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Severed Hands:
Amputation, Anxiety and Alienation in 19th and 20th Century French Literature

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Severed Hands:
Amputation, Anxiety and Alienation in 19th and 20th Century French Literature

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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
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-Abstract-

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By: Kathryn E. Miner

From Gérard de Nerval's *La Main Enchantée* to Auguste de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's *L'Ève future,* the corpus of nineteenth-century French literature is marked by the haunting return of uncanny severed hands. Over the course of the century, Prosper Mérimée, Théophile Gautier, and Guy de Maupassant all pen texts of dead hands coming back to life with malicious and deadly intent. Furthermore, the reanimated severed hand does not die at the turn of the century, but extends ghostly fingers forward into twentieth-century literature and film, reappearing in the World War II era works of director Maurice Tourneur and *poète de la main gauche* Blaise Cendrars.

The hand, by virtue of its privileged relation to both reading and writing, might seem to provide an ideal figure for interpretation, illumination and transmission. However, the severed hands of modern literature produce only misreadings, anxiety and death for those who encounter them. In an attempt to elucidate the severed hand's complicated relationship to anxiety, mortality and return, I turn to psychoanalysis. In readings informed by object relations and trauma theory, as well as Freud's concept of the repetition compulsion, this study seeks to examine the ways in which the severed hand functions as a figure of failed transmission and failed return.

Chapter one examines the criminal masculine hand, beginning with the legacy of *poète-assassin* Pierre-François Lacenaire as read through Gautier's poem "Etude de mains," and finishing with a reading of three short texts by Maupassant: "La Main d'écorché," "La Main" and "En Mer." Chapter two similarly explores the hand's relationship to criminality and guilt in Blaise Cendrars' *La Main Coupée* and *L'Homme Foudroyé.* Chapter three considers questions of reproduction, prosthesis and misrecognition through the artificial feminine hands of Mérimée's *La Vénus d'Ille* and Villiers' *L'Ève future.* Finally, chapter four revisits these texts and invokes Tourneur's film *La Main du diable* to examine how efforts to restrain and bind the severed hand raise fundamental questions about the very nature of control, exchange, connection and loss.

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Introduction: Handwriting and Palm Reading

"Caught red-handed," we say in English, or "pris la main dans le sac," as the French idiom goes. In these expressions the human hand embodies, or one might say *dis*embodies, a person's relation to crime and guilt, effacing the subject and leaving behind only the disquieting metonymy of the hand, signifier of criminality. Such is the hand's liminal, criminal power— to be able to steal in and out of language, to simultaneously represent both the figurative and the concrete. As the primary instrument of thieves and illusionists, but also of authors, it inhabits a marginal space between word and deed. Given this unique status, it is perhaps not coincidental that the corpus of modern French literature finds itself in the grip of an eerily large number of severed hands. Writing from liminal spaces themselves, be it the unnerving realm of the fantastic or the blended fact and fiction of autobiographical memoir, authors throughout the 19th and early 20th century will pen texts of amputated arms that remain defiantly independent and alive. Many of the severed hands these authors present are explicitly figured as criminal, and even those that are not ultimately prove deadly and uncontrollable.

In the 19th century, authors from Nodier to Nerval, Mérimée to Maupassant, and Villiers to Verlaine will pen fantastic texts featuring ghostly or ghastly hands that reach back from beyond the grave to scare, strangle or steal. In the first half of the 20th century, writers like Cendrars and Genet, and film makers such as Maurice Tourneur, will slightly shift the focus of this trope, emphasizing not so much the physical presence of the severed limb as the absence and loss embodied by the alien figure of the *manchot*. Across both centuries, however, this unlikely brotherhood of authors relies on the hand's tendency towards *double entendre* and rhetorical overdetermination to create ominous effects within their work. What is it that allows

this part of the body, perhaps more than any other, to perform such a linguistic prestidigitation and sleight of hand?

The uncomfortable and eerie linguistic slippage between the hand as physical object and the hand as signifier is made possible by a cultural discourse that metonymically links this appendage to both identity and possession. As Karin Ueltschi points out in *La main coupée: Métonymie et mémoire mythique*, the hand is the part of the body that stands at the precise intersection of "being" and "having."[1] As such, it can simultaneously represent an ontology and an economy, existence and exchange. This double status is perhaps responsible for the hand's predominance in idiomatic speech. In both French and English, one gives or asks for a hand in marriage, lends a hand, or forces someone's hand. Such expressions deftly substitute the part for the whole, implying that where the hand goes, the rest of the body will follow. Of course, this assumption is explicitly not the case when we are speaking of severed hands. By fragmenting this traditional continuity, these hands also break up our assumptions about the functioning of language itself.

We might begin our discussion of the hand's relationship to language and literature by recalling that hands, like texts, can be read. The 19th century's obsession with the art of palmistry is evident when one considers the publication of works such as Jules Gautier's *Chiromancie et chirognomonie, ou L'art de lire dans la main* (1885) and Adolphe Desbarrolles' *Chiromancie Nouvelle: Les Mystères de la main révélés et expliqués* (1870).[2] The 20th century will learn to read the traces the hand leaves behind in the form of fingerprints. However, despite the existence and popularity of such codifying systems, closer inspection will reveal that the various severed hands

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1 Ueltschi, Karin, *La Main Coupée: Métonymie et mémoire mythique* (Paris: Champion, 2010) 65.

2 Gautier, Jules, *Chiromancie et chirognomonie ou l'art de lire dans la main* (Paris: J.-B. Ballière et fils, 1885); Desbarrolles, Ad. *Chiromancie Nouvelle: Les Mystères De La Main, Révélés Et Expliqués; Art De Connaître La Vie, Le Caractère, Les Aptitudes, Et La Destinée De Chacun D'après La Seule Inspection Des Mains* (Paris: Garnier frères, 1870).

haunting 19th and 20th century French literature are too strangely scripted for chiromantic interpretation. They defy any attempt at reading that goes only skin deep. Rather, the constant *misreadings* of these uncanny limbs by those who come into contact with them produce narratives marked by anxiety and death. Such misreadings frequently result from the conflation of the literal and figurative value of the hand.

The texts studied in this dissertation, which range from 1830's *novellas* and criminal confessions, to 1880's short stories and novels, to 20th century film and memoir, are as diverse and unique as fingerprints. And yet, at the same time, they are (as we would say in French) *unis comme les doigts de la main.* What unites them is perhaps their tendency to refuse the figurative or symbolic. In each of these strange tales, the protagonist, operating in the metonymic realm, either "gives his hand," be it in civil agreement, marriage or criminal enterprise, or, conversely, "takes" the hand that is offered to him in a similar overture. The deadly consequences of such a contract surface when the reader realizes that what was intended as a symbolic gesture has been more concretely interpreted by the severed hand. Such concreteness might seem strange, since hands are, of course, capable of symbolization and representation through writing and gesture. Yet these literary hands, in their amputated state, seem incapable of following the metonymical chain of association that links the protagonist's hand to his will or desire. Instead of taking him at his word, they take him at his hand. Thus, it frequently comes to pass that characters give what they did not intend to give and take what they did not intend to take.

Such a literal interpretation of legal and social structures is perhaps consistent with the appendage's role in ancient codes of justice such as the *lex talionis,* which abdicated state responsibility for crimes such as theft or bodily mutilation, instead treating them as private grievances that allowed the wronged individuals to take the

law into their own hands.[3] The fact that these severed literary hands recall this destructive form of vengeance, continuing to interfere in a symbolic register that they literalize with deadly consequences, produces texts that are marked by disorder and anxiety.

This anxiety and incomprehensibility stems not only from difficulties in linguistic interpretation, but also from the fragmentary nature of the human form in these texts. Most frequently, the hands in these narratives are literally severed from a body, either living, dead, or artificial, but it may also be the case that the narrative itself "amputates" the hand by continually foregrounding it in the text. With no body attached to these uncanny limbs, it is not always clear that the head knows what the hand is doing. This disconnection between mental processes and the phantom limb's activity— the fact that "no body" is responsible— might lead us to explore possible connections with the psychoanalytic structure of the unconscious. We would be led to question the ways in which the very existence of a structure such as the unconscious troubles the traditional notion of the hand's relation to agency. Can the hand act unconsciously? If we were to situate the unconscious in the hand rather than the missing head, and consider again that the anxieties of the text are frequently produced by a failure of language, then we might conclude that the severed hand is staging something that cannot be said, but that can only be "acted out."

Freud most clearly introduces the psychic defense of "acting out" in his 1914 work "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through," in relation to repressed memories and the compulsion to repeat. He writes, "The patient does not remember anything of what he has forgotten and repressed, but acts it out. He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action; he repeats it, without, of course, knowing that he is

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[3] "talion (law)," *Encyclopedia Britannica Online,* (2014) *Britannica Online.*

repeating it."[4] Here, Freud seems to be saying that repeated acting out begins where memory fails, and that it has inscribed in its very ontology a continuation of this failure, since the patient cannot even remember what it is that he is repeating. He continues, "As long as the patient is in the treatment he cannot escape from this compulsion to repeat; and in the end we understand that this is his way of remembering."[5] In Freud's understanding of this concept, we might say that repetition replaces remembering. Similarly, the dismembered hands of 19th and 20th century literature, in acting-out, are also repeating. This repeating may, as in the work of Guy de Maupassant, take the form of multiple hand-texts produced by a single author. Or it may, as in Villiers' *L'Ève future,* or Blaise Cendrars' *La Main Coupée,* take the form of a doubling and proliferation of multiple sets of hands across a single text. However, the most frequent form of repetition one encounters in these narratives is the figure of a buried hand that returns from the grave to haunt the realm of the living.

Of course, the burial and reappearance of the hands in question, their displacement both within their individual narratives as well as across literary works, and the fact that so many belong to the *fantastique* genre (a genre that perpetually unsettles and undermines the reader, forcing them to hesitate, as Todorov suggests, between a rational or supernatural explanation of the narrative's central mystery)[6] would also seem to invoke a different Freudian text, 1919's "The Uncanny." Freud tells us that the Uncanny, or *unheimlich* in German, is the opposite of *heimlich,* a word meaning "homelike" or "familiar."[7] What could be more familiar to us than our own hand, as the English expression "to know something like the back of one's hand,"

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[4] Freud, Sigmund, "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis II), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* Ed. and Trans. James Strachey, Vol. 12 (London: Hogarth Press, 1966-74) 149.

[5] Ibid.

[6] See Todorov, Tzvetan, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique,* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1976).

[7] Freud, Sigmund, "The 'Uncanny," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* Ed. and Trans. James Strachey, Vol. 17 (London: Hogarth Press, 1966-74) 219.

or the French equivalent "connaître sur le bout des doigts," suggest? However, as their common etymology would imply, there is a degree of the "familiar" buried inside the apparent strangeness of the uncanny. Freud writes, "*Unheimlich* is in some way or other a sub-species of *heimlich*,"[8] and goes on to argue that what ultimately produces the effect of uncanniness is the return in a different or unexpected form of something that the psyche has repressed:

> In the first place, if psycho-analytic theory is correct in maintaining that every affect belonging to an emotional impulse, whatever its kind, is transformed, if it is repressed, into anxiety, then among the instances of frightening things there must be one class in which the frightening element can be shown to be something repressed which *recurs.* This class of frightening things would then constitute the uncanny; and it must be a matter of indifference whether what is uncanny was itself originally frightening or whether it carried some *other* affect. In the second place, if this is indeed the secret nature of the uncanny, we can understand why linguistic usage has extended *das Heimliche* into its opposite, *das Unheimliche;* for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression.[9]

Brooke Hopkins notes of this passage that in identifying the Uncanny as something from the past that is repressed and surfaces at a later time, Freud situates it within a particular temporal model. She writes, "the temporal structure of the uncanny, therefore, is that of *Nachträglichkeit*, or action deferred."[10] This assertion becomes doubly interesting for the current project when we consider that *Nachträglichkeit,*

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[8] Ibid. 225.
[9] Ibid. 240.
[10] Hopkins, Brooke, "Keats and the Uncanny: 'This Living Hand," *The Kenyon Review, New Series* 11.4 (Autumn, 1989) 28.

translated variously in English as "afterwardness," "action deferred," or "deferred action," is translated in French as *après-coup.* We might rightly translate this French term as "after the initial blow." If such temporal delays are in fact a constitutive element of the *Unheimliche*, then the severed hand narratives of the 19th and 20th century cannot fail to be classified as uncanny. For, in dealing with a text about a *main coupée,* we always begin in a model of deferred temporality. The narratives necessarily open *après-coup.* Consequently, these uncanny hands seem compelled to look back towards the past, searching for a point of origin—the initial "coupure" that would perhaps fix their displaced relationship to time.

However, repetition in and of itself is not the only defining element of the Uncanny. The hands in these fantastic narratives are not uncanny because they return, but precisely because they are not the familiar, knowable and controllable hand. Rather, they disappear only to reappear in a modified form. They are buried in the earth only to resurface in another place and another time. As hands that, in many cases, have literally been interred only to reach back from beyond the grave, they are uncanny in the sense that Freud ascribes to the word as "everything that was intended to remain secret, hidden away, and has come into the open."[11] Such a definition might lead us to ask, what exactly is the secret, repressed knowledge that comes into the open when these hands return?

Given the subject of this dissertation, I would be remiss not to quote the one passage from Freud's essay where he specifically addresses the question of disarticulated bodies and phantom limbs in literature. In a well-known passage from the essay, discussing the uncanny as it appears in E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann,* Freud explicitly links the uncanniness of severed limbs and, more specifically still,

[11] Freud, Uncanny 223.

severed hands to the castration complex. He writes,

> Severed limbs, a severed head, a hand detached from the arm (as in a fairy tale by Hauff), feet that dance by themselves (as in the novel by A. Schaeffer mentioned above)— all of these have something highly uncanny about them, especially when they are credited, as in the last instance, with independent activity. We already know that this species of the uncanny stems from its proximity to the castration complex.[12]

As Nicolas Royle points out in his book on the Uncanny, readers of Freud will know to be particularly suspicious when his writing claims to be telling us what “we already know” from psychoanalysis.[13] We should be suspicious, I think, that Freud so categorically links this diverse collection of limbs to a single and monolithic source. In attributing the uncanniness of the severed limb to a return of a fear of castration, Freud, in effect, endows them with a unique and locatable point of origin. The origin of the Uncanny, as it relates to dismemberment, is to be found in the castration complex. However, is it not also true that what is essential to severed limbs, and the Uncanny more generally speaking, is that one cannot ascribe them such a point of origin? There is a reason that even when an injured extremity is still attached to the body, we speak of its *dislocation.* Accordingly, this dissertation will seek to problematize Freud's assertion of a discrete relationship between the severed limb and the castration complex.

Following this discussion, we can perhaps see the ways in which psychoanalysis and the Uncanny can aid us to “read” these inscrutable hands. However, any discussion of hands as they appear in literary texts will also necessarily provoke a discussion of the writing hand. Here again, an understanding of the

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[12] Ibid. 243.
[13] Royle, Nicolas, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003) 143.

Uncanny may prove useful since, as Hélène Cixous, Shoshana Felman and Nicolas Royle have all pointed out, the uncanny is as much (or perhaps even more) an effect of the way we read and write as it is an aesthetic or psychological experience.[14] Royle writes,

> the uncanny is— even (or especially) if *inter alia*— an experience of *writing.* And conversely of reading. One tries to keep oneself out, but one cannot. One tries to put oneself in: same result. The uncanny is an experience of being *after oneself,* in various senses of that phrase. It is the experience of something duplicitous, diplopic, being double. It calls for diplomacy, the regulation of a strange economy, an art of negotiation which presupposes a kind of double talk, double reading, double writing.[15]

Such "double reading" and "double writing" are precisely what allow the linguistic uncanniness I have already noted in the text to function. When we think we understand what is being said, we find that there is always a second, buried sense in the language of the text that provokes our feeling of unease. Such duplicity is also perhaps helpful in explaining why these severed hand texts appear to be historically specific— a product of the post-enlightenment era.

What separates these 19th and 20th century texts from earlier severed hand narratives of the medieval tradition such as *La Manekine, La Belle Hélène de Constantinople* and various *Chansons de geste,* is their placement *vis-à-vis* the Christian tradition. In such narratives, Christian mystery and divine vengeance or forgiveness are sufficient to explain the otherness of the severed hand. As Royle explains, "With a belief in God or some 'evil Will' or a variety of divine 'Beings', the

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[14] See Hélène Cixous, "La fiction et ses fantômes: Une lecture de *L'Unheimliche* de Freud," *Poétique,* 10 (1972) 199-216. See also Shoshana Felman, "Henry James: Madness and the Risks of Practice (Turning of the Screw of Interpretation)," *Writing and Madness,* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2003) 141-247.

[15] Royle 16.

uncanny does not even rear its eerie head: there is no need for 'senseless anxiety', we 'can feel at home in the uncanny' without indeed even being aware that that is what we are doing."[16] Royle suggests that as such religious certitude begins to crumble in the face of the Enlightenment, it opens up a space for the emergence of the Uncanny.[17] It therefore seems no coincidence that the fantastic, as a sub-set of the uncanny, emerges as a genre of the 19th century.

This dissertation cannot pretend to present an exhaustive list of 19th and 20th century severed hand narratives. In an effort to create a cohesive and feasible study of this trope, I have chosen to undertake in-depth analyses of a number of works that appear to use this common device to similar ends, and in which the uncanny element of this phantom limb takes center stage. The study divides the various manifestations of the severed hand into three basic categories: the criminal masculine hand, the artificial feminine hand and the bound hand. In each of the chapters that follow, I will first analyze the hand's status as an uncanny object, before turning to examine the different ways in which the text attempts to defend against the Uncanny and foreclose upon the anxiety it arouses.

Chapter one deals with the criminal masculine hand in 19th century literature. I begin by discussing the dual function of the hand of *poète-assassin* Pierre-François Lacenaire in both his own *Mémoires* and the later literary works he inspired, such as Théophile Gautier's poem "Etude de Mains" (where it is literally a question of reading Lacenaire's severed hand). Subsequently, I explore the severed hand's relationship to crime and punishment in Gerard de Nerval's *La Main Enchantée* and a number of short *contes* by Guy de Maupassant. In many cases, these phantom hands maintain an uncanny and independent life long after the moment of their amputation, as they

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16 Royle 20-21.
17 Ibid. 21-22.

continue to murder and steal while remaining separated from any body living or dead. The fugitive nature of these severed limbs creates a literary universe characterized by displacement and denial, in which the lines between criminal and victim, self and other, and guilt and innocence are continually being rewritten. Therefore, an engagement with these texts raises the question of precisely what it is the hand is stealing, as well as whom it is stealing from. Turning to the object-relations theory of Melanie Klein and her work on anxiety and guilt, I examine the ways in which the hands in these texts engage in phantasies of reparation and restoration to atone for their literary thefts.

Chapter two engages the "mytho-biographical" memoirs of 20th century author and *manchot* Blaise Cendrars, which offer a slightly different manifestation of the criminal hand. The hand that Cendrars loses on the battlefield of Champagne during the First World War, while a traumatic loss in its own right, also represents the loss of the author's original *main de poète,* and in fact comes to stand as the repetition of a far older trauma that is also related to writing. In examining *L'Homme Foudroyé* and *La Main Coupée,* the first two volumes of the four-part *Tétralogie,* we can see how Cendrars views the loss of his right hand as a fitting punishment for the literary crimes it has committed. Engaging certain concepts of trauma theory and André Green's work on *La Mère morte,* I consider how the author's severed right hand, as it appears in his texts, comes to be marked by death and destruction. Simultaneously, I examine how the remaining left hand, as it appears in these works, engages in a literary effort to undo the right hand's misdeeds by building up a personal myth of construction and reparation.

Chapter three undertakes an examination of the artificial feminine hand as it appears in 19th century fantastic literature. If displacement and alienation characterize

criminal masculine hand-texts, then the narratives that feature artificial feminine hands are marked by a different form of anxiety and unlocatability. In texts such as Auguste de Villiers de L'Isle-Adam's futuristic novel *L'Ève future* and Prosper Mérimée's novella *La Vénus d'Ille*, the severed hand is associated with *méconnaissance,* or misrecognition. The artificial hands of the artificial women in these two texts are often mistaken for those of living women, dead women or even men. By participating in such moments of mistaken identity, they also operate unsettling transformations on the boundaries between organic and inorganic, life and death. In reading these texts against the psychoanalytic concepts of fetishism and wish-fulfillment, I argue that these two texts frequently invert and subvert the typical Pygmalion narrative of a work of art brought to life for the erotic gratification of her creator. Rather, the statues and androids of these texts get "out of hand," so to speak, and escape the controlling male grasp that seeks to appropriate them. Simultaneously, they reverse the very terms of the agreement, bringing death to the one that has brought them to life.

Finally, chapter four revisits and re-examines the literary works discussed in chapters one through three, as well as Maurice Tourneur's film *La Main du diable* (1943), with a focus on the diverse forms of restraint, linking and binding that unfailingly accompany literary representations of the severed hand. This hybrid figure of hand and ligature is what I have termed "the bound hand," and it is a trope that appears in both masculine and feminine hand texts, but not always with an identical function. In some cases, the severed hand's restraints appear to serve merely as a form of incarceration— binding the hand in an effort to control and subjugate its malevolent energies. In many cases, however, the means of incarceration also serves as a form of communication, one that works towards uniting the hand with a greater

body. As such, the trope of the bound hand is not only tied up in ropes or chains, but also in figures of social and economic exchange such as marriage or mortgage. Turning to case material taken from Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and related texts, I consider how the bound hand defends against anxiety with fantasies of omnipotence, control and self-sufficiency.

In no way would I suggest that the interpretive framework I have outlined in this introduction might reveal a complete and satisfactory chirognomy of the severed hand. Rather, I hope it will serve to block out and highlight certain similarities between these diverse literary works so that we may consequently examine the important ways in which they diverge from such a typology. For, as I have suggested, the one constant among these texts is perhaps the very inconsistency of the hands they portray. These severed limbs are at all times overdetermined, unlocatable and duplicitous. I will therefore submit that the deeper we read, the uncannier these hands will perhaps become.

Chapter 1: Mains Coupées, Mains Coupables : Criminal Hands from Lacenaire to Maupassant

1.1- The Criminal Hand

Considering its unique connection to human action and free will, it is unsurprising that the hand, more than any other part of the body, has come to represent the criminal in literature. Apart from the idiomatic expressions such as those noted in the introduction that associate the hand with thieving or violence, the discovery of the uniqueness of fingerprints in the later half of the 19th century, and its subsequent development as a criminal science in the early 20th century, suddenly meant that a person's hand could betray their guilt even in their absence, literally becoming the signature to a particular crime.[18] It therefore seems natural that a number of 19th and 20th century French writers chose to examine questions of both criminal and literary authorship through the severed hand.

In the 19th century, authors such as Théophile Gautier and Guy de Maupassant, inspired by the literary and criminal legacy of Pierre-François Lacenaire, the *poète-assassin* whose amputated hand was supposedly purchased by Maxime du Camp, will resurrect the early modern figure of *la main de gloire*. The "hand of glory" was a talisman formed from the severed hand of a convict that endowed its owner with certain occult powers (such as the power to become invisible, to put others into a sleeping trance and to open locks) that would be used in the perpetration of thefts and other crimes.[19] The texts of Gautier and Maupassant present us with hands amputated from criminal bodies that, in spite of this amputation, continue to murder and steal, remaining defiantly independent and alive. Maupassant in particular gives these

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[18] See Simon A. Cole, *Suspect Identities: A History of Fingerprinting and Criminal Identification,* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001).

[19] Larousse, Pierre, "Main de gloire," *Le Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIXe siècle: Historique, géographique, mythologique, bibliographique, littéraire, artistique,* scientifique, etc., etc.V.10 (Paris: Larousse 1867) 954.

talismans an uncanny sort of subjectivity— hinting they are capable of committing murder while simultaneously refusing to definitively assign them responsibility for the crimes committed in his works. As a result of this narrative indeterminably, crime and guilt are both displaced with deadly consequences.

In the 20th century, *poète de la main gauche* Blaise Cendrars will explore the loss of his own hand and its relationship to writing in his World War II-era memoirs. Renowned Cendrars critic Claude Leroy, in his book *La Main de Cendrars,* puns upon the French word for guilty when he describing the poet's rumored auto-mutilation of his injured right hand on the battlefield during World War I. "La main," he writes, "a été coupée parce qu'elle était *coupable."*[20] In French, *coupable,* in addition to meaning guilty, also means that which is capable of being cut: guilty and "cut-able." The hand, Leroy argues, could (and should) be severed because, for Cendrars, it bore the guilt of a terrible criminal action. In examining works by Lacenaire, Gautier and Maupassant, we will see that this serendipitous pun holds true not only for the work of Cendrars, but for these earlier 19th century authors as well. The fugitive nature of their *main coupées* renders problematic any attempt to identify a *coupable* for the criminal acts that play out in their texts.

Etymologically speaking, the pun works only by happy accident, since "couper" and "coupable" do not share the same Latin roots. *Couper* is derived from the noun *coup,* from the Latin *colaphus*, meaning a punch or a slap. *Couper* thus means "to separate by a strong blow."[21] *Coupable,* as it relates to culpability, is derived from the Latin *culpabilis,* meaning guilty of a crime.[22] However, the association between misdeed and amputation is as old as the Judeo-Christian tradition,

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[20] Leroy, Claude, *La Main de Cendrars* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion. 1996) 42.

[21] "Couper," *Nouveau Petit Larousse Illustré,* (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1951) 248.

[22] "Coupable," *Nouveau Petit Larousse* 248.

and the gospels of Mark and Matthew both contain specific references to self-amputation as a form of penance, while the Torah and other ancient codes call for a hand to be severed as a punishment for violence or theft.[23]

In French literature the association between guilt and the severed hand has its first manifestations in medieval narratives such as *La Manekine* and *La Belle Hélène de Constantinople,* in which the eponymous heroine cuts off her own hand in order to save herself from the paternal crime in incest. Through this kind of text we learn that, in contrast with the ancient judicial codes, the punishment of amputation may not always fall upon the perpetrator of a crime. The name "*manekine"* in old French means both *manchot* and *mannequin,* implying through this linguistic overdetermination the young woman's role as substitute or sacrificial figure for another's guilt.[24] In examining much later severed hand texts of the 19th century, we will discover a similar preoccupation with questions of sacrifice and substitution, made doubly strange with the introduction of the severed hand's curious autonomy.

As Katherine Rowe points out in her book *Dead Hands: Fictions of Agency, Renaissance to Modern,* the difficulty of assigning guilt in these texts goes beyond mere questions of substitution and instead stems in part from the way the human hand, which should represent an unquestionable display of motivated human will, is transformed by these works into something independent from the brain and the rest of the body. Speaking of the trope as it appears in 19th century *littérature fantastique,*

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23 Mark 9:43: "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out."
Exodus 21:23-24: "But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot." (*The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments with the Apocryphal/ deuterocanonical Books: New Revised Standard Version,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) 1117; 84).

24 For an in-depth analysis of medieval hand-texts, see Karin Ueltschi, *La Main Coupée: Métonymie et mémoire mythique (*Paris: Editions Champion. 2010). Of the substitutive role of La Manekine, Ueltschi writes "Joie devient la Manekine, la manchote, le *mannequin.* L'article défini souligne l'amputation d'elle-même qu'elle est proprement *devenue.* C'est donc à une manière de suicide qu'elle s'est livrée; elle devient un double altéré d'elle-même, une sorte de substitut" (119).

she writes, "The hands in these stories appropriate the qualities and functions that ought to distinguish humans as willful and effective. By alienating those same characteristics from their victims, they profoundly threaten that distinction."[25] In short, Rowe seems to be arguing that these hands are operating a sort of displacement of action, and I would argue that in displacing action they are also displacing culpability. However, this sort of dislocation seemingly cannot be affected without a deadly cost. Rowe continues, "This transfer of agency and intention, from what should be part of a person to a grotesquely animated object, induces an acute social and psychic estrangement, manifested in frenzy, hospitalization, and eventual death."[26] By continually shifting willful acts and criminal intention from human figures to more fantastic ones, these texts create a destabilizing world in which disorder and persecution reign.

In the introduction, I suggested that these severed hands perform a kind of "acting out" of particular forms of anxiety. What then, are these severed hands acting out in their repetitive appearance in 19th century literature? At least in the case of the masculine hands we find in Lacenaire and Gautier, it would appear to be a criminal anxiety related to questions of authorship, which in turn relates to a larger cultural anxiety of the 19th century: the rewriting of a national history following the radical break of the French Revolution. Maupassant's work, while sharing similar anxieties of authorial influence, is also connected to a much more personal history of origins. Ultimately, we will see that, as Susan Hiner suggests in her work on 19th century hand-texts, the work of these uncanny and dismembered hands is, in fact, to *remember.*[27]

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[25] Rowe, Katherine, *Dead Hands: Fictions of Agency Renaissance to Modern* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999) 143.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Hiner, Susan, "Hand Writing: Dismembering and Re-Membering in Nodier, Nerval and

1.2: Taking the Law in One's Hands: Lacenaire's Criminal and Poetic Vengeance

Our own remembering should begin with one of the most notorious and romantic criminals of the 19th century, Pierre-François Lacenaire. On November 14th, 1834, Lacenaire and his accomplice Victor Avril brutally murdered Jean-François Chardon and Chardon's elderly mother in the *passage du Cheval-Rouge* in Paris. The alleged motive for this grisly double homicide was simple greed— a robbery gone awry. However, Lacenaire's subsequent arrest and spectacular trial instead reveal one man's criminal vendetta against 19th century society. Refusing to defend himself, but rather claiming full authorship of his crimes, Pierre-François ran willingly into the arms of the guillotine, which he had already designated as his “belle fiancée.”[28] In light of this, Lacenaire’s execution must no longer be viewed as capital punishment, but as suicide by guillotine.[29] The suicide note of this so-called *poète-assassin* took the form of a lengthy memoir written in prison prior to his 1836 execution, as well as a series of poems and songs published in the same Parisian newspapers that carried the details of his sensational trial.

