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Identity Trouble:
Fragmentation and Disillusionment in the Works of Guy de Maupassant

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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in French

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Abstract

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In a period of a little over a decade, Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893) produced a vast and diverse body of work, traversing numerous genres such as the novel, the short story, journalistic work, and even poetry. While he is best known for his "fantastical" story entitled "Le Horla," the majority of his short stories and novels, written in the tradition of the Realist movement, comprises a collection of *snap-shots* of the private life of petty bourgeois characters. Maupassant's oeuvre intersects with various significant transformations in France. Socially, the decline of the aristocracy was counteracted by the rise of the petty bourgeois, whose social titles rarely carried any genealogical significance, and were instead dubious products of transaction and speculation. This same period of the 19th century also saw the development of psychiatry and the birth of psychoanalysis, as well as the birth of the human sciences in general. This dissertation explores the effects of these transformations on the concept of identity and its representation in Maupassant's oeuvre. In all of his works, Maupassant opposes identity as a solid unit, revealing instead its fragmented and conflicting nature.

The four chapters of this dissertation approach various aspects of identity in Maupassant's fictional texts — novels and short stories. Chapter one explores the role of the body as a vehicle of the reflexive relationship between the subject and society. This part of my dissertation considers the various forms of visual representation of the subject, through such devices as the mirror, painting and photography, which in Maupassant's texts intersect with the questions of visual and social resemblance, doubling, rivalry and the duel. Chapter two discusses the breakdown of genealogy and proper names as symbols of a stable identity. The third chapter focuses on Maupassant's representation of characters as *victims* and analyzes the characters' downfall as a result of disillusionment. In the final chapter, I limit my scope of analysis to three stories, 'Lettre d'un fou" and the two versions of "Le Horla." My objective has been to establish a link between the elusive figure of the Horla, which haunts, persecutes and controls man, and the crowd.

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Introduction

The 19th century saw many social and political transformations in France, with repercussions on many dimensions of society. The effects of the French Revolution were visible in the decline of the aristocracy, along with the notion of honor, and the rise of the bourgeoisie. It was also the century of positivism, the decline of religion and the birth of the human sciences, including psychoanalysis, which placed the question of identity at the forefront of many disciplines. These social transformations all attest to the failure of the concept of identity as a stable, immutable unit, and reveal its inherent fragmentation and multiplicity. The changing conceptions of the individual and society are also reflected in literature. The underlying ambiguity of identity, as represented by 19th century literature, is symptomatic of this new vision of society and the individual. Along with some of his contemporaries, such as Théophile Gautier and Gustave Flaubert, Guy de Maupassant brings to light this question of identity as multiplicity. This ambiguous concept of the subject is pervasive throughout Maupassant's works and it is depicted in a variety of ways.

In each of his texts, the author presents the identity of characters from a psycho-social perspective that opens a wide-ranging field of gender positions and social classes. This pervasive attention to the social-sexual position of his characters will serve as the starting point for my own analysis. Instead of glorifying the individual as a unique force that empowers itself, Maupassant cynically insists on the decline and failure of every individual's effort to assert his or her individuality. As I will show, for Maupassant, the

claim to singularity not only fails to promote liberty, but rather becomes the very source of victimization.

Considering this fact, the main hypothesis that I would like to develop suggests that behind the semblance of individuality, each Maupassantian subject finds him or herself to be the victim of social institutions and norms. The repetition in Maupassant's works, remarked by a number of literary critics, can be understood as many variations on a single theme. I will show that this theme can be defined as the victimization of the subject by the claim of a unified identity that social norms and conventions impose. In Maupassant's texts, the status of the victim is redefined. With this in mind, what exactly constitutes a victim? Is one a victim only of a clearly delineated act imposed by a distinct perpetrator? We will see throughout Maupassant's works that the "criminal" is not merely confined to the figure who physically or psychologically violates the subject in a direct manner, but can also be embodied by an entire social institution or convention. I will also show that Maupassantian subjects are most often victims of social norms and institutions such as physical appearance, genealogy, gender difference, social class and politics. If social conventions, which are in part constitutive of one's identity, can be the source of victimization, then the concept of *identity* itself is victimizing. In other words, it is the very concept of identity that becomes criminal through its claim of unity and infallible coherence, which the subject consistently fails to embody, as the ideal of unity is both repressive and unattainable.

Maupassant's texts manifest his interest in the construction of identity, particularly from the psychological perspective. In fact, he attended Charcot's seminars on hysteria, — alongside Freud — whose influence on Maupassant's stories is visible in

the recurring presence of the psychiatrist, who represents the authoritative voice of medicine and highlights the mysteries of the human psyche. Furthermore, toward the end of his life, he himself suffered from delusions that would become progressively apparent in his work. By focusing on the social, external impact on the formation of identity, Maupassant's texts foresee what Freud would theorize with psychoanalysis several decades later.[1] What one believes to be inherent to one's identity, in reality contains an otherness that seems foreign to us, according to Julia Kristeva.[2] Most notably, one's destabilizing confrontation with an enigmatic foreignness echoes Freud's concept of the uncanny that Kristeva draws upon in her text. The figure of the uncanny appears in many of Maupassant's texts, from the first short story entitled "La main d'écorché" to the last, "Qui sait?".

In nearly each of his fictional texts, short story or novel, we can situate a point of rupture in the unity and fluidity of the characters' identity and social status. This moment of transition can be viewed from the structural perspective of the text, as well as from the perspective of character development, marking the moment of the subject's problematic self-confrontation. This moment of rupture is brought on by the character's conscious confrontation with the uncanny, with the juxtaposition of apparent extremes, of the familiar and the unknown. The character's apprehension of a seeming contradiction in his or her identity — where one no longer seems to resemble oneself — triggers a spiraling social and psychological downfall. Considering this idea of non-resemblance in the

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[1] See Pierre Bayard, *Maupassant, juste avant Freud* (Paris: Minuit, 1994).
[2] See Julia Kristeva, *Etrangers à nous-mêmes*, (Paris: Fayard, 1988).

context of social implications on identity, we can therefore read Maupassant's oeuvre as texts of victimization, decline and failure.

In my quest to analyze the representations of identity, I was confronted with Maupassant's considerable body of work, consisting of six novels, more than three hundred short stories and novellas, an extensive correspondence and two volumes of journalistic work. It is in this last group of texts that we can find the author's most overtly critical representation of society, reflecting his own experiences. While several of these newspaper articles will serve to support my hypotheses, I will nevertheless rely mainly on his fictional work.

I will argue that each of Maupassant's fictional texts illustrates the theme of social injustice and the consequent victimization of the individual. While the short stories resemble one another like fugue-like variations on a single theme, each text represents a unique, singular situation. These texts give the reader a sense of voyeuristic pleasure into the life and suffering of another being, with an exit from this imposing position only several pages away. The momentary voyeurism, which liberates the reader from the sense of responsibility for the protagonist's suffering, creates a curious effect of multiplicity, by which the oeuvre as a whole embodies a comprehensive representation of society in its anonymity, on the one hand, and a representation of the individual, on the other. As a consequence, the reader can navigate at ease the entirety of the stories.

While the novels could be perceived as elaborate developments of the short stories, the latter are not simply sketches for the novels, for the brevity in which these stories are retold bears its own significance. Instead, we could interpret the short stories as infinite additions to the collective that they represent. If, considering the repetition in

Maupassant's short stories, the objective of each story is to give a new perspective on the life of an individual character, this significant part of the author's oeuvre would represent an interminable objective with ever-accumulating perspectives.

I have limited my scope of study to four major themes that seem most prevalent in the author's works, and particularly those that most clearly reveal the multiplicity of the characters' identity. I begin by addressing the question of visual and most rudimentary representation of the individual in society. In the first chapter, I ask the following questions: How does one perceive oneself? How does the singularity of the subject contrast and oppose his or her social position, particularly vis-à-vis one's physical presence in society?

In the second chapter, I examine the genealogical implications on identity. How can genealogical legitimacy oppose and even compromise the claim to a unified identity? With Maupassant's texts, we find that even genealogical legitimacy does not guarantee the subject a stable social position.

After establishing several sources of identitary fragmentation, in the third chapter, I address the figure of the victim. In conjunction to the social position of the victim, I have traced the two predominant outcomes of the characters' lives: decline and suicide. While the latter is clearly more extreme and irreversible, both destinies bear striking resemblance to one another, to the extent that one could claim that decline and suicide represent one and the same movement.

Finally, in the fourth chapter, I analyze the recurring questions of the crowd and solitude, and particularly in what is the most well-known text by Maupassant, "Le Horla." In my opinion, the multiplicity that defines the subject's identity could in fact be

derived from the figure of the Horla, as that which is never to be totally discernible, and one that is simultaneously the reflection and the erasure of the modern subject.

In support of my reading, I have relied largely on psychoanalytic theory, notably Freud's texts on the double, the uncanny, and mass psychology, as well as Kristeva's aforementioned text. Other influences on my reading include Louis Marin's *Des pouvoirs de l'image*, Judith Butler's *Giving an Account of Oneself*, and René Girard's works on the figure of the scapegoat. Several theoretical works have allowed me to develop my hypotheses of Maupassant's representation of decline and suicide, notably by Emile Durkheim, Michel Thévoz and Serge Margel.

The significance of Maupassant's oeuvre has resulted in a considerable body of literary criticism, which I have used as a starting point and support for my own claims. The most prevalent of these include Mary Donaldson-Evans's *A Woman's Revenge: The Chronology of Dispossession in Maupassant's Fiction*, Antonia Fonyi's *Maupassant 1993*, Pierre Bayard's *Maupassant, juste avant Freud* and Philippe Bonnefis's *Comme Maupassant*.

We will see that these four perspectives overlap and that the texts used in my analysis can act as *examples* of each. I will use one particularly rich and complex short story, entitled "Un lâche," throughout the four chapters because the various issues of identity arising in Mupassant's oeuvre can all be identified in this text alone.

The first perspective focuses on various forms of visual representation of the subject, taking into consideration various devices such as the mirror, painting and photography. I treat the questions of visual and social resemblance, doubling, rivalry and

the duel in *Fort comme la mort*, *Bel-Ami* and *Pierre et Jean*, as well as in "Le masque," "Adieu," "Fini" and "Un lâche."

The second perspective addresses proper names and genealogy. As we will see in *Pierre et Jean*, "Un lâche" and "Monsieur Parent," the unquestionable certainty contended by lineage and naming instead reveals the doubt of legitimacy. In turn, genealogical doubt provokes cowardice and escape among Maupassantian characters.

The third perspective raises two questions: the definition of the victim and the *consequences* that fragmentation has on the subject. I divide this latter issue into two groups of existential movements: decline and suicide. I will claim that the question of the victim prevails throughout Maupassant's oeuvre, represented in various forms, from physical victimization such as rape and murder, to psychological and social violence enacted on the subject in a more implicit manner. I deliberately exclude victims of physical violence in order to focus more on the social and psychological dimensions. Among the texts that I analyze are "Le vagabond," "Le gueux," "L'aveugle," "Monsieur Parent," "Suicides," "Un lâche" and "L'Endormeuse." No matter the social position and success of the characters, *all* Maupassantian characters are subject to a social downfall, which in a majority of the cases results from the disillusionment of one's social ideals. Whatever the social ideal the character aspires to, he or she always realizes that, in fact, this ideal is but a reflection of social conventions and norms. The question of suicide in Maupassant's work is of particular interest, for it appears in a considerable number of texts. Once again, I will show that decline and suicide are variations of one another, and represent the "outcome" of every text.

Finally, for the fourth perspective of identity as multiplicity, I focus primarily on "Lettre d'un fou" (1885), "Le Horla" (1886) and "Le Horla" (1887), as three versions of one text. In this last chapter, I will argue that the figure of the Horla represents the social mass and its overpowering force of effacement of individual identity. The uncontrollable and indefinable "being" or force embodied by the social mass controls the subject's will and structures his or her identity. The mass is a social fabric that allows the modern subject to remain integrated in society, yet which ultimately alienates the subject from society by his or her subjection to it.

CHAPTER ONE

Fatal Reflection:
The Fragmented Identity of Maupassantian Characters

If one experiences pleasure in reading Maupassant's short stories, it is in great part due to the author's masterful way of capturing the character's private world. An entire life unravels in only several pages, revealing its fullness and vulnerability. As with the majority of such short texts, the narrative is handed down from one voice to another, through a chain of narrators, until it finally reaches the reader. With voyeuristic indifference to the character's suffering, the reader proceeds to the next glimpse. Like a collection of snapshots in an album, more than three hundred in fact, Maupassant's short stories range in subject from the banal, everyday occurrences to the most extraordinary situations that result between characters or within the psychological disposition of a character. In other words, the stories appear to be unconnected and independent from each other. However, Maupassant's texts contain an underlying distinction: the character's self-questioning, whether it be in confrontation with various modes of reproduction that mimic the character or by intersubjective relations that question the character's identity.

I would like to begin by proposing several examples that evoke the ubiquitous presence of doubling in the author's works. I will focus particularly on the different modes of visual reproduction, such as the mirror, the painting and the photograph. I will then shift my focus to the intersubjective relations that reproduce the mirror-effect. The

short story entitled "Le masque," for instance, will allow us to analyze a relationship between two characters, in which one character functions as a mirror to the other's parasitical gaze. While elements of doubling and resemblance abound in the texts, the author pushes the character's self-questioning beyond what we might have encountered thus far in fantastical texts. In fact, this literary genre, whose influence on Maupassant is apparent in his own texts, reveals the psychological dimension of the individual within a social setting, represented by such figures as the double. The traditional concept of the double relies on visual reproduction, one that threatens the character's sense of authenticity with substitution by another, who claims to be identical to the first. In Maupassant's works, however, elements of resemblance are no longer fantastical, and are thus latent rather than visual. Consequently, the line between a character and the "double," or between two characters, becomes blurred and the opposition more complex. I will try to show that the uncertainty and fragmentation that a character experiences toward his or her identity exceeds the fantastical opposition between the authentic and the reproduction.

1. Visual Modes of Representation and Fragmentation

Resemblances

Objects that reproduce the characters' image abound in Maupassant's works. It is with the intervention of the mirror or the portrait, painted or photographed, that a Maupassantian character comes confronts his or her approaching death; and this confrontation occurs in *solitude* rather than in one's relationship with another subject.

The acknowledged discrepancy between the self and the image acts as a critical point of rupture in the character's self-perception, and in the text itself. As I will attempt to show, the character consistently attributes this critical point another character, in an attempt to dispel the solitude in which this realization occurs.

Many of Maupassant's texts point deliberately to the pivotal, intermediary position that the instruments of resemblance hold in relation to his characters. In *Fort comme la mort*, a text full of games of resemblance, we find a complex structure of reflections: between the painter and his model, between the model and her painted representation, and finally between the subject and his or her mirror reflection. In fact, the collage of resemblances we find in this novel ranges from visual reflections to temporal and generational doubling. When Anne and her daughter Annette find themselves before Anne's painted portrait, others are astonished by the uncanny resemblance between the mother's portrait as a young woman and the daughter. "Dieu ! est-ce possible ! Dieu ! est-ce possible !" exclaims the duchess, "C'est une *ressuscitée* !"[3] By this description alone, Anne is not simply substituted by her daughter's uncanny physical resemblance to Anne from the past. The exclamation itself mirrors the doubling between the two women. In fact, verbal repetition often reappears in Maupassant's works, and embodies itself the underlying workings of resemblance and doubling. Furthermore, Annette, as her mother's *double*, replaces Anne, who is described as being already dead. However, the threat of substitution does not arise from another, Annette in this case, but rather from Anne's

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[3] Guy de Maupassant, *Fort comme la mort* (FCM), ed. Louis Forestier, vol. *Romans*, (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1987) 955. [Emphasis added.] Subsequent citation of Maupassant's novels will be referenced as *Fort comme la mort,* in vol. *Romans*. In addition, all of Guy de Maupassant's novels, short stories and novellas will be quoted from the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade collection. All three volumes were edited by Louis Forestier; Volume *Contes et nouvelles I* was published in 1974, and volume *Contes et nouvelles II* in 1979. They will be referenced as vol. *Contes et nouvelles I* and vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*.

image of herself, with which she can no longer coincide. In other words, it is not Annette as an individual who substitutes for Anne, since her identity is reduced here to her mother's return from the dead. In this abyssal cycle, the daughter stands in for the mother, yet this substitution depletes the latter's individual significance. What is at stake here then is the perceived coincidence of the projected social image and the subject. The duchess continues:

> Oh ! Ma petite Any, comme je vous retrouve, moi qui vous ai si bien connue alors, dans votre premier deuil de femme, non, dans le second, car vous aviez déjà perdu votre père ! Oh ! Cette Annette, en noir comme ça, mais c'est sa mère revenue sur la terre. Quel miracle ![4]

In this text, we can see that the duchess's discourse is split. While addressing Anne in amazement to the resemblance between the two women, she turns away from her toward the others, speaking of Anne in the third person, as if the latter were absent. The coincidence between Annette and Anne-of-the-past relegates the present Anne to a new social position. Her youthful state having been taken over by Annette, Anne's identity is now reduced to that of *mother*, an identitary position that makes a permanent cut in the character's youth. As we will see, in *Fort comme la mort* as in a number of other texts, motherhood carries the connotation of loss in social power.

Anne's youthful image, at the beginning of the novel, mirrors the admiring gaze of the others around her. However, their admiration shifts position, as we saw in the triptych scene of resemblance, between Anne, Annette and the portrait. The other's gaze that once valorized Anne's beauty and social prestige, now acts as a death sentence to her youth. Interestingly, the uncanny resemblance between the three – Anne, Annette and the

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[4] Ibid.

portrait – is effectuated by the context of mourning. It is in mourning that Annette enters society with promising glory, while casting a shadow over her mother, whose social position and power she takes over.

The duchess points out Anne's estrangement by the closed-in resemblance between Annette and the portrait, exclaiming: "Sans ce portrait on ne s'en serait pas aperçu ! Votre fille vous ressemble encore beaucoup, en réalité, mais elle ressemble bien plus à cette toile !"[5] While the portrait acts as an intermediary link between the two women, it also eventually expulses and embodies Anne as the point of reference. The difference between Anne and Annette's social positions increases, consequently decreasing their resemblance to one another: "Votre fille vous ressemble *encore* beaucoup, en réalité."[6] This description foresees the progressive divergence between the two women. Annette-in-mourning brings back the Anne-of-the-past, who, in the portrait, is in mourning as well. This game of reflection recalls Freud's description of the double as "the uncanny harbinger of death,"[7] which haunts and, in this case, substitutes the "original." By the mediation of the portrait, these two women coincide with each other, and from this point on, the source of mourning for Anne would be the partial loss of her own identity, whose continuity is abruptly cut by uncanny resemblance. This fatal moment forces Anne down the generational progression to which her social identity binds her. The above description reveals the stages in Anne's identity, which are all linked by the act of mourning: of her father, of her husband's father, now of her mother as well as of her own, youthful self.

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid. [Emphasis added.]

[7] Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny'," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Ed. and Trans. James Strachey, vol. 17 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955) 235.

Upon Annette's entrance into Parisian society, Anne confronts a radical transformation in her mirror image, similar to the transformation experienced by the characters of "Fini" and "Adieu" that I will evoke further along:

> […] elle avait vieilli ! C'était fini ! Elle retrouvait pourtant encore en elle *ses attendrissements de jeune fille* et *ses élans passionnés de jeune femme*. Rien n'avait vieilli que sa chair, sa misérable peau […]. L'idée fixe avait fait naître une sensation d'épiderme, la sensation du vieillissement […]. Comme un être atteint d'un mal dévorant […], la perception et la terreur de ce travail abominable et menu du temps rapide lui mirent dans l'âme l'irrésistible besoin de le constater dans les glaces. […] Cela devint une maladie, une possession. […]
>
> […] la piqûre du désir la harcelait, et bientôt sa main […] se tendait par un mouvement irrésistible vers la petite glace à manche de vieil argent qui traînait sur son bureau. Dans le cadre ovale et ciselé son visage entier s'enfermait comme une figure d'autrefois, comme un portrait du dernier siècle, comme un pastel jadis frais que le soleil avait terni. […]
>
> Elle le maniait maintenant comme un bibelot irritant et familier que la main ne peut quitter, s'en servait à tout moment en recevant ses amis, et s'énervait jusqu'à crier, le haïssait comme un être en le retournant dans ses doigts.
>
> Un jour, exaspérée par cette lutte entre elle et ce morceau de verre, elle le lança contre le mur où il se fendit et s'émietta.
>
> Mais au bout de quelque temps son mari, qui l'avait fait réparer, le lui remit plus clair que jamais. Elle dut le prendre et remercier, résignée à le garder.
>
> Chaque soir aussi et chaque matin enfermée en sa chambre, elle recommençait malgré elle cet examen minutieux et patient de l'odieux et tranquille ravage.[8]

Similarly to the main characters of "Fini" and "Adieu," Anne is struck by the realization of her age that the mirror reveals. In each of these texts, this realization is brought on by a confrontation with another character, which reveals the main character's past. The past is defined here by youthful beauty and past glory. It is for this reason that the character's

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[8] Guy de Maupassant, *Fort comme la mort*, in vol. *Romans*, 996-997. [Emphasis added.]

realization of age is experience with terror. In *Fort comme la mort*, Anne's progressively morbid obsession with her own self-destruction precipitates the succession of her generational roles. Trapped in a closed link with her own image, she follows every change methodically that the mirror reflects back to her. Thus, in her obsession, she is unable to turn away from the image of her slowly *deteriorating* body. With each gaze, she checks the creases and alterations in her fleeting physique. In response to the transformations in her appearance, Anne cedes to an irresistible desire, an "idée fixe," to look repeatedly in the mirror. This compulsive and insatiable desire to observe her transformation mirrors the platonic opposition between an immutable model and the fleeting nature of appearance. Anne's obsessive *fixed* thought fails to stop the image from constantly eluding her grasp and leading her to unavoidable death. Her obsessive gaze acts as a weapon against her youth, while the language of this text, too, begins to slip and pun. For instance, the above description of Anne echoes her desire to stop her image from eluding her. The language here reflects Anne's refusal to accept her physical and social transformations by embodying multiple significations. The change in Anne's social roles hides the decrease in her social power.

Similar ambiguity exists in the language. For example, in the following sentence, the word *mirent* makes an allusion to several interpretations: "Comme un être atteint d'un mal dévorant […], la perception et la terreur de ce travail abominable et menu du temps rapide lui mirent dans l'âme l'irrésistible besoin de le constater dans les glaces." While the intended *mirent* as *mettre* provides a straight-forward description that active aging has on Anne, it also resembles the word *mirer*, defined as the perception of a target that a weapon must attain. In the reflexive form (*se mirer*) is defined as the act of gazing at

one's own mirror image. These two definitions (*mirer* and *se mirer*) associate the mirror image to a deadly weapon that takes the subject prisoner of his or her reflection. Anne's gaze is also likened to an illness that penetrates, possesses and devours ("un mal dévorant"). She is possessed by the need to see herself in the mirror, and whose hand becomes as if attached to the handle of the "glace à manche," which she handles with irritation. In other words, despite the working of time on her body, it is her gaze that deploys the corrosion of the image by coinciding with the social influence that condemns her youth.

Anne's obsessive relation to the mirror transforms into hatred of its irresistible power. The growing violence, strengthened by the nightmare-like, inescapable repetition of her movement toward it, culminates in an explosive destruction of this despised object. However, this mirror defies destruction. Not only is the mirror reassembled like a puzzle by Anne's husband, its reflective quality exceeds its previous state ("plus clair que jamais"). Thus, the irreparable mysteriously finds its original form, condemning her to resignation. Giving in to the struggle, Anne resumes to observe her gradual physical degradation.

The identities of Anne and Annette appear to be distinct and clearly defined until the portrait blurs the separation between them. In the previous scene with the portrait, Bertin and Anne's look-alike appear hand in hand, like a hallucination of Anne's past. She is excluded from the triangular binding between the daughter, the portrait and Bertin: "Elle s'était sentie soudain disparue, dépossédée, détrônée. Tout le monde regardait Annette, personne ne s'était plus tourné vers elle !"[9] The mother and the daughter

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[9] Guy de Maupassant, *Fort comme la mort*, in vol. *Romans*, 956.

coincide here as *temporal doubles* of each other, at the point where their existence in time and the significance of their social value intersect. Anne is excluded because Annette's image and social function correspond to those of Anne from the past. In this sense, the image of Anne-of-the-past overshadows the present, even if it is Annette who embodies it. Bertin's love for Anne, whom he himself fixed on the canvas in question,[10] transfers onto Annette who reproduces and regenerates the Anne-of-the-past. Philippe Bonnefis evokes Bertin's fidelity to his object of desire:

> Olivier Bertin *(Fort comme la mort)* aurait pu simplement préférer la fille à sa mère. Mais non, c'est la mère qu'il aime dans sa fille, la mère ou plutôt une image intériorisée de celle-ci, souvenir de l'Anne d'autrefois qu'isole et fixe un portrait […], lequel, un beau jour, trouve dans Annette, et donc au dehors, sa réplique.[11]

Bertin's love object faithfully remains in the portrait, to the detriment of its source of inspiration, while Annette, according to Bonnefis, is but a replica. Nevertheless, she is a replica that can, at least for a while, give life to the object of Bertin's love, an object that a portrait, *his* portrait, always reproduces better than any other live copy. His love thus lies more in the painted representation of which he is the author rather than in the models

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[10] We can draw a close analogy between the painted portrait and photography as modes of representation. The latter expresses the mechanical quality that exists in the genealogical and social movement, as it reflects in the visual medium that captures it. In Maupassant's time, this new medium appears in a number of his works, including "Le Horla."

Roland Barthes's analysis of photography in *La chambre claire* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1980) and the petrifaction of the represented subject by the image echoes Anne's mourning of herself before her own image. Linked by an umbilical cord, the photographed subject and the spectator are as if "bound" by common skin (*La chambre claire*, 126-127). In her essay "*Nothing to Say: Fragments on the Mother in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*," Elissa Marder calls photography the "mechanical maternal medium," attributing the unbreakable umbilical bond to the body's haunting of the image. She writes: "photography seizes the body of the living subject, reproduces it, and then returns it as corpse ("*Nothing to Say: Fragments on the Mother in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*," in *L'Esprit Créateur*, vol. XL, No. 1, Spring 2000, 32). The living body of the subject haunts the photograph in the form of an undead body that can never be fully buried" (Marder, 32). The three-point link between Anne, Annette and Anne's portrait resembles the bond that, at the end of the novel, is reproduced by Anne's obsession with her own reflection.

[11] Philippe Bonnefis, *Comme Maupassant* (Lille, PUL, 1993) 128.

that will always fail to live up to it. In fact, it is not Anne as an individual that Bertin loves, but rather her *interiorized image*. In addition to this, the interiorized image of youthful Anne reflected in Annette is inseparably linked to Bertin's own youth, the true anchor of his love. Consequently, Bertin's fidelity to Anne's image as an object of desire reveals his own aging. As we shall see further in this chapter, aging is a recurring theme in Maupassant's works, where characters are juxtaposed to an unstable image of themselves, and thus to an identity beyond their grasp.

By the end of the novel, Anne becomes progressively full of hate for her overshadowing daughter as an existential menace to the social value that defines her. The seduction and power that Anne once possessed, Annette now embodies, leaving the first feeling "dispossessed" of her own identity, in the midst of the growing threat and betrayal of aging. Yet, it is important to remember that Annette's identity is itself reduced to that of a younger Anne. This form of doubling is a displacement in time, as if a past moment had been *folded*[12] and brought closer to another distant moment. For this reason, it is Annette who coincides with Anne's portrait, and not the woman who is represented there. In other words, the two copies, one painted, another reproduced in flesh, coincide, while excluding the original. In fact, the original has no more *value* in the face of the copy, which reproduces it better. Annette, by her name alone, takes over her mother's identity, – her beauty, her success in society and her hopes – becoming her mother's enemy precisely by the authenticity of lineage.

The portrait in *Fort comme la mort* captures and affirms Anne's youthful identity. However, once put into question by a "competitor," her daughter in this case, Anne's

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[12] I am borrowing this term from Deleuze, whose work on the multiple and the concept of the fold I will investigate more closely further in this chapter. See Gilles Deleuze, *Le pli: Leibniz et le Baroque* (Paris: Minuit, 1988).

identity splits. The mourning she wears for her mother's death coincides with the mourning of her own eclipsed identity, which is determined by substitution, a mechanical shift from generation to generation. Just as Anne's portrait in *Fort comme la mort* resuscitates an Anne from the past, in *Pierre et Jean*, the portrait of Maréchal also has the strange ability to bring back the dead.

Maupassant's preoccupation with the representation of the subject's psychological development through visual devices of simulacrum, such as the mirror and painting, takes root in a long literary tradition. For instance, in Pliny's text depicting the birth of painting, a woman substitutes her departed lover with a sculpted relief of his form on the wall.[13] In this story, the image not only represents the absent lover, it replaces him. In other words, in the subject's absence, the image embodies and thus replaces the referent, acquiring a distinct definition in relation to the woman whose perception structures and affects its meaning. No longer a simple representation, secondary to the original, the image acquires its autonomy, according to Louis Marin,[14] in relation to the gaze that it attracts and to the object it represents. We find such presence and "force" in Maréchal's (*Pierre et Jean*) painted portrait.

By the illegitimacy that is already suspected and implied by Jean's inheritance, the portrait acts as a reminder, as a reference even. In an attempt to prove his brother's illegitimacy, Pierre decides to compare his brother to Maréchal's painted portrait, a triangular configuration similar to the one we saw in *Fort comme la mort*:

> Le portrait, portrait d'ami, portrait d'amant, était resté dans le salon bien en vue, jusqu'au jour où la femme, où la mère s'était aperçue, la première, avant tout le

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[13] Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, Book 35 (Painting and sculpture), ed. H. Rackham, vol. IX (London: Loeb Classical Library, 1952).

[14] Louis Marin, *Des pouvoirs de l'image: Gloses* (Paris: Seuil, 1993) 10.

> monde, que ce portrait ressemblait à son fils. Sans doute, depuis longtemps, elle épiait cette ressemblance ; puis, l'ayant découverte, l'ayant vue naître et comprenant que chacun pourrait, un jour ou l'autre, l'apercevoir aussi, elle avait enlevé, un soir, la petite peinture redoutable et l'avait cachée, n'osant pas la détruire.[15]

However, the portrait does not confirm to Pierre a definite resemblance between Jean and Maréchal: 'Elles avaient, certes, des signes communs : la même barbe et le même front, mais rien d'assez précis pour permettre de déclarer : "Voilà le père, et voilà le fils.".'[16] It is rather the mother's reaction to this test – to the possibility of doubt that this portrait might instill in the family members – that qualifies the portrait as an intermediary link between Jean and his biological father.[17]

In *Pierre et Jean*, as in *Fort comme la mort*, a distinction is made between *woman* and *mother*, confirming a clear separation in the social positions of the *two*. In the above excerpt, the narrator modifies the woman's reaction to the portrait of Maréchal for, in referring to her as woman rather than as mother, the portrait represents the object of her love, of her passion. Substituting this description of woman with that of mother, the narrator insists on the adulterous act of the parent, and thus on the guilt that her criminal act might provoke.

Furthermore, in this example, the portrait acts as a double, and thus as a reminder of death, Maréchal's as well as Pierre's forthcoming disappearance. The position of the portrait is significant as well, "le petit portrait du mort appuyé contre la pendule,"[18] for it

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[15] Guy de Maupassant, *Pierre et Jean*, in vol. *Romans*, 775.
[16] Guy de Maupassant, *Pierre et Jean*, in vol. *Romans*, 780.
[17] It is significant to note that it is Madame Roland who notices the resemblance between Maréchal's portrait and Jean's physique, seeing in her son what she had intimately seen in her lover. This ambiguity points to her choice between the two sons, ultimately leading to Pierre's final expulsion from the family.
[18] Guy de Maupassant, *Pierre et Jean*, in vol. *Romans*, 781.

symbolically enacts the return of the dead, of the father, but also of Madame Roland's desire, stifled by her familial and social situation. In fact, the portrait triggers the unraveling of the family story, representing the criminal past that has come back to haunt the characters. However, Madame Roland's criminal past and Jean's acceptance of the inheritance left to him by Maréchal cannot be justified by Pierre's *legitimate* existence. With Jean taking the place of the portrait, the adulterous past can finally be integrated into the family, and to some degree lose its adulterous connotations. However, this is possible only at the cost of Pierre's place in the family, who, for knowing the secret truth, must disappear.

The painted image in *Pierre et Jean* is not simply a representation of the illegitimate father, but rather, it embodies the symbolic presence that Maréchal has in the tension among the characters, and in Madame Roland's differing love for her two sons. As the illegitimate son's resemblance to his father's image increases with time, he is progressively accepted within what appears to be an ideal representation of a modern, nuclear family. Maupassant juxtaposes Jean's illegitimacy within the family with the irony of his "laundered" identity, which necessarily implies the expulsion of the other son, who by his mere existence contests this new, forged legitimacy.

The mirror in Maupassant's works also plays a considerable role in shattering the subject's sense of a solid identity. In texts such as "Fini" (1885), *Bel-Ami* and "Le Horla," the mirror systematically tricks the viewer's perception, rendering one's reflection inconsistent and misleading. In "Fini," for instance, the image that Lormerin sees of himself transforms radically from the beginning of the story to the end, several days later. In "Fini" and "Adieu" (1884), the fear of aging is the motor of the main characters' self-

destruction, which reappears several years later in *Fort comme la mort* (1889). In *Bel-Ami* and "Le Horla," on the other hand, the mirror reflects the extreme transformation of the character to the point of non-recognition. Whereas in *Bel-Ami*, the moment of non-recognition represents Georges Duroy's successful transformation and the dissimulation of his identity, in "Le Horla," non-recognition is taken to the radical level of what André Green calls *negative hallucination*. While I will focus on this latter relationship to the mirror image in chapter four, I would like to evoke here the well-known mirror scene in *Bel-Ami*.

Preparing his entrance into an elite social circle, Duroy rents the appropriate attire and, while approaching his host's apartment, encounters his own reflection. His first gaze is not that of self-admiration, but rather that of surprise, taking himself for another:

> Il montait lentement les marches, le cœur battant, l'esprit anxieux, harcelé surtout par la crainte d'être ridicule ; et, soudain, il aperçut en face de lui un monsieur en grande toilette qui le regardait. Ils se trouvaient si près l'un de l'autre que Duroy fit un mouvement en arrière, puis il demeura stupéfait : c'était lui-même, reflété par une haute glace en pied qui formait sur le palier du premier une longue perspective de galerie. Un élan de joie le fit tressaillir tant il se jugea mieux qu'il n'aurait cru. […]
>
> Mais voilà qu'en s'apercevant brusquement dans la glace, il ne s'était même pas reconnu ; *il s'était pris pour un autre*, pour un homme du monde, qu'il avait trouvé fort bien, fort chic, *au premier coup d'œil*. […]
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> […] Et une confiance immodérée en lui-même emplit son âme.[19]

From anxiety and self-doubt to immoderate self-confidence, the transformation that takes place in this short moment passes by the mediation of the mirror. In other words, Duroy's fear dissipates upon seeing that his reflection conforms to the image he desired to embody. Thus, Duroy takes himself for another, though only for a short moment, "au

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[19] Guy de Maupassant, *Bel-Ami*, in vol. *Romans*, 211. [Emphasis added.]

premier coup d'œil." The illusion dissipates immediately upon noticing the details of his rented, poorly fitted attire. Though Duroy triumphs over his successful reproduction of a "look," its details have no value in themselves. His creation of a significant appearance *out of nothing* will mirror the successful social status that he will fabricate. If he experiences anxiety prior to seeing his reflection, it is because his sense of self and the image he seeks to assume do not coincide, until the mirror literally feeds the image to him. This image will overshadow his past and thus dissolve his previous self-doubt. In other words, only Duroy's mirror image can confirm his conformation to a sought-out identity. His identity is defined by its elusive and indefinable nature, metamorphosing into a desired form. Therefore, he can mistake himself for someone else ("il s'était pris pour un autre"). As we see throughout the novel, the ease with which Duroy adapts to society, like a chameleon that can take on the attributes of its environment, corresponds to his malleable form. Duroy recreates his identity, like a rebirth from a past that he will leave behind. Facing his new image, Duroy rejoices, for, as the text reveals to us, "[n]'ayant chez lui que son petit miroir à barbe, il n'avait pu se contempler entièrement,"[20] until this moment. Bel-Ami embodies the opportunistic, petit bourgeois, self-made man, a monstrous construction of parts, for, in his tiny mirror, "il n'y voyait que fort mal les diverses parties de sa toilette improvisée, il s'exagérait les imperfections, s'affolait à l'idée d'être grotesque."[21] And now, seeing himself fully for the first time, the mirror "formait sur le palier du premier une longue perspective de galerie," thus creating an image of grandeur that Duroy would assume from then on.[22] His fragmented image is replaced by a multiplicity of his form that would contaminate the rest of society. Like an

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[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.

artist sculpting his vision, he creates the image of a *type* that he aspires to incarnate, evolving his *creation* from the preceding scene of delusional desire to the final one, in which he is the focus of an admiring public. Thus, the Parisian elite at the end of the novel replaces the doubling mirror effect that fills Duroy with initial confidence.

Duroy's relation to the other is parasitical, feeding off others' social status and interests in order to uphold his new, transforming identity. We see this when he progressively overshadows and finally appropriates Forestier's place, first as journalist and then as husband. Duroy's newspaper articles are not entirely his own either, but are rather the product of Madame Forestier's dictations.[23] In the scene of rebirth and self-realization, the other – defined here by physical appearance, as well as social and financial status – is already incorporated by the character. As we just saw, Duroy's self-perception nearly instantaneously transforms from insecurity to a feeling of grandeur, the stairwell transforming into a large hall of mirrors representing an infinite number of replicas of his image. With this image of replication, Duroy finds an army of look-alikes who confirm his successful imitation of the elite. In this sense, Duroy's success lies in his

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[23] Yet, Duroy is hardly the only interested character. While he uses Monsieur and Madame Forestier to gain social success, the latter two characters could also be perceived as benefiting from Duroy's presence, as the following questions would suggest. Why does Monsieur Forestier help Duroy? Is it from pure kindness, or does he see himself in his past army friend, and thus uses the difference in their social status to symbolically elevate his own even more? In other words, is his "act of kindness" without interest? Madame Forestier's interest is clearly linked to the social limitations of her gender, which she bypasses by secretly writing the articles for her husband, and then later for Duroy. In fact, until Duroy "secures" his social success, his future depends on Madame Forestier's writing, for that he himself lacks the skills that he pretends to have. We must also note that Madame Forestier *dictates* the articles to Duroy, an action that, as the word itself suggests, defines the hierarchy between the two characters. The articles are the actual work behind his success, yet, upon reaching a certain status, they are no longer necessary for him to remain where he is. He understands well that his success will come by exploiting the principles by which society defines work and social development. In a short story entitled "Suicides," dictation signifies one's submission to authority and the social norm, as the underlying basis for the subject's integration in society. In this text, the character rereads the letter, dictated to him by his teacher, that he had given to his mother at the age of 7. In this letter, he declares that he has reached the age of reason. Ironically, the age of reason is marked by an adherence to the voice of authority, embodied in this text by the teacher. While, in "Suicides," the submission to the dictates of social norms and authority disillusions the character and consequently leads him to death, in *Bel-Ami*, Duroy's lucid comprehension of the social order leads him to exploit it for his own benefit.

ability to find himself in others and to project the others' views in his opportunistic journalism.[24]

In "Le masque," the identification of the main character, Ambroise, with his lost youth and beauty takes on a grotesque, caricature-like mask that physically binds him to his loss. Every night, he flaunts his mask at Parisian dance halls. The mask here plays two roles; on the one hand, it dissimulates the aged face underneath, while reinforcing Ambroise's attachment to his youth, on the other hand. In other words, through this object of artifice, the character's extreme identification with his youthful image, though now physically lost, finds an object of substitution. His wife, Madeleine,[25] explains to the narrator: "c'est le regret qui le conduit là et qui lui fait mettre une figure de carton sur la sienne."[26]

While, as we see with such texts as "Le masque," both men and women manipulate their body to project a particular image of themselves, their relationship to the forms of simulacrum differs dramatically. We can contrast men's approach to artifice and masking with *Fort comme la mort*. A Maupassantian woman can manipulate her appearance as long as she remains within the social parameters that, in this historical context, define her as being inherently linked to artifice. Despite her attempt to reproduce her youthful image, a woman's self-manipulation fails to coincide with her body's transformations. In this failure, she is forced to assume her new social roles. In other

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[24] We will see this inconsistency in the identity of the main character of "Un lâche," named Signoles. In fact, this short story reappears nearly verbatim in *Bel-Ami*, when Duroy is obliged to duel another journalist for the latter's insult directed toward Forestier's newspaper. These two texts diverge when Signoles's agony preceding the duel overpowers and leads him to commit suicide. This agony is fueled by the character's cowardly fear that others will perceive his hesitation. In *Bel-Ami*, on the other hand, fear of the duel does not hinder Duroy's ruthless aim toward his new social status.

[25] Here, regret resembles mourning. Yet, unlike Anne in *Fort comme la mort* who also mourns her youth, Ambroise's youth finds a replacement in the mask that simulates an image of beauty.

