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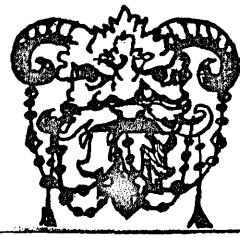

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Lautréamont's Outrageous Text: Language as Weapon and Victim in the Chants de Maldoror

Published in 1869, Lautréamont's Chants de Maldoror enjoyed little success until resurrected by the Surrealists and hailed as an exemplary surrealist text. But this revival was brief, and the Chants fell back into obscurity until recently proclaimed by "textualist" critics (Kristeva, Sollers, etc.) as exemplary of modernist écriture. Why such short bursts of popularity? Why is this work still omitted from most anthologies of French literature?

The Chants de Maldoror has long been considered an inaccessible and even unreadable text for reasons of structure as well as of content. The work is composed of six Chants, or cantos, containing five to sixteen "strophes" each and recounting seemingly unrelated incidents of violence and perversions. While our response to a literary text is always colored by our personal experiences, our social, economic, and political context--"the reader brings to the text certain expectations which are the result of his culture"[1]--the nearly universal response to the Chants de Maldoror is outrage, disgust, and horror. For, indeed, who would not be offended and outraged by the violence and perversity of Lautréamont's subjects: incest, rape, seduction of innocents, torture, mutilation, blasphemy, etc. Our cultural grid, which includes our system of values and our understanding of a logical order, is turned upside down and shattered by Lautréamont. None of our experiences--literary, cultural or otherwise--can provide any stable point of reference to help us overcome the feelings of revulsion and disorientation provoked by this work. The litany of taboos and horrors, the perversely fantastic characters and events which make of the Chants a

kind of twisted fairy tale, transgress all bounds of decency.

It is on this level of content that the outrageous nature of the Chants is first evident. But the very composition of the Chants is outrageous, even monstrous, in that it manifests a certain unclassifiable crossing of genres: narrative, commentary, allegory, parable, poetry, novel, critique, and drama are all intertwined. In addition, time, space, and character have new meaning: events are commented on before they occur and the narrator, who is both je and il, is both ici and là-bas, in and out of the "plot." Indeed, a study of the work's internal structure reveals that, far beyond the unspeakable images, events, and construction that characterize the work, it is Lautréamont's language, his manipulation (use and abuse) of language that is the work's most outrageous element. It is not merely what he says but how he says it; as Chaleil tells us, " . . . le renversement de l'ordre établi ne s'opère plus simplement au niveau de simples phénomènes, mais aussi, comme le dit Playnet, "à celui des structures linguistiques.'"[2] Lautréamont liberates language from rhetorical and referential limitations. This liberation, this change of meaning which is simultaneously destruction and creation, is accomplished not merely by a certain choice of words but by the very organization of the words and of the Chants as a cohesive, organic whole. This work, where words no longer function merely as referents, is a "cri contre le langage-prison";[3] words take on new (not merely extended) meanings and functions within the context of the whole.

Change of meaning takes place in the very first lines of the Chants but, ironie suprême, the reader cannot be aware of this change until the entire work has been read.

> Plût au ciel que le lecteur, enhardi et devenu momentanément féroce comme ce qu'il lit, trouve, sans se désorienter,

> son chemin abrupt et sauvage, à travers les marécages désolés de ces pages sombres et pleines de poison; . . . Par conséquent, âme timide, avant de pénétrer plus loin dans de pareilles landes inexplorées, dirige tes talons en arrière et non en avant.

The beginning not only anticipates the end, but depends on it for its impact. In the very first line, by invoking le ciel the poet invokes none other than himself, for the entire text is the experience of the genius poet who, by the supreme power of his language, makes himself the "Tout Puissant." This initial twist is one of the most outrageous and most spectacular, for here the end precedes the beginning. This, however, is not understood by the reader until the "end" when it is too late, so the beginning remains off-center and sets the tone for the entire text. A sense of balance emerges only as we penetrate further into the "landes inexplorées," but it is a sense of balance that is, at best, precarious. Aware of this and of what is to come, the poet flaunts his superior knowledge and power by invoking himself as "protector" of the reader. This initial deception is also one of the cruelest, for the reader has not yet been taught to "trouve[r] . . . son chemin . . ." and is clearly defenseless. We are duped from the beginning, led to believe that the poet is addressing an outside, superior force to warn us, while all the time he is addressing himself, and his solemn tone of concern is but a silent, mocking laugh. Indeed, the "warning" to the reader constitutes an invitation, even a tease, that piques the reader's curiosity and lures him into this texte piégé. This is the first of many such warnings/seductions that spur curiosity mixed with fear and a sense of foreboding--a nameless sensation.

Nowhere is the effect of Lautréamont's language more striking than in Chant II, strophe 6, ("Cet enfant, qui est assis sur un banc du jardin des

Tuileries, comme il est gentil!"), the strophe on ruse, in which saying is doing. In this strophe--which is a transformation of Chant I, strophe 11 (" ("Une famille entoure une lampe . . .") and a premonition of the fatal seduction of Mervyn in Chant VI--the poet demonstrates the power of his language on an innocent child whom he is warning against the wickedness of mankind and of the necessity of being armed against attacks. The ruse which he advocates here as "le plus bel instrument des hommes de génie, une arme mortelle, un pouvoir transformateur" is the very language which he is using to illustrate the notion of ruse. The power of the ruse to transform is evident in the animalisation of the child by Maldoror's words:

> Maldoror s'aperçoit que le sang bouillonne dans la tête de son jeune interlocuteur; ses narines sont gonflées, et ses lèvres rejettent une légère écume blanche. Il lui tâte le pouls; les pulsations sont précipitées. La fièvre a gagné ce corps délicat.

Maldoror does not accomplish this transformation of the child by describing or giving examples of a ruse; rather, the best illustration of ruse is its demonstration, its use. As in the liminal strophe where the "warning" to the reader seduces him into the text, the attack on the innocent child is accomplished within the warning against such attacks. Meaning is reversed, the performative is twisted, and the unarmed child is the victim of the warning against the very attack he suffers, the victim of ruse in action. The "meaning" of the words is subverted by their utterance and the child, like the language used, is transformed. There is no longer any distance between notion and action: Maldoror uses ruse to define ruse, and the child learns the power of ruse by being subjected to it, by becoming its victim. In this way, the whole strophe is a

kind of performative[4] in which saying is doing; the only subject of the strophe is, then, the very language which constitutes it. The double twist of language is as outrageous as is the effect of the language on the child, for it leaves us helplessly suspended in a kind of limbo where words no longer merely "mean" but "do."

As effective as this is in this early stage of the Chants, it becomes even more so as the text evolves, especially in Chant VI when another innocent child, Mervyn, is similarly transformed but by the written word, by the letter from Maldoror:

> Mervyn est dans sa chambre; il a reçu une missive . . . Il jette la missive de côté. . . . la curiosité de Mervyn s'accroît et il ouvre le morceau de chiffon préparé. . . . Des larmes abondantes coulent sur les curieuses phrases que ses yeux ont dévorées, et qui ouvrent à son esprit le champ illimité des horizons incertains et nouveaux. Il lui semble (ce n'est que depuis la lecture qu'il vient de terminer) que son père est un peu sévère et sa mère trop majestueuse. . . . Ses professeurs ont observé que ce jour-là il n'a pas ressemblé à lui-même; ses yeux se sont assombris démesurément, et le voile de la réflexion excessive s'est abaissé sur la région péri-orbitaire. (Chant VI, Chapter iii)

The notion of performative language is thus expanded from the spoken word to the written word, and there is no distance between writing/reading and doing. The written word, a transformation of the verbal ruse, is l'arme of the genius poet that is capable of transforming and destroying the reader, as well as language and meaning.

This change in the capacity of words from "meaning" to "doing" is evident in strophe 12 of

Chant II ("O Créateur de l'univers . . .") where the notion of prayer is degraded in and by a "prayer." The traditional beginning and end formulas ("O Créateur . . . Ainsi soit-il") are its only "prayer" elements, and they are emptied of meaning by the "prayer" itself which these formulas bracket. The prayer destroys itself as it is prayed, and the abusive degradation of the prayer becomes itself the prayer. The terms "O Créateur" and "Ainsi soit-il," far from attaching this "prayer" to any notion of reverence, make it all the more blasphemous. These formulas are instead "syllabes sonores," and make of the passage a kind of exemplary non-prayer; the real prayer is the denouncing of prayer. Lautréamont's language manages here to destroy a revered notion and formula, to empty the word "prayer" of any meaning, and to elevate degradation to a level of prayer. The reversal is complete and doubly outrageous in that a formula of reverence is used to mock and degrade that very reverence.

Throughout the Chants, Lautréamont demonstrates the capacity of his language to destroy meaning, and this very demonstration is the glorification of his own supremacy. In this outrageous text, ruse and prayer, weapon and victim, saying and doing, exaltation and degradation exist beyond any notion of polarity. The poet's weapon--his language--destroys any system of values founded on opposites and puts these "opposites" on the same level, where the supreme value is the glorification of the very process which destroys polarity, where opposites are not mutually exclusive, where words are eviscerated of their meaning, and where the process illustrates and exalts itself.

This power to transform meaning, and the resultant tension within the reader and the language itself, is particularly striking in the haunting strophe of the omnibus, where it is a question of both a frantic pursuit and a desperate inability to move:

Il est minuit; on ne voit plus un seul omnibus de la Bastille à la Madeleine. Je me trompe; en voilà un qui apparaît subitement, comme s'il sortait de dessous terre. . . . L'omnibus, pressé d'arriver à la dernière station, dévore l'espace, et fait craquer le pavé . . . Il s'enfuit! . . . Mais, une masse informe le poursuit avec acharnement, sur ses traces, au milieu de la poussière. Il s'enfuit! . . . il s'enfuit! . . . Mais, une masse informe le poursuit avec acharnement, sur ses traces, au milieu de la poussière. (Chant II, strophe 4)

The entire strophe plays on the tension between the pitiful child's desire and inability to catch up with the bus: the more desperate and frenzied his pursuit, the more firmly rooted in place he remains. However, despite the child's pursuit and the rapidly receding bus that "dévore l'espace," this strophe is not full of movement but is, instead, paralyzed. Everything is tension, immobility, suspension in a kind of eternal midnight that is reflected and emphasized by the repeated return to the refrain, "Il s'enfuit! . . . Mais une masse informe le poursuit avec acharnement . . . ." Lautréamont destroys the ordinary meaning of words in a uniquely outrageous way in this strophe, for while it is charged with words of movement, of agitation, of frustrated activity, these very words communicate immobility and silence, and do so with an exactness and a precision that could not be communicated by words designating absence of movement. Here, words of pursuit, action, and movement do not express these activities but rather negate them, demonstrating the poet's power to reverse things and to empty words of their usual meaning: the child runs but gets nowhere; the bus drives away but doesn't disappear over the horizon until the child stumbles and falls. Just as in the strophe of

the prayer, where the negation of prayer is the prayer par excellence, here the words of movement create an absence, indeed a negation, of movement, and finally destroy the very notion of movement. Words have been disconnected from their usual meaning, and it is precisely this subversion of meaning that creates and sustains the terrible, haunting quality of this strophe (we are now far beyond both the simple image of a pathetic child pursuing a bus, and the familiar nightmare of trying to run and being unable to move). The refrain "Il s'enfuit!" rivets us, at every reprise, more firmly in place. Indeed, this cry, whose urgency is underscored by the frequent repetitions, exclamation marks, and ellipsis points, is chillingly silent and evokes vivid memory of Edvard Munch's "The Scream"--the very essence of terror, beyond the human voice. So transformed is the language that we do not feel sympathy for the child but actually participate in his terror; the reader's heartbeat races with the child's, whose pursuit of the ever-receding bus may be seen as analogous to the reader's pursuit of ever-changing meaning.

This transforming power of Lautréamont's language and his glorification of himself is nowhere more evident than in the strophe of the scarabée, which evolves into the description of a horrible, unnamable monster, a unique creation/creature that resembles nothing else in the world. The strophe, like the monster it describes and like Lautréamont's entire work, is a "combinaison particulière,"[5] a mélange of genres, a unique and unrepeatable cross-breeding of several different species. The monster, which Lautréamont qualifies as "beau," is the manifestation of the poet's destructive-creative ability; what is monstrous is beautiful in this "marécage"/universe of reversed values, and what is beautiful is what the poet writes. This strophe, then, is the manifestation of this monstrous language that glorifies itself. This passage of "beau comme" is meta-

morphosed in the same strophe ("Le grand-duc de Virginie, beau comme un mémoire sur la courbe que décrit un chien en courant après son maître . . .") and later in the celebrated Chant VI, chapter i:

> Il est beau comme la rétractilité des serres des oiseaux rapaces; ou encore, comme l'incertitude des mouvements musculaires dans les plaies des parties molles de la région cervicale postérieure; ou plutôt, comme ce piège à rats perpétuel . . . et surtout, comme la rencontre fortuite sur une table de dissection d'une machine à coudre et d'un parapluie!

Philippe Sollers has noted that what is beau here is the strophe itself; it is compared to itself since it has no equal (equivalent) outside.[6] Furthermore, the terms "comme" and "ou plutôt" and "et surtout"--found, in changing order, in each of the "beau comme" passages--do not separate the elements of the "comparison" in order to distinguish them from each other, but rather propel the passages, function as verbs to motivate the transformation of each element into the next. "Beau" and "comme," their usual meanings and functions destroyed, combine to create a new "verb" that charges the passage with movement and activity.

This transformation of such basic linguistic elements as "comme," "ou plutôt," etc. is a continuation of the formula set in motion in Chant IV, strophe 1 ("C'est un homme ou une pierre ou un arbre qui va commencer le quatrième chant . . .") where the "ou" is not proof of Lautréamont's indecision or indifference, as Marcel Jean would have us believe,[7] nor a word that separates and maintains as different the three elements involved here, but rather a word that transforms "homme" into "pierre" and "pierre" into "arbre," much as "deux piliers" are transformed

into "deux baobabs" later in the same Chant. These transformations/destructions prepare us for the ultimate one, where Falmer, by a prolonged projection of the last syllable of his name (which recalls the "mère" of the liminal strophe), is transformed into Mervyn and finally into a fronde, the final metamorphosis of the innocent child seduced, victimized, and tortured by the language of the poet. Mervyn's fate is sealed when he reads Maldoror's letter. The spectacle of Mervyn--"squelette desséché, resté suspendu" (Chant VI, viii)--on the dome of the Panthéon provokes, in the students of the Latin Quarter, a prayer that they may escape the same fate. Their prayer, however, is hollow, no more than "des bruits insignifiants," a transformation but repetition of the meaningless "syllabes sonores" of the "prayer" we have already discussed.

Throughout the Chants, Lautréamont's language functions as a weapon that changes, even mutilates, its victims. The entire work is the manifestation of this process in action, a prolonged demonstration of the poet's capacity to transform through the use of his language/weapon. The innocence of the victims intensifies the outrageousness of the crimes committed against them, and not the least of the victims is language itself. Lautréamont's mutilation of language, his changing of the meaning and function of words into something (horribly) other, is far more outrageous than the litany of monsters and horror which he creates, for it leaves us helpless and disoriented; our own familiar and reliable sense of language provides us no security against the vertiginous current of the text. Lautréamont's mutilation of language is indeed his most monstrous creation. Impossible to classify according to genre, the Chants de Maldoror is a beautiful monster, one that creates in us a feeling which is itself beyond language; appropriately, there exists no word for this feeling of outraged admiration, of speechless, horrified wonder.

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Notes

[1] Peter Nesselroth, Lautréamont's Imagery: A Stylistic Approach (Genève: Droz, 1969), p. 115.