While Pierre-François's case is certainly not the only example of 19th century criminal celebrity to enchant the popular press through a series of *fait divers* (one could easily cite Eugène-François Vidocq, Pierre Rivière, or Marie Lafarge), it would be fair to say that no other criminal has occupied such a pervasive place in the literary

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Maupassant,” *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 30.3-4 (2002) 301-315.

[28] Lacenaire, Pierre-François. “Le dernier chant,” qtd. in Bonnelier, Hippolyte, *Lacenaire après sa condamnation: Ses conversations intimes, ses poésies, sa corréspodance, un drame en trois actes.* (Paris: Marchant, 1836) 168.

[29] Lacenaire himself shared the perception that his death was a suicide. Author and phrenologist Hippolyte Bonnelier, who convinced Lacenaire to sit for a plaster cast of his skull before his execution, and who subsequently conducted the murderer's *Autopsie physiologique,* records Lacenaire telling him, “La preuve que je hais la société , me dit-il, c'est que je vais mourir!... Si elle ne m'eût pas tué, j'allais me tuer.... ma mort, tell qu'elle aura lieu, est encore un suicide!” (*Autopsie physiologique de Lacenaire, mort sur l'échafaud le 9 janvier. 1836.* (Paris: L. Mathias, 1836) 25).

imagination.[30] Lacenaire's unique legacy subsequently provided later 19th century authors with a compelling model for both criminal literature and the criminal potential *of* literature. Baudelaire alludes to him as a hero of modern life in *Curiosités Esthétiques*[31] and Stendhal would borrow Lacenaire's philosophy of crime for the character of Valbayre in his unfinished novel *Lamiel*.[32.] In the later half of the century, his crimes served as the inspiration for those of Dostoyevsky's Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* and also Villiers' short story "Le Secret de L'échafaud."[33] Nor is Lacenaire's literary influence limited to the 19th century, as he would also become a seductive figure for the surrealists in the 20th century. Lacenaire figures in the *Anthologie de l'Humour Noir*[34] and Leo Malet will group together a series of poems for *La Main à Plume* under the heading "Le Frère de Lacenaire."[35] The myth of Lacenaire would even survive the translation from text to cinema, featuring prominently in Marcel Carné's *Les Enfants du Paradis* (1945).

However, this far-reaching legacy is not, as one might expect between authors, literary, but rather criminal. These later writers gleefully adopt the *assassin* and all but dispense with the *poète,* fetishizing Lacenaire for his status as an outlaw and a killer. Yet upon closer examination we will see how, in spite of Lacenaire's repeated claims that his crimes and execution were willful acts of vengeance against a society he

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[30] Daniel Desormeaux contends of the intersection between crime and the popular press presented by the *fait divers,* "Ce que le XIXe siècle a découvert finalement, c'est moins l'existence du crime que l'écriture du crime pour les uns, la littérature criminelle pour les autres." ("Les assassins de Pierre Larousse: encyclopédisme et fait divers," *Romantisme* 97 (Paris: Armand Colin, 1997) 45).

[31] In the section of this posthumous work entitled "De l'héroïsme de la vie moderne" Baudelaire writes, "Cette phrase fait allusion à la funèbre fanfaronnade d'un criminel, d'un grand protestant, bien portant, bien organisé, et dont la féroce vaillance n'a pas baissé la tête devant la suprême machine!" (Baudelaire, Charles, *Curiosités Esthétiques: Salons 1845-1859* (Paris: M. Levy, 1868)197).

[32] Demartini, Anne-Emmanuelle, *L'Affaire Lacenaire,* (Paris: Aubier, 2001) 345.

[33] See Pierre Reboul, "Autour d'un conte de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam," *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France*, 49.3. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France,1949) 235-245.

[34] Breton, André, *L'Anthologie de l'humour noir,* (Paris: Sagittaire 1940) 46-47.

[35] Malet, Leo, "Le Frère de Lacenaire," *La Main à plume: Anthologie du surréalisme sous l'Occupation,* Ed. Anne Vernay and Richard Walter (Paris: Editions Syllepse, 2008) 146-149.

despised, it is also possible to view them as the predestined and inescapable result of a particular social and political inheritance— a Revolutionary legacy marked by the symbol of that beheader of kings, the guillotine.

In examining the figure of Lacenaire, I would like to address two different issues. Firstly, I will explore Lacenaire's own inheritance, which is both political and personal, and the way this inheritance affects his writing and its relationship to crime. Secondly, I will consider the criminal bequest he leaves behind for later authors. In attempting to answer these questions, Lacenaire's severed hand will prove as useful a symbol as his severed head. 19th century Parisian society developed a fascination with the extremity and attempted to preserve it textually, through works of poetry and prose such as Théophile Gautier's "Etude de mains," but also in a grotesquely literal fashion: severed and embalmed at the home of Maxime du Camp. In taking up this hand I hope to demonstrate that it is precisely this double gesture of "handing down," or bequeathing (from the Revolution to Lacenaire and from Lacenaire to later authors), which allowed Lacenaire's legacy to remain intact even as his body was hopelessly fragmented.

In a passage of his *Mémoires* that reveals why he would later prove an inspiration to Charles Baudelaire, Lacenaire portrays his criminal revenge on society through the image of the duel, affirming, "Eh Bien! Maintenant qu'elle est satisfaite cette vengeance, je n'y songe plus, je ne veux plus de mal à personne, semblable au duelliste qui se dépouille de sa haine en essuyant le fer qui vient de blesser son ennemi."[36] Despite this proclamation, one cannot help feeling that Lacenaire is continuing this same vendetta through his writing, which continually criticizes and accuses the indifference and injustice of a society he feels has left him with no other

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[36] Lacenaire, Pierre-François, *Mémoires* (Paris: Éditions du Boucher, 2002) 88.

option than a life of crime. Lacenaire's sword may be wiped clean, but certainly not his pen. The hand of this *poète-assassin* thus became a captivating object due to its transgressive duel against society through two different media— writing and crime.

Given the dual (or duel) function of Lacenaire's hand, it is easy to see why 19th century society became enthralled with the overdetermined appendage. However, this degree of idolatry would appear unwarranted if considered only in light of Lacenaire's criminal exploits. While he may be one of the most remembered and remarkable criminals of the 19th century, Lacenaire was certainly not its most adept. Despite his claims of criminal notoriety, Lacenaire could in fact only be proven responsible for a string of petty thefts, two bungled murders and a botched attempt at a third. Maxime Du Camp himself, perhaps the individual most enamored with the killer's hand, nonetheless famously remarked of Lacenaire that he “n'a jamais réussi de tuer d'un seul coup.”[37] It is therefore not his criminal prowess that made the outlaw so appealing, and it would perhaps be fair to say that, of his two instruments, Lacenaire was more skilled with pen than knife. And yet, Lacenaire's writing reveals how from his earliest days, he felt himself destined for a criminal rather than a literary vocation. For, we must remember that Lacenaire's hand represents only a secondary amputation, a ghostly echo of a blow that came before and that, we shall see, was always and already before. I refer of course to the severing blow of the guillotine, the machine that would be both a part of Lacenaire's historical inheritance and personal myth.

When Pierre-François was merely an adolescent, his father, a successful *bourgeois* merchant, brought his delinquent son before the guillotine in Lyon to impart the following fatherly advice: “Tiens, me-dit-il, regarde, c'est ainsi que tu finiras si tu ne changes pas!...” One might say that in this moment, Lacenaire's father

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[37] Du Camp, Maxime, *Paris, ses organes, ses fonctions et sa vie dans la second moitié du XIXe siècle,* Vol. 4 (Paris: Hachette, 1875) 491.

gives his son a death sentence. Lacenaire's response to this parental caution is unexpected but telling: "Dès ce moment, un lien invisible existe entre moi et l'affreuse machine. J'y pensais souvent sans pouvoir m'en rendre compte. Je finis par m'habituer tellement à cette idée, que je me figurais que je ne pouvais mourir autrement."[38] This conviction of acting out an unavoidable destiny makes his execution not a punishment for his crimes that he must passively accept, but rather a conscious choice of state-sponsored suicide. However, Lacenaire is not only the inheritor of this parental sanction, but also of a historical legacy that results in his being doubly marked for the guillotine.

It is not that a Revolutionary inheritance is unique to Lacenaire. Rather, it is the general legacy of 19th century French society. François Furet contends in his article "The Tyranny of Revolutionary Memory" that "For the past two hundred years the French Revolution has been the sole heritage of French public life, and even those who opposed it could lay claim to no other past."[39] Furet argues that with the restarting of the calendar in the year I, the Revolutionary government symbolically severs themselves and the entire future of the French nation from any memory or inheritance of the *Ancien Régime*.[40] Lacenaire, born a mere ten years later, was therefore not only born with no future, but with no past as well— or at least, with no past that did not include the looming figure of the guillotine. Lacenaire's uniqueness lies in what he decides to do with this particular inheritance, and the way in which his criminal acts reawaken a terror of the Terror.

Lacenaire's biographer Anne-Emanuel Demartini notes the following of the criminal's public image and the potential political threat he posed to 19th century

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38 Lacenaire, *Mémoires* 56-57.

39 Furet, François, "The Tyranny of Revolutionary Memory," *Fictions of the French Revolution,* Ed. Bernadette Fort (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1991) 151.

40 Ibid.

society: “déclamant contre l'injustice sociale, il apparaît comme le rejeton de la tradition égalitaire de la Révolution, le dernier des “niveleurs” dont les républicains continuent de se faire les interprètes en brandissant l'étendard de la souveraineté populaire.”[41] Rémy Bijaoui concludes that in the political figure presented by Lacenaire, “La boucle est bouclée: ainsi Lacenaire apparaît-il comme le maillon d'une longue chaîne tirée vers l'effondrement social, des salons philosophiques aux 'égouts' en passant par les 'ateliers de la révolution.”[42] Both Demartini and Bijaoui argue that contemporaries viewed Lacenaire as the last of his kind— a sort of “super republican” representing the evolution of popular sovereignty. Based on these observations, we might say that through his personal vengeance, Lacenaire becomes the embodiment of an uncontrollable and unpredictable societal force that survived both the Empire and the Restoration. He symbolizes on an individual level the larger threat of a populace taking the law into its own hands.[43]

And yet, Lacenaire would ultimately prove more an object of fascination than fear due to the subjugation and displacement of his Revolutionary potential. Michel Foucault explains in *Surveiller et Punir* that Lacenaire is, to a certain way of thinking, condemned to a life of criminality by being born too late. Born a generation earlier, Foucault argues, Lacenaire would have been a revolutionary but, born too late, his rebellion was instead channeled into petty crime. His allure for the *bourgeoisie* that attended his trial and followed the details of his imprisonment in the newspapers stemmed from the double detour of his particular criminality: “on célébrait la figure

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41 Demartini 144.
42 Bijaoui, Rémi, *Lacenaire: poète-assassin (*Paris: Éditions Imago, 2011) 164-165.
43 It should be noted that this political significance was projected onto Lacenaire by society, rather than espoused by him. In his *Mémoires*, he cites his distaste for political engagement, writing, “Si la politique n’était pas parfois une chose si sérieuse et qui entraîne quelquefois après elle tant de calamités, il n’y aurait vraiment qu’à en rire de pitié. Dupes et fripons, voilà en deux mots comment peut se résumer toute la politique passée, présente et future” (73). Lacenaire's challenge to order would not come from within the dominant political system, but rather, in the manner of a true outlaw, from outside of it.

symbolique d'un illégalisme assujetti dans la délinquance et transformé en discours--c'est-à-dire rendu deux fois inoffensif."[44] To put it differently, Pierre-François Lacenaire is an individual who has been temporally displaced. He is born in the wrong time or, we might even say, born out of time. As the beneficiary of a certain Revolutionary inheritance, there is a way in which, even before the infamous paternal proclamation, Lacenaire was always and already beheaded. His unswerving trajectory towards the guillotine would therefore be not so much a race towards an inescapable future as a running back to an inescapable past, and this turn, or rather, return, can only be accomplished through writing.

Daniel Arasse writes in *The Guillotine and the Terror,* that "The overthrow of the monarchy took physical form in the destruction of the body royal, which marked the emergence of a category and image essential to republican ideology, namely the 'body of the People."[45] With the beheading of the king in 1793, the royal body ceased to incarnate the law, leaving *le peuple* to take the law into their own hands. This included not only the bloodstained hands of the Terror, but also the writing hand. For the law, having been dismembered, now needed to be reconstituted, and given the now plural nature of the government, this had to be done through writing, which allowed for the distribution and transmission of Revolutionary ideals.

In a similar way, Lacenaire's own writing played a vital role in what he had termed his "lutte contre la société"— a sort of microcosmic echo to this Revolutionary legacy— and it is also largely responsible for the enduring mythology surrounding his life and crimes. In writing, Lacenaire reconstitutes his own history and his own law as he would like it to be remembered. He explains in the preface of his *Mémoires* that one of the primary aims of his writing is to actively forestall the

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[44] Foucault, Michel, *Surveiller et Punir* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1975) 332.

[45] Arasse, Daniel, *The Guillotine and the Terror,* Trans. Christopher Miller (London: The Penguin Group, 1989) 61.

dissection sure to occur after his death by affecting a self-dissection through writing. He begins, “Bien vivant, sain de corps et d'esprit, à faire de ma propre main mon autopsie et la dissection de mon cerveau.”[46] In conducting a preemptive autopsy, Lacenaire's *Mémoires* invert the chronological/ causal relationship between death and dissection. One could thus say that Lacenaire, pen-as-scalpel in hand, dismembers himself long before the guillotine delivers the cutting blow, and long before the amputation of hand from body. Indeed, he professes that his primary purpose for writing is the hope that dissecting his own character will eliminate the need for a post-mortem autopsy, continuing, “J'espère qu'en récompense de ce dévouement, ils voudront bien, après mon décès, ne pas éparpiller mes membres dans leurs amphithéâtres et les laisser paisibles dans leur trou pour être plus à portée de se réunir au grand jour de la résurrection.”[47] What is at stake for Lacenaire in this passage goes beyond a simple acknowledgement of the anatomist's table as the final resting place for the body of a condemned man. In explaining his criminal motivations through his *Mémoires,* Lacenaire is effectively providing the reader with “cause of death.” Whereas traditionally, an autopsy might be used to reveal the cause of death, Lacenaire's has been determined from his earliest childhood, negating the need for any additional dissection beyond the single slice of the guillotine's blade. In dissecting himself through writing, he re-inscribes the same amputation he had long ago enacted between himself and society. It is through writing *and* murder, death *and* sentence that Lacenaire accomplishes his “lutte contre la société,” unsettling the societal order and calling into question the traditional purpose of literature and crime.

Anne-Emmanuelle Demartini argues in *L'Affaire Lacenaire* that the murderer's decision to devote the three-month incarceration between his sentencing

[46] Lacenaire, *Mémoires* XII.
[47] Ibid. XIII.

and his execution to his *Mémoires,* even to the point of contemptuously dismissing all visitors who interfered with his work, constitutes a radical inversion of the typical function of imprisonment. She writes of Lacenaire, "il montre bien que l'écriture est un acte de résistance à la condition de prisonnier, impliquant une totale mise à disposition."[48] In refusing to submit to the authority of the judicial system, even while contained within its very walls, Lacenaire reveals writing to be a form of active rebellion against society. This writing was considered so dangerous that large portions of the published *Mémoires* were censored, presumably so that Lacenaire's seditious commentary on religion and society would not corrupt the reader, but throughout the work the criminal maintains his *droit d'auteur* for both his poetry and crimes (for example, by refuting allegations that he merely planned attacks in which he did not participate, or claiming that his published poetry had been incorrectly attributed to others). It is significant that in making these assertions, Lacenaire once again evokes the figure of the hand as a metaphor for action and authorship. He writes of choosing Victor Avril for his accomplice:

> Il me fallait enfin un homme qui n'eût pas encore été abruti par le séjour du bagne; un homme qui eût foi en moi et en ma capacité : qui se contentât d'être en mes mains un docile instrument; qui ne fût qu'un de mes bras, je voulais être la tête et l'autre bras. Car il n'était jamais entré dans mon caractère ni dans mes plans de répudier une part du danger; j'ai toujours au contraire réclamé la première, la suite le prouvera.[49]

Avril, *un docile instrument* in the hands of Lacenaire, serves the same function as the poet's pen— a mere tool allowing Pierre-François to express and enact his own muse (be it criminal or poetic).

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[48] Demartini 39.
[49] Lacenaire, *Mémories* 89.

What's more, Lacenaire, who writes in these *Mémoires* that he committed his first robbery for the express purpose of *being imprisoned,* in order to take a course in criminality from those already behind bars, once again uses writing to invert and pervert society's objectives for imprisonment. As Foucault has explained in *Surveiller et Punir,* the rise of the prison in the 19th century was intended to have an educating effect and eventually restore reformed men to society. However, as Foucault points out, the logistics of the prison system frequently had the inverse and entirely predictable result of providing a criminal rather than a moral education: “La prison rend possible, mieux, elle favorise l'organisation d'un milieu de délinquants, solidaires les uns des autres, hiérarchisés, prêts pour toutes les complicités futures... et c'est dans ces clubs que se fait l'éducation du jeune délinquant qui en est à sa première condamnation.”[50] It was during this same educational prison stay that Lacenaire first turned to writing poetry.[51] Thus, through the figure of Lacenaire, writing itself becomes a criminal and transgressive act and, by extension, murder similarly becomes a form of writing, with blood replacing ink.

Lisa Downing notes in her book *The Subject of Murder: Gender, Exceptionality and the Modern Killer,* that in Romantic narratives of murder there is a veneration of, “having blood on one's hands as a mark of authenticity, of getting one's hands dirty, in contradistinction to theoretical pontificating.”[52] Lacenaire's hand, with its double authorship, becomes a figure of fascination for Romantic authors such as Nerval, Gautier and Hugo in part because his violent crimes express in a different and more carnal register the same violent transgressions against the established order that

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[50] Foucault 311.
[51] Lacenaire, *Mémoires* 99.
[52] Downing, Lisa, *The Subject of Murder: Gender, Exceptionality, and the Modern Killer* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013) 42.

these authors attempted to enact through their writing.[53] In turning our attention back to this mummified extremity, we might begin to understand the legacy it hands down to later authors.[54]

1.3 Gautier's Chiromancy

Théophile Gautier's poem "Etude de mains," published in the collection *Emaux et Camées* in 1852, begins with the poet contemplating the hand of the beautiful courtesan Impéria, before contrasting it in the second *étude* with the criminal mummified hand of Lacenaire. The second half of the poem is reproduced below:

II- LACENAIRE
Pour contraste, la main coupée
De Lacenaire l'assassin,
Dans des baumes puissants trempée,
Posait auprès, sur un coussin.

Curiosité dépravée!
J'ai touché, malgré mes dégoûts,
Du supplice encor mal lavée,
Cette chair froide au duvet roux.

Momifiée et toute jaune
Comme la main d'un pharaon,
Elle allonge ses doigts de faune
Crispés par la tentation.

Un prurit d'or et de chair vive
Semble titiller de ses doigts
L'immobilité convulsive,
Et les tordre comme autrefois.

Tous les vices avec leurs griffes
Ont, dans les plis de cette peau,
Tracé d'affreux hiéroglyphes,
Lus couramment par le bourreau.

On y voit les œuvres mauvaises

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53 Downing makes the point that Lacenaire's advantage over earlier writer such as Sade, Schiller and De Quincy is due precisely to his practical experience that the other's lacked. She writes, "as both a killer *and* a poet, a master of praxis rather than only of theory, the sheen of authenticity glimmered more convincingly about his name because he had *used his hands."* (43).

54 For an in-depth analysis of the aesthetic and political significance of the grotesque corporeal fragment for romantic authors and artists, see Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer's article "Géricault's Severed Heads and Limbs: The Politics and Aesthetics of the Scaffold," *The Art Bulletin* 74.4 (1992): 599-618.

Ecrites en fauves sillons,
Et les brûlures des fournaises
Où bouillent les corruptions;

Les débauches dans les Caprées
Des tripots et des lupanars,
De vin et de sang diaprées,
Comme l'ennui des vieux Césars!

En même temps molle et féroce,
Sa forme a pour l'observateur
Je ne sais quelle grâce atroce,
La grâce du gladiateur!

Criminelle aristocratie,
Par la varlope ou le marteau
Sa pulpe n'est pas endurcie,
Car son outil fut un couteau.

Saints calus du travail honnête,
On y cherche en vain votre sceau.
Vrai meurtrier et faux poète,
Il fut le Manfred du ruisseau![55]

The poem is notable for Gautier's use of literary paradox as he attempts to paint the inherently contradictory character of Lacenaire, the bourgeois criminal who simultaneously evoked fascination and disgust. In Gautier's poem, Pierre-François literally becomes a *pierre de touche* for poetic creation:

> Curiosité dépravée! / J'ai touché, malgré mes dégoûts,
>
> du supplice encor mal lavée/ cette chair froide au duvet roux[56]

This need to touch, even *à contrecœur,* and to, as in Downing's earlier suggestion, "get one's hands dirty" with the "supplice encor mal lavée," implies a desire for transmission, infusing the hand with the fetishistic power of a magic talisman: a true *main de gloire*— a dead man's hand used by criminals to unlock any door. It is as if, in touching the dead hand, some of Lacenaire's criminal *gloire* would be transferred into the *œuvre* of Gautier's alive and writing hand, a *main de gloire* that would open

[55] Gautier, Théophile, "Étude de mains," *Emaux et Camées,* (Paris: Éditions Didier, 1852) 18-21.
[56] "Étude de mains" ln 45-48.

the doors of literary salons.[57] But perhaps the transmission works in both directions, since the third and fourth stanzas render an uncanny reanimation to this still life *tableau,* presenting a hand that both evokes and denies death*:*

> Momifiée et toute jaune/ comme la main d'un pharaon,
>
> Elle allonge ses doigts de faune/ Crispés par la tentation.
>
> Un prurit d'or et de chair vive/ Semble titiller de ses doigts/
>
> l'immobilité convulsive/ et les tordre comme autrefois[58]

This figure of the reanimated severed hand will become a common 19th century trope, reappearing in works by Nerval, Maupassant and Verlaine, where it will continue to perpetuate acts of murder and mayhem, allowing Lacenaire's legacy of criminal literature to reach back from beyond the grave.[59] In a way, Gautier's poem might therefore be read as the inverse of John Keats' famous fragment "This Living Hand."[60] Whereas Keats' text transforms a living hand into a dead hand, Gautier's text attempts to bring the dead hand back to life.

Perhaps most importantly, the poem intriguingly introduces a metaphor of reading and writing through multiple references to the practice of chiromancy, asserting that both the past and future of an individual are inscribed upon the hand. The fifth stanza of the second part of the poem maintains:

> Tous les vices avec leurs griffes/ Ont, dans les plis de cette peau,
>
> Tracé d'affreux hiéroglyphes/ Lus couramment par le bourreau[61]

In this way, through the invocation of hieroglyphics and the metaphor of reading, a

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57 For a detailed study on the mutual influences between the 19th century criminal and the Romantic hero, see Laurence Senelick, *The Prestige of Evil: The Murderer as Romantic Hero from Sade to* Lacenaire (New York: Garland, 1987).

58 "Etude de mains" ln 49-56.

59 Nerval and Maupassant's severed hand narratives will be discussed in detail later in this chapter. For Verlaine's text, see "La Main du Major Müller," *Œuvres en prose complètes,* Ed. Jacques Borel, (Paris: Gallimard, 1972) 154-161.

60 Keats, John, "This Living Hand," *Norton Anthology of Poetry* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005) 940.

61 "Étude de mains" ln 60-64

text *about* hands is transformed into a different kind of "hand-text." The hand in question becomes a textual object, open to interpretation. The next stanza of the poem continues the reading metaphor, while at the same time explicitly introducing the figure of writing:

On y voit les œuvres mauvaises/ Écrites en fauves sillons,

Et les brûlures des fournaises/ où bouillent les corruptions[62]

Thus, the reading performed by the executioner and by extension the reader of the poem is not, as is often the case in palm reading, of a prophetic nature, but instead more akin to the reading of a criminal record. Rather than predicting the future, the lines of the hand serve as engravings of past actions, that is to say as another form of *mémoire,* mimicking the fatalistic quality Lacenaire evokes in his own writing. One must ask if, in citing the murderer's *œuvres mauvaises,* Gautier was referring to the criminal's offenses against the law or against literature.

Famed 19th century chiromancer Adolphe Desbarrolles, in his 900 page treatise *Révélations Complète: chiromancie, phrénologie, graphologie, études physiologiques, révélations du passé, connaissance de l'avenir,* claims that the ability to both record the past and foretell the future is a quality unique to chiromancy, one that makes this discipline superior to the other *sciences.* However, moving beyond the apparently self-serving propaganda of this assertion, Desbarrolles makes a truly interesting claim when he continues, "Ainsi elle [la chiromancie] annonce la destinée, l'avenir, modifiable par LA VOLONTÉ, en donnant pour preuves des révélations futures les révélations du passé."[63] Here then, we have the assertion that these hands-as-texts are not fixed entities, but that they remain open to re-writes, made possible through human will and agency. The sentence one reads there need not be a death

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[62] Ibid. ln 65-68.

[63] Desbarolles, Adolphe, *Révélations Complètes. chiromancie, phrénologie, graphologie, études physiologiques, révélations du passé, connaissance de l'avenir.* (Paris: Vigot Frères, 1922) 6.

sentence. In light of this, Lacenaire's decision to claim his past as his future is yet another indication of his death as a willful suicide. It is not just the law that Lacenaire takes into his own hands, but his death as well.

The penultimate stanza of Gautier's poem exemplifies how Lacenaire's status as a member of the *bourgeoisie* contributed to the attraction he held for society:

> Criminelle aristocratie/Par la varlope ou le marteau
>
> Sa pulpe n'est pas endurcie/Car son outil fut un couteau[64]

The two final stanzas of the poem thus combine to add yet another layer of signification to the already over-determined appendage. If the palms of Lacenaire's hands remain soft, it is not merely because his preferred weapon does not form calluses. Rather, his choice of a weapon such as a knife, with its metonymic resonances to swords and noble combat, classifies Lacenaire as a more refined and elegant breed of criminal, a member of the *aristocratie.* The irony expressed in the closing stanzas is, of course, that even if Lacenaire had never turned to crime, he would have been unlikely, as the son of a wealthy *bourgeois,* to have ever had his hand covered by the "saints calus du travail honnête."[65] Gautier's poem thus tropes on the undercurrents of classism inherent in nineteenth-century France; Lacenaire's greatest crime was perhaps not his penchant for poorly executed robberies, but rather the way he transgressed the clear-cut social boundaries between the upper and lower classes, evoking political anxiety about the not-so-distant Revolutionary past. This transgression is also apparent in Lacenaire's own use of language both during his trial and in his *Mémoires,* where he proves himself fluent in *argot* acquired from his reading of Vidocq's *Mémoires* and his first stay in prison,[66] a fact requiring frequent

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[64] "Étude de mains" ln 73-76.

[65] Ibid. ln 77.

[66] Lacenaire, *Mémoires* 98. In addition to his *Mémoires,* Vidocq published a *Dictionnaire d'Argot* in 1829, although Lacenaire does not specifically mention this text in his own *Mémoires.*

translations in the trial transcripts for the *bourgeois* readers entranced by the case.[67] Gautier himself seems incapable in his poem of thinking this unexpected mélange, labeling Lacenaire a guttersnipe and an aristocrat in the space of a few syllables (le Manfred du ruisseau).[68]

What is most fascinating in Gautier's poem is that Lacenaire's hand is not contrasted with (or one might say, read against) another formerly living hand, but rather a prosthesis. The hand of Impéria, a courtesan, is explicitly figured as a mere plaster cast— a replica of human flesh "moulée en plâtre" that is described as a "pur fragment d'un chef-d'œuvre humain."[69] This would have indeed been the more customary form of preservation. Taking casts of the faces and hands of the departed was a common 19th century practice, fed by the emerging cult of *bric à brac* and souvenirs, and there was a particular demand for plaster casts of the hands of renowned artists or literary figures.[70] Indeed, Lacenaire himself, despite his professed contempt for phrenology, had a cast made of his skull prior to his execution but not, to anyone's knowledge, of his hand.[71] In light of this, the odd comparison of Gautier's poem serves to highlight the way in which Lacenaire's severed hand is a ghastly re-inscription and literalization of this practice. It confronts the reader with a fragment of the human body that has been turned into an aesthetic object for contemplation— a work of art. This poetic gesture of turning flesh into sculpture for the purpose of collection and conservation, specifically as it relates to the hand of a killer, would seem to recall Thomas De Quincy's classification of murder as "one of the fine arts,"

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67 Cochinat, Victor, *Lacenaire: ses crimes*, *son procès et sa mort* (Paris: J. Laisné, 1857) 248.
68 "Étude de mains" ln 80.
69 "Étude des mains" ln 1-4.
70 Godfrey, Sima, "Lending a Hand: Nerval, Gautier, Maupassant and the Fantastic," *Romantic Review* 78.1 (January,1987) 79.
71 Bonnelier, *Autopsie physiologique* 11.

but it also raises the question as to why Gautier finds this hand worth preserving.[72]

Sima Godfrey, in her article "Lending a Hand: Nerval, Gautier, Maupassant and the Fantastic," argues that in reading these two palms, one plaster and one flesh, Gautier the romantic seeks to contrast the "false poetry" and all too real violence of Lacenaire with the "true poetry" figured by Impéria's hand that, in her words, "suspends time, inspires dreams and enchants the imagination of art."[73] The poem's ultimate goal, she argues, is for these hands to "join together as a unit, as pairs of hands do, to embody the fateful dualities that inform the Romantic artist's keen awareness of his own divided self."[74] While I agree that the poem may legitimately be read as presenting two opposing facets of the divided romantic self, I am not sure that I agree with Godfrey as to which of these two hands most enchants Gautier's imagination. The sight of the criminal's hand at Maxime Du Camp's inspired Gautier's poem, and Claudine Gothot-Mersch notes in the Gallimard edition of *Emaux et Camées* that a manuscript version of "Etude de mains" in fact reversed the order of the *étude,* so that the reading of Lacenaire's hand preceded that of the courtesan.[75]

Furthermore, as Lisa Downing points out, the juxtaposition of these two hands underscores the fact that the Lacenaire portion of the "Etude de mains" presents a grotesque, gender-inverted version of the *blason du corps féminin* popular in the 16th century, in which the various fragments of a woman's body are lyrically enumerated and praised, with the poet asserting at the end that it is in fact the sum of these parts that constitute the woman's beauty. However, Downing notes, "Gautier's poetic evocation of Lacenaire never reaches this stage of summing up. He appears

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[72] Demartini is quick to caution that the symbolism that Lacenaire's literary brethren attributed to his criminal acts was not shared by Lacenaire himself. She writes, "De même, les écrits de Lacenaire ne confortent pas l'interprétation, dérivée de Quincey, sur l'artiste du crime. Problématisé dans la seule perspective morale, l'assassinat, pour Lacenaire, n'est pas une œuvre d'art" (349).

