Tous les savants étaient autrefois accusés de magie. Je n’en suis point étonné. Chacun disait en lui-même: “J’ai porté les talents naturels aussi loin qu’ils peuvent aller; cependant un certain savant a des avantages sur moi: il faut bien qu’il y ait là quelque diablerie.”

À présent que ces sortes d’accusations sont tombées dans le décri, on a pris un autre tour; et un savant ne saurait guère éviter le reproche d’irréligion ou d’hérésie.—Montesquieu

Je veux tâcher que pour apprendre à s’apprécier, on puisse avoir du moins une pièce de comparaison; que chacun puisse connoitre soi et un autre, et cet autre ce sera moi. . . . Je vais travailler pour ainsi dire dans la chambre obscure; il n’y faut point d’autre art que de suivre exactement les traits que je vois marqués.—Jean-Jacques Rousseau

I. THE WAY IT WAS, OR, WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

The heroes of the libertine novels are all men of letters. The narrator of the Fragments is a famous poet, and poetry is also the avocation of the young Francion. By the 1626 version of his life-novel, the part-time poet has developed full-scale novelistic projects. Raymond asks Francion the classic question: Why does he not write his memoirs? He answers that he has already done so: “Il y en a encore un autre où j’ay plaisament descrit quelques unes de mes aventures, lequel j’appelle la Jeunesse de Francion” (p. 437). However, his claims to authorship are disputed, in the books that describe his youthful adventures, by a frame narrative in which Francion is no more than a character referred to in the
third person by an "I" who takes responsibility for the narration and who cannot be confused with Francion. No matter. With his ex post facto appropriation of the book, Francion also lays claim to the title reserved by Démoris for the page: "Le héros écrivant entre dans la fiction; c'est à un livre que conduisaient ses aventures."1 True, the page is more noticeably an author than Francion. From the start, he is associated with the production of a book. And once this step has been taken with the page, the libertine hero remains an "écritant." No subsequent narrator hides the fact that his adventures lead to a book.

The majority of the works composed by these libertine hero/writers are produced through the mediation of a very particular type of camera obscura, the prison cell. The composition of the book is generally preceded by time spent in this dark chamber, and may thus be said to result from the experience of enforced confinement, from the realization that the cell door locks the prisoner into a position of difference. When the mother of the page's mistress decides to put him on trial for plotting to help her niece poison her daughter, she has him isolated, first in a room, then in the prison of any would-be hero's dreams, "une vieille tour qui était séparée de tout le reste du bâtiment" (p. 181). In L'Autre Monde, the narrator is taken prisoner by soldiers in Canada, and on the moon is twice trapped in a cage. And to prevent his reader from thinking that life is any easier in the land of light and truth, he is captured once again on the sun, this time by birds who hold him prisoner in a tree trunk. As for D'Assoucy, Colombey is forced to admit right at the start of his preface that "chacune des grandes étapes de sa vie est marquée par un cachot" (p. v).

D'Assoucy allegedly lets these captivity sequences build up until their number is quite impressive before he launches into the series of texts he hopes will turn the tables against his various captors. It is significant that for the publication, if not the composition, of these segments, D'Assoucy reverses chronological order, so that he could first unburden himself of the two prison narratives, La Prison de Monsieur Dassoucy and the Pensées de Monsieur Dassoucy, dans le Saint-Office de Rome.2 The Avantures contains a final (initial?) captivity scene, the description of D'Assoucy's imprisonment as a result of the Montpellier scandal, which is far removed from the romanticism of the page's con-
finement in the tower, or the burlesque vision of Dyrcona restricted to a hollow tree trunk by the swarms of jailor-birds perched on its branches. In his treatment of the passage, D'Assoucy provides so many graphic details that for once the reader almost forgets to laugh at his plight: "Je ne reposay point; mon matelas, qui, dans la septentième année de son service, pouvoit encore disputer de la blancheur avec mes draps, et qui, avec la couverture, ne faisoient pas tout ensemble l'épaisseur de la langue d'un chat, ne me donna pas beaucoup d'envie de me dépouiller" (p. 142).

In all these instances, the camera obscura is also a camera lucida, an instrument that enables its inhabitants to project their experiences of confinement onto an exterior surface. There is nothing paradoxical about this transformation, which is simply an early variant of the standard literary function of the hero's imprisonment. From his period of enforced separation from life, the page, à la Monte Cristo, draws the courage necessary for the adventures that will eventually form the great book of his life. Since the actual book of his adventures appears only much later (assuming a "realistic" chronology, in which the hero lives out his story, then writes his memoirs), and since its existence is at the time of its composition directly attributed to a friend's prodding, the prison episode is a source of indirect inspiration at best. In the Avantures, on the other hand, the relationship between the cell and the text is organic. Only D'Assoucy's text lives up to the model set up by the prologue to Don Quixote, in which Cervantes suggests that he began his novel while in a prison cell. At the end of his description of his imprisonment in Montpellier, D'Assoucy explains that he composed the account of this episode inside his cachot: "Ce sage Gentilhomme avec plusieurs de mes amis ayant trouvé qu'il estoit de mon honneur de donner au public la relation de cette tragicomique avanture, . . . je la fis voir à Monsieur le Juge Mage, qui en suite me donna la permission de la faire imprimer" (p. 148). The immense narrative of the Avantures and the subsequent volumes may have germinated out of this chapter.3

The relatively optimistic pattern of the passage through darkness as a prelude to enlightenment and writing cannot be used, however, to describe the most developed captivity sequence in a libertiné text, the story in the Estats et empires of Dyrcona's en-
forced stays in two prisons, the first in a village near Toulouse, the second in Toulouse itself. *L’Autre Monde* already had portrayed the narrator as a prisoner on several occasions. These imprisonments supposedly precede the composition of the text that describes them, which takes place in the first pages of the *Estats et empires*. Here, Dyrcona, at the urging of his protector, passes from the partial oral accounts of his adventures, of which there are many, both in *L’Autre Monde* and in the beginning of the *Estats et empires*, to a comprehensive written one:

Je mis donc la plume à la main, et à mesure que j’achevois un cahier, impatient de ma gloire qui luy [i.e., M. de Colignac] démangeoit plus que la sienne, il alloit à Toulouse le proner dans les plus belles assemblées. . . . Mes louanges dont il sembloit l’infatigable écho, me firent connoistre de tout le monde. Déjà les graveurs, sans m’avoir vu, avoient buriné mon image; et la ville retentissoit, dans chaque carrefour, du gosier enroué des colporteurs qui crioyent à tue teste: Voilà le Portrait de l’Auteur des Estats et Empires de la Lune (p. 101).

In this case, the prison pattern becomes double because the account of captivities generates new captivities. The *Estats et empires de la lune* is an immediate and immense succès de scandale, a book that polarizes the opinions of all its readers until it becomes no less than the moving force of life in Toulouse:

Peu après les copies en manuscrit se vendirent sous le manteau; tout le monde et ce qui est hors du monde, c’est-à-dire depuis le gentilhomme jusqu’au moine, acheta cette pièce, et les femmes mesmes prirent party. Chaque famille se divisa, et les intérêts de cette querelle allèrent si loin, que la ville fut partagée en deux factions, la Lunaire et l’Antilunaire (p. 102).

A work that incites even such notorious outsiders as monks and women to take an active part in the functioning of a society, and one that pushes an entire city to the brink of insanity (*lunaire’s* ties to *lunatique* are never denied in Cyrano’s works) is clearly a work destined for censorship. All because Dyrcona is self-sacrificing enough to want to make his dear friend happy and unlucky enough to have a controversial best-seller on his hands, the members of the Parlement of Toulouse would reserve a harsh fate for him indeed. They describe this fate to Colignac with the help of a decidedly Tartuffian formula: “Nous engageons nostre hon-
neur de le faire brûler sans scandale” (p. 103). Dyrcona manages to escape this sentence, only to be hauled off to a country jail by a band of peasants inspired by the local curé (who in turn is inspired more by revenge for Colignac’s unpaid tithes and a desire for Dyrcona’s fat mule than by consideration for the moral salvation of his community). He bribes his way out of this first confinement, but not before he has a chance to appreciate the charms of his surroundings:

Je demeuray tout seul, et fort mélancolique, le corps arrondi sur un bateau de paille en poudre: elle n'estoit pas pourtant si menue que plus de cinquante rats ne la broyaient encor. La voûte, les murailles et le plancher, estoient composez de six pierres de tombe, afin qu'ayant la mort dessus, dessous, et à l'entour de moy, je ne pusse douter de mon enterrement. La froide bave des limas, et le gluant venin des crapauts, me couloient sur le visage; les poux y avoient les dents plus longues que le corps (p. 110).

After his escape, Dyrcona is obliged to take up the life of a fugitive. He has a hard time on the run, because “mon estampe m'avait fait connoistre mesme aux harangères” (p. 114). Under the circumstances, it is not surprising that he is quickly recaptured in Toulouse and thrown into a dark hole similar to his first “tomb,” but even more densely populated. In addition to the usual toads and rats, it contains more exotic lizards and couleuvres, even “une, à la sombre clarté de ses prunelles étincelantes, qui, de sa gueule toute noire de venin, dardoit une langue à trois pointes dont la brusque agitation paroissoit une foudre où ses regards mettoient le feu” (p. 117).

Of the prison tales that help give birth to a book, only D'Assoucy's goes beyond a romantic or a comic treatment of the experience to suggest the horror of enforced isolation. His evocation is, however, far surpassed by the details of slimy walls and creatures that make the descriptions of Dyrcona’s prisons stand out among contemporary treatments, despite the presence in them of a comic element. Cyrano never abandons his burlesque sense of distancing. Yet, the accumulation of unpleasant details makes it impossible to dismiss the earth adventures that open the Estats et empires as lightly as Fournel does: “Je laisse de côté le pittoresque récit du début, où Cyrano... après avoir écrit l'histoire de son premier voyage, raconte comment il est exorcisé, appréhendé au
The story of a writer who is imprisoned under harsh conditions because he is the author of a book judged to be heretical and mad—surely this cannot be belittled as merely "pittoresque." This is especially true when the book that opens the prison gates for the fictive author Dyrcona is one that was actually composed by the not-so-fictive man of letters whose name appears on the cover of the Estats et empires du soleil, one that was known to Cyrano's contemporaries under the same title used for the fictive work, the Estats et empires de la lune, and one that, at the time of the composition of the Estats et empires du soleil, was being passed around in manuscript form in certain Parisian circles every bit as avidly as the fictional manuscript in Toulouse.

Actually, the circulation of the "real" manuscript of L'Autre Monde! Les Estats et empires de la lune was so carefully controlled that Cyrano never risked the fate he reserves for his fictional substitute. The fame and the infamy so gleefully heaped on the double of his creation may certainly be traced to very evident mythologizing tendencies on Cyrano's part, but even the exaggeration of the self-made scapegoat's fate cannot completely deflect attention from the vignette's serious side. Cyrano chose not to publish L'Autre Monde, and simply to inscribe in its sequel a (somewhat inflated) version of the fate he and it certainly would have known, had he allowed it to circulate more widely. Cyrano is not the only author to describe a reversal of the precedence of prison over book established by Don Quixote. But whereas many authors are imprisoned because of their books (and Cyrano undoubtedly had examples in mind), it is more unusual to foresee this fate, to avoid it in actuality, and to live it out in fiction.

The role of the outsider assumed by Dyrcona because of the type of novel he chooses to write is a complex one. When he is threatened by the "Barbes à longue robe" of Toulouse (p. 102), he is attacked because he is one of the men of letters of a new school who have no place in the world of the "Barbes." These murderous scholars stand for old systems and old ways of expressing ideas, for the baggage of the pedant so frequently satirized by the libertines: Théophile's Sidias, Cyrano's "nouvel Sidias," Sorel's Hortensius. To the pedant, the libertine is particularly threatening because he is at the same time comprehensible and incomprehensible.
sible. Like the pedant, the libertine is primarily concerned with the exploration of philosophy and science, but, unlike him, he chooses to present his reflections on these matters in highly frivolous garb. His rejection of the seriousness and purity of accepted and acceptable philosophical discourse in favor of the tainted lightness of the novel alienates the libertine from the pedant—without even the advantage of gaining for him the support of other novelists as substitute allies. The libertine stresses the distance that separates him from contemporary novelists by refusing to water down his subject matter in order to rejoin the characteristic thematics of the novel. He also attacks the novel's style and its conventions—both Théophile and Sorel choose to open their novels with parodies of the heroic tradition. Too frivolous for some, too serious for others, and eager to thwart any hopes for peaceful coexistence by poking fun at all attempts at intellectual or stylistic codification, the libertine text seems driven by a desire for isolation and by a quest for incomprehension. The libertine broadens his conception of the pedant to include all those who readily and totally adhere to a system of belief that pretends to be airtight. He then logically accompanies his rejection of the pedantic with an attempt to avoid all its pitfalls—in other words, to remain constantly open, constantly doubting, and in constant suspension of belief. This desire to remain marginal translates into a particular vision of the man of letters, one that corresponds historically to the fate reserved for many contemporary libertine authors.

The heroes find themselves in prison on numerous occasions in the course of these novels. Only in the case of Dyrcona at the beginning of the *Estats et empires* does confinement result from the composition of memoirs. Otherwise, the prison doors open for these writers for a variety of reasons that on the surface may seem to have little in common, but that may in fact all be assigned to the same category of offenses against the seventeenth-century's code of sameness. In his *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, Michel Foucault describes the replacement of the single global explanation for the exclusion and confinement of difference in the Middle Ages, leprosy, by a collection of troubles bearing names as different as madness, poverty, and old age. The classical period multiplied the names of otherness, and refined the process of its
containment. It did not always bother to distinguish clearly between the crimes of, say, the alchemist and the atheist, but it knew that neither of these figures conformed to its image of sameness. In choosing a mask of alienation for its hero to wear, the libertine text has therefore a wide selection of more or less interchangeable grimaces from which to pick. It may speak of the alchemist, the atheist, the sorcerer, or the possessed. All are destined for similar fates, since all forms of otherness are reunited in prison.

The libertine writers therefore evoke regularly a certain number of subjects about which contemporary literature otherwise adopts one of two attitudes: prudent avoidance (the stance usually chosen by the more respectable literary traditions), or eventual “taming” as a result of a purely stereotypical and comic treatment (as is the case with all baroque portrayals of madness, that of the *Gascon extravagant*, for example).

