CHAPTER THREE

FRAGMENTS OF A PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOURSE

You see, added Rastelli, after a pause, that our profession wasn't born yesterday and that we have our own story—or at least our stories.—Walter Benjamin

Un auteur paradoxal ne doit jamais dire son mot, mais toujours ses preuves; il doit entrer furtivement dans l'âme de son lecteur et non de vive force. C'est le grand art de Montaigne qui ne veut jamais prouver et qui va toujours prouvant, en me ballotant du blanc au noir, et du noir au blanc.—Denis Diderot

The libertine text may be considered progressive and ahead of its time in terms of the first-person narrative technique it develops. A similar first person, one also enriched from contact with personal literature and its two-timing dialogue, would be associated in the eighteenth century with the birth of what is commonly known as the “modern” novel. In one important way, however, the seventeenth-century works considered here are narratively conservative and archaic; they do not look forward to a literature liberated from the system of codification accepted by contemporary prose fiction but over their shoulders, back to a formal tradition that includes as its conscious and unconscious adherents such figures as Petronius, Menippus, and even the authors associated with the Arabic literary form known as maqāmāt.1 The quality linking the libertine text to these predecessors may be defined, vaguely, as a certain formal bizarreness. As a result of this structural aberration, all these works tend to defy classification.

No literary genre is as successful in avoiding definition as the novel. I choose to adopt Walter Benjamin’s image of the “aver-
age" novel, not because I subscribe wholeheartedly to it—I am far too aware of its idiosyncrasies to do so—but because I find that it enables me to point out the formal peculiarities of the libertine text as I see them. Benjamin's typical novel might seem atypical by other critical standards; but within his system, the libertine text’s narrative uniqueness can be situated, so I hope my readers will be willing to overlook their potential disagreements with Benjamin’s suppositions. In the definition he elaborates in his brilliant essay “The Storyteller,” Benjamin stresses the novel’s singleness of purpose. It is dedicated to the “meaning of life,” and in particular to the meaning of one, and only one, life: “one hero, one odyssey, one battle.” The novel is the archetypal remembrance of things past, the story of a man’s life, with the assumption that this life is uniquely important. From this assumption, the novel develops its particular sense of character. The full meaning of life cannot be grasped before its conclusion. The novelist must be prepared, therefore, to provide his readers with a vision of growth, culminating in the hero’s “experience of death,” at the very least, a “figurative death—the end of the novel—but preferably [his] ‘actual one.’”

Although surface resemblances might seem to link the libertine texts to the novel as described by Benjamin, a closer examination reveals that none of the major points stressed in his discussion are applicable to them. They remain finally as distant from this sense of the term “novel” as from “autobiography.” A reader can hope to find no “meaning”—of life or of anything else—from their characters, because their lives can come to no end. They will not, or cannot, reach death, either literal or metaphorical, cannot obtain the seal of completion it places on even a literary existence. In a sense, death in literature is comforting. At (long) last those slippery beings, those creatures who give the illusion of possessing a life of their own (especially when they dare to appropriate the first person) can be laid to rest, put in their places, denied any additional emotional encroachments into their readers’ hearts. With death, or at least some sort of surrogate closure, the reader, maintained in a state of perpetual victimization by the hero’s peripeteiae, at last is able to regain his control over the text and over himself. The hero’s sense of destiny is usually appreciated in the same way as his death by the reader of a novel. “It is my destiny to
say the heroes of the *romans héroïques*, meaning that
when their destiny is accomplished, and they win the war and get
the girl, they will either die, or be as good as dead.

The principal characters in the libertine texts deny the comfort
of mastery to their readers. They may speak in the first person, as
the heroes of many eighteenth-century French novels will later
do, but this first person is not linked to the developmental,
cause/effect narration that is generally considered appropriately
novelistic. In his essay, Benjamin opposes the novel to the story.
According to the distinction he sets up, the narrative structure of
the libertine work appears closer to that of the story. This some­
what paradoxical phenomenon may be explained at least partially
by some of the peculiarities of the libertine “I.” These authors
reject as much as possible the presence of a first-person narrator
with limitations of identity. There is no room in their texts for the
“I” of a hero with a unique vision, the type of vision deemed essen­
tial by Benjamin for the developmental structure characteristic of
the novel.

The recounting of uniqueness in its unfolding is characteristic
of the “I” of the novelistic narrator, but hardly of either the liber­
tine hero or the storyteller, Scheherazade’s doubles, for whom the
logic of causality is ultimately as impossible as the logic of unique­
ness. For the storyteller, a hero’s end is important not as the
culminating fulfillment of his personality but for its universal im­
plications, for its role as a moral or parable, as a metaphorical
reflection of the human condition. “Enfin je suis un raccourci de
la misère humaine,” as Scarron says in his burlesque self-
portrait. The hero of a story never claims singularity: he is Every­
man. Unlike the characters of the *roman héroïque*, this hero is
not the stuff dreams are made of. No reader could find in him
what is lacking in his own life. This hero is presented to the reader
not as larger than life but precisely in terms of his similarities. All
storytellers are as inventive as their archetype in the *Arabian
Nights*. This means they have the ability to see that one story
always leads to another, because all stories are ultimately the
same, just waiting for Propp to provide the basic schema that
reveals their lack of uniqueness.