[2] Chaleil, Introduction, Entretiens, no. 30 (1971), p. 33.

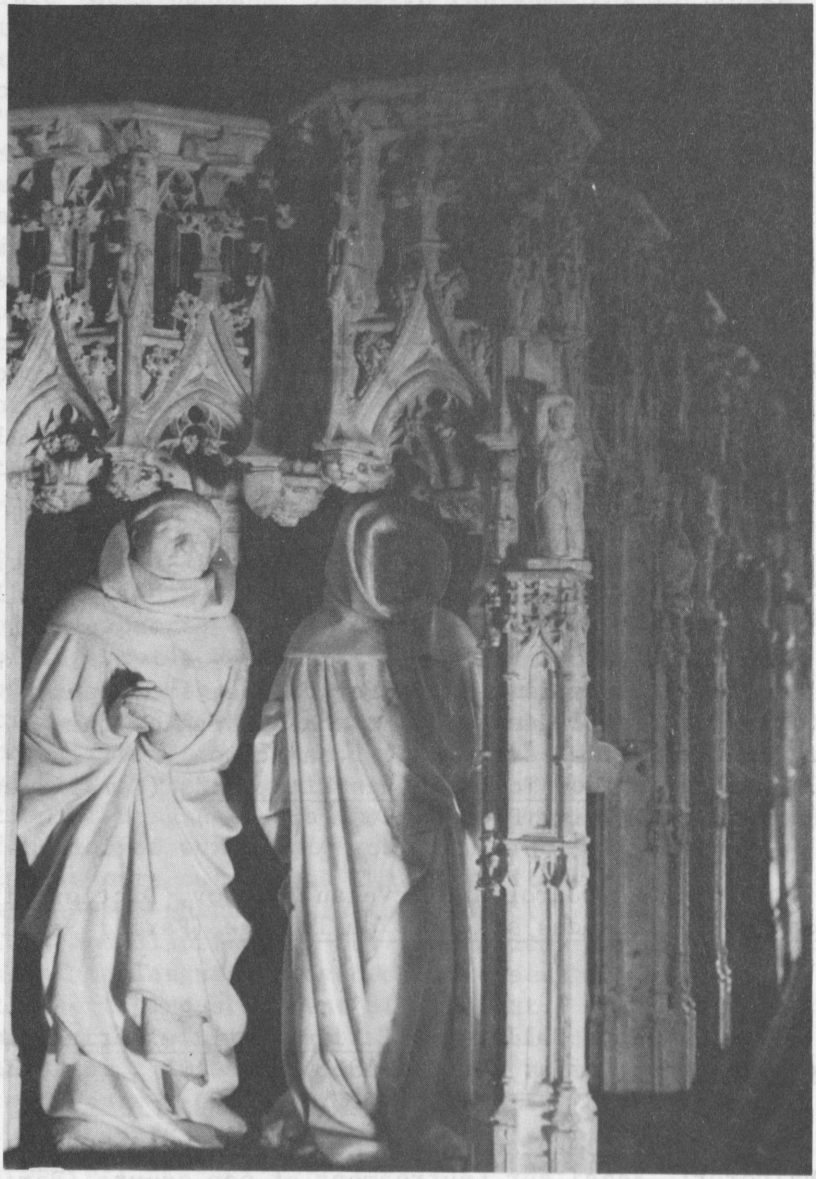
[3] J. M. G. Le Clézio, Introduction, Oeuvres complètes de Lautréamont (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), p. 9.

[4] "The name is derived, of course, from 'perform' . . . it indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action . . ." J. L. Austin, How To Do Things With Words (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), pp. 6-7.

[5] Oswald Ducrot and Tzvetan Todorov, Dictionnaire encyclopédique des sciences du langage (Paris: Seuil, 1972), p. 352.

[6] Philippe Sollers, L'Ecriture et l'expérience des limites (Paris: Seuil, 1968).

[7] Marcel Jean and Arpad Meizi, Les Chants de Maldoror: Essai sur Lautréamont et son oeuvre (Paris: Editions du Pavois, 1947), p. 140.



The Rhetoric of Self-Deprecation in Montaigne's Essais

Although it may seem far-fetched to draw comparisons between Michel de Montaigne's Essais and the twentieth-century French nouveau roman, the two do have certain elements in common if one considers the question of form and the role of the reader. In the nouveau roman, for example, virtually all the structural principles which traditionally determine the shape of the novel are undermined, thus creating the illusion of an unfinished product that the reader is induced to complete. The writer's purpose in part is to engage the reader in the creative process; should he fail to do so, the novel would not "work." Confusion and uneasiness seem to be the inevitable consequences of the reader's active role in bridging the gaps left by the novelist.

Likewise, the essay provides a dynamic framework within which both the writer and his reader can interact freely. Frederick Rider, author of Psychological Development in the Essays of Michel de Montaigne, characterizes it as an "easy" form requiring "no sustained effort" on the part of the writer, thereby "allowing him to choose his own time, topic, and approach"; it is "informal, or could easily be made to seem so . . . ."[1] Anyone who has read even a few of the essays will recognize that Montaigne is as interested in examining himself as he is the topics indicated by his titles. His essays appear to exude a certain nonchalance; they give us the impression of an aimless wandering of his thoughts as he scrutinizes himself, his own opinions and those "qui sont en usage"[2] (which are usually the target of much of his criticism), as well as philosophical, political and social questions, from every possible angle. He expands only

to contract, obscures only to elucidate, and all the while constrains the reader to do the same.

Montaigne's choice of the essay as his genre was undoubtedly a reaction to the "sec dogmatisme"[3] of his predecessors against which he protests so frequently. By constantly digressing and changing perspective he is able to break out of that rigid mold and foster interaction with his reader. Ian Winter, in Montaigne's Self-Portrait and its Influence in France, 1580-1630, contends that "Montaigne is, by his own admission, indirect and devious when it comes to the overall structure of the essay," suggesting that Montaigne's digressiveness is "highly supportive of spontaneity in self-portraiture."[4] Although Montaigne constantly insists that "je n'ai pas corrigé . . . par force de la raison mes complexions naturelles, et n'ai aucunement troublé par art mon inclination. Je me laisse aller, comme je suis venu . . ." (III, 12, 426), most critics agree that his essays were reworked and corrected as well as expanded. Rider states that "In his efforts to better express the truth, Montaigne does not shun either careful revisions or stylistic flourishes" (Rider, 103). But by understating his skill as an artist, he remains at the "human" level and consequently becomes more creditable.

The true challenge for the reader lies in dealing with the fragmentation of the self-portrait and of the subjects being treated, and in reconciling the many Montaignes within each individual essay. Wolfgang Iser describes the relationship between writer and reader in his book The Implied Reader, explaining that the writer must "activate the reader's imagination in order to involve him and realize the intentions of his text,"[5] and furthermore, that "one of the most potent weapons in the writer's armory is illusion" (Iser, 284). While such comments may seem more applicable to modern works of fiction that lend themselves to reader-response criticism, the concept also works for

Montaigne, for deception plays a major role in the Essais. The persona presented in the essays is regularly undercut by another self that Montaigne is striving to reveal. If there is some "activation" of the reader's imagination, then its source must be found in this opposition.

Such is the literary paradox in Montaigne's work: the "personal, egotistical element is strong in the self-portrait, yet intensive efforts are made to gain, or to appear to gain, objectivity" (Winter, 15). The principal method by which Montaigne attempts to achieve this unbiased demeanor is self-deprecation. It is difficult not to notice its presence, especially in light of its heavy concentration in the first few paragraphs of many of the essays. An initial reading of these essays certainly will reveal one of the faces of Montaigne: the honest, overly-sensitive down-to-earth Montaigne whose self-esteem seems uncommonly low and who apparently has absolutely nothing to flaunt. A closer reading, however, should divulge another side of the persona: the intelligent, self-conscious, analytical Montaigne who is confident that in admitting his weaknesses, he will reveal his strength of character. By appearing to be unbiased he he hopes to gain the reader's trust and cooperation; by continually frustrating our image of him, he immerses us in the relentless analysis of himself and of mankind. He camouflages the persona of strength and firm belief with a veil of modesty and weakness. By examining the preface and the beginnings of two essays, "Des Menteurs" and "De l'Institution des enfants," we will see how the interaction between the "faces" of Montaigne ultimately disturbs the reader's perception of the writer and of the intent of his book.[6]

Montaigne's first sentence in his preface, "C'est ici un livre de bonne foi, lecteur" (20) in effect exemplifies his attitude toward his reader, for among his aims is that of convincing us that what he writes is the truth, that what we will

see portrayed is the real, natural Montaigne, "tout entier, et tout nu" (20). Rider comments that "the motive force of his style is precisely the desire to be believed" (Rider, 97). It follows, then, that if Montaigne seeks to paint a true-to-life portrait, he must incorporate both his weaknesses and his strengths. He apparently feels that in order to be believed, he must underscore his flaws, his "humanness," for if he painted an immaculate portrait, his work would lose verisimilitude, which would in turn reduce his power to influence the reader. In the preface he insists almost immediately that "je ne m'y suis proposé aucune fin que domestique et privée. Je n'y ai eu nulle considération de ton service, ni de ma gloire" (20), and that his book is destined only for those relatives and friends who might wish to remember "aucuns traits de mes conditions et humeurs" (20). He would like us to believe that a "public" neither exists nor concerns him, swearing that his powers "ne sont pas capables d'un tel dessein" (20), affirming that "Si c'eût été pour rechercher la faveur du monde, je me fusse mieux paré et me présenterais en une marche étudiée" (20). Instead of stating what he really wants to say, "je ne recherche pas la faveur du monde," he uses the pluperfect subjunctive and the si clause construction to suggest that the situation is contrary to fact. We are supposed to take Montaigne's word that nothing about his character will be disguised; moreover, his defects "s'y liront au vif" (20). This technique of self-reduction tightens the bond between Montaigne and his reader. The Essais represent not an autobiography dedicated to posterity, but a conscious, though subtle, "essay" to establish his value by lauding his imperfections.

Henri Peyre, in Literature and Sincerity, discusses Montaigne's awareness of the dialectical process of thought, stating that Montaigne

> realized that some passiveness was required from him who claimed to study himself in his becoming, or else too much activity, too conscious a use of will power would transform and deform the object observed by the subject. At the same time, Montaigne understood that a searching self-analysis is a corroding agent, whittling away many illusions and delusions. He strove for some equilibrium, and he justified his desire for sincerity through his purpose as a moralist. The dilemma was for him whether to stress all that in him was mediocre or base, so as to be easily content with his own, and man's, imperfections, or to depict himself as somewhat nobler than he was, so as to attempt aiming higher and thus to improve others.[7]

The advantage of Montaigne's decision to highlight his mediocrity is this: we, as readers, can identify with imperfection much more easily than with flawlessness. Montaigne resolves the dilemma described by Peyre by relying on reverse psychology; by attempting to prove how ignoble he is, he will ultimately prove his nobility. What appears to be excessive modesty is merely a ploy which a close examination of his style will betray. As Alfred Clauser puts it in Montaigne Paradoxal, "Ses modesties affectées sont des modesties créatrices. Le doute sur soi-même prend corps et renverse le doute."[8] If Montaigne were being honest about his intentions concerning the Essais, if he really did want to leave an explanation of his character to his friends and family, then a closing statement

like "Ce n'est pas raison que tu emploies ton loisir en un sujet si frivole et si vain" (20) would be unnecessary. Such an unobtrusive statement put so well only challenges the attentive reader to forge ahead, not to toss the book aside. If he believes that claim, then he probably also believes Montaigne when he claims to be "sans contention et artifice" (20). The separation of truth from illusion is by far the most complex and intriguing aspect of the reading process.

Wayne Booth quotes François Mauriac's statement that "an author who assures you that he writes for himself alone and that he does not care whether he is heard or not is a boaster and is deceiving either himself or you."[9] In truth Montaigne does have something he considers significant to declare to the world.[10] Structurally speaking, self-deprecation at the beginning of the essay enables Montaigne to establish an easygoing, congenial rapport with his reader, so that his expression of moral judgments, which intensifies as the essay progresses, often goes unnoticed by the unsuspecting reader. In terms of style, we will see that Montaigne is almost constantly contradicting himself, so that the reader has difficulty knowing what to believe about the writer's knowledge and reliability. Barbara Bowen discusses these characteristics of the essays at length, assuring us that Montaigne's

> constant self-denigration . . . has a sound moral pretext--if we are led to sympathize with him, we shall be more likely to accept his moral outlook. Ambiguity arises only when we fail to distinguish between his attitude to the problem discussed, which is invariably quite straightforward, and his attitude to the reader, which is often falsely

> humble and self-deprecating. He often, in fact, deliberately deceives the reader rather than merely disconcerts him.[11]

Thus the reader is left to wander in a labyrinth, never sure whether to trust or to doubt.

The technique of affected modesty is hardly one of Montaigne's inventions. According to Ernst Robert Curtius, author of European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, it was frequently used by Roman orators in their exordia to put their listeners in a "favorable, attentive, and tractable state of mind."[12] Such modesty formulae were later adopted during pagan and Christian Late Antiquity and appear in medieval Latin and vernacular literature (Curtius, 83). The use of a mask enables the writer to manipulate the reaction of the reader.[13] Montaigne, too, strives for his reader's acceptance by building a protective wall of self-deprecation around himself; he even admits in a later essay that "La confession généreuse et libre énerve le reproche et désarme l'injure" (III, 9, 395). It is also an invaluable rhetorical device. Once Montaigne has submerged the reader in his subjectivity, he can then slip easily into a more objective mode and express his ideas on a particular subject.

Numerous critics have elaborated upon Montaigne's unpretentious attitude, and some have even labeled it false. But few have examined the text of a specific essay closely enough to speculate as to what makes it deceptive. In opening "Des Menteurs," for example, Montaigne sets out to prove that he is unique by demonstrating harsh self-criticism: "Il n'est homme à qui il sièse si mal de se mêler de parler de mémoire. Car je n'en reconnais quasi trace en moi, et ne pense qu'il y en ait au monde une autre si monstrueuse en défaillance" (30). The accumulation of negations and the adjective "monstrueuse" enable him to destroy any confidence we may have had

in Montaigne's ability to remember. Yet it also makes us realize that this is a man who knows himself well and who is daring enough to show his reader the negative side of his personality. Our acknowledgement of that fact somehow brightens the dark portrait he has ostensibly begun to paint. By stating that "je n'en reconnais quasi trace en moi" he is also affirming his cognizant capabilities; he is able to recognize that he does not recognize, as it were. Likewise, strategically placed at the end of the opening paragraph we find "Mais en cette-là je pense être singulier et très rare, et digne de gagner par là nom et réputation" (30). Thus, though he is "monstrous" in terms of his memory, he is at the same time superior and rare, worthy of our consideration rather than our repudiation. By denouncing himself, he manages to indirectly praise himself, or, as Glauser puts it, "S'il admet un manque, il affirme en même temps une vertu, celle qui consiste à avouer ce manque" (Glauser, 39). Peyre likens Montaigne's point of view to that of Rousseau, explaining that

> almost as much as Rousseau, albeit with keener humor, he considered himself as unique and took pride in it. Unweariedly he recurred to the strangeness that he detected in himself and to the puzzle that, to others as well as to himself, he was bound to constitute. Stressing that strange uniqueness, however, can come perilously close to boastfulness . . . (Peyre, 39).

Only by reverting to self-deprecation can Montaigne prevent himself from breaking the equilibrium that he must maintain.