They choose to speak rather than to remain silent, and they refuse to render these forbidden themes palatable by depicting them only in a comic light. This exceptional decision brings the reader to the heart of their conception of the libertine experience.

It can be argued that atheism is the most dangerous image of otherness that could be associated with the hero of a novel in the seventeenth century. For a number of reasons, this issue is particularly difficult for the libertine authors to evoke: it strikes too close to home for a partially comic description; it is perhaps simply too “hot” to handle in a complex way without compromising their always delicate enterprise. Whatever the combination of explanations, the libertine novel rarely develops the character of the religious freethinker. Its heroes are regularly accused of atheism, as is the narrator in *L'Autre Monde* by Elie. D'Assoucy is called an atheist by the Catholics in Montpellier and by many of those he meets on his travels. But such confrontations are handled as quietly as possible. The accusation is either shrugged off as a joke or simply not answered at all. Even more significant is the fact that, of a number of dangerous charges, those of atheism are the only ones not actually provoked by the heroes themselves. They provide few descriptions that might encourage the reader to doubt their religious respectability. Notable exceptions are moments of precocious freethinking on the part of both Francion and the page, such as, for example, the page’s evocation of his
encounter with a formidable representative of Catholicism when he was only three or four: "Un prince de l'Eglise de mes proches parents . . . fut surpris, lorsque, me caressant un jour et me riant sur des demandes que j'avais faites de la forma des enfers, je lui témoignai en ma manière de m'exprimer que je doutais qu'il y eut des tenebres où il y avait de si grands feux allumés" (p. 54).

The example is small, and I would not draw from it any theory of hidden clues to an atheistic reading planted in the Page. Through an examination of a series of "forbidden" or daring themes that recur with unusual frequency in the libertine text, I hope to establish certain peculiarities about their treatment of these issues. The evocation of atheism or freethinking begins to make a certain pattern clear. In the libertine novels, the hero acts out again and again the drama of his alienation. He must learn repeatedly the hard lesson that there is no place for him in the societies he hopes to frequent. Once it has been established beyond a doubt that he is "other," he is driven out or isolated in some form of prison, or both. However, if we superimpose these scenes of forced separation, a surprising fact stands out. The libertine hero is rarely exiled as a result of accusations that his enemies invent spontaneously. There is almost always complicity between libertine and accuser. It is the libertine who plants the seeds of his own downfall, the libertine who suggests the motivations for his own expulsion. Thus, in this characteristically libertine insistence on alienation, the pattern uncovered in the discussion of autobiography recurs. The libertine writer/hero fosters certain readings. He serves as a ready accomplice in his own (possibly misleading) unmasking.

To return briefly to the accusations of atheism, when these occur, they seem almost thrown in as an afterthought, simply one more in an already impressive list of charges. The Catholics of Montpellier, for example, may scream that D'Assoucy is an atheist, but they are only indulging in a bit of one-upmanship. It does not really matter whether he is an atheist or not, since he is being run out of town on a charge that appears in their eyes to be more than sufficient for his condemnation: homosexuality. Elsewhere, D'Assoucy sheds light on this apparent eclipse of the danger of freethinking. In the scene devoted to his persecution at the hands of his own incarnation of the archetypal libertine foe, the pedant
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Triboulet, he describes the moment when Triboulet passes from indirect tormenting and inferences to verbal abuse: "Il m'appela impie, sorcier, athée, hérétique et imposteur, homo sceleratus atque nefandus" (p. 75). To be sure, the charge of atheism is present here—with a proliferation of no fewer than three of its synonyms—but Triboulet's outburst is more interesting because of the ways in which it extends the limits of that dangerous word. His accusations are presented in the form of a catalogue, a stylistic choice that performs a leveling process among the terms it juxtaposes. This leveling push is encouraged by the fact that three of the nouns presented are synonyms. In this context, "sorcier," which would normally evoke a quite independent set of meanings, is restricted, through a first movement of assimilation and reduction, to synonymy with "impie, athée, hérétique." The last member of the catalogue sets in motion a second and more significant reduction of meaning. For the summation of his charges, Triboulet, like any pedant worthy of the name, turns to Latin, and in doing so, tips his hand. It seems that, for him, atheists and sorcerers are only "wicked men." With the example of the pedant's curses, D'Assoucy exposes a confusion in terms that springs from the generalized fear of otherness. The accuser driven by this fear does not linger over precision in terms, but simply throws in as many as seem necessary to make clear the distance separating him from his target. In this sense, a writer who wishes to inscribe the persecution of freethinkers in his text need not necessarily depict a freethinker in order to do so—any figure of deviation will carry the necessary implications.

Other figures of difference also provide a certain exoticism that makes a wider range of literary treatments possible. The sorcerer is surely one of these. He is related to the magician and the alchemist, since all three share the power to transform and ultimately control objects and even human beings, a power capable of such diverse manifestations as the sublimation of baser elements to obtain gold and the possession of "diaboliques." These figures—the sorcerer, the magician, and the alchemist—are clearly problematic for anyone aspiring to the title of freethinker in the mid-seventeenth century; hence their Janus-like status in the libertine text. On the one hand, their power is spent, and the only role left for them to play is that of actor in a mythological, epistemological, and intellectual past. Despite the fact that he is living
in what appears to be a period rich in witchcraft trials, poisonings, and general belief in the powers of the sorcerer, the libertine, from Gabriel Naudé to Cyrano, laughs in the face of these “diableries,” and supports the rising tide of the new science, the only force capable of breaking superstition’s back. This is the aspect of libertine thought responsible for such texts as Naudé’s *Apologie pour tous les grands personnages qui ont esté faussement soupçonnez de Magie* and Cyrano’s letters “Pour les sorciers” and “Contre les sorciers.” This attitude also affects their novels, and takes the form of what Démorès calls “une vision critique”: “Chez tous . . . une conscience aiguë de leur fascination débouche sur une vision critique: le Page poursuit son alchimiste, Cyrano est pris pour sorcier, Théophile démasque les possédées.”

It is true that the libertine hero does not always display a great deal of sympathy for the charms of the occult. In almost all cases, accusations of sorcery, rather than causing alarm, are simply shown to be completely ridiculous. Dyrcona, for example, is never bothered by the fact that, as soon as he sets foot in a new land, its ruling bodies are ready to condemn him as a magician. Thus, upon his arrival in Canada, M. de Montmagny explains that the Jesuits “veulent absolument que vous soyez magicien, et la plus grande grâce que vous puissiez obtenir d’eux, c’est de ne passer que pour imposteur” (p. 35). Back in France, one of the members of the Parlement of Toulouse assures Colignac that he can take his word that the man he is sheltering is a dangerous sorcerer, because “y a-t-il aucun Parlement qui se connoisse en sorciers comme le nostre?” (p. 102).

In neither of these instances is the libertine hero obliged to participate actively in the unmasking of superstition. Ironically, he has only to sit back and let those whose power depends on its existence do his work for him. Other libertine heroes may take a more forceful role. In the *Fragments*, the narrator unmask the “démoniaque” and her accomplices. Francion mocks the superstitions that give him total power over Valentin. If the reader considers only these uncomplicated passages in the libertine texts, he will readily accept the possibility of extending Madeleine Alcovier’s description of Cyrano to all their authors: she sees him as a rather cold man of science who does nothing but laugh at anyone or anything concerned with the occult.

It is less easy to defend this opinion in the face of a second
image of the sorcerer also prevalent in these novels. As the barbe from Toulouse reminds Colignac, any thinker who oversteps the tight limits of acceptable thought quickly finds himself put in his place by those who know a sorcerer when they see one. Many of those accused are charlatans in possession of no secrets more important than their own falseness, but some of them are true men of magic in another sense of the term. As Naudé explains in the preface to *Apologie pour tous les grands personnages qui ont esté faussement soupçonnez de Magie*, almost any thinker ahead of his time is sure to be “written off” by means of such a charge: “D’où venant . . . à me resouvenir que non seulement Virgile, mais presque tous les grands personnages estoient pareillement soupçonnez de magie, je commençay aussi tost de me douter que c’estoit à tort et sans raison.” Naudé’s choice of Virgil as his first example of a “personnage faussement soupçonnez de Magie” is a characteristic one. In the course of the *Apologie*, he often comes to the defense of writers, a decision that can be explained by his own literary preoccupations, but one that in addition is closely affiliated with the connotations of magic in the libertine text.

The central encounter made by the page disgracié is with the alchemist he will afterward refer to by many different names, but most often simply as “le philosophe.” This meeting, unlike others involving men of magic in the libertine novel, is not marked by a denunciation scene. Denunciation is an attempt to unmask, and these novels contain only would-be unmaskings in which the accuser never wins. Time after time, he thinks he has found his victim out, lifts the veil—and finds someone completely different from his expectation. From such a perspective of the trompeur trompé, the page’s alchemist, like the atheist, is of little interest. If his mask is lifted, he does have something to hide. Shortly after their initial encounter, the philosopher explains to the page who has been pursuing him why he flees all human contact. The page has been pursuing him not because of a desire to unmask him, as Démoris implies, but simply because he is driven by an irresistible fascination. In the page’s words: “Il me représenta comme en tremblant le danger que couraient ceux qui avaient un secret pareil, quand ils étaient découverts par quelque prince; que le moindre malheur qu’ils en pouvaient attendre était l’entièr e perte de leur liberté” (p. 100). This is the man the page dreams of serving as
an apprentice, in the hope of becoming, like him, a man with a secret. The page believes that coming to maturity should involve the initiation into a certain number of secrets, that there should be a Pandora's box somewhere along the way. No matter that the only man he meets with access to secret knowledge is obliged to remain a fugitive out of constant fear of persecution—the page's desire to share that knowledge is stronger than his fear.

The young page is not yet a writer. He has not yet discovered the comparison implicit behind Naudé's unmasking of an alleged unmasking and behind the repeated denunciations/unmaskings of Dyrcona as a sorcerer. None of these denunciations/unmaskings can be described as completely successful, in that none of them produces the desired effect of uncovering a sorcerer pretending to be like everyone else, pretending to be the same rather than other, that is, a man without secrets. Yet, in a way, all of them are successful because they accidentally expose writers, individuals seeking to be, like sorcerers, men with secrets and men with the power to transform. Instead of sorcerers, they uncover (only) would-be sorcerers, men pretending to be sorcerers, imposters—the Canadian Jesuits' "next-best" dream: "Ils veulent absolument que vous soyez magicien; et la plus grande grâce que vous puissiez obtenir d'eux, c'est de ne passer que pour imposteur" (L'Autre Monde, p. 35). These denunciations miss, but just barely, which goes to show that their ability to detect otherness is not entirely off. After all, no Parlement knows its way around sorcerers like the Parlement of Toulouse, so the denouncers cannot be totally wrong, which perhaps explains why alchemy ultimately leads to prison, just like the book.

It certainly explains why the libertine heroes themselves invite all the most interesting accusations of sorcery in these novels. The element of complicity in their own condemnation is especially strong in these cases, probably because all of the libertine heroes share the page's pursuit of Artefius: alchemy and artifice. They, too, are men who seek initiation, who strive to gain possession of a secret. Either to facilitate their quest or to make their audience believe they are already initiates into mysterious knowledge, these heroes play at an unusual game, at which they enjoy immense success: they pretend to be sorcerers. The first example of such a travesty is the opening scene of Francion where the hero's claims
to magical powers play havoc with everyone’s projects, even his own.

Francion succeeds admirably in convincing everyone that he is what he pretends to be: “Monsieur, reprit le Chirurgien en se sousriant, vous me pardonnerez si je vous dy que vous m’obligez à croire que l’opinion que l’on a de vous en ce village cy est veritable, qui est que vous estes tres scavant en Magie” (p. 89). Although this may be the most obvious instance of the libertine-hero-playing-at-sorcerer, and thus impossible to overlook in this context, it contains nothing of the more problematic complicity elsewhere discernible. Francion plays on the villagers’ superstitions, not in an effort to view his power over them in a broader context, but simply to demonstrate a cliché straight out of the more obvious libertine philosophy of magic: that magic has become an empty signifier, just like the formulas Valentin so blindly memorizes and repeats in the hope of regaining his own lost power: “Il se figuroit qu’il y avoit là dessous quelque sens magnifique caché” (p. 68). The adult Francion’s portrayal of a sorcerer deliberately never gets beyond the non-depth of a stereotype. It remains a class-conscious joke. Valentin and a few peasants may fall for this cardboard figure, but the chirurgien, who describes their credulity “en se sousriant” and, of course, the reader, who shares his intellectual superiority, could never be taken in for a minute by this reminder of a barbaric past.

The mature Francion may wholeheartedly mock the power of magic, but an incident he recounts from his past reveals a certain complicity in its unmasking. When Francion begins to paint his self-portrait, he turns to his own childhood, from which he selects two anecdotes to represent his preschool years. The first of these vignettes, the first image that Francion chooses to give of himself, describes a curious encounter between the child and “un maistre Singe.” This canny animal slips into Francion’s room when the baby is alone and disguises him by reversing his garments: “faisant entrer mes pieds dans les manches de ma cotte, et mes bras dedans mes chausses” (p. 165). When he is asked who did this to him, Francion replies after an interesting and apparently innocent bit of reasoning: “Parce que j’avois desja ouy appeller du nom de Diable quelque chose laide, je dy que c’estoit un petit garçon laid comme un Diable.” The child’s remark unleashes the predictable
uproar in the household. The servants are convinced “que ce fust un Diable qui estoit venu dedans ma chambre.” After the monkey makes several other visits without being seen by anyone else, even Francion’s parents come round and “furent contraints de s’imaginer qu’il revenoit un Lutin en nostre maison” (p. 166). Of course, the very natural cause is quickly discovered to eliminate this temporary intrusion of a diabolical form of supernatural magic. No explanation, however, can camouflage the pattern that enters the domain of the libertine novel from Francion’s encounter with the devilish monkey. Two subsequent libertine heroes reveal scenes from their young lives dealing with magic and sorcery that are both uncanny and uncannily similar.

