, ed. by George Mora, *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, 73 (New York: SUNY, 1991), pp. 173-74. See also Stuart Clark’s discussion of Henri Boguet’s *Discours des sorciers*. Boguet is a believer rather than a sceptic, but locates the power of the witch in ‘the devil which is her familiar’ in a similar way, Clark suggests, to Weyer. *Thinking With Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 195-203.

the supernatural other eliminated from his account.<sup>22</sup> In one sense, this spiritual opposition is immediately replaced by psychological otherness, through the diagnosis of insanity in the final sentence of the passage. However, in this instance, the madness attributed to the witch is a madness of delusion rather than of deviance: serving to eliminate, rather than to displace, her otherness and its threat.<sup>23</sup> Such an erasure is typical as a response to the threatening other in the *Essais*. I shall suggest, as I proceed, that the Montaignean self seeks not to contain or subdue, but rather to explain away, problematic difference, and to construct an integrated -- as opposed to a coherent but oppositional -- order.

However, in the instance presently in view, there is a second reason for Montaigne's decision to fictionalize, rather than to demonize, the other. The extract above not only explores how unbelief can be used to disempower the supernatural other which threatens the self, but also how tales of the supernatural threaten a philosophy of unbelief. Scepticism is not only the tool through which the threat of the other is dismantled; it is at another level the position with which the self identifies, and which testimony about the supernatural threatens to undermine: the prince takes Montaigne to see the witch 'pour rebatre [s]on incredulité'. In this sense, the project of the self is not to overcome the threat of her power, but to eliminate the threat (to his disbelief) of her reality. The decision to eliminate her spiritual otherness is therefore inevitable.

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<sup>22</sup> Elsewhere in the essay, he does acknowledge the existence of witches, speaking of '[B] les exemples que la divine parole nous offre de telles choses, très certains et irrefragables exemples'. However, he seeks to set their reality at a safe historical distance: '[B] Pour accommoder [ces exemples] et les attacher à nos evenemens modernes, puisque nous n'en voyons ny les causes, ny les moyens, il y faut autre engin que le nostre' (p. 1008). Each example of witchcraft examined in the essay is treated with considerable scepticism, and the supernatural is characterized throughout as remote, theoretical and exceptional.

<sup>23</sup> Elsewhere in his treatise, Scot too describes the witches' envisaged powers in terms of delusion: 'If anie man advisedlie marke their words, actions, cogitations, and gestures, he shall perceive that melancholie abounding in their head, and occupieng their braine, hath deprived or rather depraved their judgements, and all their senses: I meane not of coosening witches, but of poore melancholie women, which are themselves deceived.' *Discoverie*, III: 9; p. 41.

This validation of disbelief through the reinterpretation of the supernatural other also occurs elsewhere in 'Des boyteux',<sup>24</sup> and in other parts of the *Essais* as a whole:

[B] Le demon de Socrates estoit à l'avanture certaine impulsion de volonté, qui se présentoit à luy, sans attendre le conseil de son discours. En une ame bien espurée, comme la sienne, et preparée par continuel exercice de sagesse et de vertu, il est vray semblable que ces inclinations, quoy que temeraies et indigestes, estoyent tous jours importantes et dignes d'estre suyvies. Chacun sent en soi quelque image de telles agitations [C] d'une opinion prompte, vehemente et fortuite. (I: 11; p. 45)

In this passage from 'Des prognostications', the supernatural is recuperated back by the self. Socrates' 'demon', commonly seen as divine inspiration, is interpreted instead as an expression of the natural self; an 'impulsion de volonté' or 'une opinion prompte, vehemente et fortuite'. That which seemed to stand beyond the natural order comes instead to represent the hyper-natural; the passions and 'agitations' which lie beneath the surface of the wise and virtuous man. As Screech puts it: 'Socrates' *daemon*, which made him near-infallible, was in fact a natural impulse found to some extent in all of us. So the ecstasies of Socrates were at most "natural" ones.'<sup>25</sup> The supernatural other turns out to be another form of self. And in the same way, the otherness of genius is dismantled by the self: that which belonged to the 'ame bien espurée, comme la sienne', becomes as the extract proceeds the property of 'chacun'. In each case, the other is appropriated by the (natural, human, unexceptional) self to represent its own position. In this sense, the passage above moves beyond the discussion of witchcraft in 'Des boyteux': while the supernatural otherness of the witch is dissolved, the deluded old woman who remains is a no-longer-other rather than a version of self. However, the passage

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<sup>24</sup> See for example the passage which precedes the narrative of the visit to the witch: '[B] J'ay les oreilles battuës de mille tels comptes: "Trois le virent un tel jour en levant; trois le virent lendemain en occident, à telle heure, tel lieu, ainsi vestu." Certes je ne m'en croirois pas moy mesme. Combien trouvé-je plus naturel et plus vray-semblable que deux hommes mentent, que je ne fay qu'un homme en douze heures passe, quand et les vents, d'orient en occident? Combien plus naturel que nostre entendement soit emporté de sa place par la volubilité de nostre esprit detraqué, que cela, qu'un de nous soit envolé sur un balay, au long du tuiiau de sa cheminée, en chair et en os, par un esprit estrangier?' (p. 1009). In this instance, it is the mendacity, rather than the delusion, of the witnesses which produces the 'miracle'; but the process of translation -- from 'miracle' to fiction -- is essentially the same.

<sup>25</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, trans. and ed. by M. A. Screech (London: Penguin, 1987), p. 41.

above less completely resolves the paradox of the supernatural other. While the self's reinterpretations eliminate its threat, they leave very little by way of defining other. Only the 'memory' of the demon's disallowed supernatural status remains for the self to define itself against.

The relationship between other and self is crucially overdetermined in the *Essais*, therefore. A sense of anxiety in the presence of the other is balanced, in each of the examples above, by a recognition on the part of the self that the realization or authorization of its subjectivity entails an investment in the other. In each case, these contradictions lead the self to seek to fashion an integrated relation. The Renaissance self identifies in the classical past philosophical positions which will stabilize and authorize its own, if it can appropriate them to itself. The self of 'De la vanité' and 'De mesnager sa volonté' sees in the social whole the opportunity to work out its self-understanding as a moral and social agent; although such a self-fulfilling engagement with the other is precariously achieved, at best. An equivalent impulse to integration also underwrites the encounter with the supernatural other. Able to assimilate the Socratic demon, the self succeeds in dissolving, but is unable to recuperate further, the otherness of the self-professed witch.

I wish now to examine in greater detail the way in which this process works in two of Montaigne's most famous essays. 'Des cannibales' demonstrates the ways in which the gap between self and other both benefits and undermines the perspective of the self, and reveals ways in which the distinction may be preserved, but the substantial difference which divides the two overcome. The *Apologie de Raymond Sebond*, by contrast, considers the advantages and drawbacks of a close integration of other and self. In this second example, the project is to divorce, rather than to draw together, the two parts; without relinquishing, however, the stability which their fusion had produced.

## ‘DES CANNIBALES’

In *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Greenblatt argues that ‘self-fashioning is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile. This threatening Other – heretic, savage, witch, adulteress, traitor, Antichrist – must be discovered or invented in order to be attacked and destroyed’.<sup>26</sup> The contradictory activities of the other – in this case the definition and subversion of the values attaching to the self – are countered in this interpretation by a continual process of evocation and destruction: an other is invented to situate and delineate the values upheld by a particular group, and then destroyed before it can begin to establish itself, and thus to challenge or destabilize the term it was employed to define. Such a cycle is very clearly employed in Renaissance accounts of the New World; which is cast first of all as Europe’s cultural, religious and social other, and then eliminated through colonization. However, although these processes of definition and subversion are evident in many of the sources for ‘Des cannibales’, Montaigne himself addresses the alterity of the other in a different way, a way which binds self and other together into a more stable and integrated reality.

### Greenblatt, Thevet, Montaigne

In ‘Des cannibales’ it often appears that difference is not controlled or checked at all: that it is accommodated and accepted, by contrast, as if it posed no threat to the self:

[A] [Un prophete] prognostique les choses à venir et les evenemens qu’ils doivent esperer de leurs entreprinses, les achemine ou destourne de la guerre; mais c’est par tel si que, où il faut à bien devenir, et s’il leur advient autrement qu’il ne leur a predict, il est haché en mille pieces s’ils l’attrapent et condamné pour faux prophete. A cette cause, celuy qui s’est une fois mesconté, on ne le void plus.

[C] C’est don de Dieu que la divination; voylà pourquoy ce devroit estre une imposture punissable, d’en abuser. (I: 31; p. 206)

There is no immediate evidence of colonization in the passage here. The role of the prophet in cannibalistic culture, and the ways in which false prophecy is punished, are evoked and related apparently with interest: otherness is given, rather than denied, a space. It is passages such as these that have created what Quint describes as ‘the traditional and still prevalent reception of “Des cannibales”’ which ‘has congratulated Montaigne for his freedom from ethnocentric prejudice’.<sup>27</sup> The surface of the text, at least, suggests a tolerance of cultural difference, rather than an impulse to erase it.

However, beneath this apparent accommodation of difference, otherness is carefully manipulated here. The way in which it exercises control can be approached in part through an insight offered by Greenblatt in *Marvelous Possessions*. Discussing the practice of bringing New World natives to Europe for public display, he observes that:

What the spectators get for their money is the experience of wonder in the presence of the alien: they see and perhaps touch [...] a fragment of a world elsewhere, a world of difference. But, of course, that world is not present; only a sliver of it, an anecdote in the form of a dead or dying captive, has crossed the immense distance.<sup>28</sup>

The presence of the captive before the spectators promises an insight into ‘a world elsewhere’ that this encounter is unable to deliver. While the captive himself is authentic, a genuine fragment of the land from which he has been taken, his presence is insufficient to communicate anything substantial about that world to the spectators who gather to see him. The account he can give of his native land is ultimately incomplete: detached from a wider context, he is reduced to a ‘sliver’, or ‘anecdote’.

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<sup>26</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 9.

<sup>27</sup> David Quint, *Montaigne and the Quality of Mercy: Ethical and Political Themes in the ‘Essais’* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 77.

<sup>28</sup> Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991) p. 122.



The New World custom of killing false prophets might usefully be seen in much the same way. Transported to France in his servant's account, as the captive has been in the colonizer's boat, it, too, is incomplete. It is described at reasonable length, but is available only in outline: the social narratives and cultural traditions in which it was once embedded, and from which it formerly took its meaning, have inevitably been lost in transmission. Like Greenblatt's world of difference, they have failed to cross 'the immense distance' which lies between the two worlds. And once separated from these narratives, the custom is unable to resonate or communicate as it formerly could. It may be able to gesture towards the fuller meaning it once possessed, but as an expression of religious belief and cultural tradition, its significance is dependent upon its context. The account provided by the servant, therefore, is crucially incomplete.

Detached from its wider context, neither the New World captive described by Greenblatt, nor the custom related by Montaigne, has a free-standing significance. Apparently available for immediate apprehension, they finally fail to offer a complete or unambiguous meaning. They are consequently open to appropriation and misinterpretation by their viewers, who, in the absence of complete and incontrovertible prior meaning, inevitably construct the otherness of their subjects according to their own preferences or imaginative resources. This manipulation is evident in both accounts; but the ways in which it operates are finally very different.

Greenblatt continues his account of the captive with a closer assessment of the spectators who travel to view the cultural fragment:

Even this sliver of otherness is not accessible to direct apprehension; the viewers carry with them to the exhibits, as to the lands from which the exhibits have been seized, a powerful set of mediating conceptions by which they assimilate exotic representations to their own culture.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Marvelous Possessions*, p. 122.

The passage above, and the previous extract describing the New World captive, display between them the dual and contradictory impulses by which Greenblatt characterizes sixteenth-century attempts to control and regulate difference: an otherness is 'discovered or invented in order to be attacked and destroyed'. The spectators are first involved in a process of invention: they pay their money, and expect to see, 'a world elsewhere'; the world of 'the alien'; which they 'experience' with 'wonder'. Like many of those who actually travelled to the New World, the spectators construct an 'exotic' New World as they look upon the captive placed before them; a world entirely and palpably different from their own.<sup>30</sup> In some sense, of course, this difference is less 'other' than it appears: the subject of travel writing from Pliny the elder to John de Mandeville, exoticism is by the Renaissance already a familiar other, sanitized through its mythologization over the course of preceding centuries. However, the captive remains a symbol of what the European mind imagines to be not-self.

However, even as the spectators construct him in such terms, they seek to eliminate the otherness they have made, employing a 'powerful set of mediating conceptions' to 'assimilate' this 'exotic representation' to 'their own culture'. The threat of the other is such that even as it is constructed, it begins to be incorporated back into the culture by which it has been fashioned. The two processes merge into one in the passages here; as they always must in practice. If the New World is to act as a defining other without challenging the assumptions and premisses of the authority which employed it, it must be as continuously destroyed as it is continuously evoked. The identity of the authority depends upon the existence of this otherness; its stability and security upon its absence. Invention and assimilation, therefore, must both be taking place at every moment.

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<sup>30</sup> For a traveller's account which describes the New World in such terms, see Columbus's diary. The entry for 16 October 1492 describes fish 'so unlike ours that it is a marvel; [...] the colours are so fine that no man would not wonder at them', and trees with 'many branches of different kinds, and all coming from one root; one branch is of one kind and one of another, and they are so unlike each other

This method of dealing with the paradox of difference is a very familiar one, and is clearly used by Montaigne's principal source for his discussion of New World prophecy. André Thevet's *Les Singularités de la France antarctique autrement nommé amérique*, published in 1558,<sup>31</sup> describes the practice of killing false prophets in the following way:

Ces sauvages ont encores une autre opinion estrange et abusive de quelques uns d'entre eux, qu'ils estiment vrayes Prophetes, et les nomment en leur langue *Pagés*. [...] Il faut noter que les Sauvages ont en tel honneur et reverence ces *Pagés*, qu'ils les adorent ou plustost idolatrent: mesmes quand ils retournent de quelque part, vous verriez le populaire aller au devant, se prosternant, et les prier: disant, Fais que je ne sois malade, que je ne meure point, ne moy, ne mes enfans: ou autre chose. Et luy respond, Tu ne mourras point, tu ne seras malade, et semblables choses. Que s'il advient quelquesfois que ces *Pagés* ne dient la verité, et que les choses arrivent autrement que le presage, ils ne font difficulté de les faire mourir, comme indignes de ce tiltre et dignité de *Pagés*.<sup>32</sup>

In the same way as Greenblatt's spectators, Thevet sees the custom he describes in terms of difference. The elevation by the people of 'quelques uns d'entre eux' to the role of *Pagé* (the retention of the Amerindian word itself signals categorical difference) is 'estrange et abusive', while the 'honneur' and 'reverence' in which these prophets are held is seen to be idolatrous. The whole religious practice of the cannibals is interpreted in terms of blasphemy. In this sense, Thevet moves beyond the Greenblattian spectators: where they create an 'other' which is clearly different from, but stands in no specific relation to, the self, Thevet's New World religion is interpreted as the inverse of the authority he represents.<sup>33</sup> This stricter definition of difference is important, for it is this, to a large extent, which generates a coherent self-other relation. Thevet clearly intends and anticipates that the tradition he

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that it is the greatest wonder in the world'. *The Journal of Christopher Columbus*, trans. by Cecil Jane (London: Blond & Orion Press, 1960), p. 33.

<sup>31</sup> Bernard Weinberg draws together the evidence that Thevet was a source for Montaigne in 'Montaigne's Readings for "Des Cannibales"', in *Renaissance and Other Studies in Honor of William Leon Wiley*, University of North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures, 72 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), pp. 261-79.

<sup>32</sup> André Thevet, *Les Singularités de la France antarctique autrement nommé amérique: et de plusieurs terres et îles decouvertes de notre temps* (1558) (Paris: Le Temps, 1982), pp. 65, 67. Unlike the Gallimard edition of the *Essais*, this is a normalized text.

relates, like the captive, will ultimately be replaced by his own religious practice. Ultimately, therefore, the difference of the other will be erased. However, the New World other is in one sense already controlled through the judgement implied in the definition of otherness as a demonic parody of self. Perceived as the inversion of an incontrovertible order, the election and adoration of *Pagés* is renounced, if it is not destroyed, at the very moment, and in the very process, of its creation. The twin operations continually undertaken by those who view the captive are here inherent in a single act: the custom of appointing prophets is perceived to have a form which the self has denounced before the encounter begins.

In essence, therefore, the same cycle develops here as in the earlier extract from Greenblatt. If otherness is not quite so clearly invented in this instance -- the self apparently encounters and interprets, rather than projects, the otherness of the cannibal (although Thevet's account suggests very strongly a deliberate attempt to construct in his narrative an idolatrous other against which to define a pious self) -- still, the self goes to the New World expecting to find its religious other, and intending to convert it to its own terms (whether from a missionary or imperialistic impulse). The difference of the other is first encountered, then erased, in a cycle which, whether this is the purpose, or simply a product, of the encounter, defines and upholds the religious identity of the self.

Montaigne's rewriting of Thevet's account situates otherness in a different relation to the self. Where Thevet depicts an idolatrous people whose rituals are a blasphemous parody of Christianity, Montaigne describes a cannibalistic religion which closely resembles his own. As he begins to interpret the practice of killing false prophets, he fills the space behind the surface he has been given with meanings which make it comprehensible and justifiable to himself: 'C'est don de Dieu que la divination; voyla pourquoy ce devroit estre une imposture

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<sup>33</sup> Jean de Léry, whose 1578 account of the New World was also used by Montaigne, similarly describes the religious assemblies of the Tupi in terms of devil-worship. *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil*, ed. by Jean-Claude Morisot (Geneva: Droz, 1975), p. 243.

punissable, d'en abuser.' Like us, the cannibals have prophets, and like us, they understand and respond to the abuse of so sacred a ministry. Although the custom is itself entirely foreign, it is grounded, in Montaigne's interpretation, in an ethic wholly intelligible to the European Christian. The fundamental relation between other and self is no longer difference but identity.<sup>34</sup>

This identity appears to be problematized as the passage proceeds:

[C] C'est don de Dieu que la divination; voylà pourquoy ce devoit estre une imposture punissable, d'en abuser. Entre les Scythes, quand les devins avoient failli de rencontre, on les couchoit, enforgez de pieds et de mains, sur des charriotes pleines de bruyere, tirées par des bœufs, en quoy on les faisoit brusler. Ceux qui manient les choses sujettes à la conduite de l'humaine suffisance, sont excusables d'y faire ce qu'ils peuvent. Mais ces autres, qui nous viennent pipant des assurances d'une faculté extraordinaire qui est hors de nostre cognoissance, faut-il pas les punir de ce qu'ils ne maintiennent l'effect de leur promesse, et de la temerité de leur imposture? (pp. 206-07)

The resonances which attach to the Scythians in this passage are complex and ambiguous. Already embedded in the European consciousness, and located in classical antiquity, they are in one sense familiar to the French Renaissance subject, and in this sense help to mediate between the New World other and European self. Abecassis describes this process in his account of the 'other other': the cannibal can be made familiar by 'pass[ant] par "l'autre autre" impossible, à savoir par l'*exemplum* antique. De la sorte, nous avons un triangle dont les trois angles se construisent par le cannibale, les anciens et les contemporains. [...] Il y a donc une circularité parfaite entre un passé perdu et un Autre éloigné dans l'espace mais

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<sup>34</sup> Michael T. Ryan, describes a more blatant example of the invention of similarity: 'Fabricating genealogies was a major intellectual activity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. [...] Human culture was a series of complicated derivations and transmissions from the book of Genesis to the present. While the genealogist is intoxicated with the past, genealogy is essentially anti-historical: its orientation is to an original ancestor in time past. [...] Genealogical scholarship -- in whatever area -- provided consolation for men who trembled before the vicissitudes since it revealed the hidden identity of past with present.' 'Assimilating New Worlds in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 23 (1981), 519-38 (p. 532).

proche dans le *logos*.’<sup>35</sup> However, there is also a sense in which the comparison with the Scythians appears to problematize the interpretation I have offered. In Herodotus (from whom Montaigne has taken the account above), the Scythians are a barbarian people whose customs are related by the author as curious examples of the thought and belief of others; in much the same way, in fact, as cannibalistic practices are described by Renaissance ethnographers.<sup>36</sup> If the Scythians are to be seen in such a way in ‘Des cannibales’, they do not reduce the alterity of the cannibals, but rather reinforce their otherness.<sup>37</sup>

However, I would suggest that to the extent that they do represent the other in this passage, their otherness is controlled, and is not allowed to disrupt the trajectory of the passage as a whole. The reference to the Scythians is placed in the middle of a passage which reflects upon the role of the prophet in the self’s own terms: those who falsely claim prophetic powers should indeed be punished for their presumption and deceit. It is governed and controlled, therefore, by the terms of that interpretation. The Scythians are subject to the same process of appropriation as the cannibals with whom they are compared: the customs of each are assimilated by the beliefs and understanding of the self.

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<sup>35</sup> Jack I. Abecassis, “‘Des cannibales’ et la logique de la représentation de l’altérité chez Montaigne’, *BSAM*, 7th series, 29-32 (July 1992-June 1993), 195-207 (p. 203). Frank Lestringant argues that the self-antiquity-cannibal triangle works in a different way elsewhere in the text. In the Golden Age passage discussed below, it is ‘le Cannibale qui fait la leçon au philosophe d’Athènes: “C’est une nation, diroy-je à Platon, en laquelle il n’y a aucune espede de trafidique ...” Platon seroit surpris, à tout le moins, qu’une société, contrairement à celle qu’il a imaginée, puisse “se maintenir avec si peu d’artifice et de soudeure humaine”. Cinglant démenti apporté, au nom de l’expérience, à la savante et complexe architecture de la *République*’. ‘Sept paradoxes sur “Des cannibales” (Montaigne, *Essais*, I: 31)’, *L’Information Littéraire*, 45.2 (March-April 1993), 3-16 (p. 5).

<sup>36</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. by Aubrey de Sélincourt, rev. by John M. Marincola (London: Penguin, 1954), IV: 69; p. 237. The custom of killing false prophets is described amongst accounts of how the Scythians swear oaths, what the king does when he is ill, and the willow-rods used by soothsayers (IV: 67-70; pp. 236-37).

<sup>37</sup> The other references to Scythians in the *Essais* do not resolve this issue either way. While in ‘De la conscience’, Apollodorus ‘[A] songeoit qu’il se voyoit escorcher par les Scythes, et puis bouillir dedans une marmite’ (II: 5, p. 347), elsewhere the Scythians are used to demonstrate the wisdom of withdrawing from battle (‘De la constance’; I: 12; pp. 46-47), and as a courageous martial people in ‘Du pedantisme’; which seeks to prove that ‘[C] l’estude des sciences amollit et effemine les courages, plus qu’il ne les fermit et aguerrit’ (I: 25, p. 143).

The otherness of cannibalistic practice is overcome, therefore, through an appropriative representation which attributes to it the values and priorities of the self; a process which is partly mediated by, and which partly expands to include, the practices of ancient Scythia. However, this foreshortening of difference does not constitute a complete elimination of alterity. Neither the assignation to the custom of a familiar ethical motivation, nor its transposition through the comparison with that of the Scythians, eradicates difference entirely. Instead, these manoeuvres seek to demonstrate that difference is underwritten by similarity; that disparate practices manifest the same religious priorities, and that otherness resembles something valorized by the self. This remnant of difference is important, for it is this which enables the resolution of the paradox of difference. Where in Greenblatt, the contradictory demands that otherness be present and absent at once are met by the continuous and simultaneous performance of two oppositional processes, and where in Thevet they are addressed through the denunciation, and anticipated conversion of otherness, in Montaigne they are met by the creation of an other which is different enough to define the self, but which remains nevertheless firmly rooted in sameness, and which consequently offers no real threat.<sup>38</sup>

This new model for resolving the paradox of difference has two significant features. Firstly, it replaces the opposition identified by Greenblatt and displayed in Thevet's account with a basically integrated order, characterized by agreement rather than conflict. In Greenblatt the cannibal never loses its status as other: while individual communities may be assimilated or

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<sup>38</sup> Andre Tournon, reporting the conclusions of Pascal Lemaire, sees a similar difference-in-similarity in the *Apologie*: 'Ici, le traitement des données trouvées chez Gomara tend à accentuer les ressemblances, ou à estomper les traits distinctifs. Par exemple, au sujet de rites aztèques, l'historien décrivait un comportement d'énergumènes: "Quand ils entrent au temple pour parler à leur idole, ils se prennent à pleurer et braire (et c'est ce que veut dire ce mot *quaca*) et se traînent par terre jusqu'à leur idole, avec laquelle ils parlent un langage inconnu à tout le peuple"; cela devient dans les *Essais*: "la façon aux prêtres d'user en officiant de langue particulière et non vulgaire", et l'on se retrouve à Saint Nicolas du Chardonnet. Mais, [...] sur la trame des ressemblances se détachent des différences de détails: grotte pour arche dans le mythe du Déluge, purgatoire glacial.' However, he interprets these divergences in terms of disruption rather than surface difference: 'la série des similitudes est faussée par l'irruption

colonized, the notion of 'savage' remains as the inverse of European 'civilization', and will be frequently re-evoked as such as the cycle of invention and destruction proceeds. (In the same way, the heretic or witch remains a symbol of deviance, even when she has been burnt, and her threatening otherness thus overcome.) Montaigne, by contrast, reinvents the other in the image of the self, and binds the two together into an integrated whole.<sup>39</sup> The other is recruited to uphold and reinforce the ideals and beliefs of the self; to construct a community of shared belief, within which the self can locate itself, and by which it is protected. This is the same process as in 'Des boyteux', where the supernatural other, conventionally controlled through demonization, is first fictionalized -- and thus removed as an oppositional other -- and then (in the case of Socrates' 'demon') recuperated back to self, and used to reinforce the subject's own beliefs.

This elimination of oppositional otherness also makes the Montaignean relation between self and other more stable than that described by Greenblatt. In the cultural economy which Greenblatt describes, there is always scope for resistance. As cultural materialist critics have emphasized, 'to contain a threat by rehearsing it one must first give it a voice, a part, a presence [...]. Through this process the very condition of something's containment may constitute the terms of its challenge: opportunities for resistance become apparent, [...] even as the threat is being disempowered'.<sup>40</sup> The potential for such disruption is clearly evident in Greenblatt: the assimilation which must constantly take place, as a controlling counter-

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sporadique de quelques anomalies'. 'L'Étrange semblable', *BSAM*, 7th series, 29-32 (July 1992-June 1993), 249-61 (p. 251).

<sup>39</sup> The text makes explicit that the self resembles the New World other (as, for example, when cannibalism is compared to the Wars of Religion), and various critical studies have suggested that in Montaigne (Lestringant, p. 14) and ethnographies in general (see Gérard Defaux, 'Un cannibale en haut de chausses: Montaigne, la différence et la logique de l'identité', *MLN*, 97 (1982), 919-57 (p. 957)) the self extends its meaning and range through identification with the other. I want to suggest that in Montaigne, the reverse is also the case; that the other is used to buttress and reinforce the position of the self.

<sup>40</sup> Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* 2nd edn (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989). p. xxi.



pressure to the emergence (even though itself controlled) of otherness, signals the threat which not-self represents to self.

In the passage from Montaigne, by contrast, there is never any threat of struggle or contest. Constructed as essentially similar to self, otherness can be openly acknowledged or embraced, and the instabilities and conflicts which characterize the earlier models are replaced by a far less problematic relation, in which difference serves to sharpen individual outlines rather than undermining the position of the self. '[A] Je trouve [...] qu'il n'y a rien de barbare et de sauvage en cette nation' (p. 203), Montaigne concludes. Unlike those who do find disorderly otherness at the heart of the other, he is not obliged to civilize and control it.

I wish now to suggest that the same basic model of difference-in-sameness is established at other moments and levels in the text, and to consider the ways in which it operates in these instances. I propose to look briefly first of all at the politics of naming: the ways in which, at a linguistic level, difference can be evoked or suppressed; and then to consider a passage which has recently been used to place the Montaignean practice within the tradition of inventing and colonizing otherness from which I am seeking to differentiate it.

### **Linguistic colonization**

Renaissance ethnographies display a degree of manipulation even in the names they assign to Amerindian objects and figures, and once again there are decisive differences between the methods adopted by the majority of interpreters, and those employed by Montaigne. It is instructive once more to consider the sources from which he is working:

*Thevet*: Les maisons ou ils habitent sont petites logettes, qu'ils appellent en leur langue *Mortugabes* assemblées par hameaux ou villages, tels que nous les voyons en anciens lieux par deça. Ces logettes sont basties de bois, et couvertes de feuilles de palme [...] Chacune logette à plusieurs belles couvertures. [...] Au milieu desquelles chacun en son quartier, sont pendus les

licts à pilliers, forts et puissants attachez en quarrure, lesquelles sont faits de bon coton.

*Léry*: Les sauvages appellent [leur] bruvage *Caou-in*, lequel estant trouble et espais comme lie, à presque goust de laict aigre: et en ont de rouge et de blanc comme nous avons de vin.<sup>41</sup>

If there is no obvious attempt to invent the New World as any particular form of otherness in these extracts, its alterity is nevertheless made clear. Léry is explicit, noting that 'leur coustume' is 'du tout contraire à la nostre', while the terms which are used to describe the cannibalistic furniture also implicitly participate in this discourse of otherness. Both Thevet and Léry employ the Amerindian words for the objects they are seeking to describe; Thevet using the cannibalistic *Mortugabes*, Léry the Tupi *Caou-in*. Never absorbed or accepted by the European text (the Amerindian words remain what 'les sauvages appellent leur breuvage' in Léry; what 'ils appellent en leur langue *Mortugabes*' in Thevet) the Indian terms signal the decisive difference the writers perceive between the two worlds. In the same way as the exotic language used of the flora and fauna in such accounts, the Amerindian names are here employed as tools of defamiliarization.<sup>42</sup>

Once again, however, this difference is effaced or controlled once it has been evoked. The crudest form of this linguistic colonization is exemplified in the diary of Christopher Columbus:

To the first island which I found I gave the name 'San Salvador', in remembrance of the Divine Majesty, Who had marvellously bestowed all this; the Indians call it 'Guanahani'. To the second, I gave the name the island of 'Santa Maria de Concepcion', to the third, 'Fernandina', to the fourth, 'Isabella', to the fifth island, 'Juana', and so each received from me a new name.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Thevet, *Les Singularités*, p. 84; Léry, *Histoire*, p. 125.

<sup>42</sup> For exotic accounts of Amerindian animals, see for example Léry's chapters 'Des animaux, venaisons, gros lezards, serpens, et autres bestes monstrueuses de l'Amerique' and 'De la varieté des oyseaux de l'Amerique, tous differens des nostres: ensemble des grosses chauvessouris, abeilles, mouches, mouschillons, et autres vermines estranges de ce pays-la'. See also Columbus's descriptions of the fish and trees at footnote 30 above.

<sup>43</sup> 'Letter', 15 February 1493. *Journal*, pp. 191-201 (p. 191).

The names which the Indians had given their islands are erased and replaced in the extract here by others, which represent the religious and regal authorities of the colonizer's land. There is no negotiation between the two; no attempt to accommodate or translate the Indian name. There is not even the appropriation seen with the captive or the prophetic tradition; where otherness is assimilated to self. Instead, there is a simple substitution: the Indian name is eliminated entirely, and a European alternative established in its place. The other is literally converted to the terms of the self.

In Léry, a more complex process takes place. At one level, the other remains irreducibly different from the text in which it stands: throughout his account, Léry continues to use the Amerindian words for the food, drink, plants and animals he describes. The two types of root which the Indians eat are '*aypi*' and '*maniot*'; the fire they cook on, '*boucan*'; the most common herbs and plants, '*ananas*', '*panacons*' and '*petun*'. At the same time, however, the status of these words shifts over the course of the text. In the chapter on Tupi food and drink, for example, '*Caou-in*', which is initially what 'les sauvages appellent [leur] bruvage' becomes first 'ce *Caou-in*' (p. 126), and finally simply 'vingt pots de *Caou-in*' (p. 129). As it becomes increasingly familiar -- both as a word with obvious European equivalents, and as a term understood by the European reader -- it is integrated, if not absorbed, into the European account; its otherness controlled, and to some extent effaced.

The combination of equivalence and difference which thus comes to characterize the other in this instance might be understood as a response to the paradox of difference in one of two ways. It might firstly be seen to reproduce at a linguistic level the difference-in-sameness modelled by the Montaignean account of the false prophet, and to consist in a residual, surface difference diffused and controlled through the notion of equivalence by which it is underwritten. However, I would argue instead that there is a tension in Léry's text between the sameness and difference it attributes to the Amerindian term; that the impulse to

integration confronts, rather than diffusing, the unequivocal alterity of the italicized foreign term. As such, it holds in dynamic tension the impulses to evoke and eliminate difference described in Greenblatt's account. Flickering between the two, it maps out the double movement of invention and control through the constant mutual displacement of sameness and difference.

These tensions become clearer when Léry's practice is compared with that of Montaigne:

[A] Leurs bastimens sont fort longs, et capables de deux ou trois cents ames, estoffez d'escorse de grands arbres, tenans à terre par un bout et se soustenans et appuyans l'un contre l'autre par le feste, à la mode d'aucunes de noz granges. [...] Leurs lits sont d'un tissu de coton, suspenduz contre le toict, comme ceux de nos navires. [...] Ils ne boyvent pas lors, comme Suidas dict de quelques autres peuples d'Orient, qui beuvoient hors du manger; ils boivent à plusieurs fois sur jour, et d'autant. Leur breuvage est faict de quelque racine, et est de la couleur de nos vins claires. [...] Au lieu du pain, ils usent d'une certaine matiere blanche, comme du coriandre confit. (p. 205)

The repeated 'de nos', used to link the elements in each of the comparisons above, implies, as in Léry, an equivalence between us and them, ours and theirs. Their buildings, beds and drinks are fundamentally the same as those which are familiar to the self. However, unlike Thevet and Léry, Montaigne refrains from using Amerindian words throughout. He does not assign the objects he describes any kind of name at all: instead, he describes a cannibalistic object in European terms, and then supervises it further through comparison with the closest European equivalent. Where in Léry, sameness is set in tension with categorical difference, Montaigne constructs a relation based upon similarity.

However, a distinction is still preserved between self and other in Montaigne. Unlike those New World travellers described by Tuttle, for whom 'similarities in function, in behaviour or even in odour or flavour could [...] provide sufficient bases for association or shift', and who absorb American species of plant and animal, and varieties of foodstuffs into pre-existent

European categories,<sup>44</sup> Montaigne is careful not to collapse self and other together, and to make provision for the retention of otherness. When he says that cannibalistic buildings are ‘estoffez d’escorce de grands arbres, tenans à terre par un bout et se soustenans et appuyans l’un contre l’autre par le feste à la mode d’aucunes de noz granges’, or that ‘leurs lits sont d’un tissu de coton, suspenduz contre le toict, comme ceux de nos navires’, he offers comparisons between the two: in each case the New World is *like* the old. Each has a separate textual space (where in Léry’s *Histoire* the European equivalent stands (invisibly) behind, rather than alongside, the New World designatum), and the two are never allowed to merge into one.

The relationship between the similarity and difference attributed to the New World other is thus significantly different in Léry and Montaigne. Where in Léry, categorical difference and equivalence stand in continual tension, in Montaigne, difference is allowed to emerge only in a much more limited way; within, and strictly controlled by, a larger framework of integration. As with the custom of killing false prophets, otherness is not controlled, but erased; its relation with the self not a dynamic opposition, but a stable integration which grounds and reinforces the identity of the self.

### Montaigne and the Golden Age

I wish finally to look at a very famous passage from the early part of ‘Des cannibales’, which has been used to place Montaigne within the tradition of inventing and erasing difference from which I am seeking to differentiate his practice:

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<sup>44</sup> Edward F. Tuttle, ‘Borrowing Versus Semantic Shift: New World Nomenclature in European Languages’, in *First Images of America: The Impact of the New World on the Old*, ed. by Fredi Chiapelli, 2 vols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), II, pp. 595-611 (p. 598). This process of ‘extension’ is also described by Anthony Pagden, who relates how New World explorers tended, in the first instance, ‘to describe things which looked alike as if they were, in fact, identical. For men like Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, chief overseer of the mines of Hispaniola and author of the earliest natural history of America, pumas *were* lions, jaguars tigers and so on’ (italics in original). *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge: C. U. P., 1982), p. 11.

[A] Il me semble que ce que nous voyons par experience en ces nations là, surpasse non seulement toutes les peintures dequoy la poësie a embelly l'age doré et toutes ses inventions à feindre une heureuse condition d'hommes, mais encore la conception et le desir mesme de la philosophie. Ils n'ont peu imaginer une nayfveté si pure et simple, comme nous la voyons par experience; ny n'ont peu croire que nostre societé se peut maintenir avec si peu d'artifice et de soudeure humaine. C'est une nation, diroy je à Platon, en laquelle il n'y a aucune espece de trafique; nul cognoissance de lettres; nulle science de nombres; nul nom de magistrat, ny de superiorité politique; nul usage de service, de richesse ou de pauvreté; nuls contrats; nulles successions; nuls partages; nulles occupations qu'oysives; nul respect de parenté que commun; nuls vestemens; nulle agriculture; nul metal; nul usage de vin ou de bled. Les paroles mesmes qui signifient la mensonge, la trahison, la dissimulation, l'avarice, l'envie, la detraction, le pardon, inouïes. Combien trouveroit il la republique qu'il a imaginée esloignée de cette perfection: [C] *virī a diis recentes.*

[B] *Hos natura modos primum dedit.* (p. 204)

This passage is described by Paul Brown in terms of 'a "negative formula", in which the alien 'is afforded no positive terms' but 'merely displays the absence of those qualities that constitute civility, for example, no law, no government, no marriage, no social hierarchy, no visible mode of production, no permanent settlement'. Discussing Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, he suggests that 'Gonzalo's description of his imagined island kingdom in II. 1, culled from Montaigne, rehearses the standard formula by which the colonized is denigrated'. He argues that the 'typical orientation of the other around the negative formula [...] is the production of a *tabula rasa*. [...] Here the other is an empty space to be inscribed at will by the desire of the colonizer'.<sup>45</sup>

This interpretation clearly reinvokes the pattern identified by Greenblatt. Characterized by the 'absence of those qualities which constitute civility', the cannibal is cast as negative other: the nature he represents is set against a cultured European norm; his absence against a positive, developed European presence. Both are thus perceived as 'denigrating' terms. A similar interpretation of Montaigne's intention in this passage is offered by Quint, who sees

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<sup>45</sup> "'This Thing of Darkness I Acknowledge Mine': *The Tempest* and the Discourse of Colonialism', *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985) pp. 48-71 (p. 56).

the 'chain of privatives' built up as the description proceeds as a sign of ignorance and backwardness rather than of virtue: 'what the cannibal lacks, above all, is the self-consciousness and self-division of the European. [...] The cannibal cannot tell a lie, not knowing what one is, or betray, or dissemble'.<sup>46</sup> Quint's account, depicting the cannibal as an unformed and essentially identity-less creature, also points towards the *tabula rasa* produced by the negative formula; an argument which begins to look beyond the invention of the cannibalistic other, and to suggest instead his erasure. There is a sense in which cannibalistic otherness is erased even as it is identified in Brown's interpretation. Evoked as an absence or lack, it is paradoxically written out, even at the moment, and in the process, of being written into Montaigne's account. And as a blank page, or 'empty space', the cannibal is also vulnerable to the inscription and colonization which will transform him from negative other into a version of self.

As in the examples from Thevet and Greenblatt, therefore, the paradox of difference is tackled by Montaigne, according to Brown's account, by the invention and appropriation of the cannibalistic other. Its otherness is constructed as the antithesis of self, before the familiar process of annexation eliminates difference entirely. This is in many ways a persuasive interpretation; locating the essay within a recognizable tradition. However, there are a number of ways in which it is also problematic. The reading of the 'negative formula' it provides does not sit easily either with the immediate context of the essay, nor with the spirit of the classical tradition from which it has been borrowed, and its insistence upon the otherness of the cannibals might also be called into question. A closer examination of these two issues begins to suggest that Montaigne adopts a different approach to the difficulties posed by the cultural otherness of the cannibals in the passage; an approach which returns us to the strategies he employed in his encounter with New World prophecy.

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<sup>46</sup> Quint, p. 75.

The 'negative formula' Montaigne uses in this passage draws upon a tradition which reaches back to Ovid. At the start of his *Metamorphoses*, Ovid describes the four ages which followed the creation of the earth; the first of which, the golden age:

unconstrained  
 With heart and soul, obedient to no law,  
 Gave honour to good faith and trighteousness.  
 No punishment they knew, no fear; they read  
 No penalties engraved on plates of bronze;  
 No suppliant throng with dread beheld their judge;  
 No judges had they then, but lived secure. [...]  
 Earth willingly, untouched, unwounded yet  
 By hoe or plough, gave all her bounteous store;  
 Men were content with nature's food unforced,  
 And gathered strawberries on the mountainside  
 And cherries and the clutching bramble's fruit,  
 And acorns fallen from Jove's spreading tree.<sup>47</sup>

Ovid employs the negative formula not to describe a wild and primitive generation, characterized by privation, but rather to evoke an ideal, prelapsarian era in which the structures envisaged by Brown as the condition of civilization are not yet required: 'sine lege', everyone does what is right; 'sponte sua', the earth provides 'omnia tellus'. Rather than lawlessness, Ovid depicts natural virtue; instead of an uncultivated earth, he describes its natural plentitude.<sup>48</sup> The absence which Brown detects in Montaigne's description of the cannibals is here replaced by fullness: for Ovid it is the silver age, in which men are forced to till an unflourishing earth, which will symbolize lack and deprivation. If the golden age represents otherness at all, it is the not-here and not-now of utopia; the perfection of which is negatively rendered to amplify the baseness -- the positive evil -- of the present. With the arrival of the iron age, 'all evil straight broke out, /And honour fled and truth and loyalty, /Replaced by fraud, deceit and treachery/ And violence and wicked greed for gain.'<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. by A. D. Melville (Oxford: O. U. P., 1986), I. 88-94, 102-07; pp. 3-4.

<sup>48</sup> The same theme is taken up by other writers to whom Montaigne refers. Seneca recounts how the soil was 'more productive when untilled', and quotes Virgil's *Georgics*, which describe how the 'earth more freely gave/ Her riches to her sons who sought them not'. *Epistulae morales*, II, XC, pp. 398-431 (pp. 423, 425).



In its original context, therefore, the negative formula did not imply absence or lack, nor did it signify a primitive savagery. Rather it evoked an ideal, envisaging a world without the deprivations and corruptions which characterize the writer's own. This does not, of course, automatically mean that when the formula is reinvoked by later writers, its terms will retain the same significance. Many Renaissance writers do choose to redeploy it in the way suggested by Brown; transforming the ideal/corrupt dichotomy established in their source into a savage/civility antithesis which is used to denigrate the natural condition of the Indians. Columbus, for example, during his first voyage to America, reflects that the Indians he encounters are 'very deficient in everything'; 'it appeared to me that they had no creed', and existed 'without arms and without laws'.<sup>50</sup> 'Physiquement nus, [ils] sont aussi, [à ses] yeux, dépouillés de toute propriété culturelle: ils se caractérisent, en quelque sorte, par l'absence de coutumes, rites, religion.'<sup>51</sup>

However, the evidence of the passage from 'Des cannibales' suggests that Montaigne intends to uphold, not subvert, the provisions made by the Ovidian convention. The iron/gold dichotomy is still in some sense transposed, but where Columbus transforms natural plenitude into primitive lack, Montaigne redeploys the concept of 'naturalness' as the antithesis of art in its negative sense of artifice: the cannibals are 'pure' and 'simple', living without 'artifice' and 'soudeure humaine'. Nature is thus reassigned its positive resonance, while the structures of civilization, so grandly conceived elsewhere, are reduced to unnecessary trappings: '[A] Ce n'est pas raison que l'art gagne le point d'honneur sur nostre grande et puissante mere nature. Nous avons tant rechargé la beauté et richesse de ses ouvrages par nos inventions, que nous l'avons du tout estouffée' (p. 203).

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<sup>49</sup> *Metamorphoses*, I. 129-32; p. 5.

<sup>50</sup> *Journal*, 11 October 1492, pp. 23-24; 4 November 1492, p. 52.

<sup>51</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *La Conquête de l'Amérique: la question de l'autre* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1982), p. 41.

The text finally fails to support, therefore, a reading which envisages the evocation of a cannibalistic other devoid of cultural belongings; the very absence of which both authorizes and enables its ultimate inscription with the properties of self. Montaigne's cannibals emerge not as shadows or outlines, characterized by deficiency or want, but as exemplars of a social ideal, untarnished by the corruption, and unsmothered by the inventions, of their European counterparts. The paradox of difference is not approached in this case by the invention and close supervision, and eventual dissolution, of otherness, therefore: in possession of their own identity, the cannibals are not available for the colonization envisaged by Brown.

It remains to consider what strategies are employed instead, and at this point it becomes relevant to consider how, and to what extent, the cannibals are finally different from the European self in Montaigne's account. In one sense, they are absolutely and incontestably other to the corruptions and pretensions of Europe in the passage which compares them to the Age of Gold. Following Ovid, Montaigne proceeds by a series of antitheses; which admit no similarities and articulate absolute difference.<sup>52</sup> The use of the utopian mode itself also sets the imagined other at a considerable distance: although Virgil enshrined the hope that the Golden Age might one day return, it is conventionally set in the historical past, and its ideals envisage an irrecoverable innocence and perfection. Montaigne retrieves these ideals from the mythical past in assigning them to the cannibals,<sup>53</sup> but they remain in his account beyond the grasp of the 'civilized' European. The cannibals are able to represent golden age perfection '[A] pour avoir receu fort peu de façon de l'esprit humain', and remain 'fort

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<sup>52</sup> As Abecassis puts it, '[L]'inversion en série est une figure structurale de tout récit utopique dont la lecture intuitive est fort simple: les autres sont littéralement nos antipodes dans le sens où ils reflètent à l'envers ce que nous sommes.' 'L'alterité', p. 203.

<sup>53</sup> For a discussion of the ways in which a comparison between the New World and the Golden Age may be used to bring utopia to the here and now, see Stelio Cro: 'In the classical tradition the golden age is conceived as unreachable and far away in a distant past. To that golden past, the classical author often compares the present time, and refers to it as the "iron age", an age of decadence. [...] Peter Martyr, instead, presents classical antiquity for the first time as a bookish mirage, compared with the real experience of the Spaniards in the New World. [...] The myth of the golden age appears here in perspective from present to future.' *The Noble Savage: Allegory of Freedom* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1990), pp. 22, 24.

voisines de leur naïveté originelle' (p. 204): they have never been corrupted by a 'cognoissance de lettres' or a 'science de nombres'. For nations which have pursued such knowledges, there is no way of turning back: science cannot be undiscovered, or literacy unlearned.

Both through the oppositions by which it proceeds, therefore, and the golden age topos it appropriates, the passage establishes a decisive difference between the cannibals and the nations which have discovered them. However, the passage also moves beyond this binary opposition. In any utopian vision, whether set in the future or the past, whether achievable or irrecoverable, there is a degree of investment by the self which constructs it, an imaginative or emotional identification with the ideals which it represents. This is clearly the case in the passage from Montaigne; where the ideal New World he invents is characterized by a number of beliefs to which the *Essais* as a whole demonstrate his own commitment. The way in which he adapts the account provided by Ovid is particularly telling: replacing the plenitude/privation and innocence/corruption antitheses with an opposition between nature and artifice, he is able to present a society without 'la mensonge, la trahison [et] la dissimulation' -- against which he continually rails in the *Essais* -- and which lives, without trying, 'l'humaine vie'. The codes to which they conform, therefore, and which Europe is implicitly seen to deviate from, are those of Europe itself. Beneath the oppositions, there is only one interpretation of how one should behave. The cannibals conform to this set of ethics, which Europe accepts, but in practice fails to uphold. Beneath the sense of antithesis which is insistently asserted on the surface, there is a single set of moral imperatives and commitments. As in the instances above, Montaigne produces an integrated reality in which self and other combine to form a coherent whole reflecting the values of the self. Once again too, the paradox of difference is satisfied by the retention of a residual difference; not this time the surface difference which emerges in the passage about the prophet, but through the incomplete adherence of the self to the beliefs and commitments it professes.

I wish finally to think for a moment about a feature of the Montaignean resolution of the paradox of difference that I have so far left to one side. I have suggested that Montaigne produces a less problematic, more integrated relation between self and world than the writers he draws upon, and others who were writing in his moment. This does not, however, alter the fact that the bond established between other and self is finally a fabrication. As in Greenblatt, Léry or Thevet, the otherness which is encountered in Montaigne is constructed by, and for the purposes of, the self. Curiously, this is something which the essay itself, apparently unconsciously, makes manifest. In its final paragraphs, Montaigne describes the interview he is able to secure with one of three cannibals visiting France:

[A] Je parlay à l'un d'eux fort long temps; mais j'avois un truchement qui me suyvoit si mal et qui estoit si empesché à recevoir mes imaginations par sa bestise, que je n'en peus tirer guiere de plaisir. Sur ce que je luy demanday quel fruit il recevoit de la superiorité qu'il avoit parmy les siens (car c'estoit un Capitaine, et nos matelots le nommoient Roy), il me dict que c'estoit marcher le premier à la guerre; [...] si, hors la guerre, toute son autorité estoit expirée, il dict qu'il luy en restoit cela que, quand il visitoit les villages qui dépendoient de luy, on luy dressoit des sentiers au travers des hayes de leurs bois, par où il peut passer bien à l'aise.

Tout cela ne va pas trop mal: mais quoy, ils ne portent point de haut de chausses! (p. 213)

On the surface, this is not a problematic passage. The privileged position of the cannibal is carefully translated into European terms -- 'Capitaine', 'Roy' -- and described in terms of honour and nobility with which the European can identify. The picture which emerges of the cannibals here, as throughout the essay, is of people similar to, not radically different from, the writing self. The final sentence of the essay ironically dismisses those who cannot look beneath the surface, the absence of trousers, and see that these 'savages' are actually as civilized as themselves. However, on this occasion, the appropriations which have taken place finally make themselves clear. At the beginning of the extract, Montaigne describes his difficulty in communicating with the native: 'je n'en peus tirer guiere de plaisir'. This difficulty is attributed to 'la bestise' of 'un truchement qui me suyvoit mal et qui estoit

empesché à recevoir mes imaginations'. However, it might alternatively be taken to indicate the disjunctive relation in which self and other stand when the difference of the other has not been excluded by prior assimilation. Placed in direct contact with a native; or rather in a situation where the distance between himself and that native is mediated only by an interpreter -- who must bear meanings in both directions -- the communication breaks down. While the strategy of constructing an otherness which resembles the self secures a very stable fiction of reality, it is vulnerable to the intrusion of otherness itself: when monologic imagination gives way to dialogic exchange, the smooth surface texture of similarity is disrupted by the incoherence and discontinuity of incomprehension and otherness.

For the most part, however, the constructions and manipulations which take place in 'Des cannibales' are silently performed by the self. Where the other in Greenblatt or Thevet, alternately represented as (exotic or deviant) 'other' and (assimilated) 'self', bears the traces of its colonization, the cultural other of 'Des cannibales' displays no signs of the transformation which has taken place. Interpreted from the start as another form of self, it undergoes no change, and therefore does not signal the assimilative pressures to which it has been subject. This is important in the context of the Montaignean agenda. Thevet understands the conversions he anticipates in terms of amelioration. It does not matter, therefore; indeed, it is good and right, that these transformations should be made known. In Montaigne, by contrast, where the self seeks to reinforce its own position by interpreting the other as another form of self, it is essential that the manipulations it performs are not allowed to emerge. The irruption of difference in the final paragraphs of the essay, undermining and exposing the appropriations which have taken place, thus becomes a sign of both the distinctive integrative vision of 'Des cannibales', and the methods through which it is pursued. In place of the unstable cycle of demonization and conversion envisaged by Greenblatt and Thevet, Montaigne constructs, or 'discovers', what I have chosen to call a 'community of belief'; a community in which the self is able to participate, but within which it retains a distinct

identity and a specific set of coordinates.