The second paragraph begins by reiterating the the idea of a suffering Montaigne, whose "inconvénient naturel" (30) is out of his control. Soon thereafter, we see the other side of the coin, the knowledgeable

Montaigne, who feels capable of judging Plato ("Plato a raison . . .") as well as the notion that he who lacks in sense must likewise lack in memory. The juxtaposition of this appraisal and the preceding criticism of his memory would logically lead the reader to conclude that Montaigne, must, therefore, have no sense. He subsequently disproves this, however, blaming them (those unnamed others) for misreading him. He uses "comme si" with the imperfect to strike down any doubt about his judgmental capabilities ("comme si je m'accusais d'être insensé . . .") (30). For Montaigne there is a clear distinction between "mémoire et entendement," but not for those whom he accuses; it is they who "me font tort," for "il se voit par expérience"--he must be a wise and experienced man--"que les mémoires excellentes se joignent volontiers aux jugements débiles" (30). It is up to the reader to fill in the gaps and conclude that Montaigne's judgment must be excellent, given what he has told us about his memory.

The defensive tone continues throughout this paragraph, as Montaigne attempts to clarify his position with respect to his enemies. He reveals their presumed perception of him by visualizing himself through their eyes, referring to himself repeatedly in the third person. By repeating the subject pronoun "il" at the beginning of a series of choppy sentences, he is able both to mock and to defy their unfounded accusations: "Il a oublié, dit-on, cette prière ou cette promesse. Il ne se souvient point de ses amis. Il ne s'est point souvenu de dire, ou faire, ou taire cela pour l'amour de moi" (30). The echo of the conjunction "ou" also emphasizes the scope of their insinuations. Montaigne proffers a stylistic display of power here that seems quite foreign to the lamenting passivity that dominated the first few sentences of the essay. He has abandoned self-criticism in order to blame someone else.

Montaigne increasingly tells us what he is not; he is not, for example, blinded by ambition, "un mal pire qui se fût facilement produit en moi" (30), but

which was not produced in him, for he is unique. While nature has neglected to refine his memory, she has strengthened other faculties. Montaigne reverses the criticism of his memory by stating that if he had been able to remember the ideas of others, his judgment might have waned, following "couchant et alanguissant . . . sur les traces d'autrui, comme fait le monde." He has thus elevated himself above "le monde" while affirming that a feeble memory is not at all a negative quality. His speech is "plus court, car le magasin de la mémoire est volontiers plus fourni de matière que n'est celui de l'invention; si elle m'eût tenu bon, j'eusse assourdi tous mes amis de babil" (30). Once again we find that criticizing other men's memories which are burdened by superfluous details permits Montaigne to praise himself, and we almost forget our initial perception of his monstrosity. What we must extract from this image-laden passage is that since Montaigne's memory is not good, he does not deafen his friends "de babil." It is they, rather, who misuse their memories and "reculent si arrière leur narration et la chargent de vaines circonstances que si le conte est bon ils en étouffent la bonté" (30). It is ironic to note, too, that in condoning brevity and directness of speech, Montaigne creates one of the most lyrical, dynamic (considering the abundance of active verbs) passages in the entire essay. The resurgence of Montaigne the poet once again widens the gap between theory and practice.

This particular passage also marks a turning point in the movement of the essay; henceforth it becomes more and more didactic in tone. A moralizing Montaigne emerges and gradually supplants the introspective, self-critical Montaigne who dominated the beginning of the essay. Now he sets himself up as an expert on the subject of lying, emphasizing his broad experience in interpreting the actions of mankind, and stating on several occasions, for example "De quoi j'ai souvent vu l'expérience . . ." (31), and "J'ai vu plusieurs de mon temps . . ." (31), and

"Je trouve qu'on s'amuse ordinairement à châtier aux enfants . . ." (31) as well as making bold philosophical judgments which seem to reflect general truths about life and human behavior: "En vérité, le mentir est un maudit vice. Nous ne sommes hommes, et ne nous tenons les uns les autres que par la parole" (31) and "La menterie seule, et, un peu au-dessous, l'opiniâtreté, me semble être celles desquelles on devrait à toute instance combattre la naissance et le progrès" (31). Montaigne and all mindful readers should arm themselves to defend truth--a noble but ironic attitude in light of Montaigne's own paradoxical style.

The accumulation of so many absolute academic statements in the latter part of the essay will surely convince the reader of Montaigne's hatred of lying, and thus increase his credibility (Winter, 16), by implying that anyone who spurns prevarication to such a degree could by no means be misrepresenting himself. At least some of the tension that existed in the beginning has been released, as Montaigne forswears self-deprecation in order to elaborate upon examples illustrating his ideas about liars. The final impression we have of Montaigne is that of an almost superhuman person who could never bring himself to tell a lie, even in order to protect himself from danger: "Certes, je ne m'assure pas que je pusse venir à bout de moi à garantir un danger évident et extrême par un effronté et solennel mensonge" (31). Ironically, in creating the illusion of modesty, and subsequently reversing it, Montaigne has done precisely what he has been accusing others of doing--being hypocritical.

Although written seven or eight years after "Des Menteurs," the essay entitled "De l'Institution des enfants" manifests a remarkably similar process. Again the reader is bombarded at the beginning of the essay by self-deprecation, which is really the mask of a self-confident writer. Montaigne moves immediately from a generalization at the very beginning to a presumably modest, self-critical comment: "ce ne sont ici que rêveries d'homme qui

n'a goûté des sciences que la croûte première en son enfance, et n'en a retenu qu'un général et informe visage: un peu de chaque chose, et rien du tout, à la française" (72). The accumulation of negations and carefully chosen words expressing vagueness evokes an image of a dull, shallow mind which has retained virtually nothing from his education. However, the fact that this comment is preceded by "je vois, mieux que tout autre" neutralizes to a certain extent the negativity of the assessment, just as "en cette-là je pense être singulier et très rare" did in "Des Menteurs." The same sort of opposition may be identified in the following sentence, in which Montaigne begins with an affirmative "je sais qu'il y a . . ." and identifies specific examples of what he knows, but then adds, almost as if it were an afterthought, "et grossièrement à quoi elles visent" (72). The fact that the sentence concludes with "à l'aventure encore sais-je . . ." (72) increases the ambiguity, because Montaigne is once again expressing "je sais"; however, the "à l'aventure" that is tacked on weakens the affirmation and implies that what he knows, he knows only by chance. The element of chance plays an important role in this essay, functioning somewhat as nature did in "Des Menteurs" ("l'inconvénient naturel," "un défaut naturel"); both are convenient scapegoats for a writer who is not entirely serious about belittling himself. The rest of the paragraph pursues the development of the image of an ignorant, weak Montaigne, who is less knowledgeable than an "enfant des classes moyennes" (72) and who is "contraint assez ineptement de . . . tirer quelque matière de propos universel" (72) from his lessons. The addition of "si l'on m'y force" implies that he would not do it unless he were forced, and even when forced he does not do it well, but "ineptement." Montaigne's consistent use of indefinite expressions such as "quelque" and "quoi" throughout the paragraph reinforces his claim that his knowledge is both vague and worthless. He has successfully exploited all that he does not know, but has left untouched

exactly what he knows, holding his cards rather than playing them.

The second paragraph begins with "Je ne" as did the first, and perseveres in sketching a negative self-portrait. As we have seen before, he flits back and forth from self-negation to self-affirmation. His comment "Je n'ai dressé commerce avec aucun livre solide," is reversed by "sinon Plutarque et Séneque," and finally overturned again, forming a circular motion, with "où je puise comme les Danaïdes, remplissant et versant sans cesse" (72). Though he may put some of this down on paper, he retains none of it himself. Montaigne depicts himself here as a rather selfless, passive vehicle for the transmission of knowledge, a man whose work may benefit others but not himself. It goes almost without saying that this essay, as well as nearly all the others, confirms that Montaigne is as well-versed in the writers of Antiquity as any other sixteenth-century humanist. His contention that he has retained nothing is blatantly disproved by his adeptness at presenting the ideas of the great philosophers as self-consciously and judiciously as he does.

The other Montaigne, the proud one, who constantly strives to reveal himself, becomes more overt at this point, breaking into the self-criticism in order to explain why he likes poetry "d'une particulière inclination" (72). In his comparison of poetry to sound in a trumpet, Montaigne reveals both that he can be profoundly moved by literary language and that he himself is capable of translating his feelings into a powerful image. We are allowed to escape from Montaigne's subjective reality only momentarily, though, because he almost immediately returns to it, criticizing his own judgment, which "ne marche qu'à tâtons, chancelant, bronchant et chopant . . ." (72). The use of the present participle in this passage diffuses the image of faltering over time, and thus reinforces the idea of vagueness that Montaigne has so consistently attempted to establish. The same blurriness is

evoked in the description of Montaigne's visual acuity; he sees, "mais d'une vue trouble et en nuage, que je ne puis démêler" (72). He would like us to believe here that his life is spent groping about in a dense fog which obscures his perception. Montaigne must have realized that emphasizing his own ineptitude would also shield him from outside criticism.

The reader cannot help but ask himself at some point why he should pay attention to someone so lacking in self-esteem. After all, this is only Montaigne's "fantaisie" (73), and his text is witness to his changeability. But it is precisely this perpetual weaving about between self-diminution and self-praise that keeps the reader on his guard. Montaigne's position is rarely so unambiguous that the reader would simply lose interest; there is always the sneaking suspicion that this writer, who creates illusions only to break them, does know what he is talking about, and that truth is being warped somewhat in the name of rhetoric. Iser discusses the play of understatement and hyperbole in fiction, explaining how

> elements of the repertoire are continually backgrounded or foregrounded with a resultant strategic overmagnification, trivialization, or even annihilation of the allusion,

and how this affects the reader: "This defamiliarization of what the reader thought he recognized is bound to create a tension that will intensify his expectations and his distrust of those expectations" (Iser, 282). Though Montaigne may want us initially to see him as an obtuse individual, he makes sure that as the essay unfolds we are exposed to other facets of his character. The essays thrive on toying with our expectations.

Montaigne is obviously proud, for example, that

he has treated subjects that have already been treated by the Ancients; it happens "souvent" (elevation), but "il m'advient . . . de fortune" (lowering), and in comparison to them he is "si faible et si chétif, si pesant et si endormi" (73). The repetition of "si" reinforces his case against himself. On the other hand, he may lag behind them, but at least, he adds, he is heading in their direction. We must admire that, and also the fact that he has "cela, que chacun n'a pas, de connaître l'extrême différence d'entre eux et moi" (73), an observation that we have already seen in this essay and in "Des Menteurs." And while his ideas may be "faibles et basses"--which at this point is hard to believe--he does have the courage to write them down "comme je les ai produites, sans en replâtrer et recoudre les défauts que cette comparaison m'y a découverts" (73). He may deny hiding his faults, but he cannot deny the fact that he is proud of his humility. His rather ostentatious concluding sentence, "Il faut avoir les reins bien fermes pour entreprendre de marcher front à front avec ces gens-là" (73) may at first seem to be an honest assessment of how far removed from his idols he sees himself, but the way it is stated and the context in which it is found leaves open the possibility that he is attempting to walk abreast of them, if not indeed to surpass them.

The third paragraph contains another example of Montaigne's expertise in creating images. After a lengthy criticism of "les écrivains indiscrets de notre siècle" who stuff their "ouvrages de néant" with passages from the Ancients, Montaigne changes key without warning and describes how he happened upon--he would not want us to think that he were intelligent enough to have sought--a moving passage,

> au bout d'un long et ennuyeux chemin, . . . une pièce haute, riche et élevée jusques aux nues . . . c'était un précipice si droit et si coupé que . . . je m'envolais en l'autre monde; de là

> je découvris la fondrière d'où je venais, si basse et si profonde que je n'eus onques plus le coeur de m'y ravaler. (73)

The image is expanded so much and so poetically that the reader nearly forgets that Montaigne had been reprimanding indiscreet borrowing. Unlike the image of the trumpet at the beginning of this essay, which clarified his idea, this highly developed image manages only to "l'envelopper, l'embrouiller, lui donner des dimensions de rêve."[14] In a sense we, too, are elevated into "l'autre monde"; it is only once we are disengaged that we discover how tortuous the movement of the essay had become and how refined Montaigne's rhetoric can be, just as he suddenly discovers the depths to which the "paroles françaises . . . vides de matière et de sens" had led him. His "paroles françaises" here are as filled with emotion as the passage that he stumbled upon must have been. Here it is hard not to be impressed by the scope and plasticity of Montaigne's style.

Perhaps unfortunately, Montaigne plunges us abruptly back into his subject. When he states that "Si j'étoffais l'un de mes discours de ces riches dépouilles, il éclairerait par trop la bêtise des autres" (73), he is at once implying that he does not "stuff" his works (because of the si clause construction with the imperfect) and that they are foolish in the first place. It is almost ludicrous to think that the writer of such a lyrical passage in the preceding paragraph could label his work "bêtise." The juxtaposition of the poet and the "deprecator" renders the criticism even less convincing. As Peyre suggests, Montaigne "amorously polished his own statue after having appeared to hammer all its pieces asunder" (Peyre, 37).

One of the most noteworthy aspects of Montaigne's work is his adeptness at exploiting to the fullest extent the linguistic resources available to him. Language assists him on occasion in subtly

casting off the blame while appearing to blame himself. In stating "reprendre en autrui mes propres fautes ne me semble non plus incompatible que de reprendre, comme je fais souvent, celles d'autrui en moi" (73) he insulates himself from the faults; in the first clause he mentions "mes propres fautes," but they are "en autrui," not in himself. Likewise, in the second clause, it is the faults of "autrui" which are in him: they are not intrinsically his. In any case, he cautions that "il les faut accuser partout, et leur ôter tout lieu de franchise" (73). Personifying the faults allows him to be dogmatic without seeming to be; "il est dogmatique, mais paradoxalement, car il l'est avec lyrisme" (Glauser, "L'Education," p. 378). Statements using "il faut" and "que" with the subjunctive become more and more frequent as the essay progresses and as Montaigne situates himself more firmly on his authoritative pedestal. Now he says that he attempts "audacieusement," not occasionally, but "à tous coups" to "m'égaler à mes larcins, d'aller pair à pair quant et eux" (73), a much different stance from that taken earlier when he staggered behind them. He also expresses a timid desire to "tromper les yeux des juges à les discerner . . ." (73), which contradicts his previous statement disavowing any disguise that might highlight the difference between his "inventions . . . faibles et basses" and those of his paragon, the Ancients.

Montaigne's consistent reversals seem to obliterate his portrait rather than elucidate it. In the same sentence he tears down the positive image that he has just created by adding "mais c'est autant par le bénéfice de mon application que par le bénéfice de mon invention et de ma force" (73). He now seems powerless and lethargic; his sentences overflow with negations: "je ne lutte point en gros . . .", "je ne m'y aheurte pas; je ne fais que les tâter; et ne vais point tant comme je marchande d'aller" (73). Glauser's conclusion that

> le sujet n'est pas tant alors Montaigne que le personnage qu'il est en train de jouer: l'écrivain qui fait ses essais de 'honte.' Un moyen d'entrer dans l'oeuvre est de s'y présenter sous un jour défavorable qui engendre un jeu de contrastes" (40)

seems especially appropriate here. By the end of the paragraph, Montaigne has returned to his modest façade, implying that he is not an "honnête homme," nor can he "leur . . . tenir palot" (73). It is ironic that Montaigne's theory of education prescribes the formation of an "honnête homme," yet he claims not to be one himself. We must wonder about his expertise, as Glauser has: "Il nie le progrès, insiste sur l'ignorance, l'ineptie, la vanité de l'homme. C'est donc là le Montaigne qui va nous parler de pédagogie?" (Glauser, "L'Education," 376).