One of the page’s early disgraces is caused by his fascination with the occult, an obsession that will eventually lead to the mad and ill-fated pursuit of his Artefius. A reading of Jean-Baptiste Porta’s *Magie naturelle* inspires him to begin a series of experiments in illusion that eventually backfire and oblige him to run away for the first time. Like baby Francion, it is the young page himself who provides the evidence for a suggestion of diabolical intervention in his life. In the midst of his most “successful” experiment, “il y eut quelqu’un des domestiques qui se ressouvint qu’il avait vu par hasard un de mes livres sur le dos duquel il y avait écrit *Magie*, et qui dit que j’avais fais en ce lieu quelque conjuration diabolique” (p. 86). The page ridicules those who could concoct a diabolical reading of his “malice innocente,” yet his own future behavior will belie these protestations of innocence. Almost as if by accident, or unconsciously, he repeats through his experience a classic schema of libertine alienation: the book leads to denunciation, which leads to exile (prison).

The third such scene of youthful self-implication, actually a double one, has D’Assoucy setting himself up as a scapegoat. In general, the *Avantures* finds so much evidence of persecution in the recent past that it is unnecessary to look very far back for inspiration. D’Assoucy brings forth memories from his distant past only once, as a prelude to his account of the events in Montpellier that lead to the imprisonment that nurtures the book. To round out his self-portrait as the eternal victim, he supplies two scenes from his childhood. The first incident, involving D’Assoucy when not quite six, is only narrated once. In this case, it is
easy for the reader to see where the blame should be placed: "Je n'avois pas encore six ans que les sots enfans de mon quartier, issus du sang le plus abject de la lie du peuple, me poursuivoient à grands coups de pierres, parce qu'estant déjà plus raisonnable qu'eux, ils connoissoient en moy quelque chose digne de leur aversion" (p. 104). Through the effects of persecution, "I" is shifted from its initial status as subject to a closing one as object. D'Assoucy's persuasiveness is marred only by a certain hesitancy in the sentence's construction. The passage from "I" as subject to "ils" as subject seems bungled because of the presence of a syntactical gap between "estant déjà plus raisonnable qu'eux," and "ils connoissoient en moy" that calls unnecessary attention to the contrived nature of the attribution of blame.

This question recurs in far more blatant fashion with regard to the second incident. In his desperation to establish his innocence by proving once and for all that persecution constantly follows him, and that he does nothing to provoke it, D'Assoucy insists on recounting this second event on two separate occasions. In the continuation of the same sentence, the scene of the six-year-old stoned because his superior intelligence aroused suspicions is linked with a similar event that took place three years later. This incident makes even more explicit the desired identification with the classic vision of the wise men "faussement soupçonnez de Magie": "A neuf ans, estant hors de la maison de mon père, je passay pour magicien parmy le sot peuple de Calais, parce qu'estant doué d'un esprit vif, et parlant grec et latin, ces gens matériels ne pouvoient pas s'imager que sans l'aide d'un esprit malin, je pusse en un âge si tendre estre devenu si scavant" (p. 104). The Calais incident can obviously serve as a perfect prefiguration of the Montpellier disaster. Either because he is concerned that his reader will miss this point, or because in his intense preoccupation with the theme of his persecution he forgets the first evocation of Calais, D'Assoucy returns to this incident less than twenty pages later to give it a much fuller description. He makes no allusion to the first account, and, supplying more details all along the way, begins again from the beginning: "quoy que je n'eusse encore que neuf ans" (p. 121).

In the retelling, however, the question of blame, more or less neatly established a short time before, becomes problematic. Ac-
According to the second version, the nine-year-old D’Assoucy enters the service of a widow to act as a companion for her son. Both widow and son are fairly naïve, and the young D’Assoucy, “déjà assez malin pour remarquer en eux cette simplicité” (p. 122), is quick to take advantage of his situation to fabricate a character of mythical proportions for himself: “Comme je parlois déjà Grec, je leur disais que je parlois encore Siriaque, Hébreu et Caldeen; que j’estois Astrologue: et afin qu’ils n’en doutascent nullement, je leur faisais croire que j’estois le fils de ce grand et fameux faiseur d’horoscope nommé César” (p. 122). In the course of the ensuing period of influence, D’Assoucy performs exploits like forecasting the weather and reading palms. He eventually acquires such a reputation that he manages to chase off a hostile crowd of little boys with no more than a simple gesture: “ayant tiré de ma poche un certain livre dont je les menaçais” (p. 123). He even wins credit for the cure of a sick little boy. This last feat serves to confirm his fame and to bring him to the point described in his previous evocation of the event: “Toute la ville fut en rumeur. . . . Ils me prirent à neuf ans pour un célèbre magicien. . . . Le sot peuple me vouloir jeter dans la Mer” (pp. 126–27).

By returning at such length to an accusation from which he feels certain to be able to prove his innocence, D’Assoucy manages on the contrary, to provide the only explicit illustration of the complicity of the young libertines in their own condemnation. It is clear from his more detailed analysis of the magician incident that D’Assoucy, far from being solely the object of the hatred and persecution of a series of impersonal subjects—“ils,” “la ville,” “le sot peuple”—is at the source of his own troubles. This incident, like all the misadventures of young libertines, is presented as an illustration of the stupidity of others, but it backfires by revealing far more about the nascent libertine desire to be other. In fact, these portraits of young sorcerers prefigure the treatment of the adult libertine heroes. They are ominous first signs of the libertine mark.

For example, the link with sorcery follows D’Assoucy through all his persecutions. It is only natural, therefore, that it reappear in Montpellier during what he imagines to be the ultimate moment of his victimization. By the time he reaches the depth/heights of misery for which he schooled himself from age six,
D’Assoucy no longer needs to goad the crowd to come after him by forging an image for denunciation, as he did in Calais. Now, his very own (false) name is sufficient to denounce him, to expose the form of otherness to which he has so long aspired: “Mon destin parmi ce sot et méchant peuple n’aurait pas été plus doux; je ne pus pourtant pas éviter qu’ils ne fissent allusion à mon nom, et qu’au lieu de Soucy Musicien, ils ne m’appellassent Sorcier et Magicien” (p. 132). D’Assoucy returns here to his original explanation for the genealogy of incrimination, implying that he did his best to remain part of the faceless “sot peuple,” to trick them into believing he was now one of them and no longer an outsider. As always, however, he heard his difference proclaimed all around him: “je ne pus pourtant pas éviter qu’ils.” For a moment, he seems an utterly helpless victim: his name, like Akakii Akakievich’s overcoat or Kovalijov’s nose, apparently has a life of its own. He would have us believe that he was marked at birth by the sign of his ultimate downfall. But, as always, the finger pointing to the guilty party also seems to have a life of its own. It swings round to denounce D’Assoucy himself. It was, after all, he who invented and took on the name D’Assoucy; he who chose as an adult to be reborn under the sign of sorcery, just as he did as a nine-year-old when he decided to become a member of the Nostradamus family. If the people of Montpellier see “Sorcier” in “Soucy” and “Magicien” in “Musicien,” D’Assoucy has no one to blame but himself.

His complicity in his own victimization must also be evoked in conjunction with this use of comic etymologies. It is somehow less likely that the people of Montpellier spontaneously invented this splendidly appropriate rallying cry than that, inspired by his own particular mythologizing instincts, D’Assoucy set it up for them to discover. Comic etymologies are certainly compatible with the burlesque spirit that sparkles so often in his prose style, and elsewhere D’Assoucy demonstrates his delight in their whimsical charms. In the Combat de Cirano de Bergerac, avec le singe de Brioché au bout du Pont-neuf, he gives free reign to his etymological creativity. His explanation of the origin of “Cirano” (which he claims to have received from Cyrano himself), provides one of the most outrageous examples of the genre: “Bergerac soutenoit en plaisantant, que Mage et Roy étoient unum et idem, qu’on
appelloit un Roy Cir, en François Sire, et comme ce Mage, ce Roy, ce Cir, pour faire ces enchantemens, se campoit au milieu d'un cercle; c'est-à-dire d'un O, on le nommoit Cir an O. This etymology goes even farther than that of D'Assoucy's sobriquet in stressing numerous ties. D'Assoucy/Cyrano calls attention to the sorcerer's sovereignty, to the magic in names, to the magic in the men who are marked by them. In their striving to be considered as repositories of secret powers, these men would have their public believe that the sorcerer is in “D'Assoucy” and that “Cyrano” leads to the circle of his spells.

As though the difference acquired as a result of his secrets were not enough to complete his separation from the faceless crowd, the sorcerer is often marked with still another stigma of otherness. Time and again, these texts show that great men are accused of magic, and the Estats et empires goes one step further to demonstrate that the jump from magic to madness is quickly made. Appropriately, it is a sorcery expert from the Parlement of Toulouse who, in the course of his critique of Dyrcona's book, explains why this is so: “Tant de Lunes, tant de cheminées, tant de voyages par l'air, ne valent rien, je dis rien du tout; et entre vous et moy . . . je n'ay jamais veu de sorcier qui n'eust commerce avec la Lune” (p. 102). For those who, like the venerable parliamentarian, seek to deflate the magic of knowledge and transformation, this is most easily done by dismissing it as lunatic ravings. The circle within which the sorcerer's enchantments take place is the moon's sphere, and the language he speaks is incomprehensible to those unmarked by difference because it is a foreign tongue, the product, not simply of another country, but of another world.

The peculiarities of this foreign tongue make it possible to distinguish the true libertine lunatics from the stereotypical figures of madness so popular in contemporary literature. The baroque madman speaks a language that may range from the slightly incomprehensible to something near gibberish, but is always so bizarre that it is generally thought to be meaningless. Indeed, if there is any sense at all to be made from what he is saying, it is usually overlooked. This madman, far from being an individual with a secret, as is the case with the libertine figures of otherness, is simply a buffoon, whose speeches are no more than comic interludes. The baroque madman does exist in the libertine text in
roles that range from the cameo appearance by the "extravagant" Pole the page encounters late in his travels to the fairly developed characters of Hortensius and Collinet in Francion. In these cases, the madman is a clown, and his wild language is destined for the amusement of his audience rather than for the eventual decipherment of truths too dangerous to be placed in the mouths of the sane. Of these characters, only Collinet is given a daring role to play out. He has the ability to make those around him see their follies, and is thus a reincarnation of the wise-fool, never so lucid as when he is mad. He represents an important current of baroque madness, one whose philosophy is well defined in the preface to the Gascon extravagant: "A penetrer dans ses intentions, on trouve qu'il est Philosophe moral, que les gascons extravagans de cette sorte, sont raisonnables et scavans, et que si tous les foux leur ressembloient, il n'y auraient pas de difference entre la folie et la sagesse." This is the essence of the baroque madman: different only to be wiser than those who pass judgment on him, different only to annihilate difference, to eliminate the very possibility of otherness: "Si tous les foux leur ressembloient, il n'y auraient pas de difference entre folie et sagesse."

This is certainly the least troubling vision of madness imaginable. As a result, the baroque madman is usually taken in and protected, as is Collinet. And never are his pronouncements startling enough to link him to the more severely punished variants of otherness, such as sorcery. The libertine lunatic, on the other hand, deserves to be compared to the magician because he, too, has a vision, another type of secret. The lunatic is, most literally, an inhabitant of the moon, like Hortensius's mother, according to L'Autre Monde. More generally, he is anyone in direct contact with the other world in the moon. Once again according to L'Autre Monde, when Noah's Ark, riding the crest of the flood, approaches the moon, no one on board can understand what this land is, so no one wants to undertake the risk of exploring it. No one, that is, but Noah's daughter, Achab, who swims to it: "On eut beau crier après elle, l'appeler cent fois lunatique, protester qu'elle serait cause qu'un jour on reprocherait à toutes les femmes d'avoir dans la tête un quartier de la lune, elle se moqua d'eux" (p. 46).

This lunatic is not the anguished figure described in modern
literature's vision of madness, because he/she does not experience otherness within himself\textsuperscript{19} but purely in relation to outsiders. The secret that sets him apart from his race is not a power but a voyage. The lunatic has been somewhere almost no one else has been, like the narrator in \textit{L'Autre Monde}, like the occupants of the "Stultifera Navis" described by Foucault: "C'est vers l'autre monde que part le fou sur sa folle nacelle; c'est de l'autre monde qu'il vient quand il débarque."\textsuperscript{20} The traveler who returns from such a voyage can never again hope to slip by unnoticed. He remains marked by the other world he has seen. When the narrator drops back to earth and lands in Italy, he is obliged to take refuge behind barred doors, to make himself a prisoner, because he is pursued by a pack of dogs who recognize the moon's odor and are "archarnès contre moi à cause du monde d'où je venais" (p. 117).

The freethinker, the sorcerer, the lunatic—these are the categories of difference so often described in the libertine texts that it is sometimes hard to establish boundaries among them. The obsessionalness with which these visions are repeated can be explained historically. The seventeenth-century man of letters who attempted to explore uncharted territory ran a very real risk of having these labels applied to him. When they describe the persecution of their heroes, the libertines may well be either describing their own present or foretelling their own future. Occasionally, they step outside this personal vision to evoke additional categories of otherness beyond their experience, but ones that provoked the same treatment given the madman and the sorcerer.

Two of these vignettes are especially unusual. Once, D'As-soucy, at a loss to find a comparison striking enough to suggest the extent of his persecution, draws a parallel between his fate and that of the "Enfans d'Israël dans le Desert" (p. 110). The second occurs in the opening sequence of the \textit{Estats et empires}, that catalogue of forms of persecution. Dyrcona not only receives all the accusations already mentioned but even acts out a scene during which he adopts various masks of difference. After escaping from his first prison, he tries to disguise himself from his persecutors and at the same time to pass unnoticed through the crowds of Toulouse. Ironically enough, in his attempt he simply exchanges the mask of otherness forced on him (the sorcerer, the lunatic) for another one, albeit one freely chosen. The peasant who helps him
escape provides him with clothes in which Dyrcona hopes to blend in with the masses. He misses this opportunity to lose his difference because "j'avois arrangé sur moy mes haillons si bizarrément qu'avec une démarche qui ni convenoit point à l'habit, je paraissoit moins un pauvre qu'un mascarade" (p. 112). After this initial betrayal, Dyrcona realizes that he is not meant to become just another face in the crowd, and in order to improve his act, he continues to transform himself, becoming, instead of the intellectual outcast that he was, a physical one: "De peur qu'on ne me reconnut à la voix, j'adjoustay à l'exercice de quaisman, l'adresse de contrefaire le muet. Je m'avance donc vers ceux que j'aperçooy qui me regardent; je pointe un doigt dessous le menton, puis dessus la bouche, et je l'ouvre en baillant, avec un cri non articulé, pour faire entendre par ma grimace qu'un pauvre muet demande l'aumosne." Dyrcona concludes this pantomime worthy of a subsequent "other," Rameau's nephew, by establishing once again the link between otherness and the book: "Enfin, j'appris que la gueuserie est un grand Livre" (p. 114). He then takes on one final mask of the physical outcast, that of a "malade de la contagion," by dirtying his face, putting disorder in his clothing, and even adopting the sign forced on victims of the plague, like a brand, to warn others of their condition: "Ayant étendu mon mouchoir dessus le pavé et disposé aux coins quatre petits cailloux . . . je me couchay vis à vis . . . et me mis à geindre fort langoureusement." This time, his act is successful, and the crowd begins to run by him "en se bouchant le nez" (p. 115). His identification with this form of otherness does not save Dyrcona from his persecutors for long. The scene following his masquerade as a carrier of the plague finds him back in a cell, having demonstrated that the libertine hero is so accustomed to ostracism that, even outside prison, he is forever a victim.