Hand in hand with its rejection of uniqueness and its metaphor­
ical use of the hero, the story favors a type of narration that is
opposed to traditional notions of logic and explanation. The story’s web is at odds with the plausibility or verifiability associated with “information,” that form of communication so privileged during the rise of the novel, and described by Benjamin in dark tones as responsible for the destruction of magic in narrative. Information “tells all,” is in possession of all the facts and all the answers, in a sense does the reader’s work for him. Just the opposite is true of storytelling, and it is certainly the story’s holding back, its refusal to take the reader by the hand and lead him from one end of the narration to the other, that is the source of Benjamin’s admiration for its charms. The dreams provided by the novel are somehow too facile (too escapist?) for this intellectual Emma Bovary, this Baudelaian aesthete in search of more complex visions. Hence the peculiarities of his description of the nature of storytelling:

It is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it... The most extraordinary things, marvelous things are related with greatest accuracy, but the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader. It is left up to him to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks.\

For Benjamin, the source of storytelling’s greatness or “amplitude” is in the ability of its not completely fleshed-out narrative to leave space for its reader to fill with his dreams. Storytelling therefore resembles those paintings Baudelaire described as open to the critic’s theorizing because of their lack of explicitness and their distance from the overly realistic charms of that ever-present seducer, the too solid flesh. Benjamin’s preference for this type of narrative is certainly linked to his interpretation of another Baudelaian theory, that of the flâneur. Just as an individual inhabits his own interior in a special way, so the flâneur “tames” a city by living in it, by making it comfortable, and eventually his own. The city and its crowds allow him to transform them. They invite his participation in their creation. They are not closed, but open to his personal contribution. Comparing him to the flâneur, Benjamin says of Baudelaire: “he envisioned blank spaces which he filled with his poems”; and the same could be said of Benjamin himself, changing his formula to replace “poem” by “criticism.”
His admiration for the beauties of storytelling and his predilection for the work with connective gaps are the result of a modernist search for what might be termed a more "poetic" form of narrative.

In order to find a point of comparison with the seemingly incomplete structure of Tristan's text, Arland is forced to make a considerable forward leap chronologically (although an equally considerable backward one would have been just as appropriate):

"Si l'on tient à lui découvrir des correspondances, il convient de les chercher peut-être dans les souvenirs de Gérard, dans ceux de Heine ou dans certaines œuvres de notre temps . . . qui visent à une sorte de vérité poétique." What might otherwise be quickly dismissed as no more than the efforts of writers unable to structure a text properly, or as naïve, somewhat primitive narratives, may in this light be appreciated instead for their powerful integration of the narrative gap, for their weakening of prose's so-called metonymical bonds in favor of an exploration of the riches of storytelling's essentially poetic (metaphoric) narration.

I do not plan to limit my discussion of the structure of the libertine text to a search for aesthetic justifications, but intend to stress the ideological or philosophical roles performed by this lack of cause/effect development. It is important to note that the presence of a paratactical narration in the libertine novels cannot be attributed simply to a desire to maintain the form associated with the dominant prose tradition of the period. The libertine use of this narrative style is both infinitely more complex and more intellectually coherent than that found in the roman héroïque, where parataxis is simply the easiest means of integrating even the most farfetched hors d'œuvres and of passing from one thread of a complex intrigue to another with recourse to nothing but a bare minimum of formal organization—more a result of a desire for enormity than an attempt to illustrate a philosophical system.

In addition, it would be difficult to characterize the libertines as mere formal hangers-on, since elsewhere they amply demonstrate their break with contemporary norms. They manage, in fact, to anticipate one of the most far-reaching novelistic revolutions of the late seventeenth century, the change in length that was perhaps the last barrier to drop in the transfer of power from ro-
mance to novel. They thus prove to be a major, and generally neglected, exception to the schema advanced by Adam and other theoreticians of the novel:

Depuis le début de la Régence, la mode allait aux vastes sommes romanesques. Le public avait applaudi Cassandre et Cléopâtre, Cyrus et Clélie. On pouvait croire, vers 1660, que ce goût durerait encore. . . . Puis les lecteurs se lassèrent. S'ils restèrent fidèles aux longs romans d'une réputation consacrée, personne ne songea plus à faire imprimer une histoire en dix volumes. Il fut décidé qu'un roman devait avoir pour première vertu d'être court.10

The libertine writers were almost alone in their day in abandoning the narrative freedom exploited by the heroic novelists to ramble on for hundreds, even thousands, of pages, and to continue their stories with only the barest pretense at division into smaller, more easily digestible units. For the immense length of the roman héroïque, the libertines, with the obvious exception of Sorel, substitute far shorter, tighter works. And for the most part, they continue their tightening by replacing the standard heroic division into volumes or tomes (each often longer than many a complete libertine text) with chapters or other relatively short compositional units, sometimes only a few pages in length.11 Such a conception of division demands a completely different type of reading for these novels, a demand that might seem contradicted by the maintenance of parataxis, if the complex new role assigned to this narrative form by the libertine writers is not properly evaluated. They fail to make a break with the narrative disorder of the heroic tradition that seemed essential to the great majority of writers influential in the early evolution of the French novel. In their texts, the libertines not only maintain but privilege the narrative gap, and they do so not simply to indulge in still another manifestation of the rhetoric of absence, of the type associated with their treatment of the proper name. They continue to use this form of narrative silence because it leaves them free to play their complex and often dangerous games.

The first consequence of this antidevelopmental narration is an unusual, shifting type of characterization. The libertine narrator's journeys take him, in the case of the Tristan/D'Assoucy model, from one life experience to a second disturbingly similar experience to a third. In the Théophile/Cyrano variant, they take him
from philosophical system to religious discussion to political debate. In every instance, however, the lack of self-analyzing tendencies on the part of the narrator is striking. He draws no conclusions from all he sees and hears. He is apparently unmarked by his travels and experiences. There is no (evident) goal for his journey. Unlike most main characters, the libertine hero does not undergo any form of vertical development—instead, he defies psychological growth and causality by remaining, through repetition, on a strictly horizontal level of characterization.