### **THE APOLOGIE DE RAYMOND SEBOND**

In the *Apologie de Raymond Sebond*, the relationship between man and God becomes the focus of attention. Like the dialectic between the European self and New World other in 'Des cannibales', it is marked by contradictions: while the divine other is fundamental to the realization, articulation and comprehension of human identity, it is also represented as a source of self-betrayal and loss. However, the cause of these tensions has now changed. Where in 'Des cannibales' it is the difference of the other which both threatens and enables the negotiation of the identity, in the *Apologie*, it is the close integration of the two which has both benefits and drawbacks for the self. The authoritative divine other is on the one hand a source of selfhood; on the other, however, He demands an obedience and a conformity which are felt to delimit and contradict it. This change in the self's relation to the other also generates significant shifts in the nature and form of the self's response. Where in 'Des cannibales', the subject seeks to overcome the alterity of the other, binding self and other together into a coherent and integrated order, the self in the *Apologie* seeks to loosen the ties it perceives between itself and God, reinterpreting the divine order in such a way that provision is made for its own self-fashioning.

#### **The relationship between man and God**

The extent to which human subjectivity is conceived in relation to God in the *Apologie* becomes clear in comparison with a passage from Pico's *De hominis dignitate* (1486):

[God] took man as a creature of indeterminate nature and [...] addressed him thus: 'Neither a fixed abode nor a form that is thine alone nor any function peculiar to thyself have we given thee. Adam, to the end that according to thy longing and according to thy judgement thou mayest have and possess what

abode, what form, and what function thou thyself shalt desire. The nature of all other beings is limited and constrained within the bounds of laws prescribed by Us. Thou, constrained by no limits, in accordance with thine own free will, in whose hand We have placed thee, shalt ordain for thyself the limits of thy nature.’<sup>54</sup>

[A] Nos raisons et nos discours humains, c’est comme la matiere lourde et sterile: la grace de Dieu en est la forme; c’est elle qui y donne la façon et le pris. Tout ainsi que les actions vertueuses de Socrates et de Caton demeurent vaines et inutiles pour n’avoir eu leur fin et n’avoir regardé l’amour et obeissance du vray createur de toutes choses, et pour avoir ignoré Dieu: ainsin est-il de nos imaginations et discours; ils ont quelque corps, mais c’est une masse informe, sans façon et sans jour, si la foy et grace de Dieu n’y sont jointes. (II: 12; pp. 424-25)

Where Pico grants man complete autonomy from God, Montaigne makes human subjectivity crucially dependent upon the divine. Pico establishes no fixed end or aim for man; interpreting freedom from such goals as a fundamental condition of man’s dignity.

Montaigne, by contrast, allows a single human goal: as the ‘createur de toutes choses’, God should also be the ‘fin’: human existence is invested with purpose and meaning through being directed towards God. And where Pico allows man to negotiate his own subjectivity, and to live according to his own judgement, desire and will, Montaigne perceives God as a crucial point of reference in the organization of human conduct. Human action is to be a response to God, performed in ‘obeissance’ to him, and motivated by ‘l’amour’. Actions performed without reference to Him -- even ‘les actions vertueuses de Socrates et de Caton’ -- have no validity or value. The independence and authority assigned to man by Pico are revoked by Montaigne, who resituates subjectivity with a spiritual and relational framework.

The influence of God upon man in the *Apologie* extract here also goes deeper than this: to the extent that human action is performed out of love for God, it is also motivated by Him. At this point, the boundary between self and other begins to break down. The subject not only fashions himself in relation to God, but is also fashioned by God: the inner prompting to

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<sup>54</sup> Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *De hominis dignitate* (1486), trans. by Elizabeth Livermore Forbes, in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, ed. by Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller and John Herman Randall, Jr (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), pp. 223-54 (pp. 224-25).

which the self responds is itself inspired by the divine. The same sense that God shapes the subject from within as well as without is less ambiguously expressed in those parts of the extract above which examine human thought and discourse. God is immediately recognized as a collaborator with man: the subject can provide the basic material, but this ‘matiere lourde et sterile’ requires ‘la grace de Dieu’ to give it any clarity or form.<sup>55</sup> God is thus intrinsic to the process of knowing, and internal to the knower: He does not make the world available for knowledge; rather, He is ‘the basic support and underlying principle of our knowing activity.’ It is He who ‘powers the eye which sees’. So the light of God is not just ‘out there illuminating the order of being; [...] it is also an inner light.’<sup>56</sup> God’s grace is constitutive in the formation of human thought.

God is thus seen to shape the subject both from the outside (as an organizing principle), and from within (as a motivating force or inspiration). These two operations, in their turn, confer a significance and value upon the thoughts and actions they help to produce. Underwriting virtuous actions, God retrieves a value and a purpose for acts which would otherwise be ‘vaines’ and ‘inutiles’, and as the inspiration of, and a collaborator in, human discourse, He again grants ‘la façon et le pris’.

Human subjectivity also depends upon the divine in other ways in the *Apologie*. The following text responds to those who have suggested that Sebond’s arguments are weak:

[A] Il leur semble qu`on leur donne beau jeu de les mettre en liberté de combatre nostre religion par les armes pures humaines, laquelle ils n`oseroyent ataquen en sa majesté pleine d`autorité et de commandement. Le moyen que je prens pour rebatre cette frenaisie et qui me semble le plus

<sup>55</sup> This also bears comparison with Pico: whereas Montaigne speaks of ‘matiere lourde et sterile’, Pico speaks of fertile seeds which no longer require external, divine cultivation in order to bear fruit: ‘On man when he came into life the Father conferred the seeds of all kinds and the germs of every way of life. Whatever seeds each man cultivates will grow to maturity and bear their own fruit.’ *De hominis dignitate*, p. 225.

<sup>56</sup> Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: C. U. P., 1989), p. 129.



propre, c'est de froisser et fouler aux pieds l'orgueil et humaine fierté; leur faire sentir l'inanité, la vanité et deneantise de l'homme; leur arracher des points les chetives armes de leur raison; leur faire baisser la teste et mordre la terre sous l'autorité et reverance de la majesté divine. C'est à elle seule qu'appartient la science et la sapience; elle seule qui peut estimer de soy quelque chose, et à qui nous desrobons ce que nous nous contons et ce que nous nous prisons. (pp. 425-26)

The divine is conceived in the extract here as a defining other for man. The littleness of humanity is made clear in relation to the magnificence of God: 'les armes pures humaines' are contrasted with the 'majesté pleine d'autorité et de commandement'; 'l'inanité, la vanité et deneantise de l'homme' with 'l'autorité et reverance de la majesté divine'. All that is true and right comes from God, and rightfully belongs to Him: 'ce que nous nous contons et ce que nous nous prisons' is 'desrob[é]' from Him. Elsewhere in the text, God as Creator is the author of a scheme which locates the self in an integrated framework, and provides him with a stable set of co-ordinates: '[A] Il n'est piece du monde qui desmante son facteur. Ce seroit faire tort à la bonté divine, si l'univers ne consentoit à nostre creance. Le ciel, la terre, les elemans, nostre corps et nostre ame, toutes choses y conspirent; il n'est que de trouver le moyen de s'en servir. Elles nous instruisent, si nous sommes capables d'entendre. Car ce monde est un temple tressainct' (p. 424).

The divine is thus crucial to human subjectivity in the *Apologie*; stabilizing, grounding and defining it, organizing and prompting it, and shaping it from within. However, there are also ways in which the human-divine relation is problematic in the text. The Montaignean position becomes clearer in the context of a passage from Calvin's commentary on Ephesians:

Adam was at first created in the image of God, so that he might reflect, as in a mirror, the righteousness of God. But that image, having been wiped out by sin, must now be restored in Christ. The regeneration of the godly is indeed, as is said in II Corinthians 3. 18, nothing else than the reformation of the image of God in them. But there is a far more rich and powerful grace of God in this second creation than in the first. Yet Scripture only considers that our highest perfection consists in our conformity and resemblance to God. Adam

lost the image which he had originally received, therefore it is necessary that it shall be restored to us by Christ. Therefore he teaches that the design in regeneration is to lead us back from error to that end for which we were created.<sup>57</sup>

An identity grounded in God constitutes for Calvin selfhood as it was created to be. The distorted identity inherited from Adam is replaced, through surrender to the grace available through Christ, by the image of God, in which consists 'our highest perfection'. This transformation is not experienced as an invasion of self: the vocabulary of 'reformation' and 'regeneration' signals instead the realization of an identity formerly obscured. As Schwöbel, following Tillich, suggests, Christian new being, while in one sense '*creatively* new, insofar as the true relationship between God and humanity is not a stage in the natural development of humanity', is also 'the *reconstitution*, the renewal of the relationship between God and humanity', and the *fulfilment* of that relationship, and of the self which embarks upon it (italics in original).<sup>58</sup> Despite the opposition of Adam and Christ, and the idea of a 'second creation' in the passage above, there is a powerful continuity between old self and new which guarantees the preservation of individual personhood, even in its conformation to the image of God. There is no lingering affection in Calvin, therefore, for the old self discarded in this process. As a deformed and degenerate version of self, it is a contradiction, not a part, of true identity, as Calvin makes clear in his *Institutes*: 'our very being is nothing else than subsistence in the one God'; 'As it was the spiritual life of Adam to remain united and bound to his Maker, so estrangement from him was the death of his soul.'<sup>59</sup> As Schwöbel puts it: 'In the Fall human beings have dislocated themselves in the order of created being. [...] In trying to put themselves in the place of the creator they do not relate to their own relatedness in accordance with its created structure, but in contradiction to it. Therefore sin is not only self-

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<sup>57</sup> Jean Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians* (1548), trans. by T. H. L. Parker, ed. by David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1965), p. 191. Calvin is commenting on Ephesians 4. 20-24.

<sup>58</sup> Christoph Schwöbel, 'Human Being as Relational Being: Twelve Theses for a Christian Anthropology', in *Persons, Divine and Human: King's College Essays in Theological Anthropology*, ed. by Christoph Schwöbel and Colin E. Gunton (Edinburgh: Clark, 1991), pp. 141-65; p. 148.

<sup>59</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, I, I: 1, p. 35; II. 1, p. 246.

deception, but also self-contradiction insofar as by sinning human beings contradict their own destiny in the created order.’<sup>60</sup>

This is an assessment with which other Renaissance theologians agree. Luther, in his interpretation of Romans 7. 18, likewise discusses the restoration of created identity through the destruction of an old self which is at once continuous with the new and a radical contradiction of it: ‘God in Christ restores man as created and cleanses corrupted man of his guilt immediately and of his weakness gradually.’<sup>61</sup> However, it is different from the account of self-in-God provided by Montaigne:

[A] [Le scepticisme] presente l’homme nud et vuide, recognoissant sa foiblesse naturelle, propre à recevoir d’en haut quelque force estrangere, desgarni d’humaine science, et d’autant plus apte à loger en soy la divine, aneantissant son jugement pour faire plus de place à la foy. [...] [B] C’est une carte blanche preparée à prendre du doigt de Dieu telles formes qu’il luy plaira y graver. Plus nous nous renvoyons et commettons à Dieu, et renouons à nous, mieux nous en valons. (pp. 486-87)

A sense of loss is articulated in the passage here. The old self is shed: man is ‘desgarni’ of human learning, and ‘aneantit’ his intellect. In the context of earlier passages, which humiliate the pride of man, this loss is right and fitting. However, this deconstruction of Renaissance Man does not lead to the restoration of a true, created identity. In place of the new self donned in the passage from Calvin, Montaigne depicts ‘une carte blanche’, a space, or non-self, which God may then engrave as He pleases. The self is evacuated for God rather than realized through Him, and there is something disturbing about the image of the ‘carte blanche’, employed in ‘Des cannibales’ to describe foreign peoples ripe for colonization.<sup>62</sup> The following sentence, too, follows a similar pattern: ‘plus nous nous renvoyons et commettons à Dieu, et renouons à nous, mieux nous en valons’. We are called to reject

<sup>60</sup> Schwöbel, p. 149.

<sup>61</sup> *Luther’s Works*, XXV, *Lectures on Romans: Glosses and Scholia* (1515-16), trans. by Walter G. Tillmanns and Jacob A. O. Preus, ed. by Hilton C. Oswald (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1972), p. 63.

<sup>62</sup> See p. 54 above.

ourselves, but no new identity lies waiting in the wings. We become worth more by allowing God to take over what we once identified as self, rather than by allowing Him to renew and perfect that fallen and corrupted subjectivity. The same sense of loss is expressed once more a little later in the *Apologie*. Responding to the notion that Man might approach God, Montaigne argues that '[A] si, pour nous rendre capables [de concevoir la grandeur des divines promesses], on reforme et rechange nostre estre (comme tu dis, Platon, par tes purifications), ce doit estre d'un si extreme changement et si universel que, par la doctrine physique, ce ne sera plus nous' (p. 499). God reforms us to the point where our former self no longer exists.

Elsewhere in the *Apologie*, the shaping hand of God is apparently experienced as an interference in identity. In the passage which speaks of '[A] le neud qui devoit attacher nostre jugement et nostre volonté, qui devoit estreindre nostre ame et joindre à nostre createur' (p. 424), for example, the terminology is crucially ambiguous. 'Neud' may be used of a close and welcome bond, but it may also describe an unwanted tie;<sup>63</sup> 'estreindre' can mean to embrace, but it can also mean to clutch or grip. There is a sense of restriction lurking beneath the surface here; as there is also in the passage which complains about the premisses foisted upon us by other systems of belief or frames of reference: '[A] chasque science a ses principes presupposez par où le jugement humain est bridé de toutes parts' (p. 522).

Adherence to the command and guidance of God, the text implies, can lead to the circumscription and delimitation of identity, rather than to its realization. The vocabulary of otherness used of God in the *Apologie* also makes His authority over human identity problematic. When the text speaks of God's grace as '[A] la liberalité d'autrui' (p. 479), for example, or of man's need to receive his faith 'par autorité et par commandement estranger' (pp. 479-80), it expresses a sense that God is not only categorically different from the self,

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<sup>63</sup> See, for example, 'De la vanité': 'Le neud qui me tient par la loy d'honesteté me semble bien plus pressant et plus poissant que n'est celuy de la contrainte civile. On me garrote plus doucement par un notaire que par moy' (III: 9; p. 944).

but radically alien to it. Lurking behind all this is the sense that self-contradiction exists not as it does for Calvin, in existence apart from God, but instead in submission to Him.

There are, of course, occasions when Calvin does acknowledge a sense of self-contradiction in his Christian selfhood. Commenting in 1540 on Romans 7. 15 ('For I know not that which I do. For what I would, that I do not, but what I would not, that do I'), he discusses the fundamental self-division of every man living under grace:

Among the godly, [...] the regeneration of God has been begun. They are so divided, however, that although they aspire to God with the special desire of their hearts, seek heavenly righteousness, and hate sin, they are drawn back again to the earth by the remnants of their flesh. Accordingly, in this state of distraction, they fight against their own nature and feel their own nature fighting against them. They condemn their sins, not only because they are compelled by the judgment of reason, but because they abhor them with genuine feeling of the heart and detest their conduct in committing sin. This is the Christian warfare between flesh and spirit, of which Paul speaks in Gal. 5. 17.

It has, therefore, been well said that the carnal man plunges into sin with the consent of his whole soul, but that a division at once begins as soon as he is called by the Lord and renewed by the Spirit.<sup>64</sup>

The conflict identified here between fleshly nature and spiritual desire clearly leads to a sense of self-division. However, there are decisive differences between this self-contradiction and the self-betrayal described in Montaigne. Where in Montaigne, being in God is inherently contradictory—selfhood must be relinquished if godliness is to be attained—it is only the remains of the old and sinful self which produce the tensions in Calvin's account: true and perfect selfhood, as the will has already identified, is to be found in God. Where Montaigne experiences divine refashioning in terms of contradiction, Calvin's Christian explicitly disowns that part of himself which sets itself in opposition to the reconstitution effected by the power of the Holy Spirit. Where in Montaigne the contradiction is fundamental and irresolvable, in Calvin it is not. Inevitable and perpetual in a fallen human

being, it is the temporary and partial division of a selfhood seeking to surrender its falsehood, and to establish itself as it was created to be.

In the *Apologie*, however, the relationship between self and other is characterized by significant tensions. As in 'Des cannibales', the self ultimately feels both dependent on, and threatened by, the other it depicts. The self is seen to depend upon the divine for the identification and expression of its subjectivity, yet at the same time, it feels itself threatened by it: the shaping hand of God is experienced in terms of constraint and self-loss. However, the paradox here is not quite the same as that in 'Des cannibales'. In the earlier essay it is the difference of otherness which causes difficulty, even while it also enables the definition and identification of selfhood. In the *Apologie*, by contrast, it is the close integration of divine and human realms that is perceived to be both problematic and beneficial at once. In this sense the *Apologie* is closer to 'De la vanité' than to 'Des cannibales'. However, the perceived threat to the self is far more radical in the *Apologie* than in 'De la vanité'. In the latter, while the social whole demands that the self adhere to a specific set of codes, and while the self's responses to these codes may ultimately, as Starobinski suggests, lead to the internalization of a false self-image, the other never violates the boundaries of the subject.<sup>65</sup> The *Apologie*, by contrast, shows the divine-as-other remodelling the self from within. And where in 'De la vanité', the self suffers dissipation, dispersal or constraint, in the *Apologie* it is subject to erasure. The authority and influence of the divine are such that both the level of dependence, and the extent of the perceived threat, are raised to a higher power.

The tensions here are also more complex than in the other essays I have discussed. There are now two problematic relations between other and self: God stands both within and without the boundaries of the subject, and in each case, the self feels both threatened by, and

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<sup>64</sup> Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, trans. by Ross Mackenzie, ed. by David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1960), p. 149).

dependent upon Him. As an external other, the divine enables the definition, expression and organization of man's identity, but is also experienced as the 'neud' which constrains and delimits it. As an internal other, the divine is perceived both as an integral part of the subject's correct responsiveness to the world—the illumination and motivation which come from God are the source of right perception, understanding and behaviour—and as an interference which contradicts and empties out individual selfhood.

There are complex sets of demands to be met, therefore, if the human-divine relation constructed by Montaigne is to be resolved. The divine must continue to inform the judgement and understanding of the self, without erasing or supplanting its interiority, and to contextualize and organize human identity and action, without placing limits upon them. The first step in the process through which these conditions are met is a reconception of the natural condition of man.

### **The natural condition of man**

Most of the Renaissance writers who chose to write about the misery of the human condition believed that misery to consist in an original and inevitable sinfulness inherited from the Fall. This is clearly the case in Calvin's commentary on Ephesians above; a very similar account is also, perhaps surprisingly, provided by a number of humanist writers. Thus Poggio, in his *De miseria humanæ conditionis libri* (1455), describes a 'public law of the misery of life, fixed by nature in our senses, contracted from the guilt of the first parents. All our unhappiness hangs on this, from this the errors, vices, and crimes of men take their origin, from them the misery of this life is propagated'.<sup>65</sup> Even Salutati, whose view of man is in general far more optimistic, speaks in 1371 of:

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<sup>65</sup> See p. 30 above.

<sup>66</sup> Poggio Bracciolini, *De miseria humanæ conditionis libri*, in *Opera omnia*, ed. by Riccardo Fubini, 4 vols (Torino: Bottega d'Erasmus, 1964) I, pp. 88-131 (p. 89). Trans. by Charles Trinkaus, 'In Our Image and Likeness': *Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 2 vols (London: Constable, 1970), I, p. 260.

the road on which we wheel with the vehicle of our wills, which we alone are able to deflect towards evils, yet supported by divine grace we are also able to apply effectively for good. Place before your eyes, wretched man, the state of your miserable will whose freedom you glory in; see what is permitted to you by your will. What do I say, 'permitted'? The best things indeed are permitted. But see rather what you are able, indeed what you are not able. For you can, which is the highest impotence, only wish evil through your own power. Indeed by the transgression of the first parents all posterity is held to this penalty, that, although they were able by their own will not to sin, now we are completely unable not to sin, so that it is necessary to admit that whatever good we wish, if we wish to know rightly, we choose because God moves our wills.<sup>67</sup>

Not every writer on human misery would agree that the will is as bound as Salutati supposes here. Almost all would subscribe, however, to his view of an inherently corrupt human nature, based on the evidence of Genesis and the Fall. That is why almost all, like Calvin, are happy to surrender to the direction of God, and to seek an identity in Him. For Salutati, the effective application of the human will for good can be achieved only with the 'support' of 'divine grace'; for Poggio, only grace can lift man above nature. The true self—in whom the distortions produced by the Fall have been reversed—can be reclaimed by turning to God. However, such an account of man is largely abandoned by Montaigne. The *Apologie de Raymond Sebond* presents both man's misery, and his natural condition, in an entirely different way.

The misery of man is addressed at an early stage in the *Apologie*:

[A] Qu'il me face entendre par l'effort de son discours, sur quels fondemens il a basti ces grands avantages qu'il pense avoir sur les autres creatures. Qui luy a persuadé que ce branle admirable de la voute celeste, la lumiere eternelle de ces flambeaux roulans si fierement sur sa teste, les mouvemens espouvantables de cette mer infinie, soyent establis et se continuent tant de siecles pour sa commodité et pour son service? Est-il possible de rien imaginer si ridicule que cette miserable et chetive creature, qui n'est pas seulement maistresse de soy, exposée aux offences de toutes choses, se die

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<sup>67</sup> Coluccio Salutati, *De seculo et religione*, ed. by B. L. Ullman (Florence: Olscki, 1957), I: 33; p. 77; trans. by Trinkaus, pp. 196-97.



maistresse et emperiere de l'univers, duquel il n'est pas en sa puissance de cognoistre la moindre partie, tant s'en faut de la commander? (p. 427)

Human misery is here described through a series of counter-assertions to humanist arguments of the dignity of man. Where writers like Manetti, drawing on I Corinthians 3. 21-22 ('All things are yours, whether [...] the world or life or death'), believe that 'the world and all its beauties seems to have been first invented and established by Almighty God for the use of man', and that 'God, after He had created men, blessed them, [...] and made them lords of all creation and kings and emperors of the earth',<sup>68</sup> Montaigne presents a version of humanity denied the grandeur and dignity it would assign itself; according to which the world is neither created for man, nor subject to him. Likewise reason, also employed by Manetti and others as the basis of man's superiority and dignity, even his quasi-divinity,<sup>69</sup> is taken from man by Montaigne. Man cannot know 'la moindre partie' of the world he presumes to control: '[A] de toutes les vanitez, la plus vaine c'est l'homme; [...] l'homme qui presume de son sçavoir, ne sçait pas encore que c'est que sçavoir' (p. 427). His misery consists in an 'inanité', 'vanité' and 'deneantise'; his lack of all that he presumes to have and to be, and in this laughable presumption itself.<sup>70</sup>

The humiliation of man provided in these terms is comprehensive and consistent in the *Apologie*. However, it is crucially different from the accounts of Poggio and Salutati. Where in their interpretation man is inherently evil, Montaigne conducts his enquiry with no reference at all to notions of fallenness or sin. Man is not the dignified creature he imagines

<sup>68</sup> Giannozzo Manetti, *De dignitate et excellentia hominis* (1452-53), ed. by Elizabeth R. Leonard (Patavii: Antenoreis, 1975), III, p. 78; II, p. 45. Trans. by Trinkaus, pp. 238; 247. 1 Corinthians 3. 21-22 is taken from the NIV translation of the Bible.

<sup>69</sup> 'God made man in his image and similitude, and He created a soul for him of such a quality that, endowed with reason and immortality, intelligence and memory and will, he might excel and dominate all other animals.' Manetti, II, p. 47; trans. by Trinkaus, p.219.

<sup>70</sup> Pascal reverses this perception, suggesting that 'La grandeur de l'homme est grande en ce qu'il se connaît misérable'. The *Pensées* characterize man's wretchedness as a sign of his greatness: 'La grandeur de l'homme est si visible qu'elle se tire même de sa misère. Car ce qui est nature aux animaux, nous l'appelons misère en l'homme. Par où nous reconnaissons que, sa nature étant aujourd'hui pareille à celle des animaux, il est déchu d'une meilleure nature qui lui était propre autrefois. Car qui se trouve

himself to be, but neither is he necessarily evil. As Pierre Statius, reflecting upon 'l'absence dans les *Essais* de toute idée de péché, souillure ou peccabilité', suggests, 'il y a un abîme entre l'humiliation de l'homme telle qu'elle s'accomplit dans le chapitre 12 du livre II sous les auspices de Sextus et les discours religieux; [...] l'homme n'est pas, aux yeux de Montaigne, une créature inévitablement malheureuse ici-bas, ontologiquement imparfaite'.<sup>71</sup>

When the language of moral corruption is used in the *Apologie*, it is to describe man's search for knowledge—his attempts to rise above himself—rather than his natural condition.<sup>72</sup>

Against the 'Ataraxie' which is sought and cherished by Pyrrhonian sceptics, are set '[A] des agitations que nous recevons par l'impression de l'opinion et science que nous pensons avoir des choses. D'où naissent la crainte, l'avarice, l'envie, les desirs immoderés, l'ambition, l'orgueil, la superstition, l'amour de nouveauté, la rébellion, la désobéissance, l'opiniâtreté et la plupart des maux corporels' (p. 483). 'Natural' man, by contrast, represented for Montaigne by those who are not seduced and corrupted by the acquisition of knowledge, is apparently inherently virtuous: '[A] L'incivilité, l'ignorance, la simplicité, la rudesse s'accompagnent volontiers de l'innocence; la curiosité, la subtilité, le savoir entraînent la malice à leur suite; l'humilité, la crainte, l'obéissance, la débonnairerie (qui sont les pièces principales pour la conservation de la société humaine) demandent une âme vide, docile et presumant peu de soi' (p. 477). The concept of innocence here, with its prelapsarian resonance, stands in sharp contrast to the flawed and sinful humanity evoked by Poggio and Salutati.

This shift is clearly significant in terms of the paradoxes I have identified. Where Calvin, Salutati and Poggio turn to God, through whom alone they can be released from their sinful identity and restored to the selfhood for which they were created, in Montaigne there is a

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malheureux de n'être pas roi, sinon un roi dépossédé? [...] Qui se trouve malheureux de n'avoir qu'une bouche?' Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (1670) (Paris: Mercure de France, 1976), pp. 81-83.

<sup>71</sup> Pierre Statius, 'La Religion de Montaigne: essai d'interprétation', *BSAM*, 7th series, 33-34 (July-December 1993), 89-107 (p. 91).

<sup>72</sup> See my discussion below, pp. 90-91, 100-01.

human identity to embrace. He continues to recognize the imperfection of man, and to provide a narrative of amelioration, but since the corruption he identifies is now subsequent rather than original, the agent of that change may be man himself. The locus of virtue now lies within, rather than without, the self, and the sense of invasion and loss which attended divine transformation may be overcome by replacing divine regeneration with human self-realignment in accordance with its natural, and naturally virtuous, state.

However, such a transferral of agency is problematic in the *Apologie*'s own terms. To resolve a sense of self-contradiction under the shaping hand of God by positing a subject which can realize itself apart from God cuts very much against the grain of a text which emphasizes the incapacity of man in his own strength, and rails against the irreverence and presumption of seeking to stand apart from God: '[A] Considerons donq pour cette heure l'homme seul, sans secours estranger, armé seulement de ses armes, et despourvue de la grace et cognoissance divine, qui est tout son honneur, sa force et le fondement de son estre. Voyons combien il a de tenue en ce bel equipage' (p. 427). Man is also dependent upon God, as I have sought to demonstrate above, for the organization and expression of his identity, and while self-conformation to a fundamentally virtuous human nature does not altogether rule out divine illumination or guidance, the displacement of God which it supposes does problematize the notion that the divine might provide a context for human identity. However, I wish now to suggest that the perception of a basically virtuous humanity in the text is accompanied by a conception of God which, rather than disallowing human self-reference, transforms it into a properly humble and reverent activity.

### **The hiddenness of God**

The *Apologie* repeatedly insists upon the mystery and inaccessibility of the divine: '[A] Il s'en faut tant que nos forces conçoivent la hauteur divine, que, des ouvrages de nostre createur, ceux-là portent mieux sa marque et sont mieux siens, que nous entendons le moins

(p. 478); '[C] "*Melius scitur deus nesciendo*", dict S. Augustin' (p. 478); '[A] comme dit Euripides, "*Les œuvres de Dieu en diverses/ Façons nous donnent des traverses*"' (p. 490); '[A] De toutes les opinions humaines et anciennes touchant la religion, celle là me semble avoir eu plus de vraysemblance et plus d'excuse, qui reconnoissoit Dieu comme une puissance incomprehensible' (p. 493). The two levels—divine and human—are entirely and absolutely distinct. It is presumptuous and vain, therefore, to link them through speculation or enquiry: '[C] Platon estime qu'il y ayt quelque vice d'impiété à trop curieusement s'enquerir et de Dieu' (p. 479); '[B] C'est plus grande presumption, dict Plutarque, à ceux qui ne sont qu'hommes d'entreprendre de parler et discourir des dieux et des demy-dieux que ce n'est à un homme ignorant de musique, vouloir juger de ceux qui chantent' (p. 501).

If God is beyond man's legitimate reach, the reclamation of an identity in God becomes somewhat problematic. Once human and divine realms have been so decisively set apart, man's 'natural' condition and home appear to be worldly rather than heavenly, and reaching towards the divine, seen by Calvin as the way to reclaim one's true and perfect identity, is transformed into the unnaturalness of the learned overreacher, and contrasted with the limited human condition: 'Quel sacrilège, en effet, aux yeux de Montaigne, quel crime de lèse-divinité, mais aussi quelle folie, quel crime contre l'homme réel, dans sa vérité propre, dans ses limites d'homme, que de prétendre accéder à ce qui est absolument inaccessible car radicalement étranger à l'homme dans sa radicale altérité: Dieu!'<sup>73</sup> It is not irreverent to look inwards rather than upwards, therefore, but rather the reverse: where for Poggio or Calvin, man is raised from his natural sinfulness to a dignity found in God, for Montaigne, man's misery consists in his aspiration towards dignity and divinity; his greatest dignity in turning from the contemplation of God to embrace his natural humanity. It is entirely proper to abandon the search for God, therefore, and to live out one's natural condition. The text

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<sup>73</sup> Géralde Nakam, 'Le Dieu de l'*Apologie de Raymond Sebond*: de Plutarque à Montaigne', *BSAM*, 7th series, 33-34 (July-December 1993), 132-48 (p. 133).

suggests not only that man *may* look to himself rather than God, but even that he *ought* to reclaim this natural identity.

However, there is still one further move for the text to make. The conformity to one's natural humanity, while it is a properly humble alternative to the presumption of reaching towards God, is also associated with divine command:

[A] Il est plus honorable d'estre acheminé et obligé à réglément agir par naturelle et inevitable condition, et plus approchant de la divinité, que d'agir réglément par liberté temeraire et fortuite; et plus seur de laisser à nature qu'à nous les resnes de nostre conduite. La vanité de nostre presumption faict que nous aymons mieux devoir à nos forces qu'à sa liberalité nostre suffisance; et enrichissons les autres animaux des biens naturels et les leur renonçons, pour nous honorer et ennoblir des biens acquis; par une humeur bien simple, ce me semble, car je priseroy bien autant des graces toutes miennes et naifves que celles que j'aurois esté mendier et quester de l'apprentissage. Il n'est pas en nostre puissance d'acquérir une plus belle recommandation que d'estre favorisé de Dieu et de nature. (p. 437)

While nature and the divine are never equated in the *Apologie*, passages such as this suggest that it is in looking to nature that man might fulfil God's purposes for him. It is when ruled by natural impulse that the self 'approche la divinité' most closely, and 'Dieu et nature' together bestow the 'graces' and 'biens' with which it is blessed. In earlier versions of the text, the final line ends alternately with 'favorisé de Dieu' and 'favorisé de nature'.<sup>74</sup> This indecision between the two terms, and the final retention of both as sources of the human condition, suggest that nature, created by God, is for Montaigne the condition to which He wishes man to conform. Likewise elsewhere virtue, associated throughout the *Essais* with the virtuous natural condition, is seen as the proper product of Christian truth: '[B] La marque peculièere de nostre verité devroit estre nostre vertu, comme elle est aussi la plus celeste

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<sup>74</sup> Hugo Friedrich describes this hesitation in his discussion of nature in Montaigne: 'il hésite d'abord entre les termes "Dieu" et "nature", passant de l'un à l'autre, pour finalement les assimiler dans la formule "Dieu et la nature"'. *Montaigne*, trans. by Robert Rovini (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), p. 331. Craig B. Brush cites a second instance -- in "C'est folie de rapporter le vray et le faux à nostre suffisance" -- where 'Montaigne crossed out the word "Dieu" and substituted "nature" for it'. *Montaigne and Bayle: Variations on the Theme of Skepticism* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1966), p. 46.

marque et la plus difficile, et que c'est la plus digne production de la verité' (p. 419). Where Sebond proposes the Book of Nature as a source of revelation about God, Montaigne presents the book of human nature as a (partial) index to God's purposes for man.

The natural condition to which the self must conform in the absence of God is thus itself divinely ordained. According to the passage above, the self chooses submission rather than freedom in conforming to its own condition: life 'acheminé et obligé à réglément agir par naturelle et inevitable condition' is explicitly contrasted with life 'reglément par liberté temeraire et fortuite'. However, it effectively chooses both conformity to self and submission to God at once. Once natural human impulses become a register (however partial), of a divinely-appointed morality, life in accordance with oneself and with God begin to collapse together.

This vision of a divinity situated beyond the reach of man, and a human nature which serves as a guide for human conduct, resolves many of the tensions which formerly characterized the human-divine relationship. Both the sense of (external) constraint and (internal) invasion dissolve once the self's own nature is merged with divine decree: there is no longer a radical other authorized to circumscribe or empty out the subject, no longer a problematic tension between the commands of the other and the desires of the self. And at the same time, the benefits of the divine other continue to be felt. The hidden God described by Montaigne is still able to function as a defining other for man: symbolizing the Absolute, and beyond human apprehension, He serves to demonstrate the littleness and misery of impoverished humanity. The otherness of creature to Creator is preserved, therefore, even though what it means to fulfil that creatureliness is now revealed by virtuous human nature. The immediate, problematic presence of God as an Other with the authority to intervene in human identity is eliminated, but the idea of God remains. In the same way, the divine is still an important point of reference in the formation of human identity. The principle of obedience to God is

nowhere revoked; but the subject now decides what such obedience consists in according to the natural moral resources with which God has equipped him. The power of God to illuminate man is also, finally, preserved in this account. Since divine inspiration is in some sense relocated within human nature, even as God Himself is removed to a divine elsewhere, the illumination and motivation which the self earlier sought remain available to him.

This reinterpretation of the human-divine relation finds expression in the final scene of the essay:

[A] Et nous, et nostre jugement, et toutes choses mortelles, vont coulant et roulant sans cesse. Ainsin il ne se peut establir rien de certain de l'un à l'autre, et le jugeant et le jugé estans en continuelle mutation et branle. [...] Dieu seul est, non point selon aucune mesure du temps, mais selon une eternité immuable et immobile, non mesurée par temps, ny subjecte à aucune declinaison. [...]

A cette conclusion si religieuse d'un homme payen je veux joindre seulement ce mot d'un tesmoing de mesme condition [...]: "O la vile chose, dict-il, et abjecte que l'homme, s'il ne s'esleve au dessus de l'humanité!" Voylà un bon mot et un utile desir, mais pareillement absurde. Car de faire la poignée plus grande que le poing, la brassée plus grande que le bras, et d'esperer enjamber plus que de l'estanduë de nos jambes, cela est impossible et monstreux. Ny que l'homme se monte au dessus de soy et de l'humanité: car il ne peut voir que de ses yeux, ny saisir que de ses prises. Il s'esleva si Dieu lui preste extraordinairement la main; il s'esleva, abandonnant et renonçant à ses propres moyens, et se laissant hausser et soublever par les moyens purement celestes. (pp. 586, 588-89)

God is still an important presence in the passage here, but He is also set at a distance from the individual human subject. As Being—one who is, 'non point selon aucune mesure du temps, mais selon une eternité immuable et immobile'—He remains a defining other against which human judgement, 'coulant et roulant sans cesse' may be placed, and in relation to which its insignificance and misery may be understood. At the same time, however, He is set at a considerable distance. The possibility of transcendence is acknowledged; but man may rise only 'extraordinairement'; as a result of exceptional divine intervention. As Nakam puts it, 'C'est à l'extrême limite du possible que l'oxymore de Montaigne unit l'ordre divin du

miracle et l'ordre humain et naturel de la métamorphose.'<sup>75</sup> Transcendence, like the miraculous in 'Des boyteux', becomes a theoretical possibility, placed beyond the normal experience of man, and also beyond his legitimate aspiration. He should not seek to rise beyond his natural condition: 'faire la poignée plus grande que le poing', or 'esperer enjamber plus que de l'estandue de nos jambes' is not to approach godliness, but rather to pitch towards the 'monstreux', and to overreach one's calling. This calling is to conformity with the natural state and reach of the self; which must seek only to 'saisir [...] de ses prises'. The self is confined by the remoteness of God to the realm of his own humanity; a 'confinement' which grants it the authority, however, to 'voir [...] de ses yeux', and to speak its own words.

To an extent, therefore, the text succeeds in meeting the contradictory demands of the human-divine relation. The theorization of an inherently virtuous and divinely-inspired natural condition, and a remote, majestic God, enables the continued definition of the self through the otherness of the divine, and the continued illumination of the self through the convergence of the human and divine, but the removal of the threat to the integrity of the self which the divine was formerly perceived to pose.

### **The absence of Christ**

I wish finally to consider the absence of Christ from the *Apologie*, and to suggest that it supports my reading of the text, since the presence of Christ would contradict Montaignean theology as I have defined it in important ways. The lack of reference to Christ, both in the *Apologie*, and in the *Essais* as a whole, is frequently noted by critics. Brush reflects that 'The austere inhuman God of the *Apologie* seems un-Christian to the extent that Christianity is the religion of God made man. Of the three persons of the Trinity, the Son is absent; and the

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<sup>75</sup> Nakam, p. 137.



Holy Ghost, if present, is banished to the highest heavens, whence He descends seldom'.<sup>76</sup>

Conche notes that 'les mots "Sainte Trinité", "Incarnation", "Rédemption" n'apparaissent pas dans les *Essais*', while 'le mot "Dieu" revient trois cent trente et une fois', while Pholien remarks that 'les allusions au Christ sont rarissimes dans les *Essais*'.<sup>77</sup> Christine Brousseau suggests that 'dans l'*Apologie*, et dans les *Essais* plus généralement, Dieu est si abstrait, si au-delà des dogmes, de l'incarnation et par conséquent de la Trinité, si peu chrétien en somme, que, malgré les citations de Paul et d'Augustin, il est plus proche du Dieu des "philosophes" déistes que du Dieu de la théologie scolastique'.<sup>78</sup> Leake, in his concordance to the *Essais*, finds only six references to Christ, all of which are incidental, and only one of which is in the *Apologie*.<sup>79</sup>

The Incarnation is also evoked only occasionally in the text, and is always displaced or disguised. Reflecting upon human reason, Montaigne suggests that '[A] la vraie raison et essentielle, de qui nous desrobons le nom à fauces enseignes, elle loge dans le sein de Dieu; c'est là son giste et sa retraite, c'est de là où elle part quand il plaist à Dieu nous en faire voir quelque rayon, comme Pallas saillit de la teste de son père pour se communiquer au monde' (p. 523). It is the glimmers of understanding which God may bestow, rather than his self-revelation through Christ, which are compared to Pallas's departure 'de son père pour se communiquer au monde'. Elsewhere, the possibility of divine incarnation appears among the presumptuous beliefs of other people. In his discussion of how philosophy has spoken of

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<sup>76</sup> Brush, p. 114.

<sup>77</sup> Marcel Conche, 'La Signification de Dieu pour Montaigne', *BSAM*, 7th series, 33-34 (July-December 1993), 21-34 (p. 23). Georges Pholien, 'Les *Essais* et la religion', *BSAM*, 7th series, 35-36 (January-June 1994), 123-31 (p. 131).

<sup>78</sup> Christine Brousseau, 'La Divine déconstruction dans l'*Apologie de Raymond Sebond*', *BSAM*, 7th series, 33-34 (July-December 1993), pp. 69-88 (p. 69).

<sup>79</sup> Christ is referred to in a passage dismissing oracles, which '[A] avoyent commencé à perdre leur credit [...] bonne piece avant la venuë de Jesus-Christ' (I: 11; p. 42); as an example of one '[A] qui [a] annobli [sa] vie par renommée' yet died before the age of thirty-five (I: 20; p. 83); in a quote from Saint Paul: '[A] "Je désire, dict Saint Paul, estre dissout pour estre avec Jesus-Christ"' (II: 3; p. 342); in an adaption of the same verse in the *Apologie*: '[A] Je veuil estre dissout, dirions nous, et estre aveques Jesus-Christ' (II: 12; p. 422); and twice in a passage where a bishop describes the Emperor Julian as a 'traistre à Christ', and then thanks Christ that, having lost his sight, he cannot see the emperor's 'visage

God, Montaigne describes, with evident disapproval, how men '[B] ramenant Dieu jusques à l'accointance charnelle des femmes. [...] [C] Combien y a il, ès histoires, de pareils cocuages procurez par les Dieux contre les pauvres humains? et des maris injurieusement descrivez en faveur des enfans? En la religion de Mahumet, il se trouve, par la croyance de ce peuple, assés de Merlins: assavoir enfans sans pere, spirituels, nays divinement au ventre des pucelles' (pp. 512-13).<sup>80</sup> Likewise, he dismisses '[C] anciennes conclusions' to the effect that 'Dieu est [...] revestu de l'humaine figure. *Ita est informatum, anticipatum mentibus nostris ut homini, cum de deo cogitet, forma occurrat humana*' (p. 514).<sup>81</sup>

This absence of Christ is interpreted in various ways by the critics who choose to discuss it. Brousseau suggests that it is partially explained by 'Le projet de l'*Apologie*'; which is 'sans doute de prêcher l'obéissance civile et religieuse plutôt que le salut'.<sup>82</sup> Brush sees it as a symbol of 'the lack of mediation between Montaigne's God and man'.<sup>83</sup> A more detailed explanation is offered by Nakam, who argues that 'Le Dieu de l'*Apologie* ne peut avoir de "médiateur". Il doit rester radicalement "autre". Le Dieu chrétien s'incarne. Le Dieu de l'*Apologie* ne peut pas, ne doit pas s'incarner, mais rester impénétrable et abstrait. Cette conception est indispensable à Montaigne pour confondre l'inepte et monstrueuse prétention des théologiens, de leur "doctrine", de leurs diktats'.<sup>84</sup> This is in many ways a convincing interpretation: a number of the passages above are extracted from diatribes against the presumption of humanity in fashioning God in his own image. It is also clear that a number of

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impudent' (II: 19; p. 652). Roy E. Leake, *Concordance des 'Essais' de Montaigne*, Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance, 187, 2 vols (Geneva: Droz, 1981), I, p. 660.

<sup>80</sup> Brush, pp. 93-94 discusses this passage in his analysis of Montaigne's religious (in)sincerity: 'To have made gods human can only have come from "une merveilleuse yvresse de l'entendement humain". But what of the Christian doctrine of the incarnation? [...] When he mocks ancient legends of virgins impregnated by gods, how can one help thinking of the virgin Mary?'

<sup>81</sup> Elsewhere, the power of Scripture to reveal God, and the Passion of Christ, are apparently also cast in doubt: '[A] Nous disons bien puissance, verité, justice. [...] [B] Nous disons que Dieu craint, que Dieu se courrouce, que Dieu ayme, *Immortalia mortali sermone notantes*; ce sont toutes agitations et émotions qui ne peuvent loger en Dieu selon nostre forme. [...] [C] La fortitude à porter la douleur, le labour, les dangers, luy appartiennent aussi peu, ces trois choses n'ayans nul accès près de luy' (p. 479).

<sup>82</sup> Brousseau, p. 69.

<sup>83</sup> Brush, p. 113.

<sup>84</sup> Nakam, p. 137.

humanist writers did interpret the Incarnation as the glorification of man by God: 'But if our first parents had never sinned, Christ, nevertheless, would have descended from heaven to earth [...] in order that through this humble assumption of human flesh He might marvellously and unbelievably honour and glorify man. For it was thought that nothing also was lacking to that nature which He had made so beautiful, so ingenious, so wise and so opulent, so worthy and so potent, finally so happy and so blessed for its total and absolute perfection in every respect except that through admixture with divinity itself it should not only be conjoined in that person of Christ with the divine person but also rendered one and the same with the divine nature.'<sup>85</sup>

The absence of Christ operates in the first instance, therefore, as a weapon against the presumption of contemporary theologians and philosophers. However, it is also necessary if the self-conforming subjectivity I have suggested Montaigne envisages is to appear theologically legitimate. Christ is presented in other Renaissance texts as an example for the human subject to model his life upon. As Thomas à Kempis had exhorted fifteenth-century man to 'conform his whole life to His',<sup>86</sup> so too sixteenth-century handbooks of Christian conduct call for a close imitation of Christ. Erasmus, in his *Enchiridion militis christiani* (1503), believes 'the model of all piety' to be 'readily found in Christ', and seeks to illustrate the fruit of the Spirit by appealing to His example: 'Where is charity, where is that joy of the mind? Where is peace toward all men? Where is patience, long-suffering, goodness, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity? Where is the image of Christ in your morals?'<sup>87</sup> Tyndale, too, in his *Obedience of a Christian Man* (1528) continually exhorts his reader to make Christ his example and guide. He observes how 'Christ also suffered for our sakes, leaving us an ensample to follow his steps'; and praises

<sup>85</sup> Manetti, III, p. 98; trans. by Trinkaus, pp. 252-53.

<sup>86</sup> *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. by Leo Sherley-Price (London: Penguin, 1952), p. 27.

<sup>87</sup> *Enchiridion militis christiani*, in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, LXVI, trans. by Charles Fantazzi, ed. by John W. O'Malley (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), pp. 72, 75. For the Latin, see *Opera omnia*, V, ed. by Petri Vander (Hildesheim: Olms, 1962), pp. 31, 33.

the 'spiritual men' who 'look on the exceeding mercy, love, and kindness, which God hath shewed them in Christ; and therefore love again, and work freely'; and urges the reader to 'becometh a servant to other, (after the ensample of Christ [...] and his apostles)'.<sup>88</sup>

This emphasis upon the imitation of Christ contradicts Montaignean theology in a fundamental way. I have suggested that his objective of adherence to self, of life lived in accordance with one's natural humanity, is justified in terms of an unknowable and unreachable God, in seeking whom man exceeds his human prerogative. If Christ is acknowledged as a model, however, such a theology becomes impossible to sustain.

Embodying the principles and precepts of God, Christ dissolves the barriers separating God from man, and problematizes the autonomy and self-inscription envisaged by Montaigne.

While the absence of Christ from his account may signal an attempt to confound those theologians who interpret the Incarnation as evidence for the dignity of man, his own theology also requires the elimination of Christ. Seeking to establish the autonomy of man, his thinking has no place for a divine exemplar.<sup>89</sup>

Christological doctrine also poses a second threat to the theology of Montaigne. Petrarch interprets the Incarnation in the following terms:

By an unchanging law of divine wisdom from eternity humanity was to be raised up, divinity bent down. And both equally having happened, there occurred the salutary and celebrated union without which *humanitas* would have lain sick and torpid forever. Neither one could be done without the other;

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<sup>88</sup> William Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, in *Doctrinal Treatises and Introductions to Different Portions of the Holy Scriptures*, ed. by Henry Walter (Cambridge: C. U. P., 1848), pp. 131-344 (pp. 172, 182, 190).

<sup>89</sup> Conche, p. 21 suggests that the *Essais* as a whole, if not specifically the *Apologie*, substitute Socrates for Christ as an example to men: "Il est bien advenu que le plus digne homme d'estre cogneu et d'estre presenté au monde pour exemple, ce soit celuy duquel nous ayons plus certaine cognoissance. [...]" (Villey). C'est un chrétien qui parle. Le plus digne homme d'être "présenté au monde pour exemple" ne peut donc être que Jésus. Vous n'y êtes pas. C'est de Socrate qu'il s'agit. [...] Admirons, dit-il, celui qui "dressa non seulement les plus réglées, mais les plus hautes et vigoreuses creances, actions et meurs qui furent onques" Qui est celui-ci? Jésus, évidemment (quelles croyances furent plus "hautes" que les siennes?). Mais non! C'est Socrate encore.'

or rather it could be done through none other than through Him who 'bowed down His heavens and descended', who looked upon earth and made it tremble.<sup>90</sup>

For Petrarch, Christ is the redeemer of sinful mankind, the mediator between fallen man and God. And if Christ is the Saviour of man, then man must stand in need of salvation: one doctrine presupposes the other. This does not, however, accommodate the basically virtuous natural humanity posited by Montaigne. The Incarnation is a response to the Fall: the two are inextricably bound together as parts of the same theological scheme. Having chosen to reject the account provided in Genesis, therefore, Montaigne inevitably discovers a disjunction between the Christian doctrine of salvation and the anthropology he constructs.<sup>91</sup> Yet unlike those humanist writers who take an optimistic view of mankind, Montaigne cannot reinterpret the Incarnation as a sign of man's dignity and glory: his perception of man's vanity and weakness militates against such a solution. He wants it both ways: he wishes on the one hand to humiliate man, but on the other to ascribe an initial unfallenness to him, to eliminate the notion of inevitable human sin. There is no easy way for him to sustain this interpretation in the face of the Gospel narratives. And without this concept of man, the conformity to self which he envisages ceases to exist as a viable philosophy. There are two ways, therefore, in which Christological doctrine undermines Montaignean theology, and thus Montaigne's resolution of the paradox of otherness. Revealing God to man, and reconciling fallen man to God, the figure of Christ invalidates both the idea of a natural human virtue, and the theology of a God so distant that man must live in accordance with himself. It is necessary, therefore, that Christ remain absent from his text. While he wishes to fashion human identity in relation to God, he seeks to establish a distance from God, and to assume a degree of virtue apart from God, which the figure of Christ disallows.

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<sup>90</sup> Francesco Petrarch, *De otio religioso* (1347), ed. by Giuseppe Rotondi (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1958), p. 41. Trans. by Trinkaus, p. 37.

<sup>91</sup> For Montaigne, 'la nature humaine n'est pas foncièrement corrompue et n'a nul besoin d'un Rédempteur'. Pholien, p. 127.

Nevertheless, the extent to which Montaigne does wish to see man's identity in the perspective of his relationship with God is clear in the context of the extract from *De hominis dignitate* with which I began. According to Pico, man stands completely independent of God; granted by his Maker the authority to live according to his own desire and will. No demands are made upon him; no laws established to govern him, no function ordained to guide and direct him. Compared with such a vision, the complexities of the Montaignean account are made manifest. The impulse to self-government which the *Apologie* articulates, and its desire to relocate the divine presence beyond the boundaries and the perception of the self, are set against a need to be part of an order ordained and governed by God. The self depends upon the divine for purpose and definition, and for illumination and motivation to shape its thought and conduct. Where Pico abolishes all contexts and frameworks, therefore, Montaigne is careful to keep them in place. The self continues to stand in a specific relation to God, and to conceive its identity within a coherent spiritual order. However, it seeks to manipulate that order to ensure that it accommodates its own desires and self-understanding. Theorizing a divinely-inspired, naturally virtuous human condition, and a remote, majestic God, the text attempts to negotiate a human identity generated by the individual self, yet also conforming to the purposes and laws of God.