2. ONE-UPMANSHP

I have insistently maintained that these libertine novels are unusual cases within the novelistic production of their day. On the issue of alienation, however, I am prepared to claim for them an almost unique position in literary history. Rare indeed, in my experience, are the texts that can rival these in their obsessive portrayal of the situation of alienation—certainly they seem to have
no predecessors, and no successors before Rousseau. Once it has been established that the subject is omnipresent in them, it seems only natural to ask why. One could possibly begin with a historical explanation. Seventeenth-century freethinkers find themselves in a situation of helplessness before a society that actively seeks to alienate them, and this helplessness is translated in their texts into a recurrent vision both of the accusations they may face and of those actually leveled at other marginal figures with whom they identify. But as they broaden the horizon of otherness they create a vision that defies historical explanation. A close examination of the passages concerned with this issue shows that the historically motivated identification yields to a totally personal vision of alienation, not only without precedent for the libertines, but in most cases with no historical precedent whatsoever.

These completely personal themes of difference represent a related, yet separate, problem from the notion of complicity. Complicity is a basic libertine instinct, but complicity in one’s own undoing, to the point of actually giving grounds on which one might be condemned, suggests a diagnosis that grows more inevitable as the cycle of the libertine novels develops: paranoia. The presence of these intensely private themes of alienation serves to complete the impression of claustrophobia that becomes increasingly oppressive in the later libertine texts. It is as if the libertine hero were unable to live without persecution. When not describing himself as a victim on a literal (historical) level, he proceeds with a study of victimization on a metaphorical (personal) level. In the long run, persecution is found everywhere, and the most solitary libertine heroes, Dyrcona and D'Assoucy, are tracked relentlessly by their adversaries. The culminating point of this vision is undoubtedly D'Assoucy's "Epistre à Messieurs les Sots," in which he develops at great length, and with all his fervor, his story as "le plus illustre persecuteur de l'univers," from its origin to the then present day in Rome. The extent of D'Assoucy's paranoia becomes apparent at certain moments of this text, which takes the form of an actual litany of persecution (a series of attacks, each answered by a defense: "faire passer pour un Ecrivain ennemy des choses sacrées . . . celuy qui a deffendu"), culminating in a vision of the size of the armies massed against him: "comment cette premiere matiere qui servit à ce premier homme
Les libertins se sont assez alterées pour produire des hommes assez méchants et des peuples entiers assez sots, pour faire passer un enfant à neuf ans pour magicien” (p. 108; italics mine).

The libertine paranoia is observable first of all in scattered images, such as that of the hero tracked like a beast by bands of men or monsters, which occurs in both Francion’s dream (pp. 145, 147) and in the dream narratives of Dyrcona and Colignac (in Colignac’s dream, Dyrcona is chased by a “grand monstre noir,” and Dyrcona himself dreams that he is pursued by “une troupe d’assassins” [p. 106]). In what is certainly the most unusual of these visions, D’Assoucy describes his arrival in Turin after Loret has announced his death as though he were a ghost returning to life: “peu s’en falut qu’il ne tombast de son haut à la renverse, croyant sans doute que je fusse quelque fantasme, ou l’ame venge- resse des mauvaises offices qu’il m’avoit autrefois rendus” (p. 236). In D’Assoucy’s case, not a prison cell but his enemies’ success in robbing him of his very existence is at the origin of the book. The Avantures is composed to establish the continued existence of the man behind the ghost.

Curiously enough, it is through the passion for gambling shared by D’Assoucy and the page that these heroes develop most insistently their paranoid sense of isolation. Gambling is never described in these texts as either a casual pastime or one that favors a spirit of companionship. It is, on the contrary, a disastrous, uncontrollable force, a “pleasure” certain to culminate in a sense of alienation, yet one to which the libertines feel compelled to return. As such, it has nothing in common with the aristocratic amusement to which Démoris, speaking of the Avantures, compares it:

Comme dans le Page, le rappel obsédant du thème du jeu, divertissement aristocratique (et mentionné comme tel dans bien des mémoires), vient indiquer que le poète est tout aussi capable qu’un vrai noble de se donner tout entier à l’instant, dans un total mépris pour des calculs bourgeois. Mais à la différence de Tristan, son vice ne fait éprouver à d’Assoucy aucun remords. Il lui est occasion de se confirmer que la vocation littéraire est une manière de se rendre l’équivalent des gens de qualité.21

Granted, the libertine can scorn “calculs bourgeois” as well as any noble. He cannot, however, share the lack of involvement, the
depersonalization of the game that keeps the aristocratic amusement a relatively innocent one. An aristocrat does not have a passion for gambling; there is allegedly too little of him present in the game for that to be the case. As a result, he comes out of any contact with games of chance with clean hands. Indeed, gambling in an aristocratic context is not tainted with the bad reputation it acquires in another, one might say bourgeois, environment.

"The disrepute of games of chance is actually based on the fact that the player himself has a hand in it. (An incorrigible patron of a lottery will not be proscribed in the same way as the gambler in a stricter sense.)" Benjamin's comparison may be extended to pinpoint the difference between aristocratic and libertine gambling. The aristocrat gambles like the "patron of a lottery"—his hands are not really "in it." As a result, he simply either wins or loses, with none of the complications that arise from a more passionate approach to the game and its stakes, such as cheating and fleecing. Swindling has no place at an aristocratic table. No aristocrat could descend to the level of the cardsharp: to do so would be to involve himself in a system of values his own milieu could not comprehend. The aristocratic table is, furthermore, closed to all nonaristocrats, so the infiltration of swindlers can be ruled out.

This is unfortunately not the case with libertine games of chance. The description of their unhappy brushes with gambling provided by the page and D'Assoucy evoke, rather than an aristocratic spirit of fairplay and equality within the rules of the game, an ominous atmosphere of paranoid uncertainty, reminiscent of the image of gambling conveyed by Georges de la Tour's painting, Le Tricheur. At the center of this powerful canvas is a beautiful prostitute, who, with the help of two of her servants, is quietly fleecing a young nobleman. The painting is a study in silent communication, and the play on eyes and glances shooting from the prostitute, the maid serving her, and the man switching cards behind his back provides a dramatic focus. All those in on the secret (although with less of a "hand in" the game than the man they are duping) use their eyes and have the power to see. The only individual in the painting who remains blind is the young man being swindled. Were he to use his regard even briefly, he would instantly unmask the swindle posited on the absence of the fourth pair of eyes. We cannot see the victim's eyes, since he is portrayed as
simply and naively looking down at his cards, closed into a solitary universe that is invaded by the united forces of his adversaries.

La Tour's four characters give visual form to what could be described as the archetypal swindle of the libertine hero. Whenever the page and D'Assoucy gamble, the swindler and his helpers always watch their victim carefully, but the victim never sees what is happening to him until it is just a little too late. No code of honor whatsoever in their games—the only rule ever respected is that there be a cardsharp present at every hand. What he so mildly refers to as “mon naturel enclin au jeu” (p. 228) draws the page into a number of unhappy situations, usually referred to in the chapter titles simply as “nouvelles disgraces.” What is certainly the most unsettling of these encounters marks his return to France after the English sojourn. On the road from Dieppe to Paris, the page falls into the trap laid for him by a trio of swindlers. He is traveling in the company of the two helpers, who have gained his confidence, when they are joined by the chief crook. It never occurs to the page that his two very ordinary and very French traveling companions might have anything to do with the incredible stranger who overtakes them and who is variously described as: “ce personnage vêtu de drap gris, couvert d'agrafes d'argent, ayant sur la tête un bonnet de fourrures fort fantasque,” “l'espèce de Polonais,” “cet homme qui faisait l'enragé,” “cet extravagant affligé.” The Pole has a tale of woe: he has been robbed by his valet. In order to console him, they all retire to a nearby inn for a quiet evening of wine and cards. There, the page learns all the latest games from Moscow—and loses everything he owns in the process.

The page realizes only much later that he has been duped by a reenactment of the drama depicted in Le Tricheur: “Aussi c'était un effet dont je ne connaissais pas la cause; et j'ai fort bien reconnu depuis, à force de ratiociner, qu'il y avait entre ceux qui feignaient être avec moi, des jeux de cartes tout ajustés, qu'ils mettaient entre les mains du faux Polonais, escamotant adroitement les autres, lorsqu'ils faisaient semblant de les mélér” (p. 219). Perhaps the page is unable to break through the web of glances of exchanged complicity in which he is entrapped, unable to unmask the “étranger prétendu,” precisely because the “faux Polonais”
Camera Lucida 127
dupes him by means of an old libertine trick. The cardsharp clearly belongs to the world of difference, but he disguises his primary form of otherness by adopting still another mask of alienation. In this case, the mask is a double one: he pretends to be both a foreigner and a madman (the page calls him “enragé,” “extravagant,” and says that he “vint faire le démoniaque”). He acts as though the multiplication of false forms of otherness, forms of otherness alien even to him, could keep his victims off the trail of the more dangerous form of difference they protect.

The young nobleman in La Tour’s painting falls for the swindler hidden inside the prostitute, and the page for the cardsharp masked by foreign madness. In D’Assoucy’s case, he encounters only crooks wearing every possible disguise and falls for every one of them. The Avantures is just beginning, and its hero has hardly gotten out of Paris when he meets his first cardsharp. On this occasion, the wolf does not even bother to dress up elaborately as another kind of wolf, but simply slips into the oldest disguise known to his kind, that of the wolf in sheep’s clothing. The resulting “homme en qui il sembloit que la nature eust ramassé ce que le monde a de plus simple, et de plus innocent” (p. 15) pretends to understand nothing of the language of cards: “Il prenoit les Roys pour les Dames, et les Dames pour les Valets.” D’Assoucy, ever willing to help a stranger in need and appropriately incredulous at the good fortune he is encountering, valiantly tries to explain the basics to him: “Je commençay de luy donner une carte et d’en prendre une carte pour moy, mais je fus plus d’un gros quart d’heure avant que de luy pouvoir faire comprendre.” Of course, the naïveté wears away bit by bit, and the teacher has soon been taken for everything he is worth by his gifted pupil.

D’Assoucy’s initial brush with a swindler does nothing to deter him from his passion for cards. He gambles his way through city after city, rushing immediately upon his arrival to find the “Académie de jeu,” even though he fully realizes that his conduct is obsessive: “Je sçay qu’on dira que j’estois un fou de jouer davantage” (p. 320). Each new loss confirms him in his paranoid certainty that all his opponents are united in a giant plot to fleece D’Assoucy. He comes to see himself as completely alone of his kind, faced with the growing ranks of his enemies, all of the same
race. Witness his description of the Avignon "Academy": "Comme dans ce lieu il n'y avoit autre Chrétien que moy, et que, jusqu’au maistre qui donnoit les dez et les cartes, tout y estoit juif, il me fallut passer par les rigeurs de la Synagogue. Un grand Juif nommé Melchisedech, qui avoit le nez long et le visage pasle, me gagna mon argent" (p. 101).

This impression that his enemies are identical, that they all wear the same face, finds its ultimate confirmation for D'Assoucy at the time of his last victimization in the Avantures. On the way to Avignon just after his escape from Montpellier, D'Assoucy encounters a fellow voyager, a priest with a plaster on one eye. They have hardly begun to share their route when D'Assoucy "discovers" that the priest is also his long-lost "cousin de Carpentras." Both the reunion and the voyage are joyous, and only once is D'Assoucy's gaiety troubled by suspicions that his cousin is not entirely on the level: "Plus je le regardois, plus il me sembloit, à l'emplâtre près, avoir veu cet homme en quelque autre endroit du monde" (p. 157). It is certainly no surprise to the reader that all these diverse trappings—the priest's robes, the plaster, the title of cousin—turn out to be components of the most elaborate disguise put together by any of D'Assoucy's swindlers. What is surprising is that the priest/cousin/thief turns out to be none other than D'Assoucy's former student, the first cardsharp to have the honor of taking his money in the course of the Avantures. As if that were not enough, he is also none other than the German who fleeced him in Lyon, and who was described by D'Assoucy at the time as "un très-habile et très-expeditif Allemand qui, par miracle, avoit tout l'air et le visage de mon tueur de temps" (i.e., his "student" [p. 97]). Once he has been swindled no fewer than three times by the same man, D'Assoucy of course finds himself with all the proof he needs to be certain that he is always the victim of the same man, that his persecutors, whether they wear the same face or a series of different masks, all share a single identity.

On this point, the question of complicity, so often evoked in these pages, cannot be avoided. D'Assoucy's desire to be "robbed," as he calls it, is so strong that he almost manages to reverse the situation and give his money away. He cannot help but know what will happen if he gambles. His archetypal cardsharp, just after his first victory, gives him a detailed list of instructions
telling him how to avoid a repetition of the event, a warning of
which he reminds D'Assoucy in a letter left for him after his third
successful swindle: "Ressouvenez-vous . . . de la grace que je
vous fais, et n'accusez que vous de vostre desastre, puisqu'après
les protestations que vous aviez faites de profiter de mes conseils,
vous avez esté assez fol pour perdre cinquante pistoles à Lyon
contre moy qui estoit cet Allemand qui vous les gagna chez la
Lere; et icy contre un Prieur Provençal que vous ne connoissiez
pas" (p. 160). D'Assoucy, like the page, loses because he chooses
to do so.