Only in *L’Autre Monde* can there be observed a libertine hero capable of change, and even here characterization remains resolutely opposed to standard logic, never leaving the domain of the horizontal and paratactical for the generally privileged vertical and developmental. Cyrano performs this seemingly impossible task through the acknowledgment and integration of paradox. Instead of maintaining the immobility of characterization standard in the classical period, Cyrano chooses to place the responsibility for the narration in the hands of an intellectually unstable main character. The narrator’s ideas about various phenomena are contrasted with those of a series of interlocutors in the dialogues that constitute the main body of *L’Autre Monde*. His own point of view in these dialogues is shifting; the reader never knows on which side of a particular question the narrator will take a stand. At different moments in the text, he is even capable of defending contradictory positions on the same question. For example, he is forced to leave the Garden of Eden when he makes what Elie considers a profession of atheism: “Abominable, dit-il [Elie] en se reculant, tu as l’impudence de râler sur les choses saintes. . . . Va, impie, hors d’ici, va publier dans ce petit monde et dans l’autre, car tu es prédestiné à y retourner, la haine irréconciliable que Dieu porte aux athées” (p. 53).

The final “return trip” to “l’autre monde” predicted by Elie in this scene will take place only because of a complete about-face in religious matters on the narrator’s part. His last conversation is with the young man referred to as “le fils de l’hôte.” In the course of their discussion, the latter argues for the mortality of the soul, against the resurrection of the dead, and finally against the existence of God. The narrator, in this dialogue at least, consistently defends the point of view of Catholic orthodoxy against the
“opinions diaboliques” of the man he feels may be “l’Antéchrist dont il se parle tant dans notre monde” (p. 116). Through the combined use of innocence—often far blinder than that of the heroes of Voltaire’s philosophical tales—irony, and provocation, Cyrano creates the most complex anti-hero in early French fiction.

Since the ultimate libertine hero contains paradox, is capable simultaneously of defending contradictory opinions, of believing and not believing, of understanding and not understanding, it seems logical that his complexities cannot be expressed in terms of cause/effect narration. From the first, texts that current readers would unhesitatingly accept as novels, in Philip Stewart’s words, “begin at the beginning,” and then “imitate the linear chronology of life itself.”12 Such a developmental chronology is generally associated with the novelistic. “To begin at the beginning” and progress with a series of “as a result of that, this happened” steps, until the most closed-off ending possible is reached, such is the ideal of the novel’s “anti-poetical” narrative, based on a logic that refuses the integration of paradox. Ultimately, as Kristeva points out in an article that sets up a typology of the forms of logic in discourse, the rigid causality of such a system demonstrates its acceptance and integration of origin and authority, in the form of submission to such forces as God or history.13 The paradoxical logic of the libertine text (of the type Kristeva calls “logique corrélationnelle”),14 however, categorically rejects these notions, just as the libertines themselves fought against them in their own lives.

The libertine text, coming from nowhere and with nowhere to go, unfolds somewhere outside or beyond standard literary chronology. The characters in the Fragments go to bed and wake up in the morning, but that temporal distinction seems as artificial and as unmotivated by any force other than a desire to separate chapters as the division of Théophile’s collected works into Journées. D’Assoucy is terrified of staying in one place, as though, if he turned off the perpetual-motion machine of his travels, there would be no way of filling up his days, and more importantly, no way of providing a chronology for them. Thus, when his Burgundian benefactor tries to shower him with riches, stability, and comfort for even a short time, the Emperor flees this problem-free
existence in a panic. He cannot, however, provide the disorder of his adventures with a developmental story line, so the reader soon forgets to distinguish the temporal and geographical setting of each scene of gambling and swindling.

*L'Autre Monde* is such an extreme case of this defiance of time that its paradoxical chronology is as seemingly impossible as its paradoxical characterization: “Je descendais vers la terre . . . j'y retombai quelque temps après, et à compter l'heure que j'en étais parti, il devait être minuit. Cependant je reconnus que le soleil était alors au plus haut de l'horizon, et qu'il était midi” (p. 33). By means of its narrator's voyages through day and night, over and through the earth's revolutions and its so-called time zones, *L'Autre Monde* provides the clearest demonstration of an essential goal of the libertine text: to serve as a reminder of the artificiality of such notions as calendar time and watch/clock time, and above all, of the fragility of the comfort they provide as a form of control over life. *L'Autre Monde* begins: “La lune était dans son plein, le ciel était découvert, et neuf heures du soir étaient sonnées lorsque nous revenons d'une maison proche de Paris, quatre de mes amis et moi” (p. 31). This beginning adds a remarkable new precision to one of the standard opening formulas for contemporary novels of the comic and heroic traditions alike, the establishment of the time of day at which their first scene takes place. In other novels, the time is indicated only very vaguely, but here it is just after 9 P.M., and the narrator is able to pass on this information with certainty because he has heard the hour “proclaimed” by an official keeper of time. But, as he will soon learn, 9 o'clock at night is at the same time 9 in the morning in Canada and the entire other half of the globe, and who knows what time on the moon (this problem is prudently avoided in *L'Autre Monde*).

For this confusion artificially regulated by convention, the libertines substitute the clarity of a unique time, which might be described as an eternal present, were that term not too suggestive of fullness and completion. Libertine time is rather an eternal about-to-be, an eternal gamblers' time. It resembles the temporality Benjamin describes as “time in hell, the province of those who are not allowed to complete anything they have started.” The libertine text is always centered on the next hand, the next round.
This is the domain of the *éternel retour* of Scheherazade and other storytellers who, with their stories, put off death, until they finally become immune to it. They are no more than a voice (or in this case, a pen) telling stories that, because of their place within the vast web of all possible and interrelated stories, acquire a relativity unknown to the novel with its intimations of immortal unrepeatability. Time does not exist for the storyteller, so he cannot grow old. Thus, D'Assoucy fights Loret's proclamation of his death by refusing to admit the possibility of an end. He describes the last years of his life as no other writer of his century did, and largely for the purpose of showing how that life never changed, never developed. Without evolution, how can he age, how can he die? He continues to announce more adventures at the end of every volume.