[26] Guy de Maupassant, "Le masque," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 1138.

words, a mask, though it is the most evident symbol of simulacrum, would contradict and mock the "natural" relationship with artifice attributed to women at this time. Once the "mask of youth" no longer coincides with her face, she is "abandoned or exchanged with no hesitation or regret," writes Mary Donaldson-Evans in her book-length study of women's position in Maupassant's works.[27] Therefore, when Anne mourns her mother, she also mourns the image of her own passing youth:

> Elle demeura stupéfaite en face d'elle-même, effrayée de ses joues creuses, de ses yeux rouges, du ravage produit sur elle par ces quelques jours de souffrance. Son visage qu'elle connaissait si bien, qu'elle avait si souvent regardé en tant de miroirs divers, dont elle savait toutes les expressions, toutes les gentillesses, tous les sourires, dont elle avait déjà bien des fois corrigé la pâleur, réparé les petites fatigues, détruit les rides légères apparues au trop grand jour, au coin des yeux, lui sembla tout à coup celui *d'une autre femme*, un visage nouveau qui se décomposait, irréparablement malade.[28]

Anne simulates facial expressions as works of artifice – like Bertin produces his paintings on canvas, – which now irreparably resist her manipulations. Her self-perception takes a radical turn in her perception of the others' gaze. Fearing Annette's shadow, Anne cannot help but see herself altered. Yet, if a woman's "masks" and body are considered to be one and the same, once this is no longer possible, the woman's social status *must* change as well. Therefore, with the discrepancy in her identity, Anne becomes an accomplice to her own expulsion. In the scene quoted above, she perceives herself as another, whose deteriorating face rejects the manipulations she was once able to master. Consequently, she is dispossessed of her youthful identity, in a similar way that the body might reject a foreign object. Thus,

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[27] Mary Donaldson-Evans, *A Woman's Revenge: The Chronology of Dispossession in Maupassant's Fiction* (Lexington: French Forum, Publishers, Inc., 1986) 14.

[28] Guy de Maupassant, *Fort comme la mort*, in vol. *Romans*, 934. [Emphasis added.]

Anne's relationship with her body is double: she seeks to assimilate what the body instead rejects, while, by the power of this rejection, she mourns the loss of her youth by constantly reminding herself of the concept of youth that remains in her. Characters' attachment to a particular social image of themselves, such as youthful beauty, seduction and power, reveals their increasing need to conceal the chaotic accumulation of identitary fragments beneath.

With the realization of her aging, Anne is expulsed from her position as a young woman who can use her beauty and power of seduction as a tool for manipulation. She shifts to the next *phase*, that of a mother. In other words, time not only deteriorates the body, but also follows a chain of phases, inscribed in a social order that keeps the Maupassantian character captive. Similarly to *Fort comme la mort*, the closing scene of "Adieu" reproduces the same effect. In this story, as in "Fini," two old lovers meet after years of separation, only to find each other dramatically altered by time. Julie Lefèvre regretfully says to her old lover: "Je suis bien changée, n'est-ce pas ? Que voulez-vous, tout passe. Vous voyez, je suis devenue une mère, rien qu'une mère, une bonne mère. Adieu le reste, c'est fini."[29] In *Fort comme la mort*, the movement of generational substitution repeats the resemblance between Anne and Annette. The woman's status is inevitably altered by her motherhood, losing the social power she once possessed in youth. In "Adieu," the narrator compares Julie to her daughter and remarks, "Je regardai l'enfant. Et je retrouvai en elle quelque chose du charme ancien de sa mère, mais quelque chose d'indécis encore, de peu formé, de prochain."[30] The girl is inscribed within an inevitable generational movement that we witness in other texts by Maupassant. The

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[29] Guy de Maupassant, "Adieu," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles I*, 1250.
[30] Ibid.

development of the characters, progressing from phase to phase, has a mechanical quality.

Giving up her struggle with the mirror and submitting to the generational shift forced upon her, Anne finally accepts her new social role:

> Un jour, exaspérée par cette lutte entre elle et ce morceau de verre, elle le lança contre le mur où il se fendit et s'émietta.
>
> Mais au bout de quelque temps son mari, qui l'avait fait réparer, le lui remit plus clair que jamais. Elle dut le prendre et remercier, résignée à le garder.
>
> Chaque soir aussi et chaque matin enfermée en sa chambre, elle recommençait malgré elle cet examen minutieux et patient de l'odieux et tranquille ravage.[31]

In other words, if in her youth Anne assumed the artifice of her image, now she can only follow its transformation. Contrary to function of artifice in *Fort comme la mort*, in "Le masque," the mask not only hides physical degradation, but more importantly it dissimulates the infirmity of Ambroise's identity. Similarly to Anne, Ambroise had for too long relied on his youth and beauty. Once unable to maintain his youthful charm to which he had reduced himself, Ambroise substitutes this loss with a new fabricated face. He attaches the mask to his body as one would a prosthetic limb, in an attempt to replace the face that no longer corresponds to his lost image. As we can see, Ambroise's attachment to his beauty resembles that of Maupassant's female protagonists. Ambroise's reliance on the mask, however, is pathological, contrary to the "inherent" quality that simulacrum has in the case of the female characters.

The possibility of *not* resembling oneself is the threat that most Maupassantian characters confront, and in "Le masque," it involves a form of dissimulation that brings

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[31] Guy de Maupassant, *Fort comme la mort*, in vol. *Romans*, 996-997.

the character closer to resembling the identity he believes to embody. The story opens with the celebration of the Mi-Carême carnival at the Elysée-Montmartre, a Parisian dance hall that was popular during the 19th century. Traditionally, this celebration involves masked participants who, at the end of the festivities, reveal their identity to the public. The text describes Ambroise, one of the masked entertainers at the ball, as follows:

> Il était maigre, vêtu en gommeux, avec un joli masque verni sur le visage, un masque à moustache blonde frisée que coiffait une perruque à boucles. Il avait l'air d'une figure de cire du musée Grévin, d'une étrange et fantasque caricature du charmant jeune homme des gravures de mode […].[32]

This description reveals a man who dissimulates his aged face with a mask that imitates his past charm. Before Madeleine unravels to us her husband's past, the narrator attributes Ambroise's physique to elements of simulacrum: "vêtu en gommeux," "figure de cire du musée Grévin," "gravures de mode," and of course the mask itself. These comparisons with wax sculptures and figures of fashion engravings are significant because they both represent representations or copies of a model. A wax sculpture, for example, is a reproduction of a public figure, while this public figure itself is a representation of the social entity that it embodies.[33] At this moment in time, the Grévin Museum[34] served as an instrument of publicity, like the modern-day tabloid images, and which soon would be replaced by photography, a newer, more efficient medium of image

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[32] Guy de Maupassant, "Le masque", in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 1135.

[33] See Jean Baudrillard, *L'échange symbolique et la mort* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976).

[34] The Musée Grévin in Paris was founded in 1882 by Arthur Meyer, only seven years before the first publication of "Le masque," who is also the director of *Le Gaulois*, thus creating not only a direct link between the newspaper and the wax sculptures that would represent the personalities who were at the same time subjects of the *Echos*, but also to Maupassant himself. In fact, Maupassant published the majority of his newspaper articles, among other literary texts, in the *Le Gaulois*. See also Vanessa R. Schwartz, *Spectacular realities: Early Mass Culture in fin-de-siècle Paris* (University of California Press, 1999).

reproduction. Masked Ambroise,[35] cursed even by his own name, which would forever remind him of his passed youth, can only attempt to represent the copy of a copy, or the representation of a model which is itself but a generality, as is the case with the fashion engravings. Ironically and tragically, the end of this chain of representations points to an abyssal void, a subject of anguish for many of Maupassant's characters.

We must note that the etymological definitions of the face link directly to artifice. The face (*facies*), and the mask (*persona*) share the definition of *appearance*, thus implying a manipulation of one's image by which one creates a persona, in the English sense of the word. Beauty is itself a fabrication (*facio*), and whose authenticity is questionable from the start.[36] In French as well, words related to the face contain both a sense of revelation and of dissimulation, as we can see in the intersection of meaning of *visage, dévisager* and *envisager*. These last two imply that the face is itself a mask or a dissimulation. Thus, in order to see something or someone face to face, someone "en face," without an intermediary that might obscure the other, the face must first be lifted or *dévisagé*, finally returning to the circular logic and impossibility of a "true" face.

Consequently, "face" and "mask" coincide in meaning, defined by appearance and fabrication. Both share the quality of mediation, between the inside, the ego, and the outside, the society. The face mediates between the subject and the world, allowing one to more safely interact with society, while protecting one from its violence.[37] The subject

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[35] The name *Ambroise* originates from the word *ambrosia*, which in Greek mythology signifies a divine substance that gives gods their immortality.

[36] Latin *facies* is defined both as "appearance" and "false appearance." The two seemingly opposing definitions coincide due to the conscious manipulation and simulacrum that *appearance* implies.

[37] This mediational function resembles Didier Anzieu's concept of *moi-peau*, in which the skin is likened to the ego's intermediary role between the subject and society. See Didier Anzieu, *Le Moi-peau*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Dunod, 1995).

manipulates his or her expressions, in order to convey a particular message about oneself. Identity depends in part on this complex assemblage of fabrications.[38]

The narrator of "Le masque" claims that Ambroise resembles a "*gommeux*," which Louis Forestier, in a note on the text, defines as follows: "Le *gommeux* est une figure de la société du XIXe siècle. Elégant, vaniteux, remuant, il outre les défauts sans le vouloir et ne manifeste pas assez les qualités. On le définit assez par la notion de *vide*, ou de tourbillon."[39] This definition of *gommeux* resembles the earlier figure of the dandy, whose identity seeks to coincide with his own image, of becoming a representation of oneself without a referent, and thus a void.[40] Ambroise's attachment to a fragment of his identity surpasses its existence.

Aging and the anxiety of the body's transformation with the passage of time affect many of Maupassant's characters. Ambroise, for example, battles this anxiety by substituting his past youth with a mask. In other texts, the threat of aging is expressed in different ways. In "Fini," "Adieu" and *Fort comme la mort*, the characters realize their passing youth, while in "Auprès d'un mort" and *Bel-Ami*, the reader's attention is directed toward the senses, such as smell, that register one's bodily decomposition. In all

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[38] Michel Foucault writes: "[…] cette identité, bien faible pourtant, que nous essayons d'assurer et d'assembler sous un masque, n'est elle-même qu'une parodie : le pluriel l'habite, des âmes innombrables s'y disputent." Thus, the mask not only protects from society's violence by creating a unifying, "acceptable" image, but it also hides the profoundly fragmented identity of the subject ("Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire" (1971), in *Dits et écrits*, vol. I (Paris: Gallimard, 2001) 1022). Similarly, in an extensive study of the mask, Jean-Thierry Maertens writes: "le masque est lui-même masqué, de ne plus trouver son sens que de la superposition de ces significations" (*Ritologiques 3: Le masque et le miroir* (Paris: Aubier "Etranges Etrangers," 1978) 13).

[39] Guy de Maupassant, "Le masque," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 1688-1689.

[40] Among Babey d'Aurevilly's maxims on dandyism, one seems to capture truly the ephemeral nature of this figure: "Dans le monde, tout le temps que vous n'avez pas produit d'effet, restez : si l'effet est produit, allez-vous-en" (Jules Amédée Barbey d'Aurevilly, *Du dandysme et de George Brummell* (Paris: Balland, 1986) 56).

Baudelaire likens the dandy to « un miroir aussi immense que cette foule », for he reflects the vastness of society, irreducible to any one individual within it, while claiming the unmatched singularity of the modern subject (Charles Baudelaire, "Le peintre de la vie moderne," in *Sur le dandysme: Balzac, Barbey d'Aurevilly, Baudelaire* (Paris: Union générale d'édition, 1971) 201).

cases, the character confronts his or her physical transformation in terror, not so much from a fear of death but because these physical changes reflect the character's social transformation.

What precisely instills such horror to aging? It would appear that if characters like Anne follow a progression from one social status to another, terror occurs at a moment of rupture, at which one violently questions his or her entire identity. What once gave assurance and power, endangered, becomes a trap. In other words, Anne, Ambroise, and many others, are haunted by a social status they can no longer embody. Antonia Fonyi, as we shall see further along, evokes a mechanism of entrapment present in many of Maupassant's texts by which the place of escape from a trap becomes a trap itself, while the return back transforms into an asphyxiating and fatal enclosure. Attempts to escape from the entrapment make the character confront a chaotic multiplicity of identitary elements which he or she experiences as a threat. Consequently, the source of the character's terror would then be his or her realization that, despite a complex identity, death is an inevitable conclusion. This raises the question of suicide, a conclusion chosen by many of the author's characters.

So far we have looked at the Maupassantian subject's relation to objects of simulacrum that mirror one's identity. As we saw in several examples of repetition, Maupassant's language itself echoes the mirroring that occurs within the characters. In fact, Maupassant's work has been the subject of a significant structuralist analysis,[41] which has in part focused on the spatial aspect of the stories' narrative. The development of the subject occurs within the mediation of the other, by physical contact, visual

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[41] See, for example, Micheline Besnard-Coursodon, *Etude thématique et structurale de l'oeuvre de Maupassant: le piège* (Paris: Nizet, 1973); Claudine Giacchetti, *Maupassant: espaces du roman*, (Genève: Droz, 1993).

perception and speech. With the use of language as a vehicle in the intermediary space of exchange, the link with the outside world can be established. And if linguistic communication requires a common set of laws making comprehension and transmission of information between two interlocutors possible, it resembles the reflexive structure of the mirror stage. In other words, the child's appropriation of his or her own mirror image as a delusional reconstruction of the supposed gaze of the other takes place when the infant does not yet have motor autonomy. Similarly, linguistic communication, developed through imitation, is therefore also an appropriation that the subject, not yet completely developed linguistically, makes of the other. "[If] I can address you," writes Judith Butler, "I must first have been addressed, brought into the structure of address as a possibility of language before I was able to find my own way to make use of it."[42] Thus, the subject is brought into a preexisting system that he or she must first adopt, before one is able to create *with* it. "This follows," continues Butler, "not only from the fact that language first belongs to the other and I acquire it through a complicated form of mimesis, but also because the very possibility of linguistic agency is derived from the situation in which one finds oneself addressed by a language one never chose."[43] However, language, as she proceeds to show, exists in a continuation of the subject's relation to the other, preceding individuation, or the formation of the self. Therefore, the structure of address, in which the other is necessarily implicated, "is not a feature of narrative," according to Butler, but is instead "an interruption of narrative," for it exists

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[42] Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005) 53. Butler's approach to narrative and address reposes largely on Benveniste's work, such as his essay entitled "Le langage et l'expérience humaine," in *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, vol. 2, (Paris: Gallimard, 1974).
[43] Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 53.

within the unconscious, as an imposition of the other's address onto the developing subject.[44]

The structure in a majority of Maupassant's works consists of a chain of narratives that inevitably alter each one through the successive retelling of the story. Therefore, entrapment exists not only in the narrative but also in the structure itself. Just as the identity of characters lies in a complex set of reflections, the narratives mirror each other, thus distancing what one would consider the "original" account of the story from what is finally conveyed to the reader. Each succeeding narrator relays his own perspective to the reader, to whom the "final" version is open to interpretation. Repetition – proper to this narrative structure and to the discourse of the characters[45] – is consistent with the relentless doubting of reality and authenticity.[46]

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[44] Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 63.

[45] We find various forms of repetition in Maupassant's works: resemblance among the texts themselves, the characters, and the repetition within the narrative. In this third form of repetition, we frequently notice the characters' insistence, when they repeat several words or even entire statements. This raises the interesting question of the narrative's trustworthiness. For further reading on this subject, see Antonia Fonyi's *Maupassant 1993* (Paris, Kimé, 1993).

[46] Questions of identity, authenticity, doubling and social influence have interested many writers and thinkers, notably from Rousseau to the present day. I would like to evoke an especially pertinent text by Rousseau and an autobiographical text by Claude Cahun, written in the first half of the 20th century. Through her writing and photography, Cahun plays with the notions of the multiple, masks, proper names and personas. The numerous names that she adopts reflect her appropriations and influences. For instance, Cahun's Jean-Jacques echoes Jean-Jacques of Rousseau, who himself, by his dialogues, struggles with the other and the schism within him. See Claude Cahun, "Confidences au miroir," in *Claude Cahun: Ecrits*, ed. François Leperlier (Paris: Editions Jean-Michel Place, 2002). Rousseau documents his persecution by the public, but also by his own public figure as it reflects the others. Reasoning with the public's prejudices and judgments, Rousseau explains the public's rejection of him with the appropriation of the gaze of an other: "quand ils croient voir par leurs yeux, ils voient, sans s'en douter, par les yeux d'autrui" (Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Rousseau, juge de Jean-Jacques* (Paris: Flammarion, 1999) 321). With the *Dialogues*, Rousseau addresses the presence of the other within the subject's identity, the fragmentation and de-centering of the ego, preceding what would be developed by fields such as psychiatry, as well as what would later be the driving force of psychoanalysis. In "Du sujet et de la forme de cet écrit," Rousseau captures with one key phrase the reason for writing the dialogues: " il fallait nécessairement que je dise de quel œil, si j'étais un autre, je verrais un homme tel que je suis" ("Du sujet et de la forme de cet écrit" in *Rousseau, juge de Jean-Jacques* (Paris: Flammarion, 1999) 62). This phrase mirrors the text's reflexive games, ultimately proving the impossibility of arriving at a truly complete work. Rousseau's *Dialogues*, in defense of the man that he claims to be, and against the figure named *Jean-Jacques* that the public has made of him. However, this image of himself which Rousseau struggles with is itself caught up in a ricochet of resemblances, and thus undermines his conclusion: "Ils auront beau faire un J.J. à leur mode, Rousseau restera toujours le même en

Spawning interest in Maupassant's works during the past several decades, literary criticism has focused largely on the psychological and social complexity of characters and the problematic and invasive relationship with alterity.[47] The doubling effect of images is triggered by the characters' introspection and self-reflection. Consequently, these characters confront with horror their own fragmented identity, causing them strive for a sense of unity and stability. Ultimately, this aim toward stability in Maupassant's work is catastrophic, particularly as it appears in the relationship between the subject and the other.

2. The Self or the Other as Parasite

Banality and Its Point of Rupture

As we have already seen, visual modes of representation have various functions in Maupassant's work. These functions reveal to the reader the character's self-questioning, as well as his or her complex relationship to time and aging. In these texts, the character systematically finds him or herself haunted by a past or passing self-representation.

In the analysis of self-reflection, the question of the other is inevitably raised. As I will show with several textual examples, the character's confrontation with a frail

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dépit d'eux" ("Histoire du précédent écrit" in *Rousseau, juge de Jean-Jacques* (Paris: Flammarion, 1999) 419-420). Here, it is the idea of sameness that is in question. One might ask whether the repetitions and the endless comparisons in Rousseaus's text resemble Maupassant's short stories, similar in subject, often mirroring one another, yet never quite reaching a certain closure in the author's quest to discern his identity from social influence.

[47] See, for instance, Pierre Bayard, *Maupassant, juste avant Freud* (Paris, Minuit, 1994); Alberto Savinio, *Maupassant et l' "Autre"* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977); Jacques Bienvenu, "Le Horla et son double," in *Le Magazine Littéraire*, 310 (May 1993) 45-47.

representation of him or herself appears to be triggered by an encounter with another character. This encounter results in a critical moment of rupture in the character's notion of him or herself. As we shall see, this moment – though it might seem minimal – is the structural anchor of the entire works. The encounter with the other represents a moment of chaos or rupture, which contrasts with the banality of Maupassant's stories. As Antonia Fonyi insists, more than three hundred of Maupassant's short stories resemble one another in scenario and structure, including the critical moment of rupture. The character of "Suicides," for instance, rereads his old letters and realizes the banality and senselessness of his life; Anne publicly confronts Annette's resemblance to her portrait as a young woman, which reveals her frail social position; old mistresses in "Fini" and "Adieu" reveal the age of their lovers; Signoles fears ridicule to the extent of suicide; Madeleine points out Ambroise's first grey hair, triggering a downward spiral in his self-perception, and which precipitates him to put on the mask. In these games of resemblance, the blurred distinction between the self and the other plays a dominant role in the conclusion of each text.

Madeleine as Mirror

In the short story of "Le masque," the other acts as an object of reflection. As mentioned earlier, Ambroise's pathological attachment to his youthful image continues its representation with a substitutive object. He relies now on the mask for the success that his beauty once brought him. However, in order to legitimately recreate the "success" that once fueled his existence, Madeleine must act as an intermediary, between the past that she witnessed and her husband's present success stories. Therefore, her role is

essential in Ambroise's games of dress-up, mirroring his desire and his supposed success from which she herself is excluded. Only by this parasitical relationship between the two characters, at the price of Madeleine's own subjectivity, can Ambroise's fictive identity be upheld.

After Ambroise's collapse at the Elysée-Montpartre, we enter the private world of the old dancer, where the mystery begins to unravel. Described as "vieille," "propre" and "avec un bonnet de nuit bien blanc,"[48] Madeleine awaits her husband. These attributes echo her cleansing role in relation to Ambroise. Upon his return from the nightclubs, she cleans and feeds him. The latter, rejoicing, unleashes onto her the stories of his latest romantic conquests. "[Il] me disait tout… il ne pouvait pas se taire… non, il ne pouvait pas."[49] And she, like a blank slate, adopts the form that Ambroise expects from her: "J'ai été sa femme et sa bonne, tout, tout ce qu'il a voulu…,"[50] she says to the doctor, who accompanied Ambroise back home. Thus, by her submissive attachment to her husband with which she supports his self-perception, Madeleine's own identity is profoundly fragmented. She recalls herself being taken by his beauty and seduction, like a fish on a hook, a peculiar link that lasts only due to their conjugal ties, for, she explains, "sans ça il m'aurait lâchée comme les autres."[51] Unlike the other women seduced by Ambroise, Madeleine is left on the hook, so to speak, hooked (*accrochée*) like an addict to her husband's abuse.

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[48] Guy de Maupassant, "Le masque," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 1137. Analogies to water appear in the opening paragraph of this short story. However, they imply neither cleanliness nor purity, but rather, the unstoppable propagation of music, movement and desire, like water that eludes one's grasp. At the same time, a collected mass of water can have tremendous force in the same way that as a crowd of people.
[49] Ibid., 1139.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.

Unable to refuse his ignorant violence toward her, – ignorant because he appears to be unconscious of his usurpatory influence on his wife, – Madeleine appears to exist only to serve the function of reflection to her husband. Thus, every night, upon his return and despite her resentment of these torturous moments of confession, "je m'asseyais en face de lui," she says, like a martyr, accepting his violence.[52] Despite her resistance, Madeleine gives into her masochistic mirroring of Ambroise's adulterous desires. And in their face-to-face position, she closes in on and assures this reflection. This, of course, is not without a consequence to her subjectivity.

The theme of cleansing runs throughout the text. Firstly, by taking in her husband's stories, like a sponge, Madeleine cleanses him of his adulterous deeds. Contrary to Ambroise, one of the first qualities to describe her in the text is cleanliness ("*propre*"). Secondly, the significance of Madeleine's name must not be ignored, symbolizing the figure of a martyr. By the process of cleansing and self-effacement, she resembles Mary-Magdalene, who cleansed Christ's feet on the cross.[53] Thirdly, the story takes place during the carnival of "Mi-Carême," also known as "la fête des blanchisseuses," or the holiday of laundresses. Describing Ambroise's need to wear the mask, Madeleine reveals the "hygienic" contrast between her and Ambroise:

> […] pour qu'on le croie jeune sous son masque, pour que les femmes le prennent encore pour un godelureau et lui disent des cochonneries dans l'oreille, pour se frotter à leur peau, à toutes leurs sales peaux avec leurs odeurs et leurs poudres et leurs pommades… Ah ! c'est du *propre*![54]

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[52] Ibid.

[53] As we will see in chapter 2, proper names have particular significance in Maupassant's work.

[54] Guy de Maupassant, "Le masque," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 1137. [Emphasis added.] In parallel to the symbolism of cleansing, fluidity in this text is also associated with contamination, particularly in the opening of the story, when imagery of "flooding" describes the sounds of the festivities. Therefore, fluidity here implies immersion, while Madeleine's act of "cleansing" eliminates, or effaces.

The figural sense of the word *blanchir* – to whiten, to clear, to launder, to blanch – is rather revealing of Madeleine's "laundering." Even the exclamation – "Ah! C'est du propre" – mirrors Madeleine's cleansing, and more particularly *laundering* function, for it expresses the exact opposite of cleanliness. She not only "cleanses" Ambroise after his escapades to the dancehalls, but she also justifies, and thus in some sense, accepts his deeds. Madeleine is split between anger and endearment, just as she is split between suffering and admiration, and whose contrary reactions nearly coincide: "Sa compagne le regardait avec des yeux attendris et furieux."[55] Interestingly, Madeleine often describes her suffering and imprisonment as a consequence of Ambroise's and the others' desiring gaze. When she finally seeks to escape from her imprisonment, the only options are either to reduce herself even more to her sealed relationship with Ambroise – and thus to his ignorant abuse – or death.

Escape[56] seems possible when Madeleine discovers Ambroise's first grey hair. However, the liberation she foresees is not from Ambroise himself, for she is incorporated in the perverse relationship. She explains: "Je l'aurais donc pour moi toute seule, quand les autres n'en voudraient plus."[57] Happiness therefore *appears* attainable only by total possession of her object of desire. Nevertheless, her happiness is laced with suffering.[58] In search of liberation from this suffering, she explains to the visitor: "j'en ai eu des envies de pleurer, et de crier, et de me sauver, et de me jeter par la fenêtre."[59] Ironically, she describes his big eyes as windows: "des yeux noirs aussi grands que des

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[55] Ibid.
[56] "Il m'a semblé qu'on allait me sortir de prison." Ibid., 1141.
[57] Ibid.
[58] While Ambroise's relationship with Madeleine is totalizing, Madeleine transforms her reaction to her husband's behavior into pity.
[59] Ibid., 1140.

fenêtres."[60] The torturous stories that he tells her force onto her his own perspective of society. While incarnating what he wishes her to be, Madeleine adopts Ambroise's gaze to see the world as he does. By this allusion to jumping out of the window, her wish would therefore imply an "unhooking" of herself from this bond, while sealing off the source of her suffering, and consequently annihilating herself. Instead, the text ends with an indefinite continuation of the parasitical game of reflection between the two characters. Thus, Madeleine facilitates her self-effacement for her husband's need to uphold his own fabricated identity that is based on memory and attachment.[61]

In "Fini," "Adieu" and *Fort comme la mort* too, the other, by his or her juxtaposition and thus comparison to the main character, triggers a dramatic change in the self-perception of the latter. As we already saw, these three texts address the themes of aging, the passage of time, and the subject's trumping self-perception. The other disturbs this illusion. In *Fort comme la mort*, Olivier Bertin's love for Anne shifts to Annette, who seems to resemble her mother's past beauty and youth even more than Anne did herself. Yet, one is tempted to ask what exactly it would mean *not* to resemble oneself? And then, what it means for someone to resemble another more than the latter resembles oneself? Finally, what is the correlation between subjectivity, or individuality, and one's image?

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[60] Ibid., 1139.

[61] It would be of interest to further develop the analysis of Ambroise's identity, one that resembles an automaton. Firstly, Madeleine is described as resculpting him like an artist: with a hairbrush "elle lui donna, en quelques instants, une figure de modèle de peintre" ("Le masque," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 1138). Secondly, the mask itself, as an object of simulacrum, integrates the inanimate into the character's appearance, as an assimilation of the death that the mask connotes. Thirdly, Madeleine undresses and puts the unconscious Ambroise to bed as if he were a doll, as if he were her play object, in a winnicottian sense. But only in as much as he cannot, at that moment, come to life. Finally, the frenetic movements of Ambroise's dance are a result of absinth. As Madeleine explains: "La verte, […] ça lui r'fait des jambes, mais ça lui coupe les idées et les paroles" ("Le masque," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 1137). Like a wind-up doll, Ambroise retrieves his moves, while his speech, or *parole*, is "cut," or split, just like his face, or *visage*, linked to *parole* by the Latin word *os* (*oris*), is fractured. We see the two faces lying side by side in the dancehall.

As a temporal double, Annette's resemblance of her mother haunts Bertin in the irreversible passage of time. Bertin's desire for the unattainable Annette is sterile, as he himself calls it: "les tortures du désir stérile," and she, "plus terrible que le bec d'un vautour, une petite figure blonde dépeçant un vieux cœur"[62] by her resemblance alone, tears him apart. This "petite blonde" is at once the mother and the daughter, the past that has come to haunt Bertin, and thus to announce dramatically his end. Socially substituted by her daughter, Anne fears a change in Bertin's love for her, asking him: "Ce que vous éprouvez près d'elle ressemble-t-il à ce que vous éprouviez près de moi?"[63] To this Bertin replies:

> Oui et non… et c'est pourtant presque la même chose. Je vous ai aimée autant qu'on peut aimer une femme. Elle, je l'aime comme vous, puisque c'est vous ; mais cet amour est devenu quelque chose d'irrésistible, de destructeur, de plus fort que la mort. Je suis à lui comme une maison qui brûle est au feu ![64]

What alters is the nature of the love, and not the person. In other words, in as much as their social identity defines them, Anne and Annette are identical. Following this equation, Bertin's love for the two women is *identical*, in the sense that, to him, the two women are substitutable. In other words, not only are they identical, but they are one and the same, replaceable, indistinguishable: "je l'aime comme vous, puisque c'est vous." With Anne and Annette reduced to and coinciding with each other at the social roles that

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[62] Guy de Maupassant, *Fort comme la mort*, in vol. *Romans*, 1008.

[63] Ibid., 1012.

[64] Ibid. Another house burns pitilessly in "Le Horla," in the hopes of consuming the mysterious, haunting being. In this short story, the main character's decision to burn the house brings neither effect nor relief, in the same way that, in *Fort comme la mort*, Bertin's passion for Annette continues to torture him. Both characters attempt to rationally explain this ultimate other. In *Fort comme la mort*, Bertin attributes his love for Annette to his love for her mother, while in "Le Horla," the character assigns all unknown phenomena to that which science has not yet discovered. Both characters cede in their struggle against an uncontrollable force that has invaded them. Bertin's love for Annette is destructive, which he compares to the fire that consumes the house. The house is itself a small representation of the character's setting, his position in society, and his gateway into it. This detail leads one to question Maupassant's definition of love.

they embody, one can begin to conceive what it would mean for one to resemble the other more than the other does him or herself. Bertin's love for Anne-Annette becomes destructive, incompatible, deadly even. It is destructive precisely because the love he once had for Anne is displaced onto another object. While, from Bertin's perspective, his desire appears to merely shift from one object to another, this displacement reveals his own transformation.

We see a similar game of reflection in "Fini" and "Adieu," where one's self-perception is defined and radically altered by the other as a point of reference. "Fini," for example, has a closed, circular structure, which begins and ends with the main character, Lormerin, gazing at himself in the mirror. In the opening instance, the character admires what he sees before him and exclaims, "Lormerin vit encore!".[65] With the last two words of the story, "Fini Lormerin!",[66] the character closes the cycle, from self-contentment to self-deception. The decisive moment of rupture in Lormerin's identity takes place between these two scenes of self-contemplation. After his encounter with his old mistress, Lormerin's perception alters radically, and his own physical transformation reveals itself to him: "approchant la lumière, il se regarda de près, inspectant les rides, constatant ces affreux ravages qu'il n'avait encore jamais aperçus."[67] What, in his unforeseen encounter with Lise de Vance, triggered this transformation in perception? Confronted with his old mistress and her daughter, who, like in *Fort comme la mort*, is a temporal double of her mother, Lormerin is seized by fragments of the past, reappearing in both women, who are both described with such terms as "revenante"[68] and "apparition."[69] He recognizes

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[65] Guy de Maupassant, "Fini," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 513.
[66] Ibid., 518.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid., 516.

fragmented memories of the past in the girl's face, which resemble the traits that her mother once had:

> Et c'était dans l'œil clair de la jeune fille qu'il retrouvait ses souvenirs. […] La jeune fille bavardait, et parfois des intonations retrouvées, des mots familiers à sa mère et qu'elle lui avait pris, toute une manière de dire et de penser, cette ressemblance d'âme et d'allure qu'on gagne en vivant ensemble, secouaient Lormerin de la tête aux pieds.[70]

The scene of resemblance between Anne, Annette and Anne's portrait echoes in this encounter, where Lormerin stands as if before two doubles of the past, an uncanny sight that precipitates the following question: "Laquelle est la vraie?",[71] maddening in nature, as he himself claims it to be. What is maddening here, however, is not so much the resemblance between the mother and the daughter, which could simply be dismissed on the basis of their genealogical proximity. Rather, at the moment of this unexpected remembrance to his past, it is the confusion in the time sequence that is maddening. Before him Lormerin sees the past and the present side by side, as if in comparison to one another, physically embodied by the two women. Finding himself at the center of this game of reflection, Lormerin's own position in time is, all of a sudden, put into question. His juxtaposition to the past reincarnated by the girl, on the one hand, and the embodiment of a cruel transformation of his own past, on the other, are maddening. Therefore, this encounter troubles the chronology of time, which consequently *opens* the

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[69] Ibid., 517.

[70] Ibid., 518.

[71] Ibid., 517. The narrator evokes "ces songes étranges qui touchent à la folie" from this uncanny encounter. Bewildered by the resemblance of the two women, and even more so by the shattered ideal of the woman's beauty that had remained in his memory until this moment, the character exclaims in surprise what Baudelaire had expressed twenty-two years earlier in his prose poem entitled "Laquelle est la vraie?". In this poem, the shattering of an ideal love experience by the narrator is maddening, just as it is for Lormerin in "Fini". Charles Baudelaire, "Laquelle est la vraie?", in *Le Spleen de Paris* (Paris: Flammarion, 1987) 160.

character's eyes to his aging image. His illusory self-perception is caught up with by the haunting past that is here embodied by the two women in limbo, one, no longer what she was and the other, not yet what she will become.

Cowardice

Finally, I would like to present the story of "Un lâche" which reveals a case of cowardice defined by a peculiar dependence of the subject's self-perception on the gaze of the other. Just as Ambroise, in "Le masque," seeks to coincide with the others' desire, frequenting dancehalls and manipulating his appearance in order to dissimulate his old age, the main character of "Un lâche," named le vicomte Gontran-Joseph de Signoles, also seeks to appropriate the other's desire and emotion. Furthermore, the beauty and success of both characters correspond to a "type." In other words, Ambroise does not attempt to *resemble* his individual youthful physique; instead he wants to embody the *idea* of "beauty" and "youth." The aim to incarnate particular identities carries a strong theatrical connotation, by which the character, like an actor, assumes fully a certain role. For this reason, the mask suffices. Similarly, the physical and psychological descriptions of Signoles do not provide any clear definition of him. As the text shows, Signoles is described solely with elements of hearsay, attributed to the neutral "on":

> Orphelin et maître d'une fortune suffisante, il faisait figure, comme *on* dit. Il avait de la tournure et de l'allure, assez de parole pour faire croire à de l'esprit, une certaine grâce naturelle, un air de noblesse et de fierté, la moustache brave et l'œil doux, ce qui plaît aux femmes.
>
> Il était demandé dans les salons, recherché par les valseuses, et il inspirait aux hommes cette inimitié souriante qu'*on* a pour les gens de figure énergique. *On* lui avait soupçonné quelques amours capables de donner fort bonne opinion

d'un garçon. Il vivait heureux, tranquille, dans le bien-être moral le plus complet. *On* savait qu'il tirait bien l'épée et mieux encore le pistolet.[72]

When facing the reality of the approaching duel that Signoles himself provoked, the character's two-faced, hypocritical, uncertain and unfounded qualities lose their value at the critical and possibly mortal moment. Resembling a dandy-like figure, admired and desired in society, Signoles exemplifies the ephemeral structure of projections and images, beneath which nothing, with the exception of his fear and cowardice, can support his identity in the face of the unknown other. In chapter four, I will try to show that cowardice, as the title suggests by its unstable, indefinable nature, reflects particularly well the identity of the main character.

The story unravels at Tortoni's,[73] where Signoles had invited his two friends, accompanied by their husbands, after an evening at the theater. An unknown man, sitting at a neighboring table, disconcerts one of the two women with his persistent stare. She expresses a feeling of discomfort to her indifferent husband, exclaiming: "Voici un homme qui me *dévisage*,"[74] followed by: "C'est fort gênant ; cet individu me gâte ma glace."[75] She seems to be at once disturbed by and content[76] with this invasive stare that defaces her. As ambiguous as the face (*visage*) is, defined by artifice and thus overlapping with the definition of the mask, *dévisager* suggests a revelation of a face

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[72] Guy de Maupassant, "Un lâche," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles I*, 1159. [Emphasis added.]

[73] Tortoni's was a successful and elegant café, during the first half of the nineteenth century. However, in Maupassant's time, as Louis Forestier notes, this café had become less spectacular and a meeting place for "turfistes" and "sportsmen" (vol. *Contes et nouvelles I*, 1625).

[74] [Emphasis added.]

[75] Guy de Maupassant, "Un lâche," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles I*, 1159.

[76] The narrator describes the woman's indignation as being ambiguous: "moitié souriante, moitié fâchée" (Ibid.). Thus, the other's gaze does in fact split the woman's expression into two opposing, but here simultaneous, composures. A similar conflict of expressions appears on Madeleine's face, in her reaction to Ambroise's excesses. Are these conflicts contradictions to the mastery of expressions, mourned by Anne at the end of *Fort comme la mort*, or are they themselves products of a complex ambiguity in self-composure?

under another expression that one fabricates. Theatricality plays an important role here. The author suggests that, after the staged performance, theatricality overflows into the Parisian society. Furthermore, for Signoles, society plays the role of the audience, but of an audience that participates in the construction of the character's identity. In this case, the gaze of the other determines entirely Signoles's ephemeral reputation.

In the case of the woman, the stranger's piercing gaze tears through, alters, transforms, corrodes the face that she had carefully fabricated. Paradoxically, in lieu of a defense from the husband, whom the woman addresses with an ambiguous call for help against the prying gaze of the onlooker, it is Signoles who responds, considering his friends' pleasure as his obligation. In fact, he goes so far as to appropriate his friend's feeling of insult, as if it had been directed toward him: "C'était à lui que l'injure s'adressait, puisque c'était par lui et pour lui que ses amis étaient entrés dans ce café. L'affaire donc ne regardait que lui."[77] In this sense, the other's pleasure has value only as long as it enriches his own social image, and thus an insult to the other is in fact a direct insult to Signoles.

If Signoles appropriates his friends' feelings and reactions as an extension of himself, we are led to question both his perception of the other altogether and that of his own identity. We realize that all other characters, and society in general, are systematically referred back to Signoles, the composite and elusive image of their reflection. As we can see in the long quotation above, the other is generalized under the neutral pronoun "on," whose opinions of Signoles are once more removed in the form of hearsay. Furthermore, the woman's complaint, "cet individu me gâte ma glace," can

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[77] Guy de Maupassant, "Un lâche," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles I*, 1160.

easily be misread, where it is no longer the dessert in question, but rather the mirror or the social composure of her image. Signoles's dramatic reaction plays a displaced role, suggesting the chivalrous gallantry that the characters might have witnessed at the theater prior to this scene. Upon the husband's indifference, Signoles feels obliged, precisely by the displaced role he plays, to intervene: "Mais le vicomte s'était levé brusquement. Il ne pouvait admettre que cet inconnu gâtât une glace qu'il avait offerte."[78] On the one hand, the inequality between the cause and the effect leads us even more to misread the woman's complaint. On the other hand, the superfluous pleasure of eating ice cream reflects here the frivolous pleasures and luxuries that compose Signoles's identity. Therefore, what the stranger's stare ruins, as the word *gâter* suggests, is not only a small pleasure, but it also distorts and deteriorates the woman's carefully constructed *persona*. Signoles cannot tolerate this, for his own social identity consists of and depends on that of others, as he himself announces. As a result of this insult, – which Signoles appropriates as a reaction to his own persona being at risk of distortion – he calls for a duel to annul this threat. I will try to show here, and particularly in chapter four, that Signoles's identity depends radically on social influence, to the extent of slipping away, as the word *lâche* itself suggests. The absolutely ungraspable and unknowable nature of his duel opponent, Georges Lamil, threatens Signoles's fragile composure, which depends on the other's perception of him. By his fear of ridicule, of death, and most importantly, of the unknowable Lamil, he literally finds himself with an indiscernible identity, with neither a past nor a future, leaving, in semblance of a testament, only a white page *signed* in blood.

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[78] Ibid.

In the above texts, the other's presence in the life of the main character threatens and destabilizes the latter's self-perception. If identity relies on the resemblance to one's own image, how can one trust one's own perception and self-knowledge? This is the question that the characters of "Suicides" and "Un lâche" ask themselves. At this moment of the scrutinizing questioning of one's identity, the character, unable to adapt to an identity profoundly fragmented and contrary to one's conception of it, submits to death or exile.

In Maupassant's works, the relationship between the self and the other is detrimental because it is parasitical. In other words, instead of a flux between two characters, or between a character and the society that he or she lives in, one is rather progressively impoverished by this relationship. As we have seen, the main characters of "Fini," *Fort comme la mort*, "Le masque" and "Un lâche" exist in a closed, or frozen, link with the mirror and other devices of resemblance, where the other's presence and gaze troubles that image.

3. From the Double to the Multiple

Maupassant's work emerges from two literary traditions, the fantastical genre and the more contemporary Naturalist movement. His focus on the psychological dimension of the characters' development reconciles these two contrasting genres. He questions the singularity of individual identity by repeatedly confronting his characters with various figures of the double. Traditionally, this fantastical figure had been represented by

another menacing being. In Maupassant's works, however, this figure appears in latent form, by way of certain modes of resemblance, such as the mirror, painting as well as filial proximity, and finally by hallucination, as the infamous text of "Le Horla" shows. As we have seen, the author describes a reflexive relationship between the main character and the other, spiraling into confusion within the character's identity. These forms of doubling exceed the binary opposition of the fantastical figure and insist, rather, on the complexity of the characters' identity.