The accusatory tone which was noted in "Des Menteurs" also comes to the surface in this essay. Near the conclusion of this self-deprecatory introduction, Montaigne once again returns to the subject of "les écrivains indiscrets" which he suspended earlier, indicting those whom he has discovered attempting to "se couvrir des armes d'autrui jusques à ne montrer pas seulement le bout de ses doigts . . ." (73), calling it "injustice et lacheté" and charging them with trying to "se présenter par une valeur étrangère." We should include Montaigne in this category as well, since his entire self-portrait revolves around presenting himself by "valeurs étrangères."

At the end of the paragraph Montaigne will clearly distinguish himself from the "commun" group of undiscriminating borrowers, stating, quite bluntly: "De ma part, il n'est rien que ne veuille moins faire" (73). By stuffing the sentence with negations he forces the reader really to think about what the meaning is; a straightforward "Je ne le fais pas" would not "engage" us. The following

sentence could also be misleading; it begins with "je ne dis les autres," but continues with "sinon pour d'autant plus me dire." In other words, he borrows the ideas of the Ancients only in order to clarify his own position, which is undoubtedly much more important. His final comments in this paragraph about "centons" seem irrelevant and pretentious, and they demolish once and for all his earlier claim that he does not know books--now he takes pride in having seen "de très ingénieux en mon temps" (73).

On the verge of a transition, Montaigne leans once again toward the attitude of his preface, diminishing his artistic and judgmental capabilities and drowning his reader in a sea of inconclusiveness. However, he prefaces the defensive statement "je n'ai pas délibéré de les cacher" with "Quoi qu'il en soit . . . et quelles que soient ses inepties," making us wonder why, if his defects are as serious as he has led us to believe, he cannot seem to specify them now. The aim of this paragraph seems to be to revive the image of the honest, straightforward, imperfect Montaigne. Perhaps surprisingly, there are very few paradoxical statements here, probably due to the fact that he is about to embark upon the actual theory. This is, then, his final opportunity to denigrate himself before his dogmatic side comes to the fore. Now he insists, as he did in the preface, that "ce sont ici mes humeurs et opinions; je les donne pour ce qui est en ma créance, non pour ce qui est à croire . . ." (73). His seemingly modest mission to "découvrir moi-même" even has a double-edged meaning; he does indeed wish to "discover" and understand himself, but he also wants to "uncover" his character before his public. He would not want us to think that he aimed to display his pedagogical knowledge, however; instead, he suggests in very vague terms that someone else persuaded him to do it: "Quelqu'un donc, . . me disait chez moi, l'autre jour, que je me devais être un peu étendu sur le discours de l'institution des enfants," (emphasis mine), even though he has no authority

to do so: " . . . si j'avais quelque suffisance en ce sujet . . ." (73). His ulterior motive is masked by what appears to be a generous, unselfish gesture toward "ce petit homme qui . . . menace de faire tantôt une belle sortie . . ." (73). Montaigne then digresses into several personal comments addressed to Madame Diane de Foix, the mother of the "petit homme" to whom the essay is dedicated, all of which may have been appropriate, had she been the only reader he had in mind, but which seem irrelevant and even bothersome to anyone else. While it may have been a serious attempt on Montaigne's part to ingratiate himself with Mme de Foix, it also seems possible that he is digressing in order to minimize the discrepancy between the self-deprecation at the beginning of the paragraph and the audacious postulate at the conclusion: "la plus grande difficulté et importante de l'humaine science semble être en cet endroit où il se traite de la nourriture et institution des enfants" (73). Should we believe him when he says "Je n'ai point l'autorité d'être cru"? He knows, and we will find out as we continue to read, that what he has to say is not only meaningful in terms of the development of pedagogical theory, but perceptive as well. By now we should realize, on the other hand, that we cannot believe him, so in a rather twisted sense, he is being truthful.

Now that he has emphasized the difficulty of the undertaking, he will proceed to systematically expose how he envisions the instruction of children, and perhaps of mankind in general as well, proposing solutions to the problems of preceptors, books, exercise, retention, and many others, and definitions for such delicate philosophical subjects as knowledge, judgment, and virtue. It is interesting that this is the part of "De l'Institution des enfants" that is most often remembered and cited, perhaps because Montaigne's self-deprecation has mesmerized us.

These are not, as we have said, the only essays that manifest heavy doses of self-deprecation. The structure as well as the content of the essay

entitled "Des Livres" bears an almost uncanny resemblance to those of "De l'Institution des enfants," for example. Montaigne fills the first eight paragraphs with such statements as "Je ne fais point de doute qu'il ne m'advienne souvent de parler de choses qui sont mieux traitées chez les maîtres du métier et plus véritablement" (171), "ce sont ici mes fantaisies, par lesquelles je ne tâche point à donner à connaître les choses, mais moi" (171), and "il faut musser ma faiblesse sous ces grands crédits" (171). As a matter of fact, up to the point at which Montaigne begins reviewing books, the essay is little more than a recapitulation of the beginnings of the other two essays. A different technique is used in a later essay, "De la Présomption," in that self-deprecation is scattered throughout the text rather than concentrated at the beginning. This may be due to the fact that Montaigne has obviously focused on himself as the subject of the essay; in fact, it seems to be the first essay that deals overtly with self-portraiture.[15] And finally, even "L'Apologie de Raimond Sebond" expresses the idea that Montaigne puts into practice in writing his essays: man must recognize "qu'il est infiniment loin de la sagesse de Dieu, il doit être humble, et c'est précisément en s'humiliant qu'il s'élève."[16]

Many writers, both before and after Montaigne, have tried to convince their reader that what they write is the truth and nothing but. At the beginning of Le Père Goriot, for example, the Balzacian narrator insists that "ce drame n'est ni une fiction ni un roman. All is true, il est si véritable, que chacun peut en reconnaître les éléments chez soi, dans son coeur peut-être."[17] Montaigne is no different. Both writers are striving to reach the reader, to communicate with him, to touch his most sensitive nerve, and above all, to gain his trust.

Montaigne desperately needs an audience; in fact, his work is dependent upon it to function. On the surface, the technique seems simple: Montaigne lowers himself in the eyes of the reader, the reader

is lulled into believing and will consequently accept the ideas and opinions that are about to be presented. If the reader delves below the surface, however, he will find that the method is much more complex. A close analysis of the self-deprecation in the essays treated in this study reveals the constant vacillation in Montaigne's point of view, in his self-concept, and in his attitude toward his reader. This can only generate question after question about where Montaigne stands and what he actually believes. Superficially we may feel that we can trust him, and we may be impressed by his ideas and think that we know him, but at a more profound level Montaigne slips through our fingers. If it is true that Montaigne tends to "prendre la contrepartie d'une question" (Glauser, "L'Education, 377), then perhaps we cannot even take him seriously when the self-deprecation has dwindled and the approach seems straightforward. If we let ourselves be entrapped then perhaps his self-deprecation has been successful. And even if we investigate the text enough to suspect it, we still are left with nothing but fragments of a shattered self which Montaigne himself may have been unable to fit together.

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Notes

[1] Frederick Joy Rider, Psychological Development in the Essays of Michel de Montaigne (Santa Cruz: University of California Press, 1971), p. 26.

[2] Michel de Montaigne, Oeuvres Complètes, ed. Robert Barral, en collaboration avec Pierre Michel (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1967), p. 78. All

references to the Essais will be from this edition.

[3] Paul Porteau, Montaigne et la vie pédagogique de son temps (Paris: E. Droz, 1935). p. 299.

[4] Ian J. Winter, Montaigne's Self-Portrait and its Influence in France, 1580-1630 (Lexington, Kentucky: French Forum Publishers, 1976), p. 84.

[5] Wolfgang Iser, The Implied Reader (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), p. 282.

[6] Although the essays seem to defy categorization, there are a few, found primarily in Books I and II, that manifest this technique. "Des Menteurs" and "De l'Institution des enfants" have been chosen for close analysis because their concision and clarity of structure illustrate my thesis more easily than could be done using longer and more convoluted essays.

[7] Henri Peyre, Literature and Sincerity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), pp. 38-9.

[8] Alfred Glauser, Montaigne Paradoxal (Paris: A. G. Nizet, 1972), p. 36.

[9] Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 89.

[10] Glauser comments that Montaigne

> prétend écrire pour que ses proches aient de lui un portrait fidèle . . . Il sait qu'il n'écrit pas pour quelques lecteurs seulement, même s'il ne se donne pas pour exemple à suivre, mais plutôt pour exemple à éviter . . . L'ami lecteur qu'il imagine, c'est un lecteur qui participe à une vie inventée . . . Sa confession est d'ailleurs encouragée par ce public anonyme qui lui

donne toutes les audaces (36).

[11] Barbara C. Bowen, The Age of Bluff: Paradox and Ambiguity in Rabelais and Montaigne (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1972), p. 106.

[12] Ernst Robert Curtius, European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper and Row, 1953), p. 83.

[13] Hugo Friedrich also mentions the tradition of "la folie, 'locura'," which Spanish novelists "aiment prêter à l'un de leurs personnages pour lui faire dire les vérités les plus dangereuses sans qu'il soit possible de les attaquer, puisque c'est un fou qui parle." See Hugo Friedrich, Montaigne, trans. Robert Rovini (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), p. 27.

[14] Alfred Glauser, "Montaigne et l'éducation paradoxale," Kentucky Romance Quarterly, 16, no. 4 (1969): p. 376.

[15] Donald M. Frame, ed., Montaigne's Essays and Selected Writings (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1963), p. xiv.

[16] Marie-José Southworth, "Les Remarques dépréciatives de Montaigne au sujet de son livre," Bulletin de la société des amis de Montaigne, 4e série, no. 27 (1971): p. 22.

[17] Honoré de Balzac, Le Père Goriot (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1966), p. 26.

Reality Versus Illusion: A Structural Analysis of Madame Bovary

Despite the countless articles that have been written on Flaubert's Madame Bovary, it is nevertheless one of those masterpieces that still continue to draw the attention of many critics. This immense quantity of criticism may lead critics to believe that nothing else can be done except trace the role of elements such as "windows," "dust," or "shoes;" but recently developed theories also provide new ways of approaching the novel. Even though these new methods may not change the general opinion of the novel's essence, they can allow the reader to focus directly on the work's composition and thus be able to appreciate more fully its artistic qualities.

Madame Bovary is the story of a married woman torn between the demands society imposes on all individuals and her own emotional needs. To examine how these opposing forces are played against each other for the purpose of creating an artistic piece of literature, we must take into consideration both the story line and the opposing elements that make up the novel. In linguistic terms, the plot of any traditional novel occurs in a horizontal line called either the syntagmatic or the diachronic axis because of its linear development. The vertical line, called the paradigmatic or synchronic axis, contains individual events which take place only at given points and are at times interchangeable with each other. The theory that Floyd Merrell explicates in his article "Toward a New Model of Narrative Structure,"[1] and which John S. Brushwood applies and interprets in "Narrative Illusion of Paradox Resolved: Alberto Blest Gana's Martin Rivas,"[2] allows us to place Madame Bovary in a structural schema that will

emphasize the union of the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic lines. The system of analysis used by Merrell and Brushwood is composed of three levels, 1) the axiological, 2) the symbolico-semantic, and 3) the praxemic.

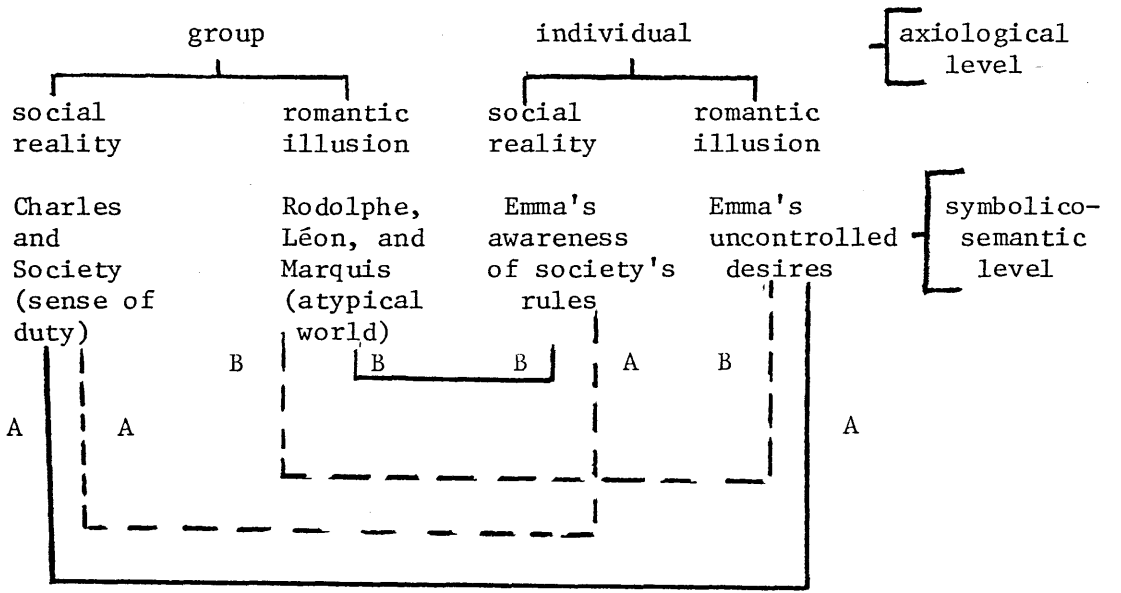
The axiological level occurs in the paradigmatic line of any text and consists of a fundamental opposition such as life versus death, individual versus group, freedom versus necessity, etc.; while the symbolico-semantic level refers to the specific text under analysis. In the praxemic level, otherwise known as the action level, the duality between paradigm and syntagma disappears momentarily to achieve a reconciliation between the two lines. The element that makes this union possible is called a "mediating agent."

In Madame Bovary, Emma is caught between reality and illusion. There are several things she wishes were different. One thing she desires throughout her life is to live in town, as opposed to living in the country. She expresses this wish even before she marries Charles: "Elle eut bien voulu, ne fut-ce au moins que pendant l'hiver, habiter la ville,..."[3] Once married she expresses a desire to lead either a life of luxury and pleasure or else of religious retreat: "Elle avait envie de faire ces voyages ou de retourner vivre à son couvent. Elle souhaitait à la fois mourir et habiter Paris" (p. 94). While Paris represents grandeur, luxury, and the unknown, the convent is the place where through mostly Romantic literature she was able to live--by using her imagination--the life of her dreams. In the intimacy of her marriage she wonders why, if she did not marry "un de ces hommes d'ardeurs taciturnes qui travaillent la nuit dans des livres," at least this name "Bovary" was not "illustre, le voir étalé chez des libraires, répété dans les journaux, connu par toute la France" (p. 95). Her unwillingness to accept her situation is the main, though not the only, cause of her inner turmoil. Society, with all

its traditional expectations, is the other element that creates a conflict within her. The fact that she belongs to the world of the nineteenth century leaves her few choices as to what she can do with her life. During this period there were basically only three institutions from which a woman could choose: the convent, marriage, or prostitution. Having chosen marriage, she yearns for her days of youth at the convent. Prostitution fails to enter her mind, perhaps because it does not exist in the realm of her bourgeois upbringing, although she does consider the possibility of adultery:

> La médiocrité domestique la poussait à des fantaisies luxueuses, la tendresse matrimoniale en des désirs adultères. (p. 141)

The fundamental opposition that results from these events is the contrast between group versus individual. The following diagram shows how this axiological opposition functions within the structure of the novel:


group
individual
axiological level
social reality
romantic illusion
social reality
romantic illusion
Charles and Society (sense of duty)
Rodolphe, Léon, and Marquis (atypical world)
Emma's awareness of society's rules
Emma's uncontrolled desires
symbolico-semantic level
A
B
B
B
A
B
A
A
A

The axiological component group versus individual "constitutes an abstract representation of the fundamental 'existential' antinomies of human thought common to all peoples in all societies; and therein lies its universal nature."[4] Thus, to figure out what makes this novel a specific and unique case within its universal realm, we must proceed to the symbolico-semantic level where we deal directly with the text itself. In this novel both Emma and different members of a collective group must confront illusion and reality. Solid line A marks a distinct contrast between Emma's illusions and society's expectations, making her desires seem outrageous in a world where conformity predominates. Solid line B also contrasts illusion and reality. In a conversation between Emma and Rodolphe, before they become sexually involved, Emma shows her awareness of society's rules when she says, "Mais il faut bien suivre un peu l'opinion du monde et obéir à sa morale" (p. 174). Her capacity to repress her feelings toward Léon while he is living in Yonville is also a sign that for a long time she is able to respect or abide by society's rules. Broken line A shows the connection there exists between Emma's world and Charles'. It is a reality she cannot escape. Broken line B connects Emma's individual world with that one outside where her illusions can be lived. In her love affair with Rodolphe, she is able to escape the the routine of her household without ever having to leave town. Léon provides an opportunity to leave both, and the Marquis d'Andervilliers' invitation to his "château" allows her to enjoy for a couple of days the world of the aristocracy and all its grandeur.