Temporal relativity is ultimately the result of repeatability, of the ability of a text to seem able to go on forever. Because it continues a tradition of paratactical narration, the libertine text is able to repeat itself with enormous facility. And just as it uses horizontal characterization to integrate paradox, the foundation of a relativistic philosophy, so it puts repetition to work for libertine ends. These novelists follow Peiresc's advice to Gassendi and attempt to find "terms si reservez et si ajustez, qu'il y ayt moyen d'entendre une bonne partie de voz intentions sans que le sens littéral y soit si preciz." They discover that, with this goal in mind, they can successfully employ a form of what might be termed "metaphorical" narration, basically a reiteration of a key passage or situation, slightly altered in each recounting. This is apparently the closest thing possible to an age-old libertine technique, one already practiced by such an illustrious predecessor as Artephius, the "inspiration" for Tristan's Artefius. In the preface to his translation of the *Philosophie naturelle*, Pierre Arnauld explains the manner in which Artephius could be considered a practitioner of narrative artifice:

> Toutes fois que les impies, ignorans, et meschans ne puissent aise­ment trouver le moyen de nuire aux bons apprenant cette science, il a un peu voilé le principal de l'art, par une artificieuse methode, faisant comme s'il repetoit plusieurs fois une chose, car dans icelles repetitions il change toujours quelques mots semblant souvent dire le contraire de ce qu'il a dit auparavant, voulant laisser au jugement du lecteur le bon chemin.
It is easy to imagine the advantages to be drawn from such a system by an author with a dangerous message. By means of simple changes in his repetitions, he may hint at a great deal while actually saying very little explicitly. As they imply with their use of the first person, all the individual libertine stories vary only slightly from the libertine Ur-text. It is therefore an easy matter to transfer elements from one biography to another, to draw parallelisms between two or more situations, to use a less controversial freethinker to draw attention away from a more or less unmentionable figure. What I have called here the libertine nod of recognition is obviously an important tool used by these novelists to shape their texts along these lines.

Since *L'Autre Monde* contains a greater number of these nods of recognition than any other text in the tradition, one would expect it to make the most complex use of metaphorical narration. Once the web formed by Cyrano's interchangeable situations is even partially unraveled, the reader begins to suspect that a proper evaluation of all the risky implications adumbrated by this lunar voyage would require an almost impossibly close reading. The principal metaphorical chain in *L'Autre Monde* is generated by the figure of a defender of intellectual freedom obliged to spend his days as a wanderer because his ideas are too daring for the society in and for which he developed them. The central figure in this chain is the work's narrator, who, in its opening paragraphs, is the first subject of a repeated vignette portraying the ostracizing of a freethinker.

It is because his imagination is not free in the intellectual circle he frequents that the narrator sets out on his journey to the moon. *L'Autre Monde* begins as he and four of his friends are returning home from a place near Paris. "La lune était dans son plein," the opening phrase, sets the stage for the prefatory conversation, reported by the narrator in indirect speech, in which three of the friends give their definitions of the moon: "une lucarne du ciel par où l'on entrevoyait la gloire des bienheureux"; "la platine où Diane dresse les rabats d'Apollon"; "le soleil lui-même, qui s'étant au soir dépouillé de ses rayons regardait par un trou ce qu'on faisait au monde quand il n'y était plus" (p. 31). The company finds this burlesquing of various systems of belief quite entertaining. When in the first direct speech of the text the narrator
offers his own definition, he is greeted by the loudest outburst of laughter thus far: "Et moi, dis-je, qui souhaite mêler mes enthousiasmes aux vôtres, je crois sans m'amuser aux imaginations pointues dont vous chatouillez le temps pour le faire marcher plus vite, que la lune est un monde comme celui-ci, à qui le nôtre sert de lune" (p. 31).

The reasons for finding this formulation so humorous are not immediately evident. The narrator’s definition is certainly no more ludicrous than those of his companions. It even fits perfectly into the overall order of presentation: the moon is first compared to two more or less rectangular, flat surfaces, then to two spheres. Moreover, this theory, unlike the others, is presented for serious consideration—"sans m'amuser"—yet, even though the narrator goes on to explain the theories of Copernicus, Kepler, and others, his audience only continues to "s'égosiller de plus belle." The reader is left to wonder if the fact that the narrator chooses to display his ideas in the same informal manner as that used by his friends does not close their minds to any serious consideration of his theory. How can something heard in a comic context be taken seriously? Thus, Cyrano inscribes a familiar problem of the histoire comique in the opening of his work. The narrator’s companions turn for their jokes to tired mythological systems and to the neutralization of the burlesque. They lack the imagination necessary to integrate his translation into a relativistic system. If the moon is an earth and the earth is a moon, then their moonlight stroll is perhaps not a unique phenomenon. The narrator, like all men with the ability to conceive of alternate systems encountered in L’Autre Monde, is mocked because of his intellectual daring.