Thus far, the libertine hero in his role as cardsharp's victim
would not seem terribly different from the libertine hero accused
of sorcery or any other mode of otherness. This similarity, in fact,
almost succeeds in masking the fundamental incomparability of
these types of victimization. The unlucky gambler does not be­
long to the historically definable victims of this period, and is
quite possibly outside any schema of difference but the libertine's.
The libertine is always a victim, but there is a vast difference in the
stakes—next to losing one's freedom and one's life, losing one's
money hardly seems important enough to merit the same trap­
pings of victimization. Furthermore, for the great majority of the
libertine novel's readers, the hero's association with the historical­
ly defined other can only have positive connotations—the hero
emerges a more sympathetic character from his brushes with the
prison cell. To be trapped by a wearer of masks, however, can
hardly be expected to add to his favorable image.

And yet, bizarrely enough, the libertine hero does not see things
this way, as a passage from the *Avantures* demonstrates. Just af­
fter winning his money for the first time, D'Assoucy's ubiquitous
swindler attempts to justify his profession in a speech full of bur­
lesque flair:

> Quoy, le Capitaine plumera le soldat, le soldat plumera le paysan,
et le goujat plumera la poule, et vous, Monsieur le Poète, pour
vous parer du bien d'autrui vous plumerez impunément tous les
auteurs, et moy, à qui mieux qu'à vous appartient le droit de
plumage, je n'oseray seulement arracher une de vos plumes?
. . . O gens barbares et dénaturiez, cruels Anthropophages,
qui, ne vivans que de la substance d'autrui, ne pouvez souffrir
qu'on touche à la vostre, que trouvez-vous en moy qui ne soit point
en vous? . . . Autant d'hommes, autant de larrons; et, autant de
larcins differens, autant de titres particuliers: comme rançonner, faire venir l'eau au moulin, faire un trou à la nuit, tirer d'un sac deux moutons, jouer de la harpe, grivelier, grapiller, plumer la poule sans crier, sophistiquer, frelatter, faire du bien d'autruy large courroye, donner à manger à la pie, mettre de la paille en ses souliers, plier la toilette, alliage, corvée, monopole (pp. 26, 29).

It is evident that, for D'Assoucy, his lack of luck with cards represents some sort of a "qui perd, gagne" situation, and the cardsharp's remarks provide a clue to understanding just what he feels he gains. By losing when he gambles, D'Assoucy proves that he is not like the rest of men, who, as the swindler teaches him, are all thieves, from the cradle to the grave. With this shift in roles, from wearer of masks to victim of masks, he is, paradoxically, able to maintain his status as an outsider and to make that category even more exclusive.

The total isolation reached by the compulsive gambler is a situation not found outside the *Page* and the *Avantures*. The only other comparable vision of solitude is found in Cyrano's two voyages. Here the reduction of human faculties and rights inherent in the notion of victimization is pushed to its limit to create what might be termed a burlesque variant on the images of otherness—Dyrcona confined not to a prison cell but to a cage, as when he is taken to be either a monkey or a bird. He has barely arrived on the moon when the narrator is classified as "la femelle du petit animal de la reine" and is imprisoned in the same cage as his male, so they can reproduce (p. 55). His male turns out to be a freethinking Spaniard who left the earth for the moon because "il n'avait pu trouver un seul pays où l'imagination même fut en liberté" (p. 66). He is able to explain to the narrator why he has been confined to a cage. When the Spaniard arrived on the moon, he was immediately taken for a monkey, since on the moon monkeys are dressed "à l'espagnole." The lunar judges maintain this opinion, so the next creature they see who looks like the Spaniard is simply placed in the same category, even though he is not dressed like their monkeys. (Why they are so certain the narrator is a female rather than a second male is never explained.) In another phase of his new life as a monkey, the narrator temporarily becomes the property of a "bateleur" charged with his training: "Il m'instruisait à faire le godenot, à passer des culbutes, à figurer
des grimaces” (p. 55). Once his act has been perfected, he is taken out to entertain the crowds, and, like a true organ grinder’s monkey, is obliged to keep performing, or be punished if he is not active enough to keep his audience amused: “Il se remit de plus belle à tirer ma corde pour me faire sauter, jusqu’à ce que les spectateurs étant souls de rire et d’assurer que j’avais presque autant d’esprit que les bêtes de leur pays” (p. 59).

When the narrator fails to become pregnant, and when, contrary to all their experience with monkeys, he is able to master their “human” language, the lunar experts revise their initial opinion and reclassify him as a “perroquet plume.” This decision at least allows them to keep him in a cage, but does necessitate new training, in the hope of making a proper bird out of the unsuccessful monkey: “Là tous les jours l’oiseleur de la Reine prenait le soin de me venir siffler la langue comme on fait ici aux sansonnet” (p. 74). When this method also fails, the narrator is given a final examination, which determines that he is “possible quelque espèce d’autruche” (p. 75).

These problems of taxonomy continue to plague Dyrcona on the sun, and even reach new heights of complexity there. He may have looked like a bird to his lunar evaluators, but on the sun, when such a resemblance could save his life, he does not stand a chance of passing for one. There, Dyrcona is put on trial by angry birds who accuse him of being a human and therefore a representative of their most hated race. In an effort to establish his (false) innocence, Dyrcona replies to their accusation by trying to play on the identity found for him on the moon: “Quant à ce qui concernoit mon espèce, que je n’estois point Homme comme ils se le figuraient mais Singe; que des hommes m’avoient enlevé au berceau fort jeune et nourry parmi eux” (p. 151). Dyrcona’s solar accusers have more evolved methods than their lunar counterparts, so they are able to unmask him very quickly. In the course of his trial, they explain:

Nous avons beau sauter, marcher, piroûter et inventer en sa présence cent tours de passe par lesquels nous pretendions l’émouvoir à faire de mesme, selon la coutume des Singes. Or quoy qu’il euste esté nourry parmi les Hommes, comme le Singe est toujours Singe, nous soutenons qu’il n’eût pas esté en sa puissance de s’abstientir de contrefaire nos singeries (p. 152).
The birds’ account of their unmasking of Dyrcona reveals a possible explanation of his desire to adopt this role. The monkey could be described as the very principle of otherness masked as sameness. For the spectators who observe him, a monkey exists as a monkey only insofar as he is able to eliminate any personal element in his behavior, in order to imitate, “singer,” his audience. Furthermore, this imitation cannot stop: “Un Singe est toujours Singe.” It can be said that a monkey, like a mirror, has no function, no life, without an audience before it. I imitate, therefore I am (not). The monkey is successful in amusing his audience because he can make himself look like them, while at the same time retaining the difference that leaves them free to indulge in “safe” laughter at this resemblance. The monkey may look like a “little man,” but the spectators remain calm, safe with the security of their superiority to this creature whose similarity might seem frightening were it not defused by his ridiculousness.

Describing a libertine hero as a monkey or a bird (who can imitate man’s voice and language) might seem a sad commentary on the reduction of his individuality to the series of masks imposed on him both by his enemies and by himself. He is denounced (unmasked) so often that in the long run there is nothing left behind the masks. But, like D’Assoucy’s notion of the “supreme victim,” the image of the monkey may also be viewed in a more positive light—at least, that is, from the libertine’s particular vantage point. To be a monkey is also to be safe from denunciation. A monkey is only a reflection of what he sees, and that reflection is constantly changing and therefore impossible to pin down. The demon of Socrates explains why this is an image of power for the libertine when he lets the narrator in on Campanella’s secret weapon:27 “Ce fut moi qui l’avisai, pendant qu’il était à l’Inquisition à Rome, de styler son visage et son corps aux grimaces et aux postures ordinaires de ceux dont il avait besoin de connaître l’intérieur afin d’exciter chez soi par une même assiette les pensées que cette même situation avait appelées dans ses adversaires, parce qu’ainsi il ménagerait mieux leur âme quand il la connaîtrait” (p. 56).

The man/monkey can control his alienation—by maintaining it at all times. Furthermore, the man may play monkey, but he remains man. His resemblance to his public is, therefore, more
frightening, and their laughter less safe. D'Assoucy, in the *Combat de Cirano de Bergerac avec le singe de Brioché*, describes the consequences of a performance by a marionnette troupe in a Swiss village that had never before witnessed this type of imitation: “Le peuple brule-sorcier . . . dénonça Brioché aux Magistrats. Des témoins attestèrent avoir ouï jargonner, parlementer, et deviser de petites figures qui ne pouvaient être que des diables.”

It is the diabolical power sensed in both the marionnettes and in Francion's monkey that transcends the absurdity of this vision of the libertine hero to link it to the more public masks of otherness.

The libertine hero as monkey is also the ultimate in otherness because he, like the loser, seeks uniqueness in difference. No one can be more other than the perfect monkey, who changes faces every second. I do not use the adjective “perfect” lightly here, because it is precisely the notion of perfection that presents the only obstacle to the positive valorization of these two images of otherness. Both of them are based on the premise that the hero as loser or monkey is not like the rest of men. Even in these apparently ridiculous situations, he is worthy of sympathy because he alone is pure, he alone is always a victim, never a victimizer. As soon, however, as anyone else portrays himself in these roles, the spell is broken. The hero can no longer be different from the rest of men, only different from most men. He is no longer the victim of all other men so united in their persecution of him that they share the same face, but simply the victim of almost all men—with the few exceptions of those who are neither like the rest of men nor really exactly like him. In short, such heroes are like the phoenix described in the *Estats et empires*—there is room on any given planet for only one of them at any given time.

D'Assoucy illustrates perfectly both the functioning of this principle and its application to the libertines' transformation of autobiography. Curiously enough, he chooses as his model not himself but Cyrano. In the *Combat de Cirano de Bergerac avec le singe de Brioché*, he imagines Cyrano's “murder” of a monkey he describes as the “presqu'homme des marionnettes.” In order to remain unique, Cyrano is obliged to kill the other who is like him, the other who, in clothes similar to his, entertains the crowd with swashbuckling sword thrusts performed with a miniature sword.
in a display reminiscent of Cyrano’s own simian antics. Brioche’s monkey threatens the very foundations of Cyrano’s act. If he allows himself to be out-monkeyed by a monkey, he will afterward be classified, no longer as fabulous, fantastic, or mad, but simply as a common buffoon. He must use his life-size weapon to impale this miniature version of himself brandishing an equally miniature sword, in order to avoid becoming one of a series—a Quaker Oats’ man looking at himself looking at himself, and so on.

Another incident from Cyrano’s apocryphal biography illustrates this desire for uniqueness in his particular brand of flamboyant behavior. It is widely chronicled that Cyrano, after a quarrel with the actor Montfleury, forbid him to act for a month. When, arriving at the theater a few days later, he caught him in the act, Cyrano threatened the frightened actor with his ever-present sword, until he ran trembling from the stage. In his public letter “Contre le gras Montfleury, mauvais auteur et comédien,” Cyrano pretends that his persecution was motivated only by Montfleury’s obesity and the poor quality of his acting. These reasons are certainly valid, but they must not be allowed to distract attention from the fact that chasing his rivals in the act of imitating others from the stage where they perform is an active fantasy for Cyrano. He defends the image of the libertine as permanent actor, as one who literally takes his theater to the streets. This eternal other with his personal vision of living theater rejects not only the potential rival he sees in the actor but also the integrated otherness that is the theater.

3. SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

Obviously, this obsessive desire for uniqueness in their victimization, this quest for perfect difference, would make peaceful coexistence within any type of society a highly problematic venture for the libertines. The ostracizing that was the lot of all free-thinkers of their day initially fostered their withdrawal into circles whose access was limited to those who shared certain beliefs. In the end, however, the libertine cooperation of the Gassendi years was broken down by paranoia and a desire for self-punishment. Solidarity disintegrated into slander, as each member of the group wanted to be unique in his alienation. Already alienated from society, the last survivors of the group originally united
under Gassendi borrowed tactics learned from official repression and used them until they succeeded in alienating themselves from each other. Their refusal to live with the concept of sameness even on so small a scale led them to a new form of prison, the chambre obscure in the sense in which Rousseau employs the term, that is, a state of isolation so advanced that “I” is the only figure of sameness admitted: “que chacun puisse connoitre soi et un autre, et cet autre ce sera moi. . . . Je vais travailler pour ainsi dire dans la chambre obscure.”

“Défiez-vous généralement de tout le monde, et surtout de vos plus grands amis; car, quoiqu’ils tous les amis ne soient pas perfides, les grands coups ne se font jamais que par les grands amis” (p. 38). The cardsharp with a thousand faces shares these words of personal wisdom with D’Assoucy, and thereby provides him with what is ultimately the best piece of advice in any libertine text. A comparison developed by Claude Lévi-Strauss in Tristes tropiques provides a means of distinguishing this persecution from within the ranks of the initiate from its external counterpart. Our societies practice the isolation of those they call possessed, their expulsion, or what Lévi-Strauss calls “anthropémie.” To these he opposes the so-called “sociétés anthropophages” who “voient dans l’absorption de certains individus, détenteurs de forces redoutables, le seul moyen de neutraliser celles-ci et même de les mettre à profit.”

External persecution attempts to deal with the libertines by means of expulsion, but the persecution that comes from within uses tactics that could better be qualified as “anthropophages.” In a so-called “société anthropophage,” the dead possessor of secrets is consumed, so that his secrets can be understood. On the moon, as the narrator of L’Autre Monde learns, a philosopher passes on his secrets to his disciples by calling them to his deathbed, in order to have them eat his flesh and drink his blood just after his death, and then immediately make love so that in the babies produced while they are nourished with his body, “ils soient comme assurés que c’est leur ami qui revit” (p. 107).

The positive connotations of this form of cannibalism stressed by both Lévi-Strauss and Cyrano disappear, however, in its “practical” libertine application. When, in an effort to preserve the purity of their sense of victimization, the libertines begin to
attack each other, they engage in a form of verbal cannibalism. Once they become aware of the importance of uniqueness for all the images they seek to present, they begin to perceive each other as rivals. They attempt to “neutralize” their rivals by devouring their reputations, and eventually their identities, in the hope of gaining unique access to the secrets they possess. In his description of Chapelle and Bachaumont’s attacks, D’Assoucy prefigures Lévi-Strauss’s terminology: “Ils ont enrichi leurs écrits de l’honneur d’autrui, plus cruels que . . . les Antropophages” (p. 147).