## SCEPTICISM

I wish finally to look at the use made of philosophical scepticism in the *Essais*, and the ways in which it is relevant to the issues examined above; firstly in the *Apologie* – where it has a vital role to play in the negotiation of the relation between self and divine other which I have described – and then as a way of resolving the paradox of difference elaborated in ‘Des cannibales’ and ‘Des boyteux’.

### Scepticism in the *Apologie*

In the *Apologie*, scepticism is used to humiliate human reason, and thus to point man back towards humble submission to God. However, the way in which it operates in the text also disguises, or reinflects, the negotiations which take place as the self takes up a position within a wider spiritual framework, while retaining its right to self-reference. I have suggested above that the self interprets God as remote and inaccessible, and that it is this unknowability of divine decree which authorizes the self to live according to the prompting of a potentially virtuous human nature. The presence and use of scepticism in the passages which discuss the character of God make such an interpretation of the divine seem more reverent, and less motivated, than it might otherwise appear. The account of Pyrrhonian scepticism in the essay differs from that in his source, Sextus Empiricus, in a number of significant ways, and these specific modifications work to further and enhance a disguise which exploits the suspension of judgement at the heart of the sceptical process.

Montaigne's account of ancient scepticism appears at first glance to follow the Greek original very closely. He describes how, finding it impossible to discern the truth on any subject, Pyrrhonians are led to suspend their judgement, and to incline instead towards doubt on every side:

[A] Leurs façons de parler sont: Je n'establis rien; il n'est non plus ainsi qu'ainsin, ou que ny l'un ny l'autre; je ne le comprends point; les apparences sont égales par tout; la loy de parler et pour et contre, est pareille. [C] Rien ne semble vray, qui ne puisse sembler faux. [A] Leur mot sacramental, c'est επεχω, c'est à dire je soutiens, je ne bouge. Voylà leurs refrains, et autres de pareille substance. Leur effect, c'est une pure, entiere et très-parfaicte surceance et suspension de jugement. Ils se servent de leur raison pour enquerir et pour debatre, mais non pas pour arrester et choisir. (II: 12, p. 485)

This is the *epoché* (εποχή) described by Sextus in his *Hypotyposes*: a complete suspension of judgement compelled by the contradictory arguments which confront the enquiring mind. The result of this suspension of judgement is *ataraxia* (αταραξία), '[A] une condition de vie

paisible, rassise, exempte des agitations que nous recevons par l'impression de l'opinion et science que nous pensons avoir des choses' (p. 483).<sup>92</sup> However, while the sceptic does not need a system of belief in order to live in the world, he does require some kind of framework to govern his actions; and this he finds in custom, laws and natural inclinations: '[A] Quant aux actions de la vie, ils sont en cela de la commune façon. Ils se prestant et accommodent aux inclinations naturelles, à l'impulsion et contrainte des passions, aux constitutions des loix et des coustumes et à la tradition des arts' (p. 485).

However, while the substance of this passage can be traced directly to the first book of the *Hypotyposes*, Montaigne modifies Sextus's account in two important ways. The first is his description of the steps which lead to the sceptical *epoche*. Sextus describes a process which begins with a search for truth: 'Men of talent, who were perturbed by the contradictions in things and in doubt as to which of the alternatives they ought to accept, were led on to inquire what is true in things and what false, hoping by the settlement of this question to attain quietude.'<sup>93</sup> However, owing to the 'equipollence' (*isosthenia*), the 'equality in respect of probability and improbability', of the conflicting arguments before him, the enquirer is forced to suspend his judgement, and in doing so finds that the quietude he has sought comes to him by accident: 'The Sceptic, in fact, had the same experience which is said to have befallen the painter Apelles. Once, they say, when he was painting a horse and wished to represent in the painting the horse's foam, he was so unsuccessful that he gave up the attempt and flung at the picture the sponge on which he used to wipe the paints off his brush, and the mark of the sponge produced the effect of a horse's foam.'<sup>94</sup> The sceptical suspension of judgement is

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<sup>92</sup> For Sextus's description of *ataraxia*, see Sextus Empiricus, trans. by R. G. Bury, 4 vols (London: Heinemann; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), I: *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, I: 4, p. 9.

<sup>93</sup> *Outlines*, I: 6, p. 9.

<sup>94</sup> *Outlines*, I: 4, pp. 7-9; I: 7, pp. 19-21.



originally unintended, therefore, and finally takes place due to the undecidability of the subject under discussion.<sup>95</sup>

The *Apologie* presents the process in different terms. While its initial presentation of the sceptical method introduces the idea of undecidability ('il n'est non plus ainsi qu'ainsin, ou que ny l'un ny l'autre; [...] les apparences sont égales par tout; la loy de parler et pour et contre, est pareille'), the text as a whole appears to interpret the sceptical process as a determined confession of ignorance which aims for, rather than being led to, a complete suspension of judgement. Sceptics '[A] cherchent qu'on les contredie, pour engendrer la dubitation et surceance de jugement, qui est leur fin' (p. 483); Pyrrhonians '[B] se sont reservez un merueilleux avantage au combat, s'estant deschargez du soing de se couvrir. Il ne leur importe qu'on les frape, pourveu qu'ils frappent; et font leurs besongnes de tout. S'ils vainquent, vostre proposition cloche; si vous, la leur. S'ils faillent, ils verifient l'ignorance; si vous faillez, vous la verifiez' (p. 484). In some sense, this interpretation already lurks beneath the surface of Sextus's account: although the first time he suspends his judgement, the sceptic may not anticipate that *ataraxia* will follow, it seems inevitable, despite Sextus's insistence to the contrary, that his scepticism would subsequently consist of a search for tranquillity through *epoche*.<sup>96</sup> However, in Montaigne, this impulse to *ataraxia* is openly

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<sup>95</sup> Burnyeat emphasizes that the sceptic 'does not and could not choose *epoche* for the sake of *ataraxia*': 'So far from relying on the will to control assent, the sceptic panacea, beginning with the Ten Modes of Aenesidemus, is to use reason to check all the sources of belief and destroy all trust in reason itself, thereby eliminating the very inclination to believe. The life without belief is not an achievement of the will but a paralysis of reason by itself.' 'Can the Sceptic Live his Scepticism?', in *Doubt and Dogmatism: Studies in Hellenistic Epistemology*, ed. by Malcolm Schofield, Myles Burnyeat and Jonathan Barnes (Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1980), pp. 20-53 (p. 42).

<sup>96</sup> Martha Nussbaum identifies the way in which Sextus upholds his position. Considering the clause in Sextus "'from which we come, through the equal force [...] first into suspension, and after that into *ataraxia*", she argues that 'Two possibilities appear to be open. First, we might treat the clause as a nonrestrictive modifier. [...] In the (*sic*) case, skepticism would apparently be any old *antithetike dunamis*, and it just happens to lead to these results. The second possibility is that the modifier is restrictive, the results a part of the definition. Skepticism is a particular *antithetike dunamis*, namely, the one from which we come into suspension, equipoise, *ataraxia*. The skeptic is not operating correctly as a skeptic, unless he is aiming his know-how at those results, or at least practicing (*sic*) his know-how in the particular way that would produce those results. We shall later see that the ambiguity is no accident: that Sextus wants and needs to claim the first understanding, but is forced continually

acknowledged, and the original dynamic of enquiry --> conflict --> *isostheneia* ---> *epoche* --> *ataraxia* is thus transformed into a static demonstration of a pre-acknowledged ignorance.

The second important difference between the presentation of Pyrrhonism in the *Hypotyposes* and the account provided by Montaigne is the latter's interpretation of the sceptical concept of life lived according to custom, or the way things appear to be. When Sextus speaks of 'the guidance of Nature', he means 'that by which we are naturally capable of sensation and thought'; the 'constraint of the passions', or 'that whereby hunger drives us to food and thirst to drink'.<sup>97</sup> In Montaigne, however, the term has a much wider application. This in turn depends upon a third modification of Sextus's original account. According to Sextus, the value of *ataraxia* is its capacity to free men from perturbation and dispute: 'The man who opines that anything is by nature good or bad is for ever being disquieted. [...] On the other hand, the man who determines nothing as to what is naturally good or bad neither shuns nor pursues anything eagerly; and, in consequence, he is unperturbed.'<sup>98</sup> While scepticism is concerned with the desirability, as well as the possibility, of knowledge, therefore, its ultimate end is human happiness. In Montaigne's account, by contrast, *ataraxia* acquires a moral resonance: as '[A] une condition de vie' which stands opposed to 'l'opinion et science', it manages to avoid 'la crainte, l'avarice, l'envie, les desirs immoderez, l'ambition, l'orgueil, la superstition, l'amour de nouvelleté, la rebellion, la desobeissance, l'opiniatreté et la pluspart des maux corporels' (p. 483).<sup>99</sup> It thus becomes identified with the natural virtue which I have discussed above, and which is elsewhere described in very similar terms: '[A] L'incivilité, l'ignorance, la simplesse, la rudesse s'accompaignent volontiers de

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towards the second.' 'Skeptic Purgatives: Therapeutic Arguments in Ancient Skepticism', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 29 (1991), 521-57 (pp. 528-29).

<sup>97</sup> *Outlines*, I: 11, p. 17.

<sup>98</sup> *Outlines*, I: 12, p. 19.

<sup>99</sup> David R. Hiley assigns a 'moral purpose' to Pyrrhonian scepticism also. However, this moral point is equivalent to the 'quietude' which I have identified above: 'moral' in this instance designates the human, as against the epistemological, end of Pyrrhonism; rather than the values which attach to *ataraxia* in the Montaignean account. 'The Deep Challenge of Pyrrhonian Scepticism', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 25 (1987), 185-213 (pp. 185-87).

l'innocence; la curiosité, la subtilité, le sçavoir trainent la malice à leur suite; l'humilité, la crainte, l'obeissance, la debonnaireté (qui sont les pieces principales pour la conservation de la société humaine) demandent une ame vuide, docile et presumant peu de soy' (p. 477).

When the Montaignean account of scepticism moves immediately on from this description of *epoche* and *ataraxia* to the way in which the sceptic lives out his life, therefore, the 'inclinations naturelles' which it cites as its guiding principle extend beyond the appetites and passions described by Sextus (which the passage has already related) to incorporate also the natural virtue to which the sceptical process is itself seen to lead.

Montaigne's representation of Pyrrhonian scepticism deviates from the original in two key ways, therefore. It reduces emphasis upon enquiry and undecidability; envisaging the suspension of judgement as the goal of the sceptical process, and it extends the range of impulses to which the sceptic can refer as he seeks to live his life according to nature. I wish now to suggest that these specific modifications of Sextus's account, and the suspension of judgement at the heart of the sceptical process, enable the Montaignean attribution of hiddenness to God, and disguise the authorization of self-reference to which it leads.

The passages in the *Apologie* which discuss the unknowability of God, and those which consider the claims of scepticism, are often intertwined: the hiddenness of God, and the sceptical doctrine of suspension, are often used to criticize the presumption of dogmatic philosophy. Thus the extended discussion of sceptical philosophy at the centre of the text is followed by a denunciation of those who would assign the divine a specific shape or form:

[C] Perseus, auditeur de Zeno, a tenu qu'on a surnommé Dieu ceux qui avoyent apporté quelque notable utilité à l'humaine vie et les choses mesmes profitables. Chrysippus faisoit un amas confus [...] et comptoit, entre mille formes de Dieux qu'il faict, les hommes aussi qui sont immortalisez. Diagoras et Theodorus nioyent tout sec qu'il y eust des Dieux. Epicurus faict les dieux luisans, transparens et perflables, logez, comme entre deux forts, entre deux mondes, à couvert des coups, revestus d'une humaine figure et de nos membres, lesquels membres leur sont de nul usage.[...] Fiez vous à vostre

philosophie; vantez vous d'avoir trouvé la feve au gasteau, à voir ce tintamarre de tant de cervelles philosophiques! (p. 496)

The contradictory perspectives produced by dogmatic affirmation undermine the notion of identifiable truth, and demonstrate the wisdom of the sceptical approach. At the same time, dogmatism is identified with presumption, and scepticism with humility.

However, the close integration of these two themes also has a second effect:

[A] Croyons nous que Platon, luy qui a eu ses conceptions si celestes, et si grande accointance à la divinité, que le surnom luy en est demeuré, ait estimé que l'homme, cette pauvre creature, eut rien en luy applicable à cette incomprehensible puissance? [...] Il faudroit luy dire de la part de la raison humaine: 'Si les plaisirs que tu nous promets en l'autre vie sont de ceux que j'ay senti çà bas, cela n'a rien de commun avec l'infinité. [...] Nous ne pouvons dignement concevoir la grandeur de ces hautes et divines promesses, si nous les pouvons aucunement concevoir: pour dignement les imaginer, il faut les imaginer inimaginables, indicibles et incomprehensibles'. (pp. 498-99)

Examined on its own, this passage reveals itself as a dogmatic assertion of the hiddenness and unreachableness of God; a verdict which is necessary if the self is to legitimate life with reference to itself. However, in the context of a discussion affirming the sceptical suspension of judgement, and showing the confusion produced by dogmatic assertion about God, it appears to make a very different statement. Scepticism has no criterion for deciding whether any particular statement about God is true or false, and therefore demands that judgement be withheld. For the sceptic, unknowability is not a quality of God: rather, the question of who or what God is is undecidable. In the extract above Montaigne uses the same idea of unknowability, but employs it as a descriptor, which he dogmatically ascribes to God: He is an 'incomprehensible puissance', His promises 'inimaginables, indicibles et incomprehensibles'. Rather than the condition of not knowing attaching to the subject, the property of unknowability is attributed to God. The slippage between the two, however, is not immediately visible: the first sense of the term, evoked by the context, appears to govern

the discussion of God's hiddenness also; which thus appears to take heed of the warning against dogmatic assertion, and to withhold its judgement in a properly humble and sceptical manner. In this way the dogmatic ascription of unknowability to God, and the ways in which this ultimately serves the purposes of the self, are hidden from view.

This disguise is helped by the modifications made to Sextus's account of Pyrrhonism by Montaigne. Montaigne's re-presentation of *epoche* as scepticism's ultimate goal, first of all, creates a middle ground between the position adopted by Sextus, and his own dogmatic assertion. If in Sextus, unknowability is a conclusion; reached through enquiry, conflict and undecidability, in Montaigne's reworking of Sextus, it is a premise, which demonstrates itself through conflict, and dispenses with enquiry altogether. This presupposition of ignorance approaches the negative dogmatism of Academic scepticism, which asserts that nothing can be known.<sup>100</sup> And the presumption that nothing can be known is closer to the assertion that God cannot be known than the latter is to the sceptical process which reflects that there are many philosophies about God between which it is not possible to decide, therefore judgement about God must be suspended. The idea that nothing can be known is crucially ambiguous, because it fails to make clear whether unknowingness attaches to the agent of knowledge, or unknowability to its object. It is thus able to mediate between the Greek position, which assumes the first meaning, and the *Apologie*, which employs the second. This is not to suggest, however, that crucial differences do not remain between the two: where the first continues to suspend judgement on all subjects, but accounts for this suspension through a quasi-dogmatic assertion of ignorance, the second actually exercises judgement, but disguises it as suspension.

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<sup>100</sup> 'Academics treat [truth] as inapprehensible: the Sceptics keep on searching' (*Outlines*, I: 1, p. 3). For a summary of the differences between Academic scepticism and Pyrrhonism, see Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), pp. xiii-xvi.

The second way in which Montaigne modifies Sextus's account -- extending the concept of 'nature' beyond the promptings of hunger and thirst to incorporate those of an inherent natural virtue -- also has a part to play in his appropriation of autonomy. Although the shift is not immediately visible, the extension of the notion of 'natural inclinations' fundamentally reverses its significance. According to Sextus's account, such inclinations would be registered, but since they are subjective impressions or value-judgements, they should be given no authority or credence. All subjective impulses ultimately constitute judgements, beliefs or impressions, and as such they must be neither affirmed nor denied.<sup>101</sup> In this sense, Pyrrhonism demands a disengagement from oneself: 'When a thing appears in a certain light to [the sceptic], that no more inclines him to believe it is as it appears than would the fact of its so appearing to someone else. It is merely one more impression or appearance to be noted. Thus the withdrawal from truth and real existence becomes, in a certain sense, a detachment from oneself.'<sup>102</sup> However, it is exactly this subjectivity which Montaigne wishes to authorize, and his reinterpretation of Sextus enables him to do so. By turning the Pyrrhonian 'guidance of nature' into 'natural inclinations', and allowing man to consult and live according to his moral, as well as his physical, nature, the subjective impressions which scepticism refused to legitimate are validated under its auspices.<sup>103</sup>

The presence of scepticism in the *Apologie* thus helps to legitimate the theology of self-reference which the text elaborates in two ways. While it humiliates human resources, and ostensibly '[A] presente l'homme nud et vuide [...] propre à recevoir d'en haut quelque force estrangere' (p. 486), its use in those passages which discuss the hiddenness of God disguises

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<sup>101</sup> Burnyeat, p. 50 argues that this undogmatic recording of subjective impressions is problematic: The sceptic 'wants to say something of the form "It appears to me that *p* but I do not believe that *p*"'.

<sup>102</sup> Burnyeat, p. 37.

<sup>103</sup> Elaine Limbrick sees the philosophy of life according to (human) nature as an inevitable withdrawal from radical scepticism rather than a manipulation of sceptical tenets: 'L'expérience, ou le bon sens, nous enseigne que le scepticisme radical est intenable: il nous faut vivre dans le monde et agir selon les règles de la probabilité. [...] Le critère de la vérité pour Montaigne, comme pour beaucoup d'autres penseurs, est la perception individuelle, subjective de la réalité.' 'La Relation du scepticisme avec la

the self's ascription of unknowability to God, and thus presents as a humble withholding of judgement what might otherwise appear as a desire to break free from God. This disguise is helped by the reinterpretation of *epoche* as the goal of the sceptical method, and the correlative presumption that nothing can be known. At the same time, the validation of self-reference for which this interpretation of God prepares the way is performed through the sceptical philosophy of life lived according to nature. The subjective impressions excluded by Sextus as unverifiable judgements are smuggled in through the expansion of 'nature' to include moral inclinations, with the result that the self-detachment demanded by the Pyrrhonians is replaced by self-reference.

### **Scepticism and the paradox of difference**

I wish to conclude by considering Montaigne's use of scepticism in relation to the paradox of otherness which emerges in 'Des cannibales' and 'Des boyteux'. I have suggested that these two essays, unlike the *Apologie*, explore the benefits and drawbacks of difference for the self which encounters them. The particular ways in which the sceptical method is used in the *Essais*, and the particular ends to which it is put, offer a further response to this paradox of difference; a response which is consistent with, and which in many ways resembles, that which is articulated in 'Des cannibales'.

Having outlined the principles of Pyrrhonism, Montaigne proceeds to contrast it with the confusion and discordance produced by dogmatic philosophies:

[A] Or voyons ce que l'humaine raison nous a appris de soy et de l'ame. [...] A Crates et Dicæarchus, qu'il n'y en avoit du tout point, mais que le corps s'esbranloit ainsi d'un mouvement naturel; à Platon, que c'estoit une substance se mouvant de soy-mesme; à Thales, une nature sans repos; à Asclepiades, une exercitation des sens; à Hesiodus et Anaximander, chose composée de terre et d'eau; à Parmenides, de terre et de feu; à Empedocles, de sang,

*Sanguineam vomit ille animam;*  
à Possidonius, Cleantes et Galen, une chaleur ou complexion chaude,  
*Igneus est ollis vigor, et cælestis origo;*  
à Hypocrates, un esprit espandu par le corps; à Varro, un air receu par la  
bouche, eschauffé au poulmon, attrempé au cœur et espandu par tout le corps;  
à Zeno, la quint'essence des quatre elemens; à Heraclides Ponticus, la  
lumiere. (pp. 523-24)

The contradictory perspectives which are rehearsed in the extract here bring into focus once again the threat which difference poses to the self. Each of these perspectives challenges, and threatens to undermine, each of the others. Whatever position the self might choose to identify with, therefore, it would be undercut by a series of alternative locations. The extent of the danger is far greater here than in 'Des cannibales' or 'Des boyteux'. In the latter, the self is confronted by a single alternative perspective: New World practice in the first instance; witchcraft and the supernatural in the second. In the extract above, by contrast, there is a huge array of competing theories and ideas: Crates, Dicæarchus, Plato, Thales and Asclepiades all have different theories to offer when it comes to the human soul.

This plurality makes the reconciliation of self and other very much harder to achieve. Some of the theories in the extract here are available for elimination: as 'Des boyteux' fictionalizes or rejects the others it encountered, so here also, the text is able, to a certain extent at least, to mediate between the different perspectives to which it gives voice: '[A] la raison pourquoy Chrysippus l'argumente autour du cœur, comme les autres de sa secte, n'est pas pour estre oubliée: "C'est par ce, dit-il, que quand nous voulons asseurer quelque chose, nous mettons la main sur l'estomac; et quand nous voulons prononcer εγω, qui signifie moy, nous baissons vers l'estomac la machouere d'embas." Ce lieu ne se doit passer sans remarquer la vanité d'un si grand personnage' (p. 525). In the same way, the view of the ancient Stoics is dismissed from serious consideration: '[C] Voylà les Stoïciens, peres de l'humaine prudence, qui trouvent que l'ame d'un homme accablé sous une ruine, traine et ahanne longtemps à sortir, ne se pouvant demesler de la charge, comme une souris prinse à la trapelle' (p. 525).



However, when so many opinions are drawn together at once, there is no chance at all of integrating or refuting them all: whichever point of view the self might adopt, many others will exist which contradict it entirely.

However, Pyrrhonian scepticism offers an alternative to this problematic play of difference. When he finds himself faced with such a clash of philosophies, but without a criterion for mediating between them, the sceptic chooses *epoche*, which effectively dissolves the threat to which the self is exposed. Renouncing affirmation or denial, it prevents the emergence of otherness altogether: the different opinions which the self encounters are assigned no status in relation to it. Categories of self and other are suppressed or elided, and the threat which those othernesses posed is thus likewise overcome.

Sceptical principles are used in a comparable way in 'C'est folie de rapporter le vray et le faux à nostre suffisance'.<sup>104</sup> Montaigne describes the difficulty of drawing conclusions when one's own beliefs are contradicted by the testimony of trustworthy others:

[A] Quand nous lisons, dans Bouchet, les miracles des reliques de saint Hilaire, passe: son credit n'est pas assez grand pour nous oster la licence d'y contredire. Mais de condamner d'un train toutes pareilles histoires me semble singuliere impudence. Ce grand saint Augustin tesmoigne avoir veu, sur les reliques Saint Gervais et Protaise, à Milan, un enfant aveugle recouvrer la veuë; une femme, à Carthage, estre guerie d'un cancer par le signe de croix qu'une femme nouvellement baptisée luy fit. [...] Dequoy accuserons nous et luy et deux Saints Evesques, Aurelius et Maximinus, qu'il appelle pour ses recors? Sera ce d'ignorance, simplesse, facilité, ou de malice et imposture? Est-il homme, en nostre siecle, si impudent qui pense leur estre comparable, soit en vertu et pieté, soit en sçavoir, jugement et suffisance? (I: 27; p. 180)

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<sup>104</sup> Although the ideas in this essay are clearly very similar to those in the section of the *Apologie* I have examined above, and although Brush (p. 40) identifies the piece among Montaigne's sceptical early essays, it does not consciously draw on the Pyrrhonian philosophy. According to Villey, Montaigne is most likely to have read Sextus's *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* in early 1576: 'Au début de l'année 1576 (en janvier ou en février), Montaigne fit frapper à son effigie une médaille pyrrhonienne: il y a là une présomption sérieuse pour croire que la lecture de Sextus se place aux environs de 1576.' *Les Sources et l'évolution des 'Essais' de Montaigne* 2nd edn, 2 vols (Paris: Hachette, 1933) I, p. 243. This is possibly before he completed 'C'est folie de rapporter' as a whole, but after he wrote the section

Once again, the self is threatened by a contradictory other which cannot easily be dismissed. To reject the opinion of such a learned opponent would be inappropriate: '[A] les condamner impossibles, c'est se faire fort, par une temeraire presumption, de sçavoir jusques où va la possibilité' (p. 179). There is no way of conflating the two positions – the self is inclined to disbelieve such miracles, while the account it is considering flatly asserts that they took place -- yet to deny its own belief would constitute self-contradiction. However, there is another solution: '[A] si nous ne pouvons estre persuadez, au moins les faut-il laisser en suspens' (p. 179). Once again, decision is refused, affirmation and denial resisted, and categories of self and other thus remain unformed. In this second case, the withholding of decision also protects the self from internal fragmentation: '[A] C'est une hardiesse dangereuse et de consequence, outre l'absurde temerité qu'elle traisne quant et soy, de mespriser ce que nous ne concevons pas. Car après que, selon vostre bel entendement, vous avez estably les limites de la verité et de la mensonge, et qu'il se treuve que vous avez necessairement à croire des choses où il y a encores plus d'estrangeté qu'en ce que vous niez, vous vous estes des-jà obligé de les abandonner' (p. 180). When the self is so slippery and inconsistent, the creation of boundaries identifying self and other may lead to a temporal disjuncture. As the self adopts first one position in relation to the other, and then switches to take up another, its shifting response defines its own instability, and brings about a form of self-fracture.

However, there are problematic, as well as beneficial, implications for the self in this suspension of otherness. As I have suggested above, the self always in some sense depends upon the other for the formation or identification of selfhood. The refusal to create a category of otherness, therefore, prevents the elaboration of an individual identity: without an other to appropriate to itself, or to establish itself against, the self has no way of negotiating its own identity. The *ataraxia* to which *epoche* leads, as Montaigne himself makes clear, is not a

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discussed here; which Villey dates 1572: 'Une allusion très directe à Bouchet indique qu'une partie au moins de cet essai est de la première période (environ 1572).' Villey, I, p. 357.

position of its own: '[A] Les Pyrrhoniens, quand ils disent que le souverain bien c'est l'Ataraxie, qui est l'immobilité du jugement, ils ne l'entendent pas dire d'une façon affirmative; mais le mesme bransle de leur ame qui leur faict fuir les precipices et se mettre à couvert du serein, celuy là mesme leur presente cette fantasie et leur en faict refuser une autre' (p. 562). The tranquillity and serenity of *ataraxia*, therefore, does not make provision for the self-consciousness of the subject: it seeks only to protect the self from the turbulence and uncertainty produced by the conflicts it encountered.

However, I wish to suggest that while the sceptical suspension of judgement does not itself furnish an otherness in relation to which a selfhood can be fashioned, the particular use to which it is put, both in the *Apologie* and in 'C'est folie', finally leads not to the dissolution, but rather to the definition, of the self. I have suggested that scepticism is primarily used in the *Apologie* as a way of establishing human ignorance; a conclusion which is used in turn to criticize the presumption of those who claim that their human resources are able to furnish certain knowledge. In this sense, it is a tool in a wider project, rather than a free-standing enquiry. The passage which elaborates theories of the soul above is followed by another denouncing those who formulate such ideas:

[A] Toutes choses produites par nostre propre discours et suffisance, autant vrayes que fauces, sont subjectes à incertitude et debat. C'est pour le chastement de nostre fierté et instruction de nostre misere et incapacité, que Dieu produisit le trouble et la confusion de l'ancienne tour de Babel. Tout ce que nous entreprenons sans son assistance, tout ce que nous voyons sans la lampe de sa grace, ce n'est que vanité et folie. (p. 535)

The predisposition of philosophers to adopt a fixed position is very clearly seen in terms of presumption here: failing to recognize the 'incertitude' of 'toutes choses produites par nostre propre discours et suffisance', their pride resembles that of those who built the Tower of Babel. While judgement is suspended about these theories individually, therefore, and on the question of the soul to which they refer, at a second level, a verdict is reached: these

dogmatic philosophies represent human vanity and presumption. At this point, categories of other and self begin to emerge once more: as judgement is passed, values and positions are established once again. However, the otherness which emerges in this process is crucially different in form to the individual dogmatic philosophies which the self originally encountered. The self was threatened at the outset by the multiplicity of these others. As the passage above re-establishes these others, however, it absorbs them into a single position. They no longer represent individual philosophies: rather, they stand as a whole for human presumption and dogmatic assertion.

The self is now faced with only a single other, therefore, and it is an other with which it can easily negotiate. Set against such vanity and pride, the suspension of judgement for which the self has come to stand automatically becomes identified with humility and reverence. In the passage above, this remains implicit; elsewhere in the *Apologie*, it is more directly stated.

Scepticism is seen to produce a man '[C] ny mescreant, [A] ny establissant aucun dogme contre les observances communes; humble, obeïssant, disciplinable, studieux; ennemi juré d'hæresie, et s'exemptant par consequant des vaines et irreligieuses opinions introduites par les fauces sectes' (p. 486). While Montaigne insists that Pyrrhonian doubt is not itself a philosophical position, he is willing as the *Apologie* proceeds to transform it into a moral position with which he wishes to identify, and through which he is able to fashion his own identity.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> In so doing, he moves beyond the exploitation of scepticism in other sixteenth-century texts. Scepticism had already been used as a tool for combatting particular moral or spiritual others by Gian Francesco Pico della Mirandola (in *Examen vanitatis doctrinae gentium*, 1520), Agrippa von Nettesheim (*De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum declamatio invectiva*, 1526) and Henri Estienne (1562) and Gentian Hervet (1569) in prefaces to editions of Sextus. However, none of these writers attempts to make scepticism itself a moral location with a specific identity. Montaigne probably did not read Pico, but certainly did read Agrippa: Villey ( I, pp. 61-62) finds 'de très nombreux emprunts dans [l'] *Apologie de R. Sebond*. [...] Des phrases entières sont copiées. Agrippa, grâce à sa grande érudition, ramasse et met à la portée de Montaigne des indications prises aux auteurs les plus variés: saint Paul, Pline, Lactance, Galien, Hippocrate, et beacoup d'autres auteurs et compilateurs, auxquels les commentateurs des *Essais* nous renvoyaient à tort'.

Scepticism is used in the *Apologie*, therefore, to transform a series of others into a single position against which the self can be defined. However, at the end of this process, there remains a confrontation between other and self. The single other of dogmatic philosophy stands against sceptical doubt, and now that the contradictory strands of which it was originally composed have been drawn together under a single banner, its position appears in many ways strengthened. The self appears to have reinvented otherness in a more powerful form than before. However, in another sense, the self has re-established otherness in a form which is already discredited, and it is therefore disabled as a threat to the morally sound position he identifies with the self. The paradox of otherness is thus in some sense resolved. The resolution is less comfortable than that achieved in 'Des cannibales'; where otherness is partially integrated by the self, and both upholds and defines it. Here, the self takes up a place in a coherent and unproblematic, but no longer an integrated, order.

A more complete resolution is attempted and achieved in 'C'est folie'. In many ways, the process is the same here as in the *Apologie*. Since attempts to judge between one's own opinions and those of respected others are perceived in the essay as presumptuous, the suspension of judgement which subsequently takes place becomes associated once again with a proper humility and respect. This humility then stands against the presumption which attaches to the idea of dismissing another's opinion, and a humility-presumption dichotomy emerges once again.

However, there is also a significant difference in this second example. Where in the *Apologie*, the self is clearly aligned with sceptical suspension of judgement, and therefore with the humility and reverence which it comes to represent, in 'C'est folie', the self is associated with both humility and presumption at once. While the self recommends a suspension of judgement, with which it clearly identifies morally, it is often seen to deviate from such an ideal. The past self especially is accused of the presumption the essay

condemns: '[A] Autrefois [j'ay] usé de [la] liberté de mon choix et triage particulier, mettant à nonchaloir certains points de l'observance de nostre Eglise, qui semblent avoir un visage ou plus vain ou plus estrange, venant à en communiquer aux hommes sçavans, j'ay trouvé que ces choses là ont un fondement massif et très-solide, et que ce n'est que bestise et ignorance qui nous fait les recevoir avec moindre reverence que le reste' (p. 181). The suspension of judgement for which the essay argues is here rejected by the self; which chooses instead to set itself apart from the authoritative other it encounters, not only presumptuously, but wrongly, as the passage concludes. And it is not only this past self which falls into such error. As the passage proceeds, it moves into the present tense:

[A] Que ne nous souvient il combien nous sentons de contradiction en nostre jugement mesmes? combien de choses nous servoyent hier d'articles de foy, qui nous sont fables aujourd'huy? La gloire et la curiosité sont les deux fleaux de nostre âme. Cette cy nous conduit à mettre le nez par tout, et celle là nous defant de rien laisser irresolu et indecis. (p. 181)

Once again, the self is aligned here with presumption rather than reverence. This has important consequences in terms of the essay's response to the paradox of difference. The presumption/other--humility/self dichotomy established in the *Apologie* produces an other which is denounced and in this sense controlled by the self, but it is controlled through containment rather than the integration which reinforces and upholds the position of the self. In this second instance, however, the situation resembles more closely that adopted by Montaigne in his discussion of the Golden Age; where the only difference which finally exists is between adherence to, and deviation from, a single moral code. In 'C'est folie', a single moral position is upheld throughout: the self expounds and acknowledges in theory, but in practice deviates from, the ideal of sceptical suspension. Rather than the self precariously controlling an oppositional other through denunciation, therefore, 'C'est folie' presents a single moral position which is propounded, if not upheld, throughout. Sceptical suspension is finally used to produce an integration, rather than a confrontation, between other and self, and thus to fashion a stable community in which the self can participate.

The sceptical self in 'C'est folie' and the *Apologie* thus traces out a pattern of negotiation with the other which resembles in many respects that in 'Des cannibales' and 'Des boyteux'. In each instance, the self is confronted with an other if not radically, at least decisively, different from itself; a difference which is experienced as a threat to the validity and stability of the self, but which is also perceived as a valuable tool for self-definition. In each case, the self seeks to control this difference, and to defuse this threat, through the construction of a community of belief. The other is reinterpreted in such a way that it reflects and affirms the moral or philosophical locus of the self, while preserving a degree of difference which continues to operate as a defining otherness. The self is thus able to participate in a wider cultural community, while retaining a distinct identity within this larger order. Such a community is most successfully constructed in 'Des cannibales', where the New World other is fashioned as an equivalent of the self, and employed to reinforce the beliefs of the constructing self. It is anticipated, however, in the appropriation of Socrates' demon as a natural, rather than supernatural phenomenon in 'Des prognostications', and (more partially and distantly), in 'Des boyteux' and 'C'est folie'; where otherness is reduced to a fiction, delusion, or temporary moral deviation, but which is consequently not subsequently available for recruitment by the self as a spokesman for its own position.

The second broadly-defined self-other relation I have identified is represented by the *Apologie de Raymond Sebond*, 'De l'institution des enfanst' and 'De la vanité', 'De mesnager sa volonté' and 'De l'utile et de l'honneste'. In these essays it is the close integration or conformity of self and other which is explored. At one level, the other is felt to constrain, erase, or disperse the self: the social whole delimits it, the classical past overshadows it, and the shaping hand of God is felt to circumscribe it. At the same time, however, the subject finds that it is authorized, stabilized or realized through its identification or engagement with the other, and with the wider orders and contexts it represents. In the case of the *Apologie*, these tensions are resolved through continued participation in, and affirmation of, a wider

order; which has been manipulated, however, to accommodate the impulse to self-reference which underwrites the essay. In 'De l'institution des enfants', the self seeks to authenticate and legitimate its position within a philosophical order; in 'De mesnager sa volonté' and 'De l'utile et de l'honneste', to occupy a specific position in a wider social whole, but with a detachment which protects the integrity of the self. In each case, the self takes up a place in an existent order or community, but negotiates with it, or reconstructs it, according to the needs or priorities of the self.



## PROUST

*A la recherche du temps perdu* announces a new set of priorities and assumptions in its treatment of the relationship between other and self. While it continues to describe an intensive process of self- and other-fashioning, it chooses to acknowledge, where the *Essais* suppressed, the constructedness of the identities it elaborates, and to examine the ways in which this constructedness might be exploited by the individual subject. The goal is no longer to identify, or to participate in, an integrated order, but rather to invent a framework advantageous to the self; to impose a form on the other, and to compose the identity of the self. The text exhibits three types of self-other relationship: bourgeois self and aristocratic other; French Catholic self and Jewish other; desiring self and desired other. In the first two cases, identity is still conceived in terms of belonging to wider groups. However, the subject now seeks to appropriate a privileged position within the given order. The bourgeois self seeks to relocate itself within the existing social framework; the antisemitic self to construct a coherent order through the demonization or absorption of its other. A greater detachment from, and decreasing dependence upon, the wider community is articulated in the text in the relation between the subject and object of desire. No longer seeking to appropriate an identity through taking up a place in a wider group, the self expresses and pursues its desires, and seeks self-realization through their imposition upon the other it has identified.

### ARISTOCRACY AND BOURGEOISIE

The bourgeois self in *A la recherche* seeks to reinvent itself as its aristocratic other. Throughout the novel a series of social aspirants attempt to climb out of the class they occupy, and to appropriate an identity in the ranks of the nobility. At one level, they clearly succeed in their attempts to penetrate the circles of the highest social class. By the conclusion

of the novel, the formerly exclusive drawing rooms of the faubourg Saint-Germain are thronging with ex- bourgeois who, through marriage, money, politics or art, have succeeded in securing access to the most elevated social gatherings. However, the text draws a clear distinction between access to the faubourg Saint-Germain, and successful self-fashioning as the aristocratic other. The ambitious bourgeois depicted in the novel fail to achieve this second level of self-transformation on two counts. First, the manner of their ascent leads to the redefinition and disintegration of social hierarchy, rather than to their relocation within it. Secondly, their penetration into aristocratic circles does not constitute naturalization within them. The language and behaviour of the aristocratic other are in various ways either unavailable to the aspiring self, or impossible for it to imitate, and the partial integration which results ultimately leads to self-fragmentation and loss.<sup>1</sup>

It is clear that *A la recherche* does depict a gradual penetration on the part of its bourgeois aspirants into the formerly exclusive circles of the faubourg Saint-Germain. The novel begins by presenting a social order which is essentially hierarchical and static. The narrator describes his family's 'idée un peu hindoue' of society, which they 'considéraient comme composée de castes fermées où chacun, dès sa naissance, se trouvait placé dans le rang qu'occupaient ses parents, et d'où rien, à moins des hasards d'une carrière exceptionnelle ou d'un mariage inespéré, ne pouvait vous tirer pour vous faire pénétrer dans une caste supérieure.'<sup>2</sup> The boundary between the nobility and the bourgeoisie is at this stage impenetrable; their hierarchical relation apparently secure. Even the brilliant social life of Swann -- figured in the margins of 'Combray' -- fails to threaten this essential stability. While Swann's career signals the possibility of crossing the great divide, Marcel's great-aunt interprets the information that

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<sup>1</sup> The bourgeoisie's ascent is more often hailed in terms of unmitigated triumph. Michael Sprinker, for example, concludes that 'The loss of social exclusivity that the novel progressively discloses, indicates the definitive, final triumph of capitalist social relations and the bourgeoisie's undisputed ideological hegemony over French society as a whole'. *History and Ideology in Proust: 'A la recherche du temps perdu' and the Third French Republic* (Cambridge: C. U. P., 1994), p. 54.

<sup>2</sup> Marcel Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, ed. by Jean-Yves Tadié and others, 4 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1987-89), I: p. 16. All references are to this edition, and are cited hereafter parenthetically after quotations in the text.

he ‘était un des plus fidèles habitués des déjeuners du dimanche chez le duc de X...’ (I: pp. 20-21), in an unfavourable light: ‘quelqu’un qui choisissait ses fréquentations en dehors de la caste où il était né, en dehors de sa “classe” sociale, subissait à ses yeux un fâcheux déclassement’ (I: p. 21). The same stability is effectively preserved throughout *Du côté de chez Swann*. While characters such as the Verdurins clearly have none of the great-aunt’s scruples about the propriety of social advancement (despite their proclamations to the contrary), the faubourg Saint-Germain remains, at this point, exclusive. Only Swann is seen at both the gathering of the little clan, and the party of Mme de Saint-Euverte.

As the text proceeds, however, the boundaries which separate these strictly circumscribed spaces slowly begin to break down. They are put under pressure first of all by the Dreyfus Affair; discussed at length in *Le Côté de Guermantes*. As the nobility pursues the case against Dreyfus, it finds itself compelled to open its boundaries to political allies who may be of a lower social class. Thus Odette, for example, previously unable, despite her marriage to Swann, to secure introductions to his fashionable friends, is able to penetrate the margins, at least, of aristocratic society by adopting a fervent nationalism (II: p. 549). And when the political situation has been resolved, the bourgeois aspirants co-opted in this way refuse to relinquish their privileges: ‘On n’accusera pas l’affaire Dreyfus d’avoir prémédité d’aussi noirs desseins à l’encontre du monde. Mais là certainement elle a brisé les cadres. Les mondains qui ne veulent pas laisser la politique s’introduire dans le monde sont aussi prévoyants que les militaires qui ne veulent pas laisser la politique pénétrer dans l’armée. Il en est du monde comme du goût sexuel, où l’on ne sait pas jusqu’à quelles perversions il peut arriver quand une fois on a laissé des raisons esthétiques dicter ses choix. La raison qu’elles étaient nationalistes donna au faubourg Saint-Germain l’habitude de recevoir des dames d’une autre société, la raison disparue avec le nationalisme, l’habitude subsista’ (III: p. 740).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> As Bowie observes, ‘When the case is over and Dreyfus has been freed and rehabilitated, these social upstarts do not obligingly melt back into the obscurity from which they had emerged. They have taken up a new social position during the state of emergency and are not now to be dislodged.’ Malcolm Bowie, *Proust Among the Stars* (London: HarperCollins, 1998), p. 130.

The boundaries between the two classes disintegrate further in the closing volumes of the novel, due to the aristocracy's financial plight. *Albertine disparue* depicts a series of marriages between aristocrats and wealthy bourgeois: Robert de Saint-Loup marries Gilberte; the Prince de Guermantes, Mme Verdurin; M. de Forcheville, Odette.<sup>4</sup> By the time the narrator attends the reception at the end of *Le Temps retrouvé*, therefore, the gathering he discovers in the Princesse de Guermantes' drawing room is very mixed indeed:

La présence de gens que j'avais vus dans de tout autres sociétés et qui me semblaient ne devoir jamais pénétrer dans celle-là m'étonna moins encore que l'intime familiarité avec laquelle ils y étaient reçus, appelés par leur prénom. Un certain ensemble de préjugés aristocratiques, de snobismes, qui jadis écartait automatiquement du nom de Guermantes tout ce qui ne s'harmonisait pas avec lui avait cessé de fonctionner. [...]  
Détendus ou brisés, les ressorts de la machine refoulante ne fonctionnaient plus, mille corps étrangers y pénétraient, lui ôtaient toute homogénéité, toute tenue, toute couleur. Le faubourg Saint-Germain, comme une douairière gâteuse, ne répondait que par des sourires timides à des domestiques insolents qui envahissaient ses salons, buvaient son orangeade et lui présentaient leurs maîtresses' (IV: pp. 534-35)

The barriers which ensured the exclusivity of the faubourg have broken down entirely in this passage. Individuals from much lower circles are received with familiarity, and even the 'domestiques' are now able to enter the drawing room to introduce their mistresses. Even the sense of a hierarchy within this expanded social group has all but disappeared. While some of those present know and respect the Duchesse de Guermantes ('sa naissance, sa primauté héraldique, ses intimités avec ce que Mme de Forcheville eût appelé des royautés' (IV: pp. 537-38)), a number of characters new to this social world '[la] tenaient pour peu de chose parce qu'elle connaissait des actrices, etc.' (IV: p. 537). And while there are 'gourmets' who

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<sup>4</sup> 'D'anciennes amies de Swann s'occupaient beaucoup de Gilberte. Dans l'aristocratie on apprit le dernier héritage qu'elle venait de faire, on remarqua combien elle était bien élevée et quelle femme charmante elle ferait' (IV: p. 159); 'Forcheville épousa [Odette], après avoir entrepris une longue tournée de châteaux et s'être assuré que sa famille recevrait sa femme. (Cette famille fit quelques difficultés, mais céda devant l'intérêt de ne plus avoir à subvenir aux dépenses d'un parent besogneux qui allait passer d'une quasi-misère à l'opulence)' (IV: pp. 154-55). In these instances, the aristocracy is clearly complicit with the bourgeois project of entry to the faubourg; as it was historically. Jean-Marie Mayeur observes that 'L'aristocratie [...] ne garde de puissance sociale que dans la mesure où elle s'est fondue à la haute bourgeoisie. Les alliances matrimoniales, la présence dans les conseils d'administration ont permis cette fusion'. *Les Débuts de la Troisième République, 1871-1898*, Nouvelle Histoire de la France Contemporaine, 10 (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973), p. 85.

know that ‘Gilberte n’était pas Forcheville, ni Mme de Cambremer Méséglise, ni la plus jeune une Valentinois’ (IV: p. 540), there are others who believe ‘le nom de Forcheville supérieur à celui de Saint-Loup’ (IV: p. 539). Hierarchy no longer has more than a conceptual value in this world: reconstructed moment by moment by the guesses of untutored arrivistes, the more informed perspectives of an older generation, and the detailed knowledge of connoisseurs, it is characterized by an instability and fluidity which effectively dissolve it.

The bourgeois selves depicted in the novel are successful in gaining access to the circles of the aristocracy, therefore. However, the question remains how far this access represents or enables their self-fashioning as their aristocratic other. It is clear that penetration into the society of the faubourg is an important part of claiming an aristocratic identity. The ambition of almost all the social aspirants in the novel is expressed and pursued above all through their attempts to secure introductions to the nobility, and to gain access to their socially-exclusive gatherings. Thus Legrandin, the inveterate flatterer; is depicted throughout the novel striving to gain access to, and to consolidate his position within, the upper echelons of Parisian society.<sup>5</sup> Thus too, there are the Cottards and the Bontemps, flitting from salon to salon, and seeking to establish themselves in aristocratic circles; Mme Swann, setting up a salon of her own, and exploiting both political and financial circumstance to gain entry to the salons of others; Bloch, manipulating his friendship with the narrator to cultivate the acquaintance of Robert de Saint-Loup, and seeking through his interest in theatre and art to gain access to the circle of Mme de Villeparisis. Even the Patronne of the Verdurin clan -- who affects to despise the ‘ennuyeux’ who populate the aristocracy, and to forge an oppositional identity<sup>6</sup> -- abandons her hostility as soon as access to the faubourg becomes available: ‘au fur et à

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<sup>5</sup> For the extravagant flattery through which Proust himself sought social ascent, see, for example, Edmund White, *Proust* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999), pp. 54-56.

<sup>6</sup> The ‘petit clan’ alternately seeks to define itself as an artistic salon -- which gathers to appreciate the talents of the painters and musicians successively championed by its Patronne -- and in terms of intimacy and informality: ‘Les Verdurin n’invitaient pas à dîner: on avait chez eux “son couvert mis”. Pour la soirée, il n’y avait pas de programme. Le jeune pianiste jouait, mais seulement si “ça lui chantait”, car on ne forçait personne et comme disait M Verdurin: “Tout pour les amis, vivent les camarades!”’ (I: p. 186).

mesure qu'augmenta le nombre des gens brillants qui firent des avances à Mme Verdurin, le nombre de ceux qu'elle appelait les "ennuyeux" diminua. Par une sorte de transformation magique, tout "ennuyeux" qui était venu lui faire une visite et avait sollicité une invitation devenait subitement quelqu'un d'agréable, d'intelligent' (IV: p. 308).<sup>7</sup>

However, it becomes clear over the course of *A la recherche* that despite this access to the circles of the faubourg, the bourgeois selves depicted in the novel fail in their attempts to appropriate an aristocratic identity. There are two reasons in particular for this failure. The first becomes clear in the scene which describes the 'expériences de sociologie' (I: p. 512) conducted by Swann in *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*. Gathering together 'des éléments hétérogènes', Swann composes 'bouquets sociaux'; which provoke, however, a mixed reaction from the bourgeois acquaintance invited to take part:

'J'ai l'intention d'inviter ensemble les Cottard et la duchesse de Vendôme', [Swann] disait en riant à Mme Bontemps, de l'air friand d'un gourmet qui a l'intention et veut faire l'essai de remplacer dans une sauce les clous de girofle par du poivre de Cayenne. Or ce projet qui allait paraître en effet plaisant, dans le sens ancien du mot, aux Cottard, avait le don d'exaspérer Mme Bontemps. Elle avait été récemment présentée par les Swann à la duchesse de Vendôme et avait trouvé cela aussi agréable que naturel. En tirer gloire auprès des Cottard, en le leur racontant, n'avait pas été la partie la moins savoureuse de son plaisir. Mais comme les nouveaux décorés qui dès qu'ils le sont voudraient voir se fermer aussitôt le robinet des croix, Mme Bontemps eût souhaité qu'après elle, personne de son monde à elle ne fût présenté à la princesse. (I: p. 512)

While her own introduction to the Duchesse de Vendôme is a matter of considerable importance to Mme Bontemps, it is not her only concern. Almost as crucial is the exclusion of her fellow-bourgeois the Cottards. To a certain extent, it is their omission from the guest list which defines her own ascent: someone must be excluded in order to make her own admission meaningful. In this sense, 'tirer gloire auprès des Cottard' is a way not simply of

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<sup>7</sup> As René Girard puts it, 'C'est au salon Guermantes que trônent les véritables dieux de la Patronne. Mais celle-ci se ferait tuer plutôt que de leur rendre ouvertement, ou même subrepticement, le culte qu'ils réclament. C'est pourquoi elle accomplit les rites de sa fausse religion esthétique avec une passion aussi frénétique que menteuse.' *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* (Paris: Grasset, 1961), p. 205.

announcing, but also of confirming, her ascent. The narrator goes on to describe how, when both invited to the same party with members of the aristocracy, the Bontemps and Cottards adopt ways of describing the evening ‘dont le cadre était identique et où seuls leurs noms respectifs étaient interchangeables’: “‘Hé bien, il y avait seulement les maîtres de maison, le duc et la duchesse de Vendôme -- (en souriant avantageusement) le professeur et Mme Cottard. et, ma foi, du diable si on a jamais su pourquoi, car ils allaient là comme des cheveux sur la soupe, M. et Mme Bontemps’” (I: p. 513). The identification which each wishes to make with the socially-exclusive society into which they have been introduced is rendered problematic by the presence of the other. The aristocratic gathering within which they could have carved out an identity if the Duc and Duchesse de Vendôme were the only other guests is transformed by the admission of other bourgeois into a socially-heterogenous affair, which affords considerably less opportunity for the redefinition of the self in noble terms. Only by casting each other as intruders can the Bontemps and Cottards sustain a sense that they circulate in these circles as accepted members of it.<sup>8</sup>

While the desire for access to the aristocracy is universal in the novel, therefore, it is not a desire for universal access. For the bourgeois aspirant, self-fashioning as its social other requires not only personal penetration into aristocratic circles, but also the exclusion of its fellow-bourgeois. It wishes to reinforce the hierarchies which already exist, but to relocate itself to the other side of the divide. And this is a desire which is frustrated rather than realized by the dissolution of boundaries which takes place in the later volumes of the novel. The desire to exclude others actually reverses the significance of the widespread penetration into the faubourg’s drawing rooms in the novel’s final scene. The quantity of bourgeois admitted to the Princesse de Guermantes’ reception has been seen as the measure of their triumph. If the agenda of the various bourgeois characters is seen to involve the exclusion of others, however, as well as their own ascent, the volume of middle-class characters present in

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<sup>8</sup> The same desire to see others remain in place is expressed at another level by the lift-boy’s sister, who declares of ‘les malheureux’ that “‘il faudra toujours qu’il y en ait pour que maintenant que je suis

this final scene might be seen instead as a measure of their defeat.