[73] Godfrey 80.

[74] Ibid.

[75] *Emaux et Camées* 231.

metonymically as a series of fragmented fetishes: hand and knife."[76] This is an important point, but I would underline that, in contrast with Godfrey's claim, it is precisely *crime* and not poetry that is being fetishized. The only *outil* mentioned by Gautier is the knife, and not the pen. Gautier's poem demonstrates his bias for the *assassin* over the *poète* in the final stanza, which concludes with the indictment: "vrai meurtrier et faux poète/ Il fut le Manfred du ruisseau."[77] For Lacenaire's contemporaries, who glorified the legitimacy of his crimes, it was the murderer's writing that lacked authenticity— only his crime is qualified as *vrai.* It is therefore a criminal bequest that the murderer leaves behind, but this grisly bequest will be transformed into poetry by later hands.

Ultimately, what Gautier's poem teaches us is that Lacenaire's most enduring legacy is not his own writing, but the literature he inspired. One could say that he gave an invaluable *coup de main* to the authors of later 19th century texts that take up similar questions of crime and justice, inspiring Stendhal, Dostoyevsky and Maupassant to name but a few. The subversive form of address that Lacenaire establishes in his *Mémoires,* one that, as Gautier's poem shows us, transforms crime into poetry, will ultimately accomplish Lacenaire's final desire for revenge. Taking up knife-as-pen, Lacenaire rewrites in bloody script the death sentence dictated to him by his father and signs his own name to it. He refuses to "finish" at the scaffold as his father decreed, but rather takes it as his point of origin, and in so doing claims authorship for his own death.

The authors that read his hand, in all its forms (from hands written on to hand writing), will fulfill Lacenaire's dying wish, literally written in blood in the final pages of his *Mémoires,* for a life after death: "Et vous qui lirez ces Mémoires, où le sang

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[76] Downing 47.
[77] "Etude de Mains" ln 79-80.

suinte à chaque page, vous qui ne les lirez que quand le bourreau aura essuyé son triangle de fer que j'aurai rougi, oh! Gardez-moi quelque place dans votre souvenir."[78] In this final quotation, we see that the wiping of the blood from the guillotine's blade and its repositioning on the pages of the *Mémoires* is the necessary precondition for both the text's readability (it cannot be read until after the execution), and its function as an object of cultural memory. In circling back to his point of origin, the Revolutionary guillotine, Lacenaire effectuates his own Revolution, in the scientific sense of "the motion of an object around a point, especially around another object or a center mass."[79] With the Revolution at the center mass of his own inheritance, Lacenaire will go on to exhibit a gravitational pull for later authors, playing an important role in the various literary revolutions of the 19th and 20th century.

1.4- Maupassant's Stolen Hand

When discussing apparitions of the criminal severed hand in French literature, the most obsessive perpetrator of this trope must be identified as Guy de Maupassant. From 1875's "La Main d'écorché," Maupassant would go on to write texts such as "Le Tic," "En Mer," and "La Main," around the theme of amputated hands. Nor, as readers of Maupassant will know, is the hand the only phantom limb to haunt his corpus. Maupassant's world is one in which severed and fragmented objects abound. We find fetishized heads of hair ("La Chevelure"), and locks of hair formed into rings ("Une veuve"), heads of corpses ("La Folle"), as well as broken legs ("Clochette"). Still, among this catalogue of human detritus, the image of a dead hand capable of independent action maintains a privileged place, leading us to wonder about the strength of its grip on his body of work. Additionally, in contrast with the majority of

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[78] Lacenaire, *Mémoires* 156.

[79] "Revolution," *American Heritage Science Dictionary* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2011) *Credo Reference,*

what we might consider Maupassant's "fetishistic" narratives, such as the ones mentioned above, which concentrate on the disarticulated feminine form, the severed hands we encounter seem unequivocally male.[80] In an effort to better understand this phenomenon, we must first look at Maupassant's various sources of inspiration for these hand-texts.

Louis Forestier notes in the Pléiade edition of "La Main d'écorché" that the eponymous severed hand, as described by the narrator of the tale, bears a strong resemblance to the hand of Lacenaire as described in Gautier's poem.[81] While this is certainly true, Maupassant's mania for the hand also appears to have developed, at least in part, due to an encounter with the British poet Algernon Charles Swinburne during a summer in the Norman village of Étretat. The teenaged Maupassant, having saved Swinburne from drowning in the English Channel, is subsequently invited to lunch by Swinburne and his friend, the reclusive British aristocrat George Powell. In "L'Anglais d'Étretat," published in *Le Galois* in 1882, Maupassant records his impressions of this momentous visit, and recalls that while the house of the poet was filled at every turn with strange "*ossements,*" his attention was particularly seized by "une affreuse main d'écorché qui gardait sa peau séchée, ses muscles noirs mis à nu, et sur l'os, blanc comme de la neige, des traces de sang ancien."[82] Maupassant writes in the same piece how he eventually purchased this hand from Swinburne's estate and placed it in his study. However, the encounter with Swinburne seems not to have provided the only source material for Maupassant's fantastic hand tales, since there are also several indications in "La Main d'écorché" that Maupassant drew inspiration

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[80] For a discussion of Maupassant's relationship to fetishism and the female form, see Philippe Lejeune, "Maupassant et le fétichisme," *Maupassant, miroir de la Nouvelle: Colloque de Cerisy,* (Saint-Denis: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 1988) 91-109.

[81] Maupassant, Guy de, *Contes et Nouvelles [de] Maupassant,* Ed. Louis Forestier (Paris: Gallimard, 1974) 1267.

[82] Maupassant, Guy de, "L'Anglais d'Étretat," *Chroniques: Nouvelle édition augmentée* (Paris: Éditions Arvensa, 2014) 411.

from an early story by Gérard de Nerval— *La Main Enchantée.*

Nerval's tale, written and first published in 1832 as *La Main de Gloire: Histoire Macaronique,* but republished in 1854 under the alternate title *La Main Enchantée*, is set in 17th century Paris and references the medieval and early modern trope of the *main de gloire.* The protagonist, Eustache, is a young tailor's apprentice engaged to marry his employer's beautiful daughter, Javotte. Unfortunately, the young woman becomes enamored with her dashing cousin Joseph, an *arquebusier* in the King's army. This rival eventually provokes Eustache into a duel, leading the frightened tailor to seek help from Maître Gonin, a well-known *sorcier* and *escamoteur* on the Pont Neuf. The magician offers Eustache a charm and, in return, asks only for his "*main*" as a guarantee for later payment.[83] What the poor *drapier* does not know is that the cunning sorcerer is asking for more than a handshake of agreement, but rather for the actual appendage to serve as collateral. Once the pact is concluded with this fatal double entendre, Eustache's hand takes on supernatural powers of agility and strength, allowing him to defeat and kill his rival. Fearing arrest, he seeks out a magistrate who is also a valuable client and begs for mercy. Unfortunately, as Eustache blubbers his apologies, his charmed hand repeatedly strikes the magistrate. The poor tailor, rather than being pardoned, is sent to the gallows. Following the hanging, the hand continues to act apart from the rest of the corpse, striking the executioner so that he severs the offending appendage from Eustache's lifeless body, at which point the hand scuttles away to rejoin its true master, Maître Gonin.

Susan Hiner, in her article "Hand Writing: Dismembering and Re-Membering in Nodier, Nerval and Maupassant," notes that the hand of Nerval's tale "belongs

[83] "quel gage en voulez-vous? --Votre main seulement" (Nerval, Gérard de, *La Main Enchantée (Histoire Macaronique)* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1994)138).

simultaneously to a criminal (Gonin) and to a hapless victim of a ruse. This shared possession highlights the ambiguity of guilt suggested by the tale."[84] In identifying Gonin as "a criminal" and Eustache as the "hapless victim of a ruse," Hiner's reading of the text leads her to conclude that, "the hand's autonomous acts eventually produce a perversion of justice in which the innocent Eustache is punished on the gallows and the criminal Gonin is rewarded."[85] Hiner is correct to underscore the fluid dynamics of guilt and punishment inherent in Nerval's text, but I would argue that in assigning the labels "criminal" and "victim," and identifying Eustache as "innocent," Hiner in fact undoes the initial gesture towards ambiguity. On the contrary, I would propose that the narrative is far from providing such clear definitions of criminal and victim, and that it is indeed because of this very ambiguity in the text, which produces a truly destabilizing concept of guilt, that Maupassant will later find inspiration in Nerval's work.

A closer reading of the story reveals a number of criminal elements associated with the text's otherwise unassuming and comical protagonist. Maître Gonin asserts that Eustache cannot escape his destiny as a criminal, transforming the moniker from a description of action into an ontological state. In a scene that eerily anticipates Lacenaire's observations on his own criminal destiny, Gonin, upon examining Eustache's hand for the first time, tells the young man that he is marked for the gallows.[86] Furthermore, is Eustache not complicit in the crimes his hand commits from the moment he searches out Gonin on the Pont Neuf, a part of Paris infamous in the 17th century for being the refuge of charlatans, magicians and thieves, to ask him for a charm? Is it not the motive of jealousy that causes him to provoke a duel,

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[84] Hiner 308.

[85] Ibid.

[86] "Ce sont deux phrases honnêtes pour remplacer deux mots: gibet et galères. Vous irez haut et moi loin" (Nerval 120).

resulting in a murder that, while perhaps not committed by his own volition, is nonetheless committed by his own hand? Eustache's enchanted hand, while it costs him his life, also allows him to reassign his own capacity for criminal action. He is hanged for a murder he ostensibly did not commit; yet he dies simultaneously a criminal and a victim. We will see that such permeable boundaries of culpability and anxiety about the limits of human self-possession also mark the later severed hand narratives of Guy de Maupassant.

1.5- La Main d'écorché

Having examined the influence of these earlier works on Maupassant's adoption of the severed hand, we must now return to the moment when it first takes hold in his writing, with his first published *conte*, "La Main d'écorché." Published under the pseudonym Joseph Prunier in 1875, when Maupassant was 25 years old, "La Main d'écorché" is set in Paris but makes frequent allusions to the Norman countryside, where both the unidentified narrator of the story and his friend Pierre were born. When the story opens, Pierre has just returned from Normandy, and joins the narrator and their common acquaintances at a drunken celebration, announcing to them "je rapporte un grand criminel de mes amis que je vous demande la permission de vous présenter."[87] However, rather than the complete criminal body we would expect to follow such a declaration, we are presented only with a fragment, described thusly in the text: "une main d'écorché; cette main était affreuse, noire, sèche, très longue et comme crispée, les muscles, d'une force extraordinaire, étaient retenus à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur par une lanière de peau parcheminée, les ongles jaune,

[87] Maupassant, Guy de, "La Main d'écorché," *Contes et Nouvelles [de] Maupassant,* Ed. Louis Forestier Vol. 1 (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1974) 3.

étroits, étaient restés au bout des doigts; tout cela sentait le scélérat d'une lieue."[88] As Daniel Sangsue observes, there are indications that the flayed hand is textually informed by the grisly gallows narrative of Nerval's *La Main Enchantée.* Pierre has bought the hand from the estate sale of a "vieux sorcier," who seems to recall Nerval's Maître Gonin.[89] However, the description that follows makes it clear that this hand was not taken from as timid and unintentional a criminal as Eustache. The hand, Pierre explains, belonged to an illustrious criminal who had killed his wife and the priest that married them, before smoking an order of monks out of their abbey and transforming a convent of nuns into a harem, crimes for which he was summarily executed.[90] When asked what he will do with this frightful object, Pierre replies that he will hang it from his doorbell to scare his creditors. Little does he know how soon his loan will come due, and with what deadly interest.

Two days later, the narrator learns that Pierre has been attacked and strangled within an inch of his life. He bears five marks on his neck as if fingers had been forced into the flesh, and the horrific criminal hand has mysteriously disappeared. Despite the promise that "la justice informe,"[91] the perpetrator of Pierre's assault remains unknown. The experience leaves Pierre in a state of madness, unable to narrate the details of his attack. Over the next 7 months, he produces only "paroles étranges," and arrives at "une idée fixe, il se croyait toujours poursuivi par un spectre."[92] Finally, Pierre succumbs to an inexplicable anxiety attack: "il s'écria en agitant les bras et comme en proie à une épouvantable terreur: "Prends-là, prends-là! Il m'étrangle, au secours, au secours!" Il fit deux fois le tour de la chambre en hurlant,

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88 Ibid.

89 Sangsue, Daniel, "De Seconde Main: Rire et Parodie chez Maupassant," *Maupassant, miroir de la nouvelle: Colloques de Cerisy,* Ed. Christiane Baroche (Paris: Presse de l'Université de Vincennes, 1988) 180.

90 Maupassant, "La Main d'écorché" 4.

91 Ibid. 6.

92 Ibid. 7.

puis il tomba mort, la face contre terre."[93] Pierre's sudden death is, among other things, the deadly consequence of a failure in interpretation. Despite the evocation of the hand's skin as "parcheminée," our protagonist is a very poor reader of the hand's criminal record. He does not recognize its murderous potential, and allows it to infiltrate his dwelling with regrettable carelessness.

Pierre originally attaches the hand to his doorbell until his landlord demands that he remove it, at which point he reattaches it to the call bell outside of his study. From this point forward, the text points to many ways in which the macabre object becomes progressively internalized. The movement of the hand from an exterior to an interior space is accompanied by a linguistic slippage demonstrating Pierre's gradual appropriation of the object. The narrator demands of his friend "comment vas-tu?" and, immediately afterwards, "et ta main?" Pierre, in kind, refers to the hand not by the definite article, but by the possessive: "ma main, tu as dû la voir à ma sonnette"—the ambiguity of the phrase implying that the hand is now a part of Pierre's own body.[94] This appropriation is doubly interesting when one considers critic Pierre Bayard's contention that domestic interiors in Maupassant's work frequently function as metaphorical spaces for the interior of the subject.[95]

What's more, this incorporation is deadly. Pierre explains upon moving the hand, "Cela vaut mieux...Cette main, comme le "Frère, il faut mourir" des Trappistes me donnera des pensées sérieuses tous les soirs en m'endormant." [96] The hand at the interior of Pierre's dwelling (self) is thus transformed into a *memento mori,* a decoration for a tomb that will quite literally sound Pierre's death knell. The marks on

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93 Ibid.

94 Ibid 4.

95 "L'habitation, et spécifiquement la maison est clairement, chez Maupassant, une métaphore du sujet, toujours menacée comme lui d'être envahie, pénétrée, occupée." (Bayard, Pierre, *Maupassant Juste Avant Freud* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1994) 144).

96 Maupassant, "La Main d'écorché" 5.

Pierre's neck following his attack are described as "les marques de cinq doigts qui s'étaient profondément enfoncés dans la chair.[97] With this description, we see (or rather don't see) a (the?) hand seeking to inhabit the most internal space possible— Pierre's own body— in an effort to annihilate him.

This gruesome appendage, however, is capable of much more than simply overcoming the physical barriers of closed doors. In the spirit of a true *main de gloire,* it is an object capable of passing across all boundaries, even the seemingly impassable line between self and other. For, it must be admitted that one of the strangest features of Pierre's delusion is that it is by no means a private fantasy. The narrator experiences the same feelings of anxiety and terror that afflict his friend, explaining that the night of Pierre's attack, "j'étais agité, nerveux; plusieurs fois je me réveillai en sursaut, un moment même je me figurai qu'un homme s'était introduit chez moi et je me levai pour regarder dans mes armoires et sous mon lit."[98] There is also the positing of a nearly fraternal relationship between Pierre and the narrator that could help to explain the strange phenomenon of their intertwined psychic experience. The narrator identifies Pierre as "un de mes bons amis d'enfance," and after Pierre's sudden death he takes charge of the body in the absence of any blood relations: "Comme il était orphelin, je fus chargé de conduire son corps au petit village de P... en Normandie, où ses parents étaient enterrés."[99] The narrator continues:

> Il faisait un temps magnifique, le ciel tout bleu ruisselait de lumière, les oiseaux chantaient dans les ronces du talus, où bien des fois, enfants tous deux, nous étions venus manger des mûres. Il me semblait encore le voir se faufiler le long de la haie et se glisser par le petit trou que je connaissais bien, là-bas, tout au bout du terrain où l'on enterre les pauvres, puis nous revenions à

97 Ibid. 5
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid. 7

> la maison, les joues et les lèvres noires de jus des fruits que nous avions mangés.[100]

This nostalgia for a shared childhood, and the fact that Pierre and the narrator returned home to "la maison" implies a fraternal relationship stemming from a shared point of origin— a single home and by extension a single maternal body. Like twins before and after birth, Pierre and the narrator seem to share an uncanny bond to one another mediated by their connection to Normandy— the motherland.

In addition to the implied psychic bond between narrator and protagonist, there is a further blurring of the line between self and other at Pierre's funeral. The narrator relates how the gravediggers, while hollowing out the final resting place, find the selected plot already occupied:

> Ils avaient trouvé un cercueil. D'un coup de pioche, ils firent sauter le couvercle et nous aperçûmes un squelette démesurément long, couché sur le dos, qui, de son œil creux, semblait encore nous regarder et nous défier; j'éprouvai un malaise, je ne sais pourquoi j'eus presque peur. "Tiens! S'écria un des hommes, regardez donc, le gredin a un poignet coupé, voilà sa main."[101]

The description of the cadaver in the grave makes it appear as if the ghastly hand continues to pursue Pierre even after his death, and causes us to wonder if Pierre is taking the place of the hand's original owner or, conversely, if the criminal has stolen his. This theme of stolen or conquered space is common throughout Maupassant's *œuvre*, betraying a fear of succumbing to the other. Pierre Bayard interprets similarly the frequent Maupassantian trope of a mirror that does not reflect a character's image, as in "Le Horla" or "Un Fou," as the fear that the other has been "entièrement

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[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.

substitué au *je.*"[102] This fear of "losing one's place" translates in Maupassant to a fear of ceasing to exist as an individual, of being absorbed back into a state of sameness that, for Maupassant critic Antonia Fonyi, is the essential state of the Maupassantian subject. She writes, "A est égal à B, tout se confond, non seulement la justice, mais la logique aussi est écrasée par la fatalité invisible et toute-puissante qui réduit l'humanité entière à l'état du "on", du même."[103]

In the universe that Fonyi describes, where justice ceases to function and sameness reigns, all bodies are potentially criminal bodies. For, it could be argued that Pierre is as much criminal as victim, having bought his talisman from the estate of a *vieux sorcier* who was also not its rightful master. Furthermore, when Pierre ties the hand to his *sonnette,* where it can be mangled by every visitor, he effectively devalorizes the hand of an illustrious criminal by transforming it into a mere curio, perhaps inviting retaliation.[104] What's more, the state of indifferentiation remarked upon by both Bayard and Fonyi comes about through that great equalizer—death. It is only at the graveside that these two criminal bodies can meet.

In Maupassant's literary universe, there appears to be no such thing as an "innocent victim"— all subjects are implicated in criminal acts that perpetuate the cycle of violence and death. As Antonia Fonyi explains, "Tout se confond. L'assassin est victime, la victime est bourreau, l'instinct meurtrier continue à agir au-delà de la mort, le crime est folie, la folie est criminelle, les hommes sont des bêtes, les bêtes partagent la bestialité des humains."[105] This state of indifferentiation, in turn, renders problematic any judgment of guilt or any effort to determine if justice has been

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[102] Bayard 77.

[103] Fonyi, Antonia, *Maupassant 1993* (Paris: Editions Kimé, 1993) 40.

[104] Daniel Sangsue observes the ironic humor in a *main de gloire,* which should open every door, being transformed into the cord of a *sonnette.* (Sangsue 180).

[105] Fonyi, Antonia, "Introduction," *La Petite Roque et autres histoires criminelles* (Paris: Flammarion, 1989) 21.

served. Given the ambiguous conclusion of the text, the crime committed in "La Main d'écorché*"* appears to represent a displaced action. Whereas a criminal's particular methods should, in theory, constitute a kind of signature, in the case of this text both the signature and the hand that signed are missing, putting into question who is the actual "author" of the crime.[106] In contrast with the displaced action of criminality, one could argue that guilt, in both a legal and affective sense, is the assumption rather than the denial of action. However, while crime is omnipresent in this tale, guilt, at least initially, appears to be absent. I would claim that this is merely the effect of yet another displacement and that drawing out the severed hand's relation to guilt requires further analysis of the text's displaced relationship to the maternal body.

1.6- Melanie Klein and Matricide

Earlier, I noted that the narrative of Pierre's death is inscribed within a framework of departure and return from Normandy, the motherland. It is Pierre's death that brings both him and the narrator back into relation with this maternal body. Consequently, a text that might at first appear to only be concerned with masculine relations (such as those between Pierre and the narrator, or between Pierre and the masculine criminal hand), in fact screens a narrative of an anxiety-fraught connection to the maternal. Given that prevailing scholarship on Maupassant by critics such as Pierre Bayard, Antonia Fonyi, Mary Donaldson-Evans and Philippe Bonnefis insists on the *œuvre*'s defining double gesture of maternal identification (daughters that are carbon copies of their mothers,[107] sons who refuse to identify with their fathers,[108]

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[106] I would recall briefly that "La Main d'écorché" was signed with the pseudonym Joseph Prunier. Neither the hand in the text nor the hand of the author has placed its signature on this crime.
[107] "M. Jocaste," *Fort Comme la Mort*
[108] *Pierre et Jean*

first names as last names because the father's name cannot be transmitted)[109] and maternal persecution (mothers who abandon their children,[110] who purposely deform or kill them in the womb), [111] our understanding of the strange displacements and detours in "La Main d'écorché" might benefit from our own detour towards the psychoanalytic work of Melanie Klein on the mother/infant relationship.[112]

My aim is certainly not to suggest that we can somehow analyze the writer's psychic state through his works, nor pathologize his fictional literary creations, but rather that we might consider his writing as something akin to the analytic function Klein attributes to play. Children, she argues, learn to bring fantasy into relation with reality through the symbolic nature of play, and this capacity to symbolize their anxiety is what keeps them from lapsing into psychosis.[113] It is thus an experience by which the child constructs his internal and external world. I am interested in what Maupassant's literary play may be trying to teach us about the very nature of anxiety and guilt, destruction and reparation. I am also interested in how Maupassant and Klein, each using their respective vocabularies that occasionally intersect in uncanny ways, attempt to account for what both seem to posit as a universal model of human experience: overwhelming fantasies of persecution and annihilation at the hands of an unknown Other.

For Klein, persecutory anxiety is a defining feature of what she terms the paranoid-schizoid position. In her major 1946 paper "Notes on some Schizoid Mechanisms," she explains that in the paranoid-schizoid position, the infant,

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[109] See Philippe Bonnefis, *Comme Maupassant* (Paris: Presses Universitaires du *Septentrion,* 2009) 97-99.

[110] "Un Parricide," "L'Abandonné"

[111] "La Mère aux monstres," "L'Enfant"

[112] The works by Bayard, Fonyi and Bonnefis to which I refer are those already cited in this dissertation. See also Mary Donaldson-Evans, *A Woman's Revenge: The Chronology of Dispossession in Maupassant's Fiction* (Lexington, KY: French Forum, Publishers, 1986).

[113] Klein, Melanie, "The Psycho-Analytic Play Technique: Its History and Significance," *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946-1963* (New York: The Free Press, 1975) 122-140.

perceiving hunger or physical discomfort as the threat of annihilation, splits its earliest objects (for Klein, the mother's breast) into “good” and “bad” parts as a way of preserving the ego. Thus, the bad breast/ bad mother is felt to be a persecutor that must be destroyed through sadistic attacks, while the good breast/good mother can be introjected and preserved.[114] In addition to the prominence given to anxiety and persecution in her work, Klein also gives central importance to the concept of guilt. Indeed, in Kleinian thought guilt becomes the psychic compliment and consequence of the destructive impulses that mark the paranoid-schizoid position. It is most often associated with the depressive anxiety that follows the intense struggle against phantasied attackers, when the infant begins to realize that the “good” and “bad” objects are in fact, one and the same.[115]

In Kleinian theory, guilt indicates that the life drive has been able to supplant the death drive for a period of time. The child feels guilt that it has injured or destroyed the mother through sadistic attacks on the bad object, and anxiety that this destruction will result in punishment.[116] To avoid these feelings of guilt and depressive anxiety, the infant feels compelled to make reparation through phantasies of rebuilding or healing.[117] Finally, it should be noted that for Klein, reaching the depressive position and the first experience of guilt by no means indicates a permanent victory, and that aggressive and murderous impulses against the primary love object are likely to reoccur, leading to an endless cycle of aggression, guilt and reparation.[118]

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[114] Klein, Melanie, “Notes on some Schizoid Mechanisms,” *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946-1963* (New York: The Free Press, 1975) 1-24.

[115] Klein, Melanie, “The Theory of Anxiety and Guilt,” *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946-1963* (New York: The Free Press, 1975) 25-42.

[116] Klein, Melanie, “The Psycho-genesis of Manic-Depressive States,” *The Selected Melanie Klein* Ed. Juliet Mitchell (New York: The Free Press, 1986) 116-145.

[117] Ibid.

[118] “Therefore persecutory anxiety very quickly interferes with progress in integration, and the experiences of depressive anxiety, guilt and reparation can only be of a transitory nature. As a

In Melanie Klein's view, the “acting out” of crime and the “acting-in” of guilt both have very explicit connections to the maternal. But, whereas guilt for Klein is the sign of healthy psychic development, followed by an urge to make reparation and an increased ability to integrate ones good and bad objects, crime is conversely the indicator of psychic failure. Providing a helpful gloss in her biography of Melanie Klein in relation to Klein's work on matricide and the *Oresteia*, Julia Kristeva explains,

> Crimes and other aggressive actings out are merely failures of the symbol; they represent a failure of the imaginary matricide that, by itself, paves the way to thought. On the other hand, the creation of thought, and then the exercise of the sovereign freedom that has the potential to give birth to a work of genius, reflects a successful matricidal fantasy.[119]

Crime represents for Klein, therefore, an acting out of what should have remained only in the realm of phantasy, that is to say internalized. It also represents the antithesis of creative activity and thought— one might say the antithesis of what constitutes literature itself. And yet, we must confront the paradox that literature is also *founded upon* a crime, albeit an imaginary one: the symbolic matricide that allows for symbolization and artistic production. Maupassant's texts, as if in an unconscious attempt to acknowledge and absolve this originary slaying, stage crime in the realm of phantasy, where determinations of guilt and innocence can be continuously displaced and delayed, allowing the author to get away with murder.

In order to see how this works in “La Main d'écorché,” we must return to one of the most fascinating aspects of the text that I have neglected to examine until now.

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result, the loved injured object may very swiftly change into a persecutor, and the urge to repair or revive the loved object may turn into the need to pacify and propitiate a persecutor.” (Klein, “Anxiety and Guilt” 37).

119 Kristeva, Julia, *Melanie Klein* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001) 134.

It seems obvious that the text is marked by what we might call a repetition compulsion, producing an uncanny sense of *déjà vu.* The inherent repetition in this hand is alluded to by one of Pierre's friends who, upon learning of its murderous history, informs him, "elle a peut-être pris de mauvaises habitudes cette main, car tu sais le proverbe: "Qui a tué tuera."[120] However, the repetition appears not merely in the talisman's murderous tendencies, but also Pierre's double experience of strangulation. Let us recall that seven months after Pierre's fall into madness, the narrator is called to his side where he discovers his friend in agony, apparently being strangled by an invisible hand. Whereas in the first attack, the scene of strangulation itself is absent (we hear about it second-hand), in the second attack, it is the agent of this strangulation that remains unknown. In both scenes, there is a void in the text that resists interpretation, making it impossible to say who or what causes Pierre's death. And of course, this phantom limb makes a final reappearance in the funeral scene. What are readers to think of a hand that refuses to remain buried, but instead exhumes itself again and again?