Now that we have seen how the axiological and the symbolico-semantic levels are operating within the novel's structure, we can examine the praxemic level. According to Merrell's theory, this is where the synchronic and the diachronic axes join and a

reconciliation between the binary oppositions becomes possible. But before this can take place, the intervention of a "mediating agent" is necessary.

Everything that occurs in the praxemic level comes from the linguistic differentiation that Roman Jakobson makes between metaphor and metonymy. Metaphor is association by selection, and one sign may be substituted for another. This line is vertical and is considered the paradigmatic, synchronic dimension. Metonymy is association by contiguity, where one sign is associated with another because one follows the other in a sequence. Unlike metaphoric signs, these cannot be substituted for each other. The metonymic line is the horizontal axis and it is syntagmatic and diachronic.[5] The difference between Jakobson's model and Merrell's is that in the former's, the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic lines are irreconcilable; while in the latter's, they join momentarily in the praxemic level through mediating agents.

In Madame Bovary there are other binary oppositions that are metaphors of the axiological opposition group versus individual. They are:

1) conformism versus rebellion
2) realism versus idealism

Both Charles and his mother are perfect examples of conformists. Through the use of free indirect style Flaubert portrays Charles' abulia: "Mais Charles n'avait point d'ambition! Un médecin d'Ivetot, ..., l'avait humilié quelque peu, au lit même du malade, devant les parents assemblés" (p. 95). While Charles recalls this anecdote nonchalantly, Emma is angered by it and feels the urge to strike her husband for being so indifferent. As far as Mme Bovary senior is concerned, just because she has led such a hard life--witnessing her husband spend her money, having to put up with his nights out with women and getting drunk, looking after business matters, plus having to take care of all the household duties--she expects Emma to do the same.

She suggests to Charles:

> Sais-tu ce qu'il faudrait à ta femme? Ce seraient des occupations forcées, des ouvrages manuels! Si elle était, comme tant d'autres, contrainte à gagner son pain, elle n'aurait pas ces vapeurs-là, qui lui viennent d'un tas d'idées qu'elle se fourre dans la tête, et du désoeuvrement où elle vit. (pp. 157-158)

Contrary to Mme Bovary senior and Charles, Emma refuses to conform to such mediocre styles of life. For one, she rebels against traditional or common beliefs. Just for the sake of being contradictory,

> elle se mettait quelquefois à exprimer des opinions singulières, blamant ce que l'on approuvait, et approuvant des choses perverses ou immorales: ce qui faisait ouvrir de grands yeux à son mari. (p. 100)

Other forms of rebellion include letting her house take care of itself, disregarding her personal appearance, and buying things she cannot afford.

Concerning the opposition realism versus idealism, it seems that everyone can accept his or her condition except Emma. There is no one character that can be directly opposed to Emma, but her own extravagant desires set her apart from the rest of society. Emma's ideal world consists of taking long trips, having an illustrious name, buying everything she desires, and getting involved in love affairs.

As the story is about Emma, she can be placed both in the paradigmatic axis--and be a part of the aforementioned metaphorical oppositions--as well as in the syntagmatic axis. Her actions, which are associated to one another by contiguity, and

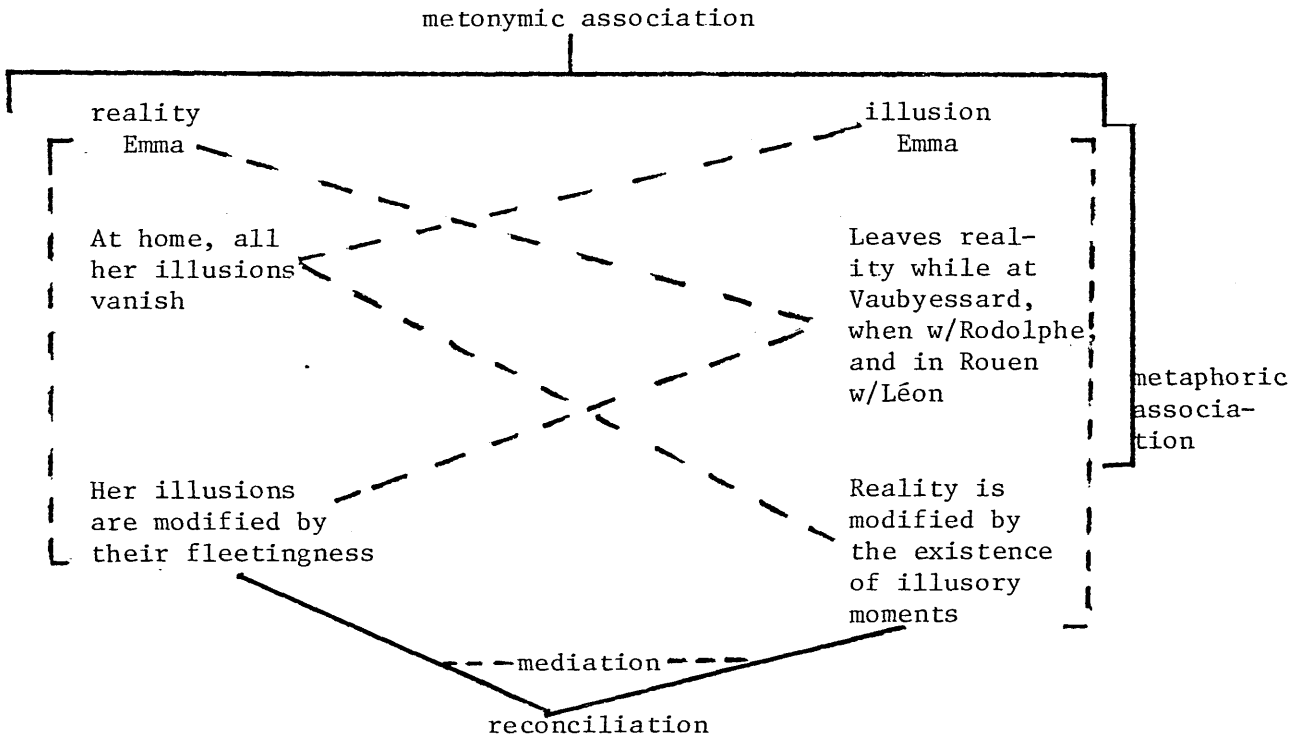
her role as protagonist, allow the novel to move chronologically along the syntagmatic line. The accumulated events in her life, starting with her many inner conflicts--"les appétits de la chair, les convoitises d'argent et les mélancolies de la passion . . ." (p. 140)--; her constant and uncontrolled spending; and her two love affairs finally lead us to the end of her story, which is at the same time the end of her life.

Having seen the manner in which the components of the synchronic and diachronic lines work individually, we can now proceed to examine how the praxemic level allows them to come together through a mediating agent, causing a reconciliation between the two. In Madame Bovary death is the mediating agent. Even though some of Emma's conflicts stem from the fact that she lives in a closed, provincial society that does not understand women with such anxieties, it is also true that most of her problems are within herself. Although the popular belief among critics is that she is a product of her provincial surroundings, the way in which Flaubert portrays her character refutes this idea:

> Emma devenait difficile, capricieuse. Elle se commandait des plats pour elle, n'y touchait point, un jour ne buvait que du lait pur, et, le lendemain, des tasses de thé à la douzaine. Souvent, elle s'obstinait à ne pas sortir, puis elle suffoquait, ouvrait les fenêtres, s'habillait en robe légère. Lorsqu'elle avait bien rudoyé sa servante, elle lui faisait des cadeaux ou l'envoyait se promener chez les voisines, ... (p. 99)

Such conflicts in a person are not exclusive to someone living in a small town; people in a big city can suffer them as well. When attempting to understand, classify, or explain Emma, one must

delve more into the development of her character and not merely be content to examine her surroundings. The nonconformist aspects of her character that Flaubert presents prove that even if she lived in an entirely different situation, she would still be dissatisfied. This being the case, what we find in the praxemic level is not the opposition group versus the individual, but Emma versus herself in a world where reality is opposed to illusion:


metonymic association
reality
Emma
illusion
Emma
At home, all her illusions vanish
Leaves reality while at Vaubyessard, when w/Rodolphe, and in Rouen w/Léon
metaphoric association
Her illusions are modified by their fleetingness
Reality is modified by the existence of illusory moments
mediation
reconciliation

Since the kind of life Emma wants to lead represents a threat to the order society has established, her existence in such a world is impossible. Despite the fact that all she finds at home is an unpleasant man who snores, has no ambition, and has all the following bad habits:

> Il prenait, avec l'âge, des allures épaisses; il coupait, au dessert, le bouchon des bouteilles vides; il se passait, après manger, la langue sur les dents; il faisait, en avalant sa soupe, un gloussement à chaque gorgée, et, comment il commençait d'engraisser, ses yeux, déjà petits, semblaient remonter vers les tempes par la bouffissure de ses pommettes. (p. 95)

she is unable to leave him and their "ugly" child because she lacks the means. Her only way out is through a man, but neither Rodolphe nor Léon is willing to play the role of the Romantic hero and rescue her. Before she meets either of her two lovers, she has already experienced momentarily the combination of illusion and reality. The first time she penetrates a world that had only existed in her dreams is when she and Charles visit the Vaubyessard castle invited by the Marquis d'Andervilliers. There she makes new discoveries; she meets dukes and counts, and tastes pineapple for the first time. For weeks thereafter she tries to relive the memory of the ball, but eventually it fades away. In her love affair with Rodolphe she is able to combine the reality of her home life with the illusion of a forbidden love. Her mistake is to believe that a man like Rodolphe wants her forever and that their love affair can become an ideal marriage. Her relationship with Léon is partly encumbered by her economic problems, and her failure to handle either of them tactfully leads her to

despair and finally to commit suicide. Because society is unable to accomodate both crude reality and fantastic illusion within its norms, this opposition can find reconciliation only in death. The fact that the last line of the novel mentions Homais' mediocre accomplishments reinforces the idea that Emma did not belong in a society where vulgarity prevailed. Homais' worldly need for power and blory--manifested in his desire to be the only man of medecine in Yonville and to be awarded the cross of the Legion of Honor--is a sharp contrast with Emma's more etheral and illusory aspirations.

Thus, what the axiological, the symbolico-semantic, and the praxemic levels have allowed us to do is see how the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic lines function and the way in which they are united by a mediating agent in order to create the totality of any given work. In the case of Madame Bovary, through the universal binary opposition group versus individual, we were able to delve into the novel and examine its inner workings. Reducing a work to its binary opposition is equivalent to reducing a set of fractions to their lowest common denominator. The act of synthesizing a work of literature or a mathematical equation to its most basic component makes it easier to find a point of departure that will lead us to the revelation of its totality. And it is precisely in the praxemic level--where the two opposing elements come together--that we are able to see the novel in its structural totality. An finally death, as the mediating agent, shows us the romantic qualities of a protagonist who is unable to live in a realistic world, and who must therefore transcent life in order to fulfill her dreams.

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NOTES

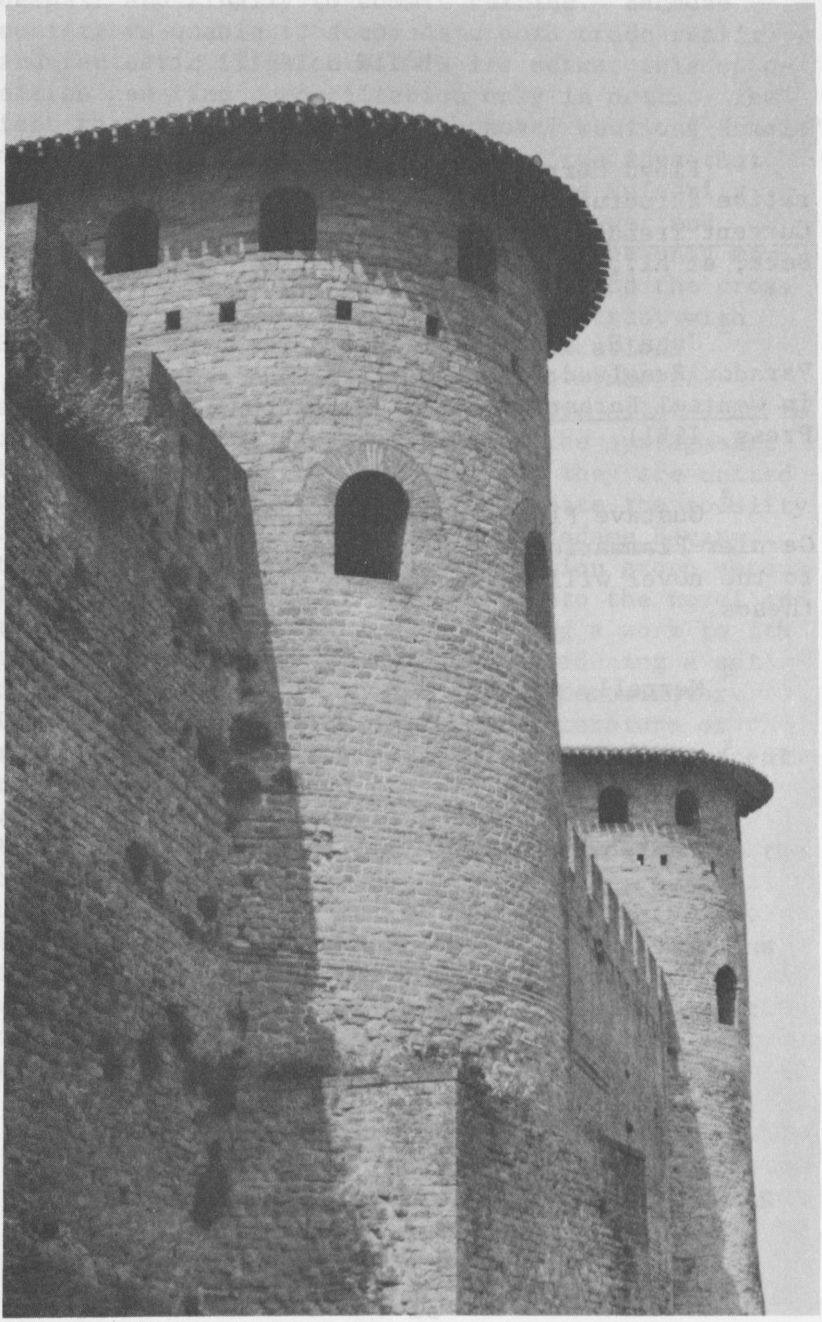
[1] Floyd Merrell, "Toward a New Model of Narrative Structure," in The Analysis of Hispanic Texts: Current Trends in Methodology, Editors, Mary Ann Beck, et al., pp. 150-169.