With devices of simulacrum, Maupassantian characters confront representations of themselves – their doubles in a sense – that open these texts to a larger questioning of identity and of perception. In "Fini" (1885) for instance, Lormerin stands before his aged lover and her daughter, asking himself in a state borderline to madness: "Laquelle est la vraie ?".[79] In *Fort comme la mort*, physical resemblance between two characters jeopardizes the identity of the characters. In many of these texts, the double embodies an important temporal dimension. As Jacques Bienvenu writes:

> Si bien que le thème du double, assez fréquent dans la littérature fantastique, prend chez Maupassant la tournure particulière d'événements vécus. A partir de 1884, ce thème se trouve amplifié dans l'œuvre par les miroirs, les photographies et les portraits peints. On constate alors que les doubles sont *décalés* dans le temps.[80]

The double in the author's texts is therefore internalized and condensed into the psyche of the subject, representing a *rival* within the subject.

The Rival

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[79] Guy de Maupassant, "Fini," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 517.
[80] Jacques Bienvenu, "Le Horla et son double," 45.

The figure of the rival in the fantastical literary genre sets the stage for the opposition we witness in and among Maupassantian characters. By projecting outward the threatening otherness interior to oneself, the subject desperately attempts to maintain a unified, stable identity. Julia Kristeva's[81] notion of the expulsion of the stranger within and its projection outward is helpful in interpreting the subject's tendency toward a sense of unity, in response to a fragmented identity. This repression of the stranger within parallels the rivalry and dominance that occurs in the fantastical representations of the double. Before analyzing numerous examples of such *internal* rivalry in the author's works, I would like to propose several examples of their fantastical precedents.

In the aim to analyze doubling in Maupassant's work, it would be important to first look at the fantastical precedents that might have influenced the author. His newspaper articles have given us a better perspective on the author's literary, political and social views, published in a number of daily newspapers, notably *Gaulois* and *Gil Blas*. And it is here that, on numerous occasions, he names Edgar Allan Poe and E. T. A. Hoffman as the principal masters of the fantastical. "[C]es psychologues étranges, à moitié fous, philosophes singulièrement subtils, bien qu'hallucinés,"[82] writes Maupassant, represent elements of science and reason, on the one hand, and illusion and delirium, on the other. In a newspaper article entitled "Le fantastique," Maupassant further evokes the juxtaposition of the rational and the fantastical, writing:

> L'extraordinaire puissance terrifiante d'Hoffmann et d'Edgar Poe vient de cette
> habileté savante, de cette façon particulière de coudoyer le fantastique et de

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[81] Julia Kristeva, *Etrangers à nous-mêmes* (Paris: Fayard, 1988).
[82] Guy de Maupassant, "Les foules," in *Guy de Maupassant. Chroniques*, ed. Gérard Delaisement, vol. I (Paris: Rive Droite, 2003) 480.

troubler, avec des faits naturels où reste pourtant quelque chose d'inexpliqué et de presque impossible.[83]

Following this definition, what renders these texts *fantastical* is therefore the extreme improbability of a certain event occurring. Maupassant's definition seeks to decrease the gap between the fantastical texts and his own works, for his texts too juxtapose realism and the enigmatic.

I would like to propose two fantastical examples of the double: Edgar Allan Poe's short story entitled "William Wilson" (1839) and Théophile Gautier's "Avatar" (1856). After reading Maupassant's journalistic work, a link between Gautier's intricately styled writing and Maupassant's extreme stylistic density becomes obvious. In "William Wilson," the stalking double embodies what could be interpreted as the conscience of the frail subject. Identical in physique and intelligence, William Wilson describes himself and his double as "the most inseparable of companions"[84] and like twin brothers. Yet, soon enough we see that this camaraderie degenerates progressively into rivalry and jealousy, even hatred. René Girard bases desire itself on this form of rivalry.[85] According to Girard, "[la] rivalité n'est pas le fruit d'une convergence accidentelle des deux désirs sur le même objet. *Le sujet désire l'objet parce que le rival lui-même le désire*."[86] And this desire is not a construction based on an exchange or development with the other, for "[ce] n'est pas par des paroles" that desire burgeons.[87] Instead, desire is "essentially mimetic."[88]

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[83] Guy de Maupassant, "Le fantastique," in *Guy de Maupassant. Chroniques*, vol. I, 720.
[84] Edgar Allan Poe, "William Wilson," in *Poetry and Tales* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1984) 343.
[85] See René Girard, *Mensonge romantique et vérité Romanesque* (Paris: Grasset, 2001).
[86] René Girard, *La violence et le sacré* (Paris: Grasset, 1993) 204.
[87] Ibid., 205.
[88] Ibid., 205.

The double rivals the subject because, by imitation and threat of substitution, it questions and thus threatens the subject's identity. Wilson's following regretful remark echoes the reaction described by Girard:

> in spite of the bravado with which in public I made a point of treating him and his pretensions, I secretly felt that I feared him, and could not help thinking the equality which he maintained so easily with myself, a proof of his true superiority.[89]

The double's superiority lies in his equality to the character, in other words, in his ability to eclipse the first Wilson. Curiously, Wilson begins to fear his double before realizing their identical resemblance. Thus, the fear arises from the other's ability to *equal* him, not only in appearance, but in action and status as well. This rapport between social and physical doubling evokes the substitution we witness between Anne and Annette. These two characters are socially acknowledged as doubles by a common social status, which in their case is mourning. Perceiving her daughter as a rival who overshadows her social position, Anne is rendered vulnerable.

Similarly, Wilson develops hatred for his threatening double. The two Wilsons split and progress as counterparts in opposing movements, the first falling into a life of debauchery and crime, while the latter returns repeatedly to remind the first of his progressive downfall. Wilson attributes his weakness and enslavement to his desires, ironically named "his *will*," and to heredity:

> I am the descendant of a race whose imaginative and easily excitable temperament has at all times rendered them remarkable; and, in my earliest infancy, *I gave evidence of having fully inherited the family character*. As I advanced in years it was more strongly developed; […] I grew self-willed, addicted to the wildest caprices, and a prey to the most ungovernable passions.

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[89] Edgar Allan Poe, "William Wilson," in *Poetry and Tales*, 342.

> Weak-minded, and beset with constitutional infirmities akin to my own, my parents could do but little to check the evil propensities which distinguished me. […] I was left to the guidance of my own will, and became, in all but name, the master of my own actions.[90]

Pronouncing himself doomed, as if robbed of agency by heredity, Wilson believes himself destined to a degenerative descent into evil. Doubtlessly, these rational explanations reflect contemporary theories of Darwinian evolution and heredity, which greatly influenced contemporary positivist thought.

Wilson's mastery of his own actions is challenged by his double, while no one else perceives the latter's identical nature to the first. Since early childhood, Wilson's will[91] has carried authority in his family. Rivaled only by the double who watches over his actions,[92] Wilson attempts to eliminate the one who repeatedly opposes his choices and actions. As we can see, the fantastical genre embodies an externalized version of the subject's conscience. In numerous fantastical texts, the attempt to kill the double leads to the death of the subject. In Poe's text, the second Wilson pronounces this mirrored death sentence to his killer:

> You have conquered, and I yield. Yet, henceforth art thou also dead – dead to the World, to Heaven and to Hope! In me didst thou exist – and, in my death, see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou hast murdered thyself.[93]

The double never attains full autonomy from the subject, remaining inextricable from the *original*. However, freedom from the other is just as unattainable for the subject. We can therefore conclude that Wilson's death to the other, incarnated by the double, whom he

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[90] Edgar Allan Poe, "William Wilson," in *Poetry and Tales*, 338. [Emphasis added.]
[91] In chapter two, I will look more closely at the significance of William Wilson's name.
[92] It might be of interest to see if a link exists between the positivist notion of natural selection and the model of rivalry.
[93] Edgar Allan Poe, "William Wilson," in *Poetry and Tales*, 356-357.

kills, follows the concept of substitution, of one element by another, more dominant one. The first Wilson's incapacity or lack of will to face his own decline leads him to assimilate the double's probing gaze, transforming it into self-perception.

Fantastical literature provides us with variations on the rivaling relationships between the character and the double. Gautier's "Avatar" is yet another variation of the rivaling relationship between the character and the double. In this text, the main character confronts his double in a duel. The double in this story represents confusion in the identities of the two distinct characters. This confusion can be traced directly to Girard's concept of desire, by which the desire of one is directly dependent on that of another. In Gautier's text, Octave's desire for Olaf's wife leads him to orchestrate a change of position, which results in life-threatening rivalry between the two men.

In Maupassant's novels and the countless short stories, rivalry appears in various forms: between brothers (*Pierre et Jean*) and villagers ("Le trou") where the rival is clearly another subject, but also between the character of "Le Horla" and the mysterious, invisible being that haunts him. Even *le Horla*, which disturbs the character's self-perception and ultimately drives him to suicide, finds a rational explanation. In stories such as "Un lâche" however, the opponent is misleading. Whereas Signoles, the main character, declares a duel against Georges Lamil, we are progressively led to believe that the opponent is not Lamil, but is rather within the main character himself. Signoles is unable to identify his opponent and thus his social status. Consequently, he cannot evaluate the threat Lamil could pose. Signoles's failure to identify Lamil mirrors the fragility of his own identity, which is absolutely dependent on and determined by social apprehension. Consequently, the structure of rivalry paired with instruments of

resemblance demands further interpretation of the double. As we will see in "Fini," *Fort comme la mort*, "Le masque" and "Un lâche," the image forms, questions, threatens and dissimulates the character's identity, while the relationship between the subject and his or her image is not a dualistic but rather a fragmented and fragmenting one. Through the image, identity mutates constantly, while remaining under the semblance of a unified whole.

Rivalry in Gautier's text is presented as follows. Octave falls in love with the unattainable countess Prascovie Labinska. The passion of his desire, unattainable to his present state, leads him to the enigmatic doctor, M. Balthazar Cherbonneau who, by exercising exotic medical technique, exchanges the souls of Octave and his rival, count Labinski. Octave's desire threatens and overpowers his physical identity, which he readily abandons in hopes of triumph. To his detriment, Octave fails to trump Prascovie's heart, which *recognizes* a foreignness within her husband's body. While reason triumphs over the heart, the body triumphs over Octave's and Olaf's identities. Thus, the duel proves unfruitful, for killing the other would result in one's own death. Consequently, this dead-end position concludes with a resolution between the two characters.[94]

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[94] Théophile Gautier, *Récits fantastiques* (Paris: Flammarion, 1981). The figures of the double in Gautier's text abound. He juxtaposes two forms of doubling: an androgynous double incarnated by Olaf and Prascovie's absolute love, which the narrator describes as "dualité dans l'unité" that creates "l'harmonie complète" (Gautier, 298) and the doubling that we see in the rivalry between Olaf and Octave. The narrator sets up an impossible duel scene: "En effet, chacun avait devant soi son propre corps et devait enfoncer l'acier dans une chair qui lui appartenait encore la veille. – Le combat se compliquait d'*une sorte de suicide non prévue*, et, quoique braves tous deux, Octave et le comte éprouvaient une instinctive horreur à se trouver l'épée à la main en face de leurs fantômes et prêts à fondre sur eux-mêmes" (Gautier, 363-364). [Emphasis added.]. According the narrator, the duel transforms into a form of suicide. Octave and Olaf face two options in this impossible situation, either proceed with the duel, which would in effect result in a suicide, or back down from the fight, which would betray the honorable status of the duel as a practice. Choosing the latter solution, the two characters jeopardize their identity, which, as we saw in Maupassant's "Un lâche," risks being tainted with the mark of cowardice, guaranteeing thus a symbolic social rejection. In other words, Octave and Olaf find themselves in a dead-end position, either of suicide or of social expulsion. The only escape from this deadlocked situation rests in the hands of Octave, who at last decides

The ambiguity we saw in "William Wilson," appears literally in Gautier's text. In both stories, the confrontation leads the character to project his unstable identity outward onto what will be his rival.[95] The consequent "internal division,"[96] as Pierre Bayard explains in his book entitled *Maupassant, juste avant Freud* (1994), is first and foremost linked to one's relationship with the stranger (*étranger*). However, as Bayard insists, the subject attributes to the unknown other what he calls a "*préforme*." Preceding the encounter with the stranger, this *préforme* makes place for the "*connu dans l'inconnu*," which, in one's failed repression, the subject expulses outward.[97] The uncanny encounter with the unknown is thus experienced as a threat, precisely due to the link between the two subjects. Rivalry and the duel, in these two fantastical texts as well as in several of Maupassant's texts, take the figure of the double as their model, in order to represent the subject's relation to his or her social status.

The Duel

The significance and evolution of the duel can help us better understand the nature of the double. While Maupassant's characters systematically experience their identity as a threat to a unitary sense of self, the duel, as an act that reinstates one's honor and thus one's social status acquires a meaning during the 19th century that differs from the

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to reunite Olaf's soul with his body, knowing also that Prascovie would not accept his partially foreign being.

[95] It is interesting to note that the examples of rivalry leading to a duel concern male characters. The examples of rivalry among women that we have seen thus far, such as the conflict between Anne and Annette in *Fort comme la mort*, never reach the possibility of a true confrontation. In the cases of discord concerning female characters, the conflict consistently leads to acceptance.

[96] In French, "division interne." Pierre Bayard, *Maupassant juste avant Freud* (Paris: Minuit, 1994) 47.

[97] Ibid., 34. "Forme classique de l'Autre, le double pose cette évidence qu'il n'y a pas d'Autre extérieur sans une division interne". This concept of the schism of the ego echoes Kristeva's theory of the other within the subject. The desperate need for unity of one's identity, as we will see in Maupassant's characters, suggests the subject's fragmentation.

preceding centuries. The duel,[98] as the word itself suggests, is a problematic of the double, defined as combat between two rivals fighting to the reinstatement of social integrity. During the 19th century, this practice gains more popularity than ever. The motive of honor, as we see up to the French Revolution, loses substance and is replaced with motives of interest. In other words, no longer being used in defense of the rigid social structure preceding the French Revolution, it reflects the era of the rising bourgeoisie and speculation. Therefore, it justifies questionable financial and social actions, in the benefit of profit, criticized cynically by Maupassant and his naturalist literary predecessors, such as Zola.

Maupassant's ironic critique of the duel in the newspaper article entitled "Le duel" (*Gil Blas*, December 8, 1881) can help us understand the shift in the meaning of this practice. Why does one duel, he asks: "Pour le point d'honneur, monsieur. Jadis on connaissait l'honneur. Aujourd'hui, il est enterré sous la Bourse ; on ne connaît plus que l'argent. La fréquence des duels tient beaucoup à cela."[99] Once again, despite its longtime interdiction, the duel grows in popularity in the time of Maupassant. In this society of profit, *honor* is acquired by interest and speculation, and the aim of the duel is to launder one's honor:

> Le duel est la sauvegarde des suspects. Les douteux, les véreux, les compromis essayent par là de se refaire une *virginité d'occasion*. […] L'honneur ! oh ! pauvre vieux mot d'autrefois, quel pitre on fait de toi !
> Comme on te blanchit […].[100]

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[98] For more on this subject, see François Guillet, *La mort en face: Histoire du duel de la Révolution à nos jours* (Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 2008).

[99] Guy de Maupassant, "Le duel," in *Guy de Maupassant. Chroniques*, in vol. I, 389.

[100] Ibid. [Emphasis added.]

According to Maupassant's article, the 19th century concept of honor resembles the concept of sexuality at that time, whose power acquires its strength through social relations, while exceeding sexuality by the restoration of purity. In *Bel-Ami* for instance, Duroy rises in social status and gains power in great part through the use of sexuality. However, with its possibility to restore what Maupassant calls "une virginité d'occasion," the duel exceeds sexuality's ability of empowerment.

What had once served as a tool to reiterate honor and integrity, – and therefore also the stability of one's identity – has become a method of justifying the subject's ambiguity. With social mobility, the concept of honor changes, acquiring meaning that is itself flexible. This flexibility implies at once an opening toward opportunity and perversion. Despite the change in motive, the duel seeks to restore a semblance of the word's previous connotation.

With the duel, one seeks to reinforce a social identity rivaled by an other. For this reason, the duel and the figure of the double coincide. The two opponents attempt to defend the semblance of unity of their otherwise unstable social identity. For Maupassant's characters, the subject's rival is one's own ambivalent identity, which one attempts to cleanse with the duel. In this sense, the main objective of the duel, honor or not, is to uphold a stable representation of identity.

While fantastical characters, such as William Wilson, are confronted with a split psyche, identity in Maupassant's characters does not have such a distinctly split form. Instead, a shift occurs in the representation of the ego, from the double – a schism, in which identity is nevertheless defined and has a referent – to the multiple, consisting of

fragments that reflect the subject's social experience.[101] In Maupassant's texts, this indetermination translates into a threat; the characters' identity is always elusive, as if before a void as an anguish-instilling opening.

By his obsessive representation of the subject's anguish before his or her "indiscernible" identity,[102] Maupassant redirects the rivaling struggle inward, between self-perception and the unconscious. However, once a distinct separation can no longer be made between the two parts, representation of the ego as a rivaling double no longer holds. In other words, turned inward into a fragmented ego, the rivalry is no longer between two entities. In fact, in a literary representation, the fragments cannot truly be opposed to each other because they do not claim autonomy of their own. Rather, they are inextricable one from another. In this sense too, an attempt to annihilate the other within would suggest suicide to the subject.[103]

Being progressively perceived as a constantly mutating form, – de-centered, contrary to the idea of a stable, unchanging set of dispositions – identity is approached with the scientific certainty of positivism. In other words, the instability and fragmentation of identity gives rise to a scientific approach that seeks to counter this movement. Consequently, Maupassant's representation of identity coincides with the birth of psychoanalysis. By tracing the ego's construction to society's influence, psychoanalysis theorizes its de-centered, reflexive structure. This shift in the figuring of

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[101] Identity here resembles more Deleuze's figure of the "fold", defined by its infinite position of the in-between. According to Deleuze, "[tout] se passe comme si les replis de la matière n'avaient pas leur raison en eux-mêmes. C'est que le Pli est toujours entre deux plis […]"(Gilles Deleuze, *Le pli : Leibniz et le Baroque*, 19).

[102] Antonia Fonyi evokes the duplicity in Maupassant's oeuvre as a repetition of stories much alike, rendered unique by their social influences: "[Je] lis la reproduction de la même histoire environ trois cents fois, tout en m'étonnant de la variété des récits qui, à l'instar des enfants semés par le même père à travers l'espace, sont toujours modelés par le milieu, social, moral, psychique, thématique, esthétique, où ils s'intègrent" (*Maupassant 1993*, 24).

[103] In chapter three, I will look more closely at the recurring theme of suicide in Maupassant's works.

the ego places the other in the privileged relation to the subject, redirecting all further conception of identity as the subject's two-way mirror position. As Bayard elaborates in his study, Maupassant's work is particularly close to psychoanalytic theory. The rival in the author's works is the transformation of the figure of the double, and is revealed by the character's complex and often conflictual identity.

In Maupassant's characters, we witness two simultaneous movements, the projection of one's "foreignness" outward and the introjection of the subject's image. This double movement is paradoxical because one cannot concretely define the foreignness within as an accumulation of various coexisting elements. Consequently, this leads the characters to question the boundaries of their identity.[104] The uncanny nature of repetition and recognition of the familiar within the foreign in Maupassant's characters becomes an experience of misrecognition and anguish. What one thought to have known or recognized as one's own, is in fact foreign, thus breaking down the idea of a stable identity. Louis Marin's definition of the image as an object of representation resembles the uncanny doubling described by Freud. While being directly linked to the subject, the double attains a power of its own over the subject's pursuit to liberate him or herself from it. Thus, according to Marin, the image can no longer be defined simply as the object of representation, for it acquires its own autonomy.[105] While in Maupassant's works the subject's fragmented identity exists in an abyssal game of reflection, – we saw this in *Fort comme la mort*, with the painting and the mirror, in "Fini," with the mirror, and in "Le masque," with the mask – the subject confronts his or her aging and thus approaching death through the image that constantly reflects the threatening transformation that

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[104] We will see this particularly in the third chapter, with Maupassant's short story called "Suicides."
[105] See Louis Marin, *Des pouvoirs de l'image : Gloses* (Paris : Seuil, 1993).

impedes a coincidence between the image and the subject. Hegel, quoted by Marin, captures particularly well this struggle: "'Le destin est la conscience de soi, mais comme d'un ennemi".'[106]

"[C]ette *étrange* réflexion de soi sur soi dans le mouvement d'absolu du désir qui pose le sujet comme moi non dans son identité, ni même dans le mouvement de l'identification de soi, mais dans une totale altérité : par l'Autre comme un autre soi," writes Marin.[107] *Estranged* from oneself by the reflexive link to one's own image, the Maupassantian subject finds him or herself in a trap. The subject of entrapment in Maupassant's works has influenced two particularly extensive works, Micheline Besnard-Coursodon's *Etude thématique et structurale de l'oeuvre de Maupassant : le piège* and Antonia Fonyi's *Maupassant 1993*. As a number of Maupassant's texts show, it is the other who reveals to the main character his or her own identity, as that which defies coincidence between the self and the image. Fonyi's analysis focuses on the process by which, in a first attempt to escape from one's entrapment, the Maupassantian character finds him or herself back in the original enclosure, which, with the experience of comparison, had become ever more oppressive. In *Fort comme la mort*, this process is clear; upon Anne's attempt to destroy the image that reflects back to her the fatal confirmation of the displacement between her self and her image, in constant failure to coincide, she gives in to her strange mirror image, scrupulously following its transformation, as if that of another.

Fonyi's elaboration of entrapment implies necessarily that the outside is just as much of a trap as the inside. Instead of a material double, as we see in fantastical

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[106] Ibid., 18.
[107] Ibid., 17.

literature, the image as a figure of resemblance shifts to the mediation of the mirror and other modes of replication. In Maupassant's texts, this relationship with the image breaks down into a multiple, infinite chain of mirroring. In other words, identity is not represented as a number of doubles, but rather as a complex structure of identifications and projections, existing between the "self" and "society."[108] In "Un lâche" and the other texts analyzed in this chapter, confrontation with alterity destroys a closed, stable perception of one's identity, finding themselves instead face to face with a fragmented mass of identifications, which, at the critical moment brought on by the interaction with the other, fails to hold up.

The figure of the double is paradoxical. As Bayard explains: "la ressemblance extérieure se fonde sur une dissemblance intérieure, qu'elle manifeste en la rendant visible,"[109] echoing Freud's concept of the uncanny. In this sense, resemblance in Maupassant's texts alienates. Both, resemblance and fragmentation are revealed at the level of the language, with puns and double-entendres so often used by the author. For instance, the ambiguous *comme*, both a link to and alienation of the character that consistently reappears in the writer's works, sets up a scene of resemblance by which the subject is lost in a string of reproductions, finding his or her individuality and sense of singularity at risk. The device of the *comme* does not create a positive link between two resemblances. Instead, the subject has two options, which are in reality but one, and what Ph. Bonnefis calls "[une] désunion ou cette parodie d'union."[110] The dissolution of the parody, like the lifting of a mask, does not destroy the image, as Anne attempts to

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[108] Deleuze's notion of the *multiple* seems to be particularly significant in interpreting identity of Maupassantian characters. He defines it as follows: "ce n'est pas seulement ce qui a beaucoup de parties, mais ce qui est plié de beaucoup de façons" (Deleuze, Gilles, *Le pli : Leibniz et le Baroque*, 5).

[109] Pierre Bayard, *Maupassant juste avant Freud*, 46.

[110] Philippe Bonnefis, *Comme Maupassant*, 55.

accomplish by shattering the mirror,[111] or as Signoles's friend feels to be the effect of Lamil's intrusive gaze.[112] In each case, the mirror creates a situation of estrangement in which the character feels alienated from his or herself. The attempt to break that link in the object of the mirror represents one's attempt at a symbolic death.

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[111] "Un jour, exaspérée par cette lutte entre elle et ce morceau de verre, elle le lança contre le mur où il se fendit et s'émietta" (Guy de Maupassant, *Fort comme la mort*, in vol. *Romans*, 997).
[112] "cet individu me gâte ma glace" ("Un lâche", in vol. *Contes et nouvelles I*, 1159).

CHAPTER TWO

Elusive Names, Troubled Genealogy

In this chapter, my analysis of identity in Maupassant's works will turn to the question of genealogy. As I've tried to show in the previous chapter, the author develops his characters' identity as a fragmented and multiple form, rather than as a stable and unified one. Visual representations of the subject – with mirrors, masks, portraits, and in certain inter-subjective relationships – reveal the disjunction between one's introjected image and the projected identity. Numerous textual examples illustrate the discordance between these two identitary fronts. Here, I would like to examine the social construction of genealogy, which in a significant number of texts bears the alienating and often fatal form of *entrapment*. It will be my aim to analyze the degenerative consequences of alienation, as they present appear in Maupassant's texts.

Entrapment is not a new subject in Maupassantian criticism; a number of studies offer an extensive analysis of this theme, particularly Micheline Besnard-Coursodon's *Etude thématique et structurale de l'oeuvre de Maupassant: le piège* and Antonia Fonyi's *Maupassant 1993*. While Besnard-Coursodon gives a large overview of various forms of entrapment and enclosure, Fonyi traces a particular repetitive mechanism in the works. In this mechanism, the character finds him or herself trapped, followed by an escape from this enclosure. The place of escape having then become itself a trap leads the character to return to the previous state, which meanwhile has "shrunk" and become ever more

unbearable.[113] Further in her analysis Fonyi writes: "Le mariage est clôture, la famille, le travail, la patrie le sont, de même que la solitude, le désoeuvrement, l'exclusion."[114] Consequently, all social institutions have the potential of taking on the form of a trap. In fact, the asphyxiating nature of entrapments reflects in a vast number of Maupassant's texts. Thus, all relations, whether they are in a social class or a convention, or in a stifling relationship, such as the family, lead to the same existential end. The narrative itself, as we will see, has the structure of an encapsulated chain, by which the narrative voice is passed along to various points of view, each depending on the perspective of the preceding one, thus putting into question the authenticity of the account. Furthermore, if expulsion from society is as encapsulating as one's integration in it, the characters' pursuit of freedom precipitates yet another trap, which necessarily implies that no true escape is thus possible. Yet, in order to analyze the characters' decline, the place of entrapment itself must first be questioned.

Inextricable from social influence, identity mirrors the entrapment that it appropriates. Reliance on one's youthful image, for instance, turns deadly when one no longer coincides with it. We see this with Anne's transformation in *Fort comme la mort*, as well as with the male characters of "Fini," "Adieu" and "Le masque." Their physical transformation, often revealed by another character, leaves them in a perplexed and dramatic state. Haunted by an image that they can no longer match, the characters perceive themselves from that moment on as fragmented or broken. Once overshadowed by doubt, identitary elements *privileged* by a character inevitably fragment and

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[113] Antonia Fonyi writes : "on se trouve dans un espace clos ; on sort dans l'espace ouvert ; on est repris dans le clos, dans le même ou dans l'autre, souvent plus resserré qu'auparavant et presque toujours néfaste" (*Maupassant 1993*, 29-30).

[114] Ibid., 34.

disintegrate. In other words, social conventions become traps once their consistency is threatened. As we witness in a majority of characters, the place of entrapment shifts from the enclosure of a reflexive bond – between the subject's self-perception and that which he or she perceives as imprisonment – to the intermediate state of a fragmented identity.

I would like to focus on two major implications that genealogy has on the characters' identity. First, I will address the subject of the proper name as a reflection or vehicle of the characters' fragmentation. Functioning as genealogical and legal identification, the proper name connotes property and ownership, while symbolizing genealogical continuation. While the proper name has traditionally mirrored the perpetuating paternal authority in the family dynamic, Maupassant raises questions of genealogy in light of the waning paternal power. This change in paternal authority ultimately reflects the changing social and political situation at the time. In Maupassant's texts, proper names are systematically weak and repetitive, while the paternal figure is often interchangeable. This leads to the question of legitimacy, which the author expresses from the perspectives of the father and the child. The stories of "Monsieur Parent" and "Le champ d'oliviers" present exemplary cases of stagnation in the power of the paternal figure. In contrast to the figure of the father, unstable and threatened with substitution, the mother is often attributed to social and financial profit. The author portrays her as monstrous because she opposes her "natural" functions of motherhood. In "La mère aux monstres," for instance, the mother uses her biological capacities for social and financial profit by creating deformed offspring that she then sells to circus exhibitors. While this story presents an extreme and grotesque image of the mother, it is nevertheless emblematic of the maternal figure in most of Maupassant's texts. Genealogical

legitimacy does not efface the mother's interest. In contrast, the father, as figure and name, is weak, inconsistent, inexistent even, reflecting the characters' uncertainty with regards to their genealogical identity.

I will begin with an analysis of Maupassant's use of proper names. The name, as in the example of Monsieur Parent, betrays its beholder. Thus, proper names suffer the threat of repetition and mutation, as the characters suffer the threat of substitution. "Tout est interchangeable chez Maupassant," writes Fonyi, "toute différence est instable,"[115] this implies all social constructions defining the individual, including the proper name. I will then continue with a study of genealogy, itself unstable and fragmented. Finally, I will conclude by directing attention to the predominance of decline among many characters. It will be my aim to show that the majority of Maupassant's characters confront the limitations of their social position – and thus of their identity in general – as asphyxiating traps, which in turn leads them to decline and alienation.

1. Proper Names

Repetitions

The proper name, as a rudimentary representation of lineage, will be our entryway into the fragmented genealogical identity of Maupassantian characters. It claims to be the unquestionable starting point and authentication of social and legal identity. It remains as proof of existence beyond death, as well as an ultimate, inextricable and unique link to its referred individual. Other literary studies of Maupassant have already developed the

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[115] Ibid., 149.

question of repetitions and variations of proper names,[116] particularly Philippe Bonnefis's *Comme Maupassant*, which traces these mutations throughout the author's work.

The function of the proper name is twofold: in some cases it effaces the difference between the characters, as mere variations of each other, in others, it acts as a *label* of the characters' identity, bluntly stating a present or absent quality. "Monsieur Parent" is a particularly good example of this, for the name *Parent* ironically coincides with the character's loss of paternity. However, it is also this loss that will trigger his decline. Thus, in many texts, such as "Monsieur Parent" and *Fort comme la mort*, proper names carry an antithetical connotation to the character's identity, and consequently coincide with the dramatic turn in the story. As we will see throughout this part, the signification and repetitions of proper names reflect the interchangeability among the characters.

If the proper name legitimizes one's genealogical identity, in Maupassant's texts, it functions as a vehicle of replacement, or effacement. In *Fort comme la mort*, for instance, Anne is disappropriated of her youthful identity by her daughter Annette, who takes her social position. Not only does the name *Annette* reflect the mother's name as a variation, it is also transformed into a diminutive version of Anne, as one that follows in the footsteps of the first. Thus, *Annette* represents the chain of generations between the two women. In fact, the entire novel is structured around a succession of generations, beginning with Anne's mourning of her mother and ending in her own physical degradation. While the paternal name carries the proof of lineage and material heritage for the male characters, the substitution among the women is represented by the first name. In other words, the female characters are neither defined by nor reduced to their

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[116] See Philippe Bonnefis, *Comme Maupassant*, PUL, Lille, 1981. See especially chapter four, "Spéculations" (93-113). In this text, Bonnefis analyzes the repetition of names that frequently appears in Maupassant's texts. He shows that, for the author, names serve as mutations of one another.

last name. Instead, their social identity is defined by their physical and maternal attributes. This is particularly significance because, as we will see with other textual examples, the male characters are irreversibly bound to their name. In turn, the male characters' identity coincides with their name. The women in Maupassant's work, however, are reduced to the interchangeability of the first name, which in itself is devoid of social and genealogical weight.

Ironically, in "Monsieur Parent," the main character's proper name echoes his obsessive quest for truth concerning his paternity, mocking endlessly his questionable status. As we will see, doubt overshadows the character's thoughts and anchors his entire life on a void. In other words, his life is inscribed in uncertainty alone, by which *he is not a parent*, while remaining unable to free himself from the negation that defines him. With his legitimacy in question, *Parent* is not a name that he will pass on.

In "Papa de Simon," the author shifts the perspective of illegitimacy to that of a child. Raised by his mother alone, Simon confronts his schoolmates who bully and criticize his fatherless family situation. In response, he attempts to *adopt* a local villager as his father, and thus to acquire a patronymic that would defend him from his illegitimate position. Without a traceable lineage, the individual is represented here as vulnerable and ungrounded. In Simon's case, any name seems to be better than none at all. Several elements are of particular interest in Simon's choice of Philippe Remy, "le forgeron" as his *adopted* father.[117] The profession of blacksmith itself suggests a forgery or a copy, of a name in this case. Thus, the father figure is a construction that Simon attempts to produce of his own will. Yet this construction is a forgery, a false copy of an

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[117] Interestingly, in English, *forgeron* is translated as *blacksmith*, which has been transformed into the common family name of *Smith*. Thus, the father figure is banal, common, and in this text, reproducible.

original or legitimate figure, a replacement, *remis* into the absence of a name. In this sense, the name bears no genealogical significance in the traditional sense, and is thus devoid of social value. However, Simon's fabrication coincides with Maupassant's persistent critique of the father figure as a weak and unstable construction. Paternal identity is weak because the characters are reduced to it, and which can at the same time be transposed. In addition, *Philippe Remy* consists of two first names, rendering the patronymic weak in genealogical power.

We also find a weakened, de-fathered patronymic in *Pierre et Jean*, a novel that is anchored on illegitimacy. In the seemingly typical family, – consisting of Madame and Monsieur Roland, and their two contrasting sons, Pierre and Jean, – we learn of Jean's illegitimacy when he receives considerable inheritance from Maréchal, his biological father. Like Parent, Monsieur Roland is the object of systematic ridicule and contempt by his dominating wife. In turn, his name, Roland, like Remy, could be mistaken for a first name. Consequently, in all three texts, the male characters' paternal identity is effaced by a weak patronymic. Furthermore, Roland cannot compete with the honorable name of Maréchal, symbolizing a high-ranking military or government official. Monsieur Roland will unknowingly cede the weight of his paternal status to Maréchal, in exchange for Jean's inheritance. While the father figure in "Papa de Simon" is *adopted*, in *Pierre et Jean*, it is bought.

We have already seen a similar type of mirroring between the first and last names, as it relates to genealogical lineage, in Edgar Allan Poe's "William Wilson." Whereas the Maupassantian father figure is threatened with dissolution, in Poe's story, the name chains the character to his personality. In this text, Wilson attributes his character-type to

the hereditary link to his ancestors. In other words, his name too is an inheritance, which unfolds infinitely throughout his lineage. William is the son of Wilson, which necessarily implies that the father's name is William as well, reiterating an entrapment in the genealogical chain. Interchangeability among the Maupassantian characters, however, does not come from genealogical lineage but from the character's confrontation with the weakening of these traditional identitary characteristics.

The Infinitely Signifying Name

Proper names mimic the methodical approach of positivist thought, which seeks to substitute the extraordinary with a rational perspective. While authenticating an individual as unique, the proper name also enters the subject into a system, a mechanism, and thus into a repetition or variation. In this sense, Wilson is *disappropriated* from a sense of uniqueness, and is instead reattached to a genealogical, and thus a reflexive lineage. In other words, Wilson is the son of Wilson who is himself but a son of Wilson who is himself but a son of Wilson….

The question of the proper name in Maupassant's texts exceeds the banality of repetition and mimicry. The kind of *serial naming* we find with Maupassant retracts the subject into a mass of interchangeable beings. Whereas in many texts proper names function as variations of one another, in many others they show a deliberately complex unfolding of meaning. In this latter case, naming is *implicitly* central to the interpretation of a character's identity. The story of "Un lâche" presents a particularly fruitful example of this; in fact, the name of the main character contains within it numerous aspects of the text: cowardice, the signature, nobility and social status, the conjunction of man and the

machine. All of these aspects are significant to the interpretation of the text, which can be retraced by a dissection and a close analysis of the character's name.

Therefore, in an attempt to decipher Signoles's identity, we are also tempted to decipher his name. In fact, the question of the proper name structures the entire text. The story opens as follows:

> On l'appelait dans le monde : le « beau Signoles ». Il se nommait le vicomte Gontran-Joseph de Signoles.
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> Orphelin et maître d'une fortune suffisante, il faisait figure, comme on dit. Il avait de la tournure et de l'allure, assez de parole pour faire croire à de l'esprit, une certaine grâce naturelle, un air de noblesse et de fierté, la moustache brave et l'œil doux, ce qui plaît aux femmes.
>
> Il était demandé dans les salons, recherché par les valseuses, et il inspirait aux hommes cette inimitié souriante qu'on a pour les gens de figure énergique. On lui avait soupçonné quelques amours capables de donner fort bonne opinion d'un garçon. Il vivait heureux, tranquille, dans le bien-être moral le plus complet. On savait qu'il tirait bien l'épée et mieux encore le pistolet.[118]

The choice in the order of the first two sentences reveals a peculiar sense of priority. The character's nickname, and thus his socially mundane identity, precedes the legal one. The nickname "beau Signoles" also echoes the well-known name of *Beau* Brummell, considered as the first and ultimate dandy.[119] As we will see, the ambiguity of Signoles's descriptions resemble the elusive manner in which literary texts describe Brummell, such as Barbey d'Aurevilly's *Du dandysme et de George Brummell* (1845) et William Jesse's

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[118] Guy de Maupassant, "Un lâche," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles I*, 1159.

[119] Brummell is the subject of numerous literary texts, including Barbey d'Aurevilly's essay entitled *Du dandysme et de George Brummell* (1845) and Baudelaire's "Le Dandy" in *Le peintre de la vie moderne* (1863). Several theoretical texts are also of particular interest, notably Françoise Coblence's *Le Dandysme, obligation d'incertitude* (Paris: PUF, 1988) and Roger Kempf's introduction to a collection of texts on the subject of dandyism, entitled "Du délire et du rien," in *Sur le dandysme: Balzac, Barbey d'Aurevilly, Baudelaire* (Paris: Union générale d'édition, 1971). Finally, *The Life of George Brummell, Esq.* (1886), a unique bibliographical text of George Brummell, written by his contemporary William Jesse, provides us with a rare account of this truly unique figure.

biography of the great dandy entitled *The Life of George Brummell, Esq* (1886).[120] Consequently, we find a parallel between the two *beaux*, one historical, the other fictional.

It is also not insignificant that the first sentence of the text begins with the pronoun "on", unlike the second starting with "il". *On*, representing the general other, is the underlying thread in the text, suggesting from the start that the undefined other will overpower the character's decisions, actions, and identity in general. Fearing fatal consequences of the duel that he declared against Georges Lamil, Signoles also fears the possibility that the others might notice his fright. In fact, this fear of the other exceeds the possibility of death because the visibility of his fear threatens his carefully constructed façade. As the title suggests, Signoles's ephemeral identity reposes on cowardice, which provides for an escape from concrete proof. Under the scrutinizing gaze of the other, his *tournure* and *allure* allow for no concrete and stable structure to his identity.[121]

Signoles carries an honorable title of viscount and an elaborate name, especially so when compared to the name of his duel opponent, Georges Lamil. Despite his title and name, Signoles is an orphan[122]. In other words, he and his name are extracted from lineage. He is the one and only element in the lineage, in reference to no other genealogical link but himself. This genealogical cut renders his name untraceable, with no concrete origin. If the proper name loses its genealogical weight, then adopting a new one, as we might find in a certain bourgeois practice in post-Revolutionary France, would

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[120] William Jesse, *The Life of George Brummell, Esq.* (London, ed. John C. Nimmo, 1886).

[121] Signoles is a fragmented Maupassantian character *par excellence*, whom even the text itself fails to describe in a *concrete* way. The descriptions of his identity all point to the fact that it escapes definition. The character is able to embody his constantly mutating identity until it is put to the test by Lamil's anonymity and apparent social insignificance, thus interfering with Signoles's mastery of his social setting.

[122] "Orphelin et maître d'une fortune suffisante […]" ("Un lâche," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles I*, 1159).

reflect the fragmented identity of the character. The aristocratic nostalgia of the bourgeois gives rise to a fabrication of an identity by financial and social speculation, as well as by the appropriation of titles of nobility. Similarly, in *Bel-Ami*,[123] upon fabricating a place for himself in a higher social class, Georges Duroy ennobles his name. He boldly transforms *Duroy* to *du Roy de Cantel*, which clearly implies a proximity to the king, yet to a king whose origin is provincial. Therefore, despite Duroy's manipulations of his name, nobility here is paradoxically juxtaposed to the obscure provincial region of Cantel. "Orphelin et maître d'une fortune suffisante,"[124] Signoles's origin is also untraceable, thus we can consider that he had adopted a name to ennoble himself with a distinguished title. With *Signoles* however, we find a semblance of the word *ignoble*, from Latin *ignobilis*, signifying "unknown, obscure, of low birth." Thus, under the pretense of nobility, lies an ignoble origin. We can infer that by his cowardice, instead of *s'anoblir* Signoles *s'ignoblit*.