While the idea of a repetition compulsion is perhaps most frequently associated with Sigmund Freud's 1920 work, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* Melanie Klein also acknowledges the existence and importance of the repetition compulsion. For her, it is clearly linked to anxiety in the earliest phases of infantile life. She writes in "The Origins of Transference," "I suggested above that one of the factors which bring about the repetition compulsion is the pressure exerted by the earliest anxiety situation. When persecutory and depressive anxiety and guilt diminish, there is less urge to repeat fundamental experiences over and over again, and therefore early patterns and modes of feelings are maintained with less tenacity."[121] Furthermore, at

[120] Maupassant, "La Main d'écorché" 4.
[121] Klein, Melanie, "The Origins of Transference" *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946-1963*

various points in her work Klein also connects the repetition compulsion with a desire for punishment stemming from overwhelming feelings of anxiety and/or guilt. In "Infantile Anxiety Situations," Klein writes, "The anxiety enhances the repetition compulsion, and the need for punishment ministers to the compulsion (now grown very strong) to secure for itself actual punishment in order that the anxiety may be allayed by a chastisement less severe than that which the anxiety situation causes him to anticipate."[122] If this criminal hand does in fact represent something like the "bad objects" that persecute the subject and drive him to violence against the maternal body, it also contains a masochistic quality that seeks to revisit this same violence on the ego as punishment for the crime, a quality that is unsurprising when one remembers Klein's assertion that the infant's perceived persecutors are in fact projections of the death drive at work in his own ego.[123] To put it differently, for all that the returning hand manifests in the text as a persecutory object arousing anxiety, there is also a way in which it defends against it, allowing for a phantasied retribution the writer (and reader) can displace and control at will: a punishment by proxy meant to assuage feelings of guilt.

For Maupassant, then, the continued inscription of these severed hands appears to be tied up in a repetitive fantasy of destroying the maternal body, a fantasy for which writing attempts to make reparation. It is as if Pierre's death, as a filial substitute, imagines a fitting punishment for the author's successful matricidal fantasy, allowing Maupassant to displace the guilt that arises from this symbolic killing. However, the severed hand that seemingly accomplishes this retaliatory murder, in its fragmented and fugitive nature, divorces this persecution from the maternal body and

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(New York: The Free Press, 1975) 48-56.

[122] Klein. Melanie, "Infantile Anxiety Situations Reflected in a Work of Art and in the Creative Impulse," *The Selected Melanie Klein.* Ed. Juliet Mitchell (New York: The Free Press,1986) 96.

[123] Klein, "Notes on some Schizoid Mechanisms" 180.

allows Maupassant to retain the idealized image of the mother as a source of creative inheritance.

For, if the maternal in Maupassant initially seems to always fall in the realm of the persecutory, we must remember the other organizing component of the Maupassantian universe that I have already mentioned; the mother is also the giver of a name and a particular inheritance that manifests in Maupassant's work as an identification with the mother. What's more, this inheritance is tied to writing and language. In making such a claim, one could note the obvious biographical anecdote that Laure de Maupassant, due to her friendship with Guy's mentor Gustave Flaubert, considered herself uniquely responsible for her son's talent, marking literature as a maternal gift. However, what is much more interesting is the way that a maternal connection to writing and, reciprocally, a connection to the maternal through writing, play out at the interior of Maupassant's *œuvre.* In order to examine this association, we will briefly leave aside the hand that strangles for the hand that writes.

One can note, as Naomi Schor does in *"*Une Vie or the Name of the Mother," the importance for Maupassant's corpus of maternal letters, discovered and read by her offspring. While these letters frequently reveal the mother's treachery and infidelity (as in the novels *Une Vie* or *Pierre et Jean)*, there is one text in which this cycle is reversed. The protagonist and narrator of *Suicides* (1883), disillusioned with life and looking for "ce que je pourrais faire pour échapper à moi-même," decides to undertake the "travail odieux" of reading through his old correspondence. Reading from the most recent to the oldest letters, he finds himself lost in memories of the past and, like Pierre, simultaneously returning towards a point of origin. He explains, "alors j'ai remonté toute ma vie ainsi qu'on remonte un fleuve."[124] Finally, in turning

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[124] Maupassant, Guy de, "Suicides," *Contes et Nouvelles [de] Maupassant,* Ed. Louis Forestier Vol. 1 (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1974) 179.

to his mother's letters addressed to him, he resuscitates the woman herself: “Oui, j'ai revu soudain toutes les vieilles toilettes de ma mère avec ses physionomies différentes suivants les modes qu'elle portait et les coiffures qu'elle avait successivement adoptées.” Finally, a single letter remains, in his own hand:

> Ma petite Maman Chérie,
>
> J'ai aujourd'hui sept ans, C'est l'âge de raison, j'en profite pour te remercier de m'avoir donné le jour. Ton petit garçon qui t'adore,
>
> Robert.
>
> C'était fini. J'arrivais à la source. et brusquement je me retournai pour envisager le reste de mes jours. Je vis la vieillesse hideuse et solitaire, et les infirmités prochaines et tout fini, fini, fini ! Et personne autour de moi.[125]

This letter, written at “l'âge de raison*,”* portrays the mother as the origin of both life and knowledge. Having reached back to the mother through writing, and having discovered she is not in fact permanently resurrected, but gone, the narrator arms his revolver before giving a final warning “Ne relisez jamais vos vieilles lettres.”[126] Of course, the narrator's text is also a letter— a suicide note. It is this note that comes to take the place of the mother's writing; for, we cannot read her letters, only the written memories they evoke for her son. Schor writes of this text, “We might say, in somewhat schematic terms, that what authorizes the son's text is the pulverization, the dispersion of a maternal *Ur-text*.”[127] However, one could argue that this dispersal is not necessarily the destruction, but rather the appropriation and absorption of the mother's text into the son's. The dead mother cannot answer this letter that is simultaneously the first and the last, so the son writes over it, creating a sort of

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[125] Ibid. 180.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Schor, Naomi, *Breaking the Chain: Women, Theory and French Realist Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985) 69.

palimpsest so that the love note and the suicide note become one and the same, with the mother as the object of both.

The troubling composite text of the letter, which links reading and writing to an idealized (but dead, and perhaps idealized because she is dead) mother, simultaneously emphasizes the lack of boundaries between self and mother, since one can be absorbed into the other. Commenting on the simultaneous strength and amorphousness of maternal identification in Maupassant, Philippe Bonnefis remarks that, "tout en renforçant le lien matrilinéaire, Maupassant entendait situer le rapport à la mère du côté de l'indétermination."[128] He continues, speaking of the Maupassantian subject in terms that directly recall the language of "Suicides," "plus il avance, plus il recule dans l'antériorité, régresse en aval du nom, c'est-à-dire, si l'on rétablit la perspective, en amont du *commencement,* vers *l'origine* dont le patronyme a cessé de le protéger."[129] This image of swimming upstream towards the point of one's origins—the mother, reinforces the fantasy of the mother as the unique source of life to which the child must return. However, to continue the aquatic analogy, once one has completed the journey back to the native waters of one's birth, there is nothing left to do but die.

In order to understand how this fantasy of a journey that is simultaneously a return and a reparation is accomplished at the narrative level by Pierre's death in "La Main d'écorché," we must reconsider my earlier observation of the appropriation through language at work in the text: "et ta main?" "Ma main, tu as du la voir à ma sonnette."[130] The hand that disappears and returns, that evokes feelings of anxiety and persecution, has been stolen and appropriated so that it no longer belongs to the Other, but is instead a part of the self. In an eerie congruity with the narrator of "Suicides,"

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[128] Bonnefis, *Comme Maupassant* 99.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Maupassant, "La Main d'écorché" 4.

or Klein's assertion that the persecuting other is in fact a projection of the ego's own death drive, Pierre, the *orphelin* whose mother is gone and destroyed, ultimately *dies by his own hand*. This symbolic self-punishment shifts our focus from retaliation to reparation. Pierre, the small Norman stone who has detached himself from the motherland, returns to be buried within her womb/tomb.[131] In so doing, he attempts to repair the broken body of this mother earth that was destroyed in the name of creativity and freedom.

This detail marks “La Main d'écorché” as the primary text of the Maupassantian corpus not only in terms of its date of publication, but also in terms of its status as point of origin. Through this sacrifice to the mother, the text lays claim to the creative literary inheritance that will allow her, in later Maupassant texts, to be mutilated, mistreated and killed *ad infinitum*. We should not, however, allow this tale to close on too placid a note. Rather, we should remain suspicious as to the effectiveness of Maupassant's sleight of hand, since eight years after the publication of “La Main d'écorché,” Maupassant will once again allow the persecutory severed hand to reach back from beyond the grave.

1.7- La Main

While “La Main,” published in 1883, contains many similarities to “La Main d'écorché,” the events of the narrative have been transported from Normandy to Corsica. Along with the continued presence of a narrator, this time presenting himself as a *juge d'instruction* named M. Bermutier, the protagonist has become an eccentric

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[131] Sabine Madeleine Hillen similarly notes this connection to the *terre-mère*. She writes, “La machine de la symétrie fonctionne pour aboutir, sinon à l'équilibre originel, du moins à un équilibre nouveau...Le personnage de Maupassant sera englouti par une terre-mère hostile qui renferme aussi les aventures passées.” (“La Main Coupée: ou la forme d'un récit bref chez Nerval, Maupassant et Schwob,” *Revue Romaine.*29:1 (1994) 79).

Englishman, Sir John Rowell.[132] Sir John also possesses a flayed hand that he shows to the narrator, but this is a hand he claims to have hunted himself. The hand is described as "une main noire desséchée, avec les ongles jaunes, les muscles à nu et des traces de sang ancien, de sang pareil à une crasse, sur les os coupés net, comme d'un coup de hache, vers le milieu de l'avant bras."[133] Monsieur Bermutier observes that the hand is secured to the wall by a heavy chain, and that three loaded revolvers are trained on it. A year later, Sir John is found murdered, and once again the ghastly hand is missing. His servant reports that his master's behavior had been erratic and paranoid for several months. He often shut himself in his room and burned letters, and he was prone to fits of anger against the chained hand. Three months after the Englishman's demise, the narrator has a dream in which he sees the frightful hand crawling like a spider up the walls of his room. The next morning, the missing hand is brought to him from where it had been found on Sir John's tombstone. He had been buried in Corsica, as they could find no trace of his family in England.

In "La Main," the criminal status of the hand's original owner is less explicit than in "La Main d'écorché." We know only that he was a "colosse" and Sir John's "meilleur ennemi." Nonetheless, the entire narrative is inscribed within a lexicon of crime and punishment. The narrator, M. Bermutier, is a *juge d'instruction* from Ajaccio who, when the story begins, is discussing with the assembled company the "affaire mystérieuse de Saint-Cloud," an "inexplicable crime" that causes him to recall the similarly mysterious "affaire" of Sir John Rowell, itself inscribed within the criminal framework of the Corsican *vendetta*. M. Bermutier explains:

Ce que j'avais surtout à poursuivre là-bas, c'étaient les affaires de vendetta. Il y

[132] Sima Godfrey has commented on the obvious resonances with George Powell, the English aristocrat and friend of Swinburne's from "L'anglais d'Étretat." (Godfrey 78).

[133] Maupassant, Guy de, "La Main," *Contes et Nouvelles [de] Maupassant,* V.1 Ed. Louis Forestier (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1974) 1119.

> en a de superbes, de dramatiques au possible, de féroces, d'héroïques. Nous retrouvons là les plus beaux sujets de vengeance qu'on puisse rêver, les haines séculaires, apaisées un moment, jamais éteintes, les ruses abominables, les assassinats devenant des massacres et presque des actions glorieuses. Depuis deux ans, je n'entendais parler que du prix du sang, que de ce terrible préjugé corse qui force à venger toute injure sur la personne qui l'a faite, sur ses descendants et ses proches." [134]

Mary L. Poteau-Tralie, in *Voices of Authority: The Criminal Obsession in Guy de Maupassant's Short Works*, has shown how Maupassantian frame stories like "La Main" are frequently inscribed within a juridical context that transforms the hearers of the story, including the reader, into judge and jury for the crime being narrated.[135] The evocation of the vendetta and the narration of the story by a judge in "La Main" are certainly consistent with this assertion. In depicting a form of violence that is perpetuated across multiple generations, the *vendetta* implies that crime is indeed a family affaire, perpetuated for and occasionally against those related by blood.[136] Yet, as with Lacenaire's attack on society, the vendetta also evokes an effort to restore balance and justice through crime— a return of the talion code of "an eye for an eye." M. Bermutier remarks of the severed hand in this tale, "Elle faisait penser naturellement à quelque vengeance de sauvage."[137] Like Lacenaire's professed vengeance against society 50 years prior, the plot of "La Main" seemingly hinges on

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[134] Maupassant, "La Main" 1117.

[135] Poteau-Tralie, Mary. L, *Voices of Authority: The Criminal Obsession in Guy de Maupassant's Short Works* (New York: P. Lang, 1994) 1-2. We might also note that this structure of the frame story bears many similarities to the emerging nineteenth-century genre of the detective or crime novel. Rosemary Peters argues that this genre "demonstrates the mid-nineteenth century's vexed relationship to property, history, and narrative itself," and that it presents "a narrative that works backwards and defies the standard motion of time," something that might also be said of the Maupassantian frame story. (*Stealing Things: Theft and the Author in Nineteenth-Century France,* (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2013) 143.

[136] In the later category, one could evoke Prosper Mérimée's short story "Mateo Falcone", in which the eponymous character kills his own son in order to maintain the Corsican code of justice.

[137] Maupassant, "La Main" 1119.

dispensing justice for a crime that has already been committed.

Sima Godfrey argues that by adopting the trope of the severed hand from earlier writers such as Nerval and Swinburne, and incorporating it into a narrative where a father substitute (Sir John Rowell) dies at the mercy of this appropriated figure, Maupassant in fact accomplishes a form of literary patricide.[138] Godfrey's claim is persuasive, given the well-documented source material for Maupassant's fascination with the device, and her argument is strengthened when one considers that until the 1830's in France, severing a convict's hand from his body was part of the punishment for a specific offense— parricide.[139] Indeed, the hand of "La Main d'écorché" is explicitly presented as "celle d'un parricide."[140] Parricide was certainly a theme familiar to Maupassant. In 1882 he published "Un Parricide," in which the protagonist, having killed his father and mother for abandoning him as an infant, considers his parents guilty of a greater crime than his own.[141]

However, we have seen in "La Main d'écorché" that the prevailing fantasy of the Maupassantian corpus, and particularly of his most macabre *contes,* is not one of patricide but of matricide—a crime initially sanctioned by the mother's perceived persecution of her offspring, but a crime which nonetheless gives rise to immense feelings of guilt. Still, Antonia Fonyi is careful to explain that this maternal violence is part of a complete circuit— it is not action, but reaction. The archaic mother must punish the child in her womb for the way in which it has attempted to escape and to destroy *her.* This destruction frequently manifests in the *œuvre* through images of consumption, voraciousness and oral sadism. She writes, "C'est le désir de dévorer la

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[138] Godfrey 82.

[139] "Les parricides-- et les régicides qu'on leur assimilait-- étaient conduits à l'échafaud sous un voile noir; là, jusqu'en 1832, on leur tranchait la main" (Foucault, *Surveiller et Punir* 20).

[140] Maupassant, "La Main d'écorché" 3.

[141] "J'aurais été un honnête homme, mon président, si mes parents n'avaient pas commis le crime de m'abandonner. Ce crime, c'est contre moi qu'ils l'ont commis. Je fus la victime, eux furent les coupables." (Maupassant, "un parricide" 555).

mère qui provoque la peur d'être dévoré par elle."[142]

Correspondingly, we can note that the denouement of "La Main" is marked by incorporation imagery that is much more literal and consumption-driven than that of "La Main d'écorché." When Sir John's body is found, the cadaver holds something in its mouth. The narrator explains, "je me baissai vers le mort, et je trouvai dans sa bouche crispée un des doigts de cette main disparue, coupé ou plutôt scié par les dents juste à la deuxième phalange."[143] This sort of oral sadism— an attempt to destroy the persecuting object through biting, chewing and eating— is in this case the further fragmentation of an already fragmented object. In Kleinian psychoanalysis, such phantasies of oral aggression are characteristic of the paranoid-schizoid position and the infant's earliest relations to its objects. The infant, being pre-genital and orally fixated, conceives of libidinal aggression and desire as biting and devouring, and believes that he can defend himself against persecutory "bad objects" by reducing them to bits and taking them into the ego.[144] Let us recall that the prototype for these "bad objects" is the "bad breast" and thus the fragmented maternal body.

These Kleinian concepts are worth bearing in mind as we consider the other narrative events of "La Main," since the reader is immediately struck by the much stronger impulse towards violence in this later Maupassantian hand-text. Sir John Rowell's graphic description of his treatment of the hand's original owner can only be described as sadistic. He says of this rival, in his heavily accented French, "C'été ma meilleur ennemi. Il vené d'Amérique. Il avé été fendu avec le sabre et arraché la peau avec une caillou coupante, et séché dans le soleil pendant huit jours. Aoh, très bonne

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142 Fonyi, *Maupassant 1993* 117.

143 Maupassant, "La Main" 1121.

144 "The child himself desires to destroy the libidinal object by biting, devouring and cutting it, which leads to anxiety, since awakening of the Oedipus tendencies is followed by introjection of the object, which then becomes one from which punishment is to be expected."(Klein, Melanie, "Early Stages in the Oedipus Conflict," *The Selected Melanie Klein.* Ed. Juliet Mitchell (New York: The Free Press,1986) 71).

pour moi, cette."[145] The fact that Sir John is portrayed as an avid hunter, and that the hand is considered a valuable trophy from the most dangerous and difficult prey of all (man) only serves to highlight the character's inherent aggression.[146] The Englishman's valet reports having heard his employer strike the hand with a riding crop, and one should of course not forget the three revolvers he keeps trained on his macabre prize. These facts certainly reveal destructive and violent tendencies but, more importantly, portrays a violence born of fear and persecution. Unlike Pierre of "La Main d'écorché," who demonstrates no anxiety prior to his attack, Sir John knows that his crimes of violence and appropriation will not go unpunished. There is a distinct fear of retaliation from the object, and this anxiety seems well founded, since contact with it proves deadly.

And yet, both Sir John's sadistic violence and anxiety are directed against an ostensibly masculine object— the severed hand of a "*colosse.*" Can we really claim for this severed hand a convincing relation to the maternal body? We could note that Rowell's broken French, rife with gender errors throughout the text, helps to confuse the gender of both the hand and its owner, feminizing it by referring to his victim as "*ma* meilleur ennemi."[147] Should we rather, as in "La Main d'écorché," claim a relationship to the Englishman's own body? Is his death also a suicide? It is true that the attack comes entirely from within Sir John's estate (M. Bermutier notes "Aucune porte n'avait été forcée, aucune fenêtre, aucun meuble. Les deux chiens de garde ne s'étaient pas réveillés"),[148] the interiority of the assault leading us to once again recall

[145] Maupassant, "La Main" 1119.

[146] Antonia Fonyi notes of the frequent allusions to hunting in Maupassant's writing, and the inherent pleasure they illicit, is in fact two-fold: the pleasure to feed oneself rather than relying on the frustrating breast, and the pleasure of proving oneself as cruel and strong as "mother nature." (*Maupassant 1993* 115).

[147] We may note a similarly slippery construction of gendered language in "La Main d'écorché", when Pierre, during his second attack, calls out "Prends-*la*! Prends-*la*! *Il* m'étrangle, au secours, au secours!" ("La Main d'écorché, 7, Emphasis mine).

[148] Maupassant, "La Main" 1121.

the connection Pierre Bayard and others establish between the Maupassantian subject and his dwelling. Still, in contrast with "La Main d'écorché," I would argue that this manifestation of the severed hand, while more incorporated, is perhaps less appropriated than the hand we have previously encountered. Rather than transforming his trophy into something else, as Pierre does in the earlier text with his *bouton de sonnette*, Sir John is instead transformed *by* the hand he possesses.

We may remark that the description of Sir John's corpse recalls in striking ways the appearance of the hand itself. It is almost as if the missing hand has infected him— as if the morsel of flesh he attempted to ingest caused him to take on certain properties of the horrific appendage. The narrator observes, "Sa figure noire et gonflée, effrayante, semblait exprimer une épouvante abominable; il tenait entre ses dents serrées quelque chose; et le cou, percé de cinq trous qu'on aurait dits faits avec des pointes de fer, était couvert de sang."[149] Like the macabre hand, Sir John's face is now blackened, frightening, and stained with blood. His incorporation of the persecuting object results in the extreme transformation, or one might even argue the transubstantiation, of the Englishman's cadaver. The scene, with its literal consumption of flesh, is staged as a diabolical and de-metaphorized Eucharist. For, rather than being saved and forgiven through the ingestion of the body of Christ, Sir John is damned by this particular form of incorporation.

This infection through introjection, that is to say, the poisonous qualities of the severed hand, would seem to find a psychoanalytic counterpart in Melanie Klein's observations on paranoid-schizoid defense mechanisms. According to Klein, one of the early ego's fundamental persecutory anxieties is a fear of being contaminated or poisoned by the objects it has introjected. In "The Psychogenesis of Manic-

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[149] Ibid. 1120.

Depressive States" she writes, "Paranoid anxiety lest the objects sadistically destroyed should themselves be a source of poison and danger inside the subject's body causes him, in spite of the vehemence of his oral sadistic onslaughts, at the same time to be profoundly mistrustful of them while yet incorporating them."[150] In Maupassant's narrative, as in Klein's theory, the persecutory objects continue to be a source of danger despite the subject's best efforts to control and defend against them by incorporation into the self. What's more, this persecution appears to be of a cyclic nature, marked by uncanny repetitions and strange temporal delays.

The evocation of the Corsican vendetta in "La Main," a text that is itself a revisiting of Maupassant's primary text, inscribes the narrative in a still more explicit frame of haunting and return, one that is reinforced at the end of the tale when M. Bermutier recounts his terrifying dream following Sir John Rowell's demise:

> Or, une nuit, trois mois après le crime, j'eus un affreux cauchemar. Il me sembla que je voyais la main, l'horrible main, courir comme un scorpion ou comme une araignée le long de mes rideaux et de mes murs. Trois fois, je me réveillai, trois fois je me rendormis, trois fois je revis le hideux débris galoper autour de ma chambre en remuant les doigts comme des pattes.[151]

As in "La Main d'écorché," the criminal hand of this narrative is marked by a repetition compulsion and a shared psychic experience. We might ask ourselves about the strange temporal delay that makes this dream all the more uncanny, since it occurs three months after Sir John's death. Does the dream represent a haunting brought forth from the past, an experience in the present, or a potential event of the future?

Juliet Mitchell, in her introduction to *The Selected Melanie Klein*, makes a major distinction between the Freudian and Kleinian conceptions of time. She

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[150] Klein, "The Psycho-genesis of Manic Depressive States," 118.
[151] Maupassant, "La Main" 1121.

explains that while Freud is essentially concerned with "pastness," for Klein the ego exists in a perpetual present. She writes, "Klein's contribution is to chart an area where present and past are one and time is spatial, not historical."[152] This more spatial conception of time might be better suited for understanding an *œuvre* structured on the idea of unrelenting persecution. Situated spatially, these ghostly secondary attacks may be understood not as an *après-coup,* but simply as the violent conclusion of a single attack that has never stopped, and against which the protagonist must continually defend.

This notion of a continuing attack seems credible when one notes that "La Main" seems to deny and subvert the logic of closure and reparation that "La Main d'écorché" attempted to establish. Sima Godfrey makes this point very clearly when she draws our attention to the pun contained in the final passages of "La Main," when the magistrate explains that the missing hand had later been found on Sir John Rowell's tomb, identifiable as such due to the fact that "l'index manquait." Godfrey suggests that in this case the word *index* signifies not merely a finger on the hand, but also the index or key that would allow the reader to definitively interpret the story.[153] With the help of Melanie Klein, we might link this lack of resolution to the previously discussed sadistic overtones that dominate this later hand-text.

As I have noted, Klein, for whom time is spatial rather than linear, does not view attempts at reparation as the permanent indicator of psychic maturity. Rather, the earlier sadistic impulses of the paranoid-schizoid position may resurface at any point, interfering with efforts to close the interpretive circle. It would therefore seem likely that this second hand-text indicates Maupassant's failure to effectively bury the matricidal anxiety and guilt that mark his work at the Norman graveside. This

[152] Mitchell, Juliet, "Introduction," *The Selected Melanie Klein,* Ed. Juliet Mitchell (New York: The Free Press, 1986) 28.
[153] Godfrey 84.

subsequent text tries to resolve the matter differently by highlighting the protagonist's need to control and dominate the criminal hand. Klein writes in “Mourning and Manic-Depressive States”:

> The desire to control the object, the sadistic gratification of overcoming and humiliating it, of getting the better of it, the *triumph* over it, may enter so strongly into the act of reparation (carried out by thoughts, activities or sublimations) that the benign circle started by this act becomes broken. The objects which were to be restored change again into persecutors, and in turn paranoid fears are revived.”[154]

If Pierre was the filial substitute who hoped to make reparation to the mother for her symbolic murder, Sir John is an all-together different sort of son. As we have seen, his life as a hunter marks a desire for independence and domination. He asserts his omnipotence and power over the hand's original owner, responding to M. Bermutier's observation that “cet homme devait être très fort” with the proclamation, “Aoh yes; mais je été plus fort que lui.”[155] This sadistic need to triumph over the Other negates the potential for any form of love or reparation and enhances the repetition compulsion. Klein concludes, “The reparation which was in progress is thus disturbed or even nullified-- according to the extent to which these mechanisms are activated. As a result of the failure of the act of reparation, the ego has to resort again and again to obsessional and manic defences.”[156]

It is often suggested that “La Main” is merely a continuation of “La Main d'écorché” — a more polished and mature form of Maupassant's earliest text that shows his growth as a writer. However, a closer reading has shown us that the two texts are, in fact, meant to go hand in hand. In fact, the later text is not a continuation,

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[154] Klein, “Mourning and Manic-Depressive States” 153.
[155] Maupassant, “La Main” 1119-1120.
[156] Klein, “Mourning and Manic-Depressive States” 153.

but rather, as the truncated title would suggest, an amputation. While the two *récits* share certain narrative details, they deal with the guilt of a symbolic matricide in very different ways. The hand that returns both is and is not the same. The first is marked by an attempt at return and reparation. The second, having excised the punitive, self-flagellating "écorché" quality of the hand, is more strongly characterized by flight and persecution.

We might compare these two opposing yet complimentary texts to the opposing yet complementary forms of anxiety posited by Melanie Klein—persecutory and depressive. Through the surrogate figures of Sir John and Pierre, Maupassant gives us two sides of the filial coin— the son who fears destruction, and the son who realizes he is himself the destroyer. The ghastly criminal hand in these two texts, divorced as it is from any body, allows for this kind of fluid anxiety, as this talisman can be shifted at will to relate to the self or the Other. However, we might ask what happens to these mutable dynamics of crime and punishment when the severed hand becomes more clearly identified with a particular body. In order to answer this question, we must turn to a very different kind of Maupassantian hand-text.

1.8- En Mer

The *conte* "En Mer," published the same year as "La Main" but predating it by several months, presents a very different pair of brothers from "La Main d'écorché." In contrast with the two fantastic narratives we have already explored, "En Mer" belongs to the realm of Maupassant's realist fiction. However, we will see that the text still contains many of the same anxieties about guilt, punishment and loss. The story opens with the unknown narrator wondering if a certain captain Javel who, according to the latest newspaper, has perhaps just perished along with his crew in a shipwreck,

is also "Le frère du manchot." The narrator then begins another story, set some years earlier than the *fait divers,* with the two brothers, Javel aîné, the captain, and his younger brother, Javel cadet, working side by side on the same fishing ship. When the vessel is caught in a storm, the younger brother's arm becomes painfully trapped between the fishing trawl and the boat, and only the severing of the expensive net can save the appendage. Yet, the text tells us, the older brother refuses to give the order to free his brother because the trawl "valait de l'argent."[157] After various attempts to create slack in the line by maneuvering the boat, Javel cadet's arm is eventually freed, but too late. Traces of gangrene begin to appear on the mangled flesh, and the young man is forced to amputate his own arm in order to save his life.

Javel cadet's arm, unlike the two fantastic hands of "La Main" and "La Main d'écorché," begins the *récit* firmly attached to a particular body. It is also the only text in which the reader is presented with the moment of the hand's loss and amputation:

> "Donne-moi ton couteau," dit-il à son frère. Le frère tendit son couteau.
> --"Tiens-moi le bras en l'air, tout drait, tire dessus."
> On fit ce qu'il demandait; Alors il se mit à couper lui-même. Il coupait doucement, avec réflexion, tranchant les derniers tendons avec cette lame aiguë, comme un fil de rasoir; et bientôt il n'eut plus qu'un moignon. Il poussa un profond soupir et déclara: "Fallait ça. J'étais foutu."[158]

The dismembering in this case is not performed by a punishing Other, but rather by the protagonist himself, upon his own body. It appears, at least initially, to be one of the most direct inscriptions of guilt in the Maupassantian corpus— a limb sacrificed to save the whole.[159] And yet, Javel cadet would himself appear to be a sacrificial

[157] Maupassant, Guy de, "En Mer," *Contes et nouvelles [de] Maupassant,* Ed. Louis Forestier Vol. 1 (Paris: Editions Gallimard. 1974) 741.
[158] Maupassant, "En Mer" 743.
[159] I will cite again the possible allusion to Mark 9:43: "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is

figure— one who suffers a loss so that his brother will not have to.

"En Mer" thus encapsulates the often-opposing functions of guilt and crime in Maupassant's work. The punishment may fit the crime, but not necessarily the criminal. But what exactly is the crime in this particular scenario? Does the tale once again ascribe to the logic of violence against the maternal body? Is the amputation of Javel cadet's hand a punishment for matricide? Were we to consider the homophonic resonances of the title alone *(En Mer/ En Mère)*, it might seem an easy case to make. To link the ocean to the maternal in Maupassant's work is certainly nothing new. Mary Donaldson-Evans remarks of the ocean's importance for Maupassant's fiction, "in its essence the ocean is regarded as a source of consolation, a friend, a mother, a symbol of life itself."[160] In this particular narrative, the fishing boat's trawl, lowered into the sea by means of a pulley system, is portrayed as an element of destruction that disturbs the peaceful ocean floor: "Et le bateau, dérivant sous le vent et le courant, tire avec lui cet appareil qui ravage et dévaste le sol de la mer."[161] Such violence seems like a direct assault against this natural body that Donaldson-Evans equates with maternal comfort and life. However, since the net is deemed by the older brother to be *non-coupable* for such destruction, it is his younger brother that must become *coupable* in its place.