[2] John S. Brushwood, "Narrative Illusion of Paradox Resolved: Alberto Blest Gana's Martin Rivas," in Genteel Barbarism (USA: University of Nebraska Press, 1981).

[3] Gustave Flaubert, Madame Bovary (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1966), p. 56. Other references to the novel will appear within the text in parentheses.

[4] Merrell, p. 154.

[5] Brushwood, p. 68.



Contextual Misogyny in the Tiers Livre

FRANÇOIS RABELAIS
à l'esprit de la royne de Navarre.

Esprit abstraict, ravy, et ecstatic,
Qui frequentant le cieulx, ton origine,
As delaissé ton hoste et domestic,
Ton corps concords, qui tant se morigine
A tes edicts, en vie peregrine,
Sans sentement, et comme en Apathie:
Vouldrois tu poinct faire quelque sortie
De ton manoir divin, perpetuel?
Et ça bas veoir une tierce partie
Des faicts joyeux du bon Pantagruel?[1]

Rabelais' Tiers Livre opens with this enigmatic poem to Marguerite de Navarre, enigmatic precisely because the true intent of it remains to this day critically virgin. Of the many scholars who have discussed the alleged misogyny of this Rabelaisian text, few have attempted to resolve the seemingly obvious discrepancy between the dedicatory poem and the content of the book itself; in fact, the appropriate relationship of this dedication to the body of the Tiers Livre has yet to be adequately established.

Numerous Rabelais scholars have recognized a certain antifeminist bias in the Tiers Livre.[2] It is perhaps because the Tiers Livre deals on the most immediate level with the question of marriage that this book receives the most criticism concerning the view of women transmitted by it. However, as M. A. Screech quite appropriately points out in his article entitled "Rabelais in Context," one must consider the literary and social atmosphere to which Rabelais was subject in the writing of his works in order to

evaluate their content properly.[3] Without an adequate context, certain criticism leveled at Rabelais' chronicles become conspicuously anachronistic.

Writing at the very beginning of the era in French literature we now term the Renaissance, Rabelais inherited a long tradition of misogynistic views of women. In fact, Rabelais' own well-documented knowledge of things classical as well as medieval only extends the boundaries of possible influences on his works. Screech, among many other critics, has very effectively shown Rabelais' familiarity not only with Biblical sources, but also with classical Latin and Greek letters and medieval literature. Antifeminist biases abound in the majority of Rabelais' predecessors. As Screech points out in The Rabelaisian Marriage,

> Extremes of antifeminist expression are commonplace in Rabelais' time. The Renaissance in France was on the whole deeply distrustful of women. Classical learning had passed on to it the idea that woman was a botched male. Roman Law held to the principle of the fragilitas of women; in an age which aped everything Ancient this notion held wide currency (6).

Not only is this antifeminist bias present in the classical learning to which Rabelais was indebted, it was also to be found in the literature of the period directly preceding Rabelais' intellectual sphere. In discussing the view of women in medieval works, Maïte Albistur and Daniel Armogathe in their study on Histoire du féminisme français emphasize the prevailing view of women in chansons de geste and littérature courtoise. They point out the purely accessory role played by women when they appear in the chanson de geste, and their directly opposite function in courtly literature, where the woman is omnipresent, if only for the motivation of the work

in question. Moreover, Albistur and Armogathe find in both extremes an inherent misogyny, claiming that, although women were accorded a greater importance in courtly literature, "le thème de la sublimation de la dame n'a même pas permis à ces poètes d'évacuer toute leur misogynie naturelle."[4]

In addition to these classical and medieval precursors, Rabelais was clearly influenced by the popular apologies and attacks on women perpetrated in the Middle Ages and early Renaissance by various authors such as André Tiraqueau (The Laws of Marriage) and Amaury Bouchard, a friend of Rabelais who responded to Tiraqueau's work with his own, Of the Female Sex, against André Tiraqueau. Screech remarks that Rabelais "seems to have remained on reasonable terms with both,"[5] an interesting fact bearing on Rabelais' alleged misogyny, considering the polemic theses of the two authors in question.

On a purely historical basis, then, one very appropriately questions the accusations of antifeminism leveled at the author of the Tiers Livre. Rather than assuming misogyny as an underlying ideology in this Rabelaisian chronicle, one can quite easily see in it a simple continuation of prevailing literary practice.[6]

However, Rabelais was most certainly not an author to accept statically the accepted traditions of his sources. On the contrary, one finds in his work the exploitation of his own fertile imagination to expand upon and renew the commonplaces of his literary inheritance. While remaining completely true to the literary tradition of paradox handed down to him by the rules of classical rhetoric, Rabelais was able in the Tiers Livre to combine the practice of defending and attacking women so that the views of women in this work emerge essentially as opposite extremes presented at one and the same time. The character in the novel who most thoroughly exemplifies this tendency is without doubt Panurge, whose question about whether to marry is the impetus for

the Tiers Livre. Panurge's desire to marry, coupled with his fear of cuckoldry, provides the basis for the varied opinions of women expressed throughout the chronicle.

However, those critics who insist upon seeing misogynistic intent in the battle waged over the question seem to ignore some essential considerations. Perhaps the most important of these considerations is the problem of just what the theme of the Tiers Livre actually is. Thomas Greene claims in his study Rabelais, A Study in Comic Courage that the Tiers Livre is "not really about the nature and status of women, as it has commonly been taken to be; nor is it primarily about the institution of marriage. . . . Rather, it is about the nature of truth and the nature of action."[7] Edwin Duval in his article "Panurge, Perplexity and the Ironic Design of Rabelais's Tiers Livre" states further that the book fundamentally treats the question of knowing oneself and one's desires.[8] It is in fact precisely this knowledge which Panurge lacks.

When first considering the possibility of marriage, Panurge is firm in his proposal:

> Je me veulx marier. . . . desjà j'endesve, je déguène, je grézille d'estre marié et labourer en diable bur dessus ma femme, sans crainct des coups de baston. O le grand mesnaiger que je seray! Après ma mort on me fera brusler en bust honorificque, pour en avoir les cendres en mémoire et exemplaire du mesnaiger perfaict (431).

He seemingly knows exactly what it is that he wants, and that is marriage, if only for socially acceptable sexual satisfaction. His knowledge of his own desires extends even into the future, for he is able to imagine the social esteem to be his in the future, when all will recognize him at his death as having been a good head of house.

The certain knowledge of his own desires is, however, but a fleeting impression given to the reader. During the course of the same conversation, his fears of marriage become apparent. Seeking Pantagruel's approval of his plans for marriage, Panurge belies his prior certainty:

> -Voyre mais (dist Panurge) je ne la vouldrois exécuter sans vostre conseil et bon advis.
>
> -J'en suis (respondit Pantagruel) d'advis, et vous le conseille.
>
> -Mais (dist Panurge) si vous congnoissiez que mon meilleur feust tel que je suys demeurer, sans entreprendre cas de nouvelleté j'aymerois mieux ne me marier poinct.
>
> -Point doncques ne vous mariez, respondit Pantagruel (437).

The self-assuredness present in Panurge when he first announces his desires to Pantagruel dissolves into total uncertainty when looking to others to approve his desires. To be sure, Rabelais makes of Pantagruel in this scene a devil's advocate, to underscore the importance of his theme of self-knowledge. Nonetheless, the reader is never again given the portrait of Panurge as sure of what he wants. Instead, we are treated to a quest for certainty, as Panurge, at Pantagruel's bidding, sets about consulting "experts" about the problem of marriage.

The doubts expressed by Panurge reveal not only the fact that he does not truly know the convictions of his own desires, but also a character trait of many humans; that is, the desire to dominate other parties in a given relationship. Many critics have discussed the relationship between love and war, both of which suggest a certain domination, established by Rabelais in the Tiers Livre. Rosalie Colie states in Paradoxia Epidemica that "marriage is a battle, a continual argument . . . ." [9] Panurge's appre-

hensions about marriage take on a very regular appearance early in the chronicle:

> -Mais si (dist Panurge) ma femme me faisoit coqu, . . .
> -Mais si (dist Panurge) Dieu le vouloit, et advint que j'esposasse quelque femme de bien, et elle me batist, je seroys plus que tiercelet de Job, si je n'enrageois tout vif . . .
> -Mais si (dist Panurge) estant malade et impotent au debvoir de mariage, ma femme impatiente de ma langueur, à aultruy se abandonnoit . . . et (que pis est) me desrobast, comme j'ay veu souvent advenir, ce seroit pour m'achever de paindre et courir les champs en pourpoinct (439-40).

Each of the fears Panurge expresses here deals with a form of domination--sexual, physical, and financial. Edward Benson in his article "'Jamais vostre femme ne sera ribaulde, si la prenez issue de gens de bien': Love and War in the Tiers Livre" interprets Panurge's fears of marriage in the following way:

> Just as the danger of having his wife guard his property is that she will appropriate it to her own uses, so the danger of casting their relationship in sexual terms is that her needs become more pressing than his. To a character whose sense of identity is so dependent on his male supremacy, that is naturally a disturbing prospect.[10]

The fears about marriage exhibited by Panurge throughout the book as well as his lack of self-knowledge paint a rather unflattering portrait of one of the major characters of the Tiers Livre. However, few critics are willing to charge Rabelais

with emasculating his male characters. Yet the antifeminist complaints persist, perhaps solely on the basis of the advice given to Panurge during his consultations with the "experts."

It is indeed interesting to note for the misogynistic argument that among all the "experts" consulted, there is only one woman, the Sibyl. However, it would be wise once again to refer to Rabelais' own context. The established social hierarchy of Rabelais' time included few women in places of importance, thus accounting for the fact that most of the advisers consulted are male. The second seemingly valid argument in support of this episode as misogynistic is the highly negative view transmitted by the scene of the Sibyl, and by analogy, of women. The actual physical description of the Sibyl is far from positive:

> La vieille estoit mal en poinct, mal vestue, mal nourrie, edentée, chassieuse, courbassée, voupieuse, languoureuse, et faisait un potaige de choux verds avecques une couane de lard jausne et un vieil savorados (471).

However, it is difficult to claim antifeminist bias by taking into account only the given details of her person. The truly incriminating evidence appears at the end of the scene: "Ces parolles dictes, se retira en sa tesniere, et sus le perron de la porte se recoursa, robbe, cotte et chemise jusques aux escelles, et leurs monstroit son cul" (473). This is hardly behavior appropriate to a prophetess. Moreover, in the process of describing this scene to his reader, Rabelais seems to be mocking not only diviners, but women as well. However, one must at all times question Rabelais' intent; rarely do we find in him an entirely serious author. In fact, the parody of Vergil's Aeneid in this scene is so evident that it becomes clear that no single-minded misogynistic intent underlies this episode. As Lance K. Donaldson-Evans points out in "Panurge Perplexus:

Ambiguity and Relativity in the Tiers Livre," "The enormity of the parody of Vergil leaves us in no doubt that the Sibyl is a purely comic character and that it would be folly indeed to give her any credence."[11]

Among the other consultations about Panurge's prospects in marriage, only Rondibilis, Hippothadée and Trouillogan expound what might be considered anti-feminist viewpoints. The doctor, Rondibilis, makes by far the most misogynistic comments about women to be found in the entire Tiers Livre when he describes womanhood, in a passage worthy, in light of this study, of lengthy quotation:

> Quand je diz femme, je diz un sexe tant fragil, tant variable, tant muable, tant inconstant et imperfaict, que Nature me semble (parlant en tout honneur et révérence) s'estre esguarée de ce bon sens par lequel elle avait crée et formé toutes choses, quand elle a basty la femme; et, y ayant pensé cent et cinq foys, ne sçay à quoy m'en resouldre, sinon que, forgeant la femme, elle a eu esguard à la sociale delectation de l'home et à la perpetuité de l'espece humaine, beaucoup plus qu'à la perfection de l'individuale muliebrité. . . . Nature leurs a dedans le corps posé en lieu secret et intestin un animal, un membre, lequel n'est es hommes, on quel quelques foys sont engendrées certaines humeurs salses, nitreuses, bauracineuses, acres, mordicantes, lancinantes, chatouillantes amerement; par la poincture et fretillement douloureux des quelles (car ce membre est tout nerveux et de vif sentiment) tout le corps est en elles esbranlé, tous les sens raviz, toutes affections interinées, tous pensemens confonduz; . . . (539-40).

The view of woman offered by Rondibilis can be taken only as negative; in effect, he reduces the nature of woman to one organ, the uterus, from which all the purported inconsistencies of woman derive. However, as with all passages in Rabelais' works, one must remain aware of the sources from which he drew. In this passage Rabelais relies partly upon previous views of women as transmitted to him through medieval literature and medecine. Albistur and Armogathe discuss the vices attributed to women in the Middle Ages: "stupidité, irritabilité, inconstance, loquacité, frivolité . . ." (59-60). Moreover, this particular view of women was popular not only in medieval times, but persisted even into the eighteenth century, where allegedly "enlightened" philosophes can be found who support the same thesis.[12]

What is perhaps most interesting about Rondibilis' comments is that, after having delivered a particularly severe portrait of women, he nonetheless advises Panurge to marry, thereby imbuing his comments with an ambivalence about women equal to that of Panurge about marriage.

Unlike the episodes concerning Rondibilis' view of women and of marriage, the chapters devoted to the "expert" in theology, Hippothadée, show no overt evidence of misogynistic stereotypes. Instead, he points out that if a woman has been well-bred and is provided by her husband suitable examples of conduct, then there will be little probability for the cuckoldry of the husband:

> jamais vostre femme ne sera ribaulde, si la prenez issue de gens de bien, instruicte en vertus et honnesteté. . . . Pour renfort de ceste discipline, vous, de vostre cousté, l'entretiendrez en amitié conjugale, continuerez en preud'homie, luy monstrerez bon exemple, vivrez pudicquement, chastement, vertueusement en vostre mesnaige, comme voulez qu'elle, de son cousté, vive; . . . (531).

Indeed, although he maintains that a woman should be subservient to her husband ("adhaerer unicquement à son mary, le cherir, le servir, totalement l'aymer après Dieu," 531) he suggests in his comments that ideally there should exist an equality between marriage partners. This equality is to be found in parallel moral behavior for the two. In the consultation with Hippothadée, then, the usual Biblical stereotypes are missing; this simple fact, combined with the suggestion for equality of behavior points out that, textually, one can in this episode make no strongly supported accusation of misogynistic intent.

However, the reader is quickly thrust back into the realm of negative views of women in the episode following Hippothadée's comments. Immediately following the generous theological viewpoint expressed in this chapter, Carpalim introduces a short anti-feminist interlude in the chapter on "Comment les femmes ordinairement appetent choses défendues." The anecdotes in this chapter reveal two stereotypes of women--unrestrained curiosity and loquaciousness. As Albistur and Armogathe pointed out, these views were common to the literature of the era preceding Rabelais' work. In fact Jourda identifies in his notes to this chapter sources for the two anecdotes related by the men present at the consultation; Rabelais has simply borrowed them from Tiraqueau and from the Farce de Maître Pathelin (note 1, p. 547 and note 1, p. 548).