From time to time in the course of L’Autre Monde, certain individuals such as Achab and Campanella are praised because they, too, were at least ridiculed, if not condemned to a harsher fate, when they tried to present new and often seemingly absurd theories. One of the few moments when the novel’s narrative tone becomes serious and elevated is reserved for Tristan L’Hermite, who is described by the demon of Socrates in a eulogy that ends: "C'est le seul poète, le seul philosophe et le seul homme libre que vous ayez" (p. 57). There is even a remarkable episode that consti-
tutes a careful parody of both *L'Autre Monde*'s opening scene and, more daringly, of Galileo's trial and subsequent renunciation of his theory. The narrator is accused of heresy by the priests on the moon because “j'avais osé dire que la lune était un monde dont je venais, et que leur monde n'était qu'une lune” (p. 79). The demon of Socrates comes to his defense by explaining that “s'il est homme, quand même il ne serait pas venu de la lune, puisque tout homme est libre, ne lui est-il pas libre de s'imaginer ce qu'il voudra? Quoi! pouvez-vous le contraindre à n'avoir que vos visions? Vous le forcerez bien à dire qu'il croit que la lune n'est pas un monde, mais il ne le croira pas pourtant” (p. 80). The demon is able through his oration to persuade them to do away with the death penalty, but that is replaced by another punishment. Despite the demon's warnings against dogmatism, the narrator is obliged to cry at every crossroads of the city: “Peuple, je vous déclare que cette lune ici n'est pas une lune, mais un monde; et que ce monde de là-bas n'est pas un monde, mais une lune. Tel est ce que les Prêtres trouvent bon que vous croyiez” (p. 81).

The narrator's fellow prisoner on the moon, the Spaniard, explains how he traveled around the world and finally left it for the moon because “il n'avait pu trouver un seul pays où l'imagination même fut en liberté” (p. 66). The demon meets Tristan L'Hermite in England. He, too, is condemned to wander because of the boldness of his thinking: “Je rencontrai un homme, la honte de son pays” (p. 57). And the demon himself is the archetypal traveler/seeker for freedom. He is still referred to by the name of his first “master,” Socrates: “Il ajouta . . . qu'on l'appelait le démon de Socrate” (p. 55). His title provides a link with Cyrano and Dyrcona's most famous predecessor in the art of dialogic reasoning—and in the unhappy fates to which it leads. The demon describes his past in some detail: he has spent the centuries since the death of Socrates traveling from country to country advising imaginative thinkers.

The narrator has in common with the various seasoned rebels he either encounters or has described for him the fact that he undertakes his voyages (more or less of his own free will) to escape persecution. The implications of these comparisons between the narrator and historical individuals are crucial. Indeed, if paradox
may be called the "negative" structuring principle on which L'Autre Monde is based, comparisons such as these constitute its "positive" unifying device. L'Autre Monde lacks the causal development of the novel. The reader cannot expect to be led by means of traditional logic to a clearly interpretable conclusion. Cyrano's text is saved from being merely a hopeless muddle of disparate fragments by the presence in it of chains of metaphorical situations: the narrator's position is like Galileo's, and Galileo's is like Tristan's, and Tristan's is like the Spaniard's, whose situation is similar to the narrator's, and so on. Meaning in L'Autre Monde is not the result of the rationality of a story line. In Cyrano's aesthetics of fragmentation, certain situations and images become obsessional. In order to comprehend the work's significance, it is necessary to replace the links omitted by ellipsis and to connect the obsessive repetitions.

It is already daring for the narrator to be compared to historical individuals persecuted for their ideas, since some of these men, such as Galileo, were considered dangerous thinkers in Cyrano's day. In addition, these parallelisms enter the realm of blasphemy when, during the course of his conversation with Elie in the Garden of Paradise, the narrator establishes by means of explicit and implicit comparisons illustrious precedents for his flights to and from paradise. In the Garden of Eden, as Elie explains to him, "n'ont jamais entré que six personnes: Adam, Eve, Enoch, moi qui suis le vieil Elie, saint Jean l'Evangéliste, et vous" (p. 44). It is apparent that the narrator's enterprise, and with it those of all his predecessors in intellectual daring, is being compared to certain key moments in biblical history. Enoch reaches paradise through a most original use of "le feu du ciel." As the fire is consuming one of his sacrificial victims, Enoch fills with the vapor rising from the sacrifice two vases that he attaches under his armpits, sure that he will get to paradise because of God's words: "L'odeur des sacrifices du juste est montée jusqu'à moi" (p. 45). The narrator's utilization of vials of dew in his first attempt at interplanetary travel is reminiscent of Elie's technique: "Je m'étais attaché autour de moi quantité de fioles pleines de rosée, et la chaleur du soleil qui les attirait m'éleva si haut, qu'à la fin je me trouvai au-dessus des plus hautes nuées" (pp. 32-33). Later, the narrator is separated from
this paradise reached by various forms of evaporation or sublimation because he lacks the patience to receive information at a rhythm dictated by his more prudent guide. This time, the comparison can be drawn, for example, with Adam and Eve’s loss of the same paradise, or with Achab’s loss of the Ark’s shelter. Just as the narrator flees Elie, Adam escapes the vengeance of God by “le feu de son enthousiasme” (p. 44). And since Adam is known to “les idolâtres” under the name of Prometheus (p. 45), the network opens up to include a prebiblical past as well.

Prometheus, who “fut bien autrefois au ciel dérober du feu” (p. 32), is the central figure in the narrator’s genealogy. L’Autre Monde sketches various possibilities for literal and figurative interpretations of the Prometheus myth. On the moon, the sexual connotations of primitive fire myths become explicit. Nobles may be recognized because they have the right to wear not a sword but “la figure d’un membre viril.” The host’s son explains to the scandalized narrator the superiority of this symbol, which, instead of honoring an instrument of destruction, exalts “un membre sans qui nous serions au rang de ce qui n’est pas, le Prométhée de chaque animal” (p. 108). And the two systems are united in the figure of the archangel who guards paradise with his “épée flamboyante” (p. 51). The idea of procreation is converted by other codes into different forms of creation that range from inspiration, to vision, to imaginative thinking, to literary creation. The fire symbolic of Prometheus is mentioned frequently in L’Autre Monde: “le feu du ciel,” “l’ardeur du feu de la charité,” “le feu de l’enthousiasme,” the “fièvres chaudes” of the narrator’s vision of “l’autre monde”—“notre imagination, plus chaude que les autres facultés de l’âme” (p. 100). All forms of liberating desire are equated, and the quest for fire becomes the unifying bond among those who make real and imaginary voyages in Cyrano’s work. Those who give free reign to the powers of the imagination, like Enoch, John the Evangelist, Galileo, and even the still anonymous narrator, travel under the sign of fire.