This widespread invasion of aristocratic ranks also frustrates the bourgeois aspirants in a second way. In dissolving the boundaries which separate noble and bourgeois classes, it not only abolishes the latter, but also redefines the former. The narrator describes how Gilberte ‘pensa[it] que le nom de Guermantes s’était maintenant incorporé à elle comme un émail mordoré’, but observes that she is mistaken: ‘la valeur d’un titre de noblesse, aussi bien que de Bourse, monte quand on le demande et baisse quand on l’offre. Tout ce qui nous semble impérissable tend à la destruction’ (IV: p. 247). She has attained what she sought, but its value has changed: the admission of others has reduced the significance and status of what she sought to gain.<sup>9</sup> The aristocratic other has no inherent value, but only what the market assigns it, and when bourgeois ascent is so widespread, this is not as high as she had hoped. Where she had sought to transform herself into the aristocratic other, she discovers that the ‘other’ is itself an unstable category; which is redefined as it accommodates their ascent.<sup>10</sup>

A gap opens up between access to, and self-realization as, the aristocratic other in the first instance, therefore, through the extent of the bourgeois ascent. There is also a second sense in which access to the aristocracy in the novel falls short of the self-transformation to which the bourgeois self aspires. Over the course of the novel, a number of characters do succeed, before the general stampede, in penetrating the social circles of the nobility. In this sense they achieve the access they have sought, which yet remains withheld from the other members of

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riche, je puisse un peu les emmerder” (III: p. 369).

<sup>9</sup> For the narrator, the access which he sought has also changed value in a second sense. Seeking initiation into a fuller, more complete reality, he invests a good deal of hope in the mythological aristocracy he constructs; only to discover, however, as do all the rising bourgeois, that the other he sought to be assimilated to, finally resembles the self: ‘Jamais je ne m’étais avisé qu’elle pouvait avoir une figure rouge, une cravate mauve comme Mme Sazerat, et [... qu’elle] appartenait à un certain type féminin, qui comprenait aussi des femmes de médecins et de commerçants’ (I: pp. 172-73). See also in this context Leo Bersani, *Marcel Proust: The Fictions of Life and of Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 145.

<sup>10</sup> In proposing such a redefinition, I wish to reverse the trajectory implied by Walter Benjamin when he suggests that ‘The pretensions of the bourgeoisie are shattered by laughter. Their return and re-assimilation by the aristocracy is the sociological theme of the work’. ‘The Image of Proust’, in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn, ed. by Hannah Arendt, rev. edn (London: Fontana, 1992), pp. 197-



their class. However, the text makes clear that their invitation into aristocratic circles does not enable their naturalization within them.

The failure of the bourgeois self-transformers to integrate fully into the faubourg Saint-Germain, and the conditions which make that failure inevitable, are focussed in the novel through the differences in the behaviour of the Duchesse de Guermantes, and Mme de Cambremer, née Legrandin. The Duchesse de Guermantes treats those of lesser social rank for the most part with condescension. While there are times when she withholds herself from the bourgeoisie -- as when she attends the performance of *Phèdre*, and performs her identity from the circumscribed space of a private box, or when she parades before the admiring bourgeoisie in the course of her morning walk<sup>11</sup> -- more typically, she affects the greatest humility. While still the Princesse des Laumes, for example, she attends the party of Mme de Saint-Euverte:

Pour montrer qu'elle ne cherchait pas à faire sentir dans un salon, où elle ne venait que par condescendance, la supériorité de son rang, elle était entrée en effaçant les épaules là même où il n'y avait aucune foule à fendre et personne à laisser passer, restant exprès dans le fond, de l'air d'y être à sa place, comme un roi qui fait la queue à la porte d'un théâtre tant que les autorités n'ont pas été prévenues qu'il est là; et, bornant simplement son regard -- pour ne pas avoir l'air de signaler sa présence et de réclamer des égards -- à la considération d'un dessin du tapis ou de sa propre jupe, elle se tenait debout à l'endroit qui lui avait paru le plus modeste (et d'où elle savait bien qu'une exclamation ravie de Mme de Saint-Euverte allait la tirer dès que celle-ci l'aurait aperçue), à côté de Mme de Cambremer qui lui était inconnue. (I: p. 325)

Aristocratic superiority is here affirmed by affecting modesty and humility. Rather than performing herself before the admiring other and having it participate in or affirm that self-representation (in a subjective short circuit whereby identity is projected and reabsorbed through the collaboration of an acquiescent other) she chooses to perform a role with which

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210 (p. 202).

<sup>11</sup> Descombes notes the distinction in the novel between knowing someone personally, and knowing them by name ('connaître sans connaître'). The Duchesse, who parades before the bourgeoisie, 'peut connaître personnellement tous les gens qu'elle connaît de nom', and her rank is affirmed by this privilege. Bourgeois aspirants, by contrast, know many by name, but not in person. Vincent

she does not identify, and to have that role dismantled from without. While she remains in complete control of the ritual which is performed in the following pages, therefore, she is able to stage it in such a way that her superior identity is confirmed without her appearing to solicit or demand such a reading of herself, or to initiate the process by which it is established. Likewise the Duc, later in the novel, is able to behave with the utmost courtesy and affability towards those who stand below him, secure in the knowledge that his superiority is understood by all. The narrator reflects towards the end of the novel: 'Je commençais à connaître l'exacte valeur du langage parlé ou muet de l'amabilité aristocratique, amabilité heureuse de verser un baume sur le sentiment d'infériorité de ceux à l'égard desquels elle s'exerce mais pas pourtant jusqu'au point de la dissiper, car dans ce cas elle n'aurait plus de raison d'être. "Mais vous êtes notre égal, sinon mieux", semblaient, par toutes leurs actions, dire les Guermantes; et ils le disaient de la façon la plus gentille que l'on puisse imaginer, pour être aimés, admirés, mais non pour être crus' (III: p. 62).<sup>12</sup>

This is signally different to the behaviour of Mme de Cambremer when she meets with the Verdurins -- her new family's tenants -- at La Raspelière:

Elle était furieuse de se compromettre ce soir chez les Verdurin et ne le faisait qu'à la prière de sa belle-mère et de son mari, dans l'intérêt de la location. [...] Elle arriva hautaine et morose, de l'air d'une grande dame dont le château, du fait d'une guerre, est occupé par les ennemis, mais qui se sent tout de même chez elle et tient à montrer aux vainqueurs qu'ils sont des intrus. [...] Désireuse pourtant de remplir ses fonctions de femme du monde, quand on lui eut nommé Brichot elle voulut lui faire faire la connaissance de son mari parce qu'elle avait vu ses amies plus élégantes faire ainsi, mais la rage ou l'orgueil l'emportant sur l'ostentation du savoir-vivre, elle dit, non comme elle aurait dû: 'Permettez-moi de vous présenter mon mari', mais: 'Je vous présente mon mari', tenant haut ainsi le drapeau des Cambremer, en dépit d'eux-mêmes, car le marquis s'inclina devant Brichot aussi bas qu'elle avait prévu. (III: pp. 306-07)

While the humility and affability displayed by her husband are in a literal way available to

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Descombes, *Proust: philosophie du roman*, (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1987), pp. 194-97.

<sup>12</sup> See also the incident at Balbec where the Princesse de Parme tips all the servants at the hotel. The narrator comments: 'je pensai au palais de Parme, aux conseils moitié religieux, moitié politiques donnés à cette princesse, laquelle agissait avec le peuple comme si elle avait dû se le concilier pour

Mme de Cambremer, in another they are not. Where her husband, like the Duchesse, is secure in his identity, and in the knowledge that his deference will be seen as a mark of his nobility, Mme de Cambremer can make no such assumptions. Having come from the same class as the Verdurins, she cannot now bow before them and perform the role of humble equal, because she cannot guarantee that the audience before her will contradict her performance and acknowledge her superiority. She is obliged, therefore, to affirm her identity by disparaging her family's bourgeois tenants, and by asserting her difference from them.

However, this is a mode of behaviour which ultimately, and somewhat paradoxically, threatens to disclose her own bourgeois past. There is a noticeable similarity between her desire to denigrate the Verdurins here, and the way in which the middle-classes treat their own social inferiors in other parts of the novel. Andrée's mother, for example, might have been 'incertaine et inquiète sur l'importance de sa propre situation si elle ne s'était rassurée elle-même et replacée dans la "réalité de la vie" en disant au maître d'hôtel: "Vous direz au chef que ses petits pois ne sont pas assez fondants." Elle retrouvait alors sa sérénité' (II: p. 288). Likewise, the narrator's mother 'eût donné aussi difficilement la main à un valet de chambre qu'elle lui donnait aisément dix francs. [...] Pour elle, qu'elle l'avouât ou non, les maîtres étaient les maîtres et les domestiques étaient les gens qui mangeaient à la cuisine' (III: p. 415). In some sense, therefore, the disdain which Mme de Cambremer metes out to her bourgeois tenants here is simply an application of the way in which, as a bourgeois, she has learnt to treat social inferiors. And as such, it exposes her bourgeois inheritance even as it seeks to cement her new-found nobility.<sup>13</sup>

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régner un jour; bien plus, si elle régnait déjà' (III: p. 185).

<sup>13</sup> Watching the audience at the opera, the narrator reflects upon the differences in behaviour between a wealthy nobleman, and an equally wealthy bourgeois: 'Là où l'un de ces derniers eût cru affirmer son chic par un ton tranchant, hautain à l'égard d'un inférieur, le grand seigneur, doux, souriant, avait l'air de considérer, d'exercer l'affectation de l'humilité et de la patience, la feinte d'être l'un quelconque des spectateurs, comme un privilège de sa bonne éducation' (II: p. 337). The one figure who reverses this trend in the novel is Saint-Loup, who speaks harshly to his groom in order to demonstrate his contempt for the sense of superiority which underwrites aristocratic affability: "'pourquoi affecterais-je de lui parler poliment? N'est-il pas mon égal? [...] Vous avez l'air de trouver que je devrais le traiter avec égards, comme un inférieur! Vous parlez comme un aristocrate'" (II: p. 138).

The naturalization of an aristocratic identity is problematic in the first instance, therefore, because the language and behaviour of the aristocratic other are in various ways unavailable to the ambitious bourgeois self. I wish now to suggest that bourgeois self-fashioning is also frustrated through a failure to imitate convincingly the mannerisms, vocabulary and attitudes of the aristocracy. In this second instance, the failure to self-transform has serious implications for the individual subjects who attempt it.

Proust himself very famously imitated the language and manners of his aristocratic acquaintances. His impersonations explore both the self-loss and self-exclusion to which imitation can lead, and also the alternative, in some sense equivalent, identity which mimicry enables the self to appropriate. Elisabeth de Clermont-Tonnerre recalls his performances of Robert de Montesquiou:

Proust imitait Montesquiou à un tel point dans la voix et les manières, qu'il avait pris son rire et la façon qu'avait celui-ci de se cacher la bouche pour qu'on ne vît pas ses dents noires. [...] Puis, il tapait du pied comme Montesquiou, ce qui était très laid, car il était petit.<sup>14</sup>

Proust takes up the gestures of the desired other here, and traces out in his own features and movements the form of his aristocratic exemplar. Montesquiou's voice, laugh and manners are all carefully observed and reproduced. However, such a self-transformation is finally impossible. By taking up the features and idiosyncracies of a particular aristocratic other, rather than imitating aristocratic manners more generally, Proust effectively evacuates himself from his own performance: he 'becomes' Montesquiou; rather than an aristocratized version of himself. Rather than elevating himself through his appropriation of aristocratic gestures and voice, he ultimately performs his own absence and erasure.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Elisabeth de Clermont-Tonnerre, *Robert de Montesquiou et Marcel Proust* (Paris: Flammarion, 1925), p. 34.

<sup>15</sup> Finn suggests that his imitation becomes 'a hysterical re-enactment which, through linguistic and gestural re-creation of the Other, poses the question of personal identity'. *Proust, the Body and Literary Form* (Cambridge: C. U. P., 1999), pp. 73-74.

At the same time, however, there is a second project at play in this scene. The self takes its revenge upon the unattainable aristocratic identity even as it demonstrates its own exclusion from it. While Proust sought to persuade Montesquiou that his impersonations were complimentary,<sup>16</sup> his choice of the latter's least attractive features to reproduce suggest a degree, at least, of malice. There is without doubt in his performance a desire to secure the laughter of his acquaintance at the expense of the aristocratic other. And this 'revenge' for his failure to self-transform also, paradoxically, begins to realize such a transformation. A reversal of sorts takes place in the passage above. Positioning himself at the centre of an admiring circle of spectators, and implicitly excluding through their laughter his aristocratic friend, he assumes for himself a typically aristocratic position: equivalent, for example, to the Duchesse de Guermantes when she claims the attention of the crowds on the boulevards or of the spectators at the opera. At the same time, he makes Montesquiou an object of satire, reminiscent of the unfashionable bourgeois acquaintance excluded through the famous Guermantes' wit. While on the one hand, Proust's parody alienates him from the role he performs, therefore, on the other, it enables him to construct and take up an equivalent position. Contrary to what one might expect, the mimetic function of impersonation leads to self-erasure, while its parodic impulse enables the partial reclamation of the desired identity.

Proust's performance sets in play, therefore, a series of unstable dialectics; hovering between self-absence and self-realization, self-erasure and self-empowerment; between a desire to become the other, and a desire to renounce and exclude it. Imitation and impersonation also have a part to play in *A la recherche* itself, but they are now distributed among various characters of different ranks; to produce a very different statement about the consequences of

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<sup>16</sup> 'Quant à l'hypothèse que vous hazardiez au sujet de mes "imitations", qui ne furent jamais que des gammes, ou mieux des vocalises, n'ayant aucune prétention de rendre aucune mélodie, rien du génie original, mieux, elles étaient de simples exercices et jeux de l'admiration, *ludi solennos festivia*, de naïfs cantiques où s'exerçait et se complaisait une admiration juvénile.' Proust, *Correspondance générale*, ed. by Robert Proust and Paul Brach, 6 vols (Paris: Plon, 1930-36), I: *Lettres à Robert de Montesquiou, 1893-1921*, p. 181.

imitation for the social aspirant.

In the text, the parodic impulse of imitation is displaced onto the Duchesse de Guermantes:

Quand elle 'imitait' le duc de Limoges, les Courvoisier protestaient: 'Oh! non, il ne parle tout de même pas comme cela, j'ai encore dîné hier soir avec lui chez Bebeth, il m'a parlé toute la soirée, il ne parlait pas comme cela', tandis que les Guermantes un peu cultivés s'écriaient: 'Dieu qu'Oriane est drolatique! Le plus fort c'est que pendant qu'elle l'imité, elle lui ressemble! Je crois l'entendre. Oriane, encore un peu Limoges!' (II: pp. 752-53)

Performed by an aristocrat, impersonation has a different purpose in the novel than in the scene described in Clermont-Tonnerre's memoir. The other is no longer an object of envy or desire, and no longer subject, therefore, to revenge. Instead, Oriane impersonates the Duc de Limoges in order to play out and affirm her witty aristocratic identity. The other becomes far less central: where Proust's imitation of Montesquiou clearly expresses and explores his relationship with his aristocratic friend, the passage here focusses instead upon the quality of the performance. This is the issue that the audience gathers to decide; the Courvoisiers (who are, however, chided by the narrator for their failure to understand mimicry) concluding that the Duchesse fails ('il ne parlait pas comme cela'), while the Guermantes affirm her status as aristocratic wit: 'Dieu qu'Oriane est drolatique! [...] pendant qu'elle l'imité, elle lui ressemble!'.

The parodic strain of Proust's biographical performance thus finds a new place and role as a tool for affirming aristocratic identity. This leaves the bourgeois aspirants in the novel with the slavishly mimetic role; seeking to reproduce, in language and gesture, the manners and forms of aristocratic behaviour. In one sense, this does not appear a difficult task: throughout the novel, aristocratic behaviour is highly codified and self-conscious. At the performance of *Phèdre*, for example, as he watches the aristocracy exchanging sweetmeats in their boxes, the narrator comments that he 'comprendai[t] bien que ce qu'ils faisaient là n'était qu'un jeu, et que [...] il convenait en vertu de rites ignorés de moi qu'ils feignissent d'offrir et de refuser

des bonbons, geste dépouillé de sa signification et réglé d'avance comme le pas d'une danseuse qui tour à tour s'élève sur sa pointe et tourne autour d'une écharpe' (II: p. 342).

Aristocratic language is equally self-conscious. Priscilla P. Clark surveys a whole range of linguistic codes through which aristocratic identity is expressed: 'the mania of nicknames (Mémé, Babal, Prince Von, Gri-Gri), the studied affectation of simplicity in the Duc de Guermantes' use of slang or popular terms, [...] the *bons mots*, the "luxe de paroles", the jargon in the Duchesse's use of *rédaction*, *rédiger*'.<sup>17</sup>

However, when the bourgeois characters in the novel seek to reproduce this artificial language and behaviour, they find, paradoxically, that they are unable to do so in an authentic way. When the narrator opens up the Goncourt journal in the final volume of the novel, he finds a description of the language of Mme Verdurin, now the Princesse de Guermantes, which makes clear her failure to imitate the language of her new family:

'Et ma foi, en entendant cette femme qui, en passant par tant de milieux vraiment distingués, a gardé pourtant dans sa parole un peu de la verdeur de la parole d'une femme du peuple, une parole qui vous montre les choses avec la couleur que votre imagination y voit, l'eau me vient à la bouche de la vie qu'elle me confesse avoir menée là-bas.' (IV: p. 291)

The freshness and freedom of Mme Verdurin's language, preserved right through her social ascent, is apparently characterized here in extremely favourable terms. The 'verdeur' of her speech -- 'la parole d'une femme du peuple' -- implies a naturalness and frankness which stand in stark contrast to the artificiality of the language of the aristocracy. However, this contrast ultimately signals her failure to adapt to the position to which she has risen. Her language has no place in the strictly-circumscribed and highly codified realms of the faubourg Saint-Germain, which requires the transcendence, rather than the preservation, of her former language and identity. The extract finally operates as a wicked retelling of Mme de Guermantes' attempts to preserve a rustic accent (II: pp. 784-85). Where the Duchesse is able.

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<sup>17</sup> Priscilla P. Clark, 'Proustian Order and the Aristocracy of Time Past', *French Review*, special issue, 6 (Spring, 1974), 92-104 (pp. 98-99).

through her links with the past, to demonstrate her ancient blood, the traces of the past in the language of the new Princesse, and her enthusiastic discussion of her roots, expose her as an imposter. She ought to imitate the language and manners of the society to which she has risen, but she chooses instead to adopt its habit of talking about its past. Proust himself disposes of a literary rival through his own imitation in this passage, which parodies the style of the Goncourt brothers. However, within this frame, the text discloses a failure of imitation. The bourgeois Mme Verdurin is incompletely erased before the Princesse de Guermantes, and the two identities stand in uneasy tension in the same way as those of Mlle Legrandin and Mme de Cambremer.

A second bourgeois character who struggles to imitate the forms and language of the class into which she has married is Gilberte, who approaches the narrator during the reception in *Le temps retrouvé*:

‘Mais comment venez-vous dans des matinées si nombreuses? me demanda Gilberte. Vous retrouver dans une grande tuerie comme cela, ce n’est pas ainsi que je vous schématisais. Certes, je m’attendais à vous voir partout ailleurs qu’à un des grands tralalas de ma tante, puisque tante il y a.’ (IV: p. 562)

Unlike the ex-Madame Verdurin, Gilberte clearly understands the need to reproduce the language of the circles in which she has begun to move. However, in this instance the very faithfulness with which she recycles aristocratic words and phrases (‘tuerie’, ‘tralalas’) betrays their foreignness on her lips: derivative and clichéd, her language arrogates the speech of the other, but is too exaggerated and imitative to enable her self-realization within the aristocratic community. Where the new Princesse de Guermantes fails to imitate aristocratic language closely enough, Gilberte reproduces it too precisely.<sup>18</sup> In the former case, the result is a problematic instability or multiplicity of identity, but for Gilberte it leads instead to a loss

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<sup>18</sup> See also in this context Odette, earlier in the novel, self-consciously recycling phrases she has heard on the lips of Swann’s smart friends (I: p. 501). Both she and Gilberte resemble the unfortunate bourgeois aspirant described by David Higgs: ‘No sooner had an erstwhile M. Jourdain carefully learned the current form of good manners than his patient mimicry was derided.’ *Nobles in Nineteenth-Century France: The Practice of Inegalitarianism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987),



of personal subjectivity. Where Proust erases his own features and speech to take up those of Montesquiou, Gilberte substitutes for her own voice a general aristocratic discourse which is equally unable to sustain a sense of her individual selfhood.<sup>19</sup> To return to the terms of Erasmus, she fails to digest, exploit or appropriate the language of the other, or to ground it in her own subjectivity, and her 'self'-expression thus paradoxically turns into a form of self-erasure.<sup>20</sup>

The attempts of the bourgeois characters in *A la recherche* to assume the identity of their aristocratic other, and to relocate themselves within the social order, are finally unsuccessful, therefore. While they succeed in penetrating the circles of the faubourg Saint-Germain, they discover when they do so that they have not relocated themselves to a privileged position within an enduring hierarchy, but rather collapsed the order in terms of which they were seeking to negotiate their identity. It also becomes clear in the novel that there is a decisive difference between gaining access to the highest social circles, and becoming integrated into them. The career of Mme de Cambremer in particular suggests that the transformation of self into other must always be incomplete; while the examples of Gilberte and Mme Verdurin suggest that this failure to transcend the bourgeois self can lead to an incoherence or erasure of identity. The novel finally presents not an unmitigated 'triumph' of bourgeois self-fashioning, but a sustained examination of the difficulties which accompany its desire to reinvent itself in the image of its social other, and to renegotiate its position within the

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pp. 181-82.

<sup>19</sup> Arno J. Mayer also describes bourgeois imitation in terms of self-loss, although, more harshly than Proust, he sees it as a form of self-disavowal and denial: 'Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the *grands bourgeois* kept denying themselves by imitating and appropriating the ways of the nobility in the hope of climbing into it.' In doing so, 'by disavowing themselves in order to court membership in the old establishment, the aristocratizing bourgeois impaired their own class formation and class consciousness and accepted and prolonged their subordinate place in the "active symbiosis of the two social strata"'. *The Persistence of the Old Regime: Europe to the Great War* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), pp. 13-14.

<sup>20</sup> The pianist's aunt in 'Un Amour de Swann' loses self-expression in a different way. Concerned that her imitation of those around her may be imperfect, she slurs her speech to such an extent that her meaning is obscured: 'Comme elle n'avait aucune instruction, [...] elle prononçait exprès d'une manière confuse, pensant que si elle lâchait un cuir il serait estompé d'un tel vague qu'on ne pourrait le distinguer avec certitude, de sorte que sa conversation n'était qu'un grailonnement indistinct duquel émergeaient de temps à autre les rares vocables dont elle se sentait sûre' (I: p. 201).

existing social order.

## REPRESENTATIONS OF JEWISHNESS

The relationship between the antisemitic self and Jewish other in *A la recherche* resembles that between the bourgeois self and its aristocratic other in a number of ways. Once again, the self seeks to appropriate an identity within a wider order, and once again, this identity is sought through the construction, manipulation and contestation of categories and boundaries. However, the subject is now primarily concerned not to reinvent and relocate itself within an established social frame, but rather to construct a coherent order by manipulating the other. This attempted appropriation takes two forms. There is on the one hand an attempt to assimilate the Jewish other; a project with which the Jewish characters in the novel are to varying degrees complicit.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, there is an impulse to demonization: the other is cast by antisemitic voices in terms of deviance and deficiency, and a favourable image secured for the self in terms of normativity and superiority.<sup>22</sup> I wish to examine the text's engagement with these projects, and to suggest that both are ultimately frustrated. Owing to a crucial overdetermination of the self-other relation, assimilation -- whether the project of the Jewish other or the self -- always remains incomplete, while attempts to demonize or exclude the Jew lead the subject into self-contradiction, self-condemnation, or self-loss.

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<sup>21</sup> This loosely reflects a historical impulse at work in nineteenth-century France. The assimilationist drive was strongest in the years following the emancipation of French Jewry in 1791. The civil rights granted to Jews by the 'Loi relatif au Juifs' came at the expense of national autonomy and privileges; which were revoked by the same decree. The degree of historical complicity by the French-Jewish population is hotly contested; Phyllis Cohen Albert outlines the terms of the debate, while arguing strongly that French Jews understood assimilation as a flexible, partial process, in 'Israelite and Jew: How Did Nineteenth-Century French Jews Understand Assimilation?', in *Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. by Jonathan Frankel and Steven J. Zipperstein (Cambridge: C. U. P., 1992), pp. 88-109.

<sup>22</sup> The historical sources of these views are only too well-known. The theories of race 'scientists' such as Renan, Taine and Gobineau were elaborated, applied and propagated through the antisemitic publications which proliferated in France in the final two decades of the nineteenth century; notably, Drumont's *La France juive* in 1886, and the newspapers *La Libre Parole* (from 1892), and *La Croix* (increasingly antisemitic from the mid-1880s).

The ways in which the assimilationist project operates, and the premisses by which it is underwritten, are clearest at the moment of its failure. When the Duc de Guermantes speaks with Froberville at the evening reception in *Le Côté de Guermantes*, he confesses that his attempts to absorb Swann into the highest circles of the faubourg Saint-Germain have finally proved unsuccessful:

‘On me dit qu’il est ouvertement dreyfusard. Jamais je n’aurais cru cela de lui, de lui un fin gourmet, un esprit positif, un collectionneur, un amateur de vieux livres, membre du Jockey, un homme entouré de la considération générale, un connaisseur de bonnes adresses qui nous envoyait le meilleur porto qu’on puisse boire, un dilettante, un père de famille. Ah! j’ai été bien trompé. Je ne parle pas de moi, [...] mais rien que pour Oriane, il n’aurait pas dû faire cela, il aurait dû désavouer ouvertement les Juifs et les sectateurs du condamné. [...] Il est vrai que Swann est juif. Mais jusqu’à ce jour -- excusez-moi, Froberville -- j’avais eu la faiblesse de croire qu’un Juif peut être français, j’entends un Juif honorable, homme du monde. Or Swann était cela dans toute la force du terme. Hé bien! il me force à reconnaître que je me suis trompé, puisqu’il prend parti pour ce Dreyfus [...] contre une société qui l’avait adopté, qui l’avait traité comme un des siens.’ (III: pp. 76-77)

The Duc very clearly expects the other to conform to self. Rather than attempting any kind of integration, or practising a liberal accommodation, he anticipates the elimination of the difference of the other. This is not in his eyes a form of colonization: rather, he feels wronged by Swann’s failure to conform, which he interprets as an act of ingratitude. Having been treated by the faubourg ‘comme un des siens’, Swann has failed, as far as the Duc is concerned, to respond to the privilege accorded him with a proper respect for the views of the class which has embraced him.<sup>23</sup>

For as long as this conformity to the faubourg consisted simply in sending the best port, attending the Jockey club and knowing the right addresses, Swann was compliant. However,

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<sup>23</sup> A similarly noble interpretation of the assimilative impulse no doubt also underlies his determination elsewhere to ‘purify’ Swann by inventing a genealogy which erases his Jewishness entirely: ‘sachant que la grand-mère de Swann, protestante mariée à un juif, avait été la maîtresse du duc de Berri, il essayait, de temps en temps, de croire à la légende qui faisait du père de Swann un fils naturel du

the Dreyfus Affair is more problematic. Creating (at least in the Duc's account above) an opposition between Jewishness and Frenchness, Jewish and French interests, it demands that Swann either renounce his identity as a Jew (rather than simply laying aside the trappings of his Jewishness), or that he affirm his Jewishness at the expense (again, in the Duc's economy) of his identity as a member of the highest circles of the French aristocracy. Choosing the latter, he demonstrates a primary identification with his origins which is cast by the text in specifically racial terms:

le nez de polichinelle de Swann, longtemps résorbé dans un visage agréable, semblait maintenant énorme, tuméfié, cramoisi, plutôt celui d'un vieil Hébreu que d'un curieux Valois. D'ailleurs peut-être chez lui en ces derniers jours la race faisait-elle reparaitre plus accusé le type physique qui la caractérise, en même temps que le sentiment d'une solidarité morale avec les autres Juifs, solidarité que Swann semblait avoir oubliée toute sa vie, et que greffées les unes sur les autres, la maladie mortelle, l'affaire Dreyfus, la propagande antisémite avaient réveillée. (III: p. 89)<sup>24</sup>

The text apparently uncovers an irreducible Jewish other. It is an otherness which may be interpreted in one of two ways. Isabelle Monette Ebert suggests that it represents 'the inescapable nature of [Swann's] heritage'; a racial identity which he wishes, but is finally unable, to conceal or to evade.<sup>25</sup> The words 'solidarité' and 'réveillée' in the extract above, however, suggest instead a renewed identification with his Jewish inheritance, and a refusal to succumb to, rather than a failure to achieve, assimilation. If his 'maladie mortelle' in one sense exposes him, in another it expresses and enables the reclamation of a Jewish identity.<sup>26</sup>

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prince. Dans cette hypothèse, laquelle était d'ailleurs fautive, Swann, fils d'un catholique, fils lui-même d'un Bourbon et d'une catholique, n'avait rien que de chrétien' (III: p. 68).

<sup>24</sup> A similar resemittization through the Dreyfus Affair is attributed to Proust himself by Hannah Arendt, who describes him as 'himself half Jewish and in emergencies ready to classify himself as a Jew'. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, rev. edn (San Diego: Harvest, 1979), p. 80. Before this time, he was apparently ambivalent about being identified as a Jew. He records in a letter to his mother on 22 September 1899 his distress at being addressed as 'le neveu de M. Weil'; but in a letter to Robert Dreyfus (29 May 1905), he says that he refrained from correcting a newspaper misprint because it would have appeared that he was seeking to suppress his Jewishness. *Correspondance*, ed. by Philip Kolb, 21 vols (Paris: Plon, 1970-93), II (1896-1901), p. 341; V (1905), pp. 180-81.

<sup>25</sup> "'Le Premier Dreyfusard': Jewishness in Marcel Proust', *French Review*, 67 (1993-94), 196-217 (p. 205).

<sup>26</sup> In earlier drafts of the novel, Swann's Jewish heritage is prominent from the start. Julia Kristeva gathers together evidence from notebooks 4 and 8 which shows that Swann originally had a Jewish mother, and that his father was the source of the grandfather's antisemitic remarks. *Le Temps sensible*:

The other prominent Jewish character in the novel, the narrator's friend Albert Bloch, is more completely complicit with the assimilative process. He is willing, where Swann is not, to disown and renounce his race as the Duc requires: “On ne peut pas faire deux pas sans rencontrer [des Israélites]. [...] Je ne suis pas par principe irréductiblement hostile à la nationalité juive, mais ici il y a pléthore. On n'entend que: 'Dis donc, Apraham, chai fu Chakop.' On se croirait rue d'Aboukir” (II: p. 97). However, his attempted self-assimilation is undercut by his incorrect pronunciation and his incomplete understanding of European titles.<sup>27</sup> It is natural, he says, that the narrator should wish to visit Venice, “pour boire des sorbets avec les belles madames, tout en faisant semblant de lire les *Stones of Venaice* de Lord John Ruskin, sombre raseur et l'un des plus barbifiants bonshommes qui soient.” Bloch croyait donc évidemment qu'en Angleterre non seulement tous les individus du sexe mâle sont lords, mais encore que la lettre *i* s'y prononce toujours *ai*” (II: p. 99). In the same way, he says 'laïft' for 'lift'; dismissing his mistake when it comes to light with 'un ton sec et hautain': “Cela n'a d'ailleurs aucune espèce d'importance” (p. 99).<sup>28</sup>

A similar failure of assimilation befalls the Jewish girls at Balbec; 'cette horde de fillasses mal élevées, poussant le souci des modes de "bains de mer" jusqu'à toujours avoir l'air de revenir de pêcher la crevette ou d'être en train de danser le tango' (II: p. 98). Exaggerating

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*Proust et l'expérience littéraire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), p. 48. For a very interesting discussion of Mme Swann in the notebooks, and the significance of her excision from the final text, see Marion A. Schmid, 'The Jewish Question in *A la recherche du temps perdu* in the Light of Nineteenth-Century Discourses on Race', *Neophilologus*, 83 (1999), 33-49.

<sup>27</sup> The inassimilability of Bloch is a constant critical theme. See, for example, John K. Hyde, 'Proust, his Jews and his Jewishness', *French Review*, 39 (1965-66), 837-48 (p. 840); Albert Sonnenfeld: 'every episode accentuates Bloch's innate misperception of the dynamics of French society', 'Marcel Proust: Antisemite? I' *French Review*, 62 (1988-89), 25-40 (p. 37); and Seth L. Wolitz; who describes him as 'the image of the unassimilated Jew in the salon', *The Proustian Community* (New York: New York University Press, 1971), p. 188; see also pp. 186-87 and 189.

<sup>28</sup> Drumont sees language as one of the loci where Jewishness is exposed: 'Le Juif attrape admirablement le jargon parisien. Heine, Albert Wolff, Halévy dont nous parlions tout à l'heure, beaucoup de nos confrères allemands sont plus parisiens que nous qui sommes nés à Paris. [...] Parler français est autre chose. Pour parler une langue il faut d'abord penser dans cette langue; il y a entre l'expression et la pensée une corrélation étroite.' Édouard Drumont, *La France juive: essai d'histoire contemporaine*, 48th edn, 2 vols (Paris: Marpon and Flammarion, [n.d.]), pp. 29-30.

their enthusiasm for the traditional seaside activities, the girls find that their behaviour becomes distinctive rather than naturalized, and is constructed by the unsympathetic onlookers in terms of moral deviance ('fillasses mal élevées'). The text diagnoses in each case a fundamental otherness, which, as with Swann, is figured in terms of a racial difference which can be disguised, but not erased: 'Les cheveux, jadis bouclés, coiffés à plat avec une raie au milieu, brillaient de cosmétique. Son nez restait fort et rouge, mais semblait plutôt tuméfié par une sorte de rhume permanent qui pouvait expliquer l'accent nasal dont il débitait paresseusement ses phrases. [...] Et grâce à la coiffure, à la suppression des moustaches, à l'élégance, au type, à la volonté, ce nez juif disparaissait comme semble presque droite une bossue bien arrangée' (IV: pp. 530-31).<sup>29</sup>

A third Jewish character in relation to whom the idea of assimilation is explored is Rachel, the actress who becomes the mistress of Robert de Saint Loup. She clearly recalls the historical Jewish actress Rachel Felix, who was able in the eyes of Matthew Arnold to transcend her Hebraicism through her art and attain a 'universalist' quality in its place.<sup>30</sup> However, when Proust's Rachel steps up to perform before the Duchesse de Guermantes' guests in *La Côté de Guermantes*, and when she later recites at the final reception, her performance is received in very different terms:

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<sup>29</sup> Proust was apparently marked by the same physiological otherness in the eyes of some of his acquaintances. Jean Reanati reports Lucien Daudet's remarks upon his 'épaisse chevelure orientale', the Comtesse de Noailles's comment upon his 'visage orientale', and Fernand Gregh's recollection that 'Un soir, après avoir pendant quelque temps laissé pousser sa barbe, c'était tout à coup le rabbin ancestral qui était reparu derrière le Marcel charmant que nous connaissions'. *Profils juifs de Marcel Proust* (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1979), pp. 15-16.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, the last of three sonnets probably written in 1863; five years after Rachel's death. The final tercet in particular emphasizes her combination of Hebraic and Hellenic qualities:

'Germany, France, Christ, Moses, Athens, Rome.  
The strife, the mixture in her soul, are ours;  
Her genius and her glory are her own.'

*The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, ed. by Kenneth Allott (London: Longmans, 1965), p. 485.

John Stokes describes instead a refusal either to transcend, or to symbolize, her Jewishness; a resistance which leads to a different type of universal appeal: 'In her tragic roles Rachel addressed [her] factional audience [which included both 'a Jewish clique' and antisemites] as if it were one, and by refusing to be appropriated, yet retaining her racial identity, held it in thrall.' 'Rachel Felix', in Michael R. Booth, John Stokes, Susan Bassnett, *Three Tragic Actresses: Siddons, Rachel, Ristori* (Cambridge: C. U. P., 1996), pp. 66-116 (p. 68).

Quand on vit l'actrice, avant de commencer, chercher partout des yeux d'un air égaré, lever les mains d'un air suppliant et pousser comme un gémissement chaque mot, chacun se sentit gêné, presque choqué de cette exhibition de sentiments. [...] Les auditeurs furent stupéfaits en voyant cette femme, avant d'avoir émis un seul son, plier les genoux, tendre les bras, en berçant quelque être invisible, devenir cagneuse, et tout d'un coup, pour dire des vers fort connus, prendre un ton suppliant. (IV: p. 577)

Rather than producing a transcendent universal communication, the gesticulations and dramatic intonations of Rachel are alien and unintelligible to her audience. The passion and intensity which helped the historical Rachel to represent the Greek and Roman heroines of Corneille and Racine,<sup>31</sup> here suggest instead an alienation from Hellenic representation and art. In the same way earlier, when she is invited to perform at the Duchesse de Guermantes', her rendition of a scene from *Les Sept Princesses* ("elle disait une phrase, pas même, un quart de phrase, et puis elle s'arrêtait; elle ne disait plus rien, mais je n'exagère pas, pendant cinq minutes"; II: 527) elicits only howls of laughter from the gathered guests.<sup>32</sup> The text appears to assert, against Arnold and Lewes and their (implicitly antisemitic) vision of a transcended racial identity, the existence of an irreducible difference which inscribes itself in artistic performance as clearly as in any other sphere.

However, unlike the otherness of Bloch and Swann, the difference detected in Rachel's performance here is finally presented in ambiguous terms. Proust's Rachel is displaced from the classical roles played by the historical actress: where the latter plays Phèdre, Camille (in *Horace*), and Hermione (in *Andromaque*),<sup>33</sup> the former performs scenes from Maeterlinck; a playwright whose work, the text makes clear, has been greeted in its own right with

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<sup>31</sup> For the intensity of Rachel's dramatic performance, see George Henry Lewes: 'Her thin, nervous frame vibrated with emotion. Her face, which would have been common, had it not been aflame with genius, was capable of intense expression. [...] Like Kean, she had a power of concentrating into a single phrase a world of intense feeling.' *On Actors and the Art of Acting* (London: Smith Elder, 1875), pp. 24, 27.

<sup>32</sup> The Duchesse also describes her unusual ideas about stage furniture and dramatic posture 'imaginez-vous qu'elle avait eu la prétention que je fisse dresser un escalier au beau milieu de mon salon. C'est un rien, n'est-ce pas, et elle m'avait annoncé qu'elle resterait couchée à plat ventre sur les marches' (II: p. 526).

incomprehension and derision by readers and spectators unable to appreciate its merits.<sup>34</sup> And in the passage from *Le Temps retrouvé*, while she is now reciting ‘poésies que presque tout le monde connaissait’, the effect of her performance is interpreted by the narrator in terms of newness rather than inalienable otherness: ‘Personne ne s’était dit que réciter des vers pouvait être quelque chose comme cela’ (IV: p. 577). While the text constructs a Jewish performance marked by difference, the reason for, and the degree of, this otherness are not made clear.

Despite this ambiguity, however, Rachel, like Swann and Bloch, is ultimately characterized by difference. In the case of Swann, the Jewish other resists the appropriation attempted by the self: while he accepts the erasure of his cultural specificity, he is at a deeper level unwilling to relinquish his Jewish inheritance. In other instances, the inassimilability attributed to the Jew signals the failure of his or her own project of self-assimilation, while equally, implicitly, demonstrating once again the impossibility for the self of controlling through erasure the difference of the other. I now wish to consider two instances where the self abandons the project of assimilating the Jew, and seeks instead to emphasize its difference; constructing it in forms favourable to the self. These attempts bring to light aspects of, and contradictions within, the self-Jewish other relation which, in their turn, develop and complicate the relationships depicted in the instances above.

The character who defines and elaborates Jewish difference most frequently in the text is the Baron de Charlus:

‘Quand on donne dans la Semaine sainte ces indécents spectacles qu’on appelle *La Passion*, la moitié de la salle est remplie de juifs, exultant à la pensée qu’ils vont mettre une seconde fois le Christ sur la Croix, au moins en effigie. Au concert Lamoureux, j’avais pour voisin un jour un riche banquier juif. On joua *L’Enfance du Christ*, de Berlioz; il était consterné. Mais il

<sup>33</sup> For a discussion of the roles performed by Rachel, see Stokes, pp. 77-107.

<sup>34</sup> The Duchesse is scathing about *Les Sept Princesses*, while M. d’Argencourt remarks that ‘L’auteur l’a envoyée au Roi qui n’y a rien compris et m’a demandé de lui expliquer’ (II: p. 526).



retrouva bientôt l'expression de béatitude qui lui est habituelle en entendant "L'Enchantement du Vendredi saint". (III: p. 490)<sup>35</sup>

The Jewish other is controlled in the passage here through a very familiar process of demonization. The Jewish other is constructed in terms of spiritual deviance: responsible for the Crucifixion of Christ, he continues to celebrate His death, and 'être consterné' at mention of His life.<sup>36</sup> And the identity of the Jew concerned -- 'un riche banquier' -- also suggests a moral degeneracy; focussing as it does the familiar theme of economic exploitation at the hands of the greedy Jew.<sup>37</sup> This moral and spiritual deficiency implicitly defines a virtuous, pious and superior constructing self; as it does in colonial discourse.<sup>38</sup> However, unlike colonial discourse, antisemitic self- and other-fashioning is conceived as permanent and static. Where the relation between the colonial self and its other is dynamic -- the other is cast as uncivilized, primitive and morally deficient in order to justify its subsequent colonization and conversion to the terms of the self -- the antisemite resists any attempt to absorb or

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<sup>35</sup> Curiously, Proust himself seems to have produced a somewhat irreverent artistic representation of the Crucifixion. William Sansom prints a comic sketch, drawn by Proust and sent to his Jewish friend, Reynaldo Hahn, of *La Trinité adorée par tous les saints*, after Durer. The kneeling figures, many bearing palm-leaves, who bow before the crucified Christ in the original, are replaced in Proust's depiction with sketchy figures with ambiguous expressions. *Proust and his World* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), p. 9.

<sup>36</sup> This is a well-rehearsed theme in antisemitic discourse. Mgr E. Jouin, for example, declares that the Jew belongs to 'a fallen race; there is deep inside him an atavistic tendency, which means that at the crucial hour there rise from his heart to his brain all the heady eternal dreams of his fathers, scheming incessantly to conquer the world, and all the ancestral hatreds which, throughout twenty centuries, have repeated the clamour of Calvary: "Let his blood be on us and on our children"'. *Le Péril judéo-maçonnique*, 2 vols (Paris, 1921), II: *La Judéo-maçonnerie et l'Eglise catholique*; cited by Stephen Wilson, *Ideology and Experience: Antisemitism in France at the Time of the Dreyfus Affair* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 1982), p. 461. Drumont also makes the case for Jewish spiritual deviance; this time through the figure of Judas: 'Vous tous petits et grands qui défendez comme vous pouvez la victime du Calvaire, le Dieu qu'ont prié vos pères, ne vous sentez-vous pas plus heureux que cet apostat qui baise la main du bourreau du Christ pour une poignée d'écus qu'on lui jette avec dégoût?' *La France juive*, I, pp. 15-16.

<sup>37</sup> The idea of being taken over by the semitic other is elaborated by Charlus in the passage with which this extract ends: learning that Bloch lives at La Commanderie, he complains of the way that Jews come to settle in towns with particularly Catholic names, and transform them into their ghettos (III: pp. 490-91).

<sup>38</sup> Elsewhere in antisemitic discourse, the themes of inferiority and deviancy are extended to intellectual deficiency and physical deformity. Thus Jules Soury, drawing upon the findings of racial 'scientists' such as Renan and Gobineau, writes to Maurice Barrès that he considers that 'le Juif est né d'un anthropoïde spécial comme le noir, le jaune, le peau-rouge'. Quoting Renan, he insists that 'la race sémitique comparée à la race indo-européenne représente réellement une combinaison inférieure de la nature humaine'. See Barrès, *Mes Cahiers*, 14 vols (Paris: Plon, 1929-57), II: *Février 1898-mai 1902*

colonize the Jew. Established in part in opposition to the assimilationist impulse, the antisemitic movement in France steadfastly rejected the idea that the Jewish other might be converted or absorbed by the self. The relation between self and other operates as a fixed hierarchy, therefore: the self constantly reinforces its identity, and controls the other's threat to its values through a vocabulary of hierarchy and deviance.

A different way of constructing and controlling the otherness of the Jew is attempted by the narrator's grandfather. Whenever Marcel brings a new friend to the house:

c'était toujours un juif, ce qui ne lui eût pas déplu en principe -- même son ami Swann était d'origine juive -- s'il n'avait trouvé que ce n'était pas d'habitude parmi les meilleurs que je le choisissais. Aussi quand j'amenais un nouvel ami il était bien rare qu'il ne fredonnât pas: 'Ô Dieu de nos Pères' de *La Juive* ou bien 'Israël, romps ta chaîne', ne chantant que l'air naturellement (Ti la lam ta lam, talim), mais j'avais peur que mon camarade ne le connût et ne rétablît les paroles.

Avant de les avoir vus, rien qu'en entendant leur nom qui, bien souvent, n'avait rien de particulièrement israélite, il devinait non seulement l'origine juive de ceux de mes amis qui l'étaient en effet, mais même ce qu'il y avait quelquefois de fâcheux dans leur famille. [...] Après nous avoir posé adroitement quelques questions précises, il s'écriait: 'À la garde! À la garde!' (I: p. 90).

The notion of deviance still has a part to play in the extract here: while the grandfather carefully separates Jewishness and deviance, it is clear that the associations he makes between Jews and immorality is not an innocent one. However, for the most part, he constructs and defines the otherness of the Jew in a different way. Where Charlus establishes a good/evil, normative/degenerate dichotomy, the grandfather sets up a simpler opposition between self and not-self, which is used to marginalize, rather than to demonize, the Jewish other. Where Charlus ascribes a series of negative characteristics to the figure of the Jew, the grandfather quotes lines from the operas *La Juive* and *Samson et Dalila* which mark out and

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(1930), pp. 117-20. Drumont also describes the aesthetically deviant Jewish body: 'les ongles carrés au lieu d'être arrondis en amande, le torse trop long'. *La France juive*, I, p. 34.

stigmatize the Jew as different from the self, but which do not define him in either positive or negative terms. Instead they exclude him.

Proust identifies two ways of constructing the difference of the Jew, therefore. While Charlus recycles the strongly defined, hierarchical oppositions deployed by Drumont and his contemporaries, to produce a static, normative, positive account of the self, the narrator's grandfather establishes a more fluid opposition which trades upon the idea of the other without seeking to evaluate or demonize it for the purposes of the self; which demands only that the boundaries between self and other be made clear. The significance of the distinction between these two ways of exploiting the notion of difference should become clear as I proceed to consider the ways in which the text responds to these racial constructions. Each is vulnerable to subversion, and to resistance by the other, but the two are susceptible in different ways.

The first way in which antisemitic constructions are challenged in the text is through the destabilization of the boundaries upon which they depend:

Quant aux hommes, malgré l'éclat des smokings et des souliers vernis, l'exagération de leur type faisait penser à ces recherches dites 'intelligentes' des peintres qui ayant à illustrer les Évangiles ou les *Mille et Une Nuits*, pensent au pays où la scène se passe et donnent à saint Pierre ou à Ali-Baba précisément la figure qu'avait le plus gros 'ponte' de Balbec. (II: p. 98)

The resemittization of St Peter in the passage here establishes a degree of continuity between Judaism and Christianity. It makes clear that Jews were the spiritual fathers and teachers of the French Catholic population, and the chosen people of the Christian God. The same idea is taken in a slightly different direction in the passage towards the start of the novel in which the narrator describes 'deux tapisseries' representing 'le couronnement d'Esther' (I: p. 60), on the walls of the church at Combray. The representation of Old Testament characters on the walls of a Catholic church emphasizes more clearly the links which exist between other

and self. Jews are not simply the people out of whom God made the first Christians, but the branch onto which Christians are grafted as the covenant of the Old Testament shared by the two religions is renewed and fulfilled by the new covenant of Christ.

The continuities thus established between the two religions introduce contradictions and incoherences into the grandfather's representation of Jewishness. The within/without dichotomy he constructs assumes that self and other are separate categories: the timid Israelite can be stigmatized and excluded because a clear distinction is perceived to exist between him and the Christian self. The grandfather hums the tunes of '*Ô Dieu de nos Pères*', and '*Oui, je suis de la race élue*' (I: p. 91) in order to 'other' the narrator's 'Jewish' friends. The figures of Peter and Esther, however, demonstrate that both the 'Dieu' and 'Pères' concerned are also those of the self, and that 'la race élue' of the Hebrew people is also that of the Christian. To exclude and disparage the Jewish other, once it has been defined in these terms, is in some sense to disown, and to be alienated from, the inheritance and spiritual identity of the self. In his description of the tapestries of Esther in the church, Marcel remarks that the colours, 'en fondant, avaient ajouté une expression, un relief, un éclairage: un peu de rose flottait aux lèvres d'Esther au-delà du dessin de leur contour' (I: 60). As the pink on Esther's lips strays beyond its designated boundaries, and the colours of the tapestries begin to merge, so too through these representations the categories established by antisemitic discourse begin to dissolve and collapse together.<sup>39</sup>

The examples of Esther and St Peter are less effective, however, as a response to the demonization performed by Charlus. While there may be continuities between Judaism and Christianity, clearly there are also fundamental differences, and by taking the Crucifixion as

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<sup>39</sup> Matthew Arnold avoids this blurring of categories between Hellenic and Hebraic by making Christianity, as well as Judaism, an expression of the Hebraic: 'Christianity changed nothing in th[e] essential bent of Hebraism to set doing above knowing. Self-conquest, self-devotion, the following not our own individual will, but the will of God, *obedience*, is the fundamental idea of this form, also, of

his subject, Charlus chooses the single event which focusses this difference most closely. The shared Old Testament inheritance which the figure of Esther makes clear does not undermine this mutual otherness of Judaism and Christianity, however distastefully it is cast in the Baron's interpretation. However, in another sense, the figures of Peter and Esther do challenge, at least, Charlus's representation. When the tapestry of Esther and the painting of St Peter are placed alongside his depiction of spiritual wickedness, it becomes clear that his interpretation does not encompass or exhaust the figure of the Jew. Esther figures Jewish faithfulness to God and His people; Peter the Jewish follower of Christ. The figure of Peter also subverts Charlus's account in a second way. Demonstrating that a Jew may become a follower of Christ, he begins to break down the static, irreducible opposition with which antisemitism replaces the cycle of invention and conversion at the centre of colonial discourse, and to reintroduce instead a more fluid relationship in which the other may be transformed into the self.