The misogyny of this episode is quite evidently not the product of Rabelais' own ideology, but a continuation of traditon. In addition, a statement made by Carpalim hints at negative qualities in men. When he boasts

> On temps (dist Carpalim) que j'estois ruffien à Orléans, je n'avois couleur de de rhétoricque plus valable, ne argument plus persuasif envers les dames,

> pour les mettre aux toilles et attirer au jeu d'amours, que vivement, apertement, detestablement remonstrant comment leurs mariz estoient d'elles jalous. Je ne l'avois mie inventé. Il est escript, et en avont loix, exemples, raisons, et experiences quotidianes. Ayans ceste persuasion en leurs caboches, elles feront leurs mariz coquz infailliblement, . . . (545-46),

he is, in essence, pointing out that not only do men make use of women, but, by using the woman, they make use of another man as well. It is first a question of claiming jealousy on the husband's part to gain his own sexual satisfaction and second, a question of dominating another man by helping to make a cuckold of him. Following this reasoning, all humans want to dominate others. Thus the episode deals no longer with antifeminism, but, by suggestion, with antihumanism, using the term in its modern sense.

Like the discourse of Hippothadée, that of Trouillogan includes no traditional stereotypes of women. Instead the last "expert" to be consulted at this meeting (for Bridoye, as legal expert, does not appear to give his opinion) leaves the reader with the same ambiguous opinions expressed by Hippothadée about the state of marriage. Trouillogan's response to Panurge's question, in the nature of true philosophers who see both sides of a problem at once, is "Tous les deux" (550). It is interesting to note that Trouillogan makes no protest when Pantagruel interprets his advice in the following manner:

> que femme avoir est l'avoir à usaige tel que Nature la créa, qui est pour l'ayde, esbatement et société de l'homme; n'avoir femme est ne soy apoiltronner autour d'elle, pour elle ne contaminer celle unicque et supreme affection que doibt l'homme à Dieu; ne laisser les

> offices qu'il doibt naturellement à sa patrie, à la République, à ses amys; ne mettre en non chaloir ses estudes et negoces, pour continuellement à sa femme complaire (551-52).

In effect, the interpretation offered by Pantagruel suggests that men should not marry simply for sexual satisfaction, as Panurge is wont to do, but for companionship. In this way, he points out the folly of Panurge's view of the married state. At the same time, Pantagruel hints at the folly of those who, in the courtly tradition, would make woman man's greatest goal, an object to be served and revered at all times. Screech says, "The antifeminism of those who would condemn marriage and women out of hand means nothing good to Rabelais. On the other hand Rabelais is not brought to side with those rhetorical feminists who would make the woman the highest end of man's achievement" (The Rabelaisian Marriage, 130).

In fact, this interpretation reinforces the use of rhetoric throughout the Tiers Livre. As Screech notes, "it is often not a question of choosing between two extremes; it is a question of harmonizing them" (The Rabelaisian Marriage, 9). What Rabelais has done with the question of marriage in the consultations which comprise most of the misogynistic elements of the Tiers Livre is to debate the extremes of the question at hand and to harmonize them, as well as to undercut previously accepted notions of how women should be viewed.

It is difficult indeed to accuse Rabelais the author of harboring essentially misogynistic views of women, as some critics have insisted upon doing. The most one can do is to accuse the text of the Tiers Livre of antifeminist ideology. Certainly the chronicle contains negative views of women; however, it contains equally negative views of men, although those views are much more textually subtle. Simply

because certain negative opinions of women exist in the text, it does not necessarily follow that the entire book should be condemned as a piece of anti-feminist propaganda. When approaching a text like Rabelais', one must constantly be aware of the use he made of previous literary and social conventions. At the very least, Rabelais' chronicle points out a fundamental misunderstanding which existed and continues to exist between the sexes. Given the fact that the Tiers Livre was written by a male author in a male-dominated society, it is completely natural to find in the work the accepted stereotypes of women of the era. However, the ambiguity which often surrounds the views of women offered by the male characters, combined with the historical context of the novel, make of the work a defense and attack of women at the same time.

Considering this contextual view of the Tiers Livre, then, it is valid to interpret the dedicatory poem as a sincere appreciation of "l'esprit de la royne de Navarre"; like Rabelais, Marguerite was interested in exploring the relationship between men and women. Rabelais' dedication to Marguerite de Navarre's spirit of inquiry as well as the content of the Tiers Livre point to an author who appreciated and understood the necessary relationship between the extremes of male and female.

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NOTES

[1] François Rabelais, Oeuvres complètes, Tome I (Paris: Garnier, 1962), p. 391. All subsequent references to this work will be noted within parentheses in the text.

[2] See M. A. Screech, Rabelais (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979) and The Rabelaisian Marriage (London: Edward Arnold, 1958), as well as Rosalie Colie, Paradoxia Epidemica (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), among others.

[3] L'Esprit Créateur 21 (Spring 1981), 69-87.

[4] Maïte Albistur and Daniel Armogathe, Histoire du féminisme français (Paris: Editions des Femmes, 1977), p. 57. All subsequent references to this work will be noted within parentheses in the text.

[5] Screech, Rabelais, p. 19.

[6] It seems indeed misogynistic that Rabelais elaborates upon an already accepted antifeminist bias in the Tiers Livre. However, we shall see through the course of this study that the ways in which Rabelais uses antifeminist material result in a work which may not be labeled intentionally misogynistic.

[7] Thomas M. Greene, Rabelais, A Study in Comic Courage (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), p. 61.

[8] Edwin M. Duval, "Panurge, Perplexity and the Ironic Design of Rabelais's Tiers Livre," Renaissance Quarterly 35,3 (1982): 381-400.

[9] Rosalie Colie, Paradoxia Epidemica, p. 56.

[10] Edward Benson, "'Jamais vostre femme ne sera ribaulde, si la prenez issue de gens de bien': Love and War in the Tiers Livre," Etudes Rabelaisiennes 15 (1980), p. 65.

[11] Etudes Rabelaisiennes 15 (1980), p. 88.

[12] Diderot, for example, authored an essay entitled "Sur les femmes," in which he claimed women to be victims of their bodies, and especially of their sexual organs, which supposedly hinder a woman's power to think logically.

Le Rôle des oppositions dans Le Misanthrope

Une étude approfondie du Misanthrope révèle l'importance de la contradiction intérieure ou de la dualité d'Alceste. Il n'est donc pas étonnant que de nombreux critiques se sont penchés sur ce côté-là dans leurs études respectives. Paul Bénichou, Gérard Defaux, Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt, Lionel Gossman ne sont que quelques-uns qui, parmi bon nombre d'autres critiques, ont soulevé l'antagonisme fondamental dans Le Misanthrope.[1] Il semble cependant qu'ils n'en aient pas suffisamment souligné le rôle. Or quelle est la fonction de l'antagonisme à l'intérieur de la pièce? Dans notre tentative de trouver une réponse, nous approfondirons d'abord la dualité d'Alceste, afin de voir à quoi se réduisent ses contradictions et quels en sont les rapports et les répercussions face à la société et aux autres personnages. Les questions qui se posent alors, sont au sujet de l'importance de la contradiction intérieure d'Alceste et de la façon dont elle s'extériorise. Est-ce que la présence d'Alceste, ses actes et ses paroles, sont nécessaires à la création des oppositions et des tensions? Si les réponses étaient affirmatives, la dualité d'Alceste et ce qui en résulte, serait en quelque sorte "l'auteur" de la pièce et en deviendrait ainsi la force motrice.

Par conséquent la première partie de cette étude se penchera sur Alceste afin d'en dégager les éléments contradictoires qui sont bien visibles lorsqu'il entre en conflit soit avec la société, soit avec ses représentants: Philinte, Célimène, Oronte, etc. Après cette première partie, nous étudierons les antagonismes et tensions au niveau structural. Les conclusions que nous espérons trouver à la suite de cette analyse devraient nous permettre de dégager la ou les forces motrices dans Le Misanthrope.

Pour étudier Alceste nous souscrivons à ce que dit Mesnard à son sujet: "C'est vraiment dans la contradiction que réside l'essence de son personnage,"[2] et il serait impossible de comprendre Alceste ou la pièce sans accepter cette fondamental dualité. Celle-ci ne se manifeste pas à travers quelques actes indépendants de la part d'Alceste. Bien au contraire, elle se dégage toujours d'une "mise en situation" avec un ou plusieurs personnages. C'est à ces moments-là, par des discussions, que non seulement se révèle la dualité d'Alceste, mais aussi les différentes tensions créées par les personnages qui, d'une façon ou d'une autre, l'affrontent. Cette dualité consiste avant tout dans le fait qu'il est hostile à la société et à ses représentants; mais en même temps, pour vivre en opposition, il a besoin de cet élément auquel il s'oppose: la société. Ce paradoxe est à la base de la dualité d'Alceste. Hubert l'a résumé de la façon suivante: "By playing the part of a misanthrope, he can dissociate himself from the world he condemns while continuing to partake in its activities."[3]

Les exemples à ce sujet sont nombreux dès le début de la pièce qui s'ouvre in medias res par une discussion antagonique entre Philinte et Alceste. C'est la première dans une suite de confrontations qui permettront au lecteur de découvrir le caractère du protagoniste. Philinte cherche la compagnie d'Alceste alors que ce dernier voudrait être seul. Opposition assez simple, semble-t-il, mais Alceste veut-il vraiment qu'on le laisse? Ses paroles reflètent-elles son véritable désir? Nous nous apercevons dès ce moment que son attitude nie ses paroles (puisqu'il reste avec Philinte), et qu'il la maintiendra tout du long de la pièce. Il recherche la compagnie ou la société afin de s'y opposer et de se créer ainsi une raison d'exister. Comme à un drogué, il lui faut le salon de Célimène; remarquons qu'il faut un order "extérieur" (l'ordre des maréchaux à la quatrième scène du deuxième acte)

pour l'en éloigner brièvement, et le lecteur ne sera guère surpris de le retrouver tout de suite après à nouveau auprès de Célimène. Nous comprenons alors d'autant mieux qu'Alceste a besoin de s'opposer à la société par la négation, et qu'il y cherche une justification de son existence. Pour cette raison il n'est pas étonnant que les "non" exclusifs abondent dans ses répliques et qu'il voudrait même perdre son procès contre Oronte: "J'aurai le plaisir de perdre mon procès./ . . . M'en coutât-il grand'chose, / Pour la beauté du fait avoir perdu ma cause."[4] Perdre son procès serait sa preuve tant attendue d'être différent des autres et de justifier la haine qu'il éprouve face à la société. Il voudrait même s'acheter le droit de la haïr: "Mais pour vingt mille francs, j'aurai droit de pester / Contre l'iniquité de la nature humaine, / Et de nourrir pour elle une immortelle haine" (vv. 1548-50). Il est plus facile pour Alceste de haïr une abstraction que de combattre une chose concrète: "Je n'y puis plus tenir, j'enrage, et mon dessein / Est de rompre en visière à tout le genre humain (vv. 95-96). Selon Guicharnaud, "Molière rend le drame plus intense en jetant cette double nature dans le monde qui précisément est le moins fait pour le satisfaire. Et finalement, c'est dans cette opposition même qu'Alceste trouve les justifications nécessaires."[5]

En plus Alceste souffre d'un besoin indomptable de se distinguer, il veut se mettre à l'écart de cette société qu'il déteste, il veut éviter le "nous" collectif des salons et leur code: "Je veux qu'on me distingue; et pour le trancher net, / L'ami du genre humain n'est point du tout mon fait" (vv.63-64). Mais du côté "actes," il est un des plus fervents fidèles qui gravitent autour de Célimène, la représentante par excellence de cette société enjouée tant critiquée par Alceste. Lui qui désire remodeler la société en réclamant l'absolue sincérité en tout et en rejetant toute flatterie, fausseté et hypocrisie, se prend à son propre piège. Mis à l'épreuve

en confrontant Oronte, Alceste ne suit pas ses principes. Quoiqu'il abhorre le sonnet, il ne fait que murmurer ses insultes. Ensuite, à trois reprises, il évite la franchise et crée avec son: "Je ne dis pas cela. / Mais . . ." (vv. 353-62), un des passages les plus ironiques de la pièce, en niant ses propres paroles avec lesquelles il avait critiqué le poème d'Oronte dans un premier temps. Critique d'ailleurs où ses sentiments et ses mots coïncidaient. Mais cette coïncidence est tout de suite détruite par sa propre négation: "In other words Alceste . . . illustrates the fact that there are times when every man needs to compromise with his own inner weakness and to disguise reality with a veil of insincerity."[6] Pour Mesnard c'est encore une preuve que "la contradiction est d'abord au coeur du personnage même d'Alceste, dont elle définit l'un des traits les plus fondamentaux . . . . Donc, si absolu que soit Alceste sur le plan des principes, la vie le contraint à éprouver la contradiction entre la sincérité et un art de plaire dont il lui faut bien tenir compte. Mais cette contradiction, en lui, demeure inavouée" (pp. 875-76).

La quatrième scène (celle des portraits), souligne davantage le manque de sincérité d'Alceste. Pour éviter de critiquer Célimène qui est à la source de toutes ces médisances, il attaque les flatteurs Clitandre et Acaste qui s'en défendent:

> Clitandre: Pourquoi s'en prendre à nous?
> Si ce qu'on dit vous blesse,/
> Il faut que le reproche à Madame
> s'adresse.
> Alceste: -Non, morbleu! C'est à vous; et
> vos ris complaisants /
> Tirent de son esprit tous ces
> traits médisants (vv. 657-60).

Alceste voit Célimène d'une certaine façon--différente de celle dont la perçoivent les autres et dont elle se comprend elle-même. La dualité

ou le paradoxe d'Alceste réside dans le divorce radical entre l'être et le paraître et aussi entre la façon dont il perçoit le monde et dont les autres le voient. Comment donc les représentants de cette société l'aperçoivent-ils? Un point saillant de son caractère est son manque d'humour. Ce sont surtout Philinte et Célimène qui font allusion à ce défaut, par exemple dans le portrait que Célimène brosse d'Alceste dans sa lettre découverte à la quatrième scène du cinquième acte:

> Pour l'homme aux rubans verts, il me divertit quelquefois avec ses brusqueries et son chagrin bourru; mais il est cent moments où je le trouve le plus fâcheux du monde.

Et c'est Alceste lui-même qui se perçoit et s'affirme dans son rôle antagoniste en s'opposant aux rieurs: "Les rieurs sont pour vous, Madame, c'est tout dire, / Et vous pouvez pousser contre moi la satire" (vv. 681-82). "Le rire est comme la fatalité d'Alceste. Cet homme qui ne rit jamais ne cesse d'être poursuivi par le rire des autres" (Defaux, p. 170).

En outre on lui reproche son caractère contradictoire, son plaisir de s'opposer à tout et à tous:

> Et ne faut-il pas bien que Monsieur contredise?
> A la commune voix veut-on qu'il se réduise?
> Et qu'il ne fasse pas éclater en tous lieux
> L'Esprit contrariant qu'il a reçu des cieux?
> (vv. 669-72)

Avec cette accusation Célimène insiste, elle aussi, sur l'antagonisme intérieur et extérieur dont le personnage d'Alceste est le symbole. Ces différents points de vue des "autres" renforcent l'impression que la dualité d'Alceste est si essentielle à l'oeuvre qu'elle pourrait en être la force motrice.

Dans toute la pièce, Alceste s'oppose constamment à des personnages qui representent la société, comme Célimène, mais aussi à ceux qui ont appris à vivre avec elle. L'exemple qui s'impose est Philinte. Voilà peut-être la raison pour laquelle Alceste se heurte constamment à son ami. Quelle est donc l'attitude de Philinte? Tout d'abord il nous frappe par sa modération qui se traduit par des mots qui différencient, restreignent et attenuent plutôt que de classer, d'opposer et de nier. Il aboutit à cet effet en utilisant fréquemment "au moins," "quelques," "il faut bien" et le verbe "croire." Son côté ironique dévoile son attitude distante face aux jeux de la société et face à l'extrémisme d'Alceste. Il lui répond au sujet de la flatterie: "Je ne vois pas, pour moi, que le cas soit pendable . . . / Et ne me pende pas pour cela, s'il vous plaît" (vv 29-32).