The principal means they employ to neutralize each other is an accusation as explosive as any of those already discussed here, that of homosexuality. Chapelle first throws it out against D’Assoucy, who returns the favor by increasing the number of those implicated. Both the meaning and the intentions of the relevant passages are absolutely clear, making the silence of the majority of critics on this subject difficult to interpret as anything but an attempt to suppress the undesirable. Even those who dare mention the unmentionable usually do so in such a veiled manner that the effects of its intrusion are muted. Colombey, for example, defends D’Assoucy so completely that he does not feel it necessary to pronounce the name of the accusation: “Le pauvre musicien/poète avait le tort de marcher flanqué de deux jeunes garçons d’allure équivoque, et qui, en réalité, n’étaient que des pages de musique chargés de prêter la fraîcheur de leur voix aux airs que leur maître composait” (p. v). Would that it were so easy to dismiss the pages, especially Pierrotin, and the episodes in which they are evoked! Or that it were possible to agree with Neubert’s allegation that D’Assoucy tries to cover up the whole unpleasant situation as quickly as possible—or even that the question of libertine homosexuality could be suspended with a question mark: “Tous ces hommes avaient-ils donc cela de commun d’être peu capable d’amour?”

Only Démoris faces up to the weight of the issue, at least as far as D’Assoucy is concerned. He categorically denies the existence of an attempted cover-up, and stresses the invitation to scandal presented by the text: “Le récit . . . n’ébauche pas l’ombre d’une justification . . . D’Assoucy . . . consacre la plus grande partie de son récit à décrire avec application les rapports de nature
assez évidemment passionnelle, qui le lient au page.”

Even Démoris does not go beyond this first step to examine the wider implications of this question, both for the *Avantures* and for other libertine texts as well.

It cannot be denied that the libertine text presents a sexuality that can only be termed unusual from a novelistic point of view, if not frankly marginal. There is no need to turn to Freudian interpretations, such as gambling as masturbation, in order to document this point. One may simply remark, along with Adam, that there are indeed few women in these texts, and further show that, when they portray a figure of desire, it is rarely a woman and more often a “bel adolescent.” This is most evident in *L'Autre Monde*, where, in the list of figures who serve as guides for the narrator, maleness is privileged over femaleness, youth over age, and daring over traditional wisdom: the archangel guarding paradise with his “épée flamboyante,” “le fils de l'hôte,” and even the demon of Socrates, who first appears to the narrator as an old man, but soon afterward slips into the body of an adolescent. In the majority of libertine texts, woman is not only removed from her pedestal but also on many occasions demoted to a negative role. D'Assoucy is driven out of Montpellier by hordes of outraged women. The page is put on trial by his mistress's mother, and when Dyrcona goes on trial on the sun, the birds who attack him most violently are all female (“Je repondis à mon accusatrice” [p. 151]).

This paranoid vision of women may be linked to the sexual implications of the libertine fascination with alchemy. As Bachelard explains in *La Psychanalyse du feu*, “toute l'Alchimie était traversée par une immense rêverie sexuelle, par une rêverie de richesse et de rajeunissement, par une rêverie de puissance.” The alchemist's “rêverie de puissance” is exceptional not only for its intensity but even more so, as Bachelard goes on to explain, for its self-reflexiveness. Alchemy upholds an absolute distinction between a principle of male fire and that of a female one. It maintains a “valorisation nettement prédominante du feu masculin,” which has definite consequences for the composition of its universe: “Il ne faut pas oublier que l'alchimie est uniquement une science d'hommes, de célibataires, d'hommes sans femme, d'initiés retranchés de la communauté humaine au profit d'une so-
ciété masculine. Elle ne reçoit pas directement les influences de la rêverie féminine. Sa doctrine du feu est donc fortement polarisée par des désirs inassouvis."

If I make these observations about the sexuality portrayed in the libertine texts, it is certainly not because I want to draw conclusions about the sexual preferences of either their heroes or their authors. This question seems no more relevant to me than to decide whether or not they were sorcerers—another specter of otherness that ultimately has its origin within the group itself. The texts themselves add homosexuality to their list of deviations. I would like to confront this accusation in order to evaluate its importance in the schema of difference they trace and, at the same time, to see if it can be used to establish a broader definition of otherness.

The homosexual rejects the other in the form of the female, and thereby chooses for himself a marginal status. If he continues his rejection of others to include all those not part of a very exclusive group, then the element of narcissism in this sexual inversion becomes flagrant. A pronounced incestuous quality greatly limits the scope of the prefix “homo-” in the homo-sexual/intellectual bonds that originally unite these libertines. This notion of incest could provide an explanation for the eventual dissolution of these seemingly stable bonds. When D'Assoucy begins what is quite evidently, in Démoris's terms, some sort of “passionate relationship” with an outsider, he breaks out of this established pattern. In so doing, he destroys its circle of power, which must remain airtight in order to function properly. For this infringement of the rules governing their isolation, for this attempt to let an outsider in on their secrets, D'Assoucy, like any member of a secret society in similar circumstances, must be punished. Chapelle's attack is an example of brutal slander, but it also an attempt to ostracize a partner who merits punishment.

The element of complicity involved in these denunciations cannot be properly situated without running the risk of appearing to indulge in what Démoris refers to as “quelque secrète jubilation dans cette représentation du scandale,” that is, without quoting at some length from the passages involved. Chapelle describes with an exceptional dose of glee the high/low point of D'Assoucy's *Avantures*, his sudden departure from Montpellier. In his account of the incident, D'Assoucy admits only to his persecution at
the hands of certain "femmes galantes" who "m'appelloient herétique, non en fait de religion, mais en fait d'amour" (p. 133), and who succeed in having him briefly imprisoned. He describes no mob scenes, and claims to have left the city, though sooner than planned, nevertheless of his own free will.

Chapelle's version, the first to appear in print, concentrates on precisely those "colorful" moments omitted by D'Assoucy. He especially relishes the description of the women's riot:

Là d'hommes on voyoit fort peu;
Cent mille femmes animées,
Toutes de colère enflammées,
Accourtoient en foule en ce lieu
Avec des torches allumées.

Elles écumoient toutes de rage, et jamais on n'a rien vu de si terrible. Les unes disoient que c'était trop peu de le bruler; et les autres, qu'il falloit l'écorcher vif auparavant, et toutes, que, si la justice le leur vouloit livrer, elles inventeroient de nouveaux suppliques pour le tourmenter (p. 84).

In Chapelle's description, D'Assoucy's punishment is rigorously parallel to that reserved for atheists. But, whereas that punishment was essentially a case of men being punished by men, the former concentrates on a much rarer type of revolt, of women against men, or rather, against a man. Given the nature of the allegations, this seems more appropriate, but it is also more terrifying because so unusual. One thinks of Dumas's *Ange Pitou*, in which Gilbert repeatedly warns the king and queen that the day the women join the Revolution is the day it will become serious.

Chapelle closes his description of the Montpellier expulsion by evoking D'Assoucy slinking out of town, a broken man (p. 85). This image of D'Assoucy recurs to dominate the *Voyage's* final scene. Chapelle recognizes his former friend, despite the fact that he is trying to hide behind his cloak, which he has pulled up over his face. Rather than respecting his embarrassment, Chapelle refuses to let D'Assoucy off the hook, and chooses just this moment to press him for more information on his relationship with Pierrotin:

"Ce petit garçon qui vous suit
Et qui derrière vous se glisse,
Que sait-il? En quel exercice,
En quel art l'avez-vous instruit?"
"Il sait tout, dit-il. S'il vous duit,
Il est bien à votre service."

(Pp. 97-98)

Although he simply thanks D'Assoucy for his offer, declines it, and takes his leave of him, the very fact that Chapelle chooses to mention this proposal provides a basis for the accusation of complicity D'Assoucy will level at him. In connection with this issue, a rather curious passage from the *Voyage* comes to mind. Before the Montpellier incident, Chapelle evokes in some detail his pleasant memories of Agen and his stay there. Agen is described as a city of enchanting women who have already succeeded in holding prisoner ("arrêter") for long periods of time a number of their (Chapelle and Bachaumont's) friends, among them a certain d'Ortis, who arranges a dinner to introduce them to these dangerous beauties. They realize that no one has escaped these women before, without at least leaving his heart "pour ôtage d'un prompt retour."

Ainsi donc qu'avoient fait les autres,
Il fallut y laisser les nôtres.
Là tous deux ils furent pris;
Mais, n'en déplaise à tant de belles,
Ce fut par l'aimable d'Ortis

Elles ne lui envièrent point cette conquête, et, nous jugeant apparemment très infirmes, elles ne daignèrent point employer le moindre de leurs charmes pour nous retenir (pp. 62-63).

The passage can of course be read simply as a declaration of friendship and loyalty, but its use of a love vocabulary makes this unclear and draws attention to this friendship in a rather suspicious manner. Without trying to continue D'Assoucy's habit of throwing out accusations, I would simply like to point out that it seems imprudent for anyone trying to denounce a friend's homosexuality to dwell on an incident that leaves him open to the same suspicion.

Prudence does not dominate D'Assoucy's response to Chapelle's slander either, but by this stage the stakes are slightly al-
tered. D'Assoucy so relishes an accusation that he is constitutionally incapable of categorical denials. The question is no longer whether or not the accusation is a just one but whether or not it can be given a broader application. As a result, he throws Chapelle's words right back in his face, explaining that firsthand knowledge leaves Chapelle well placed to judge D'Assoucy's preferences. In another of his so-called defenses against Chapelle's attacks, he implicates Cyrano in the affair, even though his name is never mentioned by Chapelle. When D'Assoucy explains that the women of Montpellier are attacking him because of the "longues habitudes que j'avois eues avec C., feu D.B." (p. 133), he does nothing to clear his own name, and merely succeeds in gratuitously complicating the matter.

It seems quite evident from D'Assoucy's handling of this issue, and reasonably evident from Chapelle's, that homosexuality is the most dangerous accusation of otherness for the libertines, the one they were least willing simply to laugh off. They can talk as much as they please about being sorcerers, or madmen, or monkeys, but they run no risk of being taken seriously. At most, the metaphorical implications of these figures will be considered. But, when from within the circle of initiates the figure of the homosexual is added to the family of exiles, the opposite is true. In this case, it is highly probable that the question will be given a completely literal interpretation—hence the silence of subsequent commentators afraid to take sides in what they feel to be the only issue: whether or not the libertines really were homosexuals.

Since the question of homosexuality is generally avoided because of this dominance of the literal, the possibility of its figurative manifestations is, of course, never even evoked. Yet, if homosexuality, the category of difference adopted by the libertines for themselves and never chosen for them by anyone from outside, is viewed in broader terms, it can deepen our understanding of the libertine compulsion to be other. In a study entitled "The Differing Seed: Dante's Brunetto Latini," Eugene Vance develops just such a wider definition of homosexuality. In an attempt to understand the place Dante assigns Brunetto in hell with the sodomists, Vance concludes:

If sodomy was considered to be a sin against nature, the concept of "nature" over and against which sodomy was believed to consti-
tute a class of corruptive behaviour had become such a broad ideological construct by Dante's time that sodomy could now easily be seen as but one member of a whole family of more subtle—and for poets, perhaps, more interesting—perversions. In this case, the relationship is embodied above all in the order and the process of language.  

With the libertines, as with Brunetto Latini, the question of homosexuality ultimately leads back once again not only to prison but also to the book. This time, however, I am not referring to the “concrete” object from which the text originates, or in which the attacks culminate, but, more basically, to the tool manipulated by the héros écrivant, language. Vance discusses the reasons why, for Dante, Brunetto’s language could be described as artificial, unnatural, perverted. Homosexuality can be read as a metaphor for linguistic “perversion,” and certainly no other writers in seventeenth-century France produced more unnatural language than the libertines. They stripped their language as much as possible of names and other “natural” signs of origin, signs that attempt to perpetuate (the myth of) the transparency of language. For the genealogical transparency that is the hallmark of so-called natural language, they substitute a dialect largely of their own creation, the burlesque. The burlesque is perhaps the most extreme manifestation of linguistic self-consciousness. Constantly calling attention to its verbal functioning, it tries to make linguistic play more important than referential content. Their linguistic creativity earns the libertine writers an additional ostracizing. Their books are not only referred to as poorly constructed treatments of unworthy themes, but they also gain the literary establishment's scorn because of their medium of expression. The libertines choose to reject the codes of literary sameness advanced in their day, and to create instead their own language of otherness, based on a reevaluation of an important term in the contemporary critical vocabulary, the sublime. In this new definition, “sublime” means simply what is most imaginative rather than what is most elevated or lofty or what inspires veneration or awe—what is able to elevate the mind from the base to the noble, as it was interpreted in dominant theories. Not that the idea of elevation is absent from the libertine definition of the sublime.
Cyrano describes the imagination as "notre imagination, plus chaude que les autres facultés de l'âme" (*L'Autre Monde*, p. 100), and attributes to it the ability to liberate the lightest particles from the weight of matter, to vaporize, to produce "fièvres chaudes" (p. 32). The difference between their goals denounces the distance between the two conceptions: the proponent of Classicism seeks to extract the beautiful while leaving the vile behind, and to lift the mind from the disorder of base ideas to the calm of noble aspirations. The libertine makes no such distinctions between beautiful and nonbeautiful, and even scorns harmony in favor of the fiery disorder of thought exploding simultaneously in multiple directions.

It is obvious that the libertines are, for once, simply being faithful to origin. They are concerned not with the vile but the vial, since they do not forget that "sublime" is tied to the alchemists' *sublimatio*, sublimation, defined by Furetière as "action par laquelle on fait éléver dans un vaisseau par le moyen du feu, les plus séches, les plus subtiles parties d'un corps." Just as the page watches his alchemist extract liquid gold from a solid, so the libertines hope to replace the alchemist's fire with that of the imagination, and thereby to explore "l'alchimie du verbe." Paradoxically, a system like the burlesque, which at the time of its creation was harshly criticized for its vulgarity, for its Rabelaisian insistence on bodily functions, proves with its use of sublimation that the opposite is true. Boileau and its other detractors were perhaps so violent in their attacks on the burlesque because they somehow sensed, and were threatened by, the sameness beneath the difference. The burlesque is not, as everyone said, a product of a too close contact with nature but a pure product of sublimation in the sense of a deflection of vital, sexual energy. "Sublimation is the use made of bodily energy by a soul which sets itself apart from the body," in Norman O. Brown's definition. After all, Cyrano exchanged the sword for the pen—he never did succeed in combining their use as he does in Rostand's fairy tale. There is no naming in these texts, since there can be no procreation.