In fact, the narrator, who seeks to unite the (apparently) contradictory ways of living in the new intellectual world he describes in L’Autre Monde, can be seen as the next Prometheus the Spaniard is searching for on the moon: “Il nous manque un Promé-
thée pour faire cet extrait” (p. 73). He himself immediately invites the comparison when he first envisions his lunar voyage in these terms:

Mais, ajoutais-je, je ne saurais m'éclaircir de ce doute, si je ne monte jusque-là?
Et pourquoi non? me répondais-je aussitôt. Prométhée fut bien autrefois au ciel (p. 32).

With his explosive book (whose writing is described at the beginning of the *Estats et empires*), the narrator becomes a worthy inheritor of Galileo and Cardano. In *L'Autre Monde*, he shares Galileo’s trial. Cardano’s works are inspired by the same men the narrator believes to be responsible for opening his copy of Cardano to the page describing their apparition to his Italian predecessor. The narrator, in the same inspirational situation as Cardano and soon to create a work similar to his, is seen reading the passage in Cardano that describes the guidance he received. The libertine mise en abyme illustrates the passing on of the torch, as does each of the other links in *L'Autre Monde*’s most essential metaphorical chain.

It is certainly in *L'Autre Monde* that this structuring principle finds its most striking elaboration, hence my decision to use this text as my main example here. No other libertine text matches its structural density, but repetition replaces development in all of them. The use of repetition varies according to each text’s particular thematic obsessions. *L'Autre Monde*’s own obsession is centered on the libertine presence, the naming of libertine ancestors. The most frequently repeated themes in the other texts, such as gambling and magic, will be discussed at length in the next chapter. To mention only one example here: though the hero-victimized-as-a-result-of-his-gambling sequence in the *Avantures* does not possess the complexity that is the source of *L'Autre Monde*’s strength, simply because it substitutes a single protagonist for the multiplicity of figures evoked by Cyrano, the blatant simplicity of its repetition is nevertheless sufficient to erase any cause/effect narration in the text.

Cause/effect narration anchored in the developmental must be erased in order to permit the juxtaposition of the segments of a given theme. The most effective play among the various occurrences of each situation is obtained from a narrative based on
constant fragmentation. These texts never necessitate the sort of attention span that caused Rousseau’s faithful reader to miss her ball. This is true not only because they are concerned with nothing so little as love, generally assumed to be the only novelistic subject capable of awakening and maintaining such sustained curiosity, but also because they are divided into completely autonomous, short units that make possible, and even encourage, a choppy reading. The building blocks of a libertine narrative are so easily separated from the text in its entirety that each appears to encourage its detachment into the sort of independent existence possessed by an anthology piece. In the only reference to division found in any of these texts, Tristan pledges allegiance to a sort of aesthetics of lazy reading, or an aesthetics of reading for a lazy reader. The page explains to model reader Thirinte that “j’ai divisé toute cette histoire en petits chapitres, de peur de vous être ennuyeux par un trop long discours, et pour vous faciliter le moyen de me laisser en tous les lieux où je pourrai vous être moins agréable” (p. 50).

It is true that Tristan’s novel sets a pace so brisk that even the demanding page could be reassured. The use of short chapters in Théophile’s Fragments provides the only real precedent for Tristan’s break with dominant tradition. It might even be argued that Tristan fails to live up to the model provided by the Fragments. There, in order to replace gripping subject matter with narrative speed, each chapter is made almost completely independent and detachable. In fact, the only elements Théophile’s reader must retain from one chapter to the next are the names and identities of the narrator’s companions.

Even without the clearly indicated division into chapters favored by Théophile and Tristan, other libertine texts achieve the same goal of narrative fragmentation. Cyrano’s extraterrestrial voyages evidently decompose into brief segments. After his initial nocturnal conversation with his friends, the narrator of L’Autre Monde is kept busy through discussions with ten interlocutors, and no attempt is made to hide the fact that each of these dialogues leads an independent existence. The Estats et empires, likewise, contains a series of Dyrcona’s conversations, and the text is further split by the insertion of four brief interpolated stories, the only occurrence in a libertine text of this “narrative aid”
otherwise so frequently encountered in seventeenth-century novels. Three of these tales are presented in the classical manner: Dyrcona notices a mysterious phenomenon, and persuades a knowledgeable bystander to provide him with an explanation for it. Thus, the nightingale’s story (pp. 142–46) is supplied by the king of the little people, the “Histoire des Arbres Amans” (pp. 168–76) by the “plus sage de tous les Chesnes du Dodonne,” and the fight between the Salamandre and the Remore (pp. 177–81) is described by Campanella. Finally, the narrator himself provides an additional story, that of his capture and trial by birds (pp. 142–64), which actually belongs to the voyage’s primary narrative plane, but is presented as though it were a distinct unit, to the point of being set off with its own subtitle, “L’Histoire des Oiseaux.”