Philinte, en homme posé, réfléchi et calme, s'oppose à Alceste par le fait qu'il accepte la société en jouant un jeu dont il est conscient: "En un sens, l'homme le mieux équilibré est celui qui a pris place lui-même avec le moins de souffrance dans l'agencement, si barbare qu'il soit, de la société existante" (Bénichou, p. 350). Ce faisant, Philinte propose une alternative à la misanthropie d'Alceste qui est plus pessimiste que celle d'Alceste: car l'espoir de pouvoir changer ou la société ou un être humain, est inexistant pour lui: "Et c'est une folie à nulle autre seconde / De vouloir se mêler de corriger le monde" (vv. 157-58). Voilà au fond le portrait d'un honnête homme du dix-septième siècle, mais qui est désillusionné et pessimiste. Par conséquent, Alceste se trouve en conflit avec un homme qui a choisi d'accepter la société telle quelle alors que ce dernier la rejette intégralement tout en espérant pouvoir y changer quelque chose. Selon Gossman: "The world which refuses to adore Alceste, to doff the mask and reveal itself to him in its defenseless nakedness, is at once the object of his desire and the enemy to be humiliated" (p. 70).

La perspective de ne pas réussir donne envie à Alceste de braver la société, de la narguer en la fuyant: "Et parfois il me prend des mouvements soudains / De fuir dans un désert l'approche des humains" (vv. 143-44). C'est Philinte qui, du début à la fin voudra le retenir, lui faire comprendre qu'on ne peut rien changer, mais qu'il faut accepter:

> Mais est-ce une raison que leur peu d'équité
> Pour vouloir se tirer de leur société?
> Tous ces défauts humains nous donnent, dans la vie,
> Des moyens d'exercer notre philosophie:
> (vv. 1559-62)

Alceste, non seulement ne pourra-t-il jamais souscrire à une telle philosophie mais il est aussi très différent de Philinte au niveau du tempérament.

Molière le rattache "à un tempérament mal équilibré, à la fois persécuteur et susceptible, égoïste et malheureux, désemparé et violent" (Bénichou, p. 350). Excessif, souvent déraisonnable, ses actes ne coïncident pas avec ses paroles. "Molière is dramatizing, among other things, the divorce inherent in every man, between so-called ethical laws and actual practice" (Hubert, p. 148). Alceste est un être d'inconséquence qui manque de sincérité. Les vers quatre et cinq illustrent fort bien cette différence au niveau de leurs dispositions, lorsque Philinte s'efforce de comprendre Alceste: "Mais on entend les gens, au moins, sans se fâcher. / Moi, je veux me fâcher, et ne veux point entendre."

D'ailleurs, comme nous l'avons mentionné plus haut, les répliques catégoriques d'Alceste abondent et il s'engage par une négation totale, parfois réitérée, contre ce qui précède. Il rejette intégralement tout ce qui est flatterie et politesse: "Non, non, il n'est point d'âme un peu bien située / Qui veuille d'une estime ainsi prostituée" (vv. 53-54, c'est moi qui souligne). Philinte essaie

constamment d'ouvrir les yeux à Alceste pour qu'il reconnaisse sa situation paradoxale: Pourquoi Alceste aime-t-il une "coquette" qui vit de la flatterie et des médisances d'autrui? Comment ce penchant peut-il s'accorder avec son désir d'absolue droiture et de sincérité? Mais non seulement aime-t-il Célimène, encore rejette-t-il une femme, Eliante, qui semble être faite pour lui:

> Mais cette rectitude
> Que vous voulez en tout avec exactitude,
> Cette pleine droiture, où vous vous renfermez,
> La trouvez-vous ici dans ce que vous aimez?...
> Vous et le genre humain si fort brouillés
> ensemble,...
> C'est cet étrange choix où votre coeur
> s'engage.
> La sincère Eliante a du penchant pour vous,...
> Cependant à leurs voeux votre âme se refuse,
> Tandis qu'en ses liens Célimène l'amuse.
> (vv. 205-208, 209,
> 214-15, 217-18)

Par des termes très clairs, Philinte a su mettre à jour le paradoxe ou la dualité d'Alceste. C'est un autre volet qui approfondit de façon plus concrète, par les exemples utilisés, le conflit entre la théorie et la pratique, entre l'être et le paraître. Cette tirade de Philinte, du vers 205 au vers 224 est importante, parce qu'elle éclaire avec succès l'inconséquence d'Alceste. Lui, qui croit si bien tout pénétrer et comprendre, est aveugle en se regardant lui-même. Philinte, par contre, perçoit avec acuité les autres et lui-même. C'est pour cela qu'il réussit si bien à exposer la dualité d'Alceste. Voilà donc un des antagonismes fondamentaux mis en évidence dès le début de l'oeuvre: "Alceste's contradicting temperament sets him in voluntary opposition to society; but in opposing it, he is also brought to oppose himself involuntarily."[7]

Venons à présent à la fonction de Célimène. La sienne est celle d'un exemple-obstacle qui catalyse la dualité d'Alceste, car l'inconséquence du misanthrope est d'être amoureux d'elle: "Par ce dernier trait, Alceste tient à l'humanité, par l'autre il s'y oppose" (Mesnard, p. 874). L'unique désir de cette jeune veuve de vingt ans est celui de s'amuser et de jouir de cette unique liberté que lui donne l'état civil de "veuve." Fait fondamental qu'il ne faut pas oublier: Célimène, en ce moment, n'a absolument pas envie d'abandonner une liberté aussi récemment découverte que la sienne. Par ailleurs il est difficile de répondre à la question si, oui ou non, elle aime Alceste. Il est probable qu'elle l'aime parce qu'il est différent des petits marquis ridicules et d'Oronte. Mais cet amour paraît être limité par les restrictions qu'il pourrait imposer à sa liberté.

Le premier à brosser un portrait de Célimène est Philinte. Pour lui, "cette belle" (v. 222) évoque le côté séduction, la femme dont la beauté doit continuellement être affirmée par la société. Ce point de vue est probablement plus réaliste que ne l'est celui d'Alceste qui n'y voit qu'une "jeune veuve" (v. 225). L'épithète "jeune" est importante pour Alceste parce qu'elle traduit son espoir de la changer: "Sa grâce est la plus forte; et sans doute ma flamme / De ces vices du temps pourra purger son âme" (vv. 233-34). Guicharnaud éclaire davantage cet antagonisme: "Pour le reste du monde, Alceste s'oppose et maintient cette opposition à la fois par ses descriptions hyperboliques et par sa passivité; pour Célimène il vise à l'assimilation complète. Il n'y a pour lui que le mal, qui est autrui dans son altérité même, et le bien, qui est lui-même; son monde est simple, mais ne permet pas la reconnaissance d'autrui comme valeur indépendante" (p. 461). Alceste s'est donc épris d'une femme située aux antipodes de sa propre philosophie: "It is precisely because Célimène is the most sought after

and worldly of women (to all appearances the most unsuitable for Alceste) that he falls in love with her" (Gossman, p. 75).

Mais s'il l'aimait vraiment, ne devrait-il pas l'accepter intégralement comme le préconise Eliante dans son petit traité d'amour? "C'est ainsi qu'un amant dont l'ardeur est extrême / Aime jusqu'aux défauts des personnes qu'il aime" (vv. 729-30). Cependant Alceste est pris entre sa philosophie et son coeur: "Puis-je ainsi triompher de toute ma tendresse? / Et quoique avec ardeur je veuille vous haïr, / Trouvé-je un coeur en moi tout prêt à m'obéir?" (vv. 1748-50). Pour Alceste, Célimène symbolise une part de cette société corrompue qu'il voudrait changer et c'est exactement ce qu'il va essayer de faire avec elle: il veut la changer en l'obligeant de se décider pour lui ce qui, en revanche, est une décision automatique contre la société puisqu'il veut l'en éloigner. Ce défi qu'il lance à Célimène et indirectement à la société, le maintient dans une constante position antagoniste qui, par sa nature, génère de continuelles tensions: "avide d'émouvoir et d'accaparer un coeur et persuadé secrètement de n'y pas réussir, il s'est fixé par hasard à la femme la mieux faite pour lui faire sentir son échec et pour justifier la colère moralisante par laquelle il essaye de compenser cet échec" (Bénichou, p. 354).

Cependant le lecteur peut s'interroger sur ce qui arriverait si Alceste réussissait à faire coïncider théorie et pratique, s'il réussissait à changer Célimène . . . Ce serait l'abolition de toutes les tensions et alors Alceste perdrait sa raison de vivre et ceci serait la fin linéaire de la pièce--or elle perdrait de son réalisme. Mais Célimène ne changera pas. Elle oppose tout un réseau de résistances à Alceste. Elle emploie des paroles vagues et l'exagération, souvent sous forme de question, pour mieux s'esquiver: "Puis-je empêcher les gens de me trouver aimable? / Et lorsque pour me voir ils font de doux efforts, / Dois-je prendre un bâton

pour les mettre dehors?" (vv. 462-64). Cet exemple rend évident que les exagérations de Célimène ont souvent un effet ironique. Par son goût du jeu et sa crainte de perdre sa liberté, Célimène, comme Alceste, manque de sincérité. Par conséquent le vers 531 dans lequel Alceste réclame la sincérité, est tout à fait ironique: "Parlons à coeur ouvert, et voyons d'arrêter . . . ." Cette interruption est typique pour toute la pièce qui, au fond, se compose d'une suite d'interruptions. Celles-ci permettent à Célimène de se dérober et d'éviter une nette prise de position jusqu'à la fin de la pièce. Or la quête d'Alceste de réaliser un entretien avec Célimène pour obtenir une réponse sincère de sa part, est un des principes dynamiques de la pièce.

Néanmoins cette quête se base elle aussi sur le principe de la dualité d'Alceste que celui-ci cherche à résoudre dans l'espoir de concilier théorie et pratique. Mais la scène finale montrera que tout n'est pas aussi facile, que l'extrémisme d'Alceste rend impossible tout compromis, c'est-à-dire, toute solution acceptable pour Célimène. Il est donc inévitable que l'entretien entre Célimène et Alceste, qui a enfin lieu dans la dernière scène de l'oeuvre, soit voué à l'échec. Il s'y oppose une dernière fois à Célimène, représentante de cette société qu'il déteste avec tant d'ardeur mais dont il ne peut pas se défaire.

Ces tensions au niveau des personnages sont également traduites au niveau structural: "Les personnages n'ont en fait qu'à exister dans la présente pièce. Fortement individualisés, ils existent chacun sur un mode qui lui est propre. Le conflit entre ces différents mondes commande la structure de la pièce" (Guicharnaud, p. 502). Un des procédés utilisés par Molière est l'interruption. Cet effet appartient d'abord au domaine spatiale; nous le trouvons sous la forme de l'alternance régulière d'un vers prononcé par un personnage et du prochain vers proféré par son antagoniste. Ces tensions sont soulignées par l'utilisation de termes antonymiques. Un bon exemple se

trouve dans la deuxième scène du premier acte, la dispute entre Oronte et Alceste:

"Mais, mon petit monsieur, prenez-le un peu moins haut. / Ma foi, mon grand monsieur, je le prends comme il faut" (vv. 433-34; c'est moi qui souligne).

Un autre moyen par lequel se traduit l'antagonisme de deux personnages et les tensions qui en résultent, est la division de l'alexandrin ou après l'hémistiche, ou quelque part entre la première et la sixième syllabe:

"C'est pour rire, je crois.
Non, en aucune sorte."
v. 741

On peut avancer que d'une part la spatialité renforce l'antagonisme entre les personnages, mais elle est aussi une des sources du comique de cette pièce. Mais avant tout, ces interruptions confèrent un certain dynamisme à la pièce; cependant leur effet est plus profond encore au niveau structural: toute la pièce se construit autour d'une interruption majeure et constamment réitérée: c'est l'interruption d'Alceste. Il veut, dès le début, un entretien avec Célimène, nous l'avons noté plus haut; mais il est constamment interrompu par des personnages-obstacles. Les tensions ainsi créées se subordonnent à la tension majeure provenant de la dualité fondamentale d'Alceste. Molière se permet encore d'autres jeux structuraux: il met en scène deux antagonistes et, tout en maintenant le degré des tensions, il le renverse. Un merveilleux exemple est donné à la troisième scène du quatrième acte où l'accusateur (Alceste) devient l'accusé et vice versa (Célimène): "Les deux personnages sont irréductiblement 'étranger' l'un pour l'autre, l'un à l'autre--et c'est cette extranéité fondamentale que la troisième scène de l'acte IV rend éclatante une fois pour toutes aux yeux du spectateur" (Guicharnaud, p. 455).

Un autre moyen pour exprimer des tensions, c'est l'ironie. La place qu'elle tient dans la pièce est

Cette idée d'une composition circulaire avait déjà été sucitée par certains vers de structure antonymique poussés à l'extrême, qui se rejoignent et deviennent circulaires: "Et c'est n'estimer rien qu'estimer tout le monde" (v. 58), et par l'image que tous les personnages tournent autour du salon de Célimène, et qu'il est difficile de se soustraire à son attraction. Pour cela il est plus que douteux qu'Alceste ait la force de s'en aller à la fin de la pièce.

En opposant Le Misanthrope à une pièce de théatre traditionnelle, on peut constater quelques différences: il n'y a pas de véritable dénouement, les personnages ne progressent pas à travers leurs expériences parce que leurs problèmes et oppositions ne sont pas résoulus à la fin.

Qu'en est-il des autres éléments d'une pièce traditionnelle, l'exposition, le noeud, le développement et la crise? Il résulte de l'analyse que l'exposition soulève déjà tous les thèmes majeurs et démontre l'importance de l'oppostion qui se base sur la dualité d'Alceste. En cela l'exposition est excellente et suit la tradition. Mais là s'arrête toute comparaison. Toutes les séquences qui suivent ne font qu'illustrer et extérioriser ce débat intérieur du protagoniste présenté au premier acte par le moyen de l'enchâssement: les oppositions des personnages à travers leurs paroles s'insèrent dans les oppositions structurales. Ainsi se crée un état de tension dont la source se retrouvera constamment dans la dualité d'Alceste. Pour cette raison cet antagonisme fondamental est la force motrice de la pièce et Alceste en est en quelque sorte l'auteur.

Cette pièce est antagoniste à tous les niveaux, même au niveau littéraire: par sa structure circulaire et ses conflits irrésolus, elle s'oppose à la tradition et nous rappelle plutôt les pièces théatrales du vingtième siècle puisqu'elles aussi se basent très souvent sur les deux principes essentiels du Misanthrope: circularité et insolubilité des conflits exposés.

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NOTES

[1] Voir Paul Bénichou, Morales du grand siècle (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), Gérard Defaux, Molière ou les métamorphoses du comique (Lexington: French Forum Monographs, 1980), Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt, Molière ou la liberté mise à nu (Paris: Julliard, 1973), et Lionel Gossman, Men and Masks (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1963).

[2] Jean Mesnard, "Le Misanthrope. Mise en question de l'art de plaire," Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de la France, No. 5-6 (sept.-déc. 1972), pp. 863-89.

[3] Judd David Hubert, Molière and the Comedy of Intellect (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), p. 144.

[4] Molière, Le Misanthrope (Paris: Garnier, 1964), vv. 196-202.

[5] Jacques Guicharnaud, Molière, une aventure théatrale: Tartuffe, Dom Juan, Le Misanthrope (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), p. 358.

[6] Peter H. Nurse, Classical Voices (London: Harrap, 1971), p. 170.

[7] Robert McBride, The Sceptical Vision of Molière (London: Macmillan Press, 1977), p. 125.

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