The libertine heroes are alienated from their bodies. Repeatedly, they view them as objects with an independent existence, as though projected outside of them by the action of a *camera luci-
As he approaches the sun, Dyrcona’s body becomes transparent, until he is able to perceive his so-called vital organs as foreign to him:

J’estois devenu diaphane . . . aucun endroit, ny de ma chair, ny de mes os, ny de mes entrailles, quoy que transparents n’avoit perdu sa couleur naturelle; au contraire, mes poumons conservoient encor sous un rouge incarnat leur mole delicatesse; mon coeur toujours vermeil balancoit aisément entre le sistolle et le diastole; mon foie semblait brûler dans un pourpre de feu, et cuisant l’air que je respirois continuoit la circulation du sang; enfin je me voyois, me touchois, me sentois le mesme, et si pourtant je ne l’estois plus (pp. 134–35).

A similar image of alienation from the life-sustaining parts of his body occurs in Francion’s dream, when Valentin rips a hole in Francion’s stomach with his cuckold’s horns: “Je me mis à contempler mes boyaux et tout ce qui estoit aupres d’eux de plus secret. Je les tiray hors de leur place et eus la curiosité de les mesurer avecque mes mains” (p. 152).

The source of this alienation, of this impotence, is explained in the scene of Dyrcona’s seizure outside Toulouse by a man who might be described as a living book: “Une longue robe tissue de feuillets d’un livre de plain-chant le couvroit jusqu’aux ongles et son visage estoit caché d’une carte où l’on ait écrit: In principio” (p. 107). As a result of this capture, Dyrcona is forced to become mute.

When the words missing from his captor’s name tag are supplied, however, the result is the genealogy not only of the world but also of his impotence. In principio erat verbum: the libertine hero is castrated by the text, by the text that is the story of his alienation (castration, unnaming) by society. He is not only outside his body but outside language as well.

The libertine hero must endure this state of self-alienation in order to produce/find the language to describe the story of his otherness. The texts suggest different metaphors to characterize the process by which sublimation results in the (re)production of the book. The Estats et empires evokes on two occasions the libertine dream of a self-enclosed procreation “machine,” in describing the birth of the first hermaphrodite (pp. 172–73), and in defining a mysterious bird with whom the narrator converses: “Le Phénix est hermaphrodite.” When the Phoenix describes the conditions for his existence, it becomes clear why he is a key figure
in libertine mythology. There is only one Phoenix at a time in a given world. Each lives for a hundred years longing for the sun, at the end of which he lays a single egg, before setting the fire in which his body is consumed (p. 149). This scenario is evidently a libertine utopia. It offers a guarantee of uniqueness, with no one else of your race to fear, and no need for anyone else at any point in the life cycle. The Phoenix can perform all functions and still reach the sun, the ultimate alchemist’s fire and the center of intellectual freedom.

In this context, the identification of the narrator in *L’Autre Monde* as the “femelle du petit animal de la reine” seems less startling. After all, the narrator himself says in the work’s opening sentences that he is “gros de mille definitions de lune, dont je ne pouvois accoucher” (p. 31). He is pregnant with definitions, with words, with the knowledge that will enable him to create the book that seeks to define the moon’s plurality (“mille definitions de lune”), that seeks to re-create/procreate plurality. The narrator is also pregnant with identities, as the other occurrence of the adjective “gros” in Cyrano’s novels makes clear. This time, his pregnancy is visible to an outsider. The Phoenix remarks to Dyrcona: “Je voy bien que vous estes gros d’apprendre qui je suis” (p. 148). The narrator is pregnant with definitions and with an identity. The answer to the Phoenix’s question, “Who am I?” is obviously “mille definitions de lune.” His identity, and Dyrcona’s, are in the book.

This identification of the libertine with his book provides the key to D’Assoucy’s use of *anthropophage*. He explains that Chapelle and his book exist only because he stole D’Assoucy’s life and reputation: “vous qui n’avez presque de nom que ce que vostre medisance et mes disgraces vous ont acquis” (p. 183), and, furthermore, that he stole them only to be able to hand D’Assoucy over to the rabble to be eaten alive: “Il ne faut pas s’étonner si la canaille, qui est toujours affamée de poison, a dévoré ce libelle et s’en lèche encore les doigts avec d’autant plus d’avidité, qu’elle trouve dans ces sortes d’ouvrages des alimens plus conformes à sa nature” (p. 202). This is the essential difference between the way the libertines persecute each other and the way they are persecuted from the outside. They are unable to hide from each other what is perhaps the ultimate libertine secret: even though they remain
outside the language that castrates them, it remains, nevertheless, the only source of identity they can accept.

To steal their language is, therefore, to steal the only thing they accept as belonging to them, to steal what they are protecting behind all the masks. Since, as D'Assoucy's cardsharp says, all men are thieves, even poets, and especially your best friend, the situation is particularly critical if your best friend happens to be a poet. For the poet alone can steal from the libertine that last bit of otherness accepted as sameness and, in so doing, make it overtly other, thereby leaving the circle of alienation absolutely airtight. Thus, the libertines' accusations of plagiarism are a sort of desperate fight for life. Because of the particular nature of the libertine writer's relationship to his text, it is not surprising that he almost never goes outside his immediate circle to find suspects. Cyrano turns out public letters with accusations of plagiarism against half of the writers he knows—"Contre La Mothe, brigand de pensées," "Contre Chapelle, brigand de pensées," "Contre Soucidas." D'Assoucy claims that Cyrano and Chapelle owe their success to plagiarism, and they all agree that it would be better to be threatened by "le singe de Brioché" than to have no more originality than D'Assoucy, commonly known as "le singe de Scar-ron." When the libertine's language is copied, his mask of protective bravado has outlived its usefulness.

The libertine texts are centered around a conflict between the liveliness, the verve, and the vitality usually associated with the so-called "élément gaulois" in the French literary tradition, and the sense of physical and verbal alienation I have been describing here—in other words, a conflict between the mask and what lies behind it. Nowhere is this conflict so clear as in what is probably the best known "morceau choisi" from any libertine text, Francion's controversial dream. Francion's account of his imaginary exploits is so baroquely rich in an apparently joyful celebration of the body and its functions (with a heavy emphasis on the sexual and the excremental) that it is usually treated as an especially glorious "rémiscence rabelaisienne," to borrow an expression from Wolfgang Leiner. This explosive text makes an extreme use of paratactical narration, which is, after all, as the marquis de Cussan explains in the *Estats et empires*'s own oneiric section, the logic of dreams: "un pot pourry de toutes les choses à quoy nous
avons pensé en veillant... un assemblage d'espèces confuses, que la fantaisie qui dans le sommeil n'est plus guidée par la Raison nous présente sans ordre" (p. 107). Francion justifies the wildness of his narrative at the outset by explaining to his listener, the "Gentil-homme Bourguignon," that "tous les songes ne se font ainsi qu'à bastons rompus" (p. 141). He then proceeds, under the cover of these rapid dislocations, to indulge in an astounding physical explicitness.

It is indeed tempting to be carried away by this bravado performance, to allow oneself to be dazzled to the point of never peeking behind the heavy curtain of wild playfulness. Leiner is among the few critics to penetrate to the level of the dream's less positive implications:

Le rêve de Francion est inquiétant. Il n'y est question que d'amour non récompensé, de projets et de plans traversés, de rencontres avec des monstres et avec des êtres bizarres, souvent méchants et grossiers. Cet univers où les dieux et les êtres sont hostiles au rêveur nous révèle l'inquiétude et l'angoisse du héros. Il est seul dans sa nacelle, entouré d'éléments ennemis, ne disposant que de son ingéniosité pour se maintenir dans un monde dangereux.

Leiner unmasks the dissimulation of the dream's baroque cover-up, but in his discussion of its disquieting aspects, he remains too close to the surface. Not only does "le rêve exprime parfaitement bien l'insatisfaction et la frustration que Francion expérimente dans la vie réelle," especially with regard to "les rapports de Francion avec la femme," but it goes far beyond the hero's personal dissatisfaction to broach wider-reaching and more unsettling problems. Leiner stresses, quite convincingly, both the internal coherence of the dream sequence and its links with the novel as a whole, thus joining forces with such critics as Serroy and Garavini in their attempt to trace the patterns of unity in Francion's wild profusion.

Although I agree that Francion's dream is no hors d'oeuvre, and that many of its themes find echoes elsewhere in the novel, I nevertheless contend that it is wrong not to insist on the exceptional status that it enjoys. Even in a novelistic space as free as that of the first edition of Francion, it is impossible not to feel that the dream possesses a narrative and thematic uniqueness. Of all the libertine novels, Francion is generally the most hopeful regarding the success and the power of the
libertine experience, and its hero rarely finds himself a victim of persecution. The dream sequence belies such optimism, and, in its powerful expression of the most frightening manifestations of alienation already discussed here, can be said to prefigure the eventual dissolution of the libertine movement.

I have already quoted the passage in which Francion, his stomach ripped open, is able to contemplate his organs, a moment of alienation from his body that is far from unique in the course of the dream. In fact, one of its most obsessive recurrent themes is the dismemberment of bodies. Dismemberment is, furthermore, usually linked to an almost infinite multiplication of one bodily part, which results in its total objectification, in an unsettling mechanization of the body. Penises are used as corks (p. 148); an entire temple is filled with vials of a liquor that Francion learns is “les pucellages des femmes” (p. 151); its counterpart is lined with cuckold’s horns (p. 151); Francion even finds himself in a room wallpapered “de jeunes tetons collez ensemble deux à deux, qui estoient comme des balons, balons sur lesquels je me plus long-temps a me rouler” (p. 149). When treated in this Busby Berkeley fashion, breasts become balloons, and all members, completely cut off from their original function, are no more than toys. The most severe of these instances of dismemberment carries this tendency to a frightening extreme. A woman has forced Francion to drink urine, so he slaps her:

Son corps tomba par pieces. D’un coste estoit la teste, d’un autre les bras, un peu plus loing estoient les cuisses: bref tout estoit divi-sé: et ce qui me sembla esmerveillable, c’est que la pluspart de tous ces membres ne laisserent pas peu apres de faire leurs offices. Les jambes se promenoient par la caverne, les bras me venoient frapper, la teste me faisoit des grimasses, et la langue me chantoit injures (p. 149).

He tries to put her back together, “mais sa langue s’escria que je n’avois pas pris ses tetons mesmes et que ceux que j’avois mis en son corps estoient d’autres que j’avois ramassés emmy la caverne” (pp. 149–50). Here, the alienation is so complete that the parts/toys are no longer in the control of either their rightful owner or of Francion, but have a sort of mechanized life of their own.

The most notorious form of dismemberment, castration, is also present in the dream, and becomes more threatening as the se-
sequence progresses. The opening scene takes place on a lake when it is raining sausages and cucumbers. A nude Francion uses his penis as a cork to stop up a hole in the cuve in which he is floating, and is thus able to grab at this phallic manna. His invention is not as successful for his companions on the lake: "Leur pauvre piece estoit si menué qu’au lieu de bondon, elle n’eust pu servir que de fausser: De sorte qu’ils furent pitoyablement noyez." The specter of impotence is evoked here, although it apparently presents no immediate threat to Francion himself, who reacts with characteristic bravado: "Moy qui ne craignois pas que ce malheur m’avint, parce que j’estoy fourny, autant que pas un, de ce qui m’estoit necessaire" (p. 141).

His second encounter with the phenomenon is much more immediate. Francion is ordered by a group of monsters to pay homage to their king by performing a bizarre ritual. He is given scissors with which to cut off a hair growing on the king's stomach, but instead, "je couppay un morceau du membre qui eust servy a la generation d’une infinité de petits diablotins comme leur pere" (p. 146). The progression continues to bring the fear closer and closer to home until, in the last scene of his dream, we pass from the castration of others to the long-expected scene of Francion's own castration. The woman who brings him to see Laurette me fit accoire que j’estois aussi impuissans que luy (Valentin) aux combas de l’amour, mais qu’elle avoit des remedes pour me donner de la vigueur. M’ayant done fait coucher tout de mon long, elle me fourra une baguette dedans le fondement, dont elle fit sortir un bout par la verge. . . . Je vy que la baguette poussa de petites branches chargées de fueilles et peu apres poussa un bouton de fleur incogneue. . . . J’eusse bien voulu sçavoir s’il avoit une odeur qui peust aussi bien contenter le nez, et ne l’en pouvant pas approcher, je couppay sa queue avec mes ongles pour la separer de la tige. Mais je fus bien estonné de voir que le sang sortit aussi tost par l’endroit où j’avois rompu la plante, et peu apres je commençay de souffrir un peu de mal (p. 153).

Here, in the dream's final image of impotence, the tables have turned. The self-assurance of the cuve sequence, when Francion seems convinced that he has no rival in virility, has disappeared. Instead, he finds himself in exactly the same situation as the much ridiculed Valentin (with whom his impotence is compared) in the novel's opening scene—obliged to submit passively to quack
treatments. Not only is he demoted from the role of doctor to that of patient, but when he carries out the prescribed treatment, he suffers a fate far worse than Valentin's. Francion, the joyful prankster and great unmasker, supplies the only scene of auto-castration in a libertine text.

The dream reaffirms the link between physical and verbal impotence. Francion begs forgiveness from the monsters for having castrated their king, but they are unable to pardon him because "ils n'avoient point de voix humaine" (p. 146). He himself shares their fate after drinking water from a magic fountain: "Je me retournay vers la Dame pour l'appeler traitresse, mais au lieu d'une voix articulée, il ne sortit de ma bouche qu'un hurlement" (p. 145). He thus announces the situation of Dyrcona, the mute beggar (pretending to be) unable to produce anything more than "un cri non articulé" (Estats et empires, p. 114).