The two earthly voyages adopt still another means of cutting, a juxtaposition of prose and verse, with its roots in both Menippean satire and burlesque narrative. Chapelle allows verse to intervene at more regular intervals than does D’Assoucy, with an end result that resembles an operatic alternation between recitative and lyric. In the Voyage, poetry is frequently assigned the role of description. If, for example, a proper name is mentioned, then a brief verse interlude will be inserted to describe some of the individual’s or place’s salient features. The narrative status of these moments as hors d’oeuvres is made clear by their distinct formal nature. D’Assoucy provides what is certainly the last word in narrative fragmentation, making the Avantures a compilation of the various methods employed in previous libertine texts. He combines short chapters characteristic of the Page and the Fragments, with occasional subtitles, such as “La Rencontre de l’Illustre Savoyard,” to set off privileged moments within chapters, a method used by Cyrano in the Estats et empires, with a mixture of verse and prose similar to Chapelle’s, as though he were concerned that one of these means alone would not be sufficient to stress his rejection of the developmental. Furthermore, D’Assoucy’s juxtaposition of prose and verse is far more paratactical than Chapelle’s. Passages of poetry composed specifically for the Avantures are generally devoted to burlesque flights of fancy and commentaries on events, and are therefore more removed from their context than Chapelle’s concrete descriptions. Moreover,
D'Assoucy indulges in moments of self-citation, inserting some of his previously published poems into the sections of his adventures that describe the events surrounding their composition. Into his text, he splices interludes so autonomous that they already possess a previous literary existence, and are therefore perfectly incompatible with any notion of subordination of the part to the whole. At these moments, the Avantures seems no more than a showcase for the recycling of moments of past literary glory, for the insertion of frozen refrains that clearly denounce the lack of progression in the text.

In The Chapter in Fiction, Philip Stevick discusses at great length some of the ways in which novelists usually leap over the silence between chapters. They try to facilitate the passage over the blank space that marks the transition through the creation of what Stevick calls “cadences”, for example, “anticipatory cadences,” or remarks at the end of a chapter that provoke suspense or anticipation for what will be found in the following one. 

Thus, as Stevick demonstrates, the normal way of dealing with the gap between chapters is simply to bridge it. He fails to leave room in his system for a less typical case, such as that of the libertine text, in which no attempt is made to eliminate the blank spaces not only between chapters or other units whose separate status is clearly indicated typographically but also between narrative entities whose boundaries, even if unmarked, are nonetheless clearly implied. In libertine narrative, parataxis is the basic structuring principle. These texts so foster disjunction that they would run the risk of near disintegration into a mass of unrelated segments, were it not for their use of the basic unifying device in early narrative, the appearance of the hero/narrator in all episodes. Only repetition within parataxis assures a form of unity.

It is largely because the libertine text reverses in these ways the generally accepted standards that govern the territories of ending and non-ending in prose fiction that it was so harshly judged for so long. For theoreticians sharing a common vision of logic and the logical, everything about the libertine text is wrong. In the first place, its chapters and other divisional units are all marked by a sense of closure and maintain their autonomy when this is least expected. Then, to make matters worse, the libertine text does an about-face and abandons its autonomy in situations
when other texts defend it, abandons the overall closure provided by an ending, or at least a sense of ending. The majority of these texts are unfinished—the *Fragments* and the *Estats et empires* literally so; the first edition of *Francion*, the *Page*, and *L'Autre Monde* because their heroes do not reach the end of their adventures. And because they are opposed to the notion of conclusiveness, they are all open-ended as well.

"There is no story for which the question as to how it continued would not be legitimate. The novelist, on the other hand, cannot hope to take the smallest step beyond that limit at which he invites the reader to a divinatory realization of the meaning of life by writing 'Finis.' "26 Walter Benjamin contrasts in these terms the contradictory goals of two types of narrative. It is easy to see why the libertine text cannot share the optimism that enables all narrative forms that can be readily classified as novels to impose limits. A novel without a goal is an impossible thing, and the libertine text has nowhere to go, either in its subject matter, stripped of such novelistic end products as love and initiation, or in its philosophical orientation, deprived of the support of a belief in truth and of the ability to stop questioning. Thus, the libertine writers are obliged not only to maintain the paratactical narrative of the *roman héroïque* but even to call attention to its importance for them.

The combination of this narrative form with dialogic subject matter and a philosophy of paradox is certainly an explosive one. *Clélie* sometimes employs what may be termed "accidental" or "unconscious" fragmentation, but, since it tries on the whole to remain faithful to an easily followed developmental logic, it was never judged either incomprehensible or mad. Unlike, for example, *L'Autre Monde*, where fragmentation is not only continuous but perfectly conscious and motivated as well, and which, as a result, has been disdained as being only "un assemblage d'éléments divers et parfois opposés,"27 and even reviled as a reflection of Cyrano's "madness." "Quand il fit son *Voyage dans la lune*, il en avait déjà le premier quartier dans la tête," as Ménage put it.

Even this summary comparison serves to demonstrate that the simple presence of fragmentation is not sufficient to have a work classified as problematic. On the other hand, any attempt to put this form in the service of a new type of logic, to develop a logic of
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fragmentation, a logic that could be considered threatening to standard notions of logic, this can never be tolerated by the dominant tradition. In conclusion, I would like to break away from the developmental movement of academic logic, and to borrow just once the libertine notion of the metaphorical chain. In "Galileo’s Language: Mathematics and Poetry in a New Science," Stillman Drake situates the origin of Galileo’s persecution in the style and the logic he developed:

The style used in writing a scientific work in any era requires respect for precision. Galileo’s predecessors sought logical precision; his successors sought mathematical precision. Galileo did not turn his back on either of these; instead, he recognized and added other ways of making things precise. . . . Modern science tends to be written in technical terms without the slightest tincture of poetic metaphor. It is of interest that Galileo rejected such a style, though it already prevailed around him. Had he adopted it, it is likely that he would have reached the top of the academic profession, would not have left the university to serve the Grand Duke, and would have died in universal esteem rather than as a condemned heretic.28

As L'Autre Monde seeks to demonstrate, Galileo is like Dyrcona/Cyrano; Dyrcona/Cyrano is like Tristan; Tristan is like Théophile, and so on.