The attempts of the antisemitic self to construct the Judaic other in terms of difference are susceptible to subversion in a number of ways, therefore. The continuities between Judaism and Christianity make the grandfather's attempts to stigmatize and exclude the 'chosen race' problematic, while Charlus's demonization of the Jews who killed Christ is set against the historical counter-examples of a Jewish apostle and faithful queen. However, the Judaic other which emerges in these extracts addresses more than the issues of demonization and exclusion. It also returns and responds to the question of assimilation. I have suggested that while at one level, Judaism is presented as continuous with Christianity, at another, the two stand in opposition: the Crucifixion expresses the fundamental, irreducible distance which stands between the two. The Jewish religious other is thus equally resistant either to attempts to demonize and exclude it, or to attempts to assimilate it. On the one hand, it is characterized

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the discipline to which we have attached the general name of Hebraism' (italics in original). *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings*, ed. by Stefan Collini (Cambridge: C. U. P., 1993), p. 128.

by continuities with the self, and by a spiritual purity and propriety which undermine the processes of exclusion, stigmatization and demonization through which the antisemitic self seeks to define and control its difference. On the other hand, it is irreducibly different from the self: the Crucifixion scene articulates an unbridgeable divide. No integration or assimilation is therefore possible by the self. The text finally describes an other which is at once irretrievably different from the self, yet stubbornly attached to it.

The combination of sameness and difference attributed to the other here recalls Montaigne's 'Des cannibales'. However, in Montaigne, the construction of an other at once different from and similar to the self enables the self to negotiate a coherent relation: grounded in sameness, the defining quality of difference is retained, while the threat which it posed to the vision of the self is successfully defused. In the instance above, by contrast, the other's simultaneous similarity to and difference from the self is deeply problematic. Difference is no longer paradoxical in Proust; on the one hand needed, on the other a threat. Rather, it can be dealt with in one of two ways. Either it can be eliminated, or it can be exaggerated to the point where it is separate from the self, and thus can safely be demonized or excluded. A combination of continuity and difference in the other is no longer helpful, therefore. Instead, it suggests that the other can never be controlled to the satisfaction of the self.

I wish now to suggest that this 'doubleness' also characterizes other instances of the self-Jewish other relation in the text. In the same way as the Jewish religious other, both the Jewish national other (which I have begun to discuss above in the figure of Swann) and the exotic Jewish other come to manifest both a fundamental difference from the self, and a continuity with it. The constructing self is thus frustrated at a number of levels. However, the artistic Jewish other represented by Rachel fails to develop this double relation to the self, and although it takes various forms in the text, it is in each case susceptible to antisemitic exploitation.

I have suggested above that through his support for Dreyfus, and in his physiognomy, Swann displays an irreducible Jewish identity, and rejects the 'French' selfhood offered by the Duc. However, while the debate about Dreyfus is at its height, he also begins to adopt a deliberate and visible militarist stance:

Il portait, ce qu'il n'avait jamais fait jusque-là, la décoration qu'il avait gagnée comme tout jeune mobile, en 70, et ajouta à son testament un codicille pour demander que, contrairement à ses dispositions précédentes, des honneurs militaires fussent rendus à son grade de chevalier de la Légion d'honneur. (III: p. 111)

Bloch sees this behaviour as a compromise, and disparages Swann as 'cocardier' (p. 111).

However, I would suggest that the passage above demonstrates instead a determination to claim a multiple identity: as a Frenchman as well as a Jew. The faubourg has sought first to eliminate his difference through assimilation, and then to control it through ostracism.

However, at the moment of exclusion, Swann re-positions himself within, and reclaims the rights due to him by, the society from which he has been set apart, and from which he has withdrawn.<sup>40</sup> He continues to display an archetypal Jewish physiognomy -- and thus to represent otherness -- but situates himself inside the boundary of French nationality. As in the examples above, therefore, he is at once decisively other to the self which wishes to assimilate him, and inseparable from the self which wishes to ostracize him. Deliberately, in this instance, the Jewish other adopts an identity which frustrates at once the different appropriative strategies of the self.

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<sup>40</sup> Jewishness and French nationhood are also brought together in the tapestry of Esther. The narrator recounts how: 'la tradition voulait qu'on eût donné à Assuérus les traits d'un roi de France et à Esther ceux d'une dame de Guermantes dont il était amoureux' (I: p. 60). Symbols of French and Jewish nations are thus condensed into these two figures. Lawrence R. Schehr, however, interprets this conflation in a different way. Rather than a fusion of Jewishness and Frenchness, he sees a making-Jewish of the non-Jew; a 'Judaism by aesthetics' which he also extends to the Odette-after-Zipporah constructed by Swann. 'Rachel, quand du Seigneur', *L'Esprit Créateur*, 37.4 (Winter 1997), 83-93 (pp. 89-92).

In this instance, the complex relation forged between other and self provides a coherent identity for the other. Swann conceives himself as both Jewish and French, and the double relation he establishes with the French self thus enables him to integrate the different parts of his identity; rather than imposing upon him a problematic multiplicity or excess of selfhood. Elsewhere in the text, however, the construction of an other at once irreducibly different from, but continuous with, the self, denies the other, as well as the self, a coherent subjectivity. To describe the Jewish other in terms of a double relatedness to the self is to elaborate an incoherent, unstable or overdetermined comparative identity; while to describe it in terms of resistance is not to afford it a place or a space of its own. The same double relation which enables the Jewish other to resist the appropriations of the self also prevents it from forging a stable identity for itself.

A third version of Jewishness which manifests this double relation is the exotic Jewish other. In this instance, the relation with the self is more complex and flexible, and the text tests and explores the ways in which the self can exploit the other, before finally depicting a relation which prevents either the assimilation, or the demonization or exclusion, of the Jewish other. The image of the exotic Jew is primarily explored through the figure of Bloch in the drawing room of Mme de Villeparisis:

Un Israélite faisant son entrée comme s'il sortait du fond du désert, le corps penché comme une hyène, la nuque obliquement inclinée et se répandant en grands 'salams', contente parfaitement un goût d'orientalisme. [...] [Bloch] restait, pour un amateur d'exotisme, aussi étrange et savoureux à regarder, malgré son costume européen, qu'un Juif de Decamps. (II: pp. 487-88)<sup>41</sup>

The relationship between self and other is still characterized by both difference and continuity in the extract here. On the one hand, the Jew is used to evoke a profound sense of

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<sup>41</sup> The scene from which this extract is taken, which describes Bloch's invitation and entry into the salon of Mme de Villeparisis, draws upon a familiar historical scenario. Wollitz describes how 'The Jew's entry into high society was furthered because the members of high society had a constant thirst for novelty to entertain themselves, for people who were interesting and even a little notorious'. *The Proustian Community*, p. 155.



otherness: arriving as if from the desert, and carrying his body in a distinctive way, he appears 'étrange' to the exoticizing eyes of the watching European. On the other, he is also strangely attached to the self. The exotic is in some sense an imaginative self-extension of the subject: it is different to it, but the self nevertheless makes a degree of investment in it. The relation between self and other is more complex and engaged here than in the examples above: fascination and attraction pull against and complicate the exclusion and marginalization which are apparently performed.<sup>42</sup> (In some sense, of course, this is true of every 'other' invented by the self. The result of the self's imaginative resources, the projection of its anxieties, or the exorcism of its own moral or spiritual deviance, it can never be entirely distinct.) The same ambiguities can also be seen in the passage which describes Charlus's desire to witness a circumcision or other Jewish rite: "Peut-être pourriez-vous demander à votre ami de me faire assister à quelque belle fête au Temple, à une circoncision, à des chants juifs. [...] Il pourrait même, pendant qu'il y est, frapper à coups redoublés sur sa charogne, ou, comme dirait ma vieille bonne, sa carogne de mère. Voilà qui serait fort bien fait et ne serait pas pour nous déplaire, hein! petit ami, puisque nous aimons les spectacles exotiques" (II: pp. 584-85). In one sense, the Jew is othered by Charlus's envisaged spectatorship: he becomes, like a circus act, a spectacle, paradoxically marginalized by his position at the centre of what Charlus construes as a performance. In another sense, however, Charlus acknowledges a degree of fascination as he describes his compulsion to be present at such an event, and that same imagined spectatorship which threatens to cast the Jew as other also suggests a degree of participation by the self.

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<sup>42</sup> Alaine Buisine describes another oriental 'other' characterized by continuity with the self; this time, however, a matter of familiarity rather than imaginative identification. He recalls the moment in 'Combray' when the narrator muses over the origin of the 'boutons d'or' which he sees spread over the fields before him: 'venus peut-être il y a bien des siècles d'Asie mais apatriés pour toujours au village'. 'Le plus étranger', he suggests, 'est toujours déjà présent dans le plus familier. [...] Le plus féérique côtoie le plus prosaïque, la quotidienneté est enchantée: sans que vous vous en doutiez, l'Orient [...] est chez vous'. 'Marcel Proust: le côté de l'Orient', *Revue des sciences humaines*, 214 (April-June, 1989), 123-44 (pp. 123-25).

However, there is a crucial difference between the 'double' relation forged between self and other here, and in the examples above. Where previously, the self sought either to demonize or to assimilate the other, and found that in each case, its project was resisted by the simultaneous difference and continuity manifested by the other, now the self constructs the other according to a double project. The construction of an exotic other enables the self to marginalize it and to emphasize its otherness, while at the same time performing some kind of imaginative self-extension through it. Rather than continuity or difference disrupting a project which demands an other either completely separate from the self, or assimilable to it, the self constructs an other which is both similar to and different from it, according to a new set of purposes. Continuity and difference no longer pull against each other in this formulation: the investment by the self in the exotic Jew remains invisible and does not complicate its construction as 'other'; while the difference of the exotic other is contained by the self's investment, by its marginalization, and by its surface character.

As the passage proceeds, however, the Jewish other begins to metamorphose, and to take up a form which problematizes these constructions:

Le spectacle auquel l'entrée dans un salon d'une Turque, d'un Juif, nous fait assister, en animant les figures, les rend plus étranges, comme s'il s'agissait en effet d'êtres évoqués par un effort médiumnique. C'est l'âme (ou plutôt le peu de chose auquel se réduit, jusqu'ici du moins, l'âme, dans ces sortes de matérialisations), [...] des anciens Juifs, arrachée à une vie tout à la fois insignifiante et transcendente, qui semble exécuter devant nous cette mimique déconcertante. [...] Il me semblait que si j'avais dans la lumière du salon de Mme de Villeparisis pris des clichés d'après Bloch, ils eussent donné d'Israël cette même image, si troublante parce qu'elle ne paraît pas émaner de l'humanité, si décevante parce que tout de même elle ressemble trop à l'humanité, que nous montrent les photographies spirites. (II: pp. 488-89)

The otherness of the Jew begins to become more radical and uncontainable in the passage here. The superficial images of otherness -- the crouched body, the profound saalams -- attributed to the Jewish figure by the exoticizing self are replaced by a disturbing otherworldliness: seemingly evoked by medium activity, it manifests a transcendental quality,

which transforms its drawing-room manner into a 'mimique déconcertante'. Its otherness has escaped the control and limits of the appropriating self, and become, like that of the racialized, Dreyfusard Swann, and that of the unassimilable Bloch, irreducible and problematic. At the same time, however, it continues to bear, or perhaps at this moment begins to make clear, an unmistakable and undeniable resemblance to the self: while the image produced by the photographs which the narrator imagines taking of Bloch would be 'troublante parce qu'elle ne paraît pas émaner de l'humanité', it would also be 'décevante', 'parce que tout de même elle ressemble trop à l'humanité'. At this point, the sameness and difference by which the exotic other is characterized cease to work according to the purposes of the self, and begin instead to operate in the same fashion as in the examples above. The otherness of the other is too great for the self either to control or invest in, while its resemblance prevents its detachment or separation from the self. The other has become once again both irreducibly different from the self, and indivisible from it.

While the constructions of the exoticizing self are apparently successful at first, however, but ultimately frustrated, neither their failure nor their success serves the cause of Bloch as a Jew seeking assimilation. When constructed as an exotic other, he gains access to the faubourg, but his 'inclusion' is (paradoxically) the result of his otherness, and depends upon his continued construction as such: 'seulement il faut [...] que le Juif n'appartienne pas au "monde"' (II: p. 488). When this projected identity begins to transmute, however, and the self to lose control of the otherness it has made, this other becomes characterized by a greater, rather than a lesser, degree of difference from the self. It escapes the exploitative construction of the self only by manifesting a radical difference which reinforces, rather than reverses, its exclusion.

The relationship between self and exotic other, therefore, like that between the French self and Jewish other, and that between the Catholic self and Judaic other, is finally characterized

by a doubleness which frustrates the appropriative strategies of the constructing self.

However, there are also examples in the text of self-Jewish other relations in which this doubleness mutates or breaks down, leaving the other susceptible to exploitation by the self.

One such relation is that between the Hellenic self and Hebraic other in the realm of art and performance. The figure of Rachel suggests that the Jew is at an artistic level marked by an irretrievable otherness. The text develops as it proceeds a more complex relation between French and Jewish art, but the self remains able throughout either to marginalize or to colonize its Hebraic artistic other.

French and Jewish culture and art are discussed once more at the evening reception in *Le Côté de Guermantes*. The narrator is appalled, when drawn to one side by Charlus, to hear of his plans for a performance by Bloch:

Il pourrait peut-être louer une salle et me donner quelque divertissement biblique, comme les filles de Saint-Cyr jouèrent des scènes tirées des *Psaumes* par Racine, pour distraire Louis XIV. Vous pourriez peut-être arranger même des parties pour faire rire. Par exemple, une lutte entre votre ami et son père où il le blesserait comme David Goliath. Cela composerait une farce assez plaisante. (II: p. 584)

While Bloch's envisaged reenactment of David killing Goliath is the central performance in this scene, it is the staging of Racine's *Psaumes* which focusses the relationship between French and Jewish culture most clearly. Were Bloch to perform the Jewish role marked out for him by Charlus, he would be a Jew enacting a Jewish text, and would therefore open up no dialogue between Hellenic and Hebraic art. In the performance of the Racinian play, by contrast, self and other are brought into direct contact. Written by Racine, the *Psaumes* are an expression of high French culture (and in this instance also of French nationhood, since performed in the presence of the king). At the same time, however, the subject-matter of the

*Psaumes* is quintessentially Jewish.<sup>43</sup> In this instance, the combination of the two is apparently unproblematic. The self draws upon and appropriates the literature of the other as it fashions its own cultural and literary tradition. Where Rachel's performance of Maeterlinck uncovers tensions between French and Jewish art, the extract above describes a rapprochement of other and self.

*A la recherche* provides two very different accounts of the relationship between Hellenic and Hebraic art, therefore. On the one hand, it describes irreconcilable difference, on the other, it envisages the conflation of the two. However, the Hebraic other is not simultaneously both irreducibly different from, and stubbornly attached to, the Hellenic artistic self. Rather, in different contexts, it manifests either a difference or a similarity, each of which can be controlled by the self. When the Jewish performer seeks to inhabit Hellenic discourse -- to convert himself into his European other -- he is characterized by otherness alone. Rachel's unintelligible gesticulations signal a fundamental difference which the self is able to control through derision, while Bloch's pro-Dreyfusard views, expressed at party to which he has been invited as a performer, are dealt with through eviction and exclusion. When the terms are reversed, however, and the French self rewrites and performs a Jewish text -- when colonization replaces imitation and self-transformation -- the Hebraic text is vulnerable to such appropriation. Unlike the other forms of Jewishness depicted in the text, the Hebraic other is finally unable to resist the constructions of the self.

As the bourgeois self failed in its attempt to refashion itself as its aristocratic other, therefore, and to relocate itself within the wider social frame, so too the antisemitic self in *A la*

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<sup>43</sup> This is also the case with the tales of Ali-Baba, which the quotation at p. ? above presents as a European text resemitized, like St Peter by 'intelligents' illustrators. Drumont uses the *Mille et Une Nuits* as an example of the (inferior) oriental text: 'Ce qui plaît [l'Aryen] ce ne sont pas des aventures dans le genre des sémitiques *Mille et Une Nuits*, où des enchanteurs découvrent des trésors, où des pêcheurs, jetant leurs filets dans la mer, les retirent pleins de diamants. Il est nécessaire, pour qu'il soit touché, que sur la trame de toutes ces fictions se détache un être qui se dévoue, qui combatte pour une cause.' *La France juive*, I, p. 11.

*recherche* fails in its attempt to construct a coherent order through the exploitation of the Jew. Characterized at once by an irreducible difference from, and an equally undeniable continuity with, the self, the Jewish other is able to resist attempts both to assimilate it, and to demonize or exclude it. The Judaic other stands at once profoundly opposed to the central beliefs of the Christian self, and as its ancestor and source; Swann as both a Frenchman and Jew; the exotic other – at first sight apparently available for appropriation by the self – as a voice from another world which yet refuses disavowal by the self. It is only when the sameness and difference of the other are distributed between different contexts and frameworks – creating an other which is no longer both continuous with and different from the self at once – that the self is able to control and exploit the ‘Jew’ it constructs, and to forge a coherent order.

### DESIRING THE OTHER

The relationship between the subject and object of desire in *A la recherche* represents a decisive departure from the self-other relations elaborated above. No longer perceiving external orders as the source and site of selfhood, the subject consults instead its inner desires, and seeks to project them outwards, and to impose them upon the world. It tries to circumscribe, fashion, control and possess the object of its desire.<sup>44</sup> Its failure to achieve such possession has many well-documented causes: the resistance and elusiveness of the other, the impossibility of securing complete knowledge of its movements and desires, and the flaws in the strategies employed by the self. However, the self is also frustrated by a series of paradoxes, contradictions and perversities which characterize and attend the operation of

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<sup>44</sup> Jonathan D. Walsh identifies the reverse dynamic when he suggests that ‘the desire to appropriate the identity and physical being of an inscrutable Other, culturally or socially different from the subject, is motivated by an envious need to complete the self by means of the Other’s qualities’. ‘Jealousy, Envy, and Hermeneutics in Prévost’s *L’Histoire d’une Grecque moderne* and Proust’s *A la recherche du*

desire itself. I wish to sketch out briefly a number of these paradoxes as they emerge in the course of the narration, and then to look in greater detail at the perversities of the cycle of desire which comes to dominate the novel. While in some sense this cycle reinforces the failure of the self discussed in the earlier examples, in other ways, it admits the possibility of forging the semblance, at least, of a productive and coherent relation between other and self.

Once Swann has himself been excluded from the 'petit clan' which gathers around the Verdurins, he fears that Odette, if allowed to attend the outings to which the clan continues to invite her, may have the opportunity to satisfy her desires with his rival, Forcheville, or with other, unknown, men. He seeks, therefore, to prevent her attendance:

'Ce qu'il faut savoir, c'est si vraiment tu es cet être qui est au dernier rang de l'esprit, et même du charme, l'être méprisable qui n'est pas capable de renoncer à un plaisir. Alors, si tu es cela, comment pourrait-on t'aimer, car tu n'es même pas une personne, une créature définie, imparfaite, mais du moins perfectible? Tu es une eau informe qui coule selon la pente qu'on lui offre, un poisson sans mémoire et sans réflexion qui, tant qu'il vivra dans son aquarium, se heurtera cent fois par jour contre le vitrage qu'il continuera à prendre pour de l'eau. Comprends-tu que ta réponse, je ne dis pas aura pour effet que je cesserai de t'aimer immédiatement, bien entendu, mais te rendra moins séduisante à mes yeux quand je comprendrai que tu n'es pas une personne, que tu es au-dessous de toutes les choses et ne sais te placer au-dessus d'aucune?' (I: pp. 285-86)

Many of the ideas employed in the extract here are familiar from colonial discourse. The notions of absence and deviancy ('l'être méprisable', 'au dernier rang de l'esprit', 'même pas une personne', 'une eau informe', 'au-dessous de toutes les choses'), of amelioration ('imparfaite, mais du moins perfectible') and its opposite (Odette 'ne sais [s]e placer au dessus d'aucune') are all deployed by Léry and Thevet -- and some by the Duc and Charlus -- in various ways above. However, they are now used in a different way. Rather than seeking to control or construct an irreducible difference, or using the concept of deviancy to justify colonization in terms of education or civilization, Swann uses these vocabularies to construct

two positions through which he hopes to manipulate Odette. If she goes to the theatre against his wishes, she will be cast in terms of deviance. He hopes that she will therefore decide not to go. However, he does not simply encourage her to stay and appropriate the morally virtuous alternative location he has prepared. This position itself is constructed in terms which will give him control. The idea of amelioration -- imperfect but at least perfectible -- suggests that even if she adopts the identity of one who is prepared to give up a pleasure, she will be cast in terms of inferiority which implicitly grant him the authority to undertake the process of perfection he perceives to be required.

However, Odette's response is far from what he hopes:

Odette depuis un moment donnait des signes d'émotion et d'incertitude. À défaut du sens de ce discours, elle comprenait qu'il pouvait rentrer dans le genre commun des 'lâius' et scènes de reproches ou de supplications, dont l'habitude qu'elle avait des hommes lui permettait, sans s'attacher aux détails des mots, de conclure qu'ils ne les prononceraient pas s'ils n'étaient pas amoureux, que du moment qu'ils étaient amoureux, il était inutile de leur obéir, qu'ils ne le seraient que plus après. Aussi aurait-elle écouté Swann avec le plus grand calme si elle n'avait vu que l'heure passait et que pour peu qu'il parlât encore quelque temps, elle allait, comme elle le lui dit avec un sourire tendre, obstiné et confus, 'finir par manquer l'Ouverture!' (I: p. 286)

The first sentence of this second extract suggests a susceptibility on the part of Odette to the moral rhetoric which Swann has employed. However, as the passage continues, it becomes clear that this is not in fact the case. Odette does not attempt to evade his control through counter-construction -- as Albertine will later do, seeking to refute the narrator's charges of deviance, and to cast his own attempts to manipulate her in a morally dubious light. Odette, by contrast, has not even heard the arguments offered by Swann: she registers them only as a 'scène de reproche'. But this is in one sense entirely fitting: Swann's careful constructions are in a crucial way irrelevant in her economy of desire. His attempts to manipulate, whatever their terms, signal his desire, and this automatically empowers her. A paradox begins to

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desire remains subsidiary, however, to the project of self-realization through imposition upon the world.



emerge at this point: the desire to control or manipulate automatically disempowers. Every attempt to exercise control inevitably articulates the jealousy which underwrites it, and thus reverses the hierarchy which the self had hoped to establish.

This paradox, and the ascendancy which it bestows upon the object of desire rings true throughout 'Un Amour de Swann'. Odette consistently ignores the strategies which Swann deploys in his attempts to control her, in the knowledge that his jealousy effectively releases her (politically rather than morally) from the need to respond, and places her in control. Thus his supplications meet with refusals, and his anger with indifference: 'Odette, sûre de le voir venir après quelques jours, aussi tendre et soumis qu'avant, lui demander une réconciliation, prenait-elle l'habitude de ne plus craindre de lui déplaire et même de l'irriter' (I: p. 299).

The relationship between Marcel and Albertine works in a different way. However, once again, the strategies of the self are frustrated by the operation of desire itself. The narrator describes how Albertine avoids meeting any of his acquaintances:

J'entendais le bruissement de la jupe d'Albertine se dirigeant vers sa chambre, car par discrétion et sans doute aussi par ces égards où autrefois dans nos dîners à La Raspelière, elle s'était ingéniée pour que je ne fusse pas jaloux, elle ne venait pas vers la mienne sachant que je n'étais pas seul. Mais ce n'était pas seulement pour cela, je le comprenais tout à coup. Je me souvenais, j'avais connu une première Albertine, puis brusquement elle avait été changée en une autre, l'actuelle. Et le changement, je n'en pouvais rendre responsable que moi-même. Tout ce qu'elle m'eût avoué facilement, puis volontiers, quand nous étions de bons camarades, avait cessé de s'épandre dès qu'elle avait cru que je l'aimais, ou, sans peut-être se dire le nom de l'Amour, avait deviné un sentiment inquisitorial qui veut savoir, souffre pourtant de savoir, et cherche à apprendre davantage. Depuis ce jour-là elle m'avait tout caché. (III: p. 565-66)

In complete contrast to Odette, Albertine seeks to behave in a way which accommodates the jealousy of Marcel: avoiding the presence of his friends, she seeks to protect him from the painful suspicions which might otherwise plague him. Likewise elsewhere in *La Prisonnière*, she relinquishes a trip to the Verdurins' -- which Odette refused to do -- and when she travels

through the streets with the narrator, keeps her eyes averted from the men and women whom they pass (III: p. 596). Where Odette understands Swann's jealousy as a sign of her own empowerment, Albertine is herself controlled by that of the narrator. Circumscribing her behaviour, and curtailing her self-expression, she fashions herself in the terms which his jealousy demands.

The jealous self succeeds in this instance, therefore, in controlling both the self-articulation of the other's desire, and her exposure to rivals who might awaken his suspicion. However, the passage above makes clear that this control not only falls short of the possession he demands, but is itself a barrier to that possession. Once Albertine begins to behave in conformity with the demands of his jealousy, the narrator loses the chance he formerly had of knowing her desires, which are concealed by the part he imposes upon her. And this is problematic; for knowledge, as the extract above begins to suggest, and the text as a whole continually insists, is also a crucial part of possession. 'The jealous lover hears', above all, and makes it his mission to heed, 'an imperious call to *know*.'<sup>45</sup> Desire creates at once in its subject the desire to control and the desire to know, but these are contradictory, mutually-frustrating projects. The desire to control seeks to impose a form upon the other; but this inscription, or rather superscription, obscures the original text which the desire to know wishes to decipher. The self is cast at once as author and detective; called to determine the desires of the other both in the sense of deciphering them, and in the sense of dictating them.<sup>46</sup> Once more, the self is frustrated not by the other -- who is in this instance almost entirely compliant -- but by the complex demands of desire itself.

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<sup>45</sup> Malcolm Bowie, *Freud, Proust and Lacan: Theory as Fiction* (Cambridge: C. U. P., 1987), p. 49. Bowie examines this jealous desire to know as a form of scientific enquiry, in which the narrator 'envisages himself in turn as chemist, philologist, pathologist, cryptanalyst, logician, biologist, physiologist, ornithologist, ichthyologist, astronomer, grammarian, philosophical analyst both deductive and inductive, historian, psychologist of perception, physicist, botanist, mathematician and meteorologist' (p. 50).

<sup>46</sup> The roles of author and interpreter do also combine in more productive ways in the novel. When Carol de Dobay Rifelj notes that Marcel 'is not only Albertine's reader', but 'also self-consciously her author', she is describing the fictions he creates about her. In this instance, authorship, now subsequent

A third contrary feature of the operation of desire emerges in another passage which considers the self's desire for authorship. The text describes how 'si, à la devanture d'un fleuriste ou d'un joaillier, la vue d'un arbuste ou d'un bijou le [Swann] charmait, aussitôt il pensait à les envoyer à Odette' (I: p. 262), and how:

Il voulait surtout qu'elle les reçût avant de sortir pour que la reconnaissance qu'elle éprouverait lui valût un accueil plus tendre quand elle le verrait chez les Verdurin, ou même, qui sait? si le fournisseur faisait assez diligence, peut-être une lettre qu'elle lui enverrait avant le dîner, ou sa venue à elle en personne chez lui, en une visite supplémentaire, pour le remercier. Comme jadis quand il expérimentait sur la nature d'Odette les réactions du dépit, il cherchait par celles de la gratitude à tirer d'elle des parcelles intimes de sentiment qu'elle ne lui avait pas révélées encore. [...]

Un jour que [ses] réflexions [...] le ramenaient encore au souvenir du temps où on lui avait parlé d'Odette comme d'une femme entretenue, et où une fois de plus il s'amusait à opposer cette personnification étrange: la femme entretenue -- chatoyant amalgame d'éléments inconnus et diaboliques, serti, comme une apparition de Gustave Moreau, de fleurs vénéneuses entrelacées à des bijoux précieux -- et cette Odette sur le visage de qui il avait vu passer les mêmes sentiments de pitié pour un malheureux, de révolte contre une injustice, de gratitude pour un bienfait, qu'il avait vu éprouver autrefois par sa propre mère, par ses amis. [...] [L']image du banquier lui rappela qu'il aurait à y prendre de l'argent. En effet, si ce mois-ci il venait moins largement à l'aide d'Odette dans ses difficultés matérielles qu'il n'avait fait le mois dernier où il lui avait donné cinq mille francs, et s'il ne lui offrait pas une rivière de diamants qu'elle désirait, il ne renouvellerait pas en elle cette admiration qu'elle avait pour sa générosité, cette reconnaissance, qui le rendaient si heureux. [...] Alors, tout d'un coup, il se demanda si cela, ce n'était pas précisément 'l'entretenir'. (I: pp. 262-64)

This passage substantially reproduces the circumscription attempted by the self in each of the instances above. Taken from early in 'Un Amour de Swann', it depicts the subject of desire before it has also become the subject of jealousy; when it seeks not to isolate the other from contact with possible rivals, that is, but rather to prompt expressions of its love. Essentially, however, the object is the same: to govern the physical movements, and through them the desires, of the other. However, once again, the desiring self finds itself frustrated. While Swann is able, as he anticipates, to elicit from Odette the 'parcelles intimes de sentiment' he

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to the failure of knowledge, approximates, supplements or replaces this unachieved knowledge and

requires, he finds that the very process which grants him this control -- the giving of money and presents -- also, at another level, dispossesses him. The gifts which secure Odette's expressions of affection also define her as 'une femme entretenue', a creature alien, threatening, 'inconnue et diabolique'; certainly not possessed. Perversely, the very same gestures which control the other also inscribe its otherness.<sup>47</sup> As the passage proceeds, Swann attempts to resist this metamorphosis of his mistress: reversing the terms, he seeks to familiarize and thus dissolve the evil connotation of the 'femme entretenue', wondering 'si, en effet, cette notion d'entretenir pouvait être extraite d'éléments non pas mystérieux ni pervers, mais appartenant au fond quotidien et privé de sa vie' (p. 264). However, he is ultimately forced to consider once again 'si on ne pouvait pas appliquer à Odette [...] ce mot qu'il avait cru si inconciliable avec elle, de "femme entretenue"' (p. 264). Where in the instance above the desire to possess disempowered the subject, the exercise of control in the extract here also dispossesses.

The working-out of desire is attended in the novel, therefore, by a series of paradoxes and contrarities which ensure the failure of the self in its project of possession. Desire engenders a need for control, but that need, once expressed, automatically disempowers. It creates a compulsion to know, but sets against this compulsion a desire to shape and control which prevents the achievement of knowledge. And the methods through which the desiring self seeks to manipulate the other perversely inscribe its otherness. I now wish to turn to examine in detail the contrary feature of desire explored in the greatest depth by the novel. The cycle

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control. 'Circumscription: Proust's *The Captive*', in *Reading the Other: Novels and the Problem of Other Minds* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), pp. 133-62 (p. 155).

<sup>47</sup> Gilles Deleuze identifies a related 'contradiction de l'amour' when he describes how 'les moyens sur lesquels nous comptons pour nous préserver de la jalousie sont les moyens mêmes qui développent cette jalousie, lui donnant une espèce d'autonomie, d'indépendance à l'égard de notre amour'. *Proust et les signes*, 2nd edn (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970), p. 13. Deleuze is describing how signs of preference and pleasure given by the other -- which, like the letters and visits of thanks in the extract above, should signify possession -- become instruments of torture to Swann when he imagines them offered to another: 'chaque préférence dont nous profitons dessine l'image du *monde possible* où d'autres seraient ou sont préférés' (p. 13; italics in original).

of desire in one sense compounds, but in another reinfects, the failure of the self to control or possess the other.

While the selves which seek to immobilize and control the objects of their desire are for the most part unsuccessful in the text, there are moments when they believe that they have, finally, succeeded in possessing the 'êtres de fuite' they have been pursuing. However, when they do so, they find that this possession is not characterized by the satisfaction or fulfilment that they anticipate. Once the narrator has imprisoned Albertine in his apartment and believes that he possesses her completely, he finds that 'Chaque jour, elle me semblait moins jolie; [...] je sentais le néant qu'elle était pour moi, que je devais être pour elle. J'étais malheureux que cet état durât' (III: pp. 537-38). Likewise Swann, even before he reaches the point where he believes he possesses Odette, 'se doutait bien que ce qu'il regrettait ainsi c'était un calme, une paix qui n'auraient pas été pour son amour une atmosphère favorable' (I: p. 295), and imagines his lack of interest should Odette cease to be for him 'une créature toujours absente, regrettée, imaginaire quand le sentiment qu'il aurait pour elle ne serait plus ce même trouble mystérieux que lui causait la phrase de la sonate, mais de l'affection, de la reconnaissance quand s'établiraient entre eux des rapports normaux qui mettraient fin à sa folie et à sa tristesse' (I: p. 295). In each case, the subject becomes the victim of a cycle of desire. For as long as he does not possess the other, he is subject to suffering and anguish, but as soon as he feels assured of his mistress's affection, he is seized by boredom and indifference, from which he will only be relieved by renewed threats to his possession.<sup>48</sup> There are moments of happiness between these phases; moments of transition in which the self feels assured that he possesses the object of his desire, before the inevitable boredom has begun to set in, or his suspicions been reawakened.<sup>49</sup> However, for the most part, the self finds himself swinging

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<sup>48</sup> The narrator reflects of Albertine early in *La Prisonnière* that 'Seul le désir qu'elle excitait chez les autres, quand l'apprenant je commençais à souffrir et voulais la leur disputer, la hissait à mes yeux sur un haut pavois' (III: p. 537-38).

<sup>49</sup> Thus when the narrator interrogates Albertine in *Sodome et Gommorhe*, the protestations of affection he secures afford him, briefly, a genuine pleasure. By *La Prisonnière*, however, even these moments of

between painful jealousy and boredom: 'Je sentais que ma vie avec Albertine n'était, pour une part, quand je n'étais pas jaloux, qu'ennui, pour l'autre part, quand j'étais jaloux, que souffrance' (III: p. 895).

This cycle is interpreted in two very different ways in the text:

Le plus souvent l'amour n'a pour objet un corps que si une émotion, la peur de le perdre, l'incertitude de le retrouver se fondent en lui. Or ce genre d'anxiété a une grande affinité pour les corps. Il leur ajoute une qualité qui passe la beauté même. [...] À ces êtres-là, à ces êtres de fuite, leur nature, notre inquiétude attachent des ailes. Et même auprès de nous, leur regard semble nous dire qu'ils vont s'envoler. La preuve de cette beauté, surpassant la beauté, qu'ajoutent les ailes, est que bien souvent pour nous un même être est successivement sans ailes et ailé. Que nous craignons de le perdre, nous oublions tous les autres. Sûrs de le garder, nous le comparons à ces autres qu'aussitôt nous lui préférons. [...] Dans la mesure où les unions avec les femmes qu'on enlève sont moins durables que d'autres, la cause en est que la peur de ne pas arriver à les obtenir ou l'inquiétude de les voir fuir est tout notre amour et qu'une fois enlevées à leur mari, arrachées à leur théâtre, guéries de la tentation de nous quitter, dissociées en un mot de notre émotion quelle qu'elle soit, elles sont seulement elles-mêmes c'est-à-dire presque rien et, si longtemps convoitées, sont quittées bientôt par celui-là même qui avait si peur d'être quitté par elles. (III: pp. 600-01)

There are two ways of reading the passage above. The opening reflections and the closing sentence suggest a process of projection and disillusionment. Marcel's anxiety and uncertainty about the extent of his possession lead him to see in Albertine 'une qualité qui passe la beauté même', in the same way that the discovery that others desire her raises her to a lofty pinnacle in his eyes elsewhere. However, the value which he thus assigns her is a false one; the product of subjective investment rather than an estimate of her worth. Detached from the emotion by which the self has coloured them, women like Albertine 'sont seulement elles-mêmes c'est-à-dire presque rien'. According to such a reading, the narrator's boredom is caused by the inadequacy of the other, which is not, 'arrachée à [son] théâtre', all that it had seemed.

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peace and happiness have disappeared, and possession is marked solely by an absence of suffering: 'Elle était capable de me causer de la souffrance, nullement de la joie' (III: p. 538).

However, stripped of its final sentence, this extract invites -- while never acknowledging or explicitly endorsing -- a very different interpretation. When the narrator reflects upon the 'ailes' which attach to fugitive others, he concludes that 'souvent pour nous un même être est successivement sans ailes et ailé', and that 'Que nous craignons de le perdre, nous oublions tous les autres. Sûrs de le garder, nous le comparons à ces autres qu'aussitôt nous lui préférons.' Rather than a process of projection and disillusionment, this appears to suggest a cycle driven by the perversity of the self. When it does not possess the other it desires above all to do so. Once possession is achieved, however, this is no longer what it wants: it immediately begins to prefer those others which remain unpossessed. In this interpretation, it is not the inadequacies of the other which cause the boredom experienced by the self, but rather the nature of the subject itself. Perpetually desiring what it does not possess, it is characterized by a fundamental incapacity for satisfaction.<sup>50</sup>

The text as a whole, and *La Prisonnière* in particular, fluctuates (while rarely explicitly distinguishing) between these two interpretations of the cycle which it elaborates. However, neither admits an easy solution. The self which pursues an unworthy other is confronted with a choice between non-possession and boredom, while the subject which desires what it does not have suffers from a perpetual displacement of desire.<sup>51</sup> Since resolution is so difficult, the self seeks instead to disguise or suspend the cycle of desire, and I wish now to consider a

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<sup>50</sup> Such an incapacity for fulfilment is directly acknowledged elsewhere in the text. Reflecting on his love for Gilberte, in *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, the narrator concludes that 'le bonheur ne peut jamais avoir lieu. Si les circonstances arrivent à être surmontées, être vaincues, la nature transporte la lutte du dehors au dedans et fait peu à peu changer assez notre cœur pour qu'il désire autre chose que ce qu'il va posséder' (I: pp. 613-14).

<sup>51</sup> Such a condition also pitches the self towards temporal disjuncture and fragmentation. If the self's shifting relation to the other is the result of an internal inconsistency of response, rather than of a multiplicity of characters ascribed over time to the other, then the rift between self and other is mirrored by an internal fracture.

series of measures which enable it to imagine, at least, the unproblematic possession which it will never in reality achieve.<sup>52</sup>

Towards the end of *La Prisonnière*, Marcel learns from Mme Bontemps that on the day when Albertine had suddenly decided to leave Balbec with him, and to live in his apartment in Paris, she had learnt that Andrée, who was expected at Balbec, was prevented from coming, and would herself be remaining in Paris. As he seeks to interpret this disclosure, he finds that Albertine's behaviour may be seen in two very different ways, according to which of two character traits he relates it to:

Le premier trait, le consolant, fut cette habitude de faire servir une même action au plaisir de plusieurs personnes, cette utilisation multiple de ce qu'elle faisait, qui était caractéristique chez Albertine. C'était bien dans son caractère, revenant à Paris (le fait qu'Andrée ne revenait pas pouvait lui rendre incommode de rester à Balbec sans que cela signifiât qu'elle ne pouvait pas se passer d'Andrée), de tirer de ce seul voyage une occasion de toucher deux personnes qu'elle aimait sincèrement: moi, en me faisant croire que c'était pour ne pas me laisser seul, pour que je ne souffrisse pas, par dévouement pour moi, Andrée, en la persuadant que, du moment qu'elle ne venait pas à Balbec, elle ne voulait pas y rester un instant de plus. [...] Mais malheureusement je me rappelai presque aussitôt un autre trait du caractère d'Albertine et qui était la vivacité avec laquelle elle saisissait la tentation irrésistible d'un plaisir. Or je me rappelais, quand elle eut décidé de partir, quelle impatience elle avait d'arriver au train, comme elle avait bousculé le directeur, qui en cherchant à nous retenir aurait pu nous faire manquer l'omnibus. (III: p. 892)

The hypotheses constructed by the narrator in this passage set up two very different versions of Albertine. On the one hand, she may be genuinely fond of him, and her urgent desire to leave Balbec an expression of her devotion; on the other, she may be having a lesbian affair with Andrée, and her impatience to depart may signify his dispossession. In the light of the cycle of desire, neither interpretation will ultimately lead to satisfaction for the self. Should

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<sup>52</sup> An alternative to the idea of resolving or disguising this cycle is offered by Deleuze, who suggests that the repetition of suffering in the cycle of desire itself tends towards redemption; revealing the essence embedded beneath its surface: 'la répétition amoureuse ne se sépare pas d'une loi de progression par laquelle nous nous rapprochons d'une prise de conscience qui transmue nos souffrances en joie. [...] Il y a un tragique de ce qui se répète, mais un comique de la répétition, et plus



he decide that the second hypothesis is true, and that Albertine is in love with Andrée, he will be subject to the anguish of jealousy. Should he conclude that the first hypothesis is true, and that Albertine is devoted to him, he will find, and indeed does find, that he exchanges the suffering of jealousy for the bondage of boredom. However, while he remains undecided about which of the two is true -- and since each finds support in what he already knows of his mistress's character, neither can finally be discounted -- he postpones the moment when either of these outcomes is attained, and thus the moment when he is confronted either with the truth of his suspicions, or the realization that the 'devoted' Albertine he has envisaged no longer arouses his interest.<sup>53</sup> The undecidability of the hypotheses constructed in the text, combined with their evocation of one faithful and one unpossessable object of desire, enables the narrator to elaborate the fiction of a happy outcome, which, never attained, can never disclose its illusoriness.

This illusion might be seen in one of two ways. It might firstly be interpreted as a cruel trick of which the desiring subject is the victim: the final impossibility of fulfilment in desire is withheld from him, and he is tantalized instead with a picture of loyalty and love; which would crumble were he ever to attain it. However, it might be seen instead as a form of self-deception. The example above occurs after the narrator has already become bored with Albertine several times over, only to find his desire reawakened in each case by revelations which suggest that she is less possessed than he had supposed. He has already encountered the cycle of desire, therefore, and the impossibility of fulfilment. However, his hypotheses enable him to carve out for himself the prospect, at least, of satisfaction, and to disguise from

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profondément une joie de la répétition comprise ou de la compréhension de la loi. Nous extrayons de nos chagrins particuliers une Idée générale'. *Proust et les signes*, pp. 89-90.

<sup>53</sup> Bersani, p. 77 suggests that deferral is used in a different way as he elaborates an alternative interpretation of the cycle of desire: 'For Marcel, personality -- his own and that of others -- is by definition what has not happened or has not yet been revealed; it is in its essence a secret. Even if there is no objective reason for him to be jealous of Albertine, you might say that he has to ask her to make him believe that there is. If she persuaded him of her faithfulness, he would not have, in her reliable love for him, the fixed image of himself he needs, for this image is by nature something that others

himself through deferral the boredom which would, inevitably, replace it were he ever to accept Albertine's faithfulness and devotion. According to this interpretation the Proustian subject, like the Montaignean self, constructs a favourable relation with its other through the exploitation of the concept of undecidability. Where sceptical *epoche* is used in the *Apologie* to dissolve the category of otherness in the face of multiple threatening others, and then to appropriate an identity of humility and reverence in contrast to these unspecified dogmatic others, Marcel reverses the process. He clings to the notion of multiplicity in order to preserve the possibility of a satisfactory resolution, and to postpone the moment when he is confronted with the truth of the negative cycle.

However, this self-deception, if it enables the construction of a happy fiction, ultimately signals the failure of the self.<sup>54</sup> Even as the undecidability of the other's identity holds out the hope of possession, it also represents a failure to possess. In the passage above, the subject is essentially a detective, seeking knowledge of the other, and in this he clearly fails. The same postponement which prevents the realization of a problematic possession also prevents the achievement of knowledge. The trajectory of the passage above remains, therefore, one of failure. The subject continues to inhabit the realm of anguish, suffering and suspicion, even as he succeeds in suspending the cycle of which this suffering is part.

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cruelly withhold from him.' In this reading, possession of the other replaces the anguish of jealousy not with disappointment and boredom but with self-loss.

<sup>54</sup> Most interpretations of the narrator's hypotheses focus on this failure of knowledge, rather than upon the ways they may serve the constructing self. Bowie, for example, interprets them in terms of an excess of interpretative power which leads to contradiction and a failure of knowledge: 'Each explanation is worked through to its point of maximum coherence and the two are then evaluated comparatively. [...] The narrator pushes his first fine edifice to one side, saying "that was one way of solving it all; now let's solve it again". This is the moment at which the speculative intelligence breaks out, moves on, takes risks. With proud ingenuity he builds an alternative model of reality and in so doing persuades himself briefly that his power of speculation is indefinitely self-replenishing. But the new model enters into competition with the old. The two hypotheses, each of them complete but the pair of them incompatible, lock together to produce a new form of mental captivity.' *Freud, Proust and Lacan*, p. 53. In the same way Bersani, p. 88, sees the overdetermination of Albertine's motives in these passages as an imaginative confusion which sets the object of desire at a greater distance from the self: 'The Proustian system of multiple motivations [...] and, especially, the agonized moving from one painful

The passages which operate in this fashion need to be distinguished, however, from others which reflect upon the identity of the other in a similar, but more general way. Often when Swann or Marcel seeks in his jealousy to know the desires of his mistress's heart, his imagination moves between contrasting images of a faithful and faithless Odette or Albertine, in the same way that the self which constructs hypotheses moves between narratives of the other's devotion to him, and betrayal of him. Thus when Swann interrogates Odette, either about her failure to open the door to him (I: pp. 273-74), or about rumours he has heard of her lesbian encounters (“Je sais bien que je suis odieux, mais il faut que je te demande des choses. Tu te souviens de l'idée que j'avais eue à propos de toi et de Mme Verdurin? Dis-moi si c'était vrai, avec elle ou avec une autre” (I: p. 356), he is essentially seeking to decide between an image of a faithful Odette, and one of an unpossessed other whose desires are satisfied with other men and women. However, these examples do not finally reproduce the self-deception to which the construction of hypotheses leads. While they continue to evoke positive and negative versions of the other, and fail to decide between them, they do not reflect upon a specific picture of a devoted other in the same way, nor do they hold onto the idea of undecidability. While they continue to invest in the hope of a possession which would never satisfy them were they to attain it, therefore, the process of manufacturing but deferring the possession of a faithful other is absent, and the emphasis on the failure to possess much greater.

I wish finally to consider the relationship between the desiring subject and its other in *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, which presents the narrator's first encounter with Albertine and her friends on the beach at Balbec, and their friendship in subsequent months. The relationship between the self and this first mysterious, then familiar, other in one sense resembles that between the jealous self and its mistress, but in another opens up complexities

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mental picture to another illustrate how the desire merely to absorb certain facts results in a proliferation of conjectures that make external reality seem more ungraspable than ever.'

which enable the negotiation of the semblance, at least, of an acceptable relation between the subject and object of desire.

The basic trajectory of the narrator's relationship with the band of girls on the beach is one of demystification:

Ni parmi les actrices, ou les paysannes, ou les demoiselles de pensionnat religieux, je n'avais rien vu d'aussi beau, imprégné d'autant d'inconnu, aussi inestimablement précieux, aussi vraisemblablement inaccessible. Elles étaient, du bonheur inconnu et possible de la vie, un exemplaire si délicieux et en si parfait état, que c'était presque pour des raisons intellectuelles que j'étais désespéré de ne pas pouvoir faire dans des conditions uniques, ne laissant aucune place à l'erreur possible, l'expérience de ce que nous offre de plus mystérieux la beauté qu'on désire. (II: p. 155)

Les géographes, les archéologues nous conduisent bien dans l'île de Calypso, exhument bien le palais de Minos. Seulement Calypso n'est plus qu'une femme, Minos qu'un roi sans rien de divin. Même les qualités et les défauts que l'histoire nous enseigne alors avoir été l'apanage de ces personnes fort réelles, diffèrent souvent beaucoup de ceux que nous avons prêtés aux êtres fabuleux qui portaient le même nom. Ainsi s'était dissipée [des jeunes filles] toute la gracieuse mythologie océanique que j'avais composée les premiers jours. (II: p. 301)

The disillusionment which takes place in the transition from the first to the second of these passages is in the context of the cycle of desire a very familiar one. Once more, a desire to know and possess, once fulfilled, leads only to the discovery that the other is less precious and interesting than the subject had at first supposed. The notion of ascription in the second extract makes clear that desire has invested the girls with a mythological dimension and value which they do not, in fact, possess. The mysterious other glimpsed by the admiring subject on the beach is therefore as unavailable for satisfactory possession as the desired mistress pursued by the jealous self. However, there are a number of significant differences between the self-other relation which emerges in the passages here, and the cycle of desire. First, the mystery with which the band of girls is invested is no longer depicted in entirely negative terms. While it causes a painful sense of longing and exclusion, it is nonetheless alluring and

attractive. This is not true of the otherness of the jealous self's mistress: Odette and Albertine may be invested with value by virtue of their elusiveness, but this elusiveness is not in itself an attractive quality. With the 'petite bande', by contrast, there is a sense in which the disappearance of the other's mystery is regretted by the self. Minos and Calypso are something less once divested, even though their mythological dimension was, it transpires, projected by the self.

The mysterious/mythological nature of the band of girls encountered at Balbec elicits contradictory responses from the desiring self, therefore, which are absent from the later relation between the jealous self and its mistress. It also elicits these responses simultaneously. The jealous self reacts to the other with alternate anguish and lack of interest in a cycle of shifting response, but in contemplating the 'petite bande', the subject experiences both pleasure and pain -- although in shifting degrees -- throughout. In the passage which describes the narrator's first glimpse of the group of girls, he confesses to feeling 'désespéré', but the terms in which he describes them ('inestimablement précieux'; 'du bonheur inconnu et possible de la vie, un exemplaire si délicieux et en parfait état [...]') make clear also a delighted admiration. Likewise, while the second extract expresses regret at the dissolution of the mystery which had surrounded the little band, the passage goes on to suggest that the self is at the same time glad: 'il n'est pas tout à fait indifférent qu'il nous arrive au moins quelquefois de passer notre temps dans la familiarité de ce que nous avons cru inaccessible et que nous avons désiré' (II: p. 301).

The passages above thus replace the fluidity of the jealous subject's reaction to his mistress with a simultaneity of response, and substitute for the entirely negative character of the latter a complex combination of appreciation and anguish in the first instance, boredom and

satisfaction in the second.<sup>55</sup> These differences inevitably alter the operation of the self-other relation in quite significant ways. In some sense, the relation between Marcel and the little band resembles the cycle of desire less than the paradoxical relation between other and self identified and explored by Montaigne. The mystery of the other is characterized by both positive and negative qualities, and its dismantlement is thus both required and regretted by the self, in the same way that sameness and difference are in various ways both needed by and a threat to, the self which encounters them in the *Essais*. This similarity to Montaigne suggests that in this instance the desiring self may be able to negotiate a satisfactory relation with the other: in many of the self-other relations depicted in Montaigne, the self succeeds in approximating, at least, a resolution of the paradox with which it finds itself confronted.