The intricate trail of definitions links many elements within the name to the text's descriptions of Signoles as a character. What is most obvious, his ephemeral identity – particularly dependent on and determined by the other – is reflected in the word *signe*, which his name contains. *Sign* refers here to his fluid, indiscernible social identity to which he seeks to correspond to. The text presents him as follow: "[…] il faisait *figure*, comme on dit. Il avait de la *tournure* et de *l'allure*, assez de grâce naturelle, un *air* de noblesse et de fierté, la moustache brave et l'œil doux."[125] His social success relies solely on these impressions which themselves are devoid of substance. Neither "faire figure,"

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[123] The analogy between the two texts, *Bel Ami* and "Un lâche", is legitimate if we consider that the short story reappears nearly verbatim in the novel.
[124] Guy de Maupassant, "Un lâche", in vol. *Contes et nouvelles I*, 1159.
[125] Ibid. [Emphasis added.]

nor having "la tournure," "l'allure" or "un air" gives to the reader an imaginable description of the character. All elements are linked to appearance, while none have a physical, concrete substance. In fact, one can project any form and interpretation onto these elusive characteristics. Furthermore, we know nothing of Signoles except what others perceive of him. The text continues:

> Il était demandé dans les salons, recherché par les valseuses, et il inspirait aux hommes cette inimitié souriante qu'on a pour les gens de figure énergique. On lui avait soupçonné quelques amours capables de donner fort bonne opinion d'un garçon.[126]

He is capable of seducing and inspiring admiration of men and women alike. Once again, the text opens: 'On l'appelait dans le monde : le "beau Signoles",' echoing in "le beau Signoles" the word "le rossignol." *Le rossignol*, or the nightingale in English, is a bird that has for centuries been associated with poetry, the troubadours and seduction. Maupassant himself evokes this poetic association to love in his short story entitled "Une partie de campagne" (1881).[127] He subverts a certain common belief and transforms it into an object of illusion, pessimism and loss.[128] While the link might at first appear distant, extraneous even, looking closer at the definitions of *rossignol*, we find the unfolding point of the character's name.

The *Trésor de la langue française* dictionary defines the voice of the nightingale as "la pureté, la variété du chant aux sonorités éclatantes et harmonieuses."[129] These

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[126] Ibid.

[127] The nightingale appears in other stories by Maupassant, notably in "Une partie de campagne" (vol. *Contes et nouvelles I*).

[128] This is a device often used by the author. With the underlying pessimism that spans Maupassant's entire oeuvre, he seeks to reveal interested motives behind apparent innocence. For instance, a mother's love might be driven by financial gain, a man might take cover in priesthood to sever himself from the consequences of his past, while the apparent bravery and idealism of another might mask cowardice.

[129] "rossignol," *Le Trésor de la Langue Française informatisé*, <http://atilf.atilf.fr/tlf.htm>.

characteristics have been used in analogy to songs of love and seduction. The pure, translucent voice of the bird mutates its melodies, varied and multiple, just as Signoles manipulates his allure. The elusive nature of the text's description of Signoles reflects his mastery of appearance. He must continuously transform his image in order to maintain his superior yet ambiguous status. It is not only the individual variations that seduce the other, but also the mutability itself, which teases the public with its ungraspable proximity.

With seduction itself, one seeks to lure the other in with embellished speech or gestures. The verity of the words' meaning is overshadowed by the *tournure* and style, shedding light on what the other desires. Blinding the listener with their self-love, flattery and seduction act as a mirror that reflects only what one wishes the other to perceive. Similarly, in the scene at the café, Signoles, as master of his image, also fabricates the other's pleasure. By appropriating the other's feeling of insult as his own, he simulates an air of bravery.

The association of the character's name to the nightingale becomes all the more relevant in conjunction to the title of the text. Cowardice bears significance here not only from a psychological dimension but also from a linguistic one. Unfolding Signoles's name further, we find that it contains the title of the text itself. The English name of *nightingale* is peculiar in its insistence on the night. In fact, the male bird sings at night to attract the female, drawing her in with his address, rather than with his physical beauty, which does not particularly distinguish the bird. Thus, the female nightingale gravitates to her mate solely by his chant. The Latin *luscinus* for *rossignol* has the double meaning of "blindness." It finds root in *luscus*, which signifies "blind" or one who only has one eye,

"*louche*" in French. Furthermore, the Latin word for nightingale could be considered as a double negative that would cancel out its consistency, for *lusc-* (blind) and *nus-* (night) reveal Signole's blindness toward his own lack of form, of consistent identity. His fear alone of being perceived as something other than what he projects himself to be, fearing that his fear will disturb the image that he so desperately upholds, will finally lead him to suicide. His blindness however does not rely on internal insight, as we might find in mythological figures such as Tiresias, who with blindness attains superior knowledge. Instead, it represents the character's weakness and lack, which consequently precipitate his death.

As already mentioned, the given definition of *luscus* also points to "*louche*," or cross-eyed, a gaze that wanders, that does not hold. And it is by this word that we are led to the title of the story itself, for *lâche* is linked to *louche* by one's inability to uphold and abandonment. *Lascio*, a derivative of *lascare*, or *lâcher* in French, is defined as *attirer* and *séduire*,[130] bringing us back to the nightingale's seductive chant. In other words, we find a connection between blindness, seduction and cowardice. Not only does Signoles seduce others with his elusive appearance, he is himself blind to his own fragmented identity. He masks this fragmentation with embellished images of himself, which, threatened, reveal his cowardice before a void.

The numerous links and associations to the character's name evoked here do not imply that the character's identity is imprinted in his name. Instead, the proper name has a function in the development of the subject's identity. With these texts, we find Maupassant's deliberate use of the name in embedding the underlying and implicit

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[130] This definition is taken from the *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue française*, eds. Oscar Bloch, Walther von Wartburg.

personality traits of a character. Names act as traps because they carry a trace of the character's identity, despite one's attempt to efface certain aspects of it. Proper names as variations and repetitions or as complex signifiers all reflect the fragmented and unstable identity of Maupassantian characters. Geoffrey Bennington, in his book entitled *Jacques Derrida* written in collaboration with Derrida, evokes this troubling relationship of the proper name and the signature to one's identity. He writes:

> Nommer fait violence à l'unicité présumée qu'il est censé respecter, donne existence et la retire du même coup, le nom propre efface le propre qu'il promet, se casse ou tombe en ruine, il est la chance de la langue, aussitôt détruite : nommer dénomme, le nom propre déproprie, désapproprie, exapproprie dans ce qu'on appellera éventuellement abîme du propre ou de l'unique.[131]

Bennington's analysis of the proper name can help us better understand Maupassant's obsessive representation of characters. Through various social links such as the proper name, these characters systematically question their identity and face the disintegration of their sense of unicity. Consequently, characters either appear as copies of one another or as powerless subjects in the formation of their identity.

Signing in Blood

The story of "Un lâche" concludes with Signoles's suicide and his peculiar *signature* that authenticates the seemingly unfinished testament: 'Un jet de sang avait éclaboussé le papier blanc sur la table et faisait une grande tache rouge au-dessous de ces quatre mots: "Ceci est mon testament.".'[132] In this scene, Signoles's signature exceeds the acts of representation and authentication of his identity. Instead, it substitutes the

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[131] Geoffrey Bennington, Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1991) 102.
[132] Guy de Maupassant, "Un lâche," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles I*, 1166.

character. Extracted from a genealogical line, Signoles's testament takes on a peculiar signification. Generally, a testament contains the final wishes and words of the subject who foresees his or her own death, acting also as a will and an address to the remaining, a confession even. Signoles however is unable to write beyond the four words "Ceci est mon testament," while the burst of blood, like ink, signs and legitimizes the words. Signoles's genealogy is reduced to and represented by the blood on the testament. The blood of the lineage here is represented literally. Consequently, *ceci* here points to the sign of the blood, which the blood itself authenticates, thus reflecting both the subject and the subject's image. The *real* here, following Clément Rosset, coincides with the symbol of the character's existence. Until this critical moment, 'l'événement réel est toujours hanté par celui qui n'est pas arrivé, qui aurait pu ou dû être à sa place, le "bon" et le véritable.'[133]

As we see throughout this short story, the character is *haunted* by the image that he seeks to embody. In the final scene, Signoles's signature, which authenticates his testamentary promise and his identity, coincides with the "heritage" he leaves beyond his death. In other words, the blood of this unique signature makes it the ultimate promise of authenticity. However, Signoles is extracted from genealogical lineage and, therefore, his signature acquires a ubiquitous signification by the blood itself. Consequently, the quality of his signature is at once the most unique and the most common. Bennington writes:

> Le fait que ma signature, pour être signature, doit être répétable ou imitable par moi-même ou par une machine, entraîne tout aussi nécessairement la possibilité de son imitation par un autre, par exemple un faussaire. La forme logique du

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[133] Clément Rosset, *Le réel et son double* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976) 47.

raisonnement par « possibilité nécessaire » nous autorise à dire que ma signature est *déjà* contaminée par cette altérité, déjà en quelque sorte signature de l'autre.[134]

Signoles's final and entirely singular signature seeks to eliminate the possibility of contamination by the other's presence. The signature in blood is visually indiscernible. It is also the most unique because it falls outside of language. It therefore cannot be interpreted, while its unique form cannot be reproduced because it is not a controlled product, as is the case with writing. Just as appearance doesn't simply represent a dandy, whose identity is multiple and elusive – for it *is* the dandy himself, – Signoles's signature is not merely a representation of him. Instead, he and his signature coincide in an ultimate act of authentication.

If we continue to unfold Signoles's name, we find that its meaning is inexhaustible. As we have seen, it can signify cowardice, blindness and seduction, while the sign links his name to the signature. Unraveling the name further, we find that it also evokes the link between man and the machine. For instance, *signole*, *chignolle* or *souaînole* signifies a mechanical apparatus called *une manivelle* in French. The signification of *signoles* to machines echoes the café scene at the moment when Signoles declares a duel to the stranger, who will later be identified as Georges Lamil. In this scene, the two women accompanying Signoles complain of the stranger's persistent stare. Signoles addresses the stranger and asks him to cease his insistence, to which Lamil responds with an injurious remark. This vulgar and minimal gesture triggers a domino effect of an irreversible sequence of events. The text describes the consequences as a chain of mechanical reactions that culminate in the declaration of the duel:

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[134] Geoffrey Bennington, Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, 153.

> Le monsieur ne répondit qu'un mot, un mot ordurier qui sonna d'un bout à l'autre du café, et fit, comme par l'effet d'un *ressort*, accomplir à chaque consommateur un mouvement brusque. Tous ceux qui tournaient le dos se retournèrent ; tous les autres levèrent la tête ; trois garçons pivotèrent sur leurs talons comme des *toupies* ; les deux dames du comptoir eurent un sursaut, puis une conversion du torse entier, comme si elle eussent été deux *automates* obéissant à la même *manivelle*.
>
> Un grand silence s'était fait. Puis, tout à coup, un bruit sec claqua dans l'air. Le vicomte avait giflé son adversaire. Tout le monde se leva pour s'interposer. Des cartes furent échangées.[135]

The sequence of events here obeys a mechanical movement that the narrator describes in an explicit manner. The domino effect triggered by Lamil's insult incorporates the onlookers. Their regular, perhaps mechanical actions at the cafe cease and everyone's attention turns to the two opponents. These reactions finally make a full circle when Signoles returns the insult by slapping his adversary. The dry sound of the slap ends the parenthetical silence, returning the setting to its previous state. The mechanical reactions of the characters are a response to an event, beyond the control of each subject. In fact, we could say that, following a certain code of honor, the duel becomes inevitable at the moment that Lamil pronounces the insulting word. Witnessed by others and thus rendered public, one word carries inevitable consequences that would in the end lead to Signoles's death.

The numerous etymologies and associations of Signoles's name are not exhaustive. The plurality of such associations and definitions correspond to various parts of the text. The entirety of these definitions constitutes the text itself, as if Signoles's

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[135] Guy de Maupassant, "Un lâche," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles I*, 1160. [Emphasis added.]

name alone were retelling the story. Having let ourselves be taken by this game of definitions, what is even more striking is the contrast between Signoles's name and that of Georges Lamil. My search was as unfruitful and arresting as it was for Signoles, who, too, sought to evaluate his *brute*[136] opponent. "Mon adversaire a-t-il fréquenté les tirs? Est-il connu ? Est-il classé ? Comment le savoir ?", asks Signoles with desperation.[137] Inquiring in Baron de Vaux's guide to pistol shooters,[138] Signoles remains unsatisfied with his search. Lamil remains traceless. In fact, we will see that it is precisely Lamil's enigmatic and indecipherable identity that triggers Signoles's decline.

The proper name has various functions in Maupassant's texts. In "Monsieur Parent," it acts as an ironic label of a lack, while "Papa de Simon" questions the ambiguity of the name's role in the subject's social status. In "Un lâche," on the other hand, the name mirrors the fragmentation of the subject's identity. In all cases, the proper name carries genealogical implications in the character's identity. It questions the weakening role of paternity, particularly in this historical post-Revolutionary context. Finally, weakened and troubled genealogy sets the stage for the subject of decline that pervades Maupassant's works.

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[136] Signoles calls his opponent by the word "brute" several times, which reveals his inability to define him. See "Un lâche," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles I*, 1160, 1161.

[137] Guy de Maupassant, "Un lâche," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles I*, 1166.

[138] This volume by Baron de Vaux on fencers and pistol shooters appeared in print in 1883, prefaced by Maupassant himself.

2. Troubled Genealogy

Paternity and Legitimacy

Maupassant extends the subject of genealogy to all forms of limits and transgressions, including incest and patricide, as consequences of dubious paternity and questionable genealogical legitimacy. While this subject permeates the majority of the author's works, I would like to focus on the short story of "Monsieur Parent." This text provides a particularly fruitful representation of the various forms of genealogical transgression. The uncertain legitimacy of Monsieur Parent's son and the father's fear of being duped lead to his decline. In *Pierre et Jean*, on the other hand, illegitimacy plays in favor of the illegitimate child. In this novel, a considerable inheritance launders the illegitimacy of one son, consequently expelling the legitimate one. The decline of the paternal figure in these texts results in what Antonia Fonyi calls the "abolition of difference." Fonyi explains further: "C'est la loi du père qui instaure la différence fondatrice d'identité. Si elle n'a pas de force de loi, l'identité ne peut être qu'évanescente. Les histoires d'inceste en sont les preuves concluantes."[139] The various forms genealogical transgressions can be found in such texts as "Un parricide," in "L'ermite" and "M. Jocaste," as examples of incest, in "Monsieur Parent" and *Pierre et Jean*, as examples of illegitimate paternity, and in "Aux champs," where a child is exchanged for

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[139] Antonia Fonyi, *Maupassant 1993*, 149.

financial gain. The family dynamic in these texts reflects the critical shift in authority, in parallel to the political and social alterations taking place at the time.[140]

Maupassant's questioning of the family structure insists on its increasing fragility. With the family subjected to manipulation and fabrication, the meaning of heredity transforms as well. This change is already present in many 19th century literary texts, such as Chateaubriand's *René* and Poe's "William Wilson." In this latter example, Wilson attributes his character traits to his ancestors. For Maupassant, however, genealogy can no longer be perceived as a natural social structure, but rather as pure fabrication.

To better understand the change occurring in Maupassant's work, in contrast to his precedents, I would like to focus primarily on the degrading paternal authority and questionable legitimacy. Gender difference distinguishes between the effects that male and female characters have on genealogy. In other words, genealogical legitimacy of the female characters carries different consequences than that of the male characters. Yet, in the question of legitimacy, Maupassant focuses primarily on the male characters. For instance, in a number of texts, the legitimacy *itself* of female characters can precipitate the downfall of another. In "L'ermite," female legitimacy leads to incest and the consequent downfall of the father, while in *Fort comme la mort*, Annette, by her resemblance alone, eclipses Anne, her mother. With these two examples we can see that women serve as sexual, and more precisely, as reproductive objects. Furthermore, in these texts, women are inextricable from a natural longing for motherhood, which men, as we shall see with Monsieur Parent, could only aspire to if they so wished. In contrast

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[140] Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993). In this text, Hunt analyzes the post-revolutionary family structure, as it mirrors the social and political repercussions of the French Revolution. Her Freudian approach questions the father figure in light of the political upheaval, where the patriarchal political structure is replaced by a fraternal one.

to the female characters, illegitimacy carries greater significance for the male characters, whose identity is inextricably linked to genealogical lineage and inheritance.

Family, genealogy and the question of legitimacy are among the most recurrent and significant social forms of entrapment in Maupassant's texts. As Antonia Fonyi points out, neither legal nor biological lineage can exclusively define the subject's identity. "[L]'identité fondée sur la filiation est vouée à se dissoudre dans le même, qu'elle est aussi peu solide que celle que devrait définir la loi,"[141] she writes. Thus, the disintegration of lineage creates a place for a new, profoundly fragmented familial-social order that is founded not on birth lineage but rather on social and financial parameters. Both legitimacy and illegitimacy in Maupassant's works can be perceived as debilitating. In "Aux champs," for example, two farmer families birth a son, and upon the proposition of a wealthy couple to adopt one of the two for a considerable sum of money, one family gives in to the temptation and *sells* its son, while the other proudly refuses the offer. The ending of this text is dramatic in its irony. Upon seeing the other son, who visibly contrasts in opulence, the grown son whom the parents had not betrayed in turn blames and leaves them for *not* giving him away. Here, legitimacy turns against the character, who bitterly compares himself to the social status he could have had, had he been the son of the analogous, neighboring family.

In *Pierre et Jean*, paradoxically, legitimacy disinherits and expulses Pierre, the legitimate son. His exile serves as a compromise for Jean's illegitimate inheritance. Both texts are linked by the exchange between legitimacy and financial gain. In both, illegitimacy is laundered by wealth. Paternity can therefore be substituted, exchanged,

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[141] Antonia Fonyi, *Maupassant 1993*, 154.

bought even. In this novel, by his portrait and testament, the haunting presence of Maréchal, Madame Roland's lover, redefines Monsieur Roland's paternal position.

Many literary critics have evoked that the figure of the father bears peculiar significance for Maupassant. It is well known that Gustave Flaubert's close relationship with Maupassant not only played a role of literary influence, but also a paternal one. As a spiritual father, Flaubert substituted Maupassant's biological father, whom Laure, his mother, deliberately excluded from the lives of her children. This family structure resembles the dichotomy of the recurring father figures in crisis, between the biological father and the lover. There is no doubt that paternity here carries a connotation of weakness, in conflict with the troubled family structure of the époque. In fact, Maupassant consistently ridicules the paternal figure, representing the father as a dupe of his social status. He embodies the remainders of nostalgia for his past powers that mirror the declining aristocracy.

In *Pierre et Jean*, lineage implies certain limitations and possibilities of the social status. Torn between two positions, as lover and mother, Madame Roland chooses to reconsider this latter position in order to launder her adulterous past with the inheritance left to Jean by Maréchal. Monsieur Roland, as the ultimate dupe, unknowingly plays the social role of father within a fiction that claims its place in the family structure. Nevertheless, his presence is necessary in this peculiar family disposition – where he is not the biological father, Jean is Maréchal's son, and the inheritance that ties them together comes from the dead lover – because his ignorance of this renders his paternal presence possible and willing. He is all the more dupe of this situation because he himself

falls prey to Jean's inheritance, so blinded by the profit that he is unable to see its true source.

In "Monsieur Parent" however, the husband is discarded from the nuclear family disposition, where the lover substitutes him. In this text, the uncertainty of his legitimacy becomes an obsession for Monsieur Parent, who is haunted by doubt. In other words, his identity, echoed also by his name, is put into question and suspended by the anguish that uncertainty provokes. This text, whose subject resembles many others, is significant by its length alone. While Maupassant develops a large majority of his short stories in six to eight pages, "Monsieur Parent" presents a rare exception. However, it is not the subject of the text that dictates the length, for we can find numerous shorter stories whose plot resembles that of "Monsieur Parent." While the story spans more than two decades, the time sequence does not distinguish it from the other texts. This leads us to ask why the author chooses to develop what appears to be a typical Maupassantian story in thirty-five pages. The text is divided into two contrasting parts. In the first, Parent discovers his wife's infidelity, which instills doubt over his paternity. This part results in a rupture that unravels in merely several hours. The rhythm of the second part contrasts greatly the first, spanning twenty-three passive years, during which we witness Parent's decline. His fatal discovery triggers a long, spiraling descent, determined more by passive projection of desire than by action.

The fatality of this discovery is not however the infidelity, but instead it is the irresoluble doubt that results from the confrontation. In a matter of hours, Parent's perception of his son transforms radically. The first part opens with a description of Monsieur Parent's tender observation of his son Georges playing in the park. The narrator

recounts an idyllic scene between father and child: "Son père, assis sur une chaise de fer, le contemplait avec une attention concentrée et amoureuse, ne voyait que lui dans l'étroit jardin public rempli de monde."[142] Surrounded by children, mothers, wet nurses and nannies, Monsieur Parent bathes in his glee of fatherhood, watching his son in admiration. Parent "suivait ses moindres gestes avec amour, semblait envoyer des baisers du bout des lèvres à tous les mouvements de Georges."[143] The reader witnesses the transformation of this scene of fatherly love to a complete renunciation and subsequent submission to self-deterioration. Parent's decline is triggered by the moment when he realizes his questionable paternity, a moment at which his entire identity is at stake. In fact, his love for Georges alters at the instant that doubt overshadows his perception.

Legitimacy and Doubt

Until the moment of discovery, Parent remains blind to the reason behind his wife's close relationship with Limousin, whom Parent himself considered as a close family friend. Even the countless and most blatant signs of his wife's infidelity and insolence toward him fail to lift the veil of ignorance. It is Julie, the servant, who opens Parent's eyes to his position of dupe. From this moment on, the familial setting that had thus far grounded Parent's life disintegrates. That which he had perceived as a happy family life, has now fallen apart. Once again, it is doubt that triggers his decline rather than his wife's infidelity. Uncertainty contaminates his paternity and then his identity in general. With this mechanism of doubt in movement, Parent closely examines his face with that of Georges, remembering Julie's hurtful remark: "Un aveugle ne s'y tromperait

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[142] Guy de Maupassant, "Monsieur Parent," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 580.
[143] Ibid., 581.

pas," she says of Georges's resemblance to Limousin.[144] Yet, by the act of repression, Parent is more than blind to the events around him. His gaze is deceiving or *louche*, unable to see beyond his idealized paternal and marital identity. His senses dulled by deception, Parent fails to notice what is clearly in front of him. However, Julie, the outsider of this nuclear family, is able to reveal Parent's illusion and denial. The small signs of his wife's infidelity and of his son's resemblance to Limousin, which "il n'avait pas su voir, pas su comprendre,"[145] are now blindingly evident. From that moment on, Parent can see nothing but the doubt that has clouded his paternity. The opening scene in the park shows Parent's envy of the mother's "unbreakable" and "natural" bond with the child in contrast to his own. Later in the text where Parent searches for traces of Limousin in Georges's face, he confirms the child's illegitimacy based on the strength of love between his wife and her lover. In this sense, motherhood is a consequence of their strong love, which necessarily makes Limousin the child's father. Parent continues to define a woman's love as a measure and justification of her fertility and motherhood. As a result of this conclusion, that which constituted his entire identity is now replaced by loss.

Examining Georges's face, he searches for elements of resemblance. This close examination of his son's face and of his own transforms progressively and distinguishes his perception of the two faces.

> Sa pensée s'égarait comme lorsqu'on devient fou ; et le visage de son enfant se transformait sous son regard, prenait des aspects bizarres, des *ressemblances invraisemblables*. […]
>
> Et il traversa le salon en deux enjambées pour aller examiner dans la glace la face de son enfant à côté de la sienne. […]

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[144] Ibid., 586.
[145] Ibid., 587.

"[…] Je ne veux plus voir… je deviens fou !…".[146]

This mirror scene of non-recognition resembles other striking mirror scenes in Maupassant's works, particularly in *Bel Ami*, "Fini" and "Adieu," as well as in "Le Horla" and "Un lâche." In all of these texts, the character's self-perception alters radically, to the extent of non-recognition or even self-effacement in the mirror image. Unlike the other texts, in "Monsieur Parent," the mirror scene is more complex. The reflection comprises three individuals, Parent, Georges and Limousin. Compelled to compare his face to his son's in the mirror, Parent places his son next to him and analyzes meticulously the two faces. While each face is doubled in the mirror, Parent also searches for his own reflection in the child's face. Yet, the doubt of his paternity has shaken his perception of reality. What was once unquestionable is now in peril. Thus, the child's face before him echoes the impossible and unacceptable *ressemblances invraisemblables*. The whole has acted as a mask, dissimulating the foreign fragments that Parent had been blind to recognize as Limousin's. Instead, Parent proceeds in a more methodical and analytical approach. To extract the subjectivity of the child before him, he fragments Georges's face and scrutinizes every facial element separately. The result confirms his fear. As in other mirror scenes, the failure to recognize one's own reflection, in the mirror or, as it is the case here, in the son's face, borders madness. Parent fails to confirm his paternity, and thus genealogical authenticity, in the child's face. Consequently, he remains in the intermediary space of obsessive doubt that precipitates his decline.

Several years pass after the fatal scene of rupture, when Parent and Georges cross paths again. Transformed with time, Georges is like another to Parent, whom the child

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[146] Ibid., 589. [Emphasis added.]

fails to recognize. As if effaced from memory and from existence, the past is resurrected by this encounter, which would haunt Parent for months to come:

> Pendant quatre mois, il regarda au cœur la plaie de cette rencontre. Chaque nuit il les revoyait tous les trois, heureux et tranquilles, père, mère, enfant, se promenant sur le boulevard, avant de rentrer dîner chez eux. Cette vision nouvelle effaçait l'ancienne. C'était autre chose, une autre hallucination maintenant, et aussi une autre douleur. Le petit Georges, son petit Georges, celui qu'il avait tant aimé et tant embrassé jadis, disparaissait dans un passé lointain et fini, et il en voyait un nouveau, comme un frère au premier, un garçonnet aux mollets nus, qui ne le reconnaissait pas, celui-là ! Il souffrait affreusement de cette pensée. L'amour du petit était mort ; aucun lien n'existait plus entre eux […].[147]

With Limousin's resemblance surfacing on the face of the child, Parent and Georges draw apart. The narrator describes Parent's desperation, "[l]'amour du petit était mort; aucun lien n'existait plus entre eux."[148] Thus, inhabited by the other's presence in his son, Parent's family ideal of "tous les trois, heureux et tranquilles, père, mère, enfant" shatters. With time, Parent's suffering shifts from deception and the loss of a child to the loss of a family ideal as an identitary value. He can now only experience this family ideal as a loss, a *hallucination* as the text calls it.

Overwhelmed by doubt, Parent submits his entire life to scrutiny, questioning every aspect and detail of reality. In fact, the key event enacts a radical change in Parent's social position. As we will see, the character shifts from an internal entrapment, behind locked doors and preserved lies, to the center of the ever-moving crowd. In other words, he goes from maintaining absolute blindness to his wife's adultery to obsessive

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[147] Ibid., 607.
[148] Ibid.

questioning of his identity as father. His inability to relieve this obsession is the cause of his consequent decline.

The sudden outburst of bravery, which allows Parent to expulse his wife and her lover, in reality, masks the cowardice lying underneath. As the narrator suggests, "sait-on combien l'audace contient parfois de lâcheté fouettée ?".[149] Once alone, his cowardice surfaces and rigidifies him into a passive position.

Finally, going so far as to doubt his own intimacy with his wife, Parent justifies Georges's illegitimacy:

> Et il se décidait à aller, dès l'aurore, requérir les magistrats pour se faire rendre Georget.
>
> Mais à peine avait-il pris cette résolution qu'il se sentait envahi par la certitude contraire. Du moment que Limousin avait été, dès le premier jour, l'amant d'Henriette, l'amant aimé, elle avait dû se donner à lui avec cet élan, cet abandon, cette ardeur qui rendent mères les femmes. La réserve froide qu'elle avait toujours apportée dans ses relations intimes avec lui, Parent, n'était-elle pas aussi un obstacle à ce qu'elle eût été fécondée par son baiser ![150]

Changes in Parent's perspective exhibit the uncertainty that overweighs his momentary outbursts of audacity. Having identified himself with an ideal paternal figure, Parent cannot accept even the slightest possibility that Georges might be of Limousin's blood. "Non, il valait mieux demeurer seul, vivre seul, vieillir seul, et mourir seul,"[151] Parent cowardly concludes in the face of doubt. He thus cedes his paternity.

In this text, we find the juxtaposition of a modern nuclear family model and the fragility of its structure. This opposition raises the question of genealogical authenticity. In the texts we have read thus far, characters suffer from illegitimacy, as the source of

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[149] Ibid., 590.
[150] Ibid., 603-604.
[151] Ibid., 604.

their shattered family ideal. More interestingly, in certain cases characters suffer from legitimacy itself, as we saw in *Fort comme la mort*, where generational resemblance eclipses the subject, and in *Pierre et Jean* where illegitimacy prevails and guarantees financial profit. Therefore, genealogy for Maupassant is a problematic that opens up to a larger question of identity and self-perception.

Cowardice and Escape

The various genealogical implications that we encounter in Maupassant's short stories and novels reveal the characters' underlying cowardice. The confrontation with a particular genealogical disposition unmasks their inability to come to terms with the reality of their social position. Cowardice provides an exceptional example of the decisive and invasive effect that the other has on the subject. The other, in this case, threatens the semblance of unity of the subject's otherwise fragmented identity. For instance, just as Signoles cannot face his duel opponent and particularly the critical gaze of the other, Monsieur Parent, too, avoids every possible confrontation. This is particularly evident in his incapacity to see what otherwise appears clearly to everyone else around him. By repressing elements of threat to his identity as a father, Parent can continue in this role. However, this becomes impossible when the doubt of his legitimacy overshadows and petrifies his entire life. As we saw with "Un lâche," cowardice and blindness go hand in hand. Like Signoles, Parent hides behind closed doors from the menacing gaze of others, whether it's his wife and Julie, or Limousin. As we will see, the subject of closed doors resurfaces on several occasions in the text. In submission to his wife's and Julie's

criticism, Parent retires behind closed doors as if behind a shield that protects him from their piercing intrusions:

> Et il entra dans son appartement. Dès qu'il y fut, il poussa le verrou pour être seul, bien seul, tout seul. Il était tellement habitué, maintenant, à se voir malmené et rudoyé qu'il ne se jugeait en sûreté que sous la protection des serrures. Il n'osait même plus penser, réfléchir, *raisonner avec lui-même*, s'il ne se sentait *garanti* par un tour de clef contre les regards et les suppositions.[152]

It is also through closed doors that the character finally gets proof of his wife's infidelity. Therefore, the door acts as Parent's protection, just as the mask does for Ambroise in "Le masque." It shields him from the others' critical gaze, which threatens to distort and even destroy the unicity of the assumed identitary image, not with knowledge and proof, but rather with questionable assumptions. Wife, child and friend lost, Parent "referma la porte, donna deux tours de clefs et poussa les verrous. À peine rentré dans le salon, il tomba de toute sa hauteur sur le parquet."[153] After the ultimate confrontation, Parent encloses himself in isolation, far from the others' prying gaze and contempt. He shuts the symbolic door with all its locks and bolts, isolating himself both from the inside of a family ideal and from the outside world.

The other's influence acts like a trap for Monsieur Parent. Escape and security are possible only in the closed space behind locked doors, *guaranteed* by the turn of the key. It is only away from the asphyxiating gaze of the other and in this other form of enclosure that Parent can reason ("*raisonner avec lui-même*"). These doors serve as protection for his identity as father and husband, both menaced by the critique of others. Finding himself alone, Parent has no one to hide from and thus no more need for the closed doors

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[152] Ibid., 582. [Emphasis added.]
[153] Ibid., 601.

that once preserved him. Alone, the image he desperately sought to preserve, *lâche*, glides

off of his fragile social status. Monsieur Parent falls (*tomber*) to the floor of his closed-in

apartment, as if into a *tomb*, never to be reopened and forgotten by the world. Rigid by

cowardice, unable neither to assert his paternity nor to leave it behind, Parent alienates

himself within society.

The question of alienation does not necessarily imply a geographical or physical

expulsion to the outside of a society. Instead, alienation can be enacted at its center. This

is the case with Monsieur Parent who, remaining at the center of busy urban life, is

nevertheless unnoticed and insignificant. According to Serge Margel's definition:

> L'aliénation n'est pas une simple altération, une transformation d'identité, un
> changement de propriétés, une réduction de subjectivité. Bien autrement, elle
> constitue ce geste même d'identification, d'appropriation ou d'assujettissement
> par lequel je me vois pour ainsi dire condamné à penser, à parler, à bouger.
> L'aliénation est une reproduction, qui s'approprie des états de vie dispersés,
> dissociés, détachés […].[154]

The fragmentation we witness in Parent, as well as in Signoles and many other

characters, is a product of a coexistence of various dissociated identitary layers. While

Parent projects fatherhood and the family ideal onto his own familial situation, his

cowardice undermines this position. Consequently, he is at once "parent" and dupe of the

lies behind his parental identity. Once the truth inevitably surfaces and thus becomes

visible to all, including Parent himself, these two positions become socially incompatible.

Irreconcilable, these social positions expel and marginalize the character from the stage

of appearance. The source of his alienation lies in his failure to articulate the dissociated

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[154] Serge Margel, *Aliénation. Antonin Artaud. Les généalogies hybrides* (Paris: Galilée, 2008) 14.

"states" that constitute his identity. In this sense, cowardice and alienation go hand in hand, for one's failure to represent and uphold an identitary state centralizes that failure within the subject's identity. Thus, the inability to communicate between these dissociated states reveals the subject's alienation. We will see that this revelation will result in Parent's decline.

Cowardice, as the definition of the word "lâche" suggests, implies a downward movement that can also be found in the movement of decline, and particularly in the French *la déchéance*, whose etymological roots point to the action of falling. While Monsieur Parent enters a downward spiral into decline, this movement is ever more evident in the story of "Un lâche." Signoles's extreme dependence on the gaze of the other ultimately also results in his decline. Looking in the mirror in terror, holding the gun that he was to use in the duel, Signoles shakes in fear: "il tremblait des pieds à la tête et le canon remuait dans tous les sens."[155] This trembling in turn shakes the reflected image before him, echoing the scene in Ovid's myth of Narcissus who, crying, blurs his reflection in the water.[156] With the veil of his illusion lifted, Signoles resigns, concluding:

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[155] Guy de Maupassant, "Un lâche," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles I*, 1166.

[156] Narcissus's tears "troublèrent les eaux et, dans l'étang agité, l'image devint indistincte" (Ovide, *Les métamorphoses* (Paris: Flammarion, 1966) 102). This scene in Ovid's text tempts an analogy to the transformations in Signoles's own self-perception during the final moments leading to his death. In her reading of Ovid's text, Claire Nouvet defines Narcissus's "death by liquefaction" as the ultimate and inextricable link of the other to the subject's form and perception. "Narcissus's death by liquefaction," she writes, "brings to thematic visibility the liquefaction initiated by the simple sentence "Iste ego sum." By defining the self as a mere imago floating on water, this sentence recognizes the figural status of the self; a recognition which "dissolves" the assumed substantiality of the human figure defining it as precisely nothing more than a figure floating on the watery, nonhuman, nonsubjective Otherness of language" ("An Impossible Response: The Disaster of Narcissus," in *Yale French Studies*, 79, *Literature and the Ethical Question*, (Yale University Press, 1991) 127). See also Claire Nouvet's *Enfances Narcisses* (Paris: Galilée, 2009). Signoles's promise to restore honor by the duel instead shifts to a different kind of promise. Signing in blood, he promises the authenticity of his testament, yet a testament that leaves nothing but his proof of death. Unlike Narcissus who leaves a trace of himself in the form of a flower, Signoles succeeds for the first time to coincide with his image: the bloodstained testament. This last gesture appears in the image of his entire being, at the same time ultimately complete and empty.

"Impossible. Je ne puis me battre ainsi."[157] Formless, soft, fluid, *lâche*: such is Signoles's ultimate state at the conclusion of the text. At the end, not only does he kill himself, the body lying "sur le dos"[158] on the floor, he "liquefies"[159] himself, reducing his entire entity to the shapeless imprint of a bloodstain. 'Un jet de sang avait éclaboussé le papier blanc sur la table et faisait une grande tache rouge au-dessous de ces quatre mots: "Ceci est mon testament.".'[160] As was already mentioned, Signoles is an orphan and of dubious social status, and is therefore isolated in a premature genealogical line. In fact, apart from the name and his considerable inheritance, the text barely mentions his lineage. The "line", so to speak, begins and ends with Signoles. Thus, he signs the four-word testament in blood, not only symbolically but literally with his entire being.

A signature in blood is defined as "être décidé à tenir infailliblement ce qu'on promet."[161] Ironically, unable to keep the promise of the duel by killing himself first, Singoles nevertheless attempts to leave a testament. The only promise he would keep is his testament, yet one that reflects nothing but his death. In other words, Signoles can leave nothing less than his entire being, which, in this case, is nothing more than a bloodstain. This bloodstain symbolizes the absolute fragmentation of his identity, and consequently his extreme self-effacement.

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[157] Guy de Maupassant, "Un lâche," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles I*, 1166.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Here, I am borrowing Nouvet's term, quoted in the note 43.
[160] Guy de Maupassant, "Un lâche," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles I*, 1166. The image of this unique will, "Ceci est mon testament" signed by the character bloodstain, echoes what linguists, notably Saussure would theorize as the sign and the correlation between the object and its linguistic or visual representation. Magritte's infamous painting (1929) of the pipe with the sentence, "Ceci n'est pas une pipe," betrays the object itself, – the title of the painting is "La Trahison des images" – for the sign never quite coincides with the object itself. In Maupassant's text, however, we are led to ask whether this *ultimate* scene of the signature does not in fact present an instance of coincidence.
[161] Jean Nicot, *Thresor de la langue françoyse* (1606).

In many of the texts we have looked at so far, one's troubled genealogy results in decline, or more appropriately *la déchéance*. For Monsieur Parent, it is by alienation, while for Signoles decline takes the form of consequent suicide. We can trace yet another form of decline in Maupassant's texts, that of expulsion. In *Pierre et Jean*, the legitimate son is exiled from his family precisely by his legitimacy. Unlike Parent who himself wastes away, here it is the family that expels and attempts to efface the existence of the legitimate child. Pierre, who wanders from profession to profession in search of passion, finally decides on becoming a doctor. Yet, upon discovering the source of Jean's inheritance, Pierre's venomous presence in the family provokes discomfort, which he cannot treat, except by disappearing altogether. As the witness and reminder of the illegitimacy, he is extracted, or rather *amputated* from the family. In turn, Jean's illegitimate inheritance closes and heals the wound of Pierre's forceful escape. It also reconfigures the family into a nuclear organization of three. Only by repression, by letting the reminder slip or sail away, can this new family structure be justified and guiltlessly experienced by Madame Roland. Yet, her relationship with Jean – the product of Maréchal and the cause of the dramatic family upheaval – manifests ambiguity in the role that the son plays for Madame Roland. After the dramatic scene of revelation between Pierre and Jean, we witness a peculiar scene between the latter and Madame Roland. Their ambiguous relationship resembles at once that of a mother and a son, and at the same time that of a passionate relationship between lovers. In this scene, Madame Roland reveals the truth of her past and the significance of Jean's inheritance. She sees only two options: either flee the family herself or expel the one whose presence will always remind her of past crime. While it is Jean who is directly linked to her past liaison

with Maréchal, she substitutes him with Pierre. The financial gain doubtlessly overshadows Madame Roland's decision.

In the following excerpt, we witness the scheme between Madame Roland and her illegitimate son, Jean:

> "[…] c'est que… si je devais rester... il faudrait... Non, je ne peux pas !… […]
>
> "Reste, maman."
>
> Elle le serra dans ses bras et se remit à pleurer ; puis elle reprit, la joue contre sa joue :
>
> "Oui, mais Pierre ? Qu'allons-nous devenir avec lui !"
>
> Jean murmura :
>
> "Nous trouverons quelque chose. Tu ne peux plus vivre auprès de lui."
>
> Au souvenir de l'aîné elle fut crispée d'angoisse.
>
> "Non, je ne puis plus, non ! non !"
>
> Et se jetant sur le coeur de Jean, elle s'écria, l'âme en détresse :
>
> "Sauve-moi de lui, toi, mon petit, sauve-moi, fais quelque chose, je ne sais pas... trouve... sauve-moi !
>
> – Oui, maman, je chercherai.[162]

And thus, Madame Roland herself proposes to sacrifice her legitimate son, as she might have wished to do with Monsieur Roland. In the meantime, Jean would take Pierre's place of legitimacy, while also representing the memory of Maréchal. In other words, this chain of relationships represents a complex model of substitution between the characters; the son replaces the deceased lover and, while symbolically taking his place, he

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[162] Guy de Maupassant, *Pierre et Jean*, in vol. *Romans*, 807-808.

consequently replaces the father, and in so doing, he expulses the brother, while the mother remains at the center of these manipulations.[163]

In the final scene of the novel, the Roland family awaits Pierre's departure on the ship named *Lorraine*. Ironically, the scene describes the apparition of the boat and its entrance into the sea in terms of childbirth, coinciding with the erasure and thus with the un-birth of the unwanted son: 'Tout à coup Roland s'écria: "La voilà. J'aperçois sa mâture et ses deux cheminées. Elle sort du bassin".'[164] The narrator continues:

> L'immense paquebot, traîné par un puissant remorqueur qui avait l'air, devant lui, d'une chenille, sortait lentement et royalement du port. Et le peuple […] se mit à crier : « Vive la *Lorraine* ! » acclamant et applaudissant ce départ magnifique, cet *enfantement* [my emphasis] d'une grande ville maritime qui donnait à la mer sa plus belle fille.[165]

The ship represents a different kind of urban space, one that, united, does not belong to any particular place, which errs instead between countries and continents. Hired as the doctor of the ship, Pierre is bound to ceaselessly treat his wound, in a way that resembles Monsieur Parent's static position as the spectator of his own progressive decline.