The text inscribes this false equivalence between subject and object, person and thing, from the initial moment of the arm's entrapment in the fishing trawl: "L'homme crispé par la douleur appela. Tous accoururent. Son frère quitta la barre. Ils se jetèrent sur la corde, s'efforçant de dégager le membre qu'elle broyait. Ce fut en

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better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. "

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

[161] Maupassant, "En Mer" 740.

vain. "Faut couper", dit un matelot, et il tira de sa poche un large couteau."[162] In the two words of dialogue "faut couper," the taciturn sailor does not specify for the reader *what* it is that must be cut— the rope or the arm. There is a moment of hesitation where the text seems to invite either interpretation, before the sentence concludes, "qui pouvait, en deux coups, sauver le bras de Javel cadet."[163] The means of redemption is there, readily available to ensure that Javel cadet remains whole and unmarked, but ultimately the younger brother is punished. However, to accept this false equivalence of the trawl and the arm is to perhaps ignore the important affect for which the net is a mere instrument.

The *chalut,* we are told, is unable to be cut because "il appartenait à Javel aîné, qui tenait à son avoir."[164] This "avoir" is not only the expensive net, but the bounty it reaps from the sea— the "bêtes endormies dans les roches, les poissons plats collés au sable, les crabes lourds aux pattes crochues, les homards aux moustaches pointues."[165] The description of this Neptunian harvest, with which Javel aîné plans to fill both his stomach and purse, is yet another example of the nutritional metaphor of consumption that we have seen dominate elsewhere in Maupassant's work.[166] Yet, the association of food with money deepens the significance of this image. Javel aîné does not take merely what he needs to survive from the ocean. Rather, he "devastates" the sea in order to enrich himself. The *chalut* is simply a tool by which the older Javel satisfies his greed.

For Melanie Klein as well, greed bears an important relationship to gluttony and excess. She writes in "Envy and Gratitude," establishing a psychic link between

[162] Ibid. 740-741.
[163] Ibid. 741
[164] Ibid.
[165] Ibid. 740.
[166] Antonia Fonyi and Mary Donaldson-Evans both treat this nutritional metaphor at length in their respective work on Maupassant.

greed and destruction, "Greed is an impetuous and insatiable craving, exceeding what the subject needs and what the object is able and willing to give. At the unconscious level, greed aims primarily at completely scooping out, sucking dry, and devouring the breast: that is to say, its aim is destructive introjection."[167] Ultimately, it is for his older brother's greed that Javel cadet suffers the loss of his arm. Thus, It is with the blade of his older brother's knife, a knife the elder willingly lends, that Javel cadet accomplishes his auto-mutilation.

It would of course be tempting to read in this moment a simple tale of Oedipal castration anxiety, with Javel aîné fulfilling the role of the castrating, punishing father. Nonetheless, in contrast with a classic oedipal narrative of a son who is punished by the father for desiring to possess the mother, Javel cadet is, in his self-amputation, paying the price of his brother's desire rather that his own.[168] Furthermore, this desire is not genital as in a Freudian Oedipus complex, but rather manual. Javel aîné is the brother who, in "ten[ant] à son avoir," holds all the cards. Javel cadet, with his arm trapped between the boat and the net, can hold on to nothing. Rather, he allows himself to be sacrificed, taking on the full weight of what should have been his brother's loss. Ultimately, the cutting of the arm, rather than the trawl, cuts all ties of fraternity between these two brothers. In Javel aîné and cadet, as with Pierre and Sir John, Maupassant appears to provide us with two contrasting sons who embody the *œuvre's* ambivalent relationship to maternity— one sadistic and one submissive. Although, if we continue to examine Javel cadet's role in the story post-amputation, we will see that he is not quite as submissive as he first appears.

The younger brother reveals himself as more than conscious of the injustice of

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[167] Klein, "Envy and Gratitude" 181.

[168] Antonia Fonyi explains the Oedipal dynamics in this count as follows "Frère aîné, frère cadet: père, fils; chalut, corde: mère. Le triangle est au complet. Mais les adversaires ne rivalisent pas pour la possession de la mère. L'un d'eux seulement, le père, veut la posséder, tandis que l'autre, l'enfant, veut se séparer d'elle, quitte à la sacrifier pour se libérer de son piège." (*Maupassant 1993* 144).

his loss in the denouement of the text, explaining in a low voice to any that will listen, "Si le frère avait voulu couper le chalut, j'aurais encore mon bras, pour sûr. Mais il était regardant à son bien."[169] In a way, Javel cadet also looks after "son bien," since rather than discard his useless amputated arm, he preserves it in salt before burying it at a proper funeral.[170] When his brother instructs him to "jeter ça à la mer," he replies, "Ah! Mais non, ah! Mais non, J'veux point. C'est à moi, pas vrai, pisque c'est mon bras."[171] While Javel cadet may not have been able to grasp anything at the moment of his mutilation, being completely at the mercy of his older brother's decision, he now refuses to be dispossessed, not of his property, but of his very self. Fonyi argues that in "En Mer," the reader encounters merely the appearance of castration anxiety, when what is actually at stake is an effort to avoid annihilation— the breaking apart of the self within the confines of the maternal body.[172] The arm that should have been the pound of flesh sacrificed to the sea for all that has been taken out of her is instead withheld and claimed as the protagonist's own. Two brothers then— two sons— on opposite sides of a divide. One holds onto his "bien," while the other holds onto his being.

Pierre Bayard, also arguing against the efficacy of the Oedipus complex in Maupassant's work, contends that the Maupassantian *œuvre* reposes on a *logique de l'être* rather than a *logique de l'avoir,* so that rather than fearing to lose what one has (castration anxiety), one fears to lose what one *is.* He writes "Dans la logique de l'être, ce qui domine est la crainte de se perdre soi-même. L'angoisse qui domine est celle de la dissociation, du morcellement, de la dépersonnalisation: bref, de l'éclatement de ces

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[169] Maupassant, "En Mer" 744.

[170] I will briefly note that, as in "La Main d'écorché," and "La Main," the severed hand is intimately associated with the grave.

[171] Maupassant, "En Mer" 743.

[172] Fonyi, *Maupassant 1993* 144.

frontières qui donnent une unité fragile à notre "moi."[173] Could we read in Javel cadet's attempt to defend against the fragmentation and dissociation Bayard describes a refusal of the good, submissive son to pay the debt for his literary fortune? In claiming the arm as a part of the self, and refusing to give it to "la mèr(e)" does Maupassant attempt to remove it from circulation as a gift from the mother and claim it as a state of being rather than a "bien?" If so, the gesture is futile. The arm, buried in a small coffin like a *mort-né,* has become useless and incapable of any production.

1.9- Conclusions

Ultimately, the macabre criminal hands that are severed, lost and buried only to return again and again from Lacenaire through Maupassant share much more than their obvious examples of intertextuality. They also share an overriding concern with displacement, deferral and otherness manifested through the figure of the severed hand. Lacenaire's *Mémoires* and criminal trial introduced into the 19th century consciousness the image of a hand that could both create and destroy— a hand that, with these conflicting occupations, was seemingly other to itself. Lacenaire also embodied otherness in his transgression of established social boundaries, managing to be simultaneously dandy and thief, educated *bourgeois* and petty criminal. Gautier's poem and Nerval's *conte macaronique,* in establishing the model of a criminal hand acting independently from its owner, consequently allowed Maupassant to appropriate the trope as a way of distancing crime from punishment and anxiety from guilt in his literary work.

The independent life of the morbid hands in these texts by authors of the 19th and 20th century share a characterization by bestial metaphors that re-inscribe their

[173] Bayard 62.

lack of humanity and otherness. Spider, crab, elephant, bird and dog are just a few of the animal associations that one finds ascribed to the severed hand in the writings of Maupassant and Nerval. This animalistic personification has the double effect of designating the hands as beyond the control of the narrative's protagonist while simultaneously implying (in most cases) that they are under the control of someone else— the hands' true "master." Anne Mounic observes that in the case of "La Main d'écorché," when Pierre drinks to the "prochaine visite" of the hands "maître," he reduces it to a state of servitude, transforming it into "un simple animal domestique,"[174] and notes that a similar relationship is implied in Nerval's tale between Gonin and the hand he purchased from Eustache, which, immediately following the tailor's hanging, "s'agita joyeusement, comme la queue d'un chien qui revoit son maître."[175] In ascribing the hands occult movements to the powers of a (frequently unknown) other, these texts are able to disavowal any culpability for the crimes that they commit.

These anxiety-producing crimes for Maupassant are associated with violence against the maternal body, and are governed by a fantasy of matricide. This aggression is an elicited response to the overwhelming fear of being persecuted to the point of annihilation for the crimes one has committed against the mother. However, because the mother is also the unique bestower of a maternal inheritance that includes the gifts of language and writing, fantasies of her death give rise to overwhelming anxiety and feelings of guilt. In an effort to master this traumatic affect, Maupassant will continually re-inscribe these hands in his *œuvre.* In Maupassant's hand-texts, it appears that filial substitutes are punished for the author's successful matricidal fantasy, dying in his place and allowing Maupassant to displace the guilt that arises

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174 Mounic, Anne, "Le phénomène et la chose en soi: que dit la main de gloire, d'écorché, embaumée? Nerval, Maupassant et Verlaine," *Temporel* (May, 2008).

175 Nerval, "La Main Enchantée," 40.

from this symbolic killing. However, the persecutory severed hands that seemingly accomplish these retaliatory murders, in their fragmented and fugitive nature, also make it impossible to name a *coupable* for these deaths. This attempt to divorce persecution from the maternal body, while simultaneously distancing it from the self, allows Maupassant to retain the idealized image of the mother as a source of creative inheritance.

This theme of inheritance is certainly not absent from the other severed hand narratives we have already encountered. As we have seen, Lacenaire inherits both a personal and political legacy, each one centered on the image of the guillotine. This legacy, which influenced both his crimes and his poetry, is what enabled him provide a literary testament for later authors such as Gautier in the form of his *Mémoires.* Maupassant, in turn, inherits his severed hand from these earlier writers. One is led to think of the medieval legal classification of *mortmain,* which Katherine Rowe treats eloquently in *Dead Hands.* Rowe explains that while the medieval usage referred to the Church's right to tenant land, by the 19th century the term's meaning had shifted slightly. She writes, "the phrase invoked any attempt by a testator to posthumously control the uses of the property he or she bequeaths."[176] Rowe also notes that *mortmain* in Romantic literature frequently signifies "the oppressive grasp of past relationships, events and experience on the present— figured in the testamentary qualities of writing and material presence."[177] In short, *mortmain* allows, through writing, for an inheritance with strings attached, permitting the bequeather to reach back from beyond the grave. In the next chapter, we will see that the severed criminal hand does indeed extend ghostly fingers forward into the next century, resurfacing in the work of *poète de la main gauche* Blaise Cendrars.

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[176] Rowe 116.
[177] Ibid.

Chapter 2: Blaise Cendrars: The Left Hand and the Hand Left Behind

L'heure est grave.

Tout homme digne de ce nom doit aujourd'hui agir, doit se défendre, de rester inactif au milieu de la plus formidable conflagration que l'histoire ait jamais pu enregistrer.

Toute hésitation serait un crime.

Point de paroles, des actes.

Des étrangers amis de la France, qui pendant leur séjour en France, ont appris à l'aimer et à la chérir comme une seconde patrie, sentent, le besoin impérieux de lui offrir leurs bras.

Intellectuels, étudiants, ouvriers, hommes valides de toutes sortes - nés ailleurs, domiciliés ici - nous qui avons trouvé en France la nourriture de notre esprit ou la nourriture matérielle, groupons-nous en un faisceau solide de volontés mises au service de la plus grande France. »

-Blaise Cendrars

Appel aux étrangers vivant en France, 1914[178]

It would be nearly impossible to speak of the trope of the severed hand without invoking the 20th century prose of Swiss author Blaise Cendrars, the great *manchot* of French literature. After enlisting voluntarily in the French Foreign Legion under his given name of Frédéric-Louis Sauser in September 1914, Cendrars would lose his right arm one year later on September 29th 1915, during the Second Battle of Champagne.[179] This tragic loss would retrospectively create a horrific irony in Cendrars' offer, quoted above in the *Appel aux étrangers vivant en France* that he published with Ricciotto Canudo, to "offrir [son] bras" in defense of his adopted country. The amputation would force Cendrars, who was right handed, to relearn how to write, and the incident would profoundly mark the poet's *œuvre*, gradually transforming him from an author of verse to one of prose— from *poète* to *raconteur*. And yet, among all of the embroidered legends and *Histoires Vraies,* the one tale

[178] Canudo, Riccoitto and Blaise Cendrars, "Appel aux étrangers vivant en France," *Le Figaro* (2 Aug. 1914) 2 *BNF Gallica,* Web.

[179] Leroy, *La Main de Cendrars* 21.

Cendrars seemed unable to recount is that of his own mutilation.

Cendrars critic Claude Leroy notes that despite the promise of published titles such as *La Main Coupée* and *J'ai Saigné,* and archival evidence for planned manuscripts bearing the titles *Touché!* and *Epilogue: Pour la première fois dans la rue avec une seule main,* Cendrars is never able to produce a text that inscribes the fatal moment of amputation.[180] Instead, the story of the author's wound is alluded to through a complex series of metaphors, temporal displacements and projections, and the battlefield injury consequently comes to form the central and organizing void of Cendrars' post-war writing. My understanding of Cendrars' left-handed work naturally owes a great debt to Leroy's masterful and comprehensive *thèse de doctorat d'état, La Main de Cendrars,* as well as the recently published Pléiade edition under his direction, and I will necessarily be compelled to quote extensively from these critical works. Where I hope to make my own contribution to the understanding of the author's lost hand is in bringing both Cendrars' own work and Leroy's observations into more direct discourse with precise psychoanalytic concepts relating to trauma and loss.

In reading these *textes de la main gauche,* there emerge striking similarities between the hand-texts of Cendrars and Maupassant. Both authors place these severed hands under the sign of a radical mystery— a *crime* for which no one can discover the *coupable.* In examining Cendrars' relationship to his severed hand, it becomes possible to read many of his works as a modern extension of and response to the same questions of anxiety, crime and guilt that plague the texts of 19th century *fantastique* authors. However, we can also note a fundamental difference between the severed hand of the 19th century and its later manifestation in the work of Cendrars. If the

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[180] Ibid. 206-207.

ghostly reanimated hands of Gautier, Nerval and Maupassant primarily express anxiety about a fantasied attack yet to come, Cendrars' literary framing of his severed limb attempts to narrate the trauma of an event that has already occurred. The metaphor, it would appear, could not be more appropriate, if we recall that the word "trauma" in Greek literally signifies "wound." For Cendrars, the missing arm that haunts his later writings is not merely the inscription of the trauma of war, but also the figure of a much greater psychic suffering that happened long before his loss on the battlefield. It is a loss, as Leroy reminds us, for which the poet believes himself (and his hand) *coupable.*[181]

Leroy argues in *La Main de Cendrars* that the works of the author's left hand establish a complex mythology that allows Cendrars to transform the loss of his right arm into a redemptive gesture, one that exculpates him from all *culpabilité* and expunges his literary record, allowing him to be born a second time like a phoenix from the ashes and embers that blatantly mark both the poet's pseudonym and his artistic production. The guilty right hand is exiled by Cendrars' subsequent work to the heavens, where it becomes integrated with the constellation of Orion, which Cendrars will designate in 1924 as "mon étoile."[182] What's more, Leroy concludes, this new poetic project must by its very nature exclude any direct framing of the wound, since it is the very nature of the non-dominant left hand to inscribe indirectly— to remain always in the realm of metaphor.[183]

Leroy's theory is especially interesting when considered vis-à-vis the works that Cendrars scholars refer to as the *Tétralogie* or *Mémoires*: *L'Homme Foudroyé, La Main Coupée, Bourlinguer,* and *Le Lotissement du Ciel.* This series of professed

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[181] Ibid. 42.

[182] Cendrars, Blaise, *Du Monde entier au cœur du monde (Poésies complètes)* (Paris: Denoël, 1957) 150.

[183] Leroy, *La Main de Cendrars* 208-209.

autobiographical memoirs, constituting some of Cendrars' latest writings, confuses all lines between man and myth, between reality and metaphor, and between guilt and innocence. In tracing the figure of the hand in Cendrars' work, I will focus primarily on the first two volumes in the *Tétralogie— L'Homme Foudroyé* (1945) and *La Main Coupée* (1946), both written and published in the shadow of the Second World War, an uncanny return of the conflict that led to Cendrars' re-invention as the *poète de la main gauche.* I will also refer to specific passages of *Bourlinguer,* in which Cendrars recalls and reconstructs his childhood, that are instrumental for understanding the mythology of loss that precedes the loss of the poet's hand.

Ultimately, these "mytho-biographical" volumes, as they are often called, establish a confusing and repetitive relationship to time and history. Blaise's daughter Miriam Cendrars asserts that a re-writing of his life in a way that emphasized relation and signification over facts and dates was indeed the very purpose of the *Mémoires,* noting of this period of her father's writing: "Tout reste à dire. Recommencer à zéro. Restituer chaque objet, à chaque événement— à chaque pensée— sa réelle signification."[184] With this schema in mind, let us now turn to the most provocatively titled volume of this project— *La Main Coupée.*

2.1- Avulsion and Evasion

Prior to any mention of the poet's amputation, the opening pages of *La Main Coupée* inscribe the entire tome in a framework of repetition and dispossession. Not only is the World War during which it was written a return of the conflict that it purports to narrate, but the dedication of the text shows how this second war, like the first, brings with it a horrific loss. The initial inscription, written in 1944, reads "Pour

[184] Cendrars, Miriam, *Blaise Cendrars* (Paris: Éditions Balland, 1984) 763.

mes fils Odilon et Rémy quand ils rentreront de captivité et de guerre et pour leurs fils quand ces petits auront vingt ans. Hélas!" The "Hélas," added in 1945, refers to Cendrars' discovery that his son Rémy, a fighter pilot, had been killed in an aviation accident in Morocco. From the inscription of this introductory sacrifice to the senselessness of war, the volume goes on to recount individual stories of victory and loss— while scrupulously avoiding any direct framing of Cendrars' own wound.

Where the reader would expect, in the *mémoires de guerre* of *La Main Coupée,* to find Cendrars' account of his own traumatic injury, one is instead met with only vague allusions to the time before and after the event. Instead, he accounts for the lives and deaths of his fellow soldiers in the Legion, frequently using their stories to double his own, before building up to an ultimate scene of denial and projection in "Le Lys Rouge." This chapter, whose title is taken from a novel by Anatole France, presents Cendrars and the other men of his squad enjoying a fine June morning in a sector where, supposedly "il ne s'y passait jamais rien." And yet, even in such a "bon coin," the author reminds us that the reality of the war rests literally hidden just beneath the surface. The idyllic description of a green meadow is undercut by the acknowledgement that the verdant space "envahissait notre parapet et cachait nos barbelés."[185] As the men laze about on the grass contemplating lunch, the tranquility of the scene is abruptly destroyed by an uncanny intruder. Cendrars writes:

> Nous avions bondi et regardions avec stupeur, à trois pas de Faval, planté dans l'herbe comme une grande fleur épanouie, un lys rouge, un bras humain tout ruisselant de sang, un bras droit sectionné au-dessus du coude et dont la main encore vivante fouissait le sol des doigts comme pour y prendre racine et dont la tige sanglante se balançait doucement avant de tenir son équilibre. D'instinct

[185] Cendrars, Blaise, *La Main Coupée, Œuvres autobiographiques complètes,* Ed. Claude Leroy and Michèle Touret (Paris: Gallimard, 2013) 786.

> nous levâmes la tête, inspectant le ciel pour y chercher un aéroplane. Nous ne comprenions pas. Le ciel était vide. D'où venait cette main coupée?[186]

The horrific and graphic nature of this scene— the image of the hand clawing, animal-like, at the ground— would seem more at home in the corpus of Maupassant or Nerval than Cendrars. However, in contrast with the 19th century narratives' focus on the anxiety inspired by a hand that moves on its own, Cendrars' evocative scene attempts to encapsulate the horror of a trauma beyond understanding.

Cendrars poses the collective question of his squad that doubles as a personal denial when he writes, "À qui était cette main, ce bras droit, ce sang qui coulait comme la sève?"[187] One of the passage's most distinguishing features is the way in which, even in the absolute presence of the bloody hand, this scene seems to represent a missed encounter. It portrays a traumatic moment that is radically unknowable—so unknowable, in fact, that the limb, rather than being perceived as a part of the human form, is instead transformed into a flower. In writing "Le Lys Rouge," Cendrars thus effectuates a double displacement in order to situate himself outside of the traumatic event of amputation: He distances the arm from his own body, making it that of an unknown amputee, and he also transforms it into something bearing only an oblique relation to the human body. The lily, Christian symbol of the body's death and resurrection, does not in this case spring forth from the earth in an evocation of rebirth, but rather falls bloody from the sky like a harbinger of death. Cendrars repeats twice over "nous ne comprenions pas," and the chapter concludes, in words that seem to echo the closing sentences of Maupassant's "La Main," "jamais nous n'eûmes la clef de l'énigme. On téléphona dans tout le secteur et jusque dans les ambulances, il

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[186] Ibid.
[187] Ibid.

n'y avait pas eu d'amputé. Rien à signaler. Mystère."[188]

This void of knowledge extends even into the typography of the text. The chapter is marked by multiple ellipses and the final page is characterized by short, truncated sentences and fragments. Lawrence Kritzman, speaking of a similarly fragmentary typography in Georges Perec's *W ou le souvenir d'enfance,* which deals with the trauma of the Holocaust, suggests that such markers are "emblematic of disjunction" and imply "a phenomenology of lack."[189] Such disjunction and lack, he argues, is consistent with a loss of memory that makes impossible a faithful reconstitution of the event. Cendrars' inability to speak of his amputation except through such clearly symbolic descriptions (the arm has even been amputated at the same spot as his own) may ultimately have as much to do with this unknowability as it does with Leroy's contention that metaphor is the proper domain of the left hand.

If Cendrars finds himself unable to write the story of his amputation, if his memory fails in the face of this personal history wrapped up with his country's history, it could indicate that the author was not far enough outside this traumatic event to serve as its witness. Indeed, there is only one figure in this scene who seems capable of witnessing the event, who is on some level able to verbalize the unspeakable horror of the scene—Faval. This young soldier is the first to notice the ghastly hand and alert the others to its presence. He is also the same one, as Leroy points out, that Cendrars must literally cut free from himself in yet another symbolic amputation after the young soldier is shot and killed.[190] In a passage from the first volume of the *Mémoires, l'Homme Foudroyé,* Cendrars writes how Faval, convinced he will die on the battlefield, "Depuis quatre jours...me tenait par un pan de ma

[188] Ibid.
[189] Kritzman, Lawrence D, "Remembrance of things past: Trauma and mourning in Perec's *W ou le souvenir d'enfance," Journal of European Studies* V.35.2 (Spring 2005) 192.
[190] Leroy, *La Main de Cendrars* 210.

capote."[191] As close to the poet as his own coat, Faval informs his corporal "Je suis toujours là, vous me sentez, hein? Je ne vous lâche pas."[192] Faval thus becomes something like Cendrars' cowardly double: *la partie "lâche"* of himself that he will have to leave behind if he is to survive the war. The passage concludes, "Quand il tomba, frappé d'une balle entre les deux yeux, je dus couper le pan de ma capote pour me libérer de son poids mort et continuer d'avancer. Il ne m'avait pas lâché."[193]

In *La Main Coupée,* the reaction of this frightened double to the severed limb encapsulates all the shock and emotion one would expect to accompany such an experience, but which Cendrars and the others present at the scene apparently lack: "je l'ai vue tomber du ciel, bredouillait-il en sanglotant les mains sur les yeux et claquant des dents. Elle s'est posée sur nos barbelés et a sauté à terre comme un oiseau. J'ai d'abord cru que c'était un pigeon. J'ai peur. Quelle horreur!..."[194] Faval's confusion in mistaking the hand for a bird would seem to recall the phoenix-like origins of Cendrars' pseudonym. However, this inglorious and inactive pigeon is certainly no triumphant mythical bird of resurrection. Rather, it produces only death and disgust.

The burden of this affect is born by Faval alone, who, by virtue of what he has seen, becomes and remains profoundly isolated despite the seeming fraternity of the squad surrounding him. While the other soldiers turn from this uncanny scene to their daily routine, heeding the call of "à la soupe," Cendrars concludes, "seul Faval sanglotait dans l'herbe chaude, secoué de spasmes."[195] While all of the soldiers see the arm in the grass, Faval is the only one to see it fall from the sky. He is the only

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[191] Cendrars, Blaise, *L'Homme Foudroyé, Œuvres autobiographiques complète,* Ed. Claude Leroy and Michèle Touret (Paris: Gallimard. 2013) 188.
[192] Ibid. 189.
[193] Ibid.
[194] Cendrars, *La Main Coupée* 786.
[195] Ibid.

eyewitness, and yet his testimony is distorted by the trauma of the experience. Faval becomes simultaneously he who sees and he who fails to see, a double distinction emphasized by the text: "...Je l'ai vue tomber du ciel," bredouillait-il en sanglotant les mains sur les yeux et claquant des dents."[196] In this quotation, the initial act of seeing is undone as Faval covers his eyes with his hands. This is not the first time in the passage that Faval's hands are mentioned. Rather, it is the opposing action of the young soldier's right and left hands that first disturbs the tranquility of the scene in "Le Lys Rouge": "tout à coup, cet idiot de Faval bondit sur ses pieds, tendit le bras droit l'index pointé, détourna la tête la main gauche sur les yeux."[197] Faval, much like the author he doubles for, enacts a simultaneous gesture of revelation and concealment. With his right index finger (a finger which, as we may recall from the preceding chapter, has for its primary function indication and illumination) he points directly to the severed right arm, before covering up and turning away with his left hand from what he dares not see.

Cathy Caruth, in her seminal text on trauma theory, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History,* highlights the indispensable role vision plays in assimilating trauma. Writing of the dynamics of sight and the disabled or deceased body in Alain Renais' film *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (a film which, incidentally, also relies heavily on the reading of twitching hands) she notes, "the act of seeing, in the very establishing of a bodily referent, erases, like an empty grammar, the reality of an event."[198] In short, Caruth seems to be arguing that the existence of a bodily referent such as a corpse or severed limb, by its continued presence, negates the psyche's ability to register the loss. Following Caruth's assertion that in the case of trauma

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[196] Ibid.

[197] Ibid. 785.

[198] Caruth, Cathy, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press,1996) 29.

seeing is, in actuality, the *opposite* of believing, we might say that Faval's witnessing of the arm's appearance, rather than illuminating the event, instead constitutes yet another failure of knowing. Additionally, the effort to see the event is accompanied by a compulsive need for narration— an effort, perhaps, to fill in the "empty grammar" of sight with language. Trauma theorist Dori Laub, in "An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival," explains, speaking of the atrocities of the Holocaust:

> The survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their story; they also needed to tell their story in order to survive . . . This imperative to tell and to be heard can become itself an all-consuming life task. Yet no amount of telling seems ever to do justice to this inner compulsion. There are never enough words or the right words, there is never enough time or the right time, and never enough listening or the right listening to articulate the story that cannot be fully captured in *thought, memory* and *speech.*[199]

In cases of trauma, be they personal, collective or both, the dynamics of vision and language thus combine in an effort to produce a readable history— a history that could be remembered and retold. However, It would seem that Blaise Cendrars' periodic and repetitive efforts to create such a history and to *tell,* to borrow Laub's terminology, through writing his own story of amputation are condemned to fail. In Cendrars' unique case, however, this may not be due only to the general insufficiency of language and vision in relation to trauma. For him, the very hand that should have done the telling, the hand that is in itself the *story to be told,* has not survived. Consequently, Cendrars will only ever produce, as in "Le Lys Rouge," a fragmented and elliptical text around the central void of his missing hand.

What seems clear is that Cendrars feels compelled to record the experience of

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[199] Laub, Dori, "An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival," *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 77.

his amputation from as early as 1917, and the following year he produced a document of 9 pages referred to by Cendrarsian critics as "La Première main coupée"— a text outlined by Cendrars in three sections: I. La Bataille de Champagne du 24 au 28 sept. 1915. II. L'Ambulance I/II. III. La Main Coupée.[200] Only the first section of this text was even begun, while the other two were entirely abandoned. It is of course interesting that the name given by scholars to this document effectively establishes a second amputation within Cendrars' *œuvre*, since a "Première Main Coupée" would seem to imply the existence of a *seconde,* with the two documents turning the writer into a kind of double amputee. This repetition compulsion seems not dissimilar to the numerous examples of uncanny manual return that appear in the hand-texts of Maupassant. Indeed, among the many similarities I intend to highlight between the *œuvres* of Blaise Cendrars and Guy de Maupassant, one finds not only the trope of the guilty severed hand, but also the evidence of a repetition compulsion— the uncanny return of the hand and other figures in an effort to master through writing the trauma of the event. However, if the primary goal of Maupassant's repetitive corpus is to master anxiety, it would appear that repetition's fundamental purpose in the Cendrarsian universe is to master time itself.

2.2- Prochronie

Daniel Briolet, in his article "L'imaginaire de l'honneur dans *La Main coupée,"* explains that the various instances in this text where Cendrars alludes to the *Offensif de Champagne* or his life as a post-war amputee and *gaucher* combine to produce a text that largely ignores the constraints of a linear chronology.[201] In its

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[200] Flückiger, Jean-Carlo, "La Main Coupée de 1918," *Blaise Cendrars et La Guerre,* Ed. Claude Leroy (Paris: Armand Colin Éditeur, 1995) 253-260.