Such a resolution is attempted in the passage which follows the second extract above; in which the narrator seeks to remythologize Albertine and the band of girls:

Mon désir avait cherché avec tant d'avidité la signification des yeux qui maintenant me connaissaient et me souriaient, mais qui, le premier jour, avaient croisé mes regards comme des rayons d'un autre univers, il avait distribué si largement et si minutieusement la couleur et le parfum sur les surfaces carnées de ces jeunes filles qui, étendues sur la falaise, me tendaient simplement des sandwiches ou jouaient aux devinettes, que souvent dans l'après-midi pendant que j'étais allongé, comme ces peintres qui, cherchant la grandeur de l'antique dans la vie moderne, donnent à une femme qui se coupe un ongle de pied la noblesse du 'Tireur d'épine' ou qui, comme Rubens, font des déesses avec des femmes de leur connaissance pour composer une scène mythologique, ces beaux corps bruns et blonds, de types si opposés, répandus autour de moi dans l'herbe, je les regardais sans les vider peut-être de tout le médiocre contenu dont l'expérience journalière les avait remplis, et pourtant sans me rappeler expressément leur céleste origine comme si, pareil à Hercule ou à Télémaque, j'avais été en train de jouer au milieu des nymphes. (II: p. 302)

This passage in one sense resolves in a typically Montaignean fashion the paradox I have described. It reintroduces the idea of mystery, yet grounds that mystery in familiarity; in the

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<sup>55</sup> Jean-François Revel sees a similarly static, simultaneous and contradictory response to the other in *La Prisonnière* also; *Sur Proust: remarques sur 'A la recherche du temps perdu'* (Paris: Julliard, 1960), p. 131. However, it seems clear that love is conceived in the later volumes above all in terms of cyclical alternation.

same way that Montaigne grounds difference in sameness in 'Des cannibales'. The narrator grafts back onto the girls a scene from Greek mythology, and thus reinvests them with a degree of mystery and divinity. However, this projection is performed 'sans vider' the girls of their ordinariness, and in one sense reinforces their familiarity; transforming them into stereotypical figures from a stock mythological scene. The mystery with which they are reinvested no longer excludes the subject, therefore; particularly since it is he himself who controls and mediates the celestial otherness which he bestows upon them. The intimations of the divine and the beyond which the self had initially ascribed to the band of girls, and the allure with which this dimension had invested them is rediscovered, but now in terms which erase the negative counterweight of exclusion which characterized the original encounter.

However, it would be wrong to suggest that the extract above constitutes, or pretends to constitute, an unmitigated triumph. While it resolves the paradox which has evolved, it also continues to express a sense of disillusionment. Self-consciously projecting back onto the girls the mystery and divinity with which the self's initial anticipatory glance had unconsciously clothed them at the outset, the passage above acknowledges that the promise of initiation which the goddesses had seemed to hold out was simply an illusion. The mystery of otherness causes the self to pursue that which, when possessed, has no value at all. In this sense, the passage above inverts those which describe the narrator's formulation of hypotheses: where the latter depict a process of self-deception which repeats the original illusion of desire, the former exposes, by self-consciously re-enacting, the illusion from which the self has now been released. Nor is it possible to recover a legitimacy for this projection by appealing to its artistic nature. Unlike the subjective apprehension which the narrator will, in his final volume, interpret as a vital part of the artist's vision,<sup>56</sup> the imaginative reflection which takes place here is deliberately transformative; projecting onto, rather than experiencing within a necessarily subjective frame, the objects upon which it

plays. The passage does not show a genuine artistic vision replacing a naive belief in the external world as the source of truth, and thus a genuinely productive engagement with the other. Instead it re-enacts and acknowledges its original illusion.

The passage above rearticulates and responds, therefore, to the two very different ways in which the self encounters the mysterious object of desire; describing a way of preserving its mystery while defusing the problems it posed to the self. However, it is compelled to acknowledge that this alluring mythological dimension is, in the final analysis, a projection of the self, and that the mysterious other, like the unpossessed other pursued by the jealous self, is ultimately an illusion. I wish finally to turn to a passage earlier in the text which goes one step further than this, questioning the success, as well as the validity, of projection onto the other by the self.

The passage which records Swann's joy when he remarks the resemblance of Odette to Botticelli's painting of Zipporah describes a process of projection similar to that performed by the narrator in relation to the 'petite bande':

Il n'estima plus le visage d'Odette selon la plus ou moins bonne qualité de ses joues et d'après la douceur purement carnée qu'il supposait devoir leur trouver en les touchant avec ses lèvres si jamais il osait l'embrasser, mais comme un écheveau de lignes subtiles et belles que ses regards dévidèrent, poursuivant la courbe de leur enroulement, rejoignant la cadence de la nuque à l'effusion des cheveux et à la flexion des paupières, comme en un portrait d'elle en lequel son type devenait intelligible et clair.

Il la regardait; un fragment de la fresque apparaissait dans son visage et dans son corps, que dès lors il chercha toujours à y retrouver, soit qu'il fût auprès d'Odette, soit qu'il pensât seulement à elle. [...] Et, tandis que la vue purement charnelle qu'il avait eue de cette femme, en renouvelant perpétuellement ses doutes sur la qualité de son visage, de son corps, de toute sa beauté, affaiblissait son amour, ces doutes furent détruits, cet amour assuré quand il eut à la place pour base les données d'une esthétique certaine. [...]

Il plaça sur sa table de travail, comme une photographie d'Odette, une reproduction de la fille de Jéthro, [...] et adaptant ce qu'il trouvait beau jusque-là d'une façon esthétique à l'idée d'une femme vivante, il le

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<sup>56</sup> See my discussion below, pp.



transformait en mérites physiques qu'il se félicitait de trouver réunis dans un être qu'il pourrait posséder. (I: pp. 220-21)

Swann here responds to the cycle of desire by investing the woman he hopes to possess -- and who has therefore become a little uninteresting -- with an artistic dimension which justifies, deepens and perpetuates his desire.<sup>57</sup> As with the 'petite bande', an extra dimension is grafted onto an other which is basically familiar and accessible to the self, in an attempt to preserve its interest and circumvent the cycle of desire. Once again, however, the value which is thus assigned is clearly an illusion. The self deceives itself in this instance not only in the sense that its object is not what it makes her out to be; but also in the sense that the aesthetic dimension it assigns her makes her desirable to it: '[Swann] oubliait que [...] son désir avait toujours été orienté dans un sens opposé à ses goûts esthétiques' (p. 221).<sup>58</sup>

However, the success of this self-projection is challenged both in the passage itself, and elsewhere in the narrative of Swann's love. When Swann reflects that 'tandis que la vue purement charnelle qu'il avait eu de cette femme, en renouvelant perpétuellement ses doutes sur la qualité de son visage, de son corps, de toute sa beauté, affaiblissait son amour, ces doutes furent détruits, cet amour assuré quand il eut à la place pour base les données d'une esthétique certaine', he identifies a battle between the material and artistic versions of Odette which questions the stability of the self-projector's vision.<sup>59</sup> Likewise elsewhere in the text,

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<sup>57</sup> Françoise Leriche proposes a 'complicité' on the part of Odette with Swann's projection here. Why does Odette wish to see the 'gravure' which she is bending over when Swann notices her resemblance to Zipporah? 'Pour "être initiée", sans doute. En clair, entrer dans l'univers des représentations de Swann. Il faut bien, du reste, qu'elle ait demandé à voir *cette* gravure parce que Swann lui en aura parlé, aura manifesté intérêt ou prédilection pour cette œuvre. [...] Tout se passe comme si la femme jusque là non désirée avait le pouvoir osmotique, en prenant connaissance de l'idéal esthétique de Swann, de modeler ses traits à cette ressemblance, seul moyen de devenir l'objet de l'amour pour l'esthète.' 'La Seule Femme c'est la femme peinte: l'imaginaire de la *Recherche*, le fruit d'une longue "leçon d'idéalisme"' (italics in original), *BSAMPAC*, 36 (1986), 487-504 (pp. 501-02).

<sup>58</sup> These passages thus both exemplify and twist the triangle of desire explored by René Girard; according to which desire is inspired by a mediator, a rival in love, or a literary figure such as Bergotte. 'Le désir proustien est *toujours* un désir emprunté' (italics in original), *Mensonge romantique*, p. 40. In the passage here, Swann's desire for Odette is clearly mediated by Botticelli, but in this instance the other does not direct the self and its desires, so much as lead it to contradict them.

<sup>59</sup> A similar battle between imaginative projection and reality clearly takes place at a number of levels in the text. Neither the vision which he seeks to project upon Balbec, nor that with which he approaches

there are passages which suggest that the material is capable of imposing itself and frustrating the interpretative strategies of the self. A little further into 'Un Amour de Swann', Swann remarks that 'Physiquement, [Odette] traversait une mauvaise phase: elle épaississait; et le charme expressif et dolent, les regards étonnés et rêveurs qu'elle avait autrefois semblaient avoir disparu avec sa première jeunesse. [...] Il la regardait longuement pour tâcher de ressaisir le charme qu'il lui avait connu, et ne le retrouvait pas' (I: p. 287). The projection through which the self at Balbec succeeded in constructing a satisfactory, if illusory, relation with the other is here only sporadically and partially able to overcome the ordinariness of the other through its displacement into a work of art. In some sense, the projection is too formal and inflexible in this instance to accommodate the necessarily mobile and shifting nature of Odette's physical form. Juliette Monnin-Hornung notes that while Proust usually compared human and painted figures in terms of 'la vie de l'âme', in the case of Odette 'il n'a pas su animer Odette d'autres mouvements que celui que le peintre lui a donné pour l'éternité'.<sup>60</sup> The self is unable consistently to recapture the form and posture of Zipporah in his mistress, therefore, and is pitched once more towards a problematic cycle of desire; not in this instance an alternation of suffering and boredom, but instead a cycle of successful projection followed by the disillusionment which accompanies its failure.

This resistance -- now entirely unconscious -- on the part of the other begins to demonstrate an important common factor between the failure of the desiring self, which operates through

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Mme de Guermantes, is able to survive his encounter with the material or physical form. (II: pp. 19-21; I: pp. 172-73; see also footnote ? above). In the latter case, the battle between the mythological and the human realities is a protracted one. Disconcerted by the appearance of the Duchesse at the wedding of Dr Percepied's daughter, he is nevertheless able to invest her with an historical and mythological dimension; which will only slowly be dismantled in *Le Côté de Guermantes*.

<sup>60</sup> *Proust et la peinture* (Geneva: Droz; Lille: Giard, 1951), pp. 102, 110. Monnin-Hornung sees Proust's close translation of Botticelli as a weakness in the characterization of Odette -- who takes on no life of her own -- rather than as a mould too specific to contain the 'human' figure, and thus to sustain a successful projection: 'si cette comparaison a le mérite de traduire avec bonheur l'œuvre peinte, [...] elle présente un léger défaut, celui d'être trop fidèlement la description d'une peinture. [...] [L]a grande mémoire et [l]a sensibilité [de la réalité que Proust a perçue], qui le servent magnifiquement, le gênent aussi parfois. Elles l'empêchent, dans ce passage par exemple, de faire vivre réellement un personnage' (pp. 109-10).

projection onto the other, and the bourgeois and nationalist selves, which depend upon assimilation, whether their own transformation into the likeness of the other, or the conversion of the other to the terms of the self. These latter colonizations fail because of the other's irreducible difference. When the Duc seeks to assimilate Swann, he is frustrated by the 'racial' otherness of his friend, who refuses to denounce Dreyfus, and affirms instead his Jewish inheritance. Likewise, when Mlle Legrandin seeks to naturalize herself in the sphere into which she has married, her bourgeois past continues to inform her attitudes and behaviour, and thus to prevent her fully assuming her new identity. It would seem at first sight that projection onto the other by the desiring subject should avoid such a difficulty: in the passage above, no demands are directly placed on the other, which is not itself substantially changed. The site of transformation has shifted, with the perceptions of the self, rather than the other, becoming the locus of assimilation, and there is consequently no apparent reason why this form of conversion should not be successful (in the same way that the Duc succeeded in assimilating Swann when he constructed in his own mind a fictional genealogy for him, rather than demanding that his friend renounce his Jewishness). However, the contest which takes place between the physical and 'artistic' dimensions of Odette suggests that even when the other is assigned a much less central role in its own assimilation, its difference from the ideal which the self has conceived for it continues to make itself clear. The projection attempted by the desiring self is ultimately subject to the same unsuccessful confrontation with otherness as the bourgeois and French selves which sought to carve out an identity through the colonization of the other.

However, for the subject of desire, irreducible difference is not the only reason for the failure to control the other. It is now the self-defeating nature of desire itself which moves centre stage, disempowering and dispossessing the self as it seeks to control and know the other, and mutating into boredom as soon as it is realized. The subject of desire also finds ways of responding to its failure unconsidered by the bourgeois and antisemitic selves. Where the

social self persists in its unsuccessful self-transformations, and where the non-Jewish self shuttles between assimilation and demonization, the subject of desire confronts its failure, and turns instead to a form of self-deception which enables it to approach, at least, a less problematic relation with the other. However, like the bourgeois and antisemitic selves, the subject of desire ultimately discovers that its powers of projection, narration and fictionalization are insufficient to enable it to exploit the other or wider order as it had hoped. As the bourgeois self fails to relocate itself within the social order, and the antisemitic self to construct a coherent cultural and religious order, so too the subject of desire fails in its attempts to project its emotions outwards, and to impose them upon its other. The text's extended enquiry into the possibility of self- and other-fashioning, and into the exploitation and creation of coherent frameworks and communities, unequivocally demonstrates the limits of subjective agency, and shows the self tending in addition towards self-absence, alienation, fragmentation and loss.

## WOOLF

In Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, the situation of the subject is very different from that in the *Essais* or *A la recherche*. Now occupying the position of the other, the female self is no longer the exploiter or constructor of wider communities, but rather the victim of circumscription; no longer the agent, but now the object, of other-fashioning. As such, its self-realization involves not the negotiation of a coherent and consistent community, but rather the dissolution of the Victorian patriarchal order which controls and delimits it. And as such, it appears to complete the trajectory of increasing self-detachment from external orders that I have sought to trace out. Where the Montaignean self negotiates with wider frameworks to produce an integrated order which yet accommodates its own values and priorities, and where the Proustian subject seeks first to exploit, and then to construct, wider orders and communities, Woolf depicts self-realization and expression in terms of the dissolution of order. However, as *To the Lighthouse* proceeds, complete autonomy and self-detachment prove to be problematic for the female self, and the text begins to elaborate instead a new form of community; a community which releases, rather than frames or controls, female self-expression, and inspires, rather than curtails, female vision.

Having traced this trajectory of increasing self-detachment and self-authorship from Montaigne to Proust to Woolf, I wish in the second half of the chapter to turn in a decisively different direction, and to identify a second, in some sense a counter-trajectory which emerges when Proust and Woolf are read in relation to Montaigne. While at one level the later writers develop the impulse to agency and self-construction which the Montaignean self negotiates, and increasingly move away from the integrated orders he describes, at another, they depict selves seeking to recuperate something of the integration and embeddedness identified in the *Essais*. When Proust and Woolf turn to examine the plight of the modernist subject, they describe a self isolated or alienated from the world beyond itself, and painfully

aware of its exclusion from wider realities. This self is no longer concerned to secure the greatest possible degree of autonomy, and no longer sees self-realization in terms of detachment from external frameworks, but instead seeks to establish a contact with the world which will stabilize and authorize its subjectivity.

There are two stages in the development of this discussion. In Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, the issues of isolation and reintegration are raised and explored, but never unequivocally resolved. Through her representation of Septimus Smith, Woolf traces out a dialectic between a desire for communication with the world beyond the self, and an uncertainty, bordering on a scepticism, that such a communion might ever be achieved. In *To the Lighthouse* and *A la recherche*, a firmer resolution is sought. Proust identifies the work of art as a site of revelation and communication which bridges the gap between self and external world. In *To the Lighthouse*, where the separation of self from world takes a number of different forms, the proposed resolutions are more partial and provisional. However, the final section of the text depicts a series of negotiations between self and self, and self and outside world which lead, if not to complete or unproblematic resolutions, at least to the construction of precarious orders which go some way towards stabilizing and integrating the individual subject.

### ***TO THE LIGHTHOUSE***

The relationship between the female subject and the Victorian order in the early part of *To the Lighthouse* is uncompromisingly drawn:

It was sympathy he wanted, to be assured of his genius, first of all, and then to be taken within the circle of life, warmed and soothed, to have his senses

restored to him, his barrenness made fertile, and all the rooms of the house made full of life. [...]

He was a failure, he repeated. Well, look then, feel then. Flashing her needles, glancing round about her [...] she assured him, beyond a shadow of a doubt, by her laugh, her poise, her competence (as a nurse carrying a light across a dark room assures a fractious child), that it was real; the house was full; the garden blowing. If he put implicit faith in her, nothing should hurt him; however deep he buried himself or climbed high, not for a second should he find himself without her. So boasting of her capacity to surround and protect, there was scarcely a shell of herself left for her to know herself by; all was so lavished and spent; and James, as he stood stiff between her knees, felt her rise in a rosy-flowered fruit tree laid with leaves and dancing boughs into which the beak of brass, the arid scimitar of his father, the egotistical man, plunged and smote, demanding sympathy.

Filled with her words, like a child who drops off satisfied, he said, at last, looking at her with humble gratitude, restored, renewed, that he would take a turn. [...] Immediately, Mrs Ramsay seemed to fold herself together, one petal closed in another, and the whole fabric fell in exhaustion upon itself [...] while there throbbed through her, like the pulse in a spring which has expanded to its full width and now gently ceases to beat, the rapture of successful creation.<sup>1</sup>

The coherence of the relationship between Mr and Mrs Ramsay does not consist in a natural congruence here, but depends instead upon female complicity with male demands. Mrs Ramsay is not an autonomous subject with an independent integrity, but an uncentred 'other', whose subjectivity is developed in relation to, and circumscribed by, the demands and needs of her 'egotistical' husband. The passage begins with a list of his desires and demands: 'it [i]s sympathy' he wants; 'to be assured of his genius', 'to be taken within the circle of life', 'to have his senses restored to him, his barrenness made fertile', and it is in relation to these needs that Mrs Ramsay's subjectivity is shaped: 'He was a failure, he repeated. Well, look then, feel then'. He behaves like 'a fractious child', and she is therefore cast as the 'nurse' who reassures him; he approaches with his 'beak of brass', and she is forced to 'rise in a rosy-flowered fruit tree laid with leaves and dancing boughs' into which this 'arid scimitar' can 'plunge'.

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<sup>1</sup> Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, ed. by Stella McNichol (London: Penguin, 1992). pp. 43-44. All references are to this edition, and are hereafter cited parenthetically after quotations in the text.

Makiko Minow-Pinkney, comparing Lily Briscoe's multi-perspectivism with the 'icily focussed' gaze of the male, sees the female act of 'surrounding' undertaken by Mrs Ramsay here in extremely favourable terms: 'Penetration must give way to gentle envelopment. The former burrows at a single point in order to infiltrate the core of its object, while the latter surrounds so caressingly that the object rather becomes *its* inner core. [...] Envelopment is a mode of total contact that paradoxically leaves the loved object its autonomy, whereas male penetration makes a localised incision but claims absolute possession' (italics in original).<sup>2</sup>

The passage above, by contrast, considering the effects of envelopment upon the enveloper, rather than upon its object, sees it as deeply problematic. Mrs Ramsay allows her husband to become her inner core at the cost of her own identity: surrounding becomes a moulding of the self to the shape of the other it seeks to protect. It is also clear that the female self gives at the cost of herself in a second sense. The images which suggest a natural nourishment in the passage ('Filled with her words, like a child who drops off satisfied, he said, at last, [...] that he would take a turn') are countered by others which intimate a parasitic relationship: 'all was so lavished and spent'; 'the whole fabric fell in exhaustion upon itself'. Mrs Ramsay renews her husband not from her surplus, but from her essence: her giving is self-sacrificial. The affirmation of Mr Ramsay's identity, and the stability of the relation as a whole, depend upon a perpetual appropriation of the subjectivity of his wife.<sup>3</sup>

However, Woolf elucidates a crucial ambiguity in the way this circumscription is experienced by the female self. While female subjectivity is clearly delimited in the passage above, it is provided in the process with a positive role and coherent and stable identity. As a

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<sup>2</sup> *Virginia Woolf and the Problem of the Subject* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1987), p. 105.

<sup>3</sup> The absence and relativity of identity described in this passage were actively sought by Victorian anti-feminist writers. Sarah Ellis, for example, writing in 1842, argued that women's 'highest duty is so often to suffer, and be still; whose deepest enjoyments are all relative; who has nothing, and is nothing of herself; whose experience, if unparticipated, is a total blank.' *The Daughters of England, their position in society, character and responsibilities* (London: Fisher, 1842), pp. 3, 126; cited by Valerie



nurse, Mrs Ramsay has a specific role to play, and a positive identity; as a figure of competence, poise and protection.<sup>4</sup> The demands of the barren male, too, define, and enable the expression of, the fertility and vitality of the woman who renews and restores her husband, and brings life and warmth in her act of successful creation.<sup>5</sup> The passage above also suggests that circumscription and submission may, paradoxically, be experienced in terms of agency and authority. Many of the roles and characteristics ascribed to Mrs Ramsay here are typically male: protection and reassurance of her spouse, competence and poise, and all suggest a degree of agency, if not power. The text even has Mrs Ramsay assume the power of a deity, 'creating' the subjectivity of her husband, and inviting him to place his hope and trust in her: 'If he put implicit faith in her, nothing should hurt him; however deep he buried himself or climbed high, not for a second should he find himself without her.' This authority is, of course, ironically described: Mrs Ramsay's 'power' consists in answering her husband's demands; her act of creation in restoring his ego at the expense of her own identity. In the same way, her 'triumph' at the end of 'The Window' consists in admitting that he was right, she wrong, about the possibility of visiting the lighthouse, and the success of Minta Doyle at dinner ('she knew, directly she came into the room, that the miracle had happened; she wore her golden haze') in denigrating herself and serving the ego of Mr Ramsay; making herself out 'even more ignorant than she was, because he liked telling her

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Sanders, *Eve's Renegades: Victorian Anti-Feminist Women Novelists* (London: Macmillan, 1996), p. 20.

<sup>4</sup> Julia Stephen takes this one stage further when she portrays nursing not simply as a coherent role, but also as an art: 'A nurse's life is certainly not a dull one, and the more skilful the nurse the less dull she will be. The more she cultivates the *art* of nursing, the more enjoyment she will get. [...] To give relief, even if only temporary [...] is perhaps a greater pleasure than can be found in the performance of any other duty' (italics in original). 'Notes from Sick Rooms', in *Julia Duckworth Stephen: Stories for Children, Essays for Adults*, ed. by Diane F. Gillespie and Elizabeth Steele (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), pp. 216-40 (p. 217).

<sup>5</sup> Woolf does not, however, assign Mrs Ramsay the moral and spiritual role commonly ascribed to women by anti-suffrage writers; according to which the mother should remain in her domestic space, and act as the moral guardian of her own generation and the next. See *Eve's Renegades*, pp. 15-21.

she was a fool' (*TL*, p. 107).<sup>6</sup> However, this triumph and authority offer the female self an attractive sense, at least, of her selfhood and identity.

While Woolf is unequivocal, therefore, in her depiction of a female subjectivity circumscribed and dictated by the egotism of the patriarchal order, she identifies important tensions and contradictions in the way this delimitation is experienced. The passage above depicts both the sacrifice and exhaustion of female subjectivity through its continual pouring-out, and the coherent self-definition paradoxically made possible through this self-sacrifice; both the reduction of the female subject to a relative other, and its apparent establishment as author and agent. The female self is not simply, in Woolf, subject to a prescriptive, exploitative order which oppresses and suppresses it, but rather, subject to an order which offers it a coherent identity as it denies it the freedom to shape itself; which reveres it as part of a process of controlling and imposing upon it. These profound contradictions at the heart of Victorian female experience complicate the question of renegotiation. While Mrs Ramsay does seek to respond to the curtailment of her subjectivity, her allegiance to, and investment in, the positive identity proffered by the patriarchal order limit and problematize that response in crucial ways.

For the most part, Mrs Ramsay remains complicit with the order by which she is exploited. She is determined to protect the status quo ('woe betide the girl -- pray Heaven it was none of her daughters! -- who did not feel the worth of [men's reverence], and all that it implied, to the marrow of her bones'), and has 'the whole of the other sex under her protection; for reasons she could not explain, for their chivalry and valour, for the fact that they negotiated treaties, ruled India, controlled finance; finally for an attitude towards herself which no woman could fail to feel or to find agreeable, something trustful, childlike, reverential' (*TL*,

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<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of this passage, and the price which Minta pays for her golden haze, see Margaret Homans, *Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 277-79.

p. 10). Elevated by the patriarchal order, she chooses in these instances to accept the identity it prepares for her, and with it the correlative circumscription; to be ruled along with India and controlled along with finance.

However, there are moments in the text when she begins to explore the possibility of renegotiating her relationship with this wider order:

Arriving late at night, with a light tap on one's bedroom door, wrapped in an old fur coat (for the setting of her beauty was always that -- hasty, but apt), [Mrs Ramsay] would enact again whatever it might be -- Charles Tansley losing his umbrella; Mr Carmichael snuffling and sniffing; Mr Bankes saying, 'the vegetable salts are lost'. All this she would adroitly shape; even maliciously twist; and, moving over to the window, in pretence that she must go, -- it was dawn, she could see the sun rising, -- half turn back, more intimately, but still always laughing, insist that she must, Minta must, they all must marry, since in the whole world, whatever laurels might be tossed to her (but Mrs Ramsay cared not a fig for her painting), or triumphs won by her [...] there could be no disputing this: an unmarried woman (she lightly took her hand for a moment), an unmarried woman has missed the best of life. (*TL*, pp. 55-56)

Mrs Ramsay seeks here to respond to her circumscription by assuming an authority which does not consist in sacrifice or submission, and which grants her instead a genuine power to control and determine male subjectivity. In one sense, she is able to do so: replaying and reinventing the words and actions of her victims according to her own desire and malice. However, there are a number of ways in which this performance is deeply problematic. Mrs Ramsay's control of male subjectivity, first of all, is partial and unstable. This becomes clear when the passage above is compared with similar performances by Julia Stephen.

Remembering her mother in her 'Reminiscences', Woolf recalls her ability to sculpt and dictate male character: 'She stamped people with characters at once, and at St Ives, or on Sunday afternoons at Hyde Park Gate, the scene was fit for the stage; boldly acting on her conception she drew out from old General Beadle, or C. B. Clarke, or Jack Hills, or Sidney

Lee, such sparks of character as they have never shown to anyone since'.<sup>7</sup> Julia Stephen stages a public performance, in which General Beadle and Jack Hills are compelled to act according to her conception; Mrs Ramsay, by contrast, performs a private reconstruction, in which fictional re-workings are substituted for actual performances. The passage above describes an imagined, rather than a substantive, power over masculine subjectivity. And these reinscriptions are the preface to a celebration of marriage -- the symbol throughout the novel of female deference and submission to patriarchal codes. The domination, inscription and interpretation of male character boldly envisaged at the outset clashes with, and cannot sustain itself for long before, Mrs Ramsay's more familiar assumption that female subjectivity may, even must, be realized in the context of the patriarchal order.

There are also more significant difficulties with Mrs Ramsay's restaging of male subjectivity. Faced with a situation in which her subjectivity is circumscribed by her husband's demands, but through which her plenitude and vitality are expressed, she addresses the negative part of this formula -- seeking to escape her position as exploited other by assuming power over masculine identity -- rather than identifying contexts in which her energy and creativity might be less problematically expressed. The result of this choice is a form of self-loss. When she assumes the identity of Tansley or Mr Carmichael during her performance, she forfeits access to the positive subjectivity elucidated, however problematically, by the demands of Ramsay and Tansley. At the same time, however, her performance prevents her from fashioning an alternative identity: adopting the tone, and delivering the words, of another, she effectively empties out her own identity. When Mr Ramsay seized control of her subjectivity in the earlier passage, he came to have his identity renewed; and received such replenishment at her expense. In the passage above, by contrast, Mrs Ramsay receives nothing in the way of a coherent identity from the other she manipulates; and at the same time loses the identity she possessed when she was herself subject to manipulation. In exchanging the position of object

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<sup>7</sup> 'Reminiscences', in *Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings*, ed. by Jeanne

for that of subject of circumscription, she gains control of masculine subjectivity, but finally not of her own. The collapse of her performance into a eulogy on the benefits of marriage effectively acknowledges that the more she takes on the role of author and controller in this context, the less, paradoxically, of a positive identity she can assume.

There is also a related problem with the assumption of authority by the female subject. In reversing the relationship between self and other, Mrs Ramsay not only denies herself access to the parts of her identity expressed through her original position, she also comes perilously close to assuming the negative identity of the male tyrant. As she becomes through her re-enactments the physical site of the words and actions of Mr Tansley and Augustus Carmichael, so in her malicious reworking of their mannerisms and habits she also becomes the denigrator (akin to Tansley), and a circumscriber like her husband.<sup>8</sup> (Elsewhere in the text, even her concern for others tips over into a form of tyranny. Put out when Mr Carmichael barely responds to her friendly enquiry, she wonders whether it is 'for her own self-satisfaction' that she 'wished so instinctively to help, to give, that people might say of her, "O Mrs Ramsay! dear Mrs Ramsay ... Mrs Ramsay, of course!" and need her and send for her and admire her?' (*TL*, p. 47). As she is cast in various roles by her husband, according to his need, so also she casts others as needy, in order to secure her own identity.) The assumption of such a role is problematic: having examined circumscription from the perspective of its victim, the text effectively closes it off as a valid ideological space for either the male or female subject to occupy. However, there is also a second, more important, issue at stake here. In taking up the position formerly held by her husband, Mrs Ramsay effectively abandons the idea of female difference -- championed by Woolf in *A Room of*

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Schulkind (London: Chatto & Windus, 1976), pp. 28-63 (p. 35).

<sup>8</sup> Rachel Bowlby discusses how, in her polemical writing also, Woolf questions whether the 'excluded woman should want or attempt to join' the "'procession" of masculine tradition' and power. *Feminist Destinations and Further Essays on Virginia Woolf* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), p. 18.

*One's Own*,<sup>9</sup> written shortly after *To the Lighthouse* -- and seeks to transform the female self into its masculine other. Like the French bourgeois self castigated by Mayer, the female subject represented by Mrs Ramsay denies itself the opportunity to fashion its own identity by seeking to appropriate that of its other; an other which, in this instance, is denigrated rather than desired.

Mrs Ramsay's responses to the patriarchal order are therefore problematic. For the most part, she collaborates with the patriarchal order, and accepts the identity -- as object of gratitude and worship, and source of life and plenitude -- which it offers her in compensation for the sacrifices it demands, and the boundaries which it imposes. When she does seek to renegotiate her position, she does so only in private, in part, and in ways which problematize, rather than enabling, the realization of a positive identity. However, there are other female subjects in the text: outwardly submissive, but inwardly resistant to her vision of female fulfilment in marriage, and ready to embrace more radical reworkings of the relationship between self and patriarchal order. 'In silence, looking up from their plates [...] her daughters -- Prue, Nancy, Rose -- could sport with infidel ideas which they had brewed for themselves of a life different from hers; in Paris, perhaps; a wilder life; not always taking care of some man or other; for there was in all their minds a mute questioning of deference and chivalry, of the Bank of England and the Indian Empire, of ringed fingers and lace' (*TL*, pp. 10-11). Through this younger generation, and in particular through Lily Briscoe, the text begins to explore ways of releasing female creativity, and of elaborating a specifically female subjectivity.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> 'A Room of One's Own' and 'Three Guineas', ed. by Michèle Barrett (London: Penguin, 1993), pp. 1-114; see especially pp. 66-71.

<sup>10</sup> Woolf believed that such a process was taking place in her own generation. She declares her conviction in 'Women and Fiction' that women are ready to face the criticism which will accompany their attempts to write as women and to express female values: 'women are coming to be more independent of opinion. They are beginning to respect their own sense of values. [...] Women are

The way is paved for this renegotiation with the death of Mrs Ramsay:

[Mr Ramsay stumbling along a passage stretched his arms out one dark morning, but, Mrs Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, he stretched his arms out. They remained empty.] [...]

Did Nature supplement what man advanced? Did she complete what he began? With equal complacency she saw his misery, condoned his meanness, and acquiesced in his torture. That dream, then, of sharing, completing, finding in solitude on the beach an answer, was but a reflection in a mirror, and the mirror itself was but the surface glassiness which forms in quiescence when the nobler powers sleep beneath? Impatient, despairing yet loth to go (for beauty offers her lures, has her consolations), to pace the beach was impossible; contemplation was unendurable; the mirror was broken. (*TL*, pp. 140; 146)

Where the female self in many Victorian novels is compelled to embrace either marriage or death, Mrs Ramsay here has to die because she has embraced the ideal of marriage too completely. And with her death comes that of the order she has colluded with and come to represent. Mr Ramsay's outstretched arms signal the end of the Victorian institution of the married couple, while the breaking of the mirror -- gendered feminine -- which formerly reflected back 'what man advanced' has also been seen 'to inform Mrs Ramsay's absence': 'she is no longer there to reflect her husband's sense of self'.<sup>11</sup> The text envisages the emergence of an unrestricted female subjectivity in place of the Victorian wife: the 'nobler powers' which have 'slept' beneath 'the surface glassiness' of the mirror will now be able to stir. Freed from the order which dictated and delimited their identities, women can begin to develop as subjects with an independent integrity and a degree of personal agency formerly unknown. The fragments of the broken mirror symbolize both the explosion of stable male identities, and the heterogeneity of female subjectivity for which this disruption prepares the way.

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beginning to explore their own sex, to write of women as women have never been written of before'. *Granite and Rainbow: Essays by Virginia Woolf* (London: Hogarth, 1958), p. 82.

<sup>11</sup> Jane Goldman, in Randall Stevenson and Jane Goldman, "'But What? Elegy?': Modernist Reading and the Death of Mrs Ramsay', *Yearbook of English Studies*, 26 (1996), 173-86 (p. 184). See also Makiko Minow-Pinkney, who discusses (pp. 98-102) Woolf's own comment, in *A Room of One's Own*,

This dissolution of order, and the anticipated elaboration of an autonomous female subjectivity, completes the detachment I have been tracing of self from wider order, and the increasing emphasis upon the self as source and agent in the construction of its identity.

Where the Montaignean self negotiates with the cultural, religious and philosophical frameworks it encounters, to produce an integrated order which reflects and encompasses its subjectivity; where the bourgeois and antisemitic selves in *A la recherche* seek to exploit and reconstruct wider orders and communities, and to fashion themselves as privileged agents, but remain fundamentally situated entities; where the desiring subject in Proust dispenses with the idea of participation or embeddedness in a particular order, and seeks self-realization through imposition upon the object of its desire, *To the Lighthouse*, having considered and rejected both the existing Victorian order, and the partial, unstable reworking attempted by Mrs Ramsay, depicts the explosion and dissolution of coherent, integrated order, and the institution of heterogenous parts, spiritually and psychologically independent. The self no longer depends upon the wider context, and looks to itself as it fashions its identity.

However, 'Time Passes' is not the end of *To the Lighthouse*, and the explosion of order, and institution of heterogeneity which it depicts, do not represent its final conclusion. In the final section of the novel, 'The Lighthouse', Woolf explores the implications of the self-other relation she has theorized, and demonstrates the impossibility of autonomous self-realization. Through Lily Briscoe, she suggests that the female subject must construct, and locate herself within, a different, less oppressive tradition, before she can negotiate and express an explicitly female identity.

There are parts of 'The Lighthouse' which suggest a successful self-detachment from what has gone before: 'Mrs Ramsay has faded and gone, [Lily] thought. We can over-ride her wishes, improve away her limited, old-fashioned ideas. [...] All her being, even her beauty,

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that women are forced to serve 'as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of



became [...] dusty and out of date' (p. 190). Likewise, when Lily reflects that Mrs Ramsay's wishes have not come to pass ('she seemed to see her there at the end of the corridor of years saying, of all incongruous things, "Marry, marry!"'), she suggests an unproblematic renegotiation of identity: '[Paul and Minta] are happy like that. I'm happy like this. Life has changed completely' (*TL*, p. 190). However, other parts of the text suggest both the difficulty of shedding past relations, and of establishing an independent identity. The female identity instituted by the Victorian order is sustained through Lily's internalization of Tansley's comments in 'The Window': 'She looked at the canvas, lightly scored with running lines. It would be hung in the servants' bedrooms. It would be rolled up and stuffed under a sofa. What was the good of doing it then. [...] Can't paint, can't write, she murmured monotonously, anxiously considering what her plan of attack should be' (*TL*, p. 173). Formerly barred, in the person of Mrs Ramsay, from the realm of self-expression, and invited only to create and perpetuate the identity of her husband, the female self in 'The Lighthouse' involuntarily recycles the premisses which opposed and controlled her creativity.<sup>12</sup> More problematic than these internal censors, however, is the threat of re-circumscription represented by Mr Ramsay. When Lily sets up her easel and begins to paint, the approach of Mr Ramsay imposes upon her a very familiar version of female identity: 'You shan't touch your canvas, he seemed to say, bearing down on her, till you've given me what I want of you. Here he was, close upon her again, greedy, distraught' (*TL*, p. 164). Left by the death of his wife with his 'arms outstretched', he seeks to establish an equivalent order with a different female other, and as the passage proceeds, Lily is forced to lay aside her paintbrush, and to substitute self-surrender for self-realization through self-expression: 'Well, thought Lily in

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reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size'. *A Room*, p. 32.

<sup>12</sup> This is a difficulty which Woolf repeatedly raises in her critical writing. In 'Professions for Women' she describes 'a girl sitting with a pen in her hand, which for minutes, and indeed for hours, she never dips into the inkpot. [...] She was letting her imagination sweep unchecked round every rock and cranny of the world that lies submerged in the depths of our unconscious being. [...] And then there was a smash. There was an explosion. There was foam and confusion. The imagination had dashed itself against something hard. [...] The consciousness of what men will say of a woman who speaks the truth about her passions had roused her from her artist's state of unconsciousness. She could write no more.' *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* (London: Hogarth, 1942), pp. 149-54 (p. 152).

despair, letting her right hand fall at her side, it would be simpler then to have it over. Surely she could imitate from recollection the glow, the rhapsody, the self-surrender she had seen on so many women's faces' (*TL*, p. 164).<sup>13</sup> Unlike Mrs Ramsay, however, Lily is alienated from her role. Where the former was circumscribed by the demands of her husband, but was able to appropriate through her role a coherent identity and illusion of agency, the latter performs an empty imitation, which she self-consciously interprets in terms of surrender and loss.

The new order is continually threatened, therefore, by the structures of the old. However, it is also problematic in itself. The difficulties which attend autonomous self-fashioning are focussed in the scene which follows the departure of Mr Ramsay and his demands, and considers Lily's emotions as she stands alone on the lawn:

So they're gone, she thought, sighing with relief and disappointment. Her sympathy seemed to fly back in her face, like a bramble sprung. She felt curiously divided, as if one part of her were drawn out there -- it was a still day, hazy; the Lighthouse looked this morning at an immense distance; the other had fixed itself doggedly, solidly, here on the lawn. She saw her canvas as if it had floated up and placed itself white and uncompromising directly before her. It seemed to rebuke her with its cold stare for all this hurry and agitation; this folly and waste of emotion; it drastically recalled her and spread through her mind first a peace, as her disorderly sensations (he had gone and she had been so sorry for him and she had said nothing) trooped off the field; and then, emptiness. She looked blankly at the canvas, with its uncompromising white stare; from the canvas to the garden. (*TL*, p. 171)

On one level, there is a huge sense of possibility in this passage. When Lily observes how the 'cold stare' of the canvas 'seemed to rebuke her' for her 'folly and waste of emotion', it would seem that she is directing back towards Mr Ramsay what ought to be discharged onto the canvas which stands before her. She needs to turn to the blankness of her canvas, and to

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<sup>13</sup> The impediments to female self-expression here, are different from those in late Victorian writing. Where Mr Ramsay's interference compels Lily to put down her paintbrush, and to summon her resources of sympathy, Lyn Pykett describes how petty domestic duties are commonly portrayed elsewhere as the chief barriers to the female artist. 'Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman: Representations of the Female Artist in the New Woman Fiction of the 1890s', in *Victorian Women Writers and the Woman Question*, ed. by Nicola Diane Thompson (Cambridge: C. U. P., 1999), pp.

carve out for herself, through the process of self-expression, a new, less circumscribed identity. A subsequent passage notes that once she has succeeded in subduing ‘the impertinences and irrelevances that plucked her attention and made her remember how she was such and such a person, had such and such relations to people, she took her hand and raised her brush. For a moment it stayed trembling in a painful but exciting ecstasy in the air. Where to begin?’ (TL, p. 172).

However, there is also in this passage a disconcerting sense that the explosion of the Victorian order also prohibits the formation of a new subjectivity. Once Mr Ramsay has left, and she is no longer called to perform the recognizable role that his demands have conferred upon her, Lily experiences a loss of self: ‘her disorderly sensations (he had gone and she had been so sorry for him and she had said nothing) trooped off the field; and then emptiness’. She is left exchanging blank looks with the ‘uncompromising white stare’ of the canvas, which becomes both a metaphor for the blankness of her own mind, and a symbol of her new relation to the world. The backdrop and context provided by Victorian expectations has gone, but there is no clearly-defined ‘female’ identity for her to assume in its place; no vocabulary either for female self-expression. This is a difficulty which ‘Professions for Women’ also explores: ‘The Angel was dead; what then remained? You may say that what remained was a simple and common object -- a young woman in a bedroom with an inkpot. In other words, now that she had rid herself of falsehood, that young woman had only to be herself. Ah, but what is “herself”? I mean, what is a woman? I assure you, I do not know. I do not believe that you know.’<sup>14</sup>

At this point, the text appears to reach an impasse. The heterogeneity of the order which governs ‘The Lighthouse’ liberates female subjectivity from its former circumscription, and

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135-50 (pp. 142-44). Woolf transforms and displaces this discussion in her portrait of Mrs Ramsay; the mother who must express her creativity *through* her bowl of fruit (p. 105) and *bœuf en Daube* (p. 109).

<sup>14</sup> *The Death of the Moth*, p. 151.

anticipates and invites its self-inscription and expression. At the same time, however, the absence of relatedness by which it is characterized apparently leads to self-loss. The complete detachment from wider orders, experienced in terms of autonomy and freedom, also represents an isolation which prevents the articulation of identity. However, the text does not end with a stark choice between the circumscribed but coherent identity of 'The Window', and the self-loss of self-liberation. As it proceeds, it moves beyond both circumscription and isolation to the production of a new form of relatedness. The fragments of the mirror, released by the explosion of the patriarchal order, must now be gathered together in a new configuration.

Such a renegotiation is achieved through Lily's evocation of the dead Mrs Ramsay:

And now slowly the pain of the want, and the bitter anger [...] lessened; and of their anguish left, as antidote, a relief that was balm in itself, and also, but more mysteriously, a sense of some one there, of Mrs Ramsay, relieved for a moment of the weight that the world had put on her, staying lightly by her side and then (for this was Mrs Ramsay in all her beauty) raising to her forehead a wreath of white flowers with which she went. Lily squeezed her tubes again. She attacked that problem of the hedge. It was strange how clearly she saw her, stepping with her usual quickness across fields among whose folds, purplish and soft, among whose flowers, hyacinths or lilies, she vanished. It was some trick of the painter's eye. For days after she had heard of her death she had seen her thus, putting her wreath to her forehead and going unquestioningly with her companion, a shadow, across the fields. (*TL*, pp. 196-97)

Mrs Ramsay is no longer a symbol of marriage in this passage, or of female complicity with the patriarchal order. She is no longer arm-in-arm with the demanding male other, Mr Ramsay, but now accompanied by an ungendered, insubstantial 'shadow'; relieved 'of the weight that the world had put on her'. And divested of her former associations, she is able to become a source of inspiration for Lily, who is able, once she feels her mysterious presence beside her, to resume her self-articulation onto the canvas before her (she 'squeezed her tubes again'). Elsewhere in 'The Lighthouse', she becomes a source of revelation: 'This, that, and

the other; herself and Charles Tansley and the breaking wave; Mrs Ramsay bringing them together; Mrs Ramsay saying “Life stand still here”; Mrs Ramsay making of the moment something permanent (as in another sphere Lily herself tried to make of the moment something permanent) -- this was of the nature of a revelation. [...] “Mrs Ramsay! Mrs Ramsay!” she repeated. She owed this revelation to her’ (*TL*, p. 176).

At this point, a new community begins to emerge. Having rejected the old order (and Mrs Ramsay too to the extent that she represents that order) Lily begins to appropriate Mrs Ramsay as a mother through whom, in the terms of Woolf’s very famous injunction, she is able to ‘think back’.<sup>15</sup> Unlike the mothers envisaged in *A Room of One’s Own*, Mrs Ramsay is not an intellectual or artistic forebear, providing a model and tradition for those who follow. However, in a more mystical way, she models a female imagination and insight which releases Lily’s own creativity, and enables her self-expression. Female subjectivity is generated and sustained through, and in relation to, a community of other female selves.<sup>16</sup>

However, the relationship between the female self and the community it constructs is a carefully-negotiated one. Like the bourgeois and antisemitic selves depicted in Proust, Lily assigns herself a privileged position in the order she envisages. Perpetually remaking her ‘vision’ of Mrs Ramsay (*TL*, p. 197) she is the author and controller of her ‘mother’s’ significance; as she will also be later when she makes Mrs Ramsay (the ‘odd-shaped

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<sup>15</sup> The idea of ‘thinking back’ through Mrs Ramsay is suggested by Homans, p. 279. Her very suggestive reading of *To the Lighthouse* continues with a discussion of different ways in which this is attempted in the novel. Where Cam seeks to reproduce her mother, echoing her words, Lily’s painting tends towards representation. See *Bearing the Word*, pp. 281-85. Goldman also identifies Mrs Ramsay as ‘the origin of the feminine’, acknowledged by Lily as ‘a source of artistic strength’. ‘But What? Elegy?’, p. 183. For Woolf’s original discussion of how women ‘think back through [their] mothers’, see *A Room*, p. 69.

<sup>16</sup> The necessity of this community behind the female voice is most famously expressed in *A Room of One’s Own*: ‘Without those [eighteenth-century] forerunners, Jane Austen and the Brontës and George Eliot could no more have written than Shakespeare could have written without Marlowe, or Marlowe without Chaucer. [...] For masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice.’ *A Room*, pp. 59-60. However, unlike the ‘mothers’ in this and many other passages, Mrs Ramsay inspires and enables female writing without being an artist herself.

triangular shadow'; *TL*, p. 218) the subject of her painting. While a new community is constructed, it is a community which makes provision for the individual integrity of the constructing female subject; who wishes only to ground herself within, and refuses to be encompassed or contained by, the tradition she establishes.

Mrs Ramsay is also controlled through the text's insistence upon her pastness. As the subject of an elegy, she is displaced from the present by the work of art which commemorates her; excluded from the here-and-now, even as she is in some sense restored to life in it. (In the same way, Woolf herself claimed to have laid the ghosts of her parents, and to have escaped their influence, and their invasion of her thoughts, through the writing of *To the Lighthouse*.)<sup>17</sup> Mrs Ramsay is also relocated in a more distant past. Gilbert and Gubar have noticed that Lily's 'triangular shadow' recalls the women, 'squatting on the ground in triangular shapes' seen by Rachel and Terence as they pass by a primitive village in *The Voyage Out*.<sup>18</sup> Mrs Ramsay is represented at once as primordial origin and as history, therefore; honoured as the source, and excluded as agent from, the present of the painting which depicts her. There is a sense in which she is like the shadow which Lily imagines accompanying her. Present, but not threatening, adding depth and definition to the identity of the next generation, but standing behind it, and always subordinate to it, she represents a tradition and community in relation to which Lily can fashion herself, yet does not threaten a return to the prescriptive, circumscriptive orders described in the opening part of the novel.

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<sup>17</sup> 'Father's birthday. He would have been 1928 - 1832 = 96, yes, 96 today; & could have been 96, like other people one has known; but mercifully was not. His life would have entirely ended mine. What would have happened? No writing, no books; -- inconceivable. I used to think of him and mother daily; but writing *The Lighthouse*, laid them in my mind. And now he comes back sometimes, but differently. (I believe this to be true -- that I was obsessed by them both, unhealthily; & writing of them was a necessary act.)' *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Anne Olivier Bell, 5 vols (London: Hogarth, 1977-84), III: 1925-1930, p. 208 (28 November, 1928).

<sup>18</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*, 3 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988-94), III: *Letters From the Front*, pp. 15, 32.

Having begun by delineating a circumscriptive order, therefore, having rejected the idea of renegotiating that order through role reversal, having theorized and explored the idea of completely exploding external frameworks, and establishing entirely autonomous subjectivities, *To the Lighthouse* finally interprets this dissolution of order as a necessary preface to the establishment of a new community, which inspires and enables, but does not prescribe, female self-definition. As such, it stops short of radically completing the trajectory of increasing self-detachment and self-fashioning which I have been tracing out.

However, an impulse to self-construction clearly remains central to its depiction of female subjectivity. Like the desiring self in Proust, the female self in *To the Lighthouse* moves away from concepts of containment within, or self-identification with, a strict or strictly-defined order; ascribing the other a vital role in enabling self-realization and expression, but refusing to make it constitutive. Looking outwards -- beyond the community, to new spaces which it might occupy -- rather than seeking to appropriate an identity within or in terms of the current order, it marks a departure from both the tightly-controlled communities depicted in Montaigne, and the orders within which the bourgeois and antisemitic selves seek to place themselves in *A la recherche*. However, unlike the desiring self explored by Proust, Woolf's female subjects retain a sense of community. Where the subject of desire often stands in opposition to its other, and seeks to impose upon it, the Woolfian self is inspired by the female other which it appropriates. The subjectivity which is subsequently articulated is decisively individual ('I have had my vision'; italics mine, *TL*, p. 226), but it remains indebted to the female forebear, and rooted within a tradition of specifically female imagination. This positive relation between self and other helps to make Woolf's the more successful detachment from wider contexts. Where Proust's others resist the specific and negative identities imposed upon them, Lily's (m)other, source of inspiration, and assigned no identity beyond a pastness which prevents her own imposition upon the present, offers no opposition to the construction by Lily of a community in which she can ground herself. Less exploitative and appropriative, and more loosely-related to the other, the female subject

depicted in Woolf is more successful than any of her Proustian counterparts in becoming the source of her own identity.

At this point, I wish to turn aside from the trajectory of increasing self-authorship and increasing self-detachment from wider orders and communities which I have been tracing out so far. Begun in Montaigne, and developed in Proust, this impulse to autonomy and agency reaches a logical conclusion in Woolf's representation of female subjectivity. I wish now to turn instead to a counter-trajectory which emerges in the work of Woolf and Proust. To the extent that they write about a distinctively modernist subjectivity, they articulate a profound anxiety about the separation of self and world. Variousy alienated, isolated and dislocated from the world beyond its own frontiers, the modernist self experiences the gap between itself and others not in terms of a freedom which enables self-articulation, but rather in terms of a disjuncture which undermines and erases subjectivity. Instead of seeking to develop the impulse to autonomy and self-detachment depicted in Montaigne, therefore, this modernist self seeks to recover a sense of community, and thus tends back towards the integrated orders elaborated in the *Essais*. It is to this second discussion that I now wish to turn, first in Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, and then comparatively in *To the Lighthouse* and *A la recherche*.

### *MRS DALLOWAY*

'Have I the power of conveying the true reality? Or do I write essays about myself?'.<sup>19</sup> It was while writing *Mrs Dalloway* in 1923 that Woolf asked these famous questions, and the issues they raise -- about the status of subjectivity, and its relation to the outside world -- are central to the novel itself. They are focussed most clearly through the figure of Septimus Smith.

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<sup>19</sup> *Diary*, II: 1920-1924, p. 248 (19 June 1923).



Representing at once the Romantic visionary in communion with, and the modernist subject alienated from, the world beyond himself, he is used to stage a dialogue between the two positions; a dialogue which is used both to explore the disinheritance of the modernist subject -- the loss which accompanies the detachment of self from world -- and also to consider the possibility that some form of reintegration might take place. The novel refuses, however, to resolve this second question, and simply traces out instead a dialectic between a sense of fragmentation and a longing for reintegration and communion. It is not until *To the Lighthouse* that these tensions will be provisionally, if precariously, resolved.