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[163] 'L'amour est "le piège de la nature" selon une formule de Schopenhauer que Maupassant aime citer,' evokes Antonia Fonyi (*Maupassant 1993*, 31-32). However, I would also like to add that Maupassant considers *love* as a *social* trap, binding to social or financial profit, often confounded with the benefits reaped from family and reproduction. In other words, love in Maupassant's texts is always cut short by sexual, reproductive, financial, or social interest. The short story entitled "Amour" retells the inseparable attachment, not between two human lovers but rather between two birds. This text is an excerpt from the diary of a cosmopolitan hunter, presenting us with a comparison between the "bestial" and absolute love between the two birds to Parisian love, which many of Maupassantian texts depict grimly ('Trois pages du "livre d'un chasseur",' "Amour," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 845). Once again, the latter form of love is interested, and unlike that of the two birds, it falls prey to a different form of survival. In other words, Parisian love, based on survival and profit, is put into contrast: "Il approchait, en effet, insouciant du danger, affolé par son amour de bête pour l'autre bête que j'avais tuée," writes the narrator, who, disgruntled by this scene, returns on the same day to Paris, with the two *lovers* lying dead in a hunting sack ("Amour," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 850). Thus, the only example of absolute love that the author evokes is that among beasts, thus, opposing bestial love to human love, for the latter is interested and driven by motives of financial, social, reproductive gain.

[164] Guy de Maupassant, *Pierre et Jean*, in vol. *Romans*, 831.

[165] Ibid.

The final scene of the novel confirms his disappearance, yet it also reiterates his ephemeral presence in the form of a memory and of a past that will continue to haunt his family. As the ship slowly disappears into the horizon, the narrator describes the last visible trace as "un peu de brume."[166] The bare remains of smoke, the grey proof of distant life, dissipate into the clear of the sky, the water, and the page.

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[166] Ibid., 833.

CHAPTER THREE

Victims, Decline and Suicide

Maupassant's particularly fruitful literary production, likened by numerous critics to his excessive sexual and sports activities, is fueled by a number of broad subjects. All of these subjects reveal the identity of Maupassantian characters, multiple and fragmented in a similar way. They are represented by a series of variations developed in the novels and the hundreds of short stories. The question of variation, imitation and reproduction is particularly complex in Maupassant's work, as we have seen in the role of mirroring, between characters, such as Anne, Annette and the portrait,[167] or between individual texts, "Un lâche" and *Bel-Ami* for instance. In the first, mirroring occurs between a subject and her representation, on the one hand, and between generations, on the other. In the second form of mirroring, the reflection between texts questions the identity of each literary text, dependent on other individual works, as well as on the unity of the oeuvre in general.

The obsessive questioning of genealogy, yet another major issue linking a vast number of texts, reveals the effect that legitimacy has on the relationship between the subject and society. While each text is different and unique, it is also a variation within a larger problematic, amplifying the effect of fragmentation that questions of genealogy, sexuality and reflection have on the subject's identity. As we have seen thus far, whether it is by resemblance to another, non-resemblance to the image of oneself, by genealogical

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[167] See Guy de Maupassant, *Fort comme la mort*, in vol. *Romans*.

illegitimacy, or in other cases by legitimacy, the character consistently finds him or herself facing a rupture in one's sense of identitary unity and social stability.

Apprehension of these pervasive questions tempts the reader to consider Maupassant's work as texts representing genealogy, mirroring, "sameness"[168] and entrapment.[169] Aside from such questions that explicitly express the fragmented nature of the modern subject, I would like to evoke the ubiquitous presence of the victim. So diverse is the representation of victimization that one can confidently claim that explicit as well as more implicit representations of the victim exist in the entirety of Maupassant's short stories and novels. While the author insists on the complexity of the characters' social identity, the definition of the victim reveals ambiguity as well. The figure of the victim is variable, existing in all social classes and situations. The works contain victims of rape and murder ("La Petite Roque"), victims of social injustice and cruelty ("Le vagabond," "Le gueux"), victims of law ("Un fou," "L'Endormeuse") and of interdictions ("Le champ d'oliviers"), victims of social ideals and one's subsequent disillusionment ("Monsieur Parent," "Un lâche," "Suicides").

1. Victims

The plurality of victims in Maupassant's oeuvre thus ranges from direct violence that one exercises onto another to a debilitating and fragmenting self-questioning, in response to social norms and aspirations. In order to focus more on the correlation

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[168] See Philippe Bonnefis, *Comme Maupassant* (Lille: PUL, 1993) where he analyzes the reduction of all to the same throughout Maupassant's works.

[169] See Micheline Besnard-Coursodon, *Etude thématique et structurale de l'oeuvre de Maupassant: le piège* (Paris: Nizet, 1973).

between victimization and the author's objective to represent the complexity and even the coexistence of contradictions within a character's identity, I will deliberately exclude victims of rape, murder and other forms of physical violence exercised directly by one character onto another. This exclusion, though it could be perceived as superfluous, arbitrary even, will allow us to narrow in on the decline of a vast number of characters on the one hand, and on suicide on the other, as a response to a particular disposition of the victim as a subject.

While the question of the victim marks the entire oeuvre, its singularity is in no way banal, and is instead valorized, as Micheline Besnard-Coursodon suggests.[170] Each individual form of suffering rests upon a larger category of victimization, with examples ranging from physical to psychological violence, from the most basic conception of the criminal-victim relation – linear in structure – to a highly ambiguous psychological and self-reflexive model. In a linear opposition between the criminal and the victim, the criminal is generally considered to be one who imposes physical or psychological violence onto another subject. We find a literary representation of this type of criminal-victim relation in texts such as "Le vagabond," "L'aveugle" and "Le gueux." In the first story, unemployed Jacques progressively falls into degradation in physical appearance and social position. His deteriorating appearance heightens the villagers' hatred and violent rejection of him, culminating in his imprisonment. Dependent on the villagers' charity for survival, the main characters of "L'aveugle" and "Le gueux" also fall prey to the others' contempt and cruelty. The others' violence and neglect result in the consequent death of both victims. In contrast to the blind man's fate, the characters of "Le

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[170] Ibid., 163.

vagabond" and "Le gueux" ultimately find themselves without a possibility to satisfy the basic needs to nourish and lodge themselves. In turn, they are pushed to criminality for the sake of survival due to their inability to enter into a relationship of exchange with the others.

These three characters are distinguished from the others by the social unbalance imposed unto them. For Jacques Randel, the carpenter, all work is refused. While the blind man cannot work as a result of his handicap, his stepbrother steals his inheritance. Finally, the homeless man named Nicolas Toussaint cannot work due to a childhood accident in which his legs were severed. The three characters are reduced to begging not by their deliberate idleness of which the others accuse them but rather due to their physical infirmities and the exclusion that their social status imposes. Refused the possibility of exchange, they consequently resort to begging for survival. In turn, their dependence incites growing hatred and contempt from the other villagers, whose cruelty and violence victimize them. In these three examples, victimization arises as a result of failure in a social exchange.[171] As the possibility for exchange progressively diminishes, consequently each one's precarious social status deepens. The texts represent these characters purely as victims, of their marginal social status, on the one hand, and of the others' cruelty, on the other.

These stories are particularly explicit in their elaboration of the villagers' cruelty toward the three helpless characters. Even the villagers' charity comes at the price of

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[171] In "Le vagabond," Jacques Randel, unable to find work, "mangeait la soupe des autres" (vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 856). However, his idleness is not voluntary. On the contrary, proud of his profession as carpenter, Jacques leaves his own village to actively search for work of his trade. The villagers scold Nicolas Toussaint for his inability to work: "On n' peut pourtant pas nourrir ce fainéant toute l'année" ("Le gueux," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles I*, 1227). Finally, in "L'aveugle," the villagers reproach the blind man for his physical weakness that reduces him to passivity: "A chaque repas, on lui reprochait la nourriture; on l'appelait fainéant, manant ; et bien que son beau-frère se fût emparé de sa part d'héritage, on lui donnait à regret la soupe, juste assez pour qu'il ne mourût point" ("L'aveugle," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles I*, 402).

torture, manipulation, and violent expression of hatred. In "Le vagabond" for instance, when the villagers expulse Jacques Randel for begging, the text describes the others' reactions as follows:

> "Paysans et paysannes le regardaient, cet homme arrêté, entre deux gendarmes, avec une haine allumée dans les yeux, et une envie de lui jeter des pierres, de lui arracher la peau avec les ongles, de l'écraser sous leurs pieds".[172]

With uncontrollable rage that their eyes project, the others experience a brutal desire to dismember, disfigure and annihilate the vagabond.

In "Le gueux," this desire is realized. The farmers join together to beat Nicolas for his desperate act of theft:

> Et maître Chiquet, exaspéré, se précipitant sur le maraudeur, le roua de coups, tapant comme un forcené, comme tape un paysan volé, avec le poing et avec le genou pour tout le corps de l'infirme, qui ne pouvait se défendre.
>
> Les gens de la ferme arrivaient à leur tour qui se mirent avec le patron à assommer le mendiant. Puis, quand ils furent las de le battre, ils le *ramassèrent* et l'emportèrent, et l'enfermèrent dans le bûcher pendant qu'on allait chercher les gendarmes.[173]

Here too, the others' violence is meant to restrict the victim's movement, seeking to further *dismember* him. The use of the word *ramasser* typically refers to an action toward things, signifying the act of bringing back together the various parts of an object, transforming a fragmented object once again into one mass. In the case of "Le gueux," it is Nicolas's body, *deadened* by the blows, that the others reassemble and keep ironically in a wood storage (*le bûcher*). Of the three texts, "L'aveugle" expresses the desire to efface the despised other in the most vivid manner. Here, in contrast to the other texts,

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[172] Guy de Maupassant, "Le vagabond," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 862.
[173] Guy de Maupassant, "Le gueux," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles I*, 1228-1229. [Emphasis added.]

this desire is represented literally. After being driven out of the village by his stepbrother, the blind man finds himself lost in the countryside, slowly swallowed up by the snow:

> Ne pouvant reconnaître la route *ensevelie* sous cette écume de glace […]. Mais l'engourdissement des neiges l'avait peu à peu *envahi*, et, ses jambes faibles ne le pouvant plus porter, il s'était assis au milieu d'une plaine. Il ne se releva point.
>
> Les blancs flocons qui tombaient toujours l'*ensevelirent*. Son corps raidi *disparut* sous l'incessante *accumulation* de leur foule infinie ; et rien n'indiquait plus la place où le cadavre était *couché*.[174]

The snow's purity and whiteness serve as a veil to hide the villagers' hatred and cruelty. It also parallels the man's blindness, for it is his infirmity in the first place that leads him to destitute. Blindness makes it impossible for him to enter into a circuit of exchange with the others, relying therefore on their conditioned charity. At the same time, in a perverse exchange for meager nourishment, he nevertheless occupies a central place in the village as "une sorte de bouffon-martyr,"[175] a puppet that entertains the others with the cruel manipulations exercised on him. With his eyes condemning him to "éternelle obscurité,"[176] the blind man presents a sight for the others; their extreme hatred, cruelty and desire to destroy result in his death, by which he is effaced from view. In the short excerpt above, the text reiterates the blind man's gradual disappearance with such words as *ensevelir*, *envahir*, *disparaître*, *accumulation* and *coucher*, all referring to death and burial. The snow deadens and covers the living for a long sleep until the return of spring.[177] It at once hides death from view and simulates a forgetting of a perceived threat

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[174] Guy de Maupassant, "L'aveugle," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles I*, 404. [Emphasis added.]
[175] Ibid., 403.
[176] Ibid., 402.
[177] Sleep as an analogy for death reappears in other texts by Maupassant. Quite differently, in the short story of "L'Endormeuse," the suicide machine by the same name effectuates death by slow, painless, even pleasurable, asphyxiation. These two texts intersect at the erasure of the victim from public view. Thus, the

to the social order. The metaphor of snow represents well the repression of threat and the villagers' murderous desires. The perfectly white snow rigidifies and veils the object of these desires, yet which returns with the return of spring, a repetition of a past state.

The crucial scene of each of these texts demonstrates the villagers' violent desire to disfigure, deface and even efface the entire being of the victim. The third term itself implies the erasure of the face and thus of the subject's physical identity. The text of "Le vagabond" describes the others' wish to tear through the victim's skin and to crush his entire body with their feet, as if to rub his whole being into the earth that feeds off of living waste. In "Le gueux," this desire is realized by the farmers, who unite to mercilessly beat the victim and then store his body in *le bûcher*. As we saw earlier, the text refers to his body as an object or a cadaver. *Le bûcher* can be defined as the place where wood for burning is stored, but also as a stake or a pyre. These last two terms suggest either sacrifice or punishment by which one would have condemned and burnt a criminal, a heretic or a witch. The fire would thus completely eliminate the body, transforming it into immaterial smoke. In this sense, the significance of the pyre or stake represents the others' desire to efface Nicolas's physical presence in their community. Finally, in "L'aveugle," the victim is first rendered lifeless and effaced by the *foule infinie* of snow. Following his rejection from society and his effacement by the white of snow, the approaching warmth of spring melts "l'épais et léger duvet des neiges"[178] and transforms the metaphor of effacement into a literal representation of disfigurement:

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blind man is effaced by snow, while the gory sights of suicide are replaced by institutionalized death, by which it is rendered invisible.

[178] Guy de Maupassant, "La folle," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles I*, 672. As Louis Forestier evokes in his commentary on "L'aveugle" (see note 1 in vol. *Contes et nouvelles I*, 1420), a similar scene where the accumulation of snow buries the character exists in this short story, allowing us to draw an analogy between the deathly connotations of snow and burial.

les fermiers remarquèrent un grand vol de corbeaux qui tournoyaient sans fin au-dessus de la plaine, puis s'abattaient comme une pluie noire en tas à la même place, repartaient et revenaient toujours.[179]

The white *crowd* of snowflakes covering the body is shredded by a black cloud of crows, hovering over the body like a deathly down that, instead of covering the body, tears it to unidentifiable pieces.[180] This crowd of snowflakes and later the crowd of crows devour the weak blind man, just as the crowd of villagers did by their cruelty toward and consequent expulsion of the victim. In other words, devoured symbolically by the others' cruelty, at the melting of the snow, the blind man is devoured literally by the crows, the gleaners of the living.

The snow that sealed the body from view, but also from deterioration, is "ripped through" by the black blotches[181] of the birds' bodies falling onto the white surface. This violent image mimics the gesture of ink traced onto the white surface of paper. Yet, the only reference to writing in the story lies in the description of the blind man's eyes: "Il avait une figure toute pale, et deux grands yeux blancs comme des pains à cacheter."[182] The text cruelly likens the victim's eyes to bread, who dies from the cold and hunger. As a common replacement for wax, bread was used at this time to seal letters. The *cachet* encloses, authenticates and hides (*cacher*) the writing. The body of the blind man, who is unable to either read or write, embodies a representation of that which ought to remain

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[179] Guy de Maupassant, "L'aveugle," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles I*, 404-405.

[180] The vivid description of the crows contrasts the snow in more than just color. The blind man's cadaver, serving as bait for the birds, seems to contradict the meteorological changes in nature. Their assembly resembles "une *pluie* noire." Further along, the text describes this scene as follows: "Le ciel en portait un *nuage* comme s'ils se fussent réunis de tous les coins de l'horizon" ("L'aveugle," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles I*, 405).

[181] The birds' attack of the body is described as follow: "ils se laissaient tomber avec de grands cris dans la neige éclatante, qu'ils tachaient étrangement, et fouillaient avec obstination" ("L'aveugle," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles I*, 405).

[182] Guy de Maupassant, "L'aveugle," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles I*, 403.

unseen, secret and hidden from the others' view. In other words, his presence reveals a threat to society's unity, which the society seeks to seal and hide. The signature borne by the "pains à cacheter" in the place of the character's eyes reflects the society's intolerance of his position. Thus, he is rendered victim by the others' intolerance of his marginality, lying outside of the circuit of exchange. The monstrosity of their violence, grotesquely unequaled to the character's dependence on their charity, is revealed by the birds, which break the white seal of the snow, and thus transgress the proscription that the others impose on their social structure.

We find a two-fold paradox in these three texts, the radical disequilibrium between the others' hatred and violence, on the one hand, and the helplessness, vagrancy and weakness of the victim, on the other. In the first, the victim-criminal relation is represented in a linear, cause-effect manner. In other words, the three characters' inability to enter into an exchange with society precipitates a reaction so violent that the reader is lead to question the status of the victim-criminal opposition, and to consider instead a much more complex relation. The position of victim, unlike Girard's model of scapegoat[183] by which the victim is arbitrarily chosen by the criminal, exists rather in complicity with the criminal. In other words, the victimization of a subject in Maupassant's stories can be found in the correlation between the victim and the criminal.

The marginal social status of Jacques, Nicolas and the blind man pushes them to the position of victim precisely *because* their precarious status threatens the social stability and unity of the others. This threat, in turn, reveals the fragility within the social structure that is subject to norms to which the others struggle at all costs to correspond. In

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[183] René Girard, *La violence et le sacré* (Paris: Grasset, 1993).

this sense, the violence of the villagers in the three short stories results as a reaction to their own vulnerability to social norms, while the main character, the most obvious victim in each of these texts, reveals the fragility and fragmentation within that society. This can explain the violent and seemingly excessive acts of disfigurement of the victim and the others' desire to efface him or her. The victim's inability to exchange with the others undermines the identitary elements, such as hard work, piety and charity, by which the others seek to define themselves. Failing to mirror these elements, the victim's problematic status is perceived by the others as a threat to an identity that aspires to a semblance of unity and stability. Instead, the *outsider* here reveals the fragility of their social identity, a fragility that they desperately conspire to distance and hide. Though the villagers victimize the marginal subject, we can interpret their excessive violence as a reaction to their own victimization by the rigid norms of the social order. Other texts, where the ambiguity of the victim-criminal correlation is more vivid, will widen our perception of this question in the author's presentation of the modern subject.

Repression or expulsion of a threat to one's sense of unity, as a threat of fragmentation, evokes Freud's theory of the uncanny, upon which Julia Kristeva elaborates in her text entitled *Etrangers à nous-mêmes*.[184] She places the role of the stranger (*l'étranger*) in direct correlation to the others:

> [L]'étranger nous habite : il est la face cachée de notre identité, l'espace qui ruine notre demeure, le temps où s'abîment l'entente et la sympathie. De le reconnaître en nous, nous nous épargnons de le détester en lui-même.[185]

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[184] Julia Kristeva, *Etrangers à nous-mêmes* (Paris: Fayard, 1988).
[185] Ibid., 9.

Following Kristeva's claim, the three victims in Maupassant's texts serve as objects of society's projection of the otherness that inhabits them. Hatred transforms from individual violence to a collective one. The crowd is restructured into a group, whose aim is to preserve its sense of unity. The violence of the mass, according to Freud's theory of mass psychology, transgresses the relatively modest bounds of individual hatred.[186] Faced with the progressive threat of having one's sense of a unified self compromised by the *outsider*, the villagers' cruelty increases in relation to that threat. The stranger, as Kristeva observes, is:

> perçu comme un envahisseur dévoile chez l'enraciné une passion ensevelie : celle de tuer l'*autre*, d'abord craint ou méprisé, puis promu du rang de déchet au statut de persécuteur puissant contre lequel un « nous » se solidifie pour se venger.[187]

While the others consider the victim as an object of their charity, the victim neither contributes to nor returns it. As a result, their attitude toward him or her transforms, perceiving the victim as an abuser, or one who does not *mirror* their pity, and finally as an undeniable threat. Thus the definition of the victim remains closely linked to that of the criminal, or *persecutor* following Kristeva's terms. The crowd *solidifies* against the victim once he or she attains the status of persecutor, and that happens when his or her entire existence within that society reduces to one single revealing function of the fragility and fragmentation of that society.

By putting into question the other's social status in the face of the *outsider*'s precariousness, Maupassant's texts exceed the simple, linear opposition between the criminal and the victim. The definition of the victim – which acquires particular interest

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[186] See Sigmund Freud, "Psychologie des foules et analyse du moi," in *Essais de psychanalyse* (Paris: Payot, 2001).

[187] Julia Kristeva, *Etrangers à nous-mêmes*, 33.

and even its own discipline in the latter half of the 20th and the opening of the 21st century – can no longer be reduced to the basic notion of the oppressor-oppressed relation.[188] In many of the author's texts, the ambiguous correlation between the victim and the criminal exists already and makes it difficult to clearly distinguish between the two. In fact, the two positions often overlap, reverse even, where the victim becomes the criminal and vice versa. Considering this complex relationship between the victim and the criminal, we are led to further question the definition of victimization in Maupassant's texts.

The Law and the Victim

For Maupassant, all human actions have the potential of becoming a source of victimization. In order to better understand the scope of these variations, we can look at numerous types of victims in his texts. Once again, putting aside instances where physical violence is exercised by one character onto another and focusing rather on the social and psychological pressures experienced by an individual, we find that the majority of Maupassantian characters are victims of law, of social norms and institutions, as well as of ideals and intentions. While many examples of victimization are in the form of *common* situations, the experience of one's victimization vis-à-vis the oppressing factor remains purely subjective. Maupassant emphasizes the brutal banality of the situations in which a character falls prey to oppressive norms or failed aspirations. For instance, while the source of suffering for some is their genealogical illegitimacy ("Monsieur Parent"), for others it is their genealogical legitimacy (*Pierre et Jean*, "Aux champs"). This implies that we cannot generalize the nature of the victim throughout the oeuvre. Moreover, the

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[188] See, for instance, a general study of victimization by Jo-Anne Wemmers. *Introduction à la victimologie* (Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2003). She delineates the various definitions and forms of the victim.

overlap between the victim and the oppressor deepens the ambiguous nature of the characters' identity. We can attribute this ambiguity and complexity of character in part to the author's mastery of the short story as a genre, which appears in its simplicity while repeatedly captivating the reader despite the repetitive plots. In fact, numerous critics[189] have noted the repetition and variations of the same subjects throughout the hundreds of stories. The implied victimization in these texts singularizes each one, thus rendering it unique. In other words, the entirety of Maupassant's texts is marked by repetition, of the subjects treated and of the characters. Despite such profuse and explicit repetition, each text captivates the reader distinctly from the other texts. If the question of victimization reappears in the majority of the works, it renders each text unique for it focuses on the individual suffering of each character, while putting into question the social context that sets the stage for the victimization.

Each text gives a unique representation of a victim in subjection to social institutions and norms, which are placed in the position of the criminal. Among these texts, some of the most explicit and provocative stories illustrate the subject as a victim of the State and of the law. "L'état peut tuer, lui, parce qu'il a le droit de modifier l'état civil," triumphantly concludes the magistrate in "Un fou" (1885).[190] Leaving a confessional diary that describes his fascination with murder, a temptation to which he will finally give in, the respected judge compares his official position to that of a criminal. As he attests, both, the magistrate and the criminal take it upon themselves to dispose of the life of another. Despite the title, which orients and predisposes the reader to interpret the magistrate's deeds as mad, the question of official violence undertaken by

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[189] See, for instance, Ph. Bonnefis's *Comme Maupassant* and Antonia Fonyi's *Maupassant 1993*.
[190] Guy Maupassant, "Un fou," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 543.

the State remains nevertheless problematic. With such texts as this, Maupassant likens the

law to the criminal. In a delirious line of logic, the magistrate comes to conclusions that

justify murder by law:

> Moi qui ai passé mon existence à juger, à condamner, à tuer par des paroles
> prononcées, à tuer par la guillotine ceux qui avaient tué par le couteau, moi! moi!
> si je faisais comme tous les assassins que j'ai frappés, moi! moi! qui le saurait?[191]

Comparing his position of magistrate to that of the criminal, the judge concludes that

while the criminal kills out of pleasure, the State does so in the name of justice. Each

society is represented and structured by its law. The State appropriates an otherwise

forbidden desire that it reintegrates within the legal system, consequently justifying the

death it imposes on the other. Through the voice of the magistrate, Maupassant seeks to

show that if the law can kill, it does not do so only in the name of justice, by punishing

the guilty.

In his state of madness, the magistrate sees little differentiation between the two

types of imposed death. The distinction between lawful death and criminal murder

appears to lie in the instrument, or motivation. In other words, what is at stake for this

character is not the act of killing, for he kills in the name of the law and thus of duty. The

criminal, on the other hand, kills in the name of pleasure, according to the magistrate.

Having transformed his sense of duty into pleasure, he kills in the name of "l'état civil, le

Dieu légal,"[192] as the he calls it, answering to his repressed desire to destroy. He attributes

the act of destruction to its proximity to creation,[193] as a source of empowerment for the

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[191] Ibid.
[192] Ibid.
[193] "Souvent, on rencontre de ces gens chez qui détruire la vie est une volupté. Oui, oui, ce doit être une volupté, la plus grande de toutes peut-être ; car tuer n'est-il pas ce qui ressemble le plus à créer ? Faire et détruire !" ("Un fou," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 540).

State and for the criminal. The proclaimed madness of the magistrate explains his criminal actions as a diversion of power, for he uses the State as a weapon. Yet, Maupassant deliberately posits the subject of capital punishment and the power of the law in proximity to criminality, with the aim to show the ambiguity between them.

If such confusion in logic is possible here, it comes as a consequence of a social structure and social norms that themselves border hypocrisy and illegality. The context of madness does not seem to be the motor for questioning the legal system, but rather a consequence of the system's inconsistencies. In this sense, the magistrate's madness pushes him to accomplish a repressed desire that he attributes to all humanity, despite the interdiction that serves to protect one from effectuating murder.

The State's abuse of power reappears as a subject in numerous other stories. For instance, in "Le condamné à mort," the author addresses the State's right to execution, this time in a humorous and mocking tone. A man living in Monaco, kills his wife "sans raison, sans prétexte acceptable,"[194] whom the court, by lack of justification that the legal system could assimilate, convicts unanimously to execution. The dark humor begins when the convict's sentence is progressively reduced in order to economize on the expenses of the criminal's treatment, including an expensive rental of the guillotine from the French and a costly salary for the jailer. The State's economic preference finally results in a compensated expulsion of the inmate from Monaco to the bordering France. This text evokes the mutability of law, driven at times by interest rather than ideology, by which the execution of a criminal in this satirical text can be lifted for reason of impracticality. The criminal, instead, perceives his liberation as punishment. In other

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[194] Guy de Maupassant, "Le condamné à mort," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles I*, 789.

words, he experiences the State's concept of liberty as victimizing. Thus, punishment arises from an inversed definition of freedom, with the criminal's preference to remain in jail at the State's expense, rather than to regain life within a society that the author represents as a trap. Juxtaposing the criminal and the victim, liberty and imprisonment, Maupassant seeks to show the coexistence of opposites, of contradictions, of good and evil. With this text, Maupassant further pushes the boundaries of the victim.

Finally in "L'Endormeuse," the author expresses ever more cynically his judgment of capital punishment and the ambiguity between the criminal – in this case also embodied by the State and social institutions – and the victim. This text, to which I will return at greater length later in this chapter, defines capital punishment in "humanitarian," legal and practical terms. Structured within the main character's daydream, the context is nevertheless strikingly vivid and real. In this vision, the State establishes an institution by which it regulates suicide. The institution adopts the function of suicide with the goal to control and neutralize voluntary death. By the legal and official implementation of such a *killing machine*, the victim of suicide annuls his or her state of victimization by coming of one's own will. The complicity between suicidal individuals and the State exculpates society's oppressive norms.

Among the texts set in judicial court, the judgment of the apparent victim-criminal is based on several set conclusions. In all of these cases, Maupassant shows the ironic tragedy of the victim's condemnation. In "Tribunaux rustiques," an aged woman adopts and raises a boy, to whom she grants her land. Upon marriage, the latter moves away and passes his ownership of the land to his young wife. Feeling betrayed and abandoned by her adopted son, the old woman seeks justice for her double loss, the boy and the land.

The law, however, does not take her side, condemning her interested and manipulative relationship with the boy. The judgment in this case reverses the victim, from the old woman to the son. The norms of marriage and property inheritance dominate, leaving the old woman in a position of loss. Inversely, her position as the mother figure is complex because her motherly love is being driven by personal interest. As we find in many of Maupassant's texts, the seemingly devout and self-less characters prove to be motivated by interest that the author inscribes at the core of the family structure. Here, the familial link between the old woman and her adopted son turns to the law to annul the son's indebtedness that has enchained him to the woman. In other words, the young man, as a victim of the familial structure, seeks justice, which in turn puts the old woman in the position of loss and thus of victim. Therefore, the family institution is at the core of this injustice, rendering a fair and just decision impossible.

While many literary texts at this time question the family institution and in Maupassant's works, family is often represented as a source of injustice, we can apply this form of victimization to a more general category of social belonging and appearance. In fact, physical appearance alone provokes victimization and violence, as embodied by the figure of the vagrant. We see this particularly in "Le vagabond" and "Le gueux." Social status is in great part upheld by appearance. Deviance from the norms of appearance condemn the subject, regardless his or her innocence. The others' perception of the character's vagrancy is triggered by his or her progressively debilitative physical appearance. Consequently, this precipitates and justifies their expulsion of the vagrant from the community by attributing to him or her associations of violence and criminality. In "Le champ d'oliviers" for instance, a man abandons his pregnant lover, believing

another to be the father of the child. Fleeing from this deception, he joins the priesthood and leads a quiet life in the countryside. Many years later, a young vagabond approaches him and proves that he is his son. Faced with the impossible position of father and priesthood, the old man commits suicide. However, official authorities unquestionably judge his death a murder, finding the vagabond unkempt and drunk at the scene.

For Maupassant, the victim is trapped within social norms whom they fail to assimilate and to reflect back. We see this in such characters as Jacques of "Le vagabond," Nicolas of "Le gueux" and Philippe-Auguste, the vagrant, of "Le champ d'oliviers," among others. Failing to enter into a circuit of exchange, their existence alone presents a threat to the apparent order of the society in which they live. In reaction to this perceived threat, society criminalizes and convicts them by law. Therefore, vagrants become victims of the same social norms that render others criminals. The source of victimization is banal and ambiguous in nature. In other words, the lives presented by Maupassant are rarely extraordinary, and are inscribed instead within the social norms. This leads to the conclusion that every Maupassantian character at some point becomes a victim of social conventions, whether he or she succeeds or fails to adhere to them.

Social Ideals and the Victim

For Maupassant, who reveals the ambiguities and contradictions of social norms and institutions, the legal system itself presents a source of oppression. However, oppression and victimization lie not only in the consequences of social norms, but also in the ideals that they propagate. In fact, the texts where characters become victims of social ideals are abundant. In these texts however, the "criminal" is less easily discernible, for

no one agent can be isolated as the source of oppression. Moreover, as we will see, the victims subject *themselves* to such oppressive ideals, driven by motives of social norms.

Contrary to the preceding examples where characters are lead to a marginal social status by society itself, victims of social ideals fall prey to their sought out social stability. This latter form of victimization results from one's voluntary subjection to social conventions and integration. These characters seek to construct an armor-lined life, in a familial, professional, spiritual or social sense. For instance, descriptions of Monsieur Parent all point to his identity as a father, including his name. His satisfaction with his fatherhood and with his family in general renders him blind to Henriette's, his wife's, infidelity and his son's resemblance to her lover, a fact so blindly obvious that even "[un] aveugle ne s'y tromperait pas."[195] Reliance on a seemingly achieved family ideal renders him dupe of the deception that masks itself behind this ideal. Fearing a threat to his family ideal, Parent justifies every sign that points to his wife's infidelity. As long as he turns a blind eye to the threat, the family continues to *appear* as stable. Consequently, he fears everything that could disrupt this semblance of stability: "Il n'en voulait pas à Henriette d'être en retard, mais il avait peur, peur d'elle et de Julie, peur de tout ce qui pouvait arriver."[196] He is afraid of the altercations between Henriette and Julie, the maid, because they threaten his sense of stability, though the reason for the risk remains unidentified to him. Yet, it is precisely his desperate reliance on familial stability that precipitates his victimization. Consequently, the moment Parent confronts his wife's lies, his ideal image of the family shatters. Following this moment of disillusionment, in the second part of the text, we witness a long monotonous unwinding of the character's life,

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[195] Guy de Maupassant, "Monsieur Parent," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 586.
[196] Ibid., 585.

driven only by the "idée fixe"[197] of his family's disintegration and the incertitude of his paternity.

Social stability can manifest itself in the routine aspect of a character's life. While a number of texts show characters who strive for social and professional stability, it is precisely this aim that leads to their sense of victimization. In "Suicides" and "Promenade," the main characters perceive, in a similar way, the routine that structures their lives. Both characters perceive their professional achievements and the general unfolding of their lives as meaningless. After questioning the influence that professional achievements have on the significance of their lives, both characters face inescapable death. In his suicide note, the character of "Suicides" reveals the disillusionment of his past ideals. He calls the eagerness and easy beliefs of his early life a *dream*: "Mon rêve dura longtemps. Les derniers lambeaux viennent seulement de se déchirer."[198] He qualifies his general state of dreaming as an illusion, in other words as something that could, like a veil, *tear* (*se déchirer*) as well as hide from view. Triggered by a sudden realization of senselessness and the routine quality of his everyday life, the character's previous general fascination with life transforms into disillusionment. "Nous sommes les jouets éternels d'illusions stupides et charmantes toujours renouvelées."[199] Thus, not only everyday actions are routine, but also desires, illusions and fascination, things that are meant precisely to surprise and to be experienced as new each and every time. With this in mind, a surprise presupposes that the subject does not expect that event. Consequently, even the unexpected follows a repetitive course. As the character of "Suicides"

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[197] Ibid., 617.
[198] Guy de Maupassant, "Suicides," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles I*, 176.
[199] Ibid.

concludes, "[tout] se répète sans cesse et lamentablement."[200] While he is conscious of the monotony of his life, living resentfully in seeming senselessness, what triggers a sense of irreversibility in the routine is the moment that he rereads his letters. The letters, read from the last to the first, give a perspective of the character's entire life. Concluding with the beginning of what had constituted his future aspirations, he places the hopeful past in contrast to the hopeless present, and the latter before an impossible future. Thus, his suicide follows a feeling of entrapment in a monotonous and senseless procession of events, rendered ever more violent by the juxtaposition of the intangible hopes of the past to the concrete deception of the present.

In "Promenade," the sequence of events is reversed. M. Leras's solitary life had never seen any interactions nor diversions, "[sa] chambre était vide de souvenirs, comme sa vie."[201] The empty walls reflect the empty, monotonous and solitary existence of the character. When he ventures out on a unique pleasurable evening in Paris, he disturbs the closed reflection of solitude that composes his life. This evasion from the routine triggers in him an overwhelming feeling of helplessness and meaninglessness of the life that he has led thus far. The walls of his room that always reflected his solitude are suddenly replaced by a constant murmuring of Parisian nightlife:

> Il entendait autour de lui, au-dessus de lui, partout, une rumeur confuse, immense, continue, faite de bruits innombrables et différents, une rumeur sourde, proche, lointaine, une vague et énorme palpitation de vie : le souffle de Paris, respirant comme un être colossal.[202]

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[200] Ibid., 177.
[201] Guy de Maupassant, "Promenade," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 132.
[202] Ibid.

His small entrapment, devoid of life, is replaced by a "monstrous beast" that swallows him within its colossal breathing body. The sudden opening to the immensity of the world around Leras is ever more overwhelming and radical when contrasted to his lack of desire. He had never known pleasure, for "n'ayant jamais joui de rien il ne désirait pas grand-chose."[203] This *promenade* as a unique moment of pleasure is therefore fatal in a life "passée sans événements, sans émotions et presque sans espérances."[204] Consequently, in contrast to the gaiety surrounding him, Leras becomes aware of his irreversible solitude. In other words, contrary to the mirroring effect between Leras and his room, the immense breathing beast that has swallowed him up does not however reflect him. Instead, it incorporates and effaces him. In contrast to his integration in a social order of conventions that he has thus far embodied, Leras is rendered invisible by his new and unknown environment. While the character of "Suicides" perceived himself as a victim of hopes and aspirations that were integrated within the repetitive movement of his life's events, – a life that renders hope and pleasure banal and routine, – Leras's victimization comes instead from the continuity within a monotonous routine that has always been devoid of pleasure. Leras's sudden realization of solitude, in contrast to the love, affection and joyfulness he witnesses in others around him, triggers his enactment of death.

In these two stories, as in "Monsieur Parent" too, the main character's sense of victimization becomes apparent only as a consequence of a particular event. This moment is represented as a rupture in the veiling illusion of a social ideal. Aside from familial stability that we see in "Monsieur Parent" and professional and social stability

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[203] Ibid., 127.
[204] Ibid.

encountered in "Suicides" and "Promenade," Maupassant presents other social ideals toward which the subject strives in order to recreate a sense of unity in his or her life. In "Le champ d'oliviers," Abbé Vilbois's spiritual integrity is shattered with the unexpected apparition of his vagrant son. This confrontation, in turn, victimizes the son who is blamed for the priest's, his father's suicide.[205] In a more implicit example of victimization, Signoles, in "Un lâche," is a victim of a shift in the social structure, one in which his dandy-like identity holds little power. In other words, the code of conduct according to which he has lead his life no longer corresponds to the society in which he lives. Therefore, his ideal does not correspond to the social order, causing him to fatally misjudge his opponent, Georges Lamil. His fear arises from the incapacity to foresee and comprehend the parameters of his duel.

Considering these examples, one is led to conclude once again that all subjects in one way or another become victims of society. Yet, the definition of victim here is not simple. In fact, Maupassant's insistent ambiguity in the representation of victims foresees the developments of victimology, a science that does not enter the academic sphere until the second half of the 20th century.[206] This relatively new science has focused precisely on delineating the parameters of the victim's role and position in a crime, placing emphasis on the victim within the criminal dynamic. Not that the victim is responsible for the crime that was committed onto him or her, but rather that the analysis of the victim and his or her actions are applied in understanding the criminal act and its probability of taking place. Focusing the criminal as an individual or a small group, the various approaches of

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[205] Vilbois is situated between two incompatible definitions of "father", religious and genealogical.

[206] With the study of victimology, the definition of the victim sees major transformations, from being an object of sacrifice to one who plays a role, active or unconscious, in one's victimization, and from theories of complicity between the victim and the criminal (Hans von Hentig, Benjamin Mendelsohn) to causality between victimization and criminality in a subject (Henri Ellenberger, Ezzat Fattah).

victimology do not however address the more vast and general type of victim, the victim of social ideals. Therefore, in a certain way, Maupassant surpasses the positivist approach of modern victimology. "Miroir des choses et miroir des faits, chaque être humain devient un petit univers dans l'univers!",[207] proclaims the magistrate of "Un fou." Each subject is thus representative of the entire society, at once unique and encompassing the whole. Linking this idea back to the enumeration of victims in Maupassant's works, this implies that the possibility of criminal and victim, and their coexistence in one individual, can be found in every subject.

Once again, these studies do not consider the dependent and repressive relationship between the subject and the social ideals, where a clear delineation of the criminal cannot be made. While we find numerous examples of criminal acts, such as murder, rape and burglary, where clearly a particular character is at fault, a vast majority of Maupassantian victims surpass this category. These other victims suffer from an existential self-confrontation that is represented by social ideals toward which the subject aspires. In psychoanalytic terms, the ego ideal is a model constructed from the collective social influences. As a goal, the ego receives satisfaction when it coincides in any part with the ideal. Inversely, failure in this quest results in feelings of guilt and belittlement of the ego.[208] These ideals rely on existing and developed social norms, such as family, professional status, material and financial acquisitions, which all have for a goal a notion of stability within the social structure. As we saw with the first three texts, "Le vagabond," "L'aveugle" and "Un gueux," compliance with these norms provides for

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[207] Guy de Maupassant, "Un fou," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 542.

[208] "Il se crée toujours une sensation de triomphe quand quelque chose dans le moi coïncide avec l'idéal du moi. De même, le sentiment de culpabilité (et le sentiment d'infériorité) peut être compris comme expression de la tension entre moi et idéal" (Sigmund Freud, "Psychologie des foules et analyse du moi," 225).

benefits of social integration, and the failure to do so results in punishment and the threat of expulsion from society. From this perspective, the link between the *victim* and social ideals is obvious and indisputable. Victimization by a social ideal results not only in the failure toward the ideal, as we can see in the case of Monsieur Parent, but also in its *satisfaction*, as the story of "Suicides" illustrates, where the achievement of what one considered as social ideals fails to provide meaning. In this sense, whether one passes through failure or success, all aspirations and social ideals have the potential of being experienced as a source of victimization. However, we have yet to question the meaning of an attained social ideal, as the character of "Suicides" claims to have achieved.

The modern study of victimology rejects pure chance in the event of victimization, claiming that each victim sets up certain conditions that make him or her more vulnerable to crime, as if predisposed to it. However, if we consider that most Maupassantian characters perceive themselves or are represented as victims, not much chance in fact is left. We must therefore consider the character's own realization of his or her state of victimization as being in great part a subjective state, one that is not generalized nor universally recognized as such. In spite of the repetitive nature of Maupassant's stories, perhaps it is this singularity of the victim that renders each text captivating.

As we can see, the character's sense of victimization depends on his or her perception. In other words, what one character experiences as being oppressive, another does not. While the particular nature of victimization of each character varies, all of these texts are united by the characters' tendency toward stability, which in turn betrays them. The moment of betrayal is a point of rupture, represented by a particular event. And in

the majority of the short stories where the character suffers from a failed social ideal, we find two fatal consequences: decline or suicide.

2. Decline

Rigid Ideals

Maupassant ceaselessly reiterates the entrapment enacted by social institutions onto the subject. The entrapment of a vast majority of his characters results from a failure in their drive toward a social ideal promised by these institutions. Their aim toward a social ideal transforms into victimization. Defined as a form of perfection in a given domain, an ideal is precisely that which lies beyond one's reach. Yet, Maupassant overturns the notion of ideals, from positive aspiration to a source of subjugation to social norms. In his texts, an ideal is not only an attainable goal; the absolute that defines it is subjected to social conventions that define the characters. In other words, the social ideals we find in Maupassant's texts replace the classical definition of the concept, and the norms stand in for the ideals. Having failed to maintain the family ideal, Monsieur Parent's perception of the family structure rigidifies, despite its disintegration. Consequently, his aim remains in the place of lack, where the ideal once was. Failure in one's course toward an ideal acquires greater proportions and shifts from the subject's investment in an object to identification with the remaining lack.[209]

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[209] See Freud's essay, "Mourning and Melancholia," on the relationship between the subject and the lost object.