[201] Briolet, Daniel, "L'imaginaire de l'honneur dans *La Main coupée," Blaise Cendrars et La Guerre,* Ed. Claude Leroy (Paris: Armand Colin, 1995) 84.

place, the work substitutes what Leroy describes as "un régime cyclique du temps, le temps même de l'éternel retour," a temporal logic that Cendrars himself would refer to as a "Prochronie."[202] This *Prochronie* appears to involve both spatial and historical dimensions, and constitutes both an effort to layer discrete events so that they blend into one another and an attempt to fragment and break apart historical continuities.[203] Characters whose deaths are portrayed in early chapters suddenly reappear in later ones, and many of the same names and locations resurface across multiple volumes of the *Mémoires.* Moreover, the device seeks not only to regress time, but to repair it as well. In the Pléiade edition of Cendrars' autobiographical writings, Claude Leroy contrasts *prochronisme,* which situates events *before* they occur with *parachronisme,* which would move them forward in time. He notes of the difference between these two mechanisms:

> Cette quasi-homonymie incite à percevoir la prochronie comme une *distorsion réglée* de la chronologie, une chronique mettant le prochronisme au service de la maîtrise du temps. Apportée par les souvenirs neuchâtelois, la prochronie ne serait plus alors une pratique désordonnée de l'autobiographie mais la recherche du temps perdu, telle que Cendrars la conçoit.[204]

Prochronie is therefore explicitly linked to a desire to control or repair time or, we might say more accurately, to *rewrite* time. In re-situating the fundamental memories of his life at a point prior to their historical occurrence, Cendrars is recording time *as it should have been,* allowing him to potentially master traumatic events through

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[202] Leroy, Claude, "Guide d'un petit voyage en *Prochronie," Le Texte Cendrarsien: Actes du Colloque International de Grenoble* (Grenoble: Centre de création littéraire de Grenoble/CCL Éditions, 1988) 181. (Qtd. In Briolet, 84).

[203] "La palette rhétorique de la prochronie (qui est sa fabrique de la recoupe) comporte trois figures majeures: *l'étagement* des plans temporels, *la brisure* des continuités autobiographiques (ce sont des Mémoires en miettes) et le *contournement* des dates-clefs par un travail sur les bords, les marges ou les seuils." (Leroy, *La Main de Cendrars* 315).

[204] Leroy, Claude, "Notice: Sous le signe de François Villon," *Blaise Cendrars: Œuvres autobiographiques complètes* (Editions Gallimard: 2013) 845.

writing.

The result of this gesture of temporal return is a text that presents, according to Briolet, “des séries indéfinies de réseaux anecdotiques ou lexicaux destinés à dévoiler, sans en épuiser l'essence, la réalité secrète des liens de solidarité infrangibles et intimes noués entre le “Je” et l'Autre” au cœur d'un face à face brutal et absurde entre la vie et la mort.”[205] Once again, in a striking similarity with his fellow *conteur* Guy de Maupassant, Cendrars' work consistently blurs the lines between self and other to the point that it is difficult to say where “Je” ends and “l'Autre” begins. However, in contrast with Maupassant, the relationship between self and other is not one of antagonistic persecution, but rather one of solidarity.

2.3- Fellow Amputees

In the introduction of *Unclaimed Experience,* Cathy Caruth highlights the importance of, in her words, “listening to the address of another, an address that remains enigmatic yet demands a listening and a response.”[206] This listening is, for Caruth, an indispensable component in grounding the unlocatability of one's own trauma. In the case of Cendrars' *œuvre,* this unlocatability becomes all the more profound when the external sign of his trauma is everywhere duplicated and displaced. For, while Cendrars remains unable to present the reader with his own *main coupée*, the author is remarkably adept at identifying and presenting his fellow *manchots* and amputees. *L'Homme Foudroyé* and *La Main Coupée* in particular introduce a number of characters that appear to be Cendrars' brethren in wounded-ness, allowing him to present his own injury through a series of doubles and detours. In presenting these quasi-real/ quasi-fictional figures, is Cendrars in fact listening for

[205] Briolet 86.
[206] Caruth 9.

the address of the other, or do these dismembered doubles rather allow the author, through his writing, to better hear himself?

To begin, there is Cendrars' fellow legionnaire Garnéro, whom Blaise claims to have encountered in Paris ten years after the war. This wartime companion, like Cendrars, undergoes a resurrection as a result of the conflict. Presumed dead in Vimy and buried in the shallow grave made by the same shell that almost cost him his life, Garnéro regains consciousness when a second shell evicts him from what should have been his final resting place, simultaneously amputating his leg. Cendrars remarks, “Il me manquait un bras. Il lui manquait une jambe.”[207] While their injuries are not the same, the two men are bound together by the phantom pains from which they suffer. Garnéro tells his former corporal, “J'ai laissé mon pilon dans la voiture, mon moignon me fait mal,” to which Cendrars replies, “C'est comme moi, tu vois, ma manche est vide. Je ne supporte pas d'appareil, mon moignon me fait mal.”[208] The soldiers' shared *vide* refuses the false reparation of a false limb. Their pain is such that it cannot be covered over. Garnéro concludes, “C'est un joli cadeau qu'on nous a fait.”[209] Such a gift is of course a much less compelling *souvenir de guerre* than the German beer and tobacco that Cendrars reports taking from abandon enemy posts.

However, Cendrars' doubles in the *Tétralogie* extend far beyond the battlefield and his squad mates. In the second section of *L'Homme Foudroyé* entitled “Le Vieux Port,” Cendrars introduces a very different kind of comrade-in-arms. He first recounts his decision to hire for his housekeeper a woman known only to the inhabitants of La Redonne, the seaside village where he is writing, as “La femme à Mick,” a woman they suspect of thievery and witchcraft. While the employer/employee relationship proves successful, it ends abruptly one day with the

[207] Cendrars, *La Main Coupée* 608.
[208] Ibid. 609.
[209] Ibid.

appearance of the woman's drunken husband. After sketching for the reader the portrait of "un homme long, dégingandé, armé d'un bâton," Cendrars remarks, "mais ce qui m'avait le plus frappé c'est que, comme moi, sauf qu'il portait crochet, Mick était amputé du bras droit et que personne ne me l'avait dit."[210] Cendrars seems immediately to recognize in Mick, who lost his arm falling drunk from a tramway, a sort of *semblable,* and not merely for the arm they both lack.

Like Cendrars, Mick is an artist, a painter who creates with his left hand (it is unclear from the text if Mick was left-handed to begin with or if, like Cendrars, he has had to relearn his trade). Mick signs all of his paintings "Mick, le navigateur," and considering that the stars are one of the earliest and most essential tools of navigators, Mick would seem a fitting kindred spirit for the author of *Bourlinguer* who will appropriate Orion as his personal constellation. In addition to their artistic occupations, the two men are connected by a shared prosthesis, but this prosthesis is not Mick's *crochet,* but rather a prosthesis of a visual nature— a *longuevue* that is passed from La Femme à Mick to Cendrars so that he can watch the passing boats, and which Blaise returns to Mick after driving him back to his house.

"La Femme à Mick" closes with the scene of Mick's funeral, which takes place a mere "quelques jours plus tard" from the moment of mutual one-handed discovery, as if the revelation were in some way responsible for the death that follows it. At the service, Blaise is finally able to appreciate the left-handed artistic productions of his fellow *manchot,* as all of Mick's paintings are on display:

> Il y avait là des vues de forêt vierge et de fleuve géant rempli d'alligators, des scènes de la vie des bagnards à Cayenne, une chasse à l'ours blanc dans les banquises polaires, l'ascension du mont-Cervin, une chasse à la baleine au

[210] Cendrars, *L'Homme foudroyé* 266-267.

> large du Cap de Bonne-Espérance, la construction de la Tour Eiffel, les mystères de l'inquisition en Espagne, l'éruption du Vésuve et le tremblement de terre de Lisbonne, un naufrage, l'histoire du chien Saint-Bernard, la conquête de Mexico par les troupes française, etc., etc.[211]

Interestingly, as Yvette Bozon-Scalzitti notes, these paintings strike the reader as representing scenes that either are or are likely to be subjects of Cendrars' own literary production, rather than those of a sailor who, by his own account, has never sailed farther than the eye can see from his small coastal town.[212]

Finally, we might note the importance of the name of this southern seaside retreat: La Redonne—the re-giving, or the giving back. Leroy associates this name with the giving back of time.[213] Just as Cendrars returns Mick's *longuevue,* there is a way in which the volumes of the *Tétralogie,* in antedating certain events of the author's life, allow for the possibility of a *longue vue* on events still to come— a compensatory gesture that could, in theory, save the future from repeating the tragedies of the past.

Cendrars does in fact seem to show proof of such farsightedness in the second episode of *Rhapsodies Gitanes,* the second book of *L'Homme Foudroyé,* which introduces a man with not one, but two injured hands. When Blaise is convoked for an audience with the newly elected gypsy king*, le Balafré,* he notes of this long time acquaintance, the uncle Sawo, his friend from the Foreign Legion who also appears in *La Main Coupée*, "Il n'avait pas eu un sourire et ne m'avait pas tendu la main. Ses

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[211] Cendrars, *L'Homme Foudroyé* 270.

[212] "Or la plupart de ces tableaux sont aussi des décors de l'œuvre de Cendrars: par exemple, "vues de forêt vierge et de fleuve géant" pour *Moravagine;* Cayenne, pour *Rhum; "*banquises polaires" et "chasse à la baleine" pour *Le Plan de l'Aiguille;* paysage alpestre pour *Les Confessions de Dan Yack*; souvent mentionnée, la Tour Eiffel est plus particulièrement visible dans les *Dix-Neuf Poèmes élastiques* et dans *Aujourd'hui;* et "le tremblement de terre de Lisbonne" apparaît dans un vers du *Panama."* (Bozon-Scalzitti, Yvette, *Blaise Cendrars ou la passion de l'écriture* (Lausanne: Éditions l'Age d'Homme, 1977) 166).

[213] Leroy, *La Main de Cendrars* 314.

mains étaient gantées. Il les tenait devant soi, sur les genoux, et je faillis partir d'un fou rire quand je constatai qu'il les avait dissimulées, ses mains, dans une énorme paire de gants à crispin, genre mousquetaire, véritable accessoire de théâtre."[214] Cendrars will learn from *le Balafré's* sister, l*a Mère,* that her brother's hands were shredded by the claws of a trained bear that his rival Marco sent to attack their camp. This revelation leads Cendrars to conclude that *le Balafré* is "un homme fini" as he explains, "jamais deux sans trois, Mère. Je viens de le voir. Je veux dire qu'il l'a encore laissé échapper et que Marco prendra sa revanche."[215] Despite the concealing gloves, it would appears as through Blaise has read the future in the bloody lines on the *Balafré's* palms, and has recognized the mutilation as the sign of imminent death. His prediction is refuted by *La Mère,* but nonetheless comes to pass when the *Balafré* is killed by Marco the same evening. The title of this *Deuxième Rhapsodie* is *Les Ours.*

Bears, as one might expect, hold a particular symbolic importance in Cendrars' work, given their relation to the mythical figure of Orion the hunter, who as a constellation chases Ursa Major continually across the heavens. It is also important to recall that Ursa Major is in fact *La Grande Ourse,* a female bear representing the nymph Callisto, raped by Zeus and subsequently transformed into a bear by Juno and hunted by Artemis.[216] Zeus later places her in the heavens as a constellation. In other versions of the myth, such as Ovid's, Callisto gives birth to Zeus's son Arcas, who, tricked by the gods, comes close to unintentionally killing her once he is grown.[217] The domestication and weaponization of bears in Cendrars would therefore seem

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[214] Cendrars, *L'Homme Foudroyé 361.*

[215] Ibid. 384.

[216] Apollodorus, *Callisto and Arcas* in *Apollodorus' Library and Hyginus' Fabulae: Two Handbooks of Greek Mythology,* Trans. R. Scott Smith and Stephen M. Trzaskoma (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2007) 57.

[217] Ovid, *Metamorphoses Books I-VIII,* Trans. Frank Justus Miller (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004) 89-95.

linked to the destruction and persecution first of femininity and subsequently of maternity.[218] This theme is reinforced in another scene of the same *Rhapsodie,* in which *le Balafré*'s brother, *le Grêlé*, stages a play entitled "La Peau de l'Ours," featuring a domesticated bear who serves as a nursemaid until it forgets itself and murders its infant charges.[219] Both *Le Balafré*, who tyrannizes and prostitutes his sister, *La Mère*, and Mick, who beats his wife, perpetrate acts of extreme violence against women. In their function as substitutes for Cendrars' own unnarratable loss, these characters also appear to assume an equally unnarratable guilt connected to the wounding of the female body. If, like Cendrars, the injured limbs of these various doubles are, as Leroy argues, "coupée parce que coupable," then what can their stories reveal to us about the author's own crime that predates the war and the loss of his arm? The criminal actions of the missing hand can only be uncovered by reading the hands that remain.

2.4- Dire La Bonne Aventure

In addition to the frequent appearance of *manchots*, both *La Main Coupée* and *l'Homme Foudroyé* display a fascination with chiromancy that seems to strengthen the argument for Cendrars as a sort of 20th century response to the legacy of Nerval and Maupassant.[220] In *La Main Coupée,* in a sudden aside seemingly quite inconsequential

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[218] For a detailed study of the Callisto myth and its implications for the female body in literature, as well as a compilation and commentary of all classical versions of the myth, see Kathleen Wall, *Callisto Myth from Ovid to Atwood: Initiation and Rape in Literature* (Kingston, Ont.: McGill-Queen's University Press.,1988).

[219] Cendrars, *L'Homme Foudroyé* 387. The plays title cannot fail to evoke the French expression "Vendre la peau de l'ours avant de l'avoir tué," which seems to align with Blaise's observation that the *roi's* victory is, in fact, premature.

[220] Indeed, Leroy's *La Main de Cendrars* contends that Cendrars' work, in addition to being *Sous la Signe de François Villon,* as the author himself had specified, is equally "Sous la Signe de Nerval." Leroy's book contains a lengthy analysis of the author's many allusions to Nerval in his work. He specifically notes the resonance of Nerval's initials, GN, with titles like « Gêne » from *Bourlinguer* and names like « Jehanne » from *La prose du Transsibérien et de la Petite Jehanne de France.* Additionally, Leroy points out specific connections with Nerval's *La Main Enchantée,* including Cendrars' evocation of his *couteau eustache.* (*La Main de Cendrars* 167-200)

to the story he is telling, (that of a wine-pilfering, shell-sensing hedgehog adopted by the squad) Cendrars observes:

> cette semelle des hérissons a les contours d'un pied humain, la peau de cette semelle est ridée, fripée et que l'on pourrait en interpréter les lignes comme en chiromancie, qui est l'art de deviner par l'inspection de la main, de deviner et de prédire l'avenir. Je l'aurais fait et cela n'eût pas été nouveau car la chiromancie, ou mieux, la podomancie appliquée aux pattes de certains animaux a été pratiquée au moyen âge, par exemple sur les mandragores (à Paris, sur le Pont Neuf, on vendait comme mandragores, mâle ou femelle, des momies de ouistiti du Brésil à la place du fameux champignon de Corinthe).[221]

Chiromancy, as we have previously established, opens a window on both the future and the past, and would seem to offer another means for Cendrars to obtain the *longue vue* on his own history that he so desires. The mandragore to which Cendrars refers in the above passage is a small facsimile of the human form also commonly referred to as a homunculus. He will revisit this theme in *Bourlinguer,* where he will provide a detailed account of the myth of the mandragore in the chapter "Gêne."[222] There exists, as well, both an etymological and mythological connection between *mandragore* and the *main de gloire.* The word's etymological roots come from the Latin *mandragoras,* as well as the old French *mandegloire,* an altered form of *main de gloire*.[223] The mandragore is also the name of a plant know to grow beneath gallows, so named because of its roots resemblance to the human form, to which magical properties similar to those of the *main de gloire* were attributed.[224] This association, coupled with Cendrars' allusion to the Pont Neuf, appears to inscribe the self-avowed reader of

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[221] Cendrars, *La Main Coupée* 732.

[222] Cendrars, Blaise, *Bourlinguer, Œuvres autobiographiques complètes,* V. 2, Ed. Claude Leroy and Michèle Touret (Paris: Gallimard, 2013) 123-124.

[223] "Mandragore," *Le Grand Robert de la langue française* (Paris: Dictionnaires le Robert, 2011).

[224] "Mandragore," *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIXème siècle,* 1059.

Nerval within the same fluid discourse of guilt and innocence as Eustache.[225]

In *Rhapsodies Gitanes,* we find that the hand being read is Cendrars own:

> Non, me disait la Mère en me prenant la main (ma main unique), tu es né sous une bonne étoile. Tu as du cœur. Beaucoup d'ennemis, mais dans l'impuissance de nuire. Tu arriveras. Tu exerceras une grande influence autour de toi, mais avant tu iras en prison.
>
> —Comment ça, en prison, Mère?
>
> —Hé, je ne sais pas. Une prison volontaire.[226]

This first reading will have consequences in the narrative when, a number of years later, Cendrars again submits his hand to *La Mère* following his interview with *le Balafré*. She tells him, "C'est extraordinaire, ta main est en train de changer. Des tas de lignes s'effacent. Mais je vois toujours *ta* prison, là, ces barreaux..."[227] One is led from this passage to recall Desbarrolles assertion that through the sheer power of human will, one may in fact re-write a hand-text. However, despite the editing Cendrars has apparently accomplished on his palm, there is a certain narrative that remains unchanged— a voluntary prison from which he cannot escape. This prison, furthermore, is one in which he exists in a blissful state of uninterrupted harmony with a feminine figure referred to only as "elle." The *Mère's* reference to Cendrars "prison volontaire" could be understood to refer to his eventual relationship with his second wife and muse, Raymone, but leaving aside the biographical for the literary, it might also recall for the reader Marguerite de Navarre's allegorical poem *Les Prisons,* in which the enslaved lover ultimately discovers that his prison is of his own

[225] In *L'Homme Foudroyé*, Cendrars recalls receiving *Les Filles du feu* as a tenth birthday present from his father (464).
[226] Cendrars, *L'Homme Foudroyé* 380.
[227] Ibid. 382-383.

making.[228] Such a prison would not only protect the world from Cendrars', as is typically the function of imprisonment, but also Cendrars' from the world, cutting him off from his past, present and future.

Beyond these many overt textual examples of severance, mutilation and chiromancy that reveal Cendrars' enduring effort to grasp the reason for his amputation, it might also be said that the entirety of *L'Homme Foudroyé* (and perhaps by extension, the entire *Tétralogie)* is a testament to the power of the fragment. The first volume of the series is described by Cendrars in a letter to Jacques-Henri Lévesque as a sort of 20th century *Spleen de Paris*, with “ni queue ni tête.” He writes, “Chaque histoire ou chaque fragment d'histoire peut faire une nouvelle détachée, et ce n'est que dans le livre qu'elles font un “tout.” J'ai tellement battu les cartes que dans la version finale du bouquin tout pourrait encore y être interverti sur une ultime épreuve sans que rien ne soit changé,”[229] the language recalling strongly Baudelaire's preface to Arsène Houssaye.[230] This veneration of the fragment might once again support the idea that indirect representation, especially as it relates to questions of chronology, allows Cendrars to layer historical events so that any mapping out of cause and effect, action and reaction, becomes radically impossible. What can possibly be gained by this ability to present discrete historical moments as detached from their anchoring chronology? For one thing, it allows the writer to represent multiple individuals through a single figure, in the kind of condensation that Freud argues typically occurs in the dream-work, or contrastingly to represent one individual through multiple figures across space and time. We will see that in the case of Cendrars, this over-

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[228] Marguerite de Navarre, *Les Prisons,* Trans. Claire L. Wade (New York: P. Lang, 1989).

[229] Qtd in *La Main de Cendrars* 310.

[230] “Mon cher ami, je vous envoie un petit ouvrage dont on ne pourrait pas dire, sans injustice, qu'il n'a ni queue ni tête, puisque tout, au contraire, y est à la fois tête et queue, alternativement et réciproquement...Enlevez une vertèbre, et les deux morceaux de cette tortueuse fantaisie se rejoindront sans peine.” (Baudelaire, Charles *Le Spleen de Paris,* Ed. David Scott and Barbara Wright (Paris: Editions Flammarion) 73).

determined figure is female and deceased.

2.5- The Many Faces of the Mother

In tracing the female figures in Cendrars' *Mémoires,* we approach a clearer understanding of the act that rendered Cendrars' right hand *coupable* long before he would actually lose it on the battlefields of Champagne. Archival evidence suggests that the source of this guilt is most likely a sustained correspondence with a young Russian girl named Hélène, whom Freddy Sauser first encountered in Saint Petersburg in 1905 when he was apprenticed to a jeweler, and whose acquaintance corresponded with his entry into poetry. Once he returned to Switzerland, Freddy wrote Hélène occasionally— 9 letters in all that he recopied and preserved in a notebook. However, Claude Leroy points out of Hélène that, “d'elle-même, rien n'est parvenu, pas une ligne, pas une photographie. La correspondance est à une seule voix, et c'est dans l'intervalle des lettres de Freddy qu'il faut deviner Hélène.”[231] From the very beginning then, Hélène is the eternal present-absent, constructed out of the gaps and responses of Freddy Sauser's letters. Leroy theorizes that it was an attempt to extricate himself from any romantic obligation towards Hélène that led Freddy to dramatically allude to the possibility of suicide in one of his letters and to quote Vital Marilis, writing, “Je voudrais voir mon corps en cendres.”[232] However, it is not Freddy's body that will go up in flames, but Hélène's. On June 28th 1907 he would write, “À l'instant je reçois une carte de votre frère, qui me dit ce qui vous est arrivé. Pauvre, chère amie, qu'avez-vous donc fait?”[233] What Hélène had done was knock over her lamp onto her bed while drifting off to sleep, causing her to be burned alive.

Leroy argues that Freddy's plaintive question, “qu'avez-vous donc fait?”

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231 Leroy, *La Main de Cendrars* 65.
232 Ibid.
233 Ibid.

indicates that he interprets her death as a suicide, and concludes, "Dans les vers de Marilis, Hélène-a-t-elle décelé une invite? A-t-elle voulu prendre à la lettre le désir du fuyard? Elle lui offre donc son "corps en cendres." Oui, le désir peut tuer."[234] Undoubtedly true, that desire can kill, but the more intriguing question is *whose* desire, and even more specifically, *whose* desire for *what?* Are we speaking of only of Freddy's desire to escape from Hélène, or also of her desire to be loved by her correspondent to the point of self-sacrifice? In as much as both forms of desire became manifest, Blaise appears to find himself guilty of Hélène's death, and she will influence not only his choice of pseudonym, but also come to serve as muse and touchstone for the many figures of loss and absence in the poet's life. As such, what matters are not the details or veracity of this lacunary biographical episode, but rather the way Hélène is transformed in Cendrars' literary works into a composite symbol of guilt.

While Hélène may assume a significant conscious role in Cendrars' guilty conscience, she is herself only a later manifestation of an earlier broken relation— the relation to the mother. Mary-Louise Dorner, Cendrars' mother, dies in February 1908, less than a year after Hélène's accident. Their respective deaths become psychically inextricable from one another. To lose Hélène is to simultaneously lose the mother, or rather, to lose her again. Despite the biographical actualities, Hélène's death does not predict the mother's death, but rather repeats it. Writing of Cendrars' relationship with his mother Marie Louise Dorner, Leroy declares:

> Dans les portraits en miettes que trace son fils sans donner son nom, Marie-Louise Sauser, née Dorner, apparaît comme une morte-vivante. Tout tourne chez elle à la manie perpétuelle, à la neurasthénie, à une fuite vers le dedans, à

[234] Ibid.

> un “goût de malheur” (HF,V 303) qui la fait se dérober aux sollicitations de son fils: 'C'était à Neuchâtel, en Suisse, où nous étions venus passer l'été chez grand-papa. --Maman, maman, puis-je venir dans le tien lit? Demandais-je. On ne me répondait pas. (B, VI 162)[235]

One can read neither Cendrars' words that Leroy quotes from *Bourlinguer*, nor Leroy's commentary without being led to think of psychoanalyst André Green's work on *La Mère morte.*

In *Narcissisme de Vie, Narcissisme de Mort*, Green describes the phenomenon by which a mother can remain physically alive while becoming psychically dead for her child. The child, says Green, perceives that the mother is lost to him through her own depression, and he experiences this loss as death. He writes:

> Il ne s’agit pas d’une dépression par perte réelle d’un objet, je veux dire que le problème d’une séparation réelle d’avec l’objet qui aurait abandonné le sujet n’est pas ici en cause. Le fait peut exister, mais ce n’est pas lui qui constitue le complexe de la mère morte. *Le trait essentiel de cette dépression est qu’elle a lieu en présence de l’objet, lui-même absorbé par un deuil.* La mère, pour une raison ou pour une autre, s’est déprimée. La variété des facteurs déclenchant est ici très grande. [236]

Green goes on to write of the psychic consequences for the infant: “se vivant comme le centre de l'univers maternel, il est clair qu'il interprète cette déception comme la conséquence de ses pulsions envers l'objet.”[237] The child may thus see himself as the primary cause of the maternal depression, but even this sense of guilt cannot help him to attribute meaning to such an incomprehensible situation, since the punishment does

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[235] Leroy, *La Main de Cendrars* 89.

[236] Green, Andre. “La Mère morte,” *Narcissisme de Vie, Narcissisme de Mort* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1983) 229.

[237] Ibid. 231.

not seem to fit the crime. Green writes, “même en imaginant le retournement de la situation par le sujet qui s'attribue, dans une mégalomanie négative, la responsabilité de la mutation, il y a écart incomblable entre la faute que le sujet se reprocherait d'avoir commise et l'intensité de la réaction maternelle.”[238] Evidently, the impossibility to fill with meaning this “écart incomblable” leaves a psychic hole.

Green refers to this phenomenon as *deuil blanc,* or “white mourning,” for the way it is focused on a void and characterized by emptiness. He contends that the result of this paradoxical perceived absence and physical presence of the primal maternal object has the effect of a *blessure narcissique* for the child, since in this early stage of ego development the mother is still primarily conceived of as an extension of the self. Consequently, he argues, the abandoned child comes to identify with the *mère morte* in a most extraordinary way. He writes “L'objet est “mort” (au sens de non vivant, même si aucune mort réelle n'est survenue); il entraîne de ce fait le Moi vers un univers déserté mortifère. Le deuil blanc de la mère induit le deuil blanc de l'enfant, enterrant une partie de son Moi dans la nécropole maternelle.”[239] This inability to separate from the maternal object, this feeling of being buried alive, produces in the ego a feeling of being continuously emptied out. This is perhaps the true significance of Hélène's death. Through Green's work, one begins to understand how the mythologized figure of Hélène, standing at the intersection of death and absence, overlaps with the absent mother. Like Cendrars' battlefield amputation, their deaths cannot be seen or told, only transposed or projected onto another.

Nowhere does Green's work on *la mère morte* seem to better align with Cendrars' *Mémoires* than in the famous chapter “Gêne*”* in *Bourlinguer* reflecting on the death of Elena, young Freddy's childhood playmate that he refers to throughout as

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[238] Ibid. 232.
[239] Ibid. 248.

"l'enfant cherie." In the beginning of the chapter, a twenty-year-old Cendrars has returned to his childhood home in Naples and, in a conscious imitation of Kipling's Kim, has created a *trou* in which to rest and restore his strength. However, the situation leaves him feeling more tormented than invigorated. He writes,

> Je me tourne et me retourne, me détends, me renoue, recroquevillé au fond du trou que je me suis creusé comme un ver dans un tombeau, et d'où me tirent, en me faisant maudire l'existence, des crampes dans les jambes qui me contorsionnent douloureusement et les mâchoires contractées qui me font mordre la langue. --M-M..., M-ma..., M-Meûh... C'est intolérable.[240]

Yvette Bozon-Scalzitti astutely reads this passage in *Blaise Cendrars: ou la passion de l'écriture.* Her analysis of the scene's burial imagery seems to clearly illustrate Cendrars' associative linking of womb and tomb as signifiers of loss and emptiness that are destructive rather than restorative. She writes:

> À la différence de Kim à qui une mort symbolique dans le ventre de la terre-mère a redonné vie, Cendrars (le héros), qui lui aussi a "fait son trou" dans la terre du clos avec l'intention de restaurer ses forces épuisées, découvre que *"l'imitation du tombeau est l'Enfer" (98).* Aucune résurrection n'en est le terme. La mère, la mort, sont réunies par la même initiale dans la même malédiction sans issue.[241]

Much like in Maupassant, then, the Cendrarsian character appears to undergo a form of death and burial connected to the maternal body. I am not suggesting that the two deaths are analogous, as in the Maupassantian corpus the death appears to represent a burial within the womb itself —a symbolic sacrifice aimed at appeasing a persecutory/retaliatory mother— while in the Cendrarsian corpus one is instead buried

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[240] Cendrars, *Bourlinguer* 89.
[241] Bozon-Scalzitti 192.

with the mother, or in an imitation of the mother.