Woolf's reading notebooks make it clear that she read widely around the work of the major Romantic poets in the years before she began to write *Mrs Dalloway*. Her early reading for *The Common Reader*, in notebooks dated 1918-22, includes notes upon, and quotations from, *The Prelude*, the 'Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*', 'Tintern Abbey', *Biographia Literaria*, *Table Talk and Omniana*, *Endymion*, *A Defence of Poetry* and *The Banquet*.<sup>20</sup> References scattered through her essays, diaries and letters likewise testify to a continued engagement with, and reflection upon, Romantic thought and writing during these years.<sup>21</sup> As a result, a number of critics have read her work with reference to the Romantic tradition. Charles Schug uses her 'narrative lyricism and use of persona' to illustrate his thesis that 'the modern novel has a

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<sup>20</sup> The notebooks in which these notes are gathered (the first of six volumes in preparation for *The Common Reader*) are vol. XXX ([A Writer's Diary] Holograph Notebook), in which almost all the entries can be dated 1918, and vol. XXXVIII (Monk's House Papers/B. 2d), variously dated 1918-22. See Brenda R. Silver, *Virginia Woolf's Reading Notebooks* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 152-55 and 189-95.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, *Diary*, II, pp. 77 (5 December 1920), 81 (19 December 1920), 88 (31 January 1921), 129-30 (15 August 1921). While her interest is constant, however, her appreciation is less so. She writes to Saxon Sydney-Turner on 13 April 1911 of her admiration for *The Prelude*: 'Dont you think it one of the greatest works ever written? Some of it, anyhow, is sublime'. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Nigel Nicolson, 6 vols (London: Hogarth, 1975-80), I: *The Flight of the Mind*, 1888-1912, p. 460. However, in 1922 she speaks of his 'vagueness and poverty of thought' ('Byron and Mr Briggs'; *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Andrew McNeillie, 4 vols (London: Hogarth, 1986- ), III, pp. 473-99; p. 483), and in 1923 describes his poetry as 'sedative to the point of somnolence' in ('How it Strikes a Contemporary'; *Essays*, III, pp. 353-60; p. 358). See John W. Moses. 'Orlando's "Caricature Value": Virginia Woolf's Portrait of the Artist as a Romantic Poet', in *English Romanticism and Modern Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Allan Chavkin (New York: AMS Press, 1993) pp. 39-81 (p. 64).

Romantic form’;<sup>22</sup> John W. Moses sees Orlando’s aesthetic, throughout his/her life, as ‘a synthesis of Romantic theory and the aesthetic of the age’;<sup>23</sup> and various critics have argued for specific Romantic allusions in her novels.<sup>24</sup>

However, these discussions have for the most part overlooked the figure of Septimus Warren Smith.<sup>25</sup> This is surprising, since Septimus is directly identified with Keats in the course of *Mrs Dalloway* itself. Meditating first upon the ‘beauty, th[e] exquisite [...] unimaginable beauty’ of his surroundings, and then upon the ‘profound truths’ he has been called to reveal to the world, he comes to realize that ‘all of this [...] was the truth now; beauty, that was the truth now’, and to identify himself as ‘the poet of the immortal ode’.<sup>26</sup> Miss Isabel Pole, too, muses, ‘Was he not like Keats?’ (*MD*, p. 93). This final reference is interpreted by Beverly Ann Schlack as ‘an intricately interlocking allusive reinforcement of the death and rebirth theme, via the Adonis myth, here applied to Septimus by Woolf as it had been applied to Keats by Shelley’.<sup>27</sup> I would like to suggest, more simply, that it identifies Septimus as a symbol of the Romantic self.

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<sup>22</sup> *The Romantic Genesis of the Modern Novel* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979), pp. 191, 3. Schug reads *Mrs Dalloway* in the light of Karl Kroeber’s comment that the organization of *The Prelude* ‘is founded upon a continuous and systematic dialectic between public and private affairs, between social developments and personal growth, between an objective drama of political events and the subjective drama of psychological change’ (p. 199).

<sup>23</sup> Moses, p. 54. For another article linking *Orlando* with the Romantic tradition, see Nathaniel Brown, ‘The “Double Soul”: Virginia Woolf, Shelley, and Androgyny’, *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 33 (1984), 182-204.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, William J. Burling, ‘Virginia Woolf’s “Lighthouse”: An Allusion to Shelley’s *Queen Mab*?’ *ELN*, 22.2 (December, 1984), 62-65, and Beverly Ann Schlack, *Continuing Presences: Virginia Woolf’s Use of Literary Allusion* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979).

<sup>25</sup> Both Schug and Schlack have considered passages and references relevant to my own discussion, and I shall discuss their conclusions as I proceed. Neither, however, makes the identification I am proposing. See Schug, pp. 203-05, and Schlack, pp. 66-75.

<sup>26</sup> *Mrs Dalloway*, ed. by Stella McNichol (London: Penguin, 1992), pp. 23, 76, 106. All references are to this edition, and are hereafter cited in parentheses after quotations in the text.

<sup>27</sup> Schlack, p. 67. A few pages later, she returns to develop the comparison between Septimus and Keats in *Adonais*: ‘Adonis was pursued by the boar he wounded; in Shelley’s poem, Keats is hounded by bestial critics who are called “herded wolves” or “obscene ravens” or “the monsters of life’s waste”. As Keats is “a herd-abandoned deer struck by the hunter’s dart”, so Septimus is hounded and persecuted by his bestial doctors with blood-red nostrils who “hunt in packs”. Shelley’s hunted-hunter metaphor for Keats and the critics is echoed in Septimus’s feelings about “human cruelty -- how they tear each other to pieces. The fallen, he said, they tear to pieces”’ (p. 75).

Such a reading is suggested above all by the nature visions which punctuate Septimus's experience.<sup>28</sup> The first of these takes place when he walks with Rezia to Regent's Park in the early part of the novel. Sitting on a bench in the park with his wife, he begins to be filled with ecstasy at the sight of the scene before him:

A marvellous discovery indeed -- that the human voice in certain atmospheric conditions [...] can quicken trees into life! Happily Rezia put her hand down with a tremendous weight on his knee so that he was weighted down, transfixed, or the excitement of the elm trees rising and falling, rising and falling with all their leaves alight and the colour thinning and thickening from blue to the green of a hollow wave, like plumes on horses' heads, feathers on ladies', so proudly they rose and fell, so superbly, would have sent him mad. [...] But they beckoned; leaves were alive; trees were alive. And the leaves being connected by millions of fibres with his own body, there on the seat, fanned it up and down; when the branch stretched he, too, made that statement. The sparrows fluttering, rising, and falling in jagged fountains were part of the pattern; the white and blue, barred with black branches. Sounds made harmonies with premeditation; the spaces between them were as significant as the sounds. (*MD*, p. 24)

This passage resembles the Romantic encounter with nature in a number of ways. Septimus is drawn, first of all, into a close communion with the scene before him, which tends towards sublimity or ecstasy, and which is characterized by the dissolution of boundaries: 'the leaves being connected by millions of fibres with his own body, there on the seat, fanned it up and down'; 'when the branch stretched, he, too, made that statement'. The form this communion takes is more dynamic than in Wordsworth: where the Wordsworthian narrator typically describes a composed and tranquil mind, which expands to absorb the static and peaceful landscape it encounters,<sup>29</sup> Septimus is drawn into the vigorous rhythms of the scene before

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<sup>28</sup> Schug, pp. 203-05, also suggests that Septimus, along with Peter and Clarissa, experiences 'spots of time' akin to those described by Wordsworth's persona. However, he sees these 'moments' not in terms of communion, but of intensity and revelation, and sees Septimus's 'spot' -- the appearance of Evans and the voice behind the screen, *not* the nature visions (to which he does not refer) -- as 'an ironic version' of those experienced by Clarissa, since it leads to death rather than life, even if a death that frees him from his madness and suffering'.

<sup>29</sup> Wordsworth's speaker describes how he 'sate / Alone upon some jutting eminence, / At the first gleam of dawn-light, when the Vale, / Yet slumbering, lay in utter solitude':

Oft in those moments such a holy calm  
 Would overspread my soul, that bodily eyes  
 Were utterly forgotten, and what I saw  
 Appeared like something in myself, a dream,

him; a scene which is characterized also by extravagant colour and contrast (I shall return at a later stage to consider its tendency towards frenzy and fragmentation). However, the substance and shape of the communion which takes place are suggestively close to those in Romantic poetry.

Again as in Wordsworth or Coleridge, it is the human subject who precipitates the communion in the passage here: where for the Romantic poets, the creative imagination vitalizes the world beyond the self, and enables communion with it, for Septimus, the human voice quickens trees into life.<sup>30</sup> This animation of nature, too, recalls the Romantic encounter. As the natural world is imbued with a moral force in Wordsworth, and becomes the child's instructor, so too in Woolf, it offers a form of teaching to the self: 'Every power poured its treasures on his head. [...] At every moment Nature signified by some laughing hint like that gold spot which went round the wall -- there, there, there -- her determination to show, by brandishing her plumes, shaking her tresses, flinging her mantle this way and that, beautifully, always beautifully, and standing close up to breathe through her hollowed hands Shakespeare's words, her meaning' (*MD*, p. 153). This passage also suggests the privileged status of the subject able to communicate with the natural world. Septimus is a man 'called forth in advance of the mass of men to hear the truth, to learn the meaning' (*MD*, p. 74), in the same way that Wordsworth's speaker confesses a hope that his responsiveness to nature might be a sign of divine ordination: 'poetic numbers came / Spontaneously to clothe in priestly robe/ A renovated spirit singled out'.<sup>31</sup>

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A prospect in the mind.

William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: A Parallel Text*, ed. by J. C. Maxwell (London: Penguin, 1971), 1850 text, II, 342-45; 348-52; p. 93.

<sup>30</sup> See Coleridge's famous account of the imagination, which is 'essentially *vital*, even as all objects (*as* objects) are essentially fixed and dead' (italics in original). Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria, or Biographical Sketches of my Literary Life and Opinions*, ed. by James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 7, 2 vols (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), I, pp. 304-05.

<sup>31</sup> *The Prelude*, I, 51-53; p. 37.

There are moments in the text, therefore, when Septimus recalls the Romantic nature poet. Performing an intense emotional and spiritual identification with the sights and sounds which surround him, he re-enacts and re-stages the Wordsworthian communion with the world. However, at other moments in the text, different sets of resonances play across the figure of Septimus. There are times when he endures a degree of isolation, and a psychic fragmentation, which recall a very different model of subjectivity and relation to the world. I wish now to suggest that alongside his Romantic communion, Woolf presents, through his 'madness', a vision of modernist subjectivity; a dissociation and alienation which problematize and reverse it.<sup>32</sup>

Woolf's diaries and letters make clear that Septimus's 'madness' is a transposition and reworking of her own, and her reflections during her periods of depression and 'anxiety' already begin to suggest ways in which the experience of mental illness draws suggestively close to that of the modernist self:

I wish I could write out my sensations at this moment. They are so peculiar & so unpleasant. Partly T[ime] of L[ife]? I wonder. A physical feeling as if I were drumming slightly in the veins: very cold: impotent: & terrified. As if I

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<sup>32</sup> Septimus's madness, like his visions and his death, have accrued a wide range of significances in critical interpretations. Schlack sees it first as 'a deeper insight into reality than others can achieve'; which she relates to 'the Platonic myth of the cave and the man who emerges from illusory darkness into the sunlight of truth' (p. 59), and then notes its 'mythological ambience' (p. 66), and the resemblance of his vow that 'he would not go mad' to Lear's plea 'O, let me not be mad' (p. 66). Harvena Richter, in *Virginia Woolf: The Inward Voyage* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 91, compares 'the terrifying or beautiful images in which his thoughts present themselves' to 'the visions in De Quincey's opium dreams'; while Erwin R. Steinberg seeks 'to demonstrate [...] a loose but, nevertheless', he believes, 'very clear relationship between patterns in the life of Thomas Stearns Eliot and patterns in the life of Septimus Warren Smith. *Mrs Dalloway* and T. S. Eliot's Personal Waste Land', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 10 (1983), 3-25 (pp. 9-12). Karen DeMeester, in 'Trauma and Recovery in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 44 (1998), 649-73, comes close in passing to my own interpretation; before reading Septimus at length in very different terms. Having commented upon the appropriateness of modernist narrative form for the representation of madness, she suggests that 'The ultimate paradigm of the trauma survivor and hence modernist man emerged in the aftermath of the First World War – the shell-shocked war veteran' (p. 652). However, she defines the relation between Septimus and the people around him as a conflict between the meaningful perceptions of a visionary whose experience could 'instigate positive social change' (Septimus's 'view of himself as a prophet, despite the seemingly fantastical presentation, is quite valid'), and a wider community which does not wish to listen to his unwelcome description of war, and its own participant in it. See in particular pp. 649, 652, 659-60.

were exposed on a high ledge in full light. Very lonely. L. out to lunch. Nessa has Quentin and don't want me. Very useless. No atmosphere round me. No words. Very apprehensive. As if something cold & horrible – a roar of laughter at my expense were about to happen. And I am powerless to ward it off: I have no protection. And this anxiety and nothingness surround me with a vacuum. It affects the thighs chiefly [...] the exposed moments are terrifying. I looked at my eyes in the glass once & saw them positively terrified.<sup>33</sup>

A sense of isolation and exclusion is articulated in this passage. The feeling of loneliness and exposure, the sense of being surrounded by nothingness and of inhabiting a vacuum, the failure of language ('no words'); all communicate a powerful sense of alienation and remoteness from the world. However, this isolation is not, for the most part, expressed in specifically modernist terms. The exclusion to which the passage refers is a social one: Nessa has Quentin round and does not want Virginia, who thus feels 'lonely'. Likewise later, she fears 'a roar of laughter at my expense', and conceives her position on the sidelines in terms of a failure to participate: 'very useless', 'impotent'. Elsewhere in the passage, the description of physical symptoms tends to make illness the cause, and the body, the site, of isolation from the world ('it affects the thighs, chiefly'). The diary does not describe the imprisoned subjectivity of the alienated modernist self, therefore (nor would we expect it to). However, the powerful sense of isolation which it communicates suggests that the experience of psychological instability might potentially be exploited to represent that of the modernist subject.

As Woolf begins the process of planning *Mrs Dalloway*, such an appropriation appears to take place. As she consciously begins to sculpt (rather than to represent – even in her diary, she never simply transcribes) her experience, and to set it within a conceptual frame (Septimus should not only be 'founded on me' but 'might be left vague – as a mad person is – not so much character as an idea'),<sup>34</sup> she presents a picture of isolation which tends far more

<sup>33</sup> *Diary*, V, 1936-1941, p. 63 (1 March 1937).

<sup>34</sup> 'Mrs Dalloway', *Holograph Notes*, Nov. 9 1922-Aug. 2 1923, Berg, 19 November, 1922; cited by Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1996), p. 192.

towards that of the modernist self. In the holograph notes to the novel, she decides that 'There shd. be a fairly logical transition in S's mind. Beauty of natural things. This disappears upon seeing people. His sense of their demands upon him. What is his relation to them? Inability to identify himself with them'.<sup>35</sup> Where Woolf is 'lonely' in the extract from her diary, physically excluded from the company of her sister and husband, Septimus will find himself unable to identify spiritually with the people who surround him. His relationship with the external world is a matter of estrangement and dislocation: his lack of 'a natural response' suggests an alienation and disjuncture. The isolation and remoteness expressed in Woolf's own reflections are reinflected in ways which begin to recall more closely the predicament of the modernist subject.

These resonances carry through into the final version of the text; which continually reflects, particularly through the worried Rezia, upon Septimus's disorientation and otherness. His first major vision is followed by a scene where, distressed by his 'violent' starting and preoccupied air, his wife withdraws to contemplate his behaviour: 'She could not sit beside him when he stared so and did not see her and made everything terrible. [...] Looking back, she saw him sitting in his shabby overcoat alone, on the seat, hunched up, staring. [...] Septimus had fought; he was brave; he was not Septimus now' (*MD*, p. 25). And a little later in the novel, the visit to William Bradshaw also describes a disturbing disjuncture between the private reality he inhabits and the wider social whole:

'You served with great distinction in the War?'  
 The patient repeated the word "war" interrogatively. He was attaching meanings to words of a symbolical kind. A serious symptom to be noted on the card.  
 'The War?' the patient asked. The European War -- Had he served with distinction? He really forgot. In the War itself he had failed.  
 'Yes, he served with the greatest distinction,' Rezia assured the doctor; 'he was promoted.' [...]

<sup>35</sup> *Holograph Notes*, 2 August 1923; cited by Charles G. Hoffmann, 'From Short Story to Novel: The Manuscript Revisions of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 14 (1968-69), 171-86; p. 178.

‘So that you have nothing to worry you, no financial anxiety, nothing?’  
 He had committed an appalling crime and been condemned to death by human nature. ‘I have -- I have’, he began, ‘committed a crime --’  
 ‘He has done nothing wrong whatever,’ Rezia assured the doctor. (*MD*, p. 105)

There is a strong sense here that Septimus is imprisoned in a subjective realm inviolably remote from that of the people around him. He is unable to comprehend the meanings of others (‘he repeated the word “war” interrogatively’), and when he attempts to communicate his own experience, he finds himself contradicted by his wife: as he contemplates his ‘failure’ in the war, he hears Rezia assuring the doctor of his ‘great distinction’; as he tries to articulate his sense of guilt (‘He had committed an appalling crime and been condemned to death by human nature’), she cuts him short: “‘He has done nothing wrong whatever.’” Once again, this develops Woolf’s own situation; which frequently also involved disagreements with her doctors. When she, like Septimus, tries to interpret her behaviour in terms of moral deviance, she too is contradicted, and labelled in terms of insanity.<sup>36</sup> But in her case, the battle is a straightforward confrontation between narratives of moral and psychological deviance. For Septimus, by contrast, the reality or validity of his perspective upon the world is at stake; and it is this which makes his experience modernist where that of Woolf herself is not. He is locked in a private reality which has no meaning for the people who surround him.<sup>37</sup> And this isolation from the world is a constant theme of the text. Bradshaw, for

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<sup>36</sup> Quentin Bell recalls Woolf’s belief ‘that there was nothing wrong with her, that her anxieties and insomnia were due simply to her own faults, faults which she ought to overcome without medical assistance’. *Virginia Woolf: A Biography*, 2 vols (London: Hogarth, 1972), II: *Mrs Woolf, 1912-1941*, p. 15. The frequency with which Woolf disagreed with the diagnoses of her doctors is clear from her diaries and letters, which continually express her frustration at rest cures and treatments with which she does not agree. See for example her letter to Violet Dickinson, 30 October 1904, which complains about ‘that tyrannical, and as I think, shortsighted Savage’, and declares ‘I never shall believe, or have believed, in anything any doctor says’. *Letters*, I, pp. 147-48.

<sup>37</sup> For a modernist example of such isolation, see T. S. Eliot’s ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’:

Would it have been worth while,  
 To have bitten off the matter with a smile,  
 To have squeezed the universe into a ball  
 To roll it towards some overwhelming question,  
 To say: ‘I am Lazarus, come from the dead,  
 Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all’ –  
 If one, settling a pillow by her head,  
 Should say: ‘That is not what I meant at all.



instance, dismisses his revelations: 'when a man comes into your room and says he is Christ (a common delusion), and has a message, as they mostly have, [...] you invoke proportion; order rest in bed; rest in solitude [...]' (*MD*, p. 108).

Another passage, which describes Septimus's diagrams and drawings, introduces a second modernist theme:

Diagrams, designs, little men and women brandishing sticks for arms, with wings -- were they? -- on their backs; circles traced round shillings and sixpences -- the suns and stars; zigzagging precipices with mountaineers ascending roped together, exactly like knives and forks; sea pieces with little faces laughing out of what perhaps might be waves: the map of the world. [...] Now for his writings; how the dead sing behind rhododendron bushes; odes to Time; conversations with Shakespeare; Evans, Evans, Evans -- his messages from the dead; do not cut down trees; tell the Prime Minister. Universal love: the meaning of the world. (*MD*, pp. 161-62)<sup>38</sup>

Septimus finds that language is inadequate to encompass his experience; to span the immense distance which separates him from his fellow-men. His visions and revelations, when translated into language, are reduced to meaningless abstractions and unexplained imperatives: 'Men must not cut down trees. There is a God. [...] Change the world. No one kills from hatred. Make it known' (*MD*, p. 26). Even when he tries to escape the limits of language, and to express himself instead through pictures and diagrams, he produces only indecipherable designs, which even Rezia is unable to interpret. Pictures seeking to communicate important revelations are appreciated only as a child's might be: 'Some were very beautiful, she thought. She would tie them up (for she had no envelope) with a piece of silk' (*MD*, p. 162). As Hermione Lee suggests: 'There is a ludicrous, awful gap between

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That is not it, at all.'

*The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), pp. 13-21 (pp. 15-16).

<sup>38</sup> Schlack (pp. 69-72) interprets this passage instead with reference to Dante's *Inferno*. She notes that the seventh (Septimus) circle punishes suicide and war, and links the trees which Septimus sees -- and which he proclaims to be alive -- to the wood in which the suicides have been turned into trees. The 'zigzagging precipices with mountaineers ascending roped together' are related to the moment when Dante has to remove the cord tied around his waist to descend off the Great Cliff to the Eighth Circle on the back of Geryon.

Septimus's manic inspiration, and the banal unintelligibility of his utterances and scribbles.<sup>39</sup>

His sense of isolation, his inability to reach outside himself, is due in part to the fallen status of language, which is unable to translate or transcribe his experience into a form comprehensible to others.

A wedge is continually driven between Septimus and the world, therefore. He is trapped in a subjective perspective which is both inaccessible and incomprehensible to those who lie beyond it, and which is close in many ways to the incommunicable subjective perspective in which the modernist subject, haunted by fears of solipsism, and unable to reach beyond himself to verify his impressions, finds himself imprisoned. The medical 'symptoms' Bradshaw notices as he performs his examination might be read instead as a modernist writer's diagnosis of her time.

Septimus thus comes to embody two periods at once. He is used both to re-stage the communions between self and world depicted in Romantic poetry, and to present the dislocations and disjunctions which characterize the modernist subject's relation to the world. It is the combination of these two perspectives which produces the startling suggestion of madness in the nature vision discussed above. Where Wordsworth presents a scene of uninterrupted harmony, Woolf's is disrupted by an intimation of insanity: 'the excitement of the elm trees rising and falling, rising and falling with all their leaves alight and the colour thinning and thickening from blue to the green of a hollow wave [...] would have sent him mad'. The ecstasy Woolf describes in the scene moves in two directions at once. The images of communion with which the passage ends suggest a coming or gathering together: his body, the leaves, the branches and the birds are drawn into a single series of movements. The first

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<sup>39</sup> Lee, pp. 194-95. She goes on to link modernism and illness in Woolf's own self-expression: 'Septimus's scribbles about his dead friend and "the meaning of the world" reflect her own fear of unintelligibility. In all her fictional versions of her illness she expresses the horror of not being able to make sense to others. The fear of incomprehensibility links madness and writing. [...] There is a relation between illness and modernism in Virginia Woolf's writing life' (p. 195).

part, however, moves in the opposite direction. His excitement at the sight of the elm trees culminates not in a consummation, but tends instead towards fragmentation. The centrifugal impulse of modernism confronts, and finds itself conflated with, the centripetal tendency of Romantic vision.

This yoking-together of the two positions is used by Woolf to conduct a dialogue between them. It enables her first of all to measure the extent, and to identify the nature, of the dispossession which has taken place with the birth of modernism and the twentieth century. As she places Romantic visions of communion alongside modernist fears of isolation, the disinheritance which has taken place becomes clear. However, this slippage also generates tensions which are used in other instances to question the validity of subjective Romantic vision. Projecting the fears of solipsism which preoccupied her own generation back onto the Romantic visions she presents, she produces an ironic re-reading of the ‘spontaneous’ and ‘natural’ communions which she finds in Romantic texts:

He felt himself drawing towards life, [...] something tremendous about to happen. He had only to open his eyes; but a weight was on them; a fear. He strained; he pushed; he looked; he saw Regent's Park before him. Long streamers of sunlight fawned at his feet. The trees waved, brandished. We welcome, the world seemed to say; we accept; we create. Beauty, the world seemed to say. And as if to prove it (scientifically) wherever he looked, [...] beauty sprang instantly. To watch a leaf quivering in the rush of air was an exquisite joy. Up in the sky swallows swooping, swerving, flinging themselves in and out, round and round, yet always with perfect control as if elastics held them; and the flies rising and falling; and the sun spotting now this leaf, now that, in mockery, dazzling it with soft gold in pure good temper. (*MD*, pp. 75-76)

While it makes no explicit charge of self-projection, the passage above does invite a measure of suspicion about the harmony it describes. Rather than moving from sight to insight; from observation or contemplation of nature to a revelation which marks its fusion with the creatively perceiving mind, it is now anticipation (‘something tremendous [was] about to happen. He had only to open his eyes’) which precedes the important disclosure: ‘beauty, the

world seemed to say'. Subjectivity replaces external reality as the point of departure, therefore. The idea that 'he strained; he pushed' also suggests a solipsistic cycle, in which nature is simply a vehicle through which an internal impulse to insight is fulfilled. Likewise, his reflection that 'wherever he looked, beauty sprang up instantly' is ambiguous: does Septimus watch beauty spring up around him, or does that beauty spring up in response to his expectant look? The choice of 'look' over the more passive 'saw', combined with the ambiguous 'seemed to say' and the ironic reference to 'scientific' proof, suggests that the beauty perceived is in some sense solicited, and not simply apprehended, by the self. The exaggerated vocabulary also pushes the passage towards parody. The description of Septimus's 'tremendous' anticipation, of the 'fawning' streamers of sunlight and the 'brandishing' trees, of the 'exquisite' joy caused by the 'quivering' leaf, and of the swallows 'swerving' and 'flinging' themselves about suggests that Woolf intends to ironize and subvert the moment of ecstatic communion she describes.

This passage is used to question the validity of Romanticism's harmonious reality, therefore. Any direct judgement of Romantic practice is finally withheld, but the inevitable consequence of combining Romantic and modernist accounts in the single figure of Septimus is that modernist anxieties will reverberate back to question Romantic tenets. Comparable challenges are issued throughout the course of the novel: many of the instances I have considered above are susceptible to similar secondary readings. Septimus's perception of himself as a figure singled out, for example, clearly does not go unchallenged. His dramatic, exaggerated response when he discovers that Rezia has taken off her wedding ring ('He dropped her hand. Their marriage was over. [...]The rope was cut; he mounted, he was free'; *MD*, p. 73) suggests an element of self-dramatization, and the heightened tone and language tend towards irony rather than intensity. Equally, the way in which Septimus's sense of communion with the world dissolves when he enters the realm of (intersubjective) human relationships suggests that the difference between the two is a matter of Romantic self-

construction. The evidence in *Mrs Dalloway* combines to suggest that the difficulties of relating self to world encountered by modernist writers are already latent in the poetry of the previous century. The dislocations and disjunctions experienced by the modernist subject are simply concealed or eluded in Romantic texts; either through the exclusion of alterity, or through the attribution to the world of emotions or ideas which correlate with those of the self.

However, in *Mrs Dalloway*, these accusations are never explicitly levelled: Woolf never finally endorses the ironic second reading she provides. This ambiguity becomes clear when the passage above is read in comparison to the more explicit ironization of Romantic communion performed in passages of *Orlando*:

There were mountains; there were valleys; there were streams. She climbed the mountains; roamed the valleys; sat on the banks of the streams. She likened the hills to ramparts, to the breasts of doves, and the flanks of kine. [...] Trees were withered hags, and sheep were grey boulders. Everything, in fact, was something else. She found the tarn on the mountain-top and almost threw herself in to seek the wisdom she thought lay hid there; [...] she prayed that she might share the majesty of the hills, know the serenity of the plains, etc, etc, as all such believers do. Then, looking down, the red hyacinth, the purple iris wrought her to cry out in ecstasy at the goodness, the beauty of nature; raising her eyes again, she beheld the eagle soaring, and imagined its raptures and made them her own. Returning home, she saluted each star, each peak, and each watch-fire as if they signalled to her alone.<sup>40</sup>

The more witty and playful tone adopted by Woolf in this passage makes explicit the ironization which remains below the surface in *Mrs Dalloway*. Orlando's emotions and gestures are more exaggerated than those of Septimus: her instinct is to 'thr[o]w herself' into the tarn in order to discover its secrets, she 'cr[ies] out in ecstasy' at the sight of the hyacinth and iris, and makes her own the 'raptures' of the eagle who soars above her. The parodic intent of this extravagance is confirmed by the narrator's ironic asides: 'everything, in fact, was something else'. This passage is also less ambiguous in its accusations of self-projection.

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<sup>40</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography*, ed. by Brenda Lyons (London: Penguin, 1993), pp. 110-11.

While sometimes remaining oblique -- 'to seek the wisdom she thought lay hid there', for example, cloaks its challenge in the same disingenuousness as 'we welcome, the world seemed to say; we accept, we create' -- it often adopts a far more direct approach: 'raising her eyes again, she beheld the eagle soaring, and imagined its raptures and made them her own.' Where Septimus anticipates the vision which then takes place, Orlando consciously searches for communion: 'she prayed that she might share the majesty of the hills, know the serenity of the plains, etc, etc, as all such believers do'. Even Orlando is brought to question the source of the beauty which she finds in the natural world: 'she asked herself what this beauty was; whether it was in things themselves, or only in herself' (p. 111).<sup>41</sup>

The significant similarities which clearly exist between the passage above and the extract from *Mrs Dalloway* -- the sense that the communion they present is generated by the perceiving self; the way in which vision or sublimation is first solicited, and then attained -- suggest that the two were shaped with a single intention, and that the accusations levelled in the second might also be applied to the first. However, *Mrs Dalloway* never finally licences such an interpretation. Woolf evokes and questions, but stops short of completely withdrawing the ideal vision of unity she outlines. It is tantalizingly held up, challenged -- and then left. This might be equivocation or irresolution, but I would like to suggest that it is neither. Rather, it is an attempt to communicate a dialectic which goes to the heart of modernist experience.

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<sup>41</sup> Moses, p. 47 picks out this line in a brief consideration of the pages from which my own discussion here is drawn. Seeking to demonstrate its similarity with a passage from Wordsworth's *Prelude*, he suggests that 'both passages relate the identical quest for moral knowledge, but both admit the subjective character of that quest as well: the objects that Orlando hails "signalled to her alone", just as the world that Wordsworth "made ... only lived to him". Troubled by that subjectivity, Orlando questions the reliability of her perceptions, whether what she takes for nature's beauty is "in things themselves, or only in herself"'.

In the midst of its isolation and alienation, the modernist subject is sporadically presented with glimpses of wholeness and integrity. Towards the start of *Mrs Dalloway*, Clarissa recalls her feelings on those occasions when she has 'yielded' to the charm of a woman:

It was a sudden revelation, a tinge like a blush which one tried to check and then, as it spread, one yielded to its expansion, and rushed to the farthest verge and there quivered and felt the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance, some pressure of rapture, which split its thin skin and gushed and poured with an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores. Then, for that moment, she had seen an illumination; a match burning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed. But the close withdrew; the hard softened. It was over -- the moment. (*MD*, pp. 34-35)

There is in the extract here something of the communion denied to the modernist in the course of his everyday experience. Disjuncture is replaced by union, alienation by alleviation, remoteness by closeness; as the world draws near and pours out its rapture. Meanings, too become available: the ordinary incomprehensibility of experience is replaced by 'revelation' and 'illumination; a match burning in a crocus'. However, even at this moment of epiphany, the disclosure is incomplete. The illumination is partial; the inner meaning only 'almost' expressed. The 'moment' is also very brief: almost as soon as the world has drawn near, it begins to withdraw once more; no sooner has its outline crystallized and hardened, than the 'hard softens', and clarity is lost once more. The same combination of intensity and brevity is also expressed in 'How it Strikes a Contemporary'. Woolf describes how, 'Set down at a fresh angle of the eternal prospect, [our contemporaries] can only whip out their notebooks and record with agonized intensity the flying gleams, which light on what? and the transitory splendours, which may, perhaps, compose nothing whatever.' The present brings brilliant flashes, but 'the flash is soon over, and there remains with us a profound dissatisfaction. The irritation is as acute as the pleasure was intense'.<sup>42</sup> Once again, the illumination is brief: consummation and revelation are glimpsed, only to be cruelly snatched away. And where Clarissa's revelation withholds its inner meaning, the 'splendours' evoked in 'How it Strikes' are potentially illusory; composing, perhaps, 'nothing whatever'. In each case, loss and

isolation are replaced by something very different, but this 'something' remains shrouded in suspicion, or located beyond the reach of the self; almost expressed, or potentially an illusion.

Woolf's ambiguous depiction of Romantic visionary communion dramatizes these profound tensions, and expresses the 'dissatisfaction' and 'irritation' by which they are accompanied. Envisaging a communion which cannot be grasped or proven, and which is never finally either bestowed or withdrawn, Romantic visions repeat in a different vein the uncertainties and ambiguities which lie at the heart of modernist experience, and enable Woolf both to articulate and examine her position. The twentieth-century subject is for the most part divided from the world: the isolation and alienation suffered by Septimus demonstrate the unbridgeable gap which exists between any single subjective perspective, and the alternative realities of others. Set against this fragmentation, however, is an aspiration to reintegration. Through the Romantic visions of communion which are also evoked through Septimus, the wholeness and integrity lost to the modernist subject are imagined and explored, though never unequivocally restored.

## **PROUST AND WOOLF**

The discussion in *Mrs Dalloway* of the problematic relationship between self and external reality is continued in a different vein in *To the Lighthouse*. I have suggested above that the novel is used to examine the liberation of female subjectivity, and the successful construction of a female tradition which enables individual self-articulation. However, other parts of the text reflect upon the notion of heterogeneity in a different way, and question at various levels the possibility of forming coherent communities. The explosion of order which takes place in

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<sup>42</sup> *Essays*, III, pp. 359, 357.



'Time Passes' may be taken to represent not only the dissolution of the patriarchal order, but also a modernist fragmentation, and in this sense, it leads not to the liberation of subjectivity; but rather to the isolation of the individual subject. As in *Mrs Dalloway*, therefore, the question emerges of whether reintegration may be achieved.<sup>43</sup> Unlike *Mrs Dalloway*, however, *To the Lighthouse* appears to reach some (albeit tentative) conclusions. The final section of the text suggests that a degree, at least, of communication is possible between isolated selves, and that meaningful, if unstable, orders may be fashioned which offer a measure of stability to individual subjectivity.

At this point I also wish to return to Proust. A comparable anxiety about the relationship of the modernist self to the outside world is also articulated in *A la recherche*, which explores, in addition to the issue of self-fashioning, the extent to which the self may become subject to isolation. The young Marcel discovers early in the text that self and other do not hang together in the harmonious relation he had supposed, and the rest of the novel constitutes a search to bind this fragmented reality back into a whole; a search which ends only with a series of revelations, in the final volume of the text, about the nature and power of artistic representation. Both Proust and Woolf trace out a second trajectory in relation to Montaigne, therefore. In addition to the movement of progressive self-detachment which I have followed at length from the *Essais* through to *To the Lighthouse*, they also present an impulse back towards the integration and coherent wider orders depicted in Montaigne.

The opening pages of *A la recherche* describe the close communion which takes place between self and world before the self has encountered otherness and been born as an individual consciousness. The narrator describes how, as he sleeps, his mind recycles and

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<sup>43</sup> For another discussion of *To the Lighthouse* which incorporates something of both the trajectories I am describing, see Stevenson and Goldman. In this instance, alternative, rather than simultaneous readings are proposed. Stevenson traces the development in the novel from 'The Window' ('still haunted by the Edwardian age it represents, still shaped and concluded partly in terms of its conventions') to 'The Lighthouse', which 'is representative of some of the priorities of the modernist age of the twenties' (p. 177); while Goldman reads the novel 'as charting an emergent feminist

transforms the thoughts which occupied him while awake:

Je n'avais pas cessé en dormant de faire des réflexions sur ce que je venais de lire, mais ces réflexions avaient pris un tour un peu particulier; il me semblait que j'étais moi-même ce dont parlait l'ouvrage: une église, un quatuor, la rivalité de François 1er et de Charles-Quint. Cette croyance survivait pendant quelques secondes à mon réveil; elle ne choquait pas ma raison, mais pesait comme des écailles sur mes yeux et les empêchait de se rendre compte que le bougeoir n'était plus allumé. Puis elle commençait à me devenir inintelligible, [...] le sujet du livre se détachait de moi, j'étais libre de m'y appliquer ou non. (I: p. 3)

In the world of pre-consciousness (symbolized by sleep) an entirely harmonious relation obtains between self and world. The passage above describes a relationship so close that the boundaries between the two disintegrate, and they take on a single form. Self and other are so little distinguished, in fact, that the self is able, with no sense of incongruity, to assume the identity of the objects which pass through its mind. Even when it awakes, and begins to find this fusion 'inintelligible', it detaches itself only partially from the outside world, and remains 'libre de m'y appliquer ou non'. Elsewhere in the opening pages of the novel, this harmony is expressed in terms of the world's conformity to the imaginative constructions of the self. The narrator describes how, in his sleep, he is furnished with a woman, who appears to offer herself to him: 'Comme Ève naquit d'une côte d'Adam, une femme naissait pendant mon sommeil d'une fausse position de ma cuisse. Formée du plaisir que j'étais sur le point de goûter, je m'imaginai que c'était elle qui me l'offrait' (I: pp. 4-5). Generated by and from the self, the woman reflects and conforms to its projected desires. In the same way later, his body conjures up a series of physical surroundings: his 'côté ankylosé' imagines itself 'allongé face au mur dans un grand lit à baldaquin', and immediately his grandfather's house in the country springs up around him; the position of his limbs sends the walls and doors sliding in other directions, and 'j'étais dans ma chambre chez Mme de Saint-Loup' (I: p. 6). For now, the world is sensitive and responsive to the projections of the self; the relationship between the two entirely harmonious.

However, it is not long before otherness and difference begin to make themselves manifest, and the unity and stability of this world is destroyed forever. The moment of crisis comes when the narrator's mother withholds her goodnight kiss. Formerly held out 'comme une hostie' (I: p. 13), her face has been a visible symbol of communion with the world,<sup>44</sup> and when it is withheld, or more importantly, when the narrator refuses to be denied and demands a kiss from his mother, a difference of will becomes manifest which drives a wedge between them:

Il me semblait que ma mère venait de me faire une première concession qui devait lui être douloureuse, que c'était une première abdication de sa part devant l'idéal qu'elle avait conçu pour moi, et que pour la première fois elle, si courageuse, s'avouait vaincue. Il me semblait que si je venais de remporter une victoire c'était contre elle, que j'avais réussi comme auraient pu faire la maladie, des chagrins, ou l'âge, à détendre sa volonté, à faire fléchir sa raison et que cette soirée commençait une ère, resterait comme une triste date.  
(I: p. 38)

Where Marcel has formerly acknowledged no boundaries between himself and others, he is now forced to accept his separation from the world. Discovering that his mother's desires are different from his own, he is compelled to recognize that the two of them are not one body, as her host-like face has suggested, but rather, independent categories. In the same way, where the world has previously conformed to his desires, it now begins to resist him. The conflict which emerges between 'l'idéal' that his mother 'avait conçu' for him and his own desire to receive her kiss stands in stark contrast to the harmony which defined his relationship with the acquiescent 'Eve' fashioned by his imagination in his sleep. The self is 'born' as an independent entity, conscious of its difference, and thus its isolation, from the world. It is this painful separation which ensures that the day will remain a 'triste date'.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> As Gabriel Josipovici puts it: 'The kiss [...] is the tangible symbol of communion with the world; it reflects a universe in which there is no distinction between the self and other people or between the self and the world of nature.' *The World and the Book: A Study of Modern Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1971), p. 5.

<sup>45</sup> Josipovici notes that since this 'first awareness' comes to the self only as it is divided from the world, 'our only consciousness of unity, of a fullness of being, comes when we no longer possess it; for, possessing it, we are not conscious of it: the only paradise is paradise lost'. *The World and the Book*, p. 5.

This substitution of difference for sameness, conflict for harmony, isolation for communion, takes place in each relationship between self and other after the birth of consciousness. Thus the bedrooms which grew up around the narrator in the opening pages of the novel, in response to the distribution of his limbs, are replaced as the text proceeds by hostile rooms which threaten, rather than anchoring, his selfhood: 'De la place, il n'y en avait pas pour moi dans ma chambre de Balbec (mienne de nom seulement), elle était pleine de choses qui ne me connaissaient pas, me rendirent le coup d'œil méfiant que je leur jetai. [...] 'C'était presque à l'intérieur de mon moi que [l'odeur] du vétiver venait pousser dans mes derniers retranchements son offensive, à laquelle j'opposais non sans fatigue la riposte inutile et incessante d'un reniflement alarmé. N'ayant plus d'univers, plus de chambre, plus de corps que menacé par les ennemis qui m'entouraient, qu'envahi jusque dans les os par la fièvre, j'étais seul, j'avais envie de mourir' (II: pp. 27-28). This alterity has serious consequences for the self. Where the narrator's conflict with his mother isolates the self, the room at Balbec threatens to eliminate it altogether. This erasure of the self is never finally completed, however. While it is invaded by the smell of vetiver, and penetrated almost to its core, the self remains enough of a centred entity both to resist the offensive of the unfamiliar smell, and to become the subject of a wish for (as opposed to becoming subject to) the annihilation of death. Once again, the self emerges as an unstable, isolated ('j'étais seul') category, forged and precariously sustained through problematic exchanges with an unsympathetic external world.

The rift which develops between the individual self and external world in these passages is central to the text's discussion of modernist isolation. However, the novel also explores a second form of separation from the world. A little further into *Du côté de chez Swann*, as he reads in the garden at Combray, Marcel describes his sense of being surrounded by his own subjectivity:

Si on a la sensation d'être toujours entouré de son âme, ce n'est pas comme d'une prison immobile; plutôt on est comme emporté avec elle dans un perpétuel élan pour la dépasser, pour atteindre à l'extérieur, avec une sorte de découragement, en entendant toujours autour de soi cette sonorité identique qui n'est pas écho du dehors mais retentissement d'une vibration interne.  
(I: pp. 85-86)

The self finds itself locked in the hermetically-sealed prism of its own subjectivity. Seeking to move beyond itself, and to engage with the external world, it encounters only echoes of its own selfhood, reverberating around the chamber of its individual perspective. External reality is forever remote; imaginable, but unattainable, and the self remains trapped within the confines of its own personality. As in the passage describing the birth of consciousness, a gap opens up between self and other, therefore, and this dislocation is experienced once more in terms of isolation from the world. However, where the birth of consciousness is prompted by the experience of otherness, the extract above describes a subject isolated by its *failure* to encounter the otherness of the outside world. There is a sense in which this is a logically incoherent position. The self seeks to combine a failure to encounter the world with an awareness of that isolation which could only come through experience of the world. It intuits an otherness which the imprisoned subject could not logically formulate: how could the self recognize reflections of itself if it were unable to encounter otherness? The self inhabits the prism of pre-consciousness, but brings to that world a conviction of the existence of otherness which transforms its unity into an isolating prison.

This second form of isolation, like the first, has serious consequences for the self. Now separated from the world, the self is no longer subject to invasion by the other, or to the threat of obliteration experienced by Marcel in his room at Balbec. However, in a different way, the extract above also tends towards self-loss. The self is everywhere present, but this presence is also, paradoxically, an absence. It is only when the self encounters the other that it is able to define its own subjectivity: it is when Marcel becomes aware of the difference between his own desires and those of his mother that the boundaries of his personal subjectivity begin to

take shape. Without the other, therefore, the notion of self lacks meaning or significance.<sup>46</sup>

The self is confronted in *A la recherche*, therefore, with two different forms of isolation which ultimately lead, however, to the same self-absence or loss. The novel will address these problems in various ways as it proceeds; ultimately identifying a resolution in the communicative strategies of art. However, there is a sense in which, partially, at least, these two forms of isolation already go some way towards 'resolving' one another. As alternative theoretical positions, they stand as opposites, in adopting either of which the self will escape the difficulties of the other. Thus the confrontation with the difference of the other releases the self from the prism by providing the encounter with otherness for which it has been seeking. And although the subjective prism does not 'release' the self from the pain of experienced difference in quite the same way -- the transition from the encounter with otherness to the prism is an illogical one -- it does protect the self from the difference of the other, and remove the threat of annihilation it can bring (in the same way that Habit insulates the self from the world by sealing it off from its otherness). However, it is clear in both instances that these two positions 'resolve' each other only by substituting one series of problems, one form of self-loss, for another. The encounter with otherness explodes the prism, but substitutes for the frustration of imprisonment, the isolation of difference. And while the prism avoids the painful encounter with otherness, it introduces instead an equivalent alienation from the world. The self can shuttle between these two positions, as it seeks to approximate a viable relation with the world, but it will ultimately still be condemned to isolation and loss.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Vincent Descombes describes an equivalent self-loss in his discussion of solipsism. The solipsist insists: "‘Chaque fois que n’importe quoi est vu, c’est toujours moi qui vois.’" Mais si c’est le cas, note Wittgenstein, le mot *moi* ne désigne rien. [...] Plus on affirme que *le monde est mon monde*, plus on prive de sens et de raison d’être le pronom possessif "mon" (italics in original). *Proust: Philosophie du roman* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1987), pp. 61-62.

<sup>47</sup> Something close to the cycle I am describing is memorably characterized by Samuel Beckett in his discussion of Habit. Through Habit, the self concludes 'countless treatises' with its 'countless correlative objects'. But between these 'consecutive adaptations' are 'periods of transition; [...] perilous zones in the life of the individual, dangerous, precarious, painful, mysterious and fertile, when for a moment the boredom of living is replaced by the suffering of being.' *Proust* (London: Evergreen Books; New York: Grove Press, 1931), p. 8.

*A la recherche* will find alternative, more successful, solutions to the self's isolation in *Le Temps retrouvé*. Before examining these resolutions, however, I wish to return to Woolf. The isolation of consciousness is also explored in *To the Lighthouse*, which, I wish to argue, re-evokes and reworks the birth of consciousness depicted by Proust, and also explores other aspects of the modernist self's alienation from the world.

Woolf was reading *A la recherche* as she planned and wrote *To the Lighthouse*, and her diary anticipates that her own work might be influenced by Proust's. On 8 April 1925, a month before she writes of her impatience to 'get onto *To the Lighthouse*', she reflects upon the qualities of *A la recherche*, in which she is now 'embedded': 'The thing about Proust is his combination of the utmost sensibility with the utmost tenacity. He searches out these butterfly shades to the last grain. He is as tough as catgut & as evanescent as a butterfly's bloom. And he will I suppose both influence me & make me out of temper with every sentence of my own.'<sup>48</sup> And as she considers which books to take with her to Rodmell later in the summer -- when she would begin to write *To the Lighthouse* -- she chooses Proust, whom she wishes to finish.<sup>49</sup>

Woolf envisages that the French novel will influence her method and style. However, there are also signs in the text that she drew upon the ideas and motifs which she found there.

James's experience over the course of *To the Lighthouse* is similar in significant ways to that of Marcel in *Du côté de chez Swann*; moving from a coherent relation with others, to a moment of crisis when he discovers that he is in reality isolated from the people and objects which surround him.

At first James's world, like Marcel's, appears to correlate with the desires of the self which

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<sup>48</sup> *Diary*, III, p. 7.

<sup>49</sup> *Diary*, III, p. 37 (20 July 1925).

apprehends it:

‘Yes, of course, if it’s fine tomorrow’, said Mrs Ramsay. [...] To her son these words conveyed an extraordinary joy, as if it were settled the expedition were bound to take place. [...] Since he belonged, even at the age of six, to that great clan which cannot keep this feeling separate from that, but must let future prospects, with their joys and sorrows, cloud what is actually at hand, since to such people even in earliest childhood any turn in the wheel of sensation has the power to crystallize and transfix the moment upon which its gloom or radiance rests, James Ramsay, sitting on the floor cutting out pictures from the illustrated catalogue of the Army and Navy Stores, endowed the picture of a refrigerator as his mother spoke with heavenly bliss. It was fringed with joy. (*TL*, p. 7)

Unlike her husband, who ‘never tampered with a fact; never altered a disagreeable word to suit the pleasure or convenience of any mortal being, least of all his own children’ (*TL*, p. 8), Mrs Ramsay attempts, in these opening lines, to respond to the desires of her son. Even in the face of her husband’s insistence that ‘it won’t be fine’, she refuses altogether to dash James’s hopes that the expedition to the lighthouse might take place: ‘But it may be fine -- I expect it will be fine’ (*TL*, p. 8). She acts as a mirror; reflecting back to her son an account of the world consistent with what he wishes to hear. Like the world of sleep in Proust, the reality she produces conforms to the imaginative constructions of the self.

Mrs Ramsay mediates between her children’s desires and the outside world in similar ways throughout the opening section of the novel. Later in the evening, she arrives in Cam’s and James’s room to find them arguing over a boar’s skull which someone has nailed to the wall. Wrapping her shawl around it, she succeeds in convincing Cam, who wants it taken away, that it is no longer really a skull at all: ‘it was like a bird’s nest; it was like a beautiful mountain such as she had seen abroad, with valleys and flowers and bells ringing and birds singing and little goats and antelopes’ (p. 124). At the same time, however, she persuades James -- who wants the skull to stay -- that it is ‘still there; they had not touched it; they had done just what he wanted; it was there quite unhurt’ (*TL*, p. 125). As Marcel employs Habit to disguise the otherness of the room in which he is sleeping, so Mrs Ramsay physically drapes and imaginatively transforms the skull until its foreignness and alterity (‘She could see the



horns, Cam said, all over the room. [...] It was a horrid thing, branching at her all over the room'; *TL*, p. 124) are overcome.

This passage also recalls the Proustian pre-conscious state in a second way. Filled with joy by his mother's response, James infuses his surroundings with the glow of his own excitement: '[he] endowed the picture of a refrigerator' with 'heavenly bliss'. Once again here, there is no sense of boundary between self and world. James assumes that the world is in some sense continuous with himself, and thus might legitimately bear the traces of his own emotion. A similar unity of self and world is also associated with childhood preconsciousness in other instances in Woolf. The opening lines of *The Waves*, which describe the rising of the sun and the break of day ('The sun had not yet risen. The sea was indistinguishable from the sky, except that the sea was slightly creased as if a cloth had wrinkles in it. Gradually as the sky whitened a dark line lay on the horizon dividing the sea from the sky')<sup>50</sup> have been seen to represent the separation of self from world which the children at the centre of the novel will be forced to perform as the action proceeds. And Woolf's reflections upon her own childhood summers -- spent at Talland House on the Cornish coast -- are likewise characterized by a blurring of boundaries: 'If I were a painter I should paint these first impressions in pale yellow, silver, and green. [...] I should make a picture of curved petals; of shells; of things that were semi-transparent; I should make curved shapes, showing the light through, but not giving a clear outline.' Nothing has an independent integrity as an individual entity in this world: 'sounds would come through this petal or leaf -- sounds were indistinguishable from sights'; different parts of the seaside morning are dissolved into a single impression: 'the rocks cawing is part of the waves breaking'.<sup>51</sup> Notions of difference have not yet come to disrupt the unity and integrity of this world.