If a subject believes to have *succeeded* in coinciding with a social ideal, a question on the nature and definition of an ideal in general is raised. The character of "Suicides," for instance, affirms his deception upon achieving each aspired goal. This text raises existential questions in relation to the role that an ideal plays in the unraveling of one's life. While the character *believes* to have corresponded to his ideals, this apparent success reduces his goals and achievements to mechanical functions, devoid of idealization. Stripped of hope and of higher ideals, he attests to the reduction of his goal to mere mechanical actions: "La signification des choses m'est apparue dans sa réalité brutale."[210] The voice of the journalist, who documents M. X…'s suicide, represents the function of norms as social ideals. Unable to comprehend the reasons behind the character's suicide, he describes the victim as someone who "jouissait d'une aisance honorable et avait tout ce qu'il faut pour être heureux."[211] The definition of ideal happiness and success is reduced here to social achievements.

The belief of having attained one's goals suggests that the quality of these ideals is in itself flawed, for an ideal by definition lies within the sphere of aspiration and beyond complete achievement. Yet, the social conventions that these ideals represent thus limit the otherwise infinite scope of perfection. If an ideal lies beyond one's concrete and full grasp, it implies that its definition evolves constantly and encompasses the multiple influences, also in perpetual evolution, on the identity of the subject. This, however, is not the reality for many of Maupassantian characters, to whom all aspirations as well as real experiences are reduced to monotony and repetition. As the character of "Suicides" expresses:

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[210] Guy de Maupassant, "Suicides," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles I*, 176.
[211] Ibid., 175.

> Quels que soient nos efforts, nos détours, nos crochets, la limite est proche et arrondie d'une façon continue, sans saillies imprévues et sans porte sur l'inconnu. Il faut tourner, tourner toujours, par les mêmes idées, les mêmes joies, les mêmes plaisanteries, les mêmes habitudes, les mêmes croyances, les mêmes écoeurements.[212]

Repetition and monotony progressively overturn the possibility of ideals in Maupassant's texts. Left passively to fate, ideals wither, as we see in *Fort comme la mort*, for instance. In fact, this novel presents numerous forms of ideals: artistic and social, as well as ideals of beauty and love. The artist's quest toward an artistic ideal is sacrificed for glory that tempts him. With the promise of success in the elite world of high society, he substitutes his artistic ideal with the gain of a social norm. In other words, corrupted by triumph, Olivier Bertin's early artistic aspirations give way to social acceptance: "Riche, illustre, ayant conquis tous les honneurs, il demeurait, vers la fin de sa vie, l'homme qui ne sait pas encore au juste vers quel idéal il a marché."[213] The formulation of this phrase suggests that Bertin had already contented himself with a certain achievement, fixing his artistic ideal in a socially motivated aim. While the submission of his talent to an overwhelming "désir de plaire" brought him fortune and fame, it is by this subversion that the ideal becomes "attainable." Yet, once again, in the attainment of an ideal lies a fundamental contradiction, for, in principle the two are mutually exclusive. Bertin's submission to society's critical gaze "modifiait secrètement sa voie, atténuait ses convictions."[214] In other words, he progressively strips his ideals of their underlying absolute. He falls under the influence of Anne de Guilleroy, who persistently manipulates

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[212] Ibid., 177.
[213] Guy de Maupassant, *Fort comme la mort*, in vol. *Romans*, 838.
[214] Ibid.

his artistic principles. Consequently, the creative convictions of the talented[215] artist give way to another ideal, that of social and professional stability which the attainment of glory guarantees:

> Depuis douze ans elle accentuait son penchant vers l'art distingué, combattant ses retours vers la simple réalité, et par des considérations d'élégance mondaine, elle le poussait tendrement vers un idéal de grâce un peu maniéré et factice.[216]

While the artistic and literary movements at the time turn to Naturalism and Realism, the bourgeoisie continues to embalm itself in the excesses of past aristocratic customs. During the rise of his artistic quest, Bertin represented reality in its simplicity and followed its transformations. He becomes progressively *pushed* toward mundane and bourgeois elegance that would corrupt and end his artistic power.

Anne's aristocratic nostalgia overpowers Bertin's artistic ideals. In other words, the true ideal of an artist in the developing quest of artistic creation is here combated and ultimately replaced by another vision, "maniéré" and "factice". By contrast, an ideal, as an extreme, cannot be reproduced nor "manipulated", for this would imply already attained mastery. Thus, manipulation of an ideal would suggest subversion and consequently a nullification of the ideal. However, we will see that many of Maupassantian characters become victims of "ridigified" ideals, constructed by society with the aim to manipulate and to structure the identity of the subject.

In one's attempt to manipulate and master an ideal, failure is inevitable, for the stability that the rigid ideal promises is eventually overturned by social change. Thus,

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[215] "Intelligent, enthousiaste, travailleur tenace au rêve changeant, épris de son art qu'il connaissait à merveille, il avait acquis, grâce à la finesse de son esprit, des qualités d'exécution remarquables et une grande souplesse de talent née en partie de ses hésitations et de ses tentatives dans tous les genres" (*Fort comme la mort*, in vol. *Romans*, 838).

[216] Guy de Maupassant, *Fort comme la mort*, in vol. *Romans*, 841.

Bertin finds himself prostrated by the violent criticism that appears on the front page of *Le Figaro*, calling his work "l'Art démodé d'Olivier Bertin."[217] His professional status shifts from a glorification of traditions and classical subjects[218] to being himself deposed and replaced by a new generation. This violent break in his professional status comes as a consequence of his reliance on an elite, mundane society, adherence to which had once promised a fashionable and lavish lifestyle. However, the mundane bourgeois society grants no guarantees of a stable and unrivalled status. Just as Anne's fading beauty fails to attract, Bertin confronts his own failure to please. In his case, the other's judgment, which once brought him quick glory, dethrones and substitutes him by another *new* fashion. Considering the rigidity of his professional vision, driven now mainly by fortune, the hope typically carried by an ideal transforms into hopelessness and despair:

> Jamais pareille tristesse, pareil découragement, pareille sensation de la fin de tout, de la fin de son être physique et de son être pensant, ne l'avaient jeté dans une détresse d'âme aussi désespérée.[219]

In contrast to the definition of an ideal as that which must remain unattainable, a paralyzed *ideal* implies the absence of aspiration and of hope. Upon confronting his failed professional and social status, Bertin's hopelessness gives no perspective onto reality except as that of a victim. While at no moment does the text name the character's victimization as such, the previous quotation alone, by its passive formulation, attests to Bertin's submission to an outside influence, which had inflicted upon him his disastrous decline. Because he submits his artistic ideal to the criticism of others, it degrades into a

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[217] Ibid., 1010.

[218] "Il avait été prix de Rome, défenseur des traditions, évocateur, après tant d'autres, des grandes scènes de l'histoire; puis, modernisant ses tendances, il avait peint des hommes vivants avec des souvenirs classiques" (*Fort comme la mort*, in vol. *Romans*, 838).

[219] Guy de Maupassant, *Fort comme la mort*, in vol. *Romans*, 1010.

form of a fashion (*mode*). Once his considered as such, it must face the inevitable destiny of becoming *démodé*. The rigidity of this goal gives in to the character's quest toward social stability, while remaining, at the same time, at a risk of collapse, precisely because this goal is based solely on the others' judgment.

Characters' social identity is petrified by their paralysis, thus rendering an ideal nothing but an illusion. Reliance on a past social status as an ideal inevitably leads the character to decline. We see this with Bertin, but even more so with Signoles in "Un lâche." In this text, the viscount Gontran-Joseph de Signoles incarnates the fallen aristocratic status of a dandy, who follows a code that, at the time that the story takes place, is no longer current nor in use. Signoles's too well constructed identity crumbles upon confrontation with the undecipherable identity of his duel opponent named Georges Lamil. Puzzled by Lamil, he seeks to imagine the opponent's social status: "Mon adversaire a-t-il fréquenté des tirs ? Est-il connu ? Est-il classé ? Comment le savoir ?"[220] The first document of reference to which he turns is the "livre du baron de Vaux sur les tireurs au pistolet," a list of personalities that would correspond to Singoles's understanding of the aristocratic social structure.[221] To his surprise and despair, "Georges Lamil n'y était pas nommé. Mais cependant si cet homme n'était pas un tireur, il n'aurait pas accepté immédiatement cette arme dangereuse et ces conditions mortelles?"[222]

Other elements in Signoles's behavior point to his outdated (*démodé*) nature. In a note to the text, Louis Forestier mentions the social importance of the Parisian café called Tortoni. In fact, this highly fashionable establishment, where the elite Parisian society once went to see and to be seen, had in Maupassant's time gone slightly out of fashion,

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[220] Guy de Maupassant, "Un lâche," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles I*, 1166.
[221] Ibid.
[222] Ibid.

welcoming instead "turfistes" and "sportsmen".[223] If Signoles once represented the height of the fashionable and elite society, at this point his identity has become frozen in a past state. For both Bertin and Signoles, paralysis within a rigidified ideal proves fatal and results in suicide.

We encounter numerous social institutions as sources of *rigid ideals*: the family with Monsieur Parent, professional success and the ideal of love with Olivier Bertin, and social success with Signoles. While none of these institutions are inherently victimizing, they become so for Maupassantian characters only because they are used as an instrument toward social stability, without one's actual investment in these goals. In other words, these ideals transform into *fixed models* with the goal of attaining social acceptance. The characters' fervent aim toward a sense of security implies that they experience their identity as already being fragmented and threatened by other coexisting social influences.

The fear of this threat veils one's fragmentation with a pretense of a stable, unified identity. This form of veiling appears in Bertin's love for Anne. At the beginning of the novel, his love is uncertain, filled with doubt, tormented by feelings of attraction and desire for fortune.[224] However, these ambiguous and enigmatic feelings progressively consolidate into a form of love that is defined by conquest. By finally declaring to Anne,

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[223] See note 1 in vol. *Contes et nouvelles I*, 1625. These figures carry a derogatory connotation, reflecting less a certain nobility and more bourgeois financial and social aspirations.

[224] "Aujourd'hui il s'étonnait de ce qu'il sentait en lui. L'aimait-il ? Certes, il la désirait à peine, n'ayant pas réfléchi à la possibilité d'une possession. […] Ce qu'il éprouvait […] lui paraissait provenir d'une émotion indéfinissable, bien plus physique que morale. […] Il n'ignorait pas que ce trouble venait de Mme de Guilleroy, du souvenir qu'elle lui laissait et de l'attente de son retour. Il ne sentait pas jeté vers elle, par un élan de tout son être, mais il la sentait toujours présente en lui, comme si elle ne l'eût pas quitté ; elle lui abandonnait quelque chose d'elle en s'en allant, quelque chose de subtil et d'inexprimable. Quoi ? Etait-ce de l'amour ? Maintenant, il descendait en son propre cœur pour voir et pour comprendre. Il la trouvait charmante, mais elle ne répondait pas au type de femme idéale, que son espoir aveugle avait créé. Quiconque appelle l'amour, a prévu les qualités morales et les dons physiques de celle qui le séduira ; et Mme de Guilleroy, bien qu'elle lui plût infiniment, ne lui paraissait pas être celle-là. […] Etait-il tombé simplement dans le piège tendu de sa coquetterie […] ?" (*Fort comme la mort*, in vol. *Romans*, 853-854).

"je vous aime follement," Bertin tactfully achieves his plan to provoke Anne's love for him. The transformation of his feelings is striking, and in a matter of pages, his *love* is described as follows:

> Chez lui, ce fut une crise d'amour aigu, sensuel et poétique. Il lui semblait parfois qu'il s'était envolé, un jour, les mains tendues, et qu'il avait pu étreindre à pleins bras le rêve ailé et magnifique qui plane toujours sur nos espérances.[225]

Interestingly, Anne is absent throughout this description. Rather, Bertin's fantasy of ideal love eclipses Anne entirely. And this feeling of ideal love, profound yet calmed with time, persists throughout the novel. Bertin's final disillusionment and death come as a result of a rupture in his idea of love. Though Anne was the object of this ideal, rivaled by a double embodied by her daughter, Bertin's concept of the ideal shatters immediately. From this perspective, if ideal love has but one object, how could another replicate it? In other words, the existence of two "identical" objects for the same love is impossible for that would contradict the uniqueness of Bertin's love claimed to have. Bertin's realization that his love is haunted by memories of the past and that the object of that love is interchangeable destroys the ideals that had thus far guided his personal and artistic aspirations. "Je vous ai aimée autant qu'on peut aimer une femme,"[226] Bertin says to Anne. Thus, while she embodied the object of Bertin's ideal, the ideal itself loses meaning when the object is rivaled by another. Annette in this case represents her mother's double. In fact, Bertin merges the two women into one, "Elle, je l'aime comme

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[225] Guy de Maupassant, *Fort comme la mort*, in vol. *Romans*, 864-865.
[226] Ibid., 1012.

vous, puisque c'est vous."[227] In other words, Annette is not *like* Anne, instead they are one and the same.

Just as Monsieur Parent's investment in the family is interested and driven by social stability and acceptance, Bertin's love serves a social and professional function as well. It is for this reason that the object of the claimed ideal is in fact interchangeable. However, in order for the ideal to exist, he must remain blind to the interchangeability of the two women. And it is here that he fails, as he himself admits to Anne: "J'aurais été un homme si heureux, si vous n'aviez pas eu votre fille."[228] Therefore, the threat to Bertin's perception of ideal love comes from the existence of yet another object of desire, its double, which would threaten the authenticity of the original. Furthermore, the double reveals the subject's investment in a false, illusory ideal.

Decline and Suicide

While a vast majority of Maupassant's stories and novels presents various forms of victimization, a significant number of the victims face one of two major fates: decline or suicide. Believing to have attained a social ideal leads one to consequent disillusionment and the shattering of this ideal. Consequently, what was perceived as an achievement is now considered as a failure. In the development of the text, decline and suicide are nevertheless not arbitrary. By juxtaposing *texts of decline*, such as "Monsieur Parent," *Pierre et Jean* and "Le vagabond," to *texts of suicide*, such as *Fort comme la mort*, "Suicides," "Promenade," "L'Endormeuse," "Un lâche," "Le champ d'oliviers" and "Le petit," we can find clear differences in the development of each type of narrative. As

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[227] Ibid.
[228] Ibid., 1024.

we will see, the different unfolding of the narrative determines the reasons behind the two outcomes. In other words, the way in which a narrative unravels will aid us in comprehending the choice between decline and suicide as consequences of a particular movement in the character's drive toward his or her social ideal.

In distinguishing between these two types of consequences, I would like to show that in texts of decline the character perceives his or her identity as being stable because it appears to be based on concrete ideals. One's disillusionment and decline are triggered by a moment of rupture in the character's identity. Suicide, on the other hand, results from what appears to be a progressive development in one's identity, which ultimately reveals the substitutive nature of one's accomplishments. The structure that Maupassant gives to these two types of texts differs significantly. In texts of decline, the critical moment appears at the beginning of the text, while in texts of suicide, we witness a long degenerative progression preceding the character's death.[229] Therefore, the temporal movement of these two types of texts is decisive in character development. For instance, Monsieur Parent's confrontation with his wife's infidelity, taking place in the first pages of this longer novella, triggers his decline. In "Promenade," on the other hand, we find a long unraveling of Monsieur Leras's life before he commits suicide. While the movement, descending and ascending, of these texts differs, in both the fate is directly linked to the character's self-perception in relation to a social ideal. Decline results from a continued illusion of the social ideal, while suicide comes as a consequence of disillusionment. Thus, the link between an illusion and the ideal is fundamental in the character's fate.

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[229] I have not found explicit examples of suicide committed by women in Maupassant's works, except in "L'Endormeuse." Other texts, however, such as "La folle," provide an implicit representation of suicide. In these cases, women too are subject to this problematic.

The movement of decline bears considerable significance in Maupassant's work, not only at the level of the narrative, but also within the structure of the text. *Decline* and *degeneration* signify a regression to an inferior state, which could be understood from a physical, moral and social perspective. In English, the latter term also implies a genealogical decline. We see this second signification in such texts as *Pierre et Jean* and "Monsieur Parent," where the main character confronts a rupture in the genealogical progression, in the first as a son, and in the second as a father. As we saw in the previous chapter, the question of genealogical legitimacy runs throughout the author's works. In "Monsieur Parent," genealogy serves as a social ideal on which the main character bases his entire identity. With the rupture of his family ideal, Monsieur Parent's disillusionment leads to his fall, not only genealogical, but also social, in a more general sense. The character falls (*déchoir*) from the tight social organization that he had constructed for himself, based solely on his identity as a father. *Déchéance*, the analogous term in French for *decline*, proposes a larger field of interpretation that extends beyond biological and genealogical signification. Decline is expressed in various ways. For instance, the title of the text of "Un lâche" implies a fall (*lâcher*). In the face of his fear of the other's judgment, Signoles fails to uphold his social identity, which consequently precipitates his death.

Apart from social forms of decline, we find yet another, physical deterioration. In a number of texts, Maupassant reveals a fascination with the decay of the human body, explicitly describing the process of putrefaction. The decomposing body – Forestier's in Bel-Ami and Schopenhauer's in "Auprès d'un mort" for instance – reengages the main character with the remaining presence of the dead. Decline here is represented in the form

of decay, as the last material reminder of one's existence. The remaining presence of the subject resonates in the decay that haunts the observer. Yet, decline in these cases plays the role of resurgence rather than of passive decline. Physical and social decline differ by their effect on the others. With physical decline, the subject's fading present asserts itself onto the other, while social decline pushes away and ultimately excludes the other.

"Monsieur Parent" presents an integral example of decline, resulting from a failure of the family ideal that the character had adopted. At the beginning of the text, we witness a scene in which the father's adoration of his son likens him to the figure of the mother. His soft and shy character contrasts his wife's harshness, which incites her contempt for his "unmanly" nature. From his perspective, Henriette's antagonism presents a threat to the nuclear family structure that Monsieur Parent seeks to preserve. To him, the family ideal depends on artificial preservation of the perceived stability. Artificial preservation implies here that all possible external threats must be put off intentionally. For Monsieur Parent, this is possible by extracting the family ideal from the outside. While he asserts his paternity, he nevertheless seeks protection behind locked doors, and particularly from violent outbursts between his wife and the maid, whose quarrels risk revealing threats to the family ideal. The locked door acts here as a veil to the infidelity that would rupture his rigid conception of family, and as a guarantee to his certitude of paternity. In fact, the rigidity of his family ideal corresponds proportionally to his refusal to accept its fragility. Therefore, perception of certainty and of stability necessitates the repression of threat.

Once Parent discovers Henriette's infidelity, he begins to doubt the authenticity of his paternity. The spatial structure of the text shifts, reflecting this change, from the

comfort of closed doors to total exposure to the outside world. The text is thus divided into two parts. The first part presents an illusory stability of the character's family and takes place within the confines of his house, while in the second part, Parent obsessively doubts his paternity, which drives his life into a monotonous and spiraling decline. His liberation from the entrapment in closed spaces proves to be itself a trap as well. Throughout the twenty-three years that pass in the second part of the text, Parent leads a life of evasion and decline out in the open, surrounded by Parisian society that he observes ceaselessly from a café terrace. The outside is a trap because Parent suspends his life at the center of the general movement of society, losing himself in the crowd. Thus, rather than engaging with the world around him, he places himself as a passive and habitual spectator, decomposing progressively with time and inebriation. While at first, the family ideal functions as the only identitary shield he believes to possess, resembling the doors and locks behind which he protected himself from the outside, once this shield shatters, Parent's inability to actively engage with others further marginalizes him. Ultimately, his decline symbolizes the singular importance of the family ideal.

In texts of decline, characters exhibit passivity, either self-imposed or by social influence. Monsieur Parent is progressively engulfed by the external movement surrounding him, which renders regrettable every minimal attempt to renew interaction with the other. The closed spaces that he had at one point considered as a haven is now a source of suffering. The narrator describes Parent's perception of the space that he once shared with his family: "C'était pour lui l'instant terrible, l'instant où il fallait rentrer dans le noir, dans la chambre vide, pleine de souvenirs affreux, de pensées horribles et

d'angoisses."[230] Thus, coming face to face with his past familial position, he perceives his frail identity with weakness and fear. The closed space that was once a place of refuge[231] is now peopled by haunting memories of the past. It poses a threat of distress to his numbness, passivity and the habitual repetitions that compose his life.[232]

Instead of investing himself in the social principles that motivate him, Parent severs all ties to society. He constructs a shield as protection from the outside world that threatens to reengage or reintegrate him, on the one hand, and from anguish-provoking memories, on the other. Even his body itself becomes listless and lacking vivacity,[233] reflecting his life in the course of the twenty-three years, "lentes, monotones, et courtes,"[234] that pass in the second part of the text.

This text, whose subject resembles many others, takes on particular significance by its length alone. If this story does not differ greatly from the hundreds of others that Maupassant develops in five to eight pages, we are led to question the unique length of nearly forty pages. Despite the story's considerable time span of over two decades, this aspect does not necessarily differ from other texts either. The first part presents the events

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[230] Guy de Maupassant, "Monsieur Parent," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 606.

[231] "Il n'osait même plus penser, réfléchir, *raisonner avec lui-même*, s'il ne se sentait *garanti* par un tour de clef contre les regards et les suppositions" ("Monsieur Parent," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 582. [Emphasis added.]).

[232] The following scene juxtaposes Parent's new need to be surrounded by the world, which, at the same time, he experiences like an interment, as if in a tomb. This analogy echoes the tomb-like nature of the closed doors in the first part of the text. However, here it is the opening that is morbid and tomb-like. Finally, Parent exists between the living and the dead: "Mais comme son appartement devenait un enfer pour lui, il prit une chambre dans un grand hôtel, une belle chambre d'entresol afin de voir les passants. Il n'était plus seul en ce vaste logis public ; il sentait grouiller des gens autour de lui ; il entendait des voix derrière les cloisons ; et quand ses anciennes souffrances le harcelaient trop cruellement en face de son lit entrouvert et de son feu solitaire, il sortait dans les larges corridors et se promenait comme un factionnaire, le long de toutes les portes fermées, en regardant avec tristesse les souliers accouplés devant chacune, les mignonnes bottines de femme blotties à côté de fortes bottines d'hommes ; et il pensait que tous ces gens-là étaient heureux, sans doute, et dormaient tendrement, côte à côte ou embrassés, dans la chaleur de leur couche" ("Monsieur Parent," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 606).

[233] Guy de Maupassant, "Monsieur Parent," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 611.

[234] Ibid., 608.

of discovery and rupture, unraveling merely in several hours, while the second part stretches over twenty-three passive years during which we witness Parent's decline. In a sense, the text itself degenerates, defying the typical Maupassantian structure and mirroring the character's slow decline. "Il allait à la mort sans remuer, sans s'agiter," writes the narrator.[235] Parent becomes numb to the passage of time, moving toward death without resistance. The text too exceeds the Maupassantian norm, mirroring the unraveling of the character's life.

The fatal moment of discovery culminates in a long, spiraling descent, determined more by passive projection of desire than by action. The two contrasting parts of the text represent the alteration of Monsieur Parent's family ideal. By confronting his wife, Parent must face the rupture of his ideal, which in turn freezes it in its doubt-filled state. Yet doubt of an ideal in itself opposes the nature of the concept. Rendered immutable, his aim at paternity and at a stable family is destined to failure. Failure is represented here by an *idée fixe* that takes the place of the ideal. The *idée fixe* as an obsession replaces substance with a semblance of that goal. Thus, Monsieur Parent's relationship with his family is devoid of true investment in the social institution that he seeks to engage with. Instead, the family is but an empty form. In the first part, Monsieur Parent avoids confrontations that would threaten his rigid ideal, with the aim of maintaining its stability. In contrast, the second part consists entirely of an incessant reiteration of doubt.[236] It is significant to note that in spite of Parent's position vis-à-vis his familial role, he falls into two opposing

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[235] Ibid.

[236] The short story, entitled "Le Petit," resembles that of "Monsieur Parent" in the father's blind adoration of his child. In "Le Petit", however, the mother dies, is consequently symbolically replaced by the child. Unlike Monsieur Parent, whose decline is driven by the doubt of his paternity, Monsieur Lemonnier commits suicide. Contrary to Monsieur Parent, Lemonnier does not have the rigid family ideal, unable to construct even a fictive genealogically authentic family. If he were to doubt his paternity, this doubt could never have the possibility of being resolved with certainty, no longer having his wife to attest to the truth of the son's conception.

traps. In the first, he hides behind locked doors from external influences. In the second, he exposes himself to the society outside. Nevertheless, he no longer runs the risk of social influence due to the obsessive doubting that locks him in a passive role. In fact, this obsession overshadows his entire existence, rendering all possible interaction with the other impossible, for that would require the possibility to confront the unknown and the unexpected. Obsession acts here as an entrapment by memories.

Placing himself in the midst of Parisian society, Parent's void contrasts the others' plenitude. One could even say that it is this plenitude that defines his position of lack, for, considering this juxtaposition, lack becomes ever more obvious to the character. Yet, the unwinding of his social status is not unique in Maupassant's works. In "Promenade" too, the emptiness and the sense of meaninglessness of Monsieur Leras's life become more striking in comparison to the Parisian nightlife that had thus far remained barely known to him. The solitary enclosure of his room becomes a threat only upon immersion in the vibrant and "colossal being" of Paris.

However, the progression of events in these two texts differs. Monsieur Parent's rigid family ideal ruptures at the moment he confronts Henriette. This confrontation in turn creates doubt that would lead him to decline. For Monsieur Leras, however, the fatal event occurs when he becomes aware of the activity that exists beyond the confines of his monotonous lifestyle. This realization comes only decades after, following a long and uniform progression of his life, in which he sees but small social advancements that come not from active investment in social ideals but rather as an expectation from social and professional institutions.

> M. Leras, depuis quarante ans, arrivait chaque matin à huit heures dans cette prison ; et il y demeurait jusqu'à sept heures du soir, courbé sur ses livres, écrivant avec une application de bon employé.
>
> Il gagnait maintenant trois mille francs par an, ayant débuté à quinze cents francs. Il était demeuré célibataire, ses moyens ne lui permettant par de prendre femme. Et n'ayant jamais joui de rien, il ne désirait pas grand-chose. […]
>
> Sa vie s'était passée sans événements, sans émotions et presque sans espérances. La faculté des rêves, que chacun porte en soi, ne s'était jamais développée dans la médiocrité de ses ambitions.[237]

The text justifies Leras's meager professional progress as being due to his lack of emotion, hopes, dreams and ambitions. In contrast to Monsieur Parent, whose family ideal, despite its rigidity, structures his entire life, Leras's mediocre ambitions point to a lack of ideals that would motivate his decisions. On the contrary, Leras avoids active decisions that might disrupt his routine. Lacking any form of investment apart from his basic professional duties, Leras's life can be compared to the bare walls of his room.

The critical moment that triggers his suicide appears at the end of the text, an act that represents the culmination of his monotony. We find a similar development in the story of "Suicides" where, like Monsieur Leras, the main character follows a progressive ascension in his social or professional status. As both texts attest, the two characters clearly differ in aspirations. While Monsieur Leras's capacity to idealize and thus to actively construct his life remains undeveloped and null, Monsieur X…'s aspirations are instead substitutions of one another. In other words, the success of one goal creates yet another goal that nevertheless does not build on the preceding one. In his death note, he

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[237] Guy de Maupassant, "Promenade," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 127.

describes the naïve nature of his dreams as a veil, which had impeded him to clearly see the "brutal reality"[238] of his past aspirations.

Unlike Monsieur Parent and Pierre (*Pierre et Jean*), who project themselves onto an ideal – one that for both characters constitutes a stable family structure, – characters who commit suicide, such as Monsieur X…, Monsieur Leras and Gontran-Joseph de Signoles, consciously confront a fragmented social identity. To this second group of characters, fragmentation presents an insurmountable obstacle toward stability. In texts of suicide, the progressive ascension in social and professional status – we can see this in "Suicides" and "Promenade" – can also be interpreted as a movement of decline. Upon exposure to the world, on the one hand, and to the futility of early-life ideals and goals, on the other, the development of Monsieur X… and Monsieur Leras's lives instead constitutes a regression. Regression here does not necessarily imply a descent to an inferior state, but rather a setting in place. In other words, what might at first glance seem to be an improvement of one's condition is in fact a form of decline, which results from the subject's lack of active investment. Therefore, these characters are a product of passivity that is inscribed within the social structure. Similarly, Signoles's ("Un lâche") decline results from his rigid adherence to an outdated (*démodé*) social code, and which consequently proves to be fatal.

Development and ascension in the lives of the suicide characters is a form of decline that leads us to question the definition of suicide. Maupassant addresses this

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[238] Guy de Maupassant, "Suicides," I, in vol. *Contes et nouvelles I*, 176. "Tous les événements de l'existence qui, autrefois, resplendissaient à mes yeux comme des aurores, me semblent se décolorer. La signification des choses m'est apparue dans sa réalité brutale." The veil lifted, the meaning of things transforms, losing the qualities that might have been associated with pleasure, such as color, tenderness and charm. It is particularly significant that the character judges this new perception of things, devoid of pleasurable qualities, as regaining a more truthful value. In his state of disillusionment, he describes his perception as truth: "la raison vraie de l'amour m'a dégoûté même des poétiques tendresses" (Ibid.). In this sense, he associates pleasure with deception and illusion.

question explicitly in two texts, "Suicides" and "L'Endormeuse." From the first text, we

can deduce that suicide is not a product of a dramatic event but is rather *a consequence of*

a long chain of events that progressively leads the character to the fatal decision. The

text introduces the question of suicide with a quote from a newspaper, which qualifies

voluntary death as a *mystery*: "M. X… était âgé de cinquante-sept ans, jouissait d'une

aisance honorable et avait tout ce qu'il faut pour être heureux. On ignore absolument la

cause de sa funeste détermination."[239] Yet, as it is often the case, the narration of

Maupassant's texts is relegated to numerous points of view. Thus, the narrator appears to

be more critical of the simple reasons sought out by the general public: "Quelles douleurs

profondes, quelles lésions du cœur, désespoirs cachés, blessures brûlantes poussent au

suicide ces gens qui sont heureux ?".[240] Reduced by the narrator to social and professional

qualities, the concept of happiness corresponds to the veiled reality that the character

evokes in his letter. At the closing of the text, the narrator confirms that the cause of

suicide is not a major and singular event, but is rather a consequence of the entire scope

of the character's life.

The text of "Suicides" concludes as follows: "Et voilà comment se tuent beaucoup

d'hommes dont on fouille en vain l'existence pour y découvrir de grands chagrins."[241] A

suicide as a consequence of a major event would suggest that it is a voluntary and

individual act. Maupassant, instead, insists on a larger sphere of influence, proceeding

from the social organization as the agent that precipitates one's "voluntary" death. This

hypothesis would be developed only a decade later by Emile Durkheim in his *Suicide*

(1897). In this extensive and referential sociological work, Durkheim distinguishes

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[239] Ibid., 175.
[240] Ibid.
[241] Ibid., 180.

between social institutions and tendencies that bear an influence on suicide rates within the various social classes. Durkheim's approach has remained influential up to the present, and we can see this in contemporary texts, such as Michel Thevoz's *L'esthétique du suicide*.[242] This latter text further insists on the direct correlation between suicide and various social forces, while rejecting the perception of suicide as a result of a single moment and as a purely mastered act. As Thévoz writes,

> En principe, le suicide est un acte, ou un passage à l'acte, recommandable dans certaines situations, regrettable dans d'autres, restant de toute manière du ressort exclusif de l'intéressé. Mais il peut être différé, symbolisé, métabolisé socialement, pour ainsi dire, durer même une vie ; en tant que processus d'autodestruction ou de disparition visible ou intelligible, il peut prendre un sens qui excède la sphère personnelle.[243]

Considering this enlarged definition of suicide, we can comprehend decline in many of Maupassant's texts as a *deferred* suicide, which is realized progressively, throughout the long downfall of a character's life.

The subject of suicide is not unknown to Maupassant. Suffering from psychotic outbreaks as a consequence of his progressive state of syphilis, from which he would die at the age of forty-three, Maupassant had himself made several suicide attempts. Yet, this subject appears in his texts well before his illness triggers delirium, and his consequent attempts to die. Rather, we can trace his interest in the subject of suicide to his most rudimentary questioning of one's place in the social order, which can be found in every single text. Confrontation with madness in texts such as "Le Horla" and "Lettre d'un fou" presents an exemplary case where characters question reality. Madness threatens a stable

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[242] Michel Thevoz, *L'esthétique du suicide* (Paris: Minuit, 2003).
[243] Ibid., 7.

concept of reality, which in turn overturns everything that had thus far constituted one's identity. The chain of questioning ultimately places the characters face to face with a void, and consequently with suicide. Yet, madness is not the most common trigger for suicide in the author's works.

In many of the texts, characters perceive suicide as the final and only escape from entrapment in stifling social institutions.[244] In each case, the character replaces ideals with rigid social norms. While these norms appear to promise stability and integration within the social context, the character realizes, often too late, that these aspirations are replaceable. With this realization, one finds a void at the heart of his or her engagements.

Following Durheim's and Thévoz's definitions of suicide as a complex articulation between the individual and society, we must reconsider the word "suicide" itself. Composed of the two Latin components *sui* and *caedere*, the term implies reflexivity (*sui*) and thus an action that is imposed onto oneself. With the transformation of the modern subject to a concept of individualism, the signification of the term *suicide* transforms as well. In French, the modern sense of the word appears for the first time in the first half of the 18th century,[245] replacing "homicide de soi" that preceded it. This latter term does not differ greatly from the general sense of homicide. Thus, it must be considered as a *murder* of oneself. Sharing the suffix of *–cide*, from *caedere*, the modern term of *suicide* incorporates the subject within it. With this transformation, homicide and suicide diverge, for the latter acquires a separate form of its own. While the earlier term served to distinguish between the death of man from animals, suicide implies a separation from this dichotomy. However, diversion in the terminology does not stop there. The verb

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[244] See "Suicide" and "Promenade."

[245] Dictionaries attribute the first use of this word in French to Desfontaines, in *Le pour et le contre* (1734).

in French for the action of suicide acquires yet another reflexive element, becoming *se suicider*, thus doubling the reflexive signification of *sui*.[246] Claiming to *kill oneself oneself*, the subject forcefully asserts his or her agency in this action. It is inevitable to see the subjective assertion of modern society, yet an assertion too forceful and which instills doubt in the individual agency claimed by the doubly reflexive term.[247] In spite of the individualist claim of this word, we find that even the earliest of dictionary definitions of "suicide" explicitly state the social implications in this *action*. For instance, the second entry that *Trésor de la langue française* provides is for "suicide lent," defined as "déchéance d'une personne, dégradation progressive de son corps, de son esprit aboutissant à la mort."[248] What is most striking here is the slow degenerative aspect that this term incorporates. This key definition links suicide to decline, as the two are addressed in this analysis. In a "progressive suicide," one's entire life is subjected to decline and destruction, which necessarily implies that the subject is not solely responsible for this downfall. Rather, it is in great part the social context that precipitates this process.

With the link established between suicide and decline, we can now return to the structural difference in Maupassant's texts. While suicide in these texts often occurs over a long period of social assent, decline, on the other hand, is triggered by a sudden rupture in one's social condition. If the two fates share a common definition, they are chiasmic reflections of one another. We can analyze the overlapping of suicide and decline by comparing two short stories, "Monsieur Parent" and "Le Petit," whose plots resemble

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[246] See also Serge Margel, *Aliénation . Antonin Artaud. Les généalogies hybrides* (Paris: Galilée, 2008) 73.

[247] Therefore, starting from the 18th century and particularly during the 19th century, the implications of suicide acquire a psychological dimension that was absent before.

[248] The *Trésor de la langue française* supports this definition with a literary example from Baudelaire's *Les paradis artificiels* (1860). In this text, Baudelaire describes the effect of hashish as a *long suicide*.

greatly. In "Le Petit," we learn of Monsieur Lemonnier's passionate love for his wife Jeanne. After five years of conjugal life, she becomes pregnant. Just as in "Monsieur Parent," Jeanne maintains a close link to her childhood friend named Monsieur Duretour, whom Lemonnier had himself adopted as an intimate friend. On the day of the child's birth, the mother dies, leaving Lemonnier alone to care for his son Jean.[249] Similarly to "Monsieur Parent," the father learns of his illegitimate son through the maid, who had up to then guarded the secret. The child, who with his existence represented the woman that he loved, becomes unbearable to Lemmonier. Unable to reconcile with the illusion that had blinded him and that had before constituted his paternity, Lemmonier commits suicide. In contrast to the other texts of suicide, this story does not develop a progressive assent. Nevertheless, what triggers his suicide is not Jeanne's death, for with her death he would acquire the status of widower, which carries social value. Instead, the cause lies in the illegitimate legacy that she leaves him. While her presence might have been able to blanch the child's illegitimacy, without her, he is left merely as a dupe. In contrast, if Jeanne had remained alive, the story of "Le Petit" would present an alternative to "Monsieur Parent." Jeanne's death eliminates the jealousy that in "Monsieur Parent" plunges the character into decline. The family ideal cannot be reconstituted, nor kept intact by projection or illusion. In the case of Monsieur Parent, Henriette's and George's existence keeps up Parent's doubt. Consequently, his life reflects the void that remains in the place of his family, maintained within the passive decline by the doubt of his legitimacy. His family ideal fails due to its rigidity, which atrophies and remains present only as a haunting lack of which he cannot rid himself. Subsequently, this haunting lack

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[249] Just as in *Fort comme la mort*, we find a mirroring of proper names in "Le petit," with Jean as the masculine version of Jeanne whom he replaces upon birth.

alienates the character, tying him to the center of the Parisian society that acts as a reminder or comparison of his loss. Enclosed within the sphere of lack that has defined his position in society, Parent's alienation represents a symbolic death that intersects with suicide.

Alienation here is not a result of internment or expulsion, but is instead a consequence of the subject's failure to coincide with a projected social ideal, reduced to a definition that remains frozen within a rigid and immutable definition. "Se détacher de la société, c'est devenir tôt ou tard un suicidé de la société," writes Margel in response to Artaud's text on Van Gogh's suicide.[250] Society *suicides* Van Gogh as a punishment for his detachment from it. Yet, as Margel proceeds to show, for Artaud "un suicidé de la société" does not imply strictly the actual death enacted onto oneself, but that rather we are all in a way *suicided* by society, which can be seen in one's disjunction from the parameters that society imposes onto the subject.[251] Therefore, this concept of suicide (*se suicider*) diverges from the double insistence on the subject's enactment of death onto oneself.

In the suicides of Monsieur Leras ("Promenade"), Monsieur X… ("Suicides"), Vilbois the priest ("Le champ d'oliviers") and Gontran-Joseph de Signoles ("Un lâche"), we find a confrontation between the characters' aimed social ideals and the fragmentation of their identity, which, in their case, poses a direct threat to the smooth and solid image that they had adopted. This image is different for each character. Monsieur Leras's solitude confronts his conflicting pleasure in the Parisian nightlife. Monsieur Parent's progressive successes acquire a sense of monotony, which, in contrast to his early

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[250] Serge Margel, *Aliénation . Antonin Artaud. Les généalogies hybrides*, 72.
[251] Ibid., 73.

dreams, are revealed as a failure. Father Vilbois's new spiritual identity is tainted by the consequences of his earlier, worldly life. Finally, Signoles's social identity shatters at the threat imposed by his fear of the other's critical gaze.

Confronting the deterioration of their social and professional aspirations, too rigid and thus inevitably doomed to failure, these characters put into question their entire social existence. Unlike "Monsieur Parent," the absence of doubt renders escape from their erroneous image impossible.

Interestingly, we find a similar description of the Seine, a place of refuge for suicide victims mentioned in "L'Endormeuse," and of the source of water in Ovid's myth of Narcissus. In fact, much like Narcissus who, at the apprehension of his reflection as his own image, mortifies his body and dies chagrined, these characters cannot face the disjunction between their perceived social identities and the multiplicity that they embody.

> La Seine s'étalait devant ma maison, sans une ride, et vernie par le soleil du matin. C'était une belle, large, lente, longue coulée d'argent, empourprée par places ; et de l'autre côté du fleuve, de grands arbres alignés étendaient sur toute la berge une immense muraille de verdure.[252]

In these opening lines of "L'Endormeuse," we find a description of the Seine: calm, "sans une ride," "une belle, large, lente, longue coulée d'argent" that reflects the pure morning sunlight. This description resembles the final scene in Ovid's myth of Narcissus: "une source limpide aux eaux brillantes et argentées"[253] where Narcissus finds himself in the forest. These two sources of water, which bear the connotation of purity, are the place

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[252] Guy de Maupassant, "L'Endormeuse," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 1159.
[253] Ovid, "Narcisse. Echo," in *Les Métamorphoses*, III, 388-425, trans. J. Chamonard, (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1966), 100.

where Narcissus discovers desire, on the one hand, and where Maupassant reflects the purity of each day in "L'Endormeuse," on the other. For the latter, the reflection of the new day in the water signifies a renewal of life that is inscribed within a monotonous, repetitive movement. As the text continues: "La sensation de la vie qui recommence chaque jour, de la vie fraîche, gaie, amoureuse, frémissait dans les feuilles, palpitait dans l'air, miroitait sur l'eau."[254] In both texts, Ovid's and Maupassant's, the body of water is enclosed and protected by plants. In Ovid's text, the water is "entourée de gazon qu'entretenait la proximité de l'eau; et la forêt empêchait le soleil de jamais réchauffer ces lieux,"[255] while in Maupassant's story, "de grands arbres alignés étendaient sur toute la berge une immense muraille de verdure."[256] In both, the source of water is at once a place of refuge, protected by plants, and a place of imprisonment. It will also become a place of death, for Narcissus upon his realization that the one whom he desires is but his own reflection, and in "L'Endormeuse," for the thousands who choose the river as their death. The significance of this analogy lies in the similar role that society plays in the construction of identity, and which in both cases precipitates the subject's death. In "L'Endormeuse" however, an institution is established precisely to diverge and to "cleanse" the city of discontent and of the consequent death. The institution claims to reattribute water's connotation of purity as well as of knowledge by appropriating and transforming death into a sterile and controlled execution.