For, Bozon-Scalzitti also notes that it is in the same garden, under the same tree where Blaise has dug his tomb, that Cendrars places the lifeless body of Elena,[242] killed by a stray *coup de feu,* which, as Leroy points out, also evokes the death of Hélène, killed by an altogether different sort of *coup de feu.*[243] Claude Leroy asserts that “L'histoire d'Elena est la version publiable de la mort d'Hélène,” to which we might add that it is undoubtedly the publishable version of the mother's death as well. Leroy also notes that Elena's surname of “Ricordi” is Italian for “souvenir,” or memory, but the memory is not, in this case, an objectively historical one. Indeed, Cendrars' older brother claimed in a letter to Blaise that he had no memory whatsoever of the famous Elena.[244] Elena thus becomes yet another overdetermined female figure who simultaneously represents lover and mother, and for whose death Cendrars considers himself *coupable.* By burying himself in the mother's place, Cendrars hopes to fill the void left by her depression and bring her back to life, but instead succeeds only in re-inscribing her death and absence. His call goes unheeded, just as it did when he was a child: “Maman, maman, puis-je venir dans le tien lit? Demandais-je. On ne me répondait pas.”[245]

The plaintive calling out of the young Cendrars of *Bourlinguer* for a mother who will not or cannot respond finds a corresponding textual manifestation in the final passages of *La Main Coupée,* where Cendrars writes of the suffering soldiers left to die in No Man's Land. He writes, “Mais le cri le plus affreux que l'on puisse entendre. . . c'est l'appel tout nu d'un petit enfant au berceau: “--Maman! Maman!...” que poussent les hommes blessés à mort qui tombent et que l'on abandonne entre les

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[242] Ibid. 191.
[243] Leroy, *La Main de Cendrars* 66.
[244] Ibid. 63-64.
[245] Cendrars, *Bourlinguer* 170.

lignes après une attaque qui a échoué et que l'on reflue en désordre."[246] Cendrars' language in this passage seems to imply that the reason for this plaintive, anxious cry is not merely the physical pain of the wound inflicted by bullets or bombs, but rather the additional act of abandonment— the realization that they have been left to die. Cendrars concludes the chapter with a quotation from the book of Job: "Que ne suis-je mort dès la matrice! Que ne suis-je expiré aussitôt que je suis sorti du ventre de ma mère! Pourquoi m'a-t-on reçu sur les genoux? Et pourquoi m'a-t-on présenté des mamelles?"[247] This quotation has the effect of positing death as more tolerable than absence— and specifically maternal absence. For Cendrars, it would have been preferable to actualize the Maupassantian fantasy of death in the womb, where one could remain eternally united with the body of the mother. Instead, like Job, Cendrars experiences the trauma of separation and abandonment for which there can be no understanding.[248] However, the mother's living-death, for which he holds himself responsible, is not the only crime of Cendrars' guilty hand. It is from this dead and buried mother that he nonetheless steals a particular inheritance, essentially robbing her grave.

The content of this legacy should not surprise us. Much like Maupassant before him, although in a very different way, it is a relationship to language and writing that Cendrars snatches from the mother's grave. He writes, in *Bourlinguer*, "Il est vrai que c'est maman qui m'a appris à lire et que pour cela elle me prenait sur ses genoux. C'est tout ce que j'ai eu d'elle. Son cœur était ailleurs."[249] The living word appears as the only thing that escapes the maternal tomb. Philippe Bonnefis writes in

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[246] Cendrars, *La Main Coupée* 553.
[247] Ibid.
[248] One can also recall Cendrars poem "Le Ventre de Ma Mère", which portrays the ecstasy of complete symbiosis and identification with the maternal body— a paradise that is lost with the onset of birth: "Si j'avais pu ouvrir la bouche/ Je t'aurais mordu/ Si j'avais pu déjà parler/ J'aurais dit:/ Merde, je ne veux pas vivre!" (*Poésies Complètes* 161).
[249] Cendrars, *Bourlinguer* 306.

Dan Yack: Phonographe, " C'est la mère qui donne le livre; de l'écriture, sans conteste, elle est l'initiatrice."[250] Leroy, while conceding that literature in Cendrars is a maternal legacy, also contends that it is a "legs empoisonné," since ink is a poor liquid substitute for the milk that the mother, according to the *Mémoires,* kept from her son.[251] Nourishment in Cendrars, both physical and intellectual, must be wrestled from a mother who is hostile and withholding. Nonetheless, it is from his mother that Cendrars reports receiving the gift of reading and, consequently, the gift of writing. One might say that she therefore provided her son with his *main de poète,* the same hand that he will be forced to give up in the push through "No Man's Land." There would perhaps be no more appropriate place for such a loss than "No Man's Land," since in *L'Homme Foudroyé,* the author, in another gesture that recalls that of Maupassant, venerates and identifies himself uniquely with his maternal line of descent. Wondering from whence he has received his great love of all those that are down and out, Cendrars falls into a family genealogy that terminates as follows:

> j'ajoute pour mémoire que l'on compte dans ma famille le fameux naturaliste, anatomiste et écrivain Albert de Haller, l'illustre mathématicien Léonard Euler, appelé à la Cour de Catherine II et Lavater, le philanthrope bien connu, l'inventeur de la physiognomonie, cette science fantaisiste qui devait tant troubler Edgar Allan Poë, E.-T.-A. Hoffmann et Charles Baudelaire. Tout cela, je crois, du côté de maman. Et rien du côté de mon père qui devait être de souche paysanne.[252]

In examining this passage, one could say of Cendrars what Antonia Fonyi has already said of Maupassant: that he has created for himself a personal mythology in which he

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[250] Bonnefis, Philippe, *Dan Yack: Blaise Cendrars Phonographe* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France,1992) 73.
[251] Leroy, *La Main de Cendrars* 90.
[252] Cendrars, *L'Homme Foudroyé* 464-465.

is uniquely his mother's son— born as if by miraculous conception and owing no debt, genealogical or otherwise, to his father.[253] One could also note the many ways in which this maternal heritage is identified with writing and the epistemological impulse, single-handedly allowing Cendrars to link himself, in the space of a few lines, to Poe, Hoffmann and Baudelaire. Furthermore, the cult of the mother extends beyond the author's reconstituted version of his own history and is re-inscribed across the Cendrarsian universe.

In *Rhapsodies Gitanes* Cendrars establishes a custom of the Gypsy families, with which he claims to have lived for a year:[254]

> Et le fils porte le nom de la mère, donc le nom de la famille tutélaire de la mère à qui le chef de la horde l'avait confiée. Il y a dans cette coutume un rappel lointain du totem, l'ancêtre protecteur du clan et un relâchement manifeste de l'autorité, voir de la notion du père ou du mari en faveur de l'instauration du matriarcat et, en fait, dans chaque tribu gitane une Mère est vénérée et dirige tout, sauf les pérégrinations.[255]

Like Maupassant, Cendrars' work refuses to transmit the name of the father. As Leroy points out, this naming signifies not only a matrilineal inheritance, but also a patricidal impulse, since it effectively kills the father by erasing his name.[256] In this passage Cendrars, who frequently indicates sardonically in *L'Homme Foudroyé* that he would write on psychoanalysis if he had any belief in whatsoever in the field,[257] nonetheless seems to winkingly allude to Freud's *Totem and Taboo*. However, rather

[253] "Guy de Maupassant est le fils de sa mère et d'elle seule: l'image qu'il se donne de son père est son œuvre à elle" (Maupassant 1993, 157).
[254] Yvette Bolzon-Scalzitti notes that Cendrars knowledge of such customs most likely comes from *Mœurs et coutumes des Tziganes* by Martin Block (331-332).
[255] Cendrars, *L'Homme Foudroyé* 227.
[256] Leroy notes that the author's early decision to adopt a pseudonym accomplishes a similar gesture, replacing a name that signifies patrilineal descent with a self-determined name signifying rebirth (*La Main de Cendrars* 47).
[257] Cendrars, *L'Homme Foudroyé* 313.

than venerating a totem animal representing the murdered father, these families instead set up the mother as an enshrined, quasi-religious figure who is the keeper of both authority and history, as in the matriarchal societies that Freud discusses in the earlier chapters of the work.

2.6- La Main Amie: Destruction and Reparation

Leroy theorizes that Cendrars' conception of his mother as a *morte-vivante,* an absent-present, plays a fundamental role in the author's appropriation of Orion as his personal constellation, since according to certain versions of the Orion myth, the famous hunter is also born of a dead mother.[258] The old farmer Hyrieus, who lacks descendants, having provided hospitality to Zeus in disguise, is told by the god to bury the skin of a sacrificial cow upon which he has urinated in his wife's grave, and nine months later Orion emerges. From this remarkable origin, Orion will go forth to a brief life marked by both punishment and redemption. He will be blinded for his crimes against Merope and have his vision restored by Helios. He will be punished by Artemis and then honored by her hand that sets his form eternally in the heavens.[259]

Like the phoenix of Cendrars' pseudonym, Orion is transformed from darkness to light. In this aspect of their shared mythology, Orion's body fixed in the skies becomes the perfect body onto which Cendrars' guilty right hand might be grafted. It is thus that he writes, in a text that predates the first volume of the *Tétralogie* by twenty years, but which comes ten years after the loss of his right hand:

Orion

C'est mon étoile

Elle a la forme d'une main

[258] Leroy, *La Main de Cendrars* 161.
[259] Graves, Robert, *The Greek Myths: Classics Deluxe Edition* (New York: Penguin Group, 2012) 42-43.

C'est ma main montée au ciel

Durant toute la guerre je voyais Orion par mon créneau

Quand les Zeppelins venaient bombarder Paris ils venaient toujours d'Orion

Aujourd'hui je l'ai au-dessus de ma tête

Le grand mât perce la paume de cette main qui doit souffrir

Comme ma main coupée me fait souffrir percée qu'elle est par un dard continuel[260]

The poem crucially links the trauma of war and the trauma of writing. The poet's right hand that has merged with the constellation of the hunter is linked to perpetual violence and a perpetual Christ-like suffering. Leroy notes that since Orion is portrayed wielding a sword, both the author and constellation's right hands are associated with violence, and he contends, “L'expédition de la main droite n'est qu'un *retour à l'envoyeur.* Il faut rendre à Orion ce qui provient d'Orion: Cette main morte, dans laquelle Cendrars a “sommé,” puis retranché toute sa violence coupable.”[261]

While I accept Leroy's reading that Cendrars exiles his guilty right hand to the heavens for having caused the death of his mother and Hélène, where it shines on in the constellation of Orion, and even agree that this hand is associated with a gesture of return, I am of a somewhat different mind as to the direction of transmission. It is my opinion that the hand does not start with Orion, but rather with Cendrars himself. The hand in the sky is still the hand of the poet (he identifies it as *ma main)*, and it must remain there so that it will not rejoin his body and cause more suffering.[262] One

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[260] Cendrars, Blaise, “Orion,” (1924) Copyright Miriam Cendrars, DR (droits réservés)

[261] Leroy, *La Main de Cendrars* 163.

[262] Claire Nouvet explores a somewhat parallel example of artistic amputation and mythological identification concerning the hand of Salvador Dali with Narcissus in her article “Salvador Dali: Fleur de Mort, Main Coupée,” *Revue Des Sciences Humaines* No.262 (Lille: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2001) 17-57. She writes of Dali's painting *Métamorphose de Narcisse*. “Nous regardons le tableau, et nous oublions le geste de la main qui nous l'a donné à voir. C'est contre cette occultation que le tableau de Dali semble lutter en nous donnant à voir non seulement la tête mais également la main qui nous l'offre à voir” (51). While Dali's amputation is of a purely figurative nature, its representation that is simultaneously a failure of representation seems to share common ground with Cendrars' efforts to both reveal and hide his severed hand.

should perhaps consider the distinctly Kleinian resonances of such a statement. The author's hand is projected into the heavens in a psychic attempt to externalize the aggressive and destructive parts of the self. And yet, this is not a simple projection, in which the “bad object” is seen as entirely exterior or other to the self, but rather what Klein might term a “projective identification,” in which the bad parts of the self are expelled outward onto an objet that it is henceforth, says Klein, “not felt to be a separate individual but is felt to be *the* bad self.”[263] It is for this reason that the celestial hand not only harms, but suffers as well.

An important result of this gesture of projective identification is that persecutory forces in Cendrars, rather than coming from a “bad mother,” seem instead to emanate from the self. This is perhaps not dissimilar to the guilty suicidal gestures we have seen inscribed in Maupassant. The author obliquely persecutes himself through a number of figures, like Orion or his fellow *manchots,* with whom he could easily identify. In *La Main Coupée,* this persecutory force is embodied not, as one would expect, by the opposing German troops, but rather by the officers of the French army, particularly the sergeants, whom Cendrars frequently accuses of plotting against him. When he requests that his captain grant Przybyszewski, a fellow legionnaire, the rank of corporal “pour embêter les sergents,” the captain replies:

> --Encore tes histoires de sergents! Mais cela devient une idée fixe. Ma parole, tu es persécuté.
>
> --Certainement, mon capitaine, je le suis, mais par eux!
>
> --Et depuis quand?
>
> – Vous le savez bien, capitaine, depuis que nous sommes au front.[264]

The obsessional nature (*idée fixe*) of this belief in his persecution by this higher rank

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[263] Klein, “Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms” 183.
[264] Cendrars, *La Main Coupée* 666.

of enlisted soldier (in other words, what he himself might one day become), culminates in Cendrars' assertion to a general that he does not wish to be promoted to sergeant because, in order to attain this rank, he asserts, “il faut avoir tué père et mère.”[265] And yet, is this not precisely Cendrars' own crime, or at least the crime of which his post-amputation writing seems to accuse him? If Blaise Cendrars lost his arm on the battlefields of Champagne, it is only, as far as his *œuvre* is concerned, because this arm is the pound of flesh required to avenge the multiple death warrants that he had signed with his poet's pen. Like Lacenaire before him, Cendrars' is a hand that wields both pen and knife (in Cendrars' case the famous *eustach*e of “J'ai tué”).[266] However, in contrast with Lacenaire, Cendrars' crime is not merely one of murder that engenders writing, nor of murder that itself performs a sort of writing, but rather of murder *through writing.* Hélène's suicide by letter that doubles the perceived childhood demise of the mother, and the symbolic murder of the father accomplished by the choice of pseudonym, all point to Cendrars' right-handed compositions as producing death.

If Cendrars' right hand is excised for its murderous impulses and associated with destruction, then it seems that his remaining left hand is characterized by creation and endowed with a healing, redemptive power. In *La Main Coupée,* Cendrars recounts in an apparent aside to the main text the story of an operation he performed on his *bien-aimée* in a hotel room in Nice, in which he removes a tumor from her breast. He writes:

> Voyant que son mal empirait, qu'elle souffrait beaucoup et que son moral baissait, je lui dis au bout de quelques jours de petits soins et de compresses inutiles: “--Écoute, chérie, je vais te faire très, très mal, mais aie confiance en

[265] Ibid. 696.
[266] Leroy notes in *La Main de Cendrars* the weapon's seeming allusion to the protagonist of Nerval's *La Main Enchantée* (187).

> moi. Je vais t'opérer." Et séance tenante, sans lui laisser le temps de se reconnaître, ayant fait flamber mon instrument à la flamme de plusieurs allumettes, je lui incisai le sein avec une lame de rasoir... et pour la première fois de ma vie je tenais une lame de la main gauche! Aujourd'hui, après 30 ans, on peut l'inspecter avec une grosse loupe, ce sein, ce sein adoré, il ne porte pas la moindre cicatrice, pas la moindre modification, et le bout et le mamelon et la courbe en sont parfaits.[267]

This left hand, capable of ensuring and restoring life, would signal, in Kleinian terms, an attempt to make reparation, and the repair is enacted on the female body. It is almost as if this episode of successful cure (a cure that, nonetheless, causes immense pain for the *bien-aimée)* on a part of the body that not only distinguishes male from female, but that also represents the first partial-object for the infant—the object that is both good and bad because it gives and withholds life itself— constitutes an effort to undo the symbolic maternal murder committed by the guilty right hand. Cendrars would eventually christen this redemptive left hand "ma main amie," and would adopt this phrase as the closing salutation in much of his correspondence.

The feminine gendering of the noun *main* in French, particularly when partnered with the adjective *amie,* only seems to reinforce the idea that the remaining hand's purpose is to restore and revive the feminine form. However, since this reparation still entails a distinct component of violence and pain, it would seem a textual attempt to justify earlier acts of aggression as something in the service of a greater good— a destruction born of love, an excision of the "bad object" so that only the good remains behind. In closing, one could argue that the *Mémoires* and other *écrits de la main gauche,* constitute a similar effort, through writing, to make

[267] Cendrars, *La Main Coupée* 742-743.

reparation to the female/maternal body.

2.7- Conclusions

The criminal qualities of the severed hand in Cendrars, as in Maupassant, appear to be associated with violence against the maternal body, and for both authors the mother is the unique bestower of a creative inheritance that includes the gifts of language and writing. However, whereas this matricidal violence in Maupassant leaves behind a fear of retaliation at the hands of a persecutory mother, in Cendrars' literary world the mother's perceived death leaves behind only an incomprehensible emptiness and the trauma of abandonment. In Maupassant, the multiple evasions and relocations of the fantastic severed hand seem to work in the service of acquitting the author for his wrongdoing. Conversely, Cendrars' *Mémoires* ultimately reveal a tendency to accept guilt for his perceived literary crimes, and the displacements and circumlocutions of his *œuvre* seem to speak more to the unrepresentable nature of his loss than to a desire to avoid punishment.

Blaise Cendrars, throughout his long left-handed literary career, never wore a prosthesis. Rather, his entire literary corpus comes to function as a kind of prosthesis, if we chose to understand the term according to the beautiful definition David Wills lays forth in his book of the same title: "For the writing of prosthesis, as is demonstrated by the triple juncture that serves as its pretext, is inevitably caught in a complex play of displacements; prosthesis being about nothing if not placement, displacement, replacement, standing, dislodging, substituting, setting, amputating, supplementing."[268] Such is Blaise Cendrars *œuvre*— a complicated prochronic world in which writing serves to relocate experience, substitute one body for another and

[268] Wills, David, *Prosthesis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995) 9.

supplement memory in the hopes of rewriting the tragedy of the past. Particularly in the volumes of the *Tétralogie,* so often characterized as *mytho-biographie,* Cendrars creates for himself a prosthetic life— one that overlays and completes the holes and voids created by the absent mother.

The amputation of the poet's right hand, subsequently exiled to the heavens, represents a sacrifice that allows Cendrars to be reborn through left-handed writing. While novels and early prose works of Cendrars' remaining hand continue to be marked by violence and destruction, the *Mémoires* and later writings of *la main amie* are characterized by an effort to make reparation to the maternal body— to build back up what had been burned to the ground. As proof of the life-long commitment to such a task, we can consider the author's reported final words, whispered to Raymone on his death bed in 1961: "Construire...Construire..."[269] Building and writing, two tasks for which the hand is the instrument *par excellence.*[270]

[269] Reported by Nino Frank in "Cendrars "Tous les pays, tous les peuples, j'aime ça" Sa dernière parole: Construire" for the *Gazette Lausanne.* This passage is quoted in Claude Leroy's preface to the Pléiade edition (*Œuvres complètes* X).

[270] Jay Bochner explores at length the themes of creation and construction in Cendrars' work in *Blaise Cendrars: Discovery and Re-creation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978).

Chapter 3: Artificial Hands: Life, Death and Copy in *L'Ève Future* and *La Vénus d'Ille*

The hands that I wish to explore in this chapter differ significantly from the severed hands of Maupassant and his literary brethren. These hands are uncanny not because they were once living and continue to live, but because they should never have lived and yet, do. These are the hands of statues and androids— hands made of marble and metal that seem to miraculously come to life. And yet, the animation of the inanimate in these texts seems ultimately to speak more to man's relationship with death than to his ability to produce life. Historically, powerful connections exist between statues and death, and these connections have not gone unremarked by literary scholars. Kenneth Gross comments eloquently on this correlation in his book *The Dream of the Moving Statue*. He argues,

> The living statue turns living persons to stone or brings about their death. It is as if the fiction of animation grips us most strongly by virtue of an elusive process of identification and exchange, a sense of magical infection, a necessary crossing between the lending and the theft of life. Giving a statue life becomes a transgression, a piece of violence, an act that must be paid for by death, or at least (and this can feel deathly enough) a radical transformation of the terms of what we call life.[271]

Gross's use of the word "grip" should not go unremarked, as there would seem no better figure for this act of transfer and exchange than the human hand. Indeed, Gross's language throughout the entire passage strongly evokes the image of a hand. The term "identification" could recall the science of fingerprinting—a science that relies on the uniqueness of the hand as the ultimate symbol of identity, while "lending

[271] Gross, Kenneth, *The Dream of the Moving Statue* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006) 115.

and theft" similarly invoke the notion of exchange, with objects of value literally "changing hands," whether voluntarily or involuntarily. It is this exact figure of the hand as point of identity, exchange and infection that is taken up by 19th century authors such as Villiers de l'Isle-Adam and Prosper Mérimée in works such as *L'Ève future* and *La Vénus d'Ille*. Whereas the previous chapter focused primarily on literary representations of masculine hands and their relationship to criminality and guilt, in these two narratives it is primarily a question of feminine hands and, even more specifically, the hands of Venus. It is fitting that the primary figure of this analysis should be a Roman goddess since, in both of these texts, touching or being touched by the statue becomes a form of sacrifice— an offering up of life to death.

3.1- Idolatry and Technology

Michel Serres begins his book *Statues* by evoking this ancient connection between sculpture and sacrifice in the form of the idol. In order for the statue to "live"— that is to say, to take on the status and agency of a deity— those who worship it must die. Serres goes on to suggest that humanity has not moved as far beyond this ancient mode of sacrifice as it would trick itself into believing. He draws uncomfortable parallels between the cult of Baal in Carthage as Flaubert describes it in *Salammbô* and the modern tragedy of the space shuttle *Challenger*, explaining that both events involve the same primal impulse of sacrifice. Both the cult of Baal and the cult of modern science culminate in the filling of an empty black box with men reduced to offerings, but the tendency of humanity to look always forward leads us to forget our own anthropology and effectively blinds us to the repetition of the tragedy. In sum, Serres eloquently contends, "Nous ne reconnaissons pas Carthage à cap Canaveral ni le dieu Baal en Challenger, devant les mêmes morts. Ni la statue dans la

fusée, toutes deux métalliques et chaudes, boîtes noires pleines d'hommes."[272]

In both ancient and modern cases, he says, this failure to fully understand the risk of engaging the statue in our quest for knowledge, and the inability to accurately calculate the cost of this knowledge, results in death. He explains, "L'avantage demande une dette croissante, un certain équilibre se paie. Nous avions cru le savoir gratuit et nos interventions innocentes, nous apprenons à régler nos débits et en quelle monnaie."[273] Serres understands that the price of embracing (or being embraced by) the statue is imminent death—the bodies in the black boxes settle our debts. It is precisely this brush with the grave, as we contemplate these objects that simultaneously recall and reject life, which lends statues and androids their air of uncanniness. Serres' observations are extremely pertinent to the literary texts that I wish to discuss, as both Mérimée's *La Vénus d'Ille* and Villiers' *L'Ève future* explore the deadly consequences of failing to correctly determine what must be "handed over" to the texts' eponymous figures— a failure that results from an inability to read the past.

Serres' work is also important for the ways in which it examines the relationship between the mythological and the technological, a relationship that Elissa Marder similarly explores in her book *The Mother in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* in a way that directly maps the phenomenon onto a female body. In the introduction to the book, entitled "Pandora's Legacy," she recalls for us that the ancient Greeks' conception of woman's entry into the world was more technological than natural. She writes,

> According to the legend that comes to us from an ancient Greek text by Hesiod, Pandora, the first woman, was artificially produced rather than

[272] Serres, Michel, *Statues: Le second livre des fondations* (Paris: Editions François Bourin, 1987) 19.
[273] Ibid. 24.

> naturally born from any mother or mother figure. Commissioned by Zeus and fabricated by Hephaestus out of clay and water, this first woman, first of the race of all future "human" women, is a manufactured product. In today's parlance, we might call her an android, a robot, or a replicant.[274]

Marder refers to this complex ontological status as "Pandora's Paradox," and suggests that Pandora's narrative proves to be fertile ground for helping us to think the relationship between the natural and the artificial/technological, as well as the relationship between life and death. She recalls for us that Pandora introduces not only sexual difference, but mortality as well.[275] If the central feminine figures of these two 19th-century texts ostensibly resemble the roman goddess Venus, one cannot ignore the ways in which they also serve as re-presentations of Pandora, the first artificial woman. In comparing Villiers' and Mérimée's texts through their shared figures of artificial hands, I hope to demonstrate the ways in which both works, set against a background of scientific and technological understanding, ultimately demonstrate the failure of scientific inquiry to explain the uncanny nature of their eponymous technological figures. I will argue that the ultimate consequence of this scientific failure to define what constitutes life results in two texts that posit the nature of man's relationship to death.

3.2- Back to Eden: L'Ève future

L'Ève future, Auguste de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's 1886 fantastic masterpiece, seems almost to have anticipated the observations of Serres and Marder regarding the unsettlingly similar nature of the sculptural and the mechanical. A complex and

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[274] Marder, Elissa, *The Mother in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Psychoanalysis, Photography, Deconstruction* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012) 9.

[275] "The invention of the first artificial woman puts an end to the prehistorical era and inaugurates the dawn of human time and human history. Human history, therefore, begins with Pandora's arrival into the world of men; she brings "death," "birth," and sexual difference with her in addition to all the other "ills" associated with mortal life." (Ibid. 10).

enigmatic novel, *L'Ève future*, makes this relationship explicit through the juxtaposition of three representations of Venus— one stone, one flesh, and one electric. The novel's invocation of these three figures, from "oldest" to "newest," demands that we as readers question whether Villiers is moving us forward from death to life, from life to death, or merely from one form of death to another. Additionally, the novel raises important questions about the relationship between man and machine. As Dalia Judovitz has shown, Descartes' insistence on the subject's capacity for symbolic representation, both verbal and non-verbal, as that which separates him from the machine has left an enduring legacy on western culture.[276] However, in reading *L'Ève future*, we discover that this is a novel where nothing represents as it should. The stone woman is not simply art, the human woman fails to represent life and the electric woman goes beyond the artificial. The reason for these misrepresentations, we will find, is at least partially bound up in a kind of literary chiromancy that requires us to read the series of feminine hands that appear throughout the novel.

On a purely narrative level, *L'Ève future* tells the story of the American inventor Thomas Edison and his young British friend Lord Ewald. Having invented the phonograph and the light bulb, Edison has turned his attention and intellect to the creation of a female android named Hadaly— one that would effectively replace her human model, the modern woman, considered by Edison to be flawed and inconsistent with herself. The arrival of Lord Ewald, who is on the verge of killing himself due to the torturous nature of his relationship with just such a woman—the actress Alicia Clary—, provides the famous inventor with the ideal opportunity to test the capacities of his creation. Lord Ewald agrees to allow Edison to reproduce Alicia's

[276] Judovitz, Dalia, *Cultures of the Body: Genealogies of Modernity* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001) 80-81.

physical form on the body of the android with the hope that the mechanical woman will replicate Alicia's exterior (supposedly identical to that of the Venus de Milo) while avoiding the problem of her unbearable bourgeois sensibilities. The ultimate goal of the project is to reproduce Alicia's divine beauty while freeing it of her earthy and base sentiments. Over the course of three weeks, Edison is able to reproduce exactly Alicia's physiognomy on Hadaly's metallic form. He is aided in this endeavor by the mysterious Mistress Anderson and her mystic counterpart, Sowana. Mistress Anderson is the widow of Edison's friend Edward Anderson, who killed himself in despair after abandoning his family and ruining himself for another actress— Miss Evelyn Habal. While Mistress Anderson remains in a deep sleep, her spirit, identified only as Sowana, is able to communicate with Edison through the emerging 19th century science of magnetism.

On the day that the android is to be revealed in her new form, Alicia Clary requests that Lord Ewald accompany her on a walk through Menlo Park. The serious and otherworldly nature of her discourse convinces Lord Ewald that he has made a terrible mistake, until the Alicia before him reveals herself to be the android, Hadaly. Convinced by Hadaly that he can, in fact, love a machine, Ewald helps her into the ebony coffin in which she travels and the two depart by ship for England. Several weeks later, Edison receives word that the ocean liner on which Ewald was traveling has sunk and Hadaly, trapped in storage, has perished with the wreck. The list of casualties includes the actress Alicia Clary, but Ewald writes to Edison that he regrets only the loss of the android, and hints at his own impending death by signing his missive “Adieu.”[277]

The events of the novel, with numerous chapters devoted exclusively to

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[277] Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Auguste de, *L'Ève future, Œuvres complètes,* Ed. Alan Raitt and Pierre-Georges Castex Vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1986) 1017.

scientific explanations of the android's construction, would seem to place *l'Ève future* in the literary vein of works such as E.T.A. Hoffman's *Der Sandmann* and Edgar Allan Poe's "The Man that was Used Up," which deal respectively with the construction of automatons and mechanical prosthesis. In fact, Villiers specifically references works by both of these authors in one of Edison's many *éloge* to the wonders of his artificial woman.[278] However, Villiers' introduction of Sowana as an otherworldly consciousness that infiltrates Hadaly's mechanical form propels the novel beyond basic questions of the artificial versus the organic. While the novel certainly explores the themes of artificiality and mechanical reproduction, Villiers' larger concern seems to involve the relationship between technology and death. After all, it should never be forgotten that Ewald is on the point of killing himself when he comes to see Edison, and Edison offers him a mechanical woman as a means of keeping him alive. The stakes of the experiment are literally life or death.

This is not a problematic that is unique to *L'Ève future*. Many of Villiers' shorter narratives, eventually published in the collections *Contes Cruels* and *L'Amour Suprême*, show a marked obsession with the mechanical and the possibilities of life beyond death represented by the figure of the guillotine. It would seem that hands are not the only objects of amputation to pique the author's interest, as narratives such as "Le Secret de l'échafaud" explore the brain/ body dichotomy in terms of the location of life. Does the guillotine cause instant death or does consciousness continue after the fatal blow? The question is left in suspension in "Le Secret de l'échafaud," where the murderer M. de La Pommerais, having agreed to advance the scientific inquiries of Dr. Velpeau by winking his right eye three times to indicate his continued consciousness after his decapitation, manages only to close the eye a single time,

[278] "Je doterai cette Ombre de tous les chants de *l'Antonia* du conteur Hoffmann, de toutes les mysticités passionnées des *Ligéias* d'Edgar Poe, de toutes les séductions ardentes de la *Vénus* du puissant musicien Wagner!" (Villiers, *L'Ève future* 125).

making it impossible to say whether the movement was the result of a willful act or merely a muscular spasm.[279] The question would appear to be similarly deferred in *L'Ève future* by the novel's fatal shipwreck. Ultimately, the mechanical idol that was created in order to preserve life instead ends up producing only death. And yet, the idol still manages to maintain the mystery of where on this spectrum of life and death she belongs, as the reader never sees her reanimated and awoken from the tomb.