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<sup>50</sup> *The Waves*, ed. by Kate Flint (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> 'A Sketch of the Past', in *Moments of Being*, pp. 64-137 (p. 66). Woolf also describes 'the feeling [...] of lying in a grape and seeing through a film of semi-transparent yellow' (p. 65). Both this and the impression of being 'half asleep, half awake' (p. 64) suggest the hermetically-sealed world of pre-

In *A la recherche*, Marcel's mother herself brings about the birth of consciousness which takes place. Mrs Ramsay clearly does not precipitate James's crisis in quite the same way: the passages I have discussed above, by contrast, show her seeking to postpone the moment when he is confronted with the fact that the outside world will not necessarily subscribe to his projected desires. However, she is soon forced to acknowledge that his wish to visit the lighthouse is not in itself sufficient to make the expedition proceed:

But he wanted to ask her one thing more. Would they go to the Lighthouse tomorrow?

No, not tomorrow, she said, but soon, she promised him, the next fine day. She covered him up. But he would never forget, she knew, and she felt angry with Charles Tansley, with her husband, and with herself, for she had raised his hopes. (*TL*, p. 125)

'The perfect simplicity and good sense of [James's] relations with his mother' (*TL*, p. 42) are disrupted in the extract here as she is forced to acknowledge that the assurances she had given him were false, and that the anticipated trip to the lighthouse will no longer be taking place. Mrs Ramsay is no longer able to mediate between her son's desires and the outside world: her 'No, not tomorrow', replacing and contradicting the 'Yes, of course' with which the novel begins, opens up a gap between herself and her son, and between him and the outside world. The continuities which he had presumed to exist are suddenly replaced by divisions; in place of unity and harmony, he is forced, like Marcel, to recognize difference. And once again, this discovery is irreversible: as Marcel's birth of consciousness 'commençait une ère', so James 'would never forget, she knew'.

Like Marcel, therefore, James sees the harmonious world of pre-consciousness disintegrate, and finds an opposition opening up between himself and the outside world. None of the other characters in the novel traces out such a closely-defined movement from communion to isolation, or experiences a recognizable rupture of consciousness. However, there are ways in which the broad pattern of his experience -- the fragmentation of a formerly unified world; the

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consciousness; the hazy indistinctness which precedes full awareness.

division of self and other -- is repeated at various levels as the characters move from the (late Victorian) 'The Window' section of the novel, to the (modernist) 'The Lighthouse'. Standing beside Mr Bankes on the lawn in the early part of the novel, and watching Mrs Ramsay reading to James, Lily is able to build the sights and sounds around her into a complex whole:

She now remembered what she had been going to say about Mrs Ramsay. She did not know how she would have put it; but it would have been something critical. She had been annoyed the other day by some highhandedness. Looking along the level of Mr Bankes' glance at her, she thought that no woman could worship another woman in the way he worshipped; they could only seek shelter under the shade which Mr Bankes extended over them both. Looking along his beam she added to it her different ray, thinking that she was unquestionably the loveliest of people (bowed over her book); the best perhaps; but also, different too from the perfect shape which one saw there. But why different, and how different? she asked herself, scraping her palate of all those mounds of blue and green which seemed to her like clods with no life in them now, yet she vowed, she would inspire them, force them to move, flow, do her bidding tomorrow. How did she differ? What was the spirit in her, the essential thing, by which, had you found a glove in the corner of a sofa, you would have known it, from its twisted finger, hers indisputably? She was like a bird for speed, an arrow for directness. (*TL*, pp. 54-55)

In 'The Window', the flux of experience, like the pre-conscious imagination, draws self and other together into a seamless whole. As the passage opens, Lily is recalling some 'highhandedness' which had made her 'annoyed' with Mrs Ramsay; a recollection which immediately draws the figure before her on the steps into a personal world of memory and emotion. When she observes Mr Bankes's worshipful glance, a second chain of thought is set in play: from Mr Bankes, to male worship, from there to the worship of women, from there to the 'shelter' afforded by the worship of men. The subjective drama, endlessly flexible, expands to incorporate the figure of Mr Bankes, and moves beyond and around his worship. As the passage proceeds, the palate and paint before Lily's eyes, and by extension her painting also, are drawn into the flux of her thought. Her reflections upon the essence of Mrs Ramsay dissolve into reflections upon her failure, in her painting, to capture the essence of the scene before her, and stir up a fresh resolution to succeed. Returning to Mrs Ramsay, her thoughts build into their flux apparently random objects -- a sofa, a glove -- which are unified by association with the central subject of her thought, and which extend the present, once

more, into alternative, imagined spaces and scenes.

The individual consciousness incorporates external reality, therefore, into a complex web of reflections, impressions, associations and memories<sup>52</sup> ('All of this danced up and down, like a company of gnats, each separate, but all marvellously controlled in an invisible elastic net -- danced up and down in Lily's mind, in and about the branches of the pear tree'; *TL*, p. 30).

The sights and sounds which surround the self are filtered and patterned to produce an intensely personal, loosely-woven fabric in which everything combines to form a unified whole. It is a less exaggerated and naive unity than that produced by James or Marcel: where Marcel literally takes upon himself the form of external objects, and James makes a refrigerator in a catalogue the deposit for his emotions, the flux of consciousness performs no such dissolution of boundaries or confusion of categories. However, its assimilation of external reality does recall the transparent transactions between self and world which take place in the earlier episodes.

However, when Lily returns to Skye with the Ramsay family ten years later in 'The Window', she finds that the external world is no longer available for such appropriation. Separated from 'The Window' by 'Time Passes', which describes the physical disintegration of the house, and the metaphorical fragmentation of the First World War, 'The Lighthouse' is characterized by a decisively modernist separation of subject and world. Sitting at the breakfast table, the day after her return to the house, Lily finds that the objects which surround her, and the words and phrases which fly past her, are strangely unrelated:

What does one send to the Lighthouse? [...] What does one send? What does

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<sup>52</sup> As Erich Auerbach's famous essay puts it, 'exterior events' serve 'to release and interpret inner events'. 'The Brown Stocking', in *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), pp. 525-57 (p. 538). Where I have interpreted this flux in terms of a productive relation between subject and object, Martha C. Nussbaum suggests that it seals the self off from other selves, since the 'drama of thought, emotion, perception, memory' is too 'elusive and complex' to be communicated to others, or to be encapsulated by language. 'The Window: Knowledge of Other Minds in *To the Lighthouse*', *NLH*, 26 (1995), 731-53 (pp. 733-34).

one do? Why is one sitting here after all? Sitting alone (for Nancy went out again) among the clean cups at the long table she felt cut off from other people, and able only to go on watching, asking, wondering. The house, the place, the morning, all seemed strangers to her. She had no attachment here, she felt, no relations with it, anything might happen, and whatever did happen, a step outside, a voice calling [...] was a question, as if the link that usually bound things together had been cut, and they floated up here, down there, off, anyhow. How aimless it was, how chaotic, how unreal it was, she thought, looking at her empty coffee cup' (*TL*, p. 160).

The other no longer submits to the self's assimilations in this passage. The play of emotions and reflections which absorbed the external world in the earlier passage is replaced by a vacuum; the continuity of self and other, by a disconcerting disconnectedness. However, Lily is not, like James, confronted with complete disjuncture: the object of perception resists the self not by asserting its difference, but rather by refusing to be incorporated into any wider scheme, or to stand in any meaningful relation to the self. Thus where Mrs Ramsay's 'no', replacing her 'yes', establishes an opposition between her son's desires and the facts of his situation, the passage above sees the relationship between subject and wider reality in terms of questions: 'What does one see? What does one do? Why is one sitting here after all?'; 'whatever did happen [...] was a question'. Lily experiences a lack of relatedness; a failure to establish meaningful relations with that which lies beyond the self. This is not however to return to the subjective prism described in Proust; where the self is so wrapped in its own subjectivity that it cannot encounter the other. Rather, Lily is able to experience the world, but no longer to absorb it into, or to assign it a place within, her own reflections.

A comparable lack of relatedness is also attributed to modernity by Woolf in her critical writing. In 'How it Strikes a Contemporary', she describes how Scott and Jane Austen 'know the relations of human beings towards each other and towards the universe. Neither of them probably has a word to say about the matter outright, but everything depends on it'. Contemporary writers, by contrast, have 'ceased to believe. [...] They cannot make a world. [...] They cannot generalize'.<sup>53</sup> The modernist subject is no longer able to control or evaluate

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<sup>53</sup> *Essays*, III, pp. 358-59.

the chaos of its experience, but is confronted instead with an atomized reality in which stable relationships have disintegrated entirely.

This uncertain relation between self and world, like the other forms of isolation depicted by Proust and Woolf, threatens the identity of the self. In this instance, it empties out individual subjectivity. The text describes how Lily 'could only make a phrase resound to cover the blankness of her mind until these vapours had shrunk. For really, what did she feel, come back after all these years and Mrs Ramsay dead? Nothing, nothing -- nothing that she could express at all' (*TL*, p. 159). Her subjectivity has been constituted through her weaving of the external world into the fabric of her consciousness. When that other resists her attempts to incorporate it, therefore, there is nothing left for her to look inwards to. Where James, finding his desires contradicted, is able to appropriate and own those desires as constitutive of his selfhood -- the oppositional relation he establishes with the world defines, even as it isolates, his subjectivity -- Lily, by contrast, has nothing to build a sense of self upon. Requiring the other to prompt the processes of reflection and association through which her subjectivity is expressed, her failure to establish any kind of relationship with it signals an inevitable absence of self.

*To the Lighthouse*, therefore, like *A la recherche du temps perdu*, explores the different forms of isolation which emerge when the harmonious conjunction of self and other begins to break down. The experience of James in 'The Window', close to that of Marcel in 'Combray', reproduces the disjunctive relation identified in *A la recherche*, although in this instance tending not towards the subject's annihilation, but the definition and contradiction of his unrealized desire. Lily experiences a disconnectedness from the world which is no longer conflictual, and which is apparently less problematic, but which ultimately leads to a more complete self-loss.

The process of resolving these various forms of isolation is painful and complex. Proust in particular extends his discussion right through the length of *A la recherche*, finding a solution only in the final volume of the text. This solution is art; which, Marcel comes to realize, opens up new perspectives and angles of vision. Reflecting upon his new-found vocation at the Guermantes' reception, he concludes that:

Le style pour l'écrivain aussi bien que la couleur pour le peintre est une question non de technique mais de vision. Il est la révélation, qui serait impossible par des moyens directs et conscients, de la différence qualitative qu'il y a dans la façon dont nous apparaît le monde, différence qui, s'il n'y avait pas l'art, resterait le secret éternel de chacun. Par l'art seulement nous pouvons sortir de nous, savoir ce que voit un autre de cet univers qui n'est pas le même que le nôtre et dont les paysages nous seraient restés aussi inconnus que ceux qu'il peut y avoir dans la lune. (IV: p. 474)

According to this passage, art enables the reader or spectator to perceive something of the way in which the artist experiences and understands the world. 'Impossible par des moyens directs et conscients', personal vision, expressed through its representation of the world, becomes available to the apprehension of another. As such, art offers a response to both the problematic self-other relations identified earlier in the text. That it enables the self to escape from the confines of the subjective prism is made clear by the language used in the extract above. Formerly unable to 'dépasser' the limits of its own subjectivity, the self is now enabled to 'sortir'; where it previously heard only the 'sonorité identique' of 'une vibration interne', it now encounters the 'différence' of the other. And in this instance, the experience of otherness does not lead, as the theoretical shuttling between the prism and the confrontation with the hostile other inevitably did, to another form of self-loss or alienation from the world. The narrator elaborates through art the notion of a productive encounter with difference; an encounter which illuminates, rather than isolates, the self, and enables it to establish communication. At one level, this seems inconsistent. The birth of consciousness assumes that difference separates self from not-self, and drives a wedge between the two; yet art, distilling the difference of individual subjectivity ('la différence qualitative qu'il y a dans la

façon dont nous apparaît le monde'),<sup>54</sup> is apparently able to break down the barriers between self and other and to establish understanding between them.<sup>55</sup> However, there are two versions of difference in play here. The difference expressed in art is not a fundamental alterity which excludes and threatens the self; which contradicts the self's desires, or stands in hostile opposition to it. Rather, it is a personal vision, which the self will never be able to inhabit entirely, but which, articulated onto the canvas or the page, has been forced to yield an artistic or linguistic form which makes it partially available for apprehension, and begins to bridge the gap between self and other.

Rather than moving between an isolation from, and an isolation through, otherness, therefore, the self identifies a form of communication which releases it from both. However, there is a sense in which this solution stands in a problematic relation to the notion of the prism; a sense in which it responds to it by contradicting it rather than resolving it. While the passage above does not deny the existence of a world external to, and lying beyond, subjective interpretations of it,<sup>56</sup> it does suggest, when it refers to 'la façon dont nous apparaît le monde',

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<sup>54</sup> For the concentration of individual subjectivity in art, see also Proust's essay 'Rembrandt': 'D'abord, les œuvres d'un homme peuvent ressembler plus à la nature qu'à lui-même. Mais plus tard, cette essence de lui-même que chaque contact génial avec la nature a excité davantage, les imprègne plus complètement. Et vers la fin, il est visible que ce n'est plus que cela qui est pour lui la réalité, et qu'il lutte de plus en plus pour la donner tout entière.' *Contre Saint-Beuve*, précédé de *Pastiches et mélanges* et suivi de *Essais et articles*, ed. by Pierre Clarac (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), pp. 659-64 (p. 660).

<sup>55</sup> Descombes makes a strong case for this contradiction in his discussion of point of view. He argues that Proust confuses 'la particularité du point de vue' (where 'point de vue' is 'une position d'où un observateur, quel qu'il soit, voit les choses se disposer selon certaines proportions dans la vision qu'il en a') with 'la singularité subjective de l'expérience' (italics in original), where the relationship between subject and experience is an internal one, and consequently incommunicable and unavailable to anyone who is not that self. The way of seeing expressed in Elstir's painting constitutes his subjectivity: it is 'le point de vue singulier d'un esprit original'. As such, it is 'incommunicable'. However, the passage on art discussed above and others like it reduce subjectivity to a point of view, making its perspective available to others. The spectator could only share the individual vision of Elstir 'par une identification étrange', through which 'il cesse d'être soi et devienne le même *sujet* (ce qui ne veut pas dire ici: le même corps) qu'Elstir' (italics in original). 'La solution artistique à l'impossibilité ordinaire de la communication', therefore, is 'la migration des âmes'; a transgression of subjective boundaries which could never, in reality, take place. Descombes, pp. 8, 39, 44-45.

<sup>56</sup> C. J. Mares identifies another passage in *A la recherche*, however, which does appear to suggest that the world has no form -- or coherence, at least -- without a perceiving consciousness: 'We get a glimpse of what the "unauthored" world might look like to the Proustian subject in the episode in Venice when the protagonist, having quarreled with his mother, fears that they are about to be parted indefinitely. Temporarily stripped of his usual defences, he finds himself confronting a Venice that has been reduced to sheer, meaningless matter. "Les palais m'apparaissaient réduits à leurs simples parties



and the 'univers' of another 'qui n'est pas le même que la nôtre', that the world as experienced is inseparable from a particular point of view. In this sense, there are only ways of seeing: the world is always refracted through, and assimilated to, the subject's perception of it. This is a vision which does not, however, make provision for the withholding of that world. While a point of view or perspective may be inaccessible or incommunicable to another subject, it incorporates the world, which is subjectively apprehended to form it. The subjective prism, by contrast, presumes that the self cannot reach beyond itself to encounter the world. It cannot hear the world, is excluded from it, because it is surrounded by echoes and reverberations of itself. Where the passage above suggests that there are only ways of seeing, the idea of a subjective prism imagines an independent world from which the self can be sealed off.

This contradiction is significant in the context of the purposes ascribed to art in the extract above. If the narrator intended a re-visioning of the self-other relation through art, if art made him realize that subject and world interact in a different way than he had formerly imagined, the contradiction which emerges would be part of a coherent scheme; a later interpretation of self and world would replace an earlier one, in the light of subsequent revelations and recognitions. However, although *Le Temps retrouvé* as a whole is concerned with revelations, and in particular, revelations about art, it does not present art as the site of discoveries which replace and overwrite the text's previous theories of subjectivity. Rather, art is depicted as a locus of resolution: the passage above suggests that art enables the self to emerge from the prism because of special conditions which make the other more available and accessible. In this context, the contradictions which emerge are problematic. In effect, the text resolves the model of isolation it sets up by applying a new set of rules.

For the most part, however, the theory of art elaborated by Proust responds successfully to the

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et quantités de marbre pareilles à toutes autres, et l'eau comme une combinaison d'hydrogène et d'azote." "Reading Proust: Woolf and the Painter's Perspective', *Comparative Literature*, 41 (1989),

difficulties of subjective isolation. Providing access to the subjectivity of another, it releases the self from the prism, and envisages a positive encounter with difference. A second way in which art can overcome the isolation of the self -- in this instance the rift between the self and a hostile other -- is elaborated a few pages later. Imagining the novel he is himself about to write, Marcel identifies a way of reinterpreting the relationship with the other which dissolves its oppositional otherness:

Chaque personne qui nous fait souffrir peut être rattachée par nous à une divinité dont elle n'est qu'un reflet fragmentaire et le dernier degré, divinité (Idée) dont la contemplation nous donne aussitôt de la joie au lieu de la peine que nous avons. Tout l'art de vivre, c'est de ne nous servir des personnes qui nous font souffrir que comme un degré permettant d'accéder à leur forme divine et de peupler ainsi joyeusement notre vie de divinités. (IV: p. 477)

The quasi-Platonic Ideas into which the self here envisages the other transformed might be interpreted in one of two ways. They might be seen as ideal individual essences, in which the uniqueness of subjectivity is purified and distilled. Such essences are imagined elsewhere in *A la recherche*: the 'moi' which emerges in the madeleine epiphany is an essential self, purified through the coalescence of past and present subjects (I: p. 44), while the works of Elstir combine to produce a concentrated version of his subjectivity.<sup>57</sup> However, the context of the extract above suggests a different interpretation. The narrator is in the midst of reflecting upon 'une foule de vérités relatives aux passions, aux caractères, aux mœurs' (IV: p. 477) which he hopes to incorporate into his novel; truths often born out of suffering or triviality. It would seem, therefore, that the divine forms he imagines are not individual essences, but rather generalizations or abstractions. The desired other is transformed into a concept. And as such, its otherness is overcome. Its difference is not transcended in the transition from particular to general itself: while its individuality is transcended, it continues to represent suffering, otherness and resistance to the self. However, the relationship between subject and

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327-59 (p. 339).

<sup>57</sup> For a series of other passages in which 'essence' is used to denote individual subjectivity, rather than 'l'essence [singulier] des choses', see Reino Virtanen, 'Differing Essences: Santayana and Proust', in *Marcel Proust: A Critical Panorama*, ed. by Larkin B. Price (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), pp. 277-88 (pp. 281-82).

object shifts in an important way, as much due to the changing perspective of the self as to the transformation of the other. The difference of the other consisted in its failure to conform to the the demands and desires of the self: the mother's withheld kiss, or Albertine's failure to yield herself to his desire for knowledge or control. However, the artist-to-be no longer makes the same demands upon them. He no longer requires them to love him, or to stand in any specific relation to himself. Rather, he requires them to provide general truths which he can incorporate into his novel. Their conformity or non-conformity to the desires of the self becomes irrelevant, therefore. Their otherness now consists in their individuality, which resists his attempts to generate general truths. As soon as they divest themselves of this individuality, therefore, and allow the self to correlate them with their counterparts in his memory and experience, their otherness is overcome.

*A la recherche* considers two ways in which isolation might be overcome through art, therefore. It proposes first of all that the self might come to apprehend the perspective of the other through the experience of art; a solution which responds to both forms of isolation depicted in the text, although it in some sense contradicts the terms of the subjective prism. The second model examined in the text, while it approaches the question more obliquely, enables the self (now the artist, rather than the spectator) to negotiate a productive relation with others who had formerly caused him suffering through the divergence of their desires.

In Woolf, the problem of individual isolation is addressed in 'The Lighthouse' section of the text. James and Lily perform a series of negotiations with the external world which enable them to forge the semblance, at least, of a coherent and integrated relationship. James seeks in the first instance to reestablish a unity with his world through a withdrawal into pre-consciousness. In his imagination, he identifies a place which recalls both Woolf's idealized childhood memories in 'A Sketch of the Past', and the Proustian account of his mother's goodnight kiss: 'The blinds were sucked in and out by the breeze; all was blowing, all was growing; and over all these plates and bowls and tall brandishing red and yellow flowers a

very thin yellow veil would be drawn, like a vine leaf, at night. But the leaf-like veil was so fine that lights lifted it, voices crinkled it; he could see through it a figure stooping, hear, coming close, going away, some dress rustling, some chain tinkling' (*TL*, p. 201). The 'rustling dress' here recalls 'le bruit léger de [l]a robe de jardin en mousseline bleue, à laquelle pendaient de petits cordons de paille tressée' (I: p. 13) worn by Marcel's mother as she travels along the passage to kiss her son goodnight; the 'stooping figure' the goodnight kiss itself: 'elle avait penché vers mon lit sa figure aimante, et me l'avait tendue comme une hostie pour une communion de paix' (I: p. 13). Woolf's memoir is recalled both by the blind sucked in and out by the breeze, and by the 'thin yellow veil': 'A Sketch of the Past' describes 'the waves breaking [...] behind a yellow blind', and the noise made as this blind 'drew its little acorn across the floor as the wind blew the blind out'.<sup>58</sup>

However, as soon as James casts back to this unified past, something 'sm[ote] through the leaves and flowers even of that happy world and made them shrivel and fall. "It will rain", he remembered his father saying. "You won't be able to go to the Lighthouse"' (*TL*, p. 201). As his mother predicted, he has not been able to forget, and even on an imaginative level, the harmony and unity of pre-consciousness prove impossible to reclaim.

At other moments in 'The Lighthouse', however, James begins to glimpse an alternative relationship with his father. As he travels towards the lighthouse, he thinks of 'a waste of snow and rock very lonely and austere', where 'he had come to feel, quite often lately, when his father said something which surprised the others, were two pairs of footprints only; his own and his father's' (*TL*, p. 200). And when he watches his father reading, as the journey draws to a close, 'He looked, James thought, [...] as if he had become physically what was always at the back of both their minds -- that loneliness which was for both of them the truth about things' (*TL*, p. 219). The isolation to which James has been subject is here replaced by an intimation of human understanding. There is a level at which he shares, or identifies with,

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<sup>58</sup> 'A Sketch of the Past', pp. 64-65.

the thoughts and experiences of his father. However, the sense of understanding which emerges is paradoxical and unstable. While there is a sense of community in the extract above, there is no sense of communion or even communication. Rather, a bridge is formed between self and other through a shared recognition of individual isolation. Separation and loneliness are reaffirmed and rearticulated even at the moment when, at another level, they are finally overcome.<sup>59</sup>

The second character subject to isolation in 'The Window', Lily, responds to her isolation through the painting of her picture. I have already discussed the way in which the canvas becomes the space where, inspired by Mrs Ramsay, she is able to negotiate a specifically female subjectivity. However, at another level, it also goes some way towards releasing the isolated modernist self. While the fact of Lily's self-articulation liberates her as a female subject, the method she adopts in her painting, and the account of reality she provides, respond to the disconnectedness with which she has found the post-War world to be characterized.

Right from the outset of 'The Lighthouse', Lily expresses a desire to gather the parts of the unrelated reality she encounters into a meaningful order or pattern. Thus, when Mr Ramsay strides past her in the garden, uttering broken phrases which strike her as fragmentary 'symbols', she acknowledges a longing to 'put them together': 'if only she could [...] write them out in some sentence, then she would have got at the truth of things' (*TL*, p. 161). However, it is not through linear sentences that she finally reconstitutes an integrated whole, but rather through providing a visual map of the world:

There was something [...] in the relations of those lines cutting across, slicing

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<sup>59</sup> Eric P. Levy argues that the community of tragic individuals which emerges in the text 'entails more than a negative unity, where all inevitably confront the same "oblivion"'. Interpreting this oblivion in terms of a self-erasure brought about by time (which 'efface[s] the structures on which personal stability depends'), rather than an isolation from the other, he sees a 'newness' and 'evanescence' in the flux which brings about self-loss; at which the characters can 'wonder'. 'Woolf's Metaphysics of Tragic Vision in *To the Lighthouse*', *Philological Quarterly*, 75 (1996), 109-32 (p. 111).

down, and in the mass of the hedge with its green caves of blues and browns. [...] The brush descended. It flickered brown over the white canvas; it left a running mark. A second time she did it -- a third time. And so pausing and so flickering, she attained a dancing rhythmical movement, as if the pauses were one part of the rhythm and the strokes another, and all were related; and so, lightly and swiftly pausing, striking, she scored her canvas with brown running nervous lines which had no sooner settled there than they enclosed (she felt it looming out at her) a space. [...]

She must try to get hold of something that evaded her. It evaded her when she thought of Mrs Ramsay; it evaded her now when she thought of her picture. Phrases came. Visions came. Beautiful pictures. Beautiful phrases. But what she wished to get hold of was that very jar on the nerves, the thing itself before it has been made anything. (*TL*, pp. 171, 209)

Art is used in the extract here to make recalcitrant matter yield both a formal and emotional coherence. At one level, its imaginative transformations compel the external world to demonstrate a compositional relatedness. In its balance and mixture of colours ('green caves of blues and browns'), its 'dancing rhythmical movement', its attention to lines, 'cutting across, slicing down', and to the heavy mass of the hedge, Lily's picture constructs fluid and mobile, but definite patterns which assemble the random parts of her reality within a single frame, and integrate them into a coherent design. At the same time, however, Lily sees her art in terms of an emotional, spiritual recuperation. The patterns she produces seek to describe not abstractions, but 'the thing itself', 'before it has been made anything'. The shapes and masses on her canvas seek to capture the 'jar on the nerves' which precedes the evolution of concrete being.<sup>60</sup>

As such, Lily's painting both recalls and moves beyond the self-other relation negotiated through the flux of consciousness. At one level -- in its fluidity, in its dependence upon pattern and rhythm (and, when it imagines and reinstalls Mrs Ramsay as a shadow on the

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<sup>60</sup> Both these goals are implied in Roger Fry's Post-Impressionist aesthetic. His famous idea of 'significant form' expresses both a commitment to 'agreeable arrangements of form' and a desire 'to bend to our emotional understanding [...] some intractable material which is alien to our spirit.' 'Retrospect', in *Vision and Design* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1923), pp. 284-302 (p. 302). The tradition interpreting Woolf's work in relation to Fry's theories goes back as far as John Hawley Roberts, who noted in 1946 a shared emphasis on 'inner essence' over 'external reality', and identified in both a 'vivid sense of life and [...] vibration and movement'. "'Vision and Design" in Virginia Woolf, *PMLA*, 61 (1946), 835-47 (pp. 836, 842). Woolf's Post-Impressionism is linked back to her feminist project (where I have suggested that the two are articulated separately in Lily's painting), in

steps, also upon memory) -- the picture reproduces and reconstitutes the ebb and flow of consciousness in which subject and object originally hung together. Where Lily formerly incorporated the sights and sounds around her into the fabric of her consciousness, she now arranges the shapes and rhythms of the external world into her painting. However, there are also decisive differences between the work of art and the stream of consciousness. Where the latter internalizes the world beyond itself, drawing it into its own subjective frame, Lily's desire to pin down the thing itself implies the reverse trajectory: a wish to penetrate and grasp the other; to reach out, rather than to draw in. This deliberate negotiation with the external world also suggests a second difference from the flux of consciousness. Where consciousness dissolves the sights and sounds it accumulates into its continual ebb and flow, assimilating the external world automatically and unreflectively, the work of art seeks to balance, in colour, size and shape, the individual objects it incorporates. These objects retain, therefore, a degree of independent integrity from the complete design. The painting ultimately fashions an order in which the parts are related to, rather than continuous with, one another, and in which self and other are therefore afforded distinct and independent identities.

Lily's painting enables her to negotiate a coherent relatedness, therefore, which provides both self and other with individual, if not precise or closely-defined, identities. However, as Lily completes her picture, it becomes clear that art is no more able than James's human community to provide a stable, permanent, concrete order. The novel ends by describing how, with a 'sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second', Lily 'drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision' (*TL*, p. 226). There is a sense of finality in this conclusion ('it was finished'), but no indication of a permanent resolution. Lily achieves the clarity and intensity she has sought, but her moment of insight is soon past, and she is left to reflect not upon her victory over the chaos of experience, but rather upon its momentary crystallization

(‘*I have had my vision*’; italics mine). While she is able through art to negotiate with, and differentiate between, the component parts of her reality, she is not able to arrest their perpetual motion, and to establish a fixed or immutable order.

Lily’s vision is, however, more definite than the flying gleams in ‘How it Strikes a Contemporary’, which ‘may compose nothing at all’, and the visions of Septimus which, ironically described, are never validated as genuine moments of insight. *To the Lighthouse* does move beyond the uncertainty of *Mrs Dalloway*; to establish a concrete, verifiable communion between self and world. It is simply that art, like the epiphanies that punctuate both texts, is able to make life yield clarity and coherence only very briefly. Woolf refuses to offer a complete or unproblematic resolution to the isolation of consciousness or the elusiveness of the external world. Instead, she elaborates fragile human relationships and precarious artistic orders which shelter the self from extreme isolation, and provide it with a degree of orientation and relatedness, but which perpetually hover on the verge of disintegration, or which remain provisional, partial or incomplete.

In *A la recherche*, Proust attempts a more complete and final resolution of individual isolation. The theories expounded in *Le Temps retrouvé* declare a definitive triumph, through art, over the otherness of the external world, and over the isolation and seclusion of the self. Art has the capacity both to make individual perspectives available for (partial) apprehension by another, and thus to establish communication between self and world, and also to reinterpret and dissolve the otherness of those who, through the divergence of their desires, have caused suffering to the self.

Whatever its final results, the desire for integration expressed in all three texts represents a distinctive second trajectory in the relationship between Proust and Woolf, and Montaigne. Various isolated, alienated and excluded from the outside world, the modernist self no longer seeks to detach itself from wider communities, or to negotiate a degree of autonomy.



Instead, it is driven by its division from the world to seek an integration and communion which will stabilize and validate its subjectivity; an integration and embeddedness which are modelled for it in Montaigne. This trajectory remains, however, a secondary one in my discussion as a whole. The trajectory of increasing self-authorization I have primarily been tracing out -- a movement away from, rather than towards, Montaigne -- also finds its most radical articulation in the work of Woolf. Examining the plight of the female subject, circumscribed by an order which defines it as the other, she envisages first the complete dissolution of order, and the free play of independent, heterogeneous fragments, before negotiating instead a female tradition which releases and inspires, without dictating or containing, female self-expression and construction.

## CONCLUSION

In August 1923, Woolf lists a series of authors through whom she hopes to write a history of literature, beginning with the Renaissance, and ending with her contemporaries. The writer who heads this list is Montaigne, for whose *Essais* she has already acknowledged a deep admiration and personal affection ('one of my favourites, as they say in birthday books'), and whose work would continue to fascinate her throughout her writing life.<sup>1</sup> The essay, 'Montaigne', which she published in the *TLS* in preparation for this project<sup>2</sup> is an idiosyncratic piece, which mimics the Montaignean style as it explores his autobiography; but in the context of my discussion it is also an important one. Reflecting explicitly upon the dialectic of self and other in Montaigne, it implicitly comments also upon the relationship between his perceptions of subjectivity and her own.

Woolf sees above all in the *Essais* a fierce opposition to conformity:

Once conform, once do what other people do because they do it, and a lethargy steals over all the finer nerves and faculties of the soul. She becomes all outer show and inward emptiness; dull, callous, and indifferent. [...] The laws are mere conventions, utterly unable to keep in touch with the vast variety and turmoil of human impulses; habits and customs are a convenience devised for the support of timid natures who dare not allow their souls free play. But we, who have a private life and hold it infinitely the dearest of our possessions, suspect nothing so much as an attitude. Directly we begin to protest, to attitudinize, to lay down laws, we perish. We are living for others, not for ourselves. We must respect those who sacrifice themselves in the public service, load them with honours, and pity them for allowing, as they must, the inevitable compromise; but for ourselves let us fly fame, honour, and all offices that put us under an obligation to others.<sup>3</sup>

According to Woolf's account, Montaigne sees conformity to external frameworks in terms of circumscription, self-contradiction, and self-loss. The self which imitates the behaviour of

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<sup>1</sup> *Diary*, II, p. 261 (17 August 1923); *Letters*, VI: *Leave the Letters Till We're Dead, 1936-1941*, p. 216 (to Ethyl Smith, 24 February 1938).

<sup>2</sup> On 31 January 1924.

<sup>3</sup> *Essays*, IV, p. 73. McNeillie uses the (minimally) revised version of the essay used in *The Common Reader*.

another must sacrifice its own subjectivity, and reduce itself to a hollow shell, ‘callous, and indifferent’. The self which relies upon external customs to structure its thought and action faces delimitation and constraint: the laws and conventions to which it turns are ‘utterly unable’ to encompass ‘the vast variety and turmoil of human impulses’, and do not allow the soul ‘free play’. And the self which shoulders public responsibilities takes on obligations to others which lead to an ‘inevitable compromise’. In every instance, the self which conforms to external orders or frameworks is compelled to betray itself, and to relinquish fulfilment of its subjectivity.

Instead of performing such a compromise, the self should live in accordance with itself. The timid creatures who ‘dare not allow their souls free play’ imply the existence of others who do have the boldness to live for themselves alone, while the reference to ‘we who have a private life and hold it infinitely [...] dear’ also suggests that withdrawal is available. The same call to self-regulation is more directly pronounced at a later point in Woolf’s essay. Turning to the question of religion in the *Essais*, Woolf suggests that Montaigne rejects divine order and guidance: ‘Perhaps, then, it will be well to turn to religion to guide us? “Perhaps” is one of his favourite expressions. [...] Such words help to muffle up opinions which it would be highly impolitic to speak outright’. Instead, she identifies ‘another monitor’ in his thought, ‘an invisible censor within, “un patron au dedans”’. This is the ‘judge’ to whom we should address ourselves (p. 75). It is the voice of the self, not of the other, which should direct our behaviour and thought.

Woolf constructs an opposition, therefore, between adherence to external conventions and conformity to oneself, and she unequivocally places Montaigne on the side of self-regulation. Elsewhere in her essay, she extends this notion of non-conformity from a philosophy of withdrawal and private self-regulation to a more general commitment to individual difference. She notes how Montaigne moves beyond withdrawal from the world, and actively

expresses his personal difference. 'This soul, or life within us, by no means agrees with the life outside us', and in matters of politics, social conventions and respected laws, the Montaignean self is ready to acknowledge that it believes the 'very opposite to what other people say' (p. 72). More significantly, Woolf also identifies in Montaigne a commitment to the difference of others. Adopting his voice, she criticizes those who, 'when they travel, wrap themselves up, "se défandans de la contagion d'un air incogneu" in silence and suspicion. When they dine, they must have the same food they get at home. Every sight and custom is bad unless it resembles those of their own village. They travel only to return' (p. 76). The self should be ready instead to encounter the 'wonders' of the world: 'halcyons and undiscovered lands, men with dogs' heads and eyes in their chests, and laws and customs, it may well be, far superior to our own' (p. 76). Difference, whether that of the other, or that of the self from the other, should be protected and embraced.

In attributing such opinions to Montaigne, Woolf is clearly recruiting him to stand for her own commitments. While she does not make her own position clear in the essay itself, the hostility to circumscription which it articulates, and its commitment to individual difference, find consistent expression elsewhere in her critical work and novels. The self-betrayal and loss which come with conformity to the social order in 'Montaigne' clearly anticipate the self-sacrifice and circumscription to which Mrs Ramsay's complicity with the patriarchal order will lead in *To the Lighthouse*, while the commitment to individual difference which emerges in her reading of the *Essais* clearly resonates both with Lily's desire to fashion an independent subjectivity, and Woolf's own call, in *A Room of One's Own*, for the construction of a specifically female identity. At the start of her essay on Montaigne, she reflects that 'As the centuries go by, there is always a crowd' standing before his self-portrait, 'gazing into its depths, seeing their own faces reflected in it, seeing more the longer they look' (p. 71). As her essay proceeds, it becomes clear that she is herself a member of that crowd, finding her own priorities and beliefs reflected in Montaigne.

In appropriating Montaigne to stand for her own views in this way, Woolf effectively establishes him, as Lily employs Mrs Ramsay, as a figure through whom she can think back, and forge a sense of tradition.<sup>4</sup> In becoming a voice which represents and advocates individual difference, he also, somewhat paradoxically, becomes a figure through whom a tradition of 'difference', and thus a sense of similarity, is established. However, as in *To the Lighthouse*, this sense of community does not compromise the autonomy of the individual self, and does not contradict or qualify Woolf's antagonism to conformity, and to participation in wider orders. Neither the female community created by Lily, nor the tradition established in 'Montaigne', involves the self inhabiting a particular framework, or submitting or adhering to any particular code; neither defines the self according to a specific set of terms or beliefs. In each case, identity is constituted, defined and expressed by the self and the self alone. In *To the Lighthouse*, Mrs Ramsay acts as a catalyst for Lily's self-fashioning, enabling and inspiring her self-articulation, but remains external to her self-expression. In Woolf's essay on Montaigne, the 'tradition' which emerges refers to a method of independent self-constitution which does not shape, define or interfere with the identity which the self assumes. In each case, provision is made for individual freedom.

When critics have written about the relationship between Woolf and Montaigne, they have generally sought to develop this picture of a Montaigne committed to individual difference, and hostile to external orders and laws, and to make explicit the links, which remain implicit in 'Montaigne', between such philosophies and the work of Woolf herself. Juliet Dusinberre, in *Virginia Woolf's Renaissance: Woman Reader or Common Reader?* takes the idea of self-reference, and the rejection of authority attributed by Woolf to Montaigne, and reapplies them to his writing method. Thus she argues that Montaigne 'defies Ramus's principles of

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<sup>4</sup> I shall describe Juliet Dusinberre's account of Woolf's appropriation below. Leila Brosnan, by contrast, sees Montaigne as a patriarchal writer, whose metaphorical fatherhood is thus 'highly

pedagogy, in which logical divisions are constructed and an argument pursued to its conclusion. His writing is “an irregular and perpetual motion, without model and without aim”, which rejoices in its own lack of direction: “Other men’s thoughts are ever wandering abroad, if they will but see it; they are still going forward. ... For my part I circulate in myself”.<sup>5</sup> Refusing to conform to external pressures and forms (‘without model and without aim’), he chooses instead the path of self-reference; ‘circulating’ in himself. Dusinberre also argues that Montaigne constitutes himself in a space which she defines as ‘woman’ (but which might equally be labelled ‘other’ or ‘non-conformity’) in a set of binary oppositions which includes universal/particular, public/private, design/haphazardness, rules/irregularity, society/solitude.<sup>6</sup> Once again, Montaigne is placed in opposition to conformity, and in a position which represents particularity and difference. Dusinberre already intimates a link with Woolf when she describes his commitment to difference in terms of gender; self-constitution in female, rather than male terms. This link is elsewhere made explicit: ‘Woolf, like Montaigne, writes as she would be read, against the grain of traditional male education and culture, reading, as he himself did, in order to inscribe herself in language’.<sup>7</sup>

A second critic who accepts Woolf’s evaluation of Montaigne, and who seeks to link the thought of the two, is Dudley M. Marchi. In *Montaigne Among the Moderns: Receptions of the ‘Essais’*, he uses Woolf’s pronouncements about individual difference in *A Room of One’s Own* to exemplify the similarities between her own thought and Montaigne’s. When she urges her audience to ‘write what you wish to write’, and not ‘to sacrifice a hair of the head of your vision, a shade of its colour, in deference to some Headmaster with a silver pot in his hand or to some professor with a measuring rod up his sleeve’, she demands a ‘conformity to personal motivation’ familiar from the *Essais*. Like Montaigne, Woolf

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problematic’. *Reading Virginia Woolf’s Essays and Journalism: Breaking the Surface of Silence* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), p. 113.

<sup>5</sup> Juliet Dusinberre, *Virginia Woolf’s Renaissance: Woman Reader or Common Reader?* (London: Macmillan, 1997), p. 54.

<sup>6</sup> Dusinberre, p. 58.

demands a freedom from hegemonic discourse, and commits herself instead to 'personal vision'.<sup>8</sup> Marchi also identifies a sceptical frame of mind in Woolf and Montaigne which, through its uncertainty and its suspension of judgement, refuses commitment and conclusion, and thus resists conformity to any particular code.<sup>9</sup>

In my own account, I have read Montaigne, and by extension the relationship between Woolf and Montaigne, in a different way. Rather than placing Montaigne on one side of a conformity/difference opposition, I have sought to identify a tension in his work between a commitment to individual agency and difference, and a desire if not to conform, at least to locate the self within a coherent order or community. Both external orders and individual difference are seen in both positive and negative terms in Montaigne. This is the lesson of the paradox of otherness, which characterizes both a close integration of self and other (conformity), and the difference of self and other, in terms of drawbacks and benefits at once. Thus the divine framework which in Woolf's interpretation Montaigne discards in favour of self-regulation, is in my own account vital for the definition, organization and expression of identity. The impulse to autonomy which Woolf identifies does underwrite the *Apologie*, but it is only one part of the Montaignean theology. In the same way, the social orders which Woolf believes to lead only to circumscription and self-loss, are in my interpretation of 'De l'utile et de l'honneste', 'De mesnager sa volonté' and 'De la vanité' also crucial to the appropriation and realization of identity. The moral dimension of subjectivity is negotiated in the public sphere, while social duties are an important part of the purpose and calling of the self. In both instances, external orders and frameworks are necessary, as well as a threat, to the self which encounters them, and which is thus obliged to negotiate carefully with them. Where Woolf depicts the Montaignean self rejecting wider frameworks, and living in

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<sup>7</sup> Dusinger, p. 45.

<sup>8</sup> Dudley M. Marchi, *Montaigne Among the Moderns: Receptions of the 'Essais'* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1994), p. 225.

conformity with itself alone, I have suggested that the self seeks to overcome the threat posed by the external order, while preserving a relationship with it, and thus retaining the benefits which that relationship confers. The self either reinterprets the order it inhabits in such a way that provision is made for its autonomy and self-reference, as in the *Apologie*, or negotiates with its public roles until they cease to compromise its integrity. In each case, the self negotiates both a position within a wider framework, and a measure of individual autonomy.

In the same way, I have suggested that the difference of the self, or of the other from the self, has both benefits and drawbacks in Montaigne's account. Where Woolf describes a Montaignean self ready to embrace the difference of others, I have suggested that while a self-other relation characterized by difference enables self-definition, and the realization of individuality, it also threatens to undermine, or destabilize, the perspective or position of the self. Thus in 'Des cannibales', the customs of the New World both clarify and challenge the cultural traditions of Europe, while the clash of philosophies about God depicted in the *Apologie* produces a clamour of competing, mutually-exclusive voices which seek to erase, even as they help to define, one another. Once again, therefore, the self is forced to negotiate. Rather than embracing difference wholeheartedly, it seeks to limit it in ways which defuse its threat while preserving its power to define. The self seeks to construct a community of belief in which the customs or philosophies of the other, while they retain a superficial difference, are cast in terms which essentially reinforce, or reflect, the beliefs of the constructing self. Once again, the self finally constitutes itself within a wider order, even as it seeks to protect, as Woolf suggests, individual integrity and difference.

Since I have interpreted Montaigne's relationship to external frameworks and to individual particularity in a different way from Woolf, I have also, inevitably, produced a different

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<sup>9</sup> Marchi, p. 227 speaks of their resistance to 'finalistic conclusions'. For the most part, however, he relates Montaigne and Woolf instead as writers whose scepticism articulates a sense of personal fluidity, and a need for constant self-revision.



account of the relationship between Woolf and Montaigne. Woolf clearly sees, while she never explicitly identifies, a close correlation between Montaigne's beliefs and her own. Like her, he is committed to the expression of individual difference, and like her, he opposes the conformity of self to other. In one sense, Montaigne does stand as Woolf's precursor in my own account also. Committed to preserving the integrity of individual subjectivity, he offers a model that both Proust and Woolf develop in various ways. However, at the same time, Woolf and Proust increasingly move away from the commitment to external orders which he describes. I have sought to map out a trajectory whereby the self is increasingly perceived and installed as the source of selfhood, and increasingly seeks to detach itself from wider frameworks and orders.

The self-other relation depicted in Montaigne is modified first of all by Proust, in his discussion of bourgeois and antisemitic identity. Now openly exploiting, rather than silently manipulating, the other or wider order, the self seeks not only the freedom to live according to its own interpretation of itself, but to construct and reinvent itself according to its own desires, attempting to assume a privileged social (in the case of the bourgeois self) or cultural (for the antisemitic self) identity. The self is still a situated entity, and its identity is defined in terms of the external communities to which it belongs, but its relationship to those communities has changed. A more decisive shift is marked by the relationship between the subject and object of desire. No longer seeking to appropriate an identity as part of a wider group, the self expresses and projects outwards its desires, and seeks to organize the world in relation to them. While it continues to negotiate its identity in relation to the other -- upon whose submission it depends for the realization of its envisaged subjectivity -- it no longer seeks an identity within, or in terms of, wider communities, and becomes more obviously the source of its own selfhood. This trajectory of self-detachment is apparently completed in *To the Lighthouse*. Occupying the position of the other, the female self envisages the dissolution of the patriarchal order which has circumscribed and suppressed her subjectivity, and

imagines the complete autonomy of the female subject. As the text proceeds, however, this radical self-detachment is rejected, and a new, female community established; a community which has an important role to play in enabling individual self-expression, but which remains external to, rather than becoming constitutive of, the identity negotiated through it. Like the desiring self in Proust, the female subject refuses to inhabit external traditions, but finds that an other is required to inspire the emotion and vision needed for its self-realization.

There is also a second sense in which the Montaignean self I have depicted differs from the Woolfian subject, a way in which it becomes an enemy rather than a model. Since Montaigne presents self-realization in terms of participation in, as well as freedom within, a wider order, and since in order to achieve this the self must construct or manipulate the wider framework, the self is continually engaged in negotiations which involve the colonization or circumscription of the other. In order to carve out an order which grounds and reinforces, without curtailing, its individual subjectivity, it has to construct or reinterpret the other in ways which betray or erase its independence or difference. In this sense, Montaigne is the circumscriber: Mr Ramsay or Sir William Bradshaw rather than Lily Briscoe, and thus Woolf's opponent rather than her precursor. Where Woolf herself sets Montaigne against those 'who, when they travel, wrap themselves up, "se défendans de la contagion d'un air incogneu"', and who demand the same food and drink that they receive at home, I would suggest instead that in his anxiety to recuperate the otherness of the cannibals back into familiar schema, to make their religious customs comprehensible to himself, and to make their food, drink, beds and buildings resemble those of his own land, he becomes exactly this kind of (imaginative) traveller.

I differ from Woolf, therefore, in perceiving significant differences between, as well as important continuities in, her own thought on autonomy and Montaigne's. While the Montaignean self is undoubtedly committed to preserving its individual integrity, it

negotiates its identity within the frame of a wider order, and often at the expense of the other it encounters. However, there is a second way in which Woolf's essay on Montaigne draws much closer to my own conclusions. I have suggested in my final chapter that while in one sense the selves in Woolf and Proust move away from the carefully-ordered self-other relations depicted in Montaigne, there is also an impulse by the isolated modernist self back towards the integrated relation of self and other established in the *Essais*. This second trajectory is also, although more obliquely, explored by Woolf in her essay on Montaigne.

'Montaigne' was written while Woolf was also working on *Mrs Dalloway*. On 19 December 1923, she notes that she is busy: 'publishing, writing; doing Hardy, & Montaigne & the Greeks & the Elizabethans & The Hours [her original title for *Mrs Dalloway*]', and on 23 January 1924 records that she is 'sending off Montaigne', and preparing to return to 'The Hours': 'Now I am going to write till we move -- 6 weeks straight ahead.'<sup>10</sup> Composed concurrently, the two pieces also articulate shared concerns, and significantly, they both address the question of individual isolation. Certain phrases migrate from the mouth of Septimus to the mind of Montaigne: in *Mrs Dalloway*, Septimus muses that 'Communication is health; communication is happiness' (p. 101); in 'Montaigne', it is now Montaigne who 'wishes only to communicate his soul. Communication is health; communication is truth; communication is happiness' (p. 76).

However, the context and meaning of these words is very different in the two instances in which they occur. Where Septimus is a figure burdened with revelations which he cannot communicate to the world, Woolf presents Montaigne as a figure who believes that coherent self-articulation may be achieved. While there are still barriers to communication – such as dishonesty and laziness – the subject is not condemned to an inevitable isolation:

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<sup>10</sup> *Diary*, II, pp. 278, 289.

We must dread any eccentricity or refinement which cuts us off from our fellow-beings. [...] To communicate is our chief business; society and friendship our chief delights; and reading, not to acquire knowledge, not to earn a living, but to extend our intercourse beyond our own time and province. [...] To share is our duty; to go down boldly and bring to light those hidden thoughts which are the most diseased; to conceal nothing; to pretend nothing; if we are ignorant to say so; if we love our friends to let them know it' (p. 76).

The individual self now has a choice: it may disguise itself, but it may also disclose itself to others; it may decide to withhold itself, but it may equally communicate freely. Montaigne thus becomes a figure in whom Septimus's anxieties are resolved. As Clarissa becomes Septimus's double within the text of *Mrs Dalloway* (she seeing the truth, he the insane truth), so Montaigne becomes an external *alter ego*, representing a model of communication and transaction with the wider community to which Septimus aspires but which he is unable to attain.

This relationship between Septimus and Montaigne is suggestively close to the relation I have sought to trace out between Montaigne and the modernist selves depicted in Proust and Woolf. Experiencing an isolation or alienation from the world, Septimus, Marcel, James, Mr Ramsay and Lily all seek in various ways to integrate themselves within, or to establish communication with, the world beyond themselves. The self confined in the prism of its subjectivity in *A la recherche* seeks to escape the echoes of its selfhood, and to establish contact with the world. Marcel and James, following their respective births of consciousness, and their division from the world, seek the reintegration of other and self into a meaningful whole. Lily, inhabiting a world of apparently random parts which lacks any sense of relatedness, seeks to negotiate a coherent order which incorporates other and self. Such an integration is described by Montaigne in his *Essais*. The communities of belief constructed by the self, and the harmonious orders it negotiates, enable the transactions and exchanges for which Septimus and the Proustian self are seeking, and establish the relatedness between self and other sought by James and Lily. The relationships which *A la recherche* and *To the*

*Lighthouse* ultimately negotiate are different in form to those in Montaigne: the shared beliefs and flexible hierarchies depicted in the *Essais* are replaced by less closely-defined orders and communities. However, the Montaignean self-other relations embody the principles of integration and communication which the modernist selves in Proust and Woolf strive to attain, and in this sense the modernist writers move towards, rather than developing or reworking, the model of subjectivity presented by Montaigne.

The relationship between the model of subjectivity elaborated in Montaigne, and the self-other dialectics represented in Proust and Woolf, therefore, finally travels in two directions at once. At one level, the movement from Montaigne to Proust to Woolf describes a trajectory of increasing detachment from external communities, and an increasing installation of the self as the source, and as an agent in the construction, of its own identity. In this sense, Proust and Woolf pull away from Montaigne, and seek to develop and modify his agenda according to changing visions and priorities. At the same time, however, the modernist selves depicted by Proust and Woolf, isolated or excluded from the world beyond themselves, seek to retrieve a measure of contact with the wider communities and external realities from which they have become disjunct. The integrated orders constructed in the *Essais*, therefore, licensing and situating subjective vision at once, stand both as their point of departure, and as their goal.

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