Perhaps the most extraordinary scene of this extraordinary narrative evokes simultaneously the form of castration reserved for Vanini and other libertines, the alienating power of the text, and the notion of the libertine hero as a figure outside language:

Je trouvay un vieillard qui avoit de grandes oreilles et la bouche fermée d'un cadenas qui ne se pouvoit ouvrir que quand l'on faisoit rencontrer en certains endroits quelques lettres qui faisoient ces mots, il est temps, lorsqu'on les assemblloit. Voyant que l'usage de la parole luy estoit interdit, je luy demanday pourquoi, croyant qu'il m'euroit voulu dire que c'estoit là que je pourrois avoir response de ce que je luy demandois. Quand j'en fus proche, j'ouyes un caquet continuële sans voir aucunement ceux qui le faisoient et m'imaginay alors que l'on parloit là pour le vieillard. Il y avoit six arbres au milieu des autres qui au lieu de feuilles avoient des langues menues attachées aux branches avec des fils de fer fort deliez, si bien qu'un vent impetueux qui souffloit contre les faisoit tousjours jargonner. . . . Un grant géant qui estoit caché à leur ombre, oyant qu'elles me descouvoient ce qu'il avoit de plus secret, tira un grand cimeterre, et ne donna point de repos à son bras qu'il ne les eust toutes abbatues et tranchées en pieces; encore estoient elles si vives qu'elles se remuoient à terre et taschoient de parler comme auparavant. Mais sa rage eut bien aprè plus d'occasion de s'accroistre, parce que passant plus loing il me vit contre un rocher où il croyloit que je lisois un ample recit de tous les mauvais deportemens de sa vie. Il s'ap-
procha pour hacher aussi en pieces ce témoin de ses crimes, et fut bien courroucé de ce que sa lame rejaillissoit contre luy sans avoir seulement escaille la pierre (p. 148).

I quote this scene in its entirety, because it provides the most complete illustration of the fear lodged at the center of the libertine message. In this passage, language is totally alienated from man, exists only outside him, is a perpetual “other” for him. The old man is a Tantalus-figure, with his big ears that enable him to take in all the language of others, while he is unable to produce any of his own. On his mouth can be formed the words *il est temps*, which, like the *in principio* sign of Dyrcona’s living book, may be described as a hollow presence, a presence that exists only to call attention to an absence—in the example from Cyrano, the suppression of the key words, in the dream, a double suppression. Like *in principio*, *il est temps* is an incomplete expression. What is it time for? The logical answer is “to speak,” but the man cannot speak, so *il est temps* is an empty signifier, has no meaning other than the impossibility or the inadequacy of language.

The old man’s language, and the language of all the original owners of the disembodied tongues, has been reduced to an endless, uncontrolled, and uncontrollable babble. Even though it is impersonal and incomprehensible, this language still remains dangerous because it retains its secret. More disquieting than even the images of the body in pieces and out of control presented by the dream is this vision of language in the form of a frozen signifier—a tongue—beaten, hacked, and sliced at, yet still continuing to exist as sound without meaning. Language with no function, language that exists only to threaten man and to alienate him, and that cannot be destroyed by him. Even when driven by all the strength of his abnormal size, and by all the energy of his paranoia, the giant cannot destroy written language in the form of a text with an all-powerful secret, the “ample recit de tous les mauvais deportemens de sa vie” (p. 148). Clearly, in Francion’s dream, man is no longer either the master or the possessor of language.

It is this vision that is the unsettling conclusion to the libertine exploration of alienation. If one accepts the picture painted by the libertine texts at face value, then they can be read as a cry against the oppression of a system that admits no difference. Although
such a reading is certainly not false, neither is it complete. When these "originaux" choose to liberate themselves from the limitations of their past by altering their names, and from those of the present by inventing personal histories, they do so in an attempt to transform themselves into human monkies, who exist only to take on the bodies of the other. They are not strangers to the sensation Starobinski attributes to Stendhal, "l'impatience d'avoir à supporter un corps." They are uncomfortable in their own bodies, so they seek to escape them by creating a public mask so shifting that it can never be pinpointed. Hence the dreams of invisible bodies in Francion and the Estats et empires and the desire to be able to transport oneself elsewhere simply through the force of imagination, a desire announced in L'Autre Monde and made explicit in a passage of the Estats et empires that betrays the limits of Cyrano's confidence. Not only can men use their imaginations to move themselves but, like spirits, they can alter their bodies, take on any form they wish: "Cippus, roy d'Italie, qui pour avoir assisté à un combat de taureaux et avoir eu toute la nuit son imagination occupée à des cornes, trouva son front cornu le lendemain; Gallus Vitius qui banda son âme et l'excita si vigoureusement à concevoir l'essence de la folie, qu'ayant donné à sa matière par un effort d'imagination les mêmes mouvements que cette matière doit avoir pour constituer la folie, devient fol" (p. 146). This force culminates on the transparent side of the sun in the race of miniature people Dyrcona meets whose bodies do not resist their imagination's desires, so that they have the power to gather themselves into any shape. When Dyrcona sees them in the form of a nightingale, he exclaims, "ce Rossignol, créateur de soy-mesme" (p. 146).

Once outside the camera obscura of their bodies, the libertines are projected through the light chamber into the universe of words where they can indulge in wild, uncontrolled free falls through language. This is the last stage of their dream of total freedom, and it is here that the question of its viability intervenes to break the fall. Can this much freedom really be handled? Can isolation be airtight? Can the body be maintained in pieces? In the case of the libertine, the master of linguistic creativity always realizes, like Francion's giant, that he cannot control either the babbling tongues or the text of his life. He cannot destroy them because, like the alchemist, he is ultimately controlled by his secret.
1. Démoris, p. 43.

2. The *Prison* was published in 1674, the *Pensées* in 1676, whereas their logical place in the narrative is after the tales told by the *Avantures* and the *Avantures d'Italie*, which did not appear until 1677. D'Assoucy explains in the preface to the *Pensées* that "cette pièce est un fragment que j'ai arraché de mes *Avantures d'Italie pour ce qu'il interrompit le cours de mon histoire" (p. 343). His statement indicates that only the order of publication was reversed, making this decision all the more exceptional. It is obvious to anyone familiar with the organization of the *Avantures* that digressiveness is generally not considered a negative quality.

3. "Je me desistay de cette entreprise, pour continuer celle que tant de fâcheux obstacles et accidens avoient interrompu" (p. 148). Since D'Assoucy explains that he chose to abandon the printed text for the book of his life, it cannot be established that the first version of his captivity corresponds to the final text. The fact remains, however, that, by his own account, the *Avantures* originates in the story of his first experience in the *chambre obscure*.

4. Since, as he admits earlier, his portrait was drawn by artists who had never seen him, the fact that he can be so easily recognized from it is unfortunate indeed!


6. Prévot defends the opposite opinion: "Cyrano étant mort avant d'avoir fait publier son roman." "En ce qui concerne *Les États et Empires de la Lune*, on ne saura jamais quel texte l'auteur aurait livré à l'impression" (pp. 7, 9). There is, however, no evidence to justify this point of view. On other occasions, with the *Mazarinades*, for example, Cyrano proved himself an author capable of getting a text to press very rapidly. By 1650, Cyrano was known as the author of *L'Autre Monde* (whose completion is dated even earlier by some critics). If he did in fact intend to publish his novel, it is strange indeed that he did not include it in the 1654 collection of his *Oeuvres diverses*, which does contain works whose composition in all probability followed that of *L'Autre Monde*, such as *La Mort d'Agrippine* (1653).

7. As Maurice Lever stresses in "Sorcellerie et littérature au dix-septième siècle," the difformities of otherness are absent to a remarkable extent in classical literature: "Décidément, l'Enfer n'est pas classique. Nos auteurs du 'grand siècle' n'osent encore s'y aventurer, fût-ce pour une saison, et les champs du mal ne produisent pas de fleurs: les cendres fumantes des buchers demeurent désespérément stériles. Vous ne trouverez dans la littérature de cette époque ni l'écho des sabbats, ni les cris des sorcières, ni la pestilence des charniers rituels. Rien ne vient troubler la sereine transparence de l'onde dans le bassin d'Apollon. ... La sorcellerie, empire du désordre, de la laideur, et du mal, échappe aux rigeurs de l'ordonnance classique, qui est aussi un ordre de classe" (p. 14). I question only Lever's omission of the decidedly different treatment of these questions in less "orderly" seventeenth-century literature.

8. Jean Rousset describes the blandness of what he calls the "folie baroque": "Combien cette folie est différente de la folie romantique! A cette folie-jeu qui plaque sur l'être un personnage factice et provisoire endossé comme un vêtement, s'oppose la déchirante folie d'Aurélia ... où il faut voir, au contraire, un arrachement de tous les voiles et une marche vers le secret de l'être" (*La Littérature de l'âge baroque en France*, p. 57).

10. *La Pensée philosophique et scientifique de Cyrano*, pp. 50–51. This opinion is echoed by other commentators, Georges Mongredien, for example, in *Madame de Montespan et l’Affaire des poisons*, p. 13.


12. "Imposter" is in this sense the one term in Triboulet’s list that escapes the reduction of meaning: "Il m’appela impie, sorcier, athée, hérétique et imposteur, *homo sceleratus atque nefandus*" (p. 75).

13. Porta’s work happens to contain an early description of the optical effects of the *camera obscura* (*Magiae naturalis* [Naples, 1558], pp. 135–36).

14. Although D’Assoucy does not identify the book, it is obvious that the little boys believe it to be some mysterious treatise of magic. A link is thereby established with the role of the book of magic for the young page, and with the role of the book in all these self-incriminations.

15. It is interesting to note that all D’Assoucy’s adventures as a young magician take place on a boy-size scale. When he is threatened by a crowd—and the parallel with the mob that will later drive him from Montpellier is clear—his attackers, even if numerous, are at least of his own size. And when he manages to effect a cure, it is on someone of his age that he concentrates his powers.

16. *Combat*, pp. 5–6. For a discussion of the relationship between these burlesque etymologies and the *nom d’auteur*, see chapter 2.


18. When the narrator of *L’Autre Monde* learns that poetry is accepted as money on the moon, he remembers having encountered this idea before: "Voilà justement la monnaie dont Sorel fait servir Hortensius dans *Francion*, je m’en souviens. C’est là sans doute, qu’il l’a dérobé; mais de qui diable peut-il l’avoir appris? Il faut que ce soit de sa mère, car j’ai ouï dire qu’elle était lunatique" (p. 64). From this genealogy, it might be deduced that (mad) pedants are the descendants of lunatics.


23. The Freudian interpretation of gambling as masturbation developed in "Dostoevsky and Parricide" would seem to be invalidated by this aloofness: "The 'vice' of masturbation is replaced by the mania for gambling; and the emphasis laid upon the passionate activity of the hands betrays this derivation" (*Character and Culture*, p. 292).

24. One must never expect consistency in his paranoia. Only ten pages later, in a passage I have already cited, D’Assoucy will unite himself as a companion in misery to the "Enfans d’Israël dans le Désert."

25. With this story, Dyrcona adds to the libertine collection of attempts to eliminate parental authority the myth of the child raised by false parents. His particular variant of the dream also allows him to exclude France as his native country:

Messieurs, s’écria une Arondelle . . . vous n’avez pas oublé qu’il vient de
dire que le pays qui l'avait vu naître est la France; mais vous savez qu'en France les Singes ne produisent pas: après cela, jugez s'il est ce qu'il se vante d'être.

Je répondis à mon accusatrice que j'avais été enlevé si jeune du sein de mes parents et transporté en France, qu'à bon droit je pouvais appeler mon pays natal celui duquel je me souvenais le plus loin" (p. 151).

26. So much so that on one occasion in *Francion* the baby hero believes the "diabolical" monkey to be a little boy. In this scene, Francion is dressed up by the monkey, (who reverses his clothes), thereby becoming a monkey's monkey and providing a reversal of roles that could be linked with that found on the moon, where men are (lunar) men's monkeys.

27. When they eventually meet in the *Estats et empires*, Campanella himself will explain the source of his power in a more detailed manner.


29. And eventually of otherness, in a progression that will be examined in the next pages.

30. Introduction of the Neuchâtel manuscript of the *Confessions, Oeuvres complètes*, 1:1149, 1154.


32. In order to avoid a neat parody of the mass, Cyrano adds a libertine twist to the eating of the flesh and the drinking of the blood.

33. The link between the demon's theory that one may understand the secret workings of someone's thought by imitating his facial expression and gestures and this belief in the transmission of secrets by eating the body is obvious.

34. Neubert, p. 45.


37. This is not the case with *Francion* and the *Page*, where women remain in this traditional role. In general, the question of marginal sexuality is not evoked by these texts, except, in a sense, by Francion's dream.


40. "Comme en ce temps-là il estoit fort généreux, quand il m'avoir retenu à souper chez lui, et que, pour me retirer chez moi l'heure estoit indue, il me cédait fort librement la moitié de son lit. C'est pourquoi, après avoir eu de si longues preuves de la qualité de mes désirs, et m'avoir bien daigné honorer plusieurs fois de sa couche, il me semble que c'est plutôt à lui à me justifier qu'à Messieurs du Presidial de Montpellier, avec lesquels je n'ai jamais couché" (pp. 200-201). I am not proposing a deliberate misreading of this passage. D'Assoucy claims to be giving irrefutable proof of his innocence here, and I only find it strange that he manages to do so in a manner that, for all its apparent innocence, creates more doubts than it erases by bringing up additional controversial incidents.

41. I quote from the unpublished English version of this article, which has appeared in French under the title "Désir, rhétorique, et texte."

42. The link between alchemy and writing is made clear during this scene. When he hears his orders to the servant, the page believes the philosopher is preparing to write: "et surtout il demanda beaucoup de bois, comme s'il eût
voulu veiller à écrire quelques mémoires d’importance” (p. 95), but instead he is about to use the fire and his art to produce gold.

43. On this point, I rejoin the basic thesis of Ferdinand Brunetière’s “La Maladie du burlesque.”


45. As if there could be any doubts, he makes the sexual connotation of his favorite weapon clear in *L’Aurore Monde*. Nobles on the moon do not wear swords, but “la figure d’un membre viril” (p. 108). Besides, in this antiprocreative land, the image may be all there is. The “membre viril” is defined as “le Prométhée de chaque animal,” and the Spaniard explains to the narrator that “il nous manque un Prométhée” (p. 73).

46. Dyrcona therefore loses his tongue in Toulouse, where Vanini’s was torn out in 1619.

47. Lachèvre attempts to defuse the adjective by adding in a footnote that it means simply “impatient, avide,” but its occurrence in the passage that defines the Phoenix’s sexuality belies the straightforwardness of his explanation.

48. Scarron is also accused of plagiarism by Cyrano in “Contre Ronscar,” so at least the source of all their ideas is clear.


50. Ibid., pp. 167, 171.