1. For a description of the formal characteristics of the maqāmāt and a discussion of their resemblances with subsequent Western literary traditions, see Ben E. Perry’s The Ancient Romances, pp. 206-7.
2. Illuminations, pp. 98, 99.
4. Œuvres comiques, 1:130.
5. Illuminations, p. 89.
7. Le Page disgracié, p. 33.
8. “Il lui manque l’ordre, l’harmonieux accord de toutes les parties, l’arrangement définitif qui fait un tout homogène,” says Fournel of Cyrano (p. 52). His criticism of L’Autre Monde’s narrative logic is representative of an important tradition of its textual interpretation.
9. This distinction between what I term non-poetic and poetic narration has obvious affinities with Barthes’s “texte de plaisir” and “texte de jouissance.” There are, for example, resemblances between the “texte de jouissance” and poetic narration. “Ce lecteur, il faut que je le cherche (que je le ‘drague’), sans savoir où il est. Un espace de la jouissance est alors créé. Ce n’est pas la ‘personne’ de l’autre qui m’est nécessaire, c’est l’espace: la possibilité d’une dialec-
tique du désir, d'une imprévision de la jouissance: que les jeux ne soient pas faits, qu'il y ait un jeu." It must be admitted, however, that the poetic text as I have described it here stops short of continuing the notion of narrative freedom to Barthes's conclusion, a permanent state of coupure: "Ce qu'il veut, c'est le lieu d'une perte, c'est la faille, la coupure, la déflation" (Le Plaisir du texte, pp. 11, 15).

10. Adam, Histoire, 4:159–60.

11. The average length of a chapter in the Page is, for example, no more than a little over two and a half pages. In my experience, the only seventeenth-century novel outside the libertine tradition to practice a division into short chapters is the Roman comique.


13. Kristeva discusses at some length the question of the logic of poetic narration in "Le Mot, le dialogue, et le roman." I plan to consider her remarks in my last chapter, along with the question of dialogue and the dialogic.


15. Sunrise and sunset are undoubtedly the most popular moments at which to open a novel, as an examination of the first sentences of works given in Lever's bibliography reveals. In general, only comic novels are ever precise enough about their opening time to indicate an hour. Even then, both of the best-known examples fail to equal Cyrano's precision, because they continue to give a choice of hours. For Scarron, when Le Roman comique begins it is "entre cinq et six" (ed. Adam, p. 532), and the first scene of Claude Le Petit's L'Heure du Berger takes place "entre huit et neuf du soir" (ed. Lachèvre, Les Oeuvres libertines de Claude Le Petit, p. 57). On the first sentences in seventeenth-century novels, see my "Scarron's Roman comique: The Other Side of Parody."


17. See chapter 1, note 53.

18. (Laurent d'Houry, 1682), p. 4. Arnauld is the probable translator of the text and author of this preface.

19. In the versions of L'Autre Monde available in the edition published by Le Bret in 1657 under the title Histoire comique and in the Munich manuscript, two of the most puzzling divergences with the text of the Paris manuscript occur in the work's first paragraph. The 1657 edition changes the number of friends returning to Paris (from "quatre de mes amis et moi" to the indeterminate "plusieurs de mes amis et moi"), and the Munich manuscript alters both the number of friends (this time, to the equally vague "quelques-uns") and the total number of definitions given (from four to five, as another of the friends pokes fun for a second time at classical mythology: "tantôt un autre, persuadé des fables anciennes, s'imaginait que possible Bacchus tenait taverne là-haut, au Ciel, et qu'il y avait pendu pour enseigne la pleine lune" (Histoire comique, pp. 1–2; and Oeuvres libertines de Cyrano de Bergerac, 1:5).

20. Maurice Laugaa describes these systems as "systèmes 'fixistes': le Dieu chrétien, l'Olympe païen, le Soleil mythique ou rationnel des théories héliocentriques" ("Lune, ou l'Autre," p. 285).

21. If the roundness suggested by "platine" because of its association with watches is dismissed. The additional definition provided by the Munich manuscript and the shifting order in which these definitions are presented in all editions of L'Autre Monde prior to Lachèvre's are responsible for a certain degree of confusion in readings of this passage by critics not completely aware of the discrepancies among editions. Jaqueline Van Baelen, for example, analyzes it
only with the inclusion of the Bacchus comparison, despite its dubious origin and the evident syntactic and semantic asymmetry created by its presence ("Reality and Illusion in L'Autre Monde: The Narrative Voyage," (pp. 179–80). Laugaa realizes that this definition provokes what he terms "une perturbation du sens" (p. 288), but he incorrectly analyzes it as belonging to Le Bret's text, instead of to that of the Munich manuscript, which has its own particular problems of origin.

22. In De Vita Propria Liber, Cardano in fact refers on several occasions to a "guardian spirit" who inspired and guided his work. He devotes a chapter to his own case and to the story of others who, like him, were attended by such beings: "all, to be sure, lived happily save Socrates and me" (p. 240). Thereby he documents one phase of the demon's pre-lunar existence.

23. As Laugaa says of L'Autre Monde: "La vogue des morceaux choisis autorise les remanieurs à trancher à nouveau dans un texte supposé docile à toutes les mutilations" (p. 282).


25. The narrator, of course, is generally not present in interpolated stories.

26. Illuminations, p. 100.