The narrator of "L'Endormeuse" discovers the death toll of suicide victims in the "Statistiques des suicidés" that he reads in the newspaper during his morning stroll:

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[254] Guy de Maupassant, "L'Endormeuse," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 1159.
[255] Ovid, "Narcisse. Echo," in *Les Métamorphoses*, III, 388-425, 100.
[256] Guy de Maupassant, "L'Endormeuse," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 1159.

"j'appris que, cette année, plus de huit mille cinq cents êtres humains se sont tués."[257]

Yet, what is curious here is not the statistical fact, but rather that, following this information, the narrator proceeds to identify himself with the thousands of victims: "Instantanément, je les vis!".[258] This remark is followed by an enumeration of the various forms of death that one can impose onto oneself. Continuing further, the narrator exclaims:

> Oh ! Les pauvres gens, les pauvres gens, les pauvres gens, comme j'ai senti leurs angoisses, comme je suis mort de leur mort ! J'ai passé par toutes leurs misères ; j'ai subi, en une heure, toutes leurs tortures. J'ai su tous les chagrins qui les ont conduits là ; car je sens l'infamie trompeuse de la vie, comme personne, plus que moi, ne l'a sentie.[259]

Not only does the character identify himself with the victims' anguish and suffering, their suffering and death condense within his being. He goes so far as to describe himself as the representation of all suicide victims. This does not imply that he necessarily seeks the same end. Instead, suicide, as the text shows better than any other mentioned thus far, is overtly inscribed within the social and political influence on the subject. As we shall see, Maupassant pushes the direct social link to suicide in this grotesque parody of political implications in society's game of appearances. Here, the government goes so far as to institutionalize suicide and thus to inscribe it within the social structure.

After reading the statistics of suicide and identifying himself with the victims, the narrator enters a daydream, which serves as the context for the story of "L'Endormeuse." Remaining thus within the framework of a dream, the story is justified by the narrator's imagination, appearing to him in the form of a fantasy in which suicide is inscribed

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[257] Ibid.

[258] Ibid.

[259] Ibid., 1160.

within society in a less confrontational, even invisible manner. In this daydream, the narrator strolls around Paris and stumbles on a large, monumental building, "fort élégant, coquet et joli."[260] On the façade of the building is inscribed the following: "Oeuvre de la mort volontaire."[261] "L'Oeuvre" or "L'Endormeuse," as this institution is called by its director, provides a regularized means for the willing to die. He officially describes its function as follows: "on tue proprement et doucement, je n'ose pas dire agréablement, les gens qui désirent mourir."[262] What shocks the narrator in this reply is not the rationality of such an institution, but rather the new and revolutionary aspect that it implies:

> J'étais surtout étonné qu'on eût pu, sur cette planète à idées basses, utilitaires, humanitaires, égoïstes et coercitives de toute liberté réelle, oser une pareille entreprise, digne d'une humanité émancipée.[263]

Despite overwhelming representations of death in modern society, the aim remains to be the manipulation or rejection of our mortality. According to Philippe Ariès, "la mort est devenue l'*innommable*."[264] Thus, victims of suicide in Maupassant's text become literally the "suicidés de la société."

What is crucial in the functioning of the monstrous machine named *l'Endormeuse* is its proximity to pleasure and diversion, which are inscribed within a system of membership, hierarchy and fashion. In other words, l'Endormeuse is a club that by the proximity of death rejoices in life. Following his guide, the narrator describes the joyful nature of the members they encounter:

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[260] Ibid., 1161.
[261] Ibid.
[262] Ibid., 1162.
[263] Ibid.
[264] Philippe Ariès, *Essais sur l'histoire de la mort en Occident du moyen âge à nos jours* (Paris: Seuil, 1975) 74.

> Il prit son chapeau, ouvrit la porte, me fit passer puis entrer dans une salle de jeu où des hommes jouaient comme on joue dans tous les tripots. Il traversait ensuite divers salons. On y causait vivement, gaiement. J'avais rarement vu un cercle aussi vivant, aussi animé, aussi rieur.[265]

The cadavers found in the Seine are thus hidden from view and the *source* cleansed, while the rejection of death takes the stage (*la scène*) in l'Oeuvre. Thus, this suicide machine assembles the famed actors of la Comédie-Française,[266] politicians and the elite in general who, in their already mortified social image, promote the joy of living and the contempt of death in the name of the institution.[267] In other words, membership to this club symbolizes one's rejection of death.[268] With its official function of managing death, l'Endormeuse also acts as an implicit machine of terror. If adherence to l'Oeuvre creates a sense of happiness among the members, it is because happiness here is a product of institutionalized terror.

In contrast to the liveliness of the salons, the narrator discovers *l'Endormeuse* the machine itself. In the age of industrialization, the guillotines, nooses, poisons and other forms of painful confrontations with death are replaced by *l'Endormeuse*, which, like a gas chamber, anesthetizes and asphyxiates slowly, pleasurably even, with the smell of a

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[265] Guy de Maupassant, "L'Endormeuse," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 1165.

[266] Ibid., 1164.

[267] "l'œuvre a une vogue inouïe. Tout le monde chic de l'univers entier en fait partie pour avoir l'air de mépriser la mort. Puis, une fois qu'ils sont ici, ils se croient obligés d'être gais afin de ne pas paraître effrayés. Alors, on plaisante, on rit, on blague, on a de l'esprit et on apprend à en avoir. C'est certainement aujourd'hui l'endroit le mieux fréquenté et le plus amusant de Paris. […] Les gens du monde sont rares ; mais les pauvres diables abondent. La classe moyenne aussi donne beaucoup" ("L'Endormeuse," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 1165).

[268] The subject develops contempt toward his or her longing for death, which the institution of *l'Endormeuse* juxtaposes to diversions. The director of *l'Endormeuse* calls this institution "une sorte de temple du mépris de la mort" ("L'Endormeuse," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 1164).

flower of the individual's choosing.[269] Death here is presented as a pleasurable act, meant to veil the fear and pain that it otherwise connotes. Disguised behind pleasure, death becomes unnamable, while being ever more officially inscribed in society.

Furthermore, this fantasized institution reproduces the social hierarchy and functions of society. Firstly, it is divided by class and wealth, charging the wealthy for their "anéantissement"[270] while killing the poor, who come in large numbers, for free. Secondly, a bureaucratic function is reproduced within the institution. In other words, the poor must provide a certificate of poverty as proof in order to benefit from the free service. While these descriptions might seem anecdotal and cynical, they serve as an analogy to society's aim to manipulate all actions of the subject, including suicide.

In this and the previous chapters, we have witnessed the duality of one's identity that comprises of fragmentation, on the one hand, and a tendency toward a sense of unity, on the other. These two seeming opposites create the conditions for the struggle with oneself that we have seen in many of the characters. Fragmentation comes as a consequence of one's blind adherence to social norms, yet which the character rejects in the name of stability. Characters strive to combat the threat of fragmentation by adopting rigid, frozen ideals. However, as we have seen in many texts, reliance on such "ideals" leads the characters to disillusionment. This disillusionment, in turn, precipitates two forms of conclusions, decline or suicide. Yet, after reconsidering the definition of suicide, these two movements intersect and can be perceived in many ways as one and the same.

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[269] This description of flowers that puts one to sleep gives us yet another reference to the myth of Narcissus, for it implies the drowsing quality of the flower *narcissus*, which is linked by popular etymology to *narcosis*, and to the Greek word *narkè*.

[270] Guy de Maupassant, "L'Endormeuse," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 1166.

CHAPTER FOUR

Horlamil:
A Figure of the Social Mass

1. Transformations of the Horla

Among Maupassant's large body of work, "Le Horla" has attracted the most attention. Unlike the majority of the his works, where the reader gets a glimpse into the uneventful life of a character, in this story, the main character describes his troubling confrontation with an invisible *being*, whose presence haunts and terrorizes him. Whereas the Horla has no visible physical form, the character perceives it nevertheless in this *absence*, and through its effects on the surroundings. While the character reflects the positivist approach of his time, meticulously analyzing and recording the Horla's *appearances*, the hesitation that the juxtaposition of the Horla and the character's seemingly unstable psychological state creates in the reader provokes a fantastical interpretation of the text. As a result, literary critics have often attributed "Le Horla" to the tradition of fantastical literature. In fact, the main character himself relates the Horla to the long tradition of fantastical beings, such as gnomes and monsters, and rationally explains their function of justification for various mysterious occurrences misunderstood by man. And yet, the text relies on the main character's perception, narrated in the first person, relayed to the reader with his diary. Thus, the rational, scientific explanations of the strange occurrences repose on the discourse of a character, whose psychological state is consequently put into question by the reader.

Following Todorov's definition of fantastical literature, which is anchored on the reader's underlying hesitation between the natural and the supernatural explanations for strange occurrences,[271] the figure of the Horla remains ambiguous, between the character's madness that gives "form" to an apparent threat and the possibility that a *new being* in the evolutionary progression has in fact come to take man's place. While the Horla can be interpreted as character's delusion due to his seeming progression into madness, the rational and "scientific" discourse with which he justifies the mysterious occurrences seeks to integrate the supernatural into the realm of a lucid understanding of the world.

One of the recurring figures in fantastical literature is the double, often taking the form of the subject's avatar, as in Poe's "William Wilson," Dostoievski's *The Double*, Adelbert von Chamisso's *Peter Schlemihl*, Hoffman's *The Devil's Elixir*, and many others. The Horla's inescapable presence and vampirical control of the main character suggests that it too resembles this figure. Yet, the double's absence of form in Maupassant's text takes the interpretation beyond the traditional notion of the fantastical genre, to a psychological dimension that questions the subject's relation to society. The double is no longer an other whom the subject can combat in an attempt to save himself from its threatening resemblance, as we saw in fantastical texts such as Gautier's "Avatar." In "Le Horla," the double's absence of physical form overpowers and effaces the subject's form, consequently threatening his entire being. Marie-Claire Bancquart identifies a different form of the double, "le double décalé,"[272] as a source of anguish for the subject, not of the double's presence, but of the character's own deterioration. In his

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[271] Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (Paris: Seuil, 1970).
[272] Marie-Claire Bancquart, *Maupassant conteur fantastique* (Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1976) 74.

study of fantastical literature in France, Pierre-Georges Castex places Maupassant at the extremity of this genre, characterized by the subject's solitude, alienation and consequent anguish (*angoisse*).[273]

The most emblematic scene of the text represents the narrator's absence from the reflection in the mirror. The character immediately interprets the absence of his reflection as the Horla's presence between him and the mirror. The Horla's invisible figure coincides with the parameters of the character's body, reducing it to an opaque white emptiness, like superposition of a photographic negative and positive that consequently erases the character's image.[274] Jacques Bienvenu has defined the Horla as the character's double, a ghost and a vampire.[275] Yet, unlike the traditional forms of the double in the fantastical literary genre, whose uncanny resemblance to the subject acquires autonomy and haunts the subject, here, the recurring subjects of solitude and the effacement of the individual in the social mass impose a new interpretation of the Horla. The character seeks refuge from the Horla in the crowd, yet the crowd confirms his solitude and alienation, forcing him to return to his isolation. The crowd can only confirm man's weakness and inability to combat the new being that escapes detection by human senses. In other words, the threat of the Horla does not come from a perfect resemblance to the subject, – as is the case in most fantastical literature, – but rather from its elusive form.

The intimate form of the journal portraying the character's progressive decline reflects his interiorization of the Horla. Possessed by his persecutor, the character

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[273] Pierre-Georges Castex, *Le conte fantastique en France: de Nodier à Maupassant* (Paris: José Corti, 1951).

[274] See André Green, *Narcissisme de vie. Narcissisme de mort.* (Paris: Minuit, 1983). This empty form resembles what Green calls a "negative" hallucination, which effaces the otherness in the reflection that doubles the narrator's form.

[275] See Jacques Bienvenu, "Le Horla et son double" in *Le Magazine Littéraire*, 310 (May 1993) 45-47.

becomes his own enemy. As Marie-Claire Bancquart points out: "L'être invisible fait […] un pas dans la possession : il gouverne la volonté du héros, entre en lui, le *remplace* comme lecteur d'un livre et comme reflet dans le miroir. La vampirisation est totale."[276] Thus, despite the narrator's attempts to attribute an individual and discernible identity to his persecutor, the subject and the double coincide.

The Horla is at once distinct from and identical to the subject, whose elusive form, according to Jean Fabre, calls for a psychiatric approach to the text. Interpretations of this text diverge significantly because it explores numerous major dimensions of humanity: social, psychological, scientific and literary, among others. Nevertheless, the psychological effects of anguish and delirium that the Horla has on the narrator dominate literary criticism. Fantastical doubling transforms thus into a figure that evades a unified, individual and definitive form. As Antonia Fonyi writes, "le fantastique de Maupassant, c'est l'angoisse poussée au délire, une angoisse provoquée par l'appréhension de la claustration universelle."[277] Le Horla's elusiveness provokes the narrator's anguish and the inability to usurp his persecutor. According to Fabre, "Maupassant a gardé à son monstre cette demi-densité, cette diaphane présence bien plus efficace finalement sur les nerfs, et plus vraisemblable au plan logique. […] Cette tendance à l'abstraction d'ailleurs, rend plausible l'interprétation psychiatrique."[278] In fact, Fabre posits the text between the genres of the fantastical and science fiction.[279] While the narrator's experience of the Horla is clearly subjective, suggesting hallucination and paranoia, Fabre's conclusion that

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[276] Marie-Claire Bancquart, *Maupassant conteur fantastique*, 94.
[277] Antonia Fonyi, *Maupassant 1993* (Paris: Kimé, 1993) 14.
[278] Jean Fabre, *Le miroir de sorcière: essai sur la littérature fantastique* (Paris: José Corti, 1992) 256.
[279] See also André Fermigier's introduction to a collection of Maupassant's stories (Guy de Maupassant, *Le Horla et autres nouvelles* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986)) where he interprets the Horla as an extraterrestrial being, qualifying it as the precursor of the science fiction genre.

the text lies between fantastical literature and science fiction points to a social dimension proper to the latter genre. While the ambiguity between lucidity and madness in "Le Horla" falls within the parameters of Todorov's definition of the fantastical genre, the uncertainty of the narrator's psychological state extends the definition of the Horla beyond individual perception, to an allegorical representation of the social and collective implications on the modern individual.

The Horla's elusive nature extends to its name as well. Without justification, the narrator names his persecutor *le Horla*, a name that has no definitive interpretation, and which has led to a long list of possibilities as to its origin and meaning.[280] One interpretation however remains consistent, the Horla's distant origin in the beyond, suggested by "hors" and "là", contained in the neologism. It is a being that comes from a beyond, exterior to the character. Yet, the ambiguity of "la", *here* and *there*, confirms the Horla's simultaneous presence within the character.

In an attempt to better understand the Horla as a social phenomenon, I will analyze other versions of this being in Maupassant's works. Literary critics have on numerous occasions evoked the repetitive and resembling nature of Maupassant's short stories. "Le Horla" is similar in this respect. While the 1887 novella form of the text has been considered as the *final* version, it has two preceding ones, "Lettre d'un fou" (1885) and an earlier version of "Le Horla" (1886). These texts will allow us to see the progressive development in the nature of the Horla and the character's reaction to it. Firstly, these three texts vary in narrative form. In "Lettre d'un fou," the distraught narrator privately addresses a doctor, to whom he reveals his uncertainty of his strange experiences. In "Le

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[280] See for instance Ph. Bonnefis's text on the Horla's elusive name. *Comme Maupassant* (Lille: PUL, 1993) 133-139.

Horla" (1886), the narrator reveals his story to a group of doctors, with the support of another doctor, while the final version of "Le Horla" is written in the intimate diary form, where the reader is the witness to the mysterious events described in the text. Thus, the first two texts insist on the psychological dimension of the narrator's experience. Although in the last years of his life, Maupassant experienced psychotic breakdowns and was consequently committed to a psychiatric hospital, his interest in psychiatry precedes his personal distress. In fact, Charcot's seminars, which he attended at one point, provided him with significant psychiatric insight that we can trace to his texts.

While the Horla's masculine singular name suggests that it is an individual rival to the narrator, the text itself does not confirm whether it is an individual being or a collective phenomenon. In this chapter, I will argue that this figure represents the effacement of the individual in the mass, as well as the alienation of the modern subject enacted by social institutions and norms.

The story takes place in an intermediary space between solitude and the crowd, where the narrator struggles with and finally succumbs to the Horla, setting the psycho-social context of the story. The narrator's confrontation with the Horla provokes doubt in the certainty of human senses and in the established notions that collective adherence guaranteed. Such fundamental doubt leads the character to question his entire existence.

Solitude and the mass reappear consistently throughout "Le Horla" and other similar texts, such as "Solitude," "Suicide" and "L'Endormeuse." In "Le Horla," the mass provides no relief from the characters' solitude, instead further amplifying their alienation. The relationship to the other is consistently mediated by the Horla, which usurps the narrator's will and identity. Contrary to the first two texts, in the final version

of "Le Horla," only one way to escape from his persecutor seems possible. As Marie-Claire Bancquart points out, "On ne tue pas le Horla. On se tue soi-même: c'est la conclusion obligée de cette seconde version du récit, bien plus intériorisée que la première."[281] The Horla controls the subject, submits him to its will, and ultimately leads him to what appears to the character as the only assertive act of human will: suicide. Yet, we will see that even this depends on the Horla's power of will over man. The Horla becomes man's new *master*, instilling doubt in human senses, perception and will.

In an attempt to redefine the Horla as a representation of a larger, collective form, whose implications on the narrator's identity extend beyond the psychological dimension, I will analyze the three texts in question, "Lettre d'un fou," "Le Horla" the short story and the novella. As we'll see, these texts reveal differently and to a varying degree, the identity of the Horla. Finally, through my analysis, it will become apparent that Maupassant's objective in "Le Horla" ultimately does not differ from the other texts that focus instead on banal, everyday occurrences.[282]

These three texts are progressive variations on the same subject. In "Lettre d'un fou" (1885), the narrator addresses a letter to his doctor, in which he describes his disillusionment with the world, and whose meaning has become increasingly

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[281] Marie-Claire Bancquart, *Maupassant conteur fantastique*, 95. By "second version", Bancquart refers to "Le Horla" (1887).

[282] As I've showed in the previous chapters, the reader's experience of Maupassant's works is always mediated by a peculiar narrative structure. Each text reveals the intimacy of an individual character, relegated to the reader by an external narrator. More often, the story is passed along a chain of narrators, who further distance the reader from the events retold. Story after story, each one gives a small glimpse into the private world of a stranger, shielding the reader from an intimate proximity to the often tragic, sometimes banal, and at times questionable lives of unknown subjects. At a safe distance to the subject of each text, the reader's voyeuristic gaze plunges, though only for a short moment, into the privacy of the main character's tormented life. This pleasure is brief, lasting on average merely five pages. While the narrator reveals the turning point only at the end, it creates discomfort that the reader can quickly leave unscathed. Yet, despite their anecdotal nature, these texts reiterate one issue, the opposition to social conventions and norms that victimize their characters.

incomprehensible to him. The source of doubt, according to the narrator, lies in the limitations of the senses, which, according to him, weaken and disprove our convictions. By discrediting the human senses, he draws the following conclusion, "je me suis aperçu que tout est faux."[283] With limited senses, we either fail to perceive the majority of the things that exist in the world, or we perceive them imperfectly. We can then conclude that our perceptions give us only insufficient proof of reality. The narrator concludes that a whole world of the invisible and the unknown exists around us. Despite such rationalizations, by which the narrator of "Lettre d'un fou" seeks to disprove human knowledge, he nevertheless entrusts his life in the hands of psychiatry.

In the first version of "Le Horla," written a year after "Lettre d'un fou," psychiatry manifests itself greater. However, it instills doubt in its authority when confronted with the character's narrative. Here, the psychiatrist defends the narrator's experience, thus projecting doubt on his patient's madness. The story concludes with the doctor's final words: "Je ne sais si cet homme est fou ou si nous le sommes tous les deux…, ou si…. si notre successeur est réellement arrivé."[284]

In the second version of "Le Horla" (1887), the development of the narrative differs drastically from the previous two texts. Not only does the author structure this novella in the form of a journal, he also opens the narrative to new directions, such as hypnosis and escapism. In the case of the latter, the character attempts to flee the Horla by temporarily taking refuge in the Mont Saint-Michel and Paris. These distractions, however, intensify the desperation and failure of escape. Here, the Horla is no longer simply a psychological phenomenon; rather, the text describes it as the successor of

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[283] Guy de Maupassant, "Lettre d'un fou" (1885), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 461.
[284] Guy de Maupassant, "Le Horla" (1886), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 830.

humanity.[285] Thus, despite the singular nomination of *le* Horla, this "being" symbolizes a kind of collective entity. The narrator frames it in a historical and literary context:

> On dirait que l'homme, depuis qu'il pense, a pressenti et redouté un être nouveau, plus fort que lui, son successeur en ce monde, et que, le sentant proche et ne pouvant prévoir la nature de ce maître, il a créé, dans sa terreur, tout le peuple fantastique des êtres occultes, fantômes vagues nés de la peur.[286]

The following day, he continues to attribute the Horla to man's fantastical inventions, which, according to him, have existed for the sole purpose of justifying the coming of the new and unknown:

> Il est venu, Celui que redoutaient les premières terreurs des peuples naifs, Celui qu'exorcisaient les prêtres inquiets, que les sorciers évoquaient par les nuits sombres, sans le voir apparaître encore, à qui les pressentiments des maîtres passagers du monde prêtèrent toutes les formes monstrueuses ou gracieuses des gnomes, des esprits, des génies, des fées, des farfadets.[287]

The narrator situates the Horla among the fantastical beings invented by man in his attempt to give form to the unknown that has, at present, come to take his place. Thus, from this perspective, the Horla represents an entire tradition of fantastical literature. Furthermore, fantastical literature, folklore, and even religion, have all prophesized the coming of a new, powerful being. These beings, such as the devil, the goblin, the Horla, have been man's attempt to represent the threat of the incomprehensible. The Horla comes to replace the religious and the fantastical figures of evil. In the positivist tradition of the time, the narrator reassembles all unknown in the figure of the Horla. Even science, whose limitations and slow progress eventually replace old theories with new ones, is

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[285] We find this in the first version of the Horla as well. However, its psychiatric framework instills doubt in the narrator's belief, which is absent in the second version.
[286] Guy de Maupassant, "Le Horla" (1887), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 931.
[287] Guy de Maupassant, "Le Horla" (1887), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 933.

subjected to the will of the Horla. In the first version of "Le Horla," the character says to the doctors: "tout ce que vous faites vous-mêmes, messieurs, depuis quelques ans, ce que vous appelez l'hypnotisme, la suggestion, le magnétisme – c'est lui que vous annoncez, que vous prophétisez !".[288] We find a similar declaration in the second version:

> Après les grossières conceptions de l'épouvante primitive, des hommes plus perspicaces l'ont pressenti plus clairement. Mesmer l'avait deviné, et les médecins, depuis dix ans déjà, ont découvert, d'une façon précise, la nature de sa puissance avant qu'il l'eût exercée lui-même. Ils ont joué avec cette arme du Seigneur nouveau, la domination d'un mystérieux vouloir sur l'âme humaine devenue esclave. Ils ont appelé cela magnétisme, hypnotisme, suggestion....[289]

The Horla is the new God and the tool of psychiatry, and this new science of mankind is likened to fantastical literature, folklore and religion, whose findings and premonitions foresee its coming and its powers. For the narrator, as for Maupassant too, terror is at the core of each of these traditions. Man seeks to rationalize and reintegrate the unknown and the devious that provoke terror in him.

The magnetism scene in "Le Horla" (1887) exemplifies the manipulation that man can exercise on the human psyche. Yet, psychiatry, described by the narrator as mere child's play, is incomparable to the Horla's total domination over man. In reference to psychiatrists, the narrator says: "Je les ai vus s'amuser comme des enfants imprudents avec cette horrible puissance !".[290] The Horla's greatest weapon is its power of will over mankind as a collective. "Malheur à nous! Malheur à l'homme!", exclaims the character

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[288] Guy de Maupassant, "Le Horla" (1886), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 829-830.
[289] Guy de Maupassant, "Le Horla" (1887), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II* 933.
[290] Ibid.

in desperation.[291] To better understand the Horla's power over man, I will first compare its appearance in all three texts and the varying reactions of the main characters.

2. The Crowd, Solitude, Finitude

We have seen in the previous chapters that Maupassant's texts, and more particularly his short stories, reveal individual, detached conflicts The stories seem to be like small glimpses into the private world of unrelated individuals. We have also seen, however, that these texts share a common link: an overt critique of the characters' subjection to social institutions and norms. Despite the radically different perspectives in these stories, the majority of Maupassantian characters are *victims* of social norms. Curiously, in the main three texts of our analysis here – "Lettre d'un fou" (1885), "Le Horla" (1886) and "Le Horla" (1887) – the question of oppression by social norms shifts to the fantastical figure of the Horla. Nonetheless, reading the three texts as a progressive variation on the same theme, the third text exceeds the first two. It is not simply a more detailed version of the preceding two, for it surpasses the description of the character's confrontation with the Horla. Another crucial question in this text concerns the crowd and solitude, which are evident in the character's numerous attempts to escape from the Horla. In "Le Horla" (1887), the author juxtaposes the narrator's solitude to his desire to escape into the crowd, where his identity as an individual can be veiled or suspended.

Maupassant insists on and critiques the social implications of modernity, represented throughout his works in the form of repetition and deindividuation. He

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[291] Ibid.

explores the transformation of the individual in opposition to the increasing power of technology and mass production, as we see in such texts as "L'Endormeuse" and *Fort comme la mort*. In these texts, the individual is challenged by technology. The reorganization of the social structure during the 19ᵗʰ century had resulted in a new form of urban life and a new kind of social exchange: economic, cultural and technological. The author's focus remains on the bourgeoisie, as an intermediary class with a mutating and elusive identity. The crowd, or the mass, represents a space of effacement, between social institutions and the individual.

Numerous thinkers and writers of the 19ᵗʰ and early 20ᵗʰ centuries, including Maupassant, have revealed their fascination with the mass. In Poe's "The Man of the Crowd," first published in 1840, the narrator of the story observes the crowd that passes him, and the various social classes that compose it. Unlike the various groups that the narrator identifies by their manner and dress, he sees a peculiar old man, whom he cannot place. The narrator follows him through the night and the following day but, puzzled by the man's aimless wandering through the city, he concludes: "I was at a loss to comprehend the waywardness of his actions."[292] At the end of his curiosity-driven pursuit, the narrator attempts to engage the man in a direct stare but fails to provoke him. Finally, nothing is learned from his pursuit but this: "He refuses to be alone. *He is the man of the crowd*. It will be in vain to follow; for I shall learn no more of him, nor of his deeds."[293] Thus, the crowd dissipates the old man's anguish, masking his solitude.

Influenced by Poe's text, Baudelaire composes a prose poem entitled "Les foules" (1864), where he attributes qualities of escapism and interchangeability to each individual

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[292] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Man of the Crowd," in *Poetry and Tales* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1984) 395.
[293] Ibid., 396.

of the crowd. He describes it as "cette ineffable orgie, […] cette sainte prostitution de l'âme qui se donne tout entière, poésie et charité, à l'imprévu qui se montre, à l'inconnu qui passe."[294] Baudelaire's definitions of the crowd valorize the social mobility that it momentarily allows. The crowd permits the individual's playfulness on the social stage, through a game of masks and artifice. As a consequence, the new urban setting becomes a place of escape, of an elsewhere inside the familiar, and where one's identity fragments and mutates. Such "prostitution of the soul," however, breaks with the rigid, immutable sense of identity, availing itself instead to the unknown and the unforeseen. For Baudelaire, the crowd presents an opening in the rigidity of the social structure, which the subject must seek out in order to take pleasure in it. This opening is a place of reflection, of playful contact with alterity that to the egotist and the idle otherwise remains inaccessible. It is a place of artistic creation, where identity is multiple, between the subject and the otherness around. The question of the crowd is also a question of solitude. In "Monsieur Parent," "Le Horla" and numerous other texts by Maupassant, solitude imposes self-confrontation and observation. "Multitude, solitude," writes Baudelaire, "termes égaux et convertibles pour le poëte actif et fécond." The poet can "peupler sa solitude" and "être seul dans une foule affairée."[295] In the crowd, the artist, with his "goût du travestissement et du masque, la haine du domicile et la passion du voyage,"[296] can take pleasure in the sea of otherness, while skillfully remaining afloat of its powerful effacement of the individual. Solitude is thus the identity of the individual that a poet, following Baudelaire, is capable of manipulating. On the reverse side of the crowd, in solitude, the poet can people his solitude with artistic creation.

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[294] Baudelaire, "La foule," in *Le Spleen de Paris* (Paris: Le livre de poche, 1964) 38.
[295] Baudelaire, "La foule," in *Le Spleen de Paris*, 37.
[296] Ibid.

In contrast to Baudelaire, Maupassant's representation of the crowd has an oppressive dimension. In a crowd, the individual is reduced to a herd, not unlike the way Gustave le Bon theorizes it in his *Psychologie des Foules*, published in 1895, which influenced Freud's study entitled *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921).[297] Yet, the resemblance among the different representations of the crowd lies in its role of unhindered production of desire. As we saw earlier, Baudelaire describes the crowd as the place of orgy of souls, and thus of possession. The question of possession of the soul reappears in "Le Horla" (1887). In the August 14th entry, the character writes, "Je suis perdu! Quelqu'un possède mon âme et le gouverne ! quelqu'un ordonne tous mes actes, tous mes mouvements, toutes mes pensées."[298] What is most pertinent at this moment is the narrator's feeling of dispossession and loss of power over his own movements and thoughts. Everything that had defined him is now in the possession of another force. Man has for centuries attributed this force to the supernatural, in as much as this "being" or "force" remains masked or "voile."[299] However, the Horla is not merely masked by the limitations of our senses, rather, it takes over our thoughts and our ability to distinguish ourselves as individuals. The following day, on August 15th, the narrator reflects back to his cousin's hypnotic state, entranced on her by Doctor Parent. The narrator attributes his cousin's state to an invasion, or a possession, by another, foreign soul: "Elle subissait un vouloir étranger entré en elle, comme une autre âme, comme une

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[297] Cf. Sigmund Freud, "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Ed. and Trans. James Strachey, vol. 18 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955).

[298] Guy de Maupassant, "Le Horla" (1887), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 929.

[299] "le surnaturel n'est autre chose que ce qui nous demeure voilé!" Guy de Maupassant, "Lettre d'un fou," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 464.

autre âme parasite et dominatrice."[300] In yet another passage, the narrator likens the newly discovered powers of psychiatrists – hypnosis and suggestion – to the powers of the Horla: "Ils ont joué avec cette arme du Seigneur nouveau, la domination d'un mystérieux vouloir sur l'âme humaine devenue esclave."[301] Within the crowd, the singularity of each subject is effaced within the unifying fabric that composes it, while individual will is suspended. This creates a chaotic but entirely suggestible mass. Similarly, the main character of "Le Horla" extends his persecutor's influence to humanity as a whole.

The author addresses the question of the crowd in a number of texts, and most directly in a newspaper article published in *Le Gaulois* on April 4th, 1882, under the title of "Les foules." Right from the beginning, he describes the crowd as a mystery, whose *coming* the writers of the first half of the 19th century had foreseen, or "pressenti." While the crowd had already existed in the urban structure at this time, Maupassant, nevertheless, perceives it as an unknown that is yet to be discovered.[302] The narrator of both versions of "Le Horla" connects man's messianic premonition of a new being to the Horla itself, which one has for centuries represented with fantastical and spiritual beings. In the 1886 text, the narrator says:

> Depuis des siècles, on le *pressent*, on le redoute et on l'annonce ! La peur de l'Invisible a toujours hanté nos pères. Il est venu. Toutes les légendes des fées, des gnomes, des rôdeurs de l'air insaisissables et malfaisants, c'était de lui qu'elles parlaient, de lui pressenti par l'homme inquiet et tremblant déjà.[303]

The narrator of the second version of "Le Horla" writes:

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[300] Guy de Maupassant, "Le Horla" (1887), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 930.

[301] Guy de Maupassant, "Le Horla" (1887), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 933.

[302] In this chronicle, he writes: "Edgar Poe, Hoffmann et autres esprits du même ordre, ont étudié ou plutôt pressenti ce mystère: une foule." "Les foules," in *Guy de Maupassant. Chroniques*, ed. Gérard Delaisement, vol. I (Paris: Rive Droite, 2003) 480.

[303] Guy de Maupassant, "Le Horla" (1886), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, p. 829. [Emphasis added.]

> J'ai sans cesse cette sensation affreuse d'un danger menaçant, cette appréhension d'un malheur qui vient ou de la mort qui approche, ce *pressentiment* qui est sans doute l'atteinte d'un mal encore inconnu, germant dans le sang et dans la chair.[304]

Finally, in a passage already mentioned earlier, the narrator speaks of man's premonition of the Horla:

> On dirait que l'homme, depuis qu'il pense, a *pressenti* et redouté un être nouveau, plus fort que lui, son successeur en ce monde, et que, le sentant proche et ne pouvant prévoir la nature de ce maître, il a créé, dans sa terreur, tout le peuple fantastique des êtres occultes, fantômes vagues nés de la peur.[305]

As this last passage shows, man has invented fantastical beings in response to his fear of the unknown. Fear arises from that which neither human senses nor the mind can explain. If we interpret the Horla as a figure of the crowd, one's fear could be attributed to the compromise of individuality within the crowd. Alone, one is distinct from the others. In a crowd, however, an individual "[cesse] d'être un homme pour faire partie d'une foule. Sa volonté individuelle [se noie] dans la volonté commune comme une goutte d'eau se mêle à un fleuve. Sa personnalité [disparaît], devenant une infime parcelle d'une vaste et étrange personnalité, celle de la foule," Maupassant writes in a chronicle entitled "Les foules."[306] The individual's solitude is indivisible from the crowd that, following Maupassant's texts, deindivualizes the subject, integrates it in the mass, while at the same time alienating it as a thinking, distinct subject.

Throughout the 1887 version of "Le Horla," the narrator avoids the feeling of solitude by seeking out the crowd, and it is also at these moments of solitude that the

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[304] Guy de Maupassant, "Le Horla" (1887), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 915. [Emphasis added.]
[305] Ibid., 931. [Emphasis added.]
[306] Guy de Maupassant, "Les foules," in *Guy de Maupassant. Chroniques*, ed. Gérard Delaisement, vol. I (Paris: Rive Droite, 2003) 481.

Horla appears to him. Before analyzing explicit representations of the narrator's solitude, I would like to evoke several implicit ones, appearing in the descriptions of his surroundings: the cathedral in Rouen, the one on the Mont Saint-Michel, and in the forest of Roumare near his house. He characterizes the gothic cathedral in Rouen as "la vaste ville aux toits bleus, sous le people pointu des rochers gothiques."[307] On a trip to the Mont Saint-Michel, he compares the beings depicted on the facets of the cathedral to "têtes bizarres hérissées de chimères, de diables, de bêtes fantastiques, de fleurs monstrueuses."[308] In search of distraction from the uneasiness experienced in his house, the narrator goes for a walk in the Roumare forest, describing the trees as "deux armées d'arbres démesurément hauts qui mettaient un toit vert, épais, presque noir, entre le ciel et moi."[309] These three references bear significance to the social institutions that govern and structure our identity: the church and the army. Finally, it is in his house and its surroundings that the narrator discovers and confronts repeatedly his persecutor. This location carries significance in its genealogical ties to the character. In fact, he begins to tell his story with the description of his roots:

> J'aime ce pays, et j'aime y vivre parce que j'y ai mes racines, ces profondes et délicates racines, qui attachent un homme à la terre où sont nés et morts ses aïeux, qui l'attachent à ce qu'on pense et à ce qu'on mange, aux usages comme aux nourritures, aux locutions locales, aux intonations des paysans, aux odeurs du sol, des villages et de l'air lui-même.[310]

He endearingly speaks of his roots as an attachment to the land and its customs, which define his taste and preferences, as well as his thoughts. This passage sets the stage

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[307] Guy de Maupassant, "Le Horla" (1887), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 913.
[308] Ibid., 917.
[309] Ibid., 916.
[310] Ibid., 913.

for the social influences that structure and define him. With the positive tone of this description, he seems to insist on the origin and the continuity of his identity. The Horla, on the other hand, is an external force that infiltrates his thoughts and movements. Yet, its influence appears to be destructive to the character because it forces him to confront his submission to social norms. For this reason, the family home becomes a threat that must be destroyed. In retreat from others, in his house, in the forest, at the Mont Saint-Michel, the narrator nevertheless feels himself surrounded by representations of major social institutions: the family, the law and the church. It is at these moments and places that the Horla appears to him.

The passage of "Le Horla" (1887) where the narrator flees to the forest in escape from the Horla reveals the link between solitude and his persecutor. He writes:

> Tantôt, pour fatiguer mon corps, si las pourtant, j'allai faire un tour dans la forêt de Roumare. Je crus d'abord que l'air frais, léger et doux, plein d'odeur d'herbes et de feuilles, me versait aux veines un sang nouveau, au cœur une énergie nouvelle. Je pris une grande avenue de chasse, puis je tournai vers La Bouille, par une allée étroite, entre deux armées d'arbres démesurément hauts qui mettaient un toit vert, épais, presque noir, entre le ciel et moi.
>
> Un frisson me saisit soudain, non pas un frisson de froid, mais un étrange frisson d'angoisse.
>
> Je hâtai le pas, inquiet d'être seul dans ce bois, apeuré sans raison, stupidement, par la profonde solitude. Tout à coup, il me sembla que j'étais suivi, qu'on marchait sur mes talons, tout près, tout près, à me toucher.
>
> Je me retournai brusquement. J'étais seul. Je ne vis derrière moi que la droite et large allée, vide, haute, redoutablement vide ; et de l'autre côté elle s'étendait aussi à perte de vue, toute pareille, effrayante.[311]

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[311] Ibid., 916.

Despite his feeling of regeneration in the freshness of nature, the forest isolates him from the world beyond. Escaping from the familial roof of his house, instead, he finds himself enclosed by the woods. The light, sweet smell of grass and leaves is overpowered by the heaviness and thickness of the trees that entrap him. Seized by a feeling of anguish, the narrator fears his solitude in this enclosure. His fear of being alone, in "profound solitude" as he calls it, seems to be paradoxical to his desire to escape from the Horla's presence that he detects inside his house. It is with this suspicion of the Horla's presence, or perhaps due to his feeling of absolute solitude, that the narrator suddenly believes that someone is following him. With the relationship between solitude and the crowd, this paradox proves that it is precisely the *presence* of an other that reveals one's alienation. In Baudelaire's text, the poet is capable of peopling his solitude. In Maupassant's text, solitude becomes apparent by the suspected presence of alterity. Yet, this presence remains ambiguous whether it is the character who *produces* it, or if this being truly exists. Feeling the Horla's presence in the forest, the narrator describes his strange impulse to close his eyes and to quickly turn in place, "comme une toupie,"[312] a movement that consequently destabilizes him and provokes vertigo and anxiety. He writes, "je rouvris les yeux; les arbres dansaient; la terre flottait; je dus m'asseoir. Puis, ah! je ne savais plus par où j'étais venu! Bizarre idée! Bizarre! Bizarre idée! Je ne savais

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[312] Ibid., 916. The character feels compelled, from fear of the Horla's presence, to turn in place, like a spinning top, until the surroundings are no longer recognizable. A similar movement appears in "Un lâche" when Lamil utters an injurious word, setting in motion a chain of reactions. "Le monsieur ne répondit qu'un mot, un mot ordurier qui sonna d'un bout à l'autre du café, et fit, comme par l'effet d'un ressort, accomplir à chaque consommateur un mouvement brusque. Tous ceux qui tournaient le dos se retournèrent ; tous les autres levèrent la tête ; trois garçons pivotèrent sur leurs talons comme des *toupies* ; les deux dames du comptoir eurent un sursaut, puis une conversion du tourse entier, comme si elles eussent été deux automates obéissant à la même manivelle". "Un lâche" (1884), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles I*, 1160. In this text, Lamil's insult triggers a domino effect of the bystanders' reactions, which ultimately leads to the provocation of a duel. Their witnessing to the altercation renders the duel inevitable. In "Le Horla," it is the character's fear of the Horla's presence that precipitates his disorienting motion. In both texts, an outside force influences and manipulates the characters.

plus du tout."[313] By closing his eyes, he shuts out the oppressive surroundings while, by turning in place, he loses his balance to the extent that, upon opening his eyes, the thick, suffocating surroundings come to life and move around him. A crowd of dancing trees and the flowing ground now people the solitude he had felt just earlier. This transformation renders his place in these surroundings unrecognizable to the point of losing his sense of direction.

The character feelings of solitude coincide with the Horla's presence, which push him to escape the familiar place. Once in Paris, immersed within the crowd, he immediately feels cured of his unrest and anguish, just as he did when he first entered the Roumare forest.

> Je suis rentré à l'hôtel très gai, par les boulevards. Au coudoiement de la *foule*, je songeais, non sans ironie, à mes terreurs, à mes suppositions de l'autre semaine, car j'ai cru, oui, j'ai cru qu'un être invisible habitait sous mon toit. Comme notre tête est faible et s'effare, et s'égare vite, dès qu'un petit fait incompréhensible nous frappe ![314]

Relieved by the change he experiences, the narrator makes the following conclusion:

> [La] *solitude* est dangereuse pour les intelligences qui travaillent. Il nous faut, autour de nous, des hommes qui pensent et qui parlent. Quand nous sommes *seuls* longtemps, nous *peuplons le vide de fantômes*.[315]

Following this conclusion, our psyche counteracts solitude by reproducing the crowd. Yet, this crowd, composed of *ghosts*, haunts and threatens the character by further distancing him from society. The narrator's attempt to dissipate his loneliness with the

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[313] Ibid.
[314] Ibid., 921. [Emphasis added.]
[315] Ibid. [Emphasis added.]

illusion that escape provides can also be seen in "Lettre d'un fou." "Et, dans cette glace, je commence à voir des images folles, des monstres, des cadavres hideux, toutes sortes de bêtes effroyables, d'êtres atroces, toutes les visions invraisemblables qui doivent hanter l'esprit des fous," explains the character[316]. He attributes these visions to madness. In "Le Horla" (1887), however, instead of seeing monstrous beings, the narrator compares his solitude to a feeling of presence and persecution. For instance, earlier in the text, he wakes up from a nightmare that he describes vividly and looks around him in search of his persecutor, only to find that he is alone. He writes, "Et soudain, je m'éveille, affolé, couvert de sueur. J'allume une bougie. Je suis *seul*."[317] Toward the end of this text, the narrator, who has felt himself as the Horla's prey, decides to turn the hunt around, with the Horla as his target.[318] Believing in his ability to entrap his persecutor, the narrator undertakes his murderous plan: "J'étais sûr qu'il n'avait pu s'échapper et je l'enfermai, tout *seul*, tout *seul*! Quelle joie! Je le tenais!".[319] The exclamation "tout seul, tout seul" is ambiguous, for it can either imply that the narrator has managed to capture his persecutor and to isolate it in his room, or that the narrator has captured the Horla all by himself, alone, as a form of savior from humanity's apparent successor. Considering the second interpretation, the narrator's heroic status would distinguish him as an individual subject, singled out like a heroic figure. Yet, the Horla's indeterminate nature threatens the

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[316] Guy de Maupassant, "Lettre d'un fou," in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 466.

[317] Guy de Maupassant, "Le Horla" (1887), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 916. [Emphasis added.]

[318] In "Le Horla" (1886), the character refers to his love for hunting: "J'aime la chasse et la pêche. Or, j'avais derrière moi, au-dessus des grands rochers qui dominaient ma maison, une des plus belles forêts de France, celle de Roumare, et devant moi un des plus beaux fleuves du monde." "Le Horla" (1886), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 823. A bit further, he writes, "Je pensai donc qu'il y avait dans la maison une influence fiévreuse due au voisinage du fleuve" (824). The narrator concludes that the Horla comes from the Brazilian ship that he witnessed passing on the Seine beside his house. It is in the forest that a feeling of a presence reveals to the narrator his solitude. Considering these two locations, the river and the forest, we can draw the conclusion that the place of pleasurable hunting for the narrator has transformed into his own trap, and the place of the hunter and the prey inverse.

[319] Guy de Maupassant, "Le Horla" (1887), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 937. [Emphasis added.]

narrator's confidence, leading him to the conclusion that the Horla cannot be killed by man.

The naming of the Horla is also revealing of the character's solitude. In both versions of the text, he refers to it with the pronouns *on*, *il*, *lui*, and words such as *l'Être* and *l'Invisible*. While in the first text, the narrator invents this enigmatic name, in the second, it is the Horla itself that *suggests* its name to the character. Literary critics have provided many interpretations of this name, ranging from anagrams and references to foreign words to a conjunction of the two French words *hors* and *là*.[320] As mentioned earlier, this last interpretation suggests that the Horla is at once beyond and within, strange and familiar, and whose uncanny presence evokes existential questions of identity for the narrator. Despite the numerous and inconclusive interpretations of this name, what seems to be most significant here is precisely its indeterminate and multiple nature, for it reflects the character's growing doubt in his own place in society. We have already seen such nominal ambiguity in "Un lâche" with the name of Georges Lamil, which renders Signoles unable to discern his duel opponent, failing to attribute Lamil to any known social order. Lamil represents a new social class that is unknown to a bourgeoisie, nostalgic of the aristocracy, of which Signoles is a perfect example. In "Le Horla" (1886), the naming of the unknown being characterizes the narrator's identity. He says, "Attendez. L'Être! Comment le nommerai-je? L'Invisible. Non, cela ne suffit pas. Je l'ai baptisé le Horla. Pourquoi? Je ne sais point. Donc le Horla ne me quittait plus guère."[321] Naming it the *Invisible* does not suffice, for, as we will see, the invisibility of known things in the world, such as the wind, does not pose a threat to one's identity. The Horla,

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[320] See Ph. Bonnefis, "*Considérons* Horla *comme un nom migrateur*," in *Comme Maupassant* (Lille: PUL, 1993).

[321] Guy de Maupassant, "Le Horla" (1886), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 827.

however, is more than invisible. It is rationally unknowable to man. Once named, it no longer leaves the character, dispelling doubt that would render repression of the persecutory presence possible.

Finally, the language of the text alone attests to the narrator's defense against his solitude. In a rather ambiguous statement, the narrator of the novella describes the Horla's power of will over his mind and body. Subjected to his persecutor like "un spectateur esclave et terrifié,"[322] the narrator is denied everything that would have defined him as a subject. Sitting placidly in his chair, unable to move, the narrator writes: "Je suis rivé à mon siège; et mon siège adhère au sol, de telle sorte qu'aucune force ne *nous* soulèverait."[323] As this passage shows, he is as deprived of will as a piece of furniture. Yet, we can also interpret the "nous" as the narrator's attempt to divert his alienation and to create his own form of collective, even if that means that the others are objects, while he reduces himself to an objectified position of submission. In all three texts, we find a striking example of such identification with otherness, as the narrator's way to counteract his solitude. This takes place in the infamous mirror scene, where he fails to see his own reflection in the mirror. In all three texts, the narrator reacts with trepidation at this horrifying sight, and which he rationalizes as the Horla's predatory advance. I would like to quote all three texts, first from "Lettre d'un fou" followed by "Le Horla" (1886) and finally from "Le Horla" (1887), in order to compare the characters' conclusions to the loss of their reflection:

> Je n'osais pas aller vers [la glace], sentant bien qu'il était entre *nous*, lui, l'Invisible, et qu'il me cachait.[324]

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[322] Guy de Maupassant, "Le Horla" (1887), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 929.
[323] Ibid., 930. [Emphasis added.]
[324] Guy de Maupassant, "Lettre d'un fou" (1885), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 466. [Emphasis added.]

> Et je regardais cela avec des yeux affolés, et je n'osais plus avancer, sentant bien qu'il se trouvait entre *nous*, lui, et qu'il m'échapperait encore, mais que son corps imperceptible avait absorbé mon reflet.[325]

> Et je regardais cela avec des yeux affolés ; et je n'osais plus avancer, je n'osais plus faire un mouvement, sentant bien pourtant qu'il était là, mais qu'il m'échapperait encore, lui dont le corps imperceptible avait dévoré mon reflet.[326]

There is a progression in each narrator's rationalization of this event. In "Lettre d'un fou," he feels the Horla's presence, and whose imperceptible form *hides* him from the mirror. In the first version of "Le Horla," his persecutor's presence appears to be stronger and more active, not simply blocking the narrator's reflection, but rather *absorbing* it. Finally, in the third text, the Horla *devours* his reflection, like an animal preying on its victim. Yet, the target is not his body, but rather his representation that inextricably reflects the subject's identity. The relationship between the subject and his or her reflection is all the more clearly stated in the first two texts, where the narrator groups himself and his reflection under the pronoun "nous". The reflected image thus acquires a form of independence from its subject. With the bond between them broken by the presence of the Horla, the narrator's social position is threatened, and whatever affirmations he might have had of his own identity are now cut off from the social structure that anchors it. While in the first two texts, the narrator attempts to people his solitude with a collective "we", in the third text, he can no longer oppose the deindividuation forced onto him by the social mass phenomenon named the Horla.

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[325] Guy de Maupassant, "Le Horla" (1886), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 828. [Emphasis added.]
[326] Guy de Maupassant, "Le Horla" (1887), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 936.

Freud's interest in mass psychology confirmed his long developed conclusions on the formation of the subject's identity as an evolving reflection of social institutions and influences. The crowd represents a condensed form of social influence, which it embodies as a collective. However, the mass opposes from the individual in the schism that occurs between the individual as a subject and the mass's identity that revokes the sense of responsibility from each of its constituents. The crowd provides escape from the individual's identitary doubts and self-scrutiny. As we saw "Le Horla" (1887), when the narrator believes he is in the presence of the Horla, he feels entrapped in his house as in the forest, estranged from society and suffocated by his persecutor. Inversely, contact with the crowd dissipates the collective of *ghosts* that put his sense of reality into question, for, peopling his solitude with ghosts and visions challenges and threatens his senses. Within the crowd, the subject's identity is suppressed by the identity of the mass, thus reducing contact with others to the physical minimal, a mere "coudoiement," by which the individuals weave themselves into one human fabric, as the word *foule* suggests.[327]

Solitude is dangerous for the thinking, intelligent subject, according to the narrator. Nonetheless, the crowd exists just as much in solitude, but this time in the form of a collective of ghosts. Therefore, the relief that the narrator seeks from the crowd does nothing more than confirm his alienation within the mass that expulses him as a singular, lucid subject. The crowd succeeds however in reducing the narrator's fears to insignificance. Away from the crowd, however, this same small mystery reaches a

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[327] Another definition of the French word *la foule*, and the verb *fouler*, is the act of weaving a cloth, which essentially consists of linking individual threads to create one single mass.

dimension that overshadows the subject's entire life, by which everything that one thought to have known becomes incomprehensible and foreign.

The narrator critiques the mass for its unquestioning devotion to the leader. While it permits him to escape from the oppression that tortures him at home, he quite rationally and pessimistically opposes mass psychology. In the July 14th entry, he writes:

> Fête de la République. Je me suis promené par les rues. Les pétards et les drapeaux m'amusaient comme un enfant. C'est pourtant fort bête d'être joyeux, à date fixe, par décret du gouvernement. Le peuple est un troupeau imbécile, tantôt stupidement patient et tantôt férocement révolté. On lui dit : « Amuse-toi. » Il s'amuse. On lui dit : « Va te battre avec le voisin. » Il va se battre. On lui dit : « Vote pour l'Empereur. » Il vote pour l'Empereur. Puis, on lui dit : « Vote pour la République. » Et il vote pour la République.
>
> Ceux qui le dirigent sont aussi sots ; mais au lieu d'obéir à des hommes, ils obéissent à des principes, lesquels ne peuvent être que niais, stériles et faux, par cela même qu'ils sont des principes, c'est-à-dire des idées réputées certaines et immuables, en ce monde où l'on n'est sûr de rien, puisque la lumière est une illusion, puisque le bruit est une illusion.[328]

Our actions depend on the social conventions and institutions that influence us, such as public holidays and political decisions. Even emotions such as joyfulness and hatred within the mass depend on the principles that the leader commands onto it. In turn, the principles that the leader adheres to are *reputed* as certain and immutable, yet a reputation is itself defined by opinion, thus contradicting the objectivity that these principles claim to have.

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[328] Guy de Maupassant, "Le Horla" (1887), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 921-922.

3. The senses

The narrator of "Le Horla" claims that nothing we perceive coincides with reality because our senses are flawed and limited. He concludes: "en ce monde où l'on n'est sûr de rien, puisque la lumière est une illusion, puisque le bruit est une illusion."[329] Similarly, earlier in the text when he is alone in his home, everyday experiences become incomprehensible: "j'essaye de lire; mais je ne comprends pas les mots ; je distingue à peine les lettres."[330] According to the narrator, principles followed by leaders are not simply subjective, but *false*. If they are false, it is because our perception of reality, on which we base our convictions, is illusory, and our senses are greatly limited in view of everything that exists in the world.

Before recounting his encounter with the Horla, in all three texts, the narrator expresses his disappointment with the limitations of human senses. With this weakness, we fail to perceive even the things that we know exist. "Ah! si nous avions d'autres organes […] que de choses nous pourrions découvrir encore autour de nous !", writes the narrator of "Le Horla" (1887).[331] The imperfection of our senses permits us to detect only a fraction of what surrounds us, thus, what we perceive lies beyond complete comprehension. The narrator of "Lettre d'un fou" describes his realization of human error.

> Je vivais comme vivent les bêtes, comme nous vivons tous, accomplissant toutes les fonctions de l'existence, examinant et croyant voir, croyant savoir, croyant connaître ce qui m'entoure, quand, un jour, je me suis aperçu que tout est faux.[332]

While the invisible for the narrator of the three texts represents a mystery that is yet to be explained by the rational, scientific eye,[333] the visible, on the other hand, remains within

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[329] Ibid.
[330] Ibid., 915.
[331] Guy de Maupassant, "Le Horla" (1887), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 914.
[332] Guy de Maupassant, "Lettre d'un fou" (1885), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 461.

the order of deception. Comprehension, or rather the belief of comprehension is necessarily prone to error. According to the character, *everything* is false because "nos organes sont les seuls intermédiaires entre le monde extérieur et nous."[334] Considering the limitations and imperfection of our senses, the intermediary between the individual and society can only provide a subjective perspective of the world. Consequently, the objectivity of knowledge that humanity claims, and that the crowd maintains, is contradicted by perception, as the vehicle of that knowledge. The crowd, too, functions on the principle of objectivity, rejecting individual, subjective interpretations.

The positivist tradition of the texts refutes the fantastical and spiritual interpretations of the unknown, and replaces the enigmas with scientific certainty of proof. The fantastical and the spiritual have for centuries served as protection from the unknown, whose presence man has only been able to *feel*, or *pressentir*, in the same way that the narrator senses the coming of humanity's successor.[335] In the following passage, the narrator of "Le Horla" (1887) justifies all spirituality and mysticism as man's attempt to represent this new being:

> Depuis que l'homme pense, depuis qu'il sait dire et écrire sa pensée, il se sent frôlé par un mystère impénétrable pour ses sens grossiers et imparfaits, et il tâche de suppléer, par l'effort de son intelligence, à l'impuissance de ses organes. Quand cette intelligence demeurait encore à l'état rudimentaire, cette hantise des phénomènes invisibles a pris des formes banalement effrayantes. De là sont nées

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[333] On numerous occasions, the narrator of each text speaks of the invisible as a mystery. For instance, in "Le Horla" (1887), he exclaims, "ce mystère de l'Invisible!" (914). These exclamations precede the character's encounter with the Horla.

[334] Guy de Maupassant, "Lettre d'un fou" (1885), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 461.

[335] "J'ai sans cesse cette sensation affreuse d'un danger menaçant, cette appréhension d'un malheur qui vient ou de la mort qui approche, ce pressentiment qui est sans doute l'atteinte d'un mal encore inconnu, germant dans le sang et dans la chair." Guy de Maupassant, "Le Horla" (1887), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 915).

les croyances populaires au surnaturel, les légendes des esprits rôdeurs, des fées, des gnomes, des revenants, je dirai même la légende de Dieu […].[336]

Man is distinguished from animals by his ability to think, and since he thinks and expresses his thoughts, the unknown serves as a motor for his quest for knowledge. Where one's organs fail, intelligence supplants with beliefs, going so far as to explain God and religion as representations of the unknown.[337] However, at the time that Maupassant writes these texts, science seeks to replace beliefs, as we can see in the decline of religion, for instance. With the domination of science, the narrator rejects mysticism and explains the Horla in psychological and metaphysical terms instead. From a psychological perspective, the character rationalizes his perception of the Horla as a hallucination, in which his psyche fractures from his senses as they encounter and comprehend reality. Yet, in a hallucination, it is not a question of limited senses. Rather, it concerns an alteration in one's interpretation of perception. In "Le Horla" (1887), the narrator provides a long rationalization of his visions and his unease, in a language that mimics scientific discourse.[338] However, if a hallucination is an altered perception of reality, in contradiction to a lucid and "objective" relation to the world, and if such objectivity does not exist, because our knowledge of the world is erroneous due to the limitations of our senses, then what psychology calls a hallucination is merely an attempt to rationalize what necessarily falls beyond the parameters of accepted knowledge. This knowledge has served as the basis for human existence and distinction from other beings. In other words, a hallucination is anchored on the existence of objectivity from which a

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[336] Ibid., 922.
[337] The three texts reiterate the limitations of human senses and the influence of these limitations on our knowledge, which lead us inevitably to error. Nevertheless, according to the narrator of "Le Horla" (1887), man distinguishes himself from other animals by his intelligence.
[338] See Guy de Maupassant, "Le Horla" (1887), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 928.

delusion can be distinguished. However, if, according to the narrator's conclusions on the limitations of human senses, everything is false, then objectivity and truth cannot be attained by our senses. Then, how could one make a clear distinction between delusion and lucidity. The narrator characterizes himself as "un halluciné raisonnant,"[339] claiming rationality during his experiences and visions of the Horla. This allows him to integrate, analyze and interpret these visions. A *reasoning hallucinator* would imply that one's hallucinatory experience lies within the realm of rationality. The hallucinating narrator rationalizes the discrepancy between his perception and reality, justifying his hallucinatory experiences. It is this belief in rational thought that drives the narrator to conduct scientific experiments in order to rationally define his strange experiences.

We find that scientific discourse appears even at the structural level of these texts. For instance, the word "donc" often appears at the opening of a paragraph.[340] *Donc*, or *therefore* in English, functions as a transition between cause and effect. Following descriptions of events and facts, we are led to conclusions that are drawn from them. In these three texts, *donc* also claims to give a rational explanation for seemingly irrational events. Here however, the effect created by *donc* is that of conviction rather than proof. In an attempt to rationalize the strange events that occur, the narrator attempts to link distant thoughts by a chain of explanations formulated in a scientific manner.[341]

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[339] Ibid.

[340] More specifically, this word appears at the beginning of paragraphs or sentences, four times in "Lettre d'un fou", five times in "Le Horla" (1886), and ten times in "Le Horla" (1887). In this last text, I'm counting the one instance of the word *alors*, which carries an analogous meaning.

[341] I would like to give several examples of Maupassant's use of this word as a rationalizing device. "L'humanité pourrait exister cependant sans l'oreille, sans le goût et sans l'odorat, c'est-à-dire sans aucune notion du bruit, de la saveur et de l'odeur. / *Donc*, si nous avions quelques organes de moins, nous ignorerons d'admirables et singulières choses, mais si nous avions quelques organes de plus, nous découvririons autour de nous une infinité d'autres choses que nous ne soupçonnerons jamais faute de moyen de les constater. / *Donc*, nous nous trompons en jugeant le Connu, et nous sommes entourés d'Inconnu inexploré. / *Donc*, tout est incertain et appréciable de manières différentes. / Tout est faux, tout

For the narrator of "Le Horla" (1887), as much as for Maupassant, intelligence is synonymous with science and rational thought. In turn, science uses senses and thought to analyze reality. However, since human senses are prone to error, man cannot rely on them alone to comprehend the world. As the narrator of "Lettre d'un fou" claims, "[L'œil] ne peut nous révéler que les objets et les êtres de dimension moyenne, en proportion avec la taille humaine […]."[342] These limitations precipitate an erroneous understanding of reality. He continues, "nous nous trompons en jugeant le Connu, et nous sommes entourés d'Inconnu inexploré. Donc, tout est incertain et appréciable de manières différentes."[343] By measuring everything according to the model of our sensitive capacities, we accept such perceptive error as the truth. Yet, the narrator insists, "vérité

est possible, tout est douteux" ("Lettre d'un fou," 463) [Emphasis added]. Following this chain of conclusions, everything is false because an objective view of the world does not exist.

"Mais celui qui me gouverne, quel est-il, cet invisible? cet inconnaissable, ce rôdeur d'une race surnaturelle? / *Donc* les Invisibles existent! […]" ("Le Horla" (1887), 930) [Emphasis added]. No rational, scientific link exists between the two sentences above, for, in the first, the Horla remains invisible and unknowable to the narrator, while believing himself to be in submission to this being. The *donc* appears as a rationalizing tool to justify the character's dependence on this unknown. Following the narrator's conclusion, the invisible *must* exist if it governs him, as he claims to be.

Finally, in another passage of this short story, the narrator believes to *see* the Horla when he witnesses pages of a book, left open on a table, turn over one by one, as if another being were reading it. He plunges forward in an attempt to grasp the Horla and to capture it as his own prey. He writes: "D'un bond furieux, d'un bond de bête révoltée, qui va éventrer son dompteur, je traversai ma chambre pour le saisir, pour l'étreindre, pour le tuer!… Mais mon siège, avant que je l'eusse atteint, se renversa comme si on eût fui devant moi… ma table oscilla, ma lampe tomba et s'éteignit, et ma fenêtre se ferma comme si un malfaiteur surpris se fût élancé dans la nuit, en prenant à pleines mains les battants. / *Donc*, il s'était sauvé; il avait eu peur, peur de moi, lui!" ("Le Horla" (1887), 932) [Emphasis added]. In this passage, the narrator attributes moral characteristics to his invisible persecutor, expressing them comparatively and hypothetically as the "comme si" implies. The chair turns over *as if* one were fleeing the narrator, and the window shutters move *as if* an "evil-doer" escaped through the window. Thus, the narrator projects a feeling of guilt onto the Horla for the feelings of persecution and suffering that it has inflicted on the character. In fact, the image projected onto the Horla is that of a fearful and malicious coward, reflecting perfectly the narrator himself who, at the end of the text, burns down his house, killing his servants in the process, and flees. His suicide is the ultimate flight from his fear of the being that appears to be invincible to humanity. With this interpretation, the only *apparent* reason for the Horla's flight is his fear of the narrator. The *donc* of this last sentence places this logic as the only possible interpretation. As we have seen in the three examples, these perspectives reflect the narrator's point of view, and his attempt to explain what otherwise appears unbelievable and inconceivable in a rational way. Yet, just as the senses are flawed and limited, so is thought and intelligence, for they function with the aim of the subject's protection from external disturbances and dangers. Confrontation with alterity is consistently diverted here, by reducing external threat with a rational justification.

[342] Guy de Maupassant, "Lettre d'un fou" (1885), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 462.
[343] Ibid., 463.

dans notre organe, erreur à côté. Deux et deux ne doivent plus faire quatre en dehors de notre atmosphère."[344] What the senses capture differs from reality, and what appears as the truth does not reflect the world outside of our misleading perception. Mistrusting thus his senses, the narrator relies on the scientific discourse to confirm the Horla's existence.

In all three texts, he draws one significant analogy that would allow him to find proof of the Horla. Things that our eye cannot discern, such as the wind, exist in the world. Some things are too small or too big to perceive, while others are invisible, which nevertheless have great power. For instance, the translucence of glass prevents man from perceiving it. "Un verre sans défaut le trompe,"[345] says the narrator, and what renders it visible is a defect on its surface. Defect here implies an accident, but it also refers to external influences that place everything within a context. In order to determine what the eye cannot see, the narrator turns his attention to the effects of this invisible being on its surroundings. This is precisely his goal when he covers his hands and mouth with graphite, and the carafe of water and other edibles left on the night table with white cloth. As the graphite would leave a trace on the white cloth, he could confirm whether he is the one consuming the water during the night, or if it is in fact another being. The experiment proves the Horla's presence by eliminating himself, the narrator, as the agent.[346]

Similarly, in the mirror scene, the absence of the narrator's reflection proves the Horla's presence between him and the mirror, just as a defect renders glass visible to the human eye. With the absence of his reflection in the mirror, the narrator concludes, "Je

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[344] Ibid.
[345] Ibid., 462.
[346] This method suggests photographic connotations, as does the mirror scene, where the Horla acquires the form of the character's negative. The objective of the experiments, on the other hand, is to capture a trace of a presence.

l'avais donc vu!".[347] Thus, the Horla exists. This conclusion leads him to question and reevaluate everything around him, the things man can perceive and particularly those whose existence we are not aware of. In "Lettre d'un fou," the narrator attempts to force his senses, as a way to perceive what is beyond their limitations.

> […] j'ai fait un effort de pensée surhumain pour soupçonner l'impénétrable qui m'entoure.
>
> Suis-je devenu fou?
>
> Je me suis dit : je suis enveloppé de choses inconnues. J'ai supposé l'homme sans oreilles et soupçonnant le son comme nous soupçonnons tant de mystères cachés, l'homme constatant de phénomènes acoustiques dont il ne pourrait déterminer ni la nature, ni la provenance. Et j'ai eu peur de tout, autour de moi, peur de l'air, peur de la nuit. Du moment que nous ne pouvons connaître presque rien, et du moment que tout est sans limites, quel est le reste? Le vide n'est pas? Qu'y a-t-il dans le vide apparent?[348]

Doubting reality to such an extent brings up the inevitable question of madness, which reappears throughout the three texts, as well as in a vast majority of Maupassant's works. The character's desire to see beyond the limitations of the senses relies on thought. However, his quest for proof requires what he calls "superhuman thought", an attention that transgresses human capacities. This leads to the following question: how can one distinguish between new insight and delusion? For the Maupassantian character, the world beyond the parameters of his perception remains in the dimension of future scientific discovery. Whereas in "Lettre d'un fou," the ambiguity of perception and madness leaves the possibility of the latter, as the title of the text itself suggests, in the two versions of "Le Horla," the character turns the focus away from the possibility of madness, to a pseudo-positivist and scientific explanation for his strange experiences. In

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[347] Guy de Maupassant, "Lettre d'un fou" (1885), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 466.
[348] Ibid., 464.

the 1886 text, the narrator's story is prefaced by a psychiatrist who, as a representative of science and rationality, confirms his patient's lucidity. This sets the stage for the final version of the text, where the existence of strange beings and other phenomena can be justified by our own limitations, rather than as a product of psychosis.

4. Submission of Will

Man's subordination to the mass is driven by its power over his mental processes, and ultimately over his will. As a social phenomenon, the mass has been the object of study in the fields of psychology and sociology, particularly during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[349] Psychology in particular has sought to articulate the effects of the mass on man's will and individuality. In the mass, Freud quotes Le Bon, "[the] conscious personality has entirely vanished; will and discernment are lost,"[350] due to effects of suggestion and intimidation, adherence to ideals professed by the leader or as they are represented by collective beliefs. In Maupassant's text, the effects of the Horla on the character are analogous to the effects of the crowd on an individual. The individual's interests yield to the interests of the collective, just as the character's identity and interests are confounded with the elusive identity of the Horla. We see this in the mirror scene, as well as in the character's experiments that *prove* the Horla's existence. Similarly, the narrator announces the coming of the Horla as a threat to humanity as a

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[349] See also Céline Surprenant's *Freud's Mass Psychology*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Gustave Le Bon's *Psychology of Crowds* (1895); and Gabriel Tarde's *L'opinion et la foule* (1901).
[350] Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Ed. and Trans. James Strachey, vol. 18 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955) 76.

whole.[351] The suggestibility of the individual within the crowd assures one's adherence to the group, and diverges the threat of expulsion from the collective. Suggestion and hypnotism practiced by psychiatry, and as we also see in "Le Horla (1887),[352] act in a similar way within the crowd where individual will is overpowered by the will of the crowd as a whole. The will of the individual threatens the cohesion within the crowd, thus the individual "is no longer conscious of his acts", which are repressed for the sake of the collective.[353]

Both versions of "Le Horla" reveal the struggle between the individual and the crowd's power over the character's will. Maupassant's proximity to Schopenhauer's concept of will and its intrinsic link to society as a collective, evident throughout his texts, supports the interpretation of the Horla as the mass. In addition, the question of the victim to social conventions constitutes precisely the individual's subservience to social constructions that form and constitute one's identity. The Horla manifests itself not only in the physical suffering of the narrator, but more importantly in his moral and psychological subservience to this force, which becomes progressively evident throughout the second "Le Horla". Taken aback by a feeling of unrest, the narrator writes, "je revins malgré moi,"[354] following an external influence that overpowers his

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[351] Freud quotes Le Bon who writes: "In a group every sentiment is and act is contagious, and contagious to such a degree that an individual readily sacrifices his personal interest to the collective interest". Sigmund Freud, "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Ed. and Trans. James Strachey, vol. 18 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955) 75.

[352] In "Le Horla" (1887), Maupassant uses the hypnotism episode, where a psychiatrist named Dr. Parent hypnotizes the narrator's cousin, to contrast his own *possession* by the Horla to the artificial psychological manipulation that psychiatry had become able to enact. At another moment in the text, the narrator compares hypnotism and magnetism to child's play.

[353] Sigmund Freud, "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Ed. and Trans. James Strachey, vol. 18 (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955) 76.

[354] Guy de Maupassant, "Le Horla" (1887), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 928.

own desire, as *malgré*[355] suggests. The following week, however, he describes the subordination of his will to the Horla in more radical terms. He writes: "Je n'ai plus aucune force, aucun courage, aucune domination sur moi, aucun pouvoir même de mettre en mouvement ma *volonté*. Je ne peux plus vouloir ; mais quelqu'un veut pour moi ; et j'obéis."[356] In other words, his actions are not of his own will, governed rather by another, unidentified *quelqu'un*. This statement of desperation reveals the character's lucid confrontation with an otherness that structures his identity, actions and thoughts.

In an earlier moment, the narrator believes himself to be a somnambulist when he realizes that the water in the carafe consistently disappears during the night. Before performing experiments to determine his own role in this phenomenon, he explains somnambulism in terms that resemble the power of will that he would later ascribe to another force in the passage quoted above. His justification is as follows:

> Alors, j'étais somnambule, je vivais, sans le savoir, de cette double vie mystérieuse qui fait douter s'il y a deux êtres en nous, ou si un être étranger, inconnaissable et invisible, anime, par moments, quand notre âme est engourdie, notre corps captif qui obéit à cet autre, comme à nous-mêmes, plus qu'à nous-mêmes.[357]

While the experiments disprove the possibility of his being a somnambulist, the similarity between the two passages is striking. In both descriptions, one becomes subjected to an other who commands his will, and whose force becomes indistinguishable from the subject himself; as a somnambulist, it is the subject's unconscious double that comes to life and commands his actions, while in the second passage, the character's will is

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[355] The English translation of this word is *despite*.
[356] Guy de Maupassant, "Le Horla" (1887), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 929. [Emphasis added.]
[357] Ibid., 920.

subjected to an unknown other who desires in his place. Finally, while the context of the narrator's explanations change, his submission to the other is described in a similar way.

The narrator believes the Horla to be a new being that has come to take man's place, just as man has taken the place of animals. This explanation provides a rational justification for the Horla's presence. In "Le Horla" (1886), he describes the Horla as "[celui] qui vient nous détrôner, nous asservir, nous dompter, et se nourrir de nous peut-être comme nous nous nourrissons des bœufs et des sangliers."[358] The relationship between all beings, according to this belief, which clearly reflects Darwin's theories on the survival of the species, is based on a chain of domination, in which man no longer dominates the other species. If man has distinguished himself from other animals with his ability of rational thought, what is then the Horla's dominating force over man? The narrator of "Le Horla" (1887) gives us the answer:

> Ah! Le vautour a mangé la colombe, le loup a mangé le mouton; le lion a dévoré le buffle aux cornes aigues ; l'homme a tué le lion avec la flèche, avec le glaive, avec la poudre; mais le Horla va faire de l'homme ce que nous avons fait du cheval et du bœuf : sa chose, son serviteur et sa nourriture, par *la seule puissance de sa volonté*. Malheur à nous![359]

The Horla's only weapon against man is the power that it has over his will. Yet, there is a distinction in the chain of power in the list above, for if each animal devours a weaker one, and man kills animals for food, each of these species needs the weaker one for survival. The relationship between man and the Horla, however, is based on total subordination that would ultimately lead to the destruction of man as a thinking subject. In other words, the Horla's power destroys rational thought as the distinction and weapon

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[358] Guy de Maupassant, "Le Horla" (1886), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 829.
[359] Guy de Maupassant, "Le Horla" (1887), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 933. [Emphasis added.]

that defines man, which had empowered him over other animals. By usurping man's will, the Horla also overpowers his actions and his thoughts. And if it strips him of the power of rational thought, his identity is reduced to that of the crowd, devoid of individual will. The narrator realizes these consequences, concluding:

> Je suis perdu ! Quelqu'un *possède* mon âme et le gouverne ! quelqu'un *ordonne* tous mes actes, tous mes mouvements, toutes mes *pensées*. Je ne suis plus rien en moi, rien qu'un spectateur esclave et terrifié de toutes les choses que j'accompli. Je désire sortir. *Je ne peux pas. Il ne veut pas* ; et je reste, éperdu, tremblant, dans le fauteuil où il me tient assis. Je désire seulement me lever, me soulever, afin de *me croire encore maître de moi*. Je ne peux pas ! Je suis rivé à mon siège ; et mon siège adhère au sol, de telle sorte qu'aucune force ne nous soulèverait.[360]

In this passage, the narrator reiterates his subordination to the Horla, his new master, whose soul, actions, desires and even his thoughts, are controlled by this being. Here, the subject appears to be split, resembling the doubling of Chamisso's Peter Schlemihl whose double claims its authenticity and distinction from the original. As we can see in the passage above, the true power of the Horla is in its control of the subject's will and thoughts. The succession of the two simple sentences, "Je ne peux pas. Il ne veut pas,"s clearly show that one's actions are subjected to the Horla's will. This order of hierarchy retracts the subject from his empowerment by rational thought to the order of belief. The desire to believe that one is master of oneself underlines precisely one's weakness and subjugation to external influence.

Yet, by the rationality of human thought, the narrator seeks to trump the Horla in its aim to subject the character to its own desires and movements. However, from this moment on, his actions and justifications do not take into account the consequences that

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his loss of rational thought would have on the outcome. He decides to simulate his subservience to the Horla, with the aim to overturn it in the end. However, the line between pretense and reality loses its distinction. The narrator writes of his decision: "J'ai songé toute la journée. Oh ! oui, je vais lui obéir, suivre ses impulsions, accomplir toutes ses volontés, me faire humble, soumis, lâche. Il est le plus fort. Mais une heure viendra…."[361] If his thoughts, as he wrote several pages earlier, are under the control of the Horla, then it would could conclude that this plan is accessible to it as well. Interestingly, in the first version of "Le Horla," the narrator identifies his persecutor's only weakness as the "propriété d'arrêter les rayons lumineux,"[362] while in the second version he writes, "lui dont le corps imperceptible avait dévoré mon reflet."[363] Thus, he loses his distinctive form, just as one does within the crowd. What he identifies as a weakness in the first text, in the latter, he perceives as the Horla's power to devour man's reflection, or that, which reflects the structuring social influence on the subject's identity. Just as one does not perceive the individual cells of a body, in a crowd, each individual blends in with the entire mass that constitutes it. The color white, which the narrator attributes to the Horla in both versions of the text, is a color of effacement, and in this case, the effacement of the individual within the mass.[364] Yet, what the Horla devours is

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[361] Ibid., 932.

[362] Guy de Maupassant, "Le Horla" (1886), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 829.

[363] Guy de Maupassant, "Le Horla" (1887), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 936.

[364] The color white appears on numerous occasions in both versions of "Le Horla." This color refers here to light and the erasure of distinction. The Horla is associated with light and white limpidity, as we see in the mirror scene of both texts (see "Le Horla" (1886), 828). Also, one of the only descriptions of the narrator's house is its color: "Ma demeure est vaste, peinte en blanc à l'extérieur" ("Le Horla" (1886), 823). The Brazilian boat that the narrator believes to have brought the Horla is also white: "un superbe trois-mâts brésilien, tout blanc, admirablement propre et luisant" ("Le Horla" (1887), 913). Toward the end of the text, he remembers admiring the boat: "Je le trouvai si joli, si blanc, si gai! L'Être était dessus, venant de là-bas, où sa race est née! Et il m'a vu! Il a vu ma demeure blanche aussi; et il a sauté du navire sur la rive" ("Le Horla" (1887), 933). Even before the mirror scene, in which the Horla is translucent, yet whose white opaque form *efface* the narrator's reflection, the character evokes elements whose color coincides with the Horla's coming.

not the body, as all other species do. It feeds on the subject's psyche and one's will, thus placing the body – as that which inserts the subject within society – in a secondary position. It is here that the narrator fails in his attempt to kill his predator, for the Horla destroys precisely the weapon that distinguishes man and gives him power over other species. In other words, without rational thought, he cannot overpower his opponent. The final gesture of rebellion against the Horla is suicide, by annihilating one's entire being. The narrator concludes as follows: "Non… non… sans aucun doute, sans aucun doute… il n'est pas mort… Alors… alors… il va donc falloir que je me tue moi !…".[365] However, the cell within a collective makes no change to the entirety of the body. On the contrary, the mass effaces the individuality of each subject, thus rendering the suicide of each individual, symbolic or real, a prerequisite to the composition of the whole. Here again, the question of suicide is not reduced to the death of a subject, but to the effacement of one's individual, singular identity within the crowd that each one constitutes. It is here that what Artaud calls "les suicidés de la société" can be taken as the defining force of the mass.

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[365] Guy de Maupassant, "Le Horla" (1887), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 943.

Conclusion

My primary objective has been to analyze the representations of individual and collective identity in Maupassant's works. Most of the author's texts manifest a conflict between the subject and society, which appears in various forms: (1) the subject's relation to his or her body and its representation in the texts, (2) other psychological effects on a character, such as psychosis and hallucination, and (3) the alienating consequences of social conventions and norms on marginal characters. Maupassant repeatedly evokes the failure of the concept of identity as a stable, unified unit, focusing on its fragmentation and conflict, despite the clear distinctions of social classes and roles among his characters. In many texts, we can situate a turning point where the main character becomes consciously aware of the disjunction between what one believed to have embodied and what one perceives now. In turn, this moment of realization triggers a movement of decline that is characteristic of the narrative structure in the majority of Maupassant's texts.

Each chapter addresses a different perspective of "identity in crisis". The first focuses on the question of the body; in the second chapter, I analyze the role of genealogy and authenticity; the third seeks to redefine *the victim*, and to situate it in relation to social integration and decline; finally, the fourth chapter analyzes the relationship between the individual and the crowd.

Behind the semblance of singularity hides the influence of a collective force: physical, genealogical, professional and even criminal. I've tried to show throughout my

dissertation that in each text, the main character falls prey to social norms and conventions. In other words, *all* of Maupassant's characters are victims, despite their social position and prosperity. For instance, a woman, who had been venerated for her beauty, is replaced by her younger double, in conformity to a standard of youth and social roles. She is thus the victim of these standards that strip her of her social status that had defined her entirely (*Fort comme la Mort*). In another example, social and professional success provides little happiness, for it seems to merely comply with social expectations and norms ("Suicides"). In both of these examples, which also resemble many other texts, represent the characters' disillusionment with their ideals.

Before concluding, I would like to propose an excerpt from "Lettre d'un fou," which succinctly expresses the meaning of perception for Maupassant, and the sense of disillusionment that his characters experience again and again:

> Vérité sur la terre, erreur plus loin, d'où je conclus que les mystères entrevus comme l'électricité, le sommeil hypnotique, la transmission de la volonté, la suggestion, tous les phénomènes magnétiques, ne nous demeurent cachés, que parce que la nature ne nous a pas fourni l'organe, ou les organes nécessaires pour les comprendre.
>
> Après m'être convaincu que tout ce que me révèlent mes sens n'existe que pour moi tel que je le perçois et serait totalement différent pour un autre être autrement organisé, après en avoir conclu qu'une humanité diversement faite aurait sur le monde, sur la vie, sur tout, des idées absolument opposées aux nôtres, car l'accord des croyances ne résulte que de la similitude des organes humains, et les divergences d'opinions ne proviennent que des légères différences de fonctionnement de nos filets nerveux, j'ai fait un effort de pensée surhumain pour soupçonner l'impénétrable qui m'entoure.[366]

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[366] Guy de Maupassant, ""Lettre d'un fou" (1885), in vol. *Contes et nouvelles II*, 464.

Truth, according to this excerpt, exists only in as much as human beings, who resemble one another, perceive the world in a similar way. The supernatural that had once explained the unexplainable is now replaced by the limitations of science, on the one hand, and the limitations of our bodies, on the other. We perceive what our body permits us, while science, as a form of a prosthetic organ, can help us overcome some of these limitations. Yet, even with the possibilities of science, human perception relies on frail, error-prone senses that depend on the cohesion of the social structure to construct the semblance of a unified reality.

In other words, if an apparently coherent unity exists in our beliefs and understanding of the world, according to the narrator of "Lettre d'un fou," it is only due to the likeness in our composition as human beings. This unity is an "accord" or an agreement that science and society in general justify by processes whose validity is guaranteed by established standards.

In Maupassant's texts, differences are simply variations of the same that only reinforce established "truths," limiting thus the range of divergences. Hence, many characters are disillusioned by what they had believed to be unique. These divergences function as a form of social control, by which everyone is reintegrated within established norms. To protect itself from radical difference in opinion or perception, which would compromise its manipulation of the collective, society characterizes these forms of deviation as madness. After all, the narrator of "Lettre d'un fou" asks himself: "Suis-je devenu fou?"[367] By the second version of "Le Horla," however, it is no longer one individual's psychological state in question. Rather, in this text, the figure of the Horla is

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[367] Ibid.

proper to society, and whose extreme power over the individual is unbearable to the character. The Horla is at once ubiquitous and elusive; it is the crowd and the social conventions that govern it. Similarly to Lamil, in "Un lâche", whom Signoles could not discern within the aristocratic remnants of the social order, the narrator of "Le Horla" fails to identify and oppose his persecutor. In both cases, the entire social structure is overthrown by the appearance of a new "being", the petty bourgeois Lamil, or the similarly faceless Horla.

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