The mystery of Hadaly's nature is expressed throughout the novel, in part, by a metonymic relationship between the android and her hand. It seems important to note that the reader's first knowledge of Hadaly's existence comes by means of a prototype of her hand that sits on an ebony table in Edison's laboratory. Having read Lord Ewald's dispatch announcing his arrival, Edison tosses it impatiently onto the table, where it lands on the following object: "C'était un bras humain posé sur un coussin de soie violâtre. Le sang paraissait figé autour de la section humérale: à peine si quelques taches pourpres, sur un chiffon de batiste placé tout auprès, attestaient une récente opération. C'était le bras et la main gauche d'une jeune femme."[280] At this point in the novel, the mysterious hand has not yet revealed its artificial origins, and would seem to be merely a feminine counterpart to the various severed hands we have already encountered in 19th-century literature. This impression is reinforced through the description of the small amount of blood clinging to both the arm and its cushion. After all, only living animals bleed, and so the small *taches pourpres* should serve as the ultimate marking of the hand's humanity and as the mark of its amputation from a larger whole. But, in fact, this arm has never actually belonged to a body. Deborah Harter has noted how the very nature of this hand invites us to forget at every moment its technological nature. In her book *Bodies in Pieces: Fantastic Narrative and The*

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[279] Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Auguste, "Le Secret de l'échafaud," *Œuvres complètes* Ed. Alan Raitt and Pierre-Georges Castex, V.2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1986) 19-26.

[280] Villiers, *L'Ève future* 780.

Poetics of the Fragment, she writes of the arm:

> it's lifelikeness is utterly perfect, its drops of blood are just 'barely...clotted" (45), its satiny skin contrasts completely with the artificial trappings woven about it. Indeed, the ebony table, the cushions of violet silk, the enamel viper, the sapphire ring, the pearl-colored glove (that 'must certainly have been donned many times' 45) only serve to highlight its own difference from these artifacts. It is an arm that exudes ontological fullness, so compellingly does the blood seem to flow in its veins, so gracefully do its fingers hold an elegant glove as they catch the missive Edison has just received.[281]

It is only much later in the novel, when Edison draws Ewald's attention to this uncanny curio, that this arm is finally revealed to be a sort of prosthetic double for the grisly, ghostly severed hands of other 19th-century authors. Until that moment, it effectively erases every trace of its artificial nature, fooling the reader into believing in its naturalness much as Hadaly will successfully deceive Lord Ewald in the gardens of Menlo Park. Harter remarks on this subterfuge as she concludes her remarks on the hand by noting, "it is an arm that is a fitting introduction to a novel filled with female bodies—both living and not, both wakeful and somnambulant—whose parts seem ready at every moment to circulate with perfect deception."[282] However, as Harter goes on to argue, the progression of the novel ultimately reveals this deception to be far from perfect.[283] While there are multiple moments of *méconnaissance*, or mistaken identity, that occur throughout the novel, it is in part because the various female bodies in the novel are not interchangeable that Edison's experiment in replacing one with another ultimately fails and results in death. In order to better understand where

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[281] Harter, Deborah, *Bodies in Pieces: Fantastic Narrative and the Poetics of the Fragment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996) 42.

[282] Harter 42.

[283] "it is only in Hadaly's difference— her failure to duplicate her model— that she will become beloved." (Harter 46).

the failure lies, it is helpful to note that these gaps in representation are frequently presented in the text through the figure of the female hand.

When we consider the fact that *l'Ève future* ultimately confronts the reader with three more or less physically identical women, it compels us to regard them as steps in a very specific sort of evolution—one that brings their shared form simultaneously closer to life and to death. It could be argued that the most effective way to trace this evolution is through the figure of the hand, as it is the one physical characteristic that appears to legitimately differentiate three otherwise identical forms. At different points in the novel both Alicia and Lord Ewald will comment on the importance of the hand in determining identity. For Lord Ewald, this moment comes when he finds himself alone with Alicia in the gardens of Menlo Park, listening to her strangely profound discourse and convincing himself that he has made a terrible mistake in assenting to Hadaly's creation. However, this moment is interrupted when he notices the many jeweled rings on Alicia's hand, the detail revealing to him that he is in fact conversing with the android. For Alicia Clary, this moment occurs when she finds herself faced with her stone counterpart, the Venus di Milo.

The Venus di Milo is constantly referred to in the text as the *Vénus Victrix*, a seemingly strange moniker for a goddess who has not been able to survive the passage of time with all of her beauty intact. However, Villiers is not the first to attribute this title to the statue, as an 1821 drawing by Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Debay makes use of the same nomenclature.[284] The name could refer to the fact that the Venus's left arm, found beside but separated from the statue at its excavation, originally held an apple, representing Aphrodite's victory over Hera and Athena in the judgment of Paris.[285] Of course, Aphrodite's victory in this contest also began the Trojan War, as she had

[284] Curtis, Gregory, *Disarmed: The Story of the Venus de Milo* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003). 87.
[285] Ibid. 7.

promised Paris the hand of Helen as a reward for his choice. The mythical warning would seem to be clear— a woman's beauty is a deadly thing.

However, this moral is one that would be unreadable to the characters of Villiers' novel precisely because the Venus is not whole. When confronted with the statue that is her perfect likeness, Alicia Clary's first impulse is to remark on the one feature that differentiates her from this classical double. She absurdly exclaims, "Tiens, moi!" and then continues, "oui, mais moi, j'ai mes bras, et j'ai l'air plus distinguée."[286] The statue's arms are made hyper-visible by their very absence. The stone woman is physically imperfect and the living woman is ontologically flawed, and both must therefore fade into obscurity to make room for a new order of creation— the mechanical. The narration of the novel informs us that this evolutionary process is precisely the sub-text of Edison and Ewald's verbal dissection of the android's physical construction:

> En effet, ce que disaient, en réalité, ces deux hommes, l'un avec ses calculs littérairement transfigurés, l'autre avec son silence d'adhésion, ne signifiât pas autre chose que les paroles suivantes, adressées, inconsciemment, au grand x des Causes premières. "La jeune amie que tu daignas m'envoyer, jadis, pendant les premières nuits du monde, me paraît aujourd'hui devenue le simulacre de la sœur promise et je ne reconnais plus assez ton empreinte, en ce qui anime sa forme déserte, pour la traiter en compagne."[287]

Because the divine signature, in the form of an "empreinte," or fingerprint, is no longer discernible in women like Alicia, Edison and Ewald feel the need to place themselves in the role of creator in order to bring forth a new kind of companion.[288]

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[286] Villiers, *L'Ève future* 816.
[287] Ibid. 925.
[288] "Hadaly se tenait debout entre ses deux créateurs. Immobile, voilée, silencieuse, on eût die qu'elle les regardait sous les ténèbres qui cachaient son visage." (Ibid. 931).

The mechanical arm of a future goddess would then seem to replace the missing arms of the Venus de Milo, the presumed original model for many of the other female figures in the text. However, where the statue's left hand once held an apple, the android's hand is otherwise adorned. Villiers writes, “Autour du poignet délicat s'enroulait une vipère d'or émaillé: à l'annulaire de la pâle main étincelait une bague de saphirs. Les doigts idéals retenaient un gant couleur perle, mis plusieurs fois sans doute.”[289] This substitution of a snake for an apple places the formerly pagan fruit within a distinct Judeo-Christian context, alluding to Eve's encounter with the serpent who seduces her into eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge, traditionally symbolized in western culture by an apple.[290] Villiers seems intent to remind his reader that in this future Eden, as in its biblical namesake, mankind's destruction will once again be mediated by a woman, and also that obtaining knowledge by defying the divine is not without a cost. This biblical connection is reinforced by Villiers' choice of epigraph for the final chapter of the novel, taken from the book of Genesis: “Poenituit autem Deus quod hominem fecisset in terra et, tactus dolore cordis intrinsecus: Delebo, inquit, hominem!”[291] Alan Raitt notes in his commentary of the Folio Classique edition that this biblical epigraph replaced an earlier choice of “Sic fata voluere,” and hypothesizes that the substitution is likely due to “un souci d'orthodoxie” on the part of Villiers.[292] The epigraph, of course, has the effect of

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[289] Ibid. 780.

[290] “But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate*.”* (Genesis 3:4-6 *The Holy Bible, NRSV,* 4).

[291] So the LORD said, “I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth—men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air—for I am grieved that I have made them.” (Genesis 6:7 *The Holy Bible, NRSV,* 7-8).

[292] “Sur l'exemplaire du roman qu'il a offert à J.-K. Huysmans, Villiers a substitué cette épigraphe à celle de l'édition originale, qui était “Sic *fata* voluere”, attribué aux “paroles augurales” (“Telle fut la volonté du Destin”). Il y a à cette substitution deux raisons probables: un souci d'orthodoxie qui lui fait préférer une citation biblique, et le fait que l'idée du destin était déjà explicite dans le titre du chapitre, “Fatum.” (Raitt, Alan, “Notes” *L'Ève future* (Paris*:* Folio Classique, 1993) 437).

placing the fatal shipwreck within the discourse of the biblical flood. God punishes man for his sin and his pride by covering the earth with water and vowing to start again. This final chapter ends as the novel begins, with the closing image being one of the hand: "une clarté lunaire pâlissait encore le bras charmant, la main blanche aux bagues enchantées!" and the defeated Edison gazing at the sky and its "inconcevable mystère."[293]

It is this same beautiful hand, whose image opens and closes the novel, that will allow Edison to demonstrate to Ewald precisely why his mechanical woman will be so much more than a mere doll or automaton. He draws Ewald's attention to the object, demanding of him,"Voulez-vous me dire quelle impression produit sur vous ce spectacle-ci?"[294] Until this particular scene in the novel the hand has represented merely a sort of uncanny and macabre *bric à brac*— a more beautiful and better-preserved version of Swinburne and Maupassant's *main d'écorché*. Following Edison's explanations to Ewald, it is finally revealed to be an artificial construction, a technological object that as such should have no relationship to life. However, Edison requests that his friend engage this mechanical arm in a distinctly human display of affection. He entreats, "Une expérience encore: voulez-vous serrer cette main? Qui sait? Elle vous le rendra peut-être."[295] When the young Englishman takes the fingers of this hand in his own, Villiers writes, "La main répondit à cette pression avec une affabilité si douce, si lointaine, que le jeune homme en songea qu'elle faisait, peut-être, partie d'un corps invisible. Avec une profonde inquiétude, il laissa retomber la chose de ténèbres."[296]

As I have noted earlier in this dissertation, it is frequently the case that the

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[293] Villiers, *L'Ève future* 1017.
[294] Ibid. 830.
[295] Ibid. 118.
[296] Ibid . 121.

literary figure of the hand serves as a metonymy for the body as a whole. Jutta Fortin notes the ways in which this seems true of the supposedly ideal Hadaly's mechanical arm in *l'Ève future*. She argues,

> In its combination of perfection and uncanniness, the human-looking fragment represents Hadaly as a whole. All her superficially sensible parts are perfect copies of Alicia's. Yet all of them are better in some way: more durable (her flesh) and more valuable (her golden lungs) than the original. Like the hand, Hadaly herself is at once a perfect copy of Alicia and her antithesis.[297]

While Fortin's observations are important, she attributes the uncanniness of Hadaly's hand for Ewald only to its "seeming naturalness."[298] I would argue that the uncanny effect of this hand stems not only from its flesh-like appearance, but also from the way that a mechanical object has acquired an agency that should only be available to living human flesh. If it were merely the sight of an ostensibly human hand lying on the work table that aroused a sentiment of the uncanny, we would find ourselves back in the realm of Freud's essay on the subject, whereby severed hands and dismembered limbs are primarily uncanny because of their relationship to the castration complex, and doubly so when they, to quote Freud, "prove capable of independent activity."[299] However, the text insists that what is truly uncanny about this hand for Ewald is not only its appearance, but the way in which, despite being mechanical, it is animated and responds to life. Ewald knows the hand to be artificial, and yet it responds with *affabilité*, a distinctly human trait, which causes him to classify it as something belonging to the tenebrous region between life and death. It is the particular confusion of the human and the technological embodied in this narrative moment that will

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[297] Fortin, Jutta Emma, *Method in Madness: Control Mechanisms in the French Fantastic.* (Amsterdam, NY: Rodopi, 2005) 102.

[298] "The seeming naturalness of the artificial hand is precisely what strikes Ewald as uncanny and yet the hand also simultaneously fascinates him." (Ibid. 101).

[299] Freud, "The Uncanny" 220.

eventually allow Hadaly to move beyond the realm of a mere automaton like the wooden doll Olympia of Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann*, made only of clockwork, and into the realm of a subject that can be truly brought to life.

However, in the pages of the novel directly following Lord Ewald's encounter with the artificial hand, the text continues to conceive of Hadaly as no more than a moving doll. There seems a stubborn refusal on the part of Edison and Ewald to open themselves up to the full possibility of that uncanny handshake. Just as *Der Sandmann* reveals that it is ultimately the reflection of Nathaniel's own desire that animates Olympia, *L'Ève future* initially seems to imply that Hadaly will be no more than an animated receptacle for the desire that Ewald is already investing in Alicia Clary.[300] Edison explains to Ewald that only Hadaly's physical form will come from him, but that it will be left up to the young nobleman to fill her with the Promethean spark of life. He contends, "milord, en vérité je vous le dis: une seule de ces mêmes étincelles, encore divines, tirées de votre être, et dont vous avez tant de fois essayé (toujours en vain!) d'animer le néant de votre jeune admirée, suffira pour en vivifier l'ombre."[301] In psychoanalytic terms, we might say that with this proclamation Edison is demanding that Ewald create a split in his ego, and to subsequently project a part of that ego onto Hadaly. The significance and potential of this possible ego-splitting will be discussed at a later point in this chapter, but for now let it suffice to say that this particular quotation of Edison's suggests an important connection between psychic and bodily energies, and alludes to Hadaly's status as a creation of male desire.

It is not without significance that the two characters explicitly named as Hadaly's creators are men. Just like the automaton Olympia in Hoffmann's tale, Hadaly apparently has two fathers and no mother. Chantal Diérickx contends that it is

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[300] See Hélène Cixous, "Le Nom du Pire: Lecture de l'*Homme au sable," Prénoms de Personne* (Paris: Seuil,1974) 39-99.
[301] Villiers, *L'Ève future* 841.

precisely because of Hadaly's unique parentage that she is capable of serving as the ideal woman. Diérickx argues that because Hadaly is a sterile machine, she is free of the contaminating influence of reproduction through generation. She reads Hadaly as a reverse Pandora, one that will put an end to the messy affair of birth through breeding that this trick of the gods introduced. She explains,

> En demandant à Héphaïstos de mouler pour Pandora un corps de parthénos qui la rendait semblable aux déesses et en confiant à Hermès le soin de lui insuffler un esprit de chienne et un caractère de voleuse, et de créer en son sein les mensonges et les mots trompeurs, avant de lui donner une voix, Zeus avait conçu un prototype génétique dont les hommes allaient garder le potentiel de disparate, il avait fait fabriquer le génotype initial qui, de transmission en transmission, pourrait produire des aberrations comme Alicia.[302]

Hadaly is the inversion of the Sphinx's riddle as to whether man is born of woman, because she is woman born of man.[303] What Hadaly, Eve, Venus and Pandora all have in common is that they are not of woman born, and they do not (at least originally) know death. They are all women that are created rather than procreated. This provides them with a unique relationship to the phenomenon of birth. However, of all these figures, Hadaly proves to be the only one who cannot herself give birth. She is, as Diérickx points out, excluded from the model of sexual generation. And yet, it seems important to acknowledge that the text is full of an even stranger kind of generation produced by the splitting and doubling of an original image.

When the women are viewed in chronological succession, Alicia Clary

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[302] Diérickx, Chantal Collion, *La femme, la parole et la mort dans Axël et L'Eve Future de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam* (Paris: Champion 2001) 223.

[303] Sigmund Freud contends in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* that the riddle of the Sphinx is in fact a distorted form of “the riddle of where babies come from.” (Freud, Sigmund, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* Ed. and Trans. James Strachey, Vol. 7 (London: Hogarth Press, 1966-74) 194.

appears to be the mediating body between the stone Venus and the mechanical one. She is the transitional figure between the past and the future, the one that, in a certain way of thinking, brings the stone statue to life through her identical features. Alicia is the Venus di Milo restored to her full physical beauty, but at the same time she is not complete enough to merit the perfect form bestowed upon her. Thus, Alicia comes to serve as a model for Hadaly, who will be both physically and spiritually perfect. And yet, just like her human model, Hadaly contains her own incomprehensible disconnect. Lord Ewald, having conversed with the android in a subterranean Eden, confides in Edison, "Vous m'avez dit: 'les difficultés que présente la création d'un être électromagnétique sont faciles à résoudre: le résultat seul est mystérieux.'— En vérité vous avez tenu parole; car, déjà, ce résultat me paraît presque totalement étranger aux moyens employés pour l'obtenir."[304] The non-correspondence between Hadaly's mechanical physical construction and her mysterious consciousness reads as an inverse image of Alicia's ethereal beauty and bourgeois mentality. Alicia, it would seem, is less than the sum of her parts—less than she should be—whereas Hadaly is somehow more. However, in this comparison that recalls a photograph and its negative, it becomes difficult to say which woman serves as the original and which is merely an inverted copy.

It is precisely this difficulty of representation that is discussed by Marie-Hélène Huet in her article "Living Images: Monstrosity and Representation." Huet begins her comments on the novel by presenting the ways in which the text highlights Alicia's monstrous character, citing Edison's initial reaction to the sight of this living statue in which he asserts "cette ressemblance-- n'est que maladive, que ce doit être le résultat de quelque envie, en sa bizarre lignée; qu'elle est née avec cela comme

[304] Villiers, *L'Ève future* 942.

d'autres naissent tigrés ou palmées; qu'en un mot c'est un phénomène aussi anormal qu'une géante."[305] The reason that Edison identifies Alicia as monstrous is twofold, says Huet. Firstly, her uncanny likeness to the statue is rendered doubly monstrous because "the original is not the product of nature but of art—an unnatural deformity, despite its beauty."[306] Secondly, she cites Alicia's heterogeneous and composite nature— the fact that there is an absolute disparity between her body and soul and that her physical form in no way corresponds with her middle-class mentality. She is, as Ewald says, a sphinx without an enigma.[307] This double monstrosity, Huet argues, creates a paradox that allows Alicia to simultaneously exist as both the epitome and abject failure of representation. She contends that representing a monster such as Alicia by a creature such as Hadaly "requires one to reverse the order of its original production." She explains, "Hadaly reproduces, but exactly in reverse, the reproduction which is already Alicia Clary," by which she means that whereas Alicia is the monstrous living reproduction of a work of art, Hadaly is a work of art modeled on life.[308]

So, keeping Huet's thoughtful comments on the nature of representation in the novel in mind, one should feel compelled to ask what exactly gets lost or recovered in the various "translations" of these female bodies by their male translators? In order to speak to this question I would draw attention to one of the novel's opening scenes, in which Ewald details for Edison the beginning of his relationship with Alicia Clary. When Edison expresses some confusion as to what exactly his friend finds so abhorrent about Alicia's presentation of her own history, Ewald explains, "Oui; mais— c'est ma traduction que vous venez d'entendre et non les paroles mêmes

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[305] Ibid. 969.

[306] Huet, Marie-Hélène, "Living Images: Monstrosity and Representation," *Representations* 4 (Autumn1983) 78.

[307] Villiers, *L'Ève future* 807.

[308] Huet 79.

d'Alicia. Autre style, autres sentiments:— et je vois bien qu'il me faut vous avouer le texte même."[309] The young Englishman consequently retells the narrative in Alicia's exact words, and after this second presentation Edison exclaims "Diable!" and is forced to affirm, "les deux teneurs sont d'un ton si distinct, en effet, que la sienne et votre traduction me semblent, à présent, avoir énoncé deux choses n'ayant plus entre elles qu'un rapport fictif."[310] Ewald's description of Alicia in this passage paints a completely different picture than the reality, and Alicia's monstrous qualities are therefore "lost in translation." Indeed, Alicia becomes a sort of puppet in his retelling, with Ewald speaking through her mouth.

Edison's translation of Alicia into Hadaly will similarly replace the living young woman's language with that of another. He explains to Ewald in one of the many chapters dedicated to the android's various functions that his mechanical creation will reproduce exactly the timbre and beauty of Alicia's voice, but will substitute the observations of the greatest poets and philosophers of French culture.[311] He remarks "C'est pourquoi je dis que Hadaly remplace une intelligence par l'Intelligence." [312] Given that women's speech in the novel is frequently entirely dictated by the masculine figures in the text, leaving feminine discourse more or less reduced to mere mimicry of the masculine, it would appear that a radical effort is needed to break the novel's cycle of reproduction and translation that purportedly works to create a new and improved woman of the future. However, as Huet reminds us, there is something regressive about this particular translation, the fact that she is a reversal of the original process that created Alicia Clary.

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[309] Villiers, *L'Ève future* 800.
[310] Ibid. 801.
[311] "Un seul ruban d'étain peut contenir sept heures de ses paroles. Celles-ci sont imaginées par les plus grands poètes, les plus subtils métaphysiciens et les romanciers les plus profonds de ce siècle, génies auxquels je me suis adressé, --et qui m'ont livré, au poids du diamant, ces merveilles à jamais inédites." (Ibid. 910)
[312] Ibid.

Hadaly's creation, therefore, rather than serving as the indication of scientific progress and advancement, seemingly reveals a desire to take refuge from a particular form of life that is too overwhelming and too uncontainable. One need look no further than the title of the novel to find evidence of this strange paradox in which modern scientific technology is used to engender a return to Eden. The modern Eve has evolved to a point that men like Edison and Ewald can no longer identify her as God's creation. The creation of Hadaly, the future Eve, in fact constitutes an attempt to reverse time and return to an earlier historical moment before the introduction of birth and human regeneration that, as Chantal Diérickx has argued, are responsible for the creation of horrors such as Alicia. Alicia Clary herself expresses a similar wish when she first confronts the *Vénus Victrix*. When the actress naïvely exclaims, “Tiens, moi!”, these two simple words testify to a fantasy that would disrupt the actual chronology of reproduction and instead place Alicia at an earlier moment in time that predates the Roman statue. Her incredulous exclamation enacts a displacement through which the modern day actress would have been the model for her classical double— a sort of reversing of linear time.

Hadaly is frequently likened in the novel to an as yet unborn child, one that specifically expresses a wish to remain unborn. When Edison first reveals to her how her form will be translated into that of Alicia, Hadaly exclaims, “Oh, je ne tiens pas à vivre,”[313] and later, when Ewald demands of Edison why the mysterious creature covers her face as if suffering, Edison replies, “Elle a pris l'attitude de l'enfant qui va naître: elle se cache le front devant la vie.”[314] Furthermore, this regressive gesture seemingly cannot be accomplished without a certain kind of death— the ending of that life that is too human to be tolerated. Edison says of Alicia that he will be “le

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[313] Ibid. 828.
[314] Ibid. 906.

meurtrier de sa sottise, l'assassin de son animalité triomphante."[315] The text explicitly figures Alicia's spiritual death as the condition for Hadaly's eventual life. Hadaly will be the "reincarnation," says Edison, of Alicia's external form. This is a curious reversal of reincarnation as it is typically understood, in which a previously existing soul is re-birthed into a new physical form. Here, the process is inverted; the exterior body is retained while the inner mental life is extinguished. Furthermore, the text is clear that this is not a passive, natural death, but a violent murder of Alicia's defective and animalistic mind.

Ultimately, the regressive quality of representation in the novel seems to be as much about stopping the progression of time and controlling death as it is about creating life, and Hadaly's hand once again proves a useful device for encapsulating this anxiety. Edison, in speaking of the beautiful artificial arm, notes that it is in fact superior to its human model when he explains, "Cette copie, disons-nous, de la Nature, --pour me servir de ce mot empirique,-- enterrera l'original sans cesser de paraître vivante et jeune. Cela périra par un coup de tonnerre avant de vieillir."[316] For Edison, change becomes degradation, which eventually becomes death. The beauty of the android, as evidenced in the prototype of her hand, is that she will remain forever young and forever unchanging (or as Edison puts it, always identical to herself) so that, like a work of art, you may love her forever.[317]

The novel, with all of its problematic temporalities and its confusion of the animate and inanimate, ultimately confronts the reader with an important question: is Hadaly more alive or more dead than Alicia, or is she somehow both? Ewald and Edison's desire is that Hadaly would be truly able to bring the statue of the Venus de Milo to life— something that Alicia fails to do through the vulgarity of her spirit.

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[315] Ibid. 836.
[316] Ibid. 831.
[317] "Mille fois plus identique à elle-même.. qu'elle-même!" (Ibid. 837).

However, Ewald as much as professes that what he really wants is a dead woman, one he can contemplate as an aesthetic ideal. He explains,

> Ma passion, d'abord ardente pour les lignes, la voix, le parfum et le charme extérieur de cette femme, est devenue d'un platonisme absolu. Son être moral m'a glacé les sens à jamais: ils en sont devenus purement contemplatifs. Voir en elle une maîtresse me révolterait aujourd'hui! Je n'y suis donc attaché que par une sorte d'admiration douloureuse. Contempler morte Miss Alicia serait mon désir, si la mort n'entrainait pas le triste effacement des traits humains! En un mot la présence de sa forme, fût-elle illusoire, suffirait à mon indifférence éblouie, puisque rien ne peut rendre cette femme digne de l'amour.[318]

Barbara Johnson beautifully reads in this passage from the novel Ewald's desire for a *gisant* rather than a woman in her book *Persons and Things*. She explains, "Living is truly what Alicia does wrong: a live person can never be an object as well as a dead person— or a stone person. Behaving like a subject is often a beautiful woman's mistake."[319] It is almost as if Ewald wants to reverse the Pygmalion process and turn the living girl back into a statue, or at the very least one who lives only according to his wishes.

Johnson's reading of this scene is thorough and compelling, but Ewald's use of language concerning Alicia seems to complicate the matter even further. He implores Alicia, *in abstentia,* "Trahis-moi, plutôt, mais existe!" Alicia is the only woman in the text that is unequivocally alive, and yet she is also the most disposable. The woman Ewald loves fails to even exist for him because she can't exist as a tautology of beauty. As Johnson says, Ewald wants Alicia to be dead, but added to this, she needs

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[318] Ibid. 871.
[319] Johnson, Barbara, *Persons and Things* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008) 128.

to be dead (or as good as dead), in order to exist. So, now as readers we find ourselves in a world where death constitutes existence, and now that we have fallen through this looking glass, we must ask serious questions about the psychological imperatives that would produce such a paradox. What psychic function is being served by conflating life and death in this strange way— by insisting that stasis and immobility, an ability to be always identical and in perfect correspondence with one's image, are *a priori* criteria for existence?

It seems clear that Ewald's concept of death in the above passage is one divorced from eventual decomposition. Rather, his desire to contemplate Alicia in death evokes ideas of preservation and mummification. One could say that in Ewald there is a disavowal of any kind of loss. He prefers to kill himself rather than give up Alicia, even in all her unbearable nature, and this is why Edison must intervene—to save Ewald from experiencing loss by giving him something to take Alicia's place. In short, what Edison offers Ewald in the form of Hadaly is an electrical fetish. Indeed, Edison's "diagnosis" of Lord Ewald's difficulties, wherein he informs Ewald that Alicia's *être* is "celui qui n'y existe pas, — bien plus, que vous savez ne pas y exister! Car vous n'êtes dupe ni de cette femme, ni de vous-même. C'est volontairement que vous fermez les yeux, ceux de votre esprit,-- que vous étouffez le démenti de votre conscience, pour ne reconnaître en cette maîtresse que le fantôme désiré,"[320] reads almost like a French translation of Freud's observations on fetishism, and this should hardly be surprising given what Freud says in his 1927 article about the function of the fetish.

In "Fetishism," Freud explains that an essential tenant of fetishism is the psychic defense of *Verleugnung* or "disavowal." In situations of disavowal, he argues,

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[320] *L'Ève future* 841.

a subject is able to create a sort of psychic compromise that allows him to simultaneously maintain and give up a particular belief. The fetish object is an essential part of this defense because it serves as a substitute for what is being given up, allowing the fetishist to retain the belief at one level while disavowing it on another.

For Freud, the disavowal in question is that of sexual difference, and the belief that all fetishists must psychically uphold is a belief in the maternal penis (a belief in an object, we might note, that never existed in the first place).[321] And yet, in a later section of the essay, Freud significantly links disavowal to other forms of loss in describing two patients who had failed to accept the reality of their fathers' deaths. The important feature of this particular passage is Freud's observation that in both cases, "It was only one current in their mental life that had not recognized their father's death; there was another current which took full account of that fact. The attitude which fitted in with the wish and the attitude which fitted in with reality existed side by side."[322] Lord Ewald, as he has admitted to Edison, knows perfectly well that Alicia will never correspond with his platonic ideal of beauty, and Edison repeats Ewald's earlier observation that that which he desires does not even exist. And yet, as with Freud's patients who refused to acknowledge and accept their fathers' deaths, or the fetishist who refuses to accept the inexistence of the mother's penis, Ewald insists on a form of disavowal that he has found necessary for maintaining the illusion, but which nonetheless has specific consequences for the ego.

Earlier, I argued that Edison's imperative for Lord Ewald to animate Hadaly (the artificial double of the woman that Ewald currently claims as his love object) as he is already animating Alicia Clary amounted to the request, in psychoanalytic terms,

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[321] Freud, Sigmund, "Fetishism," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* Ed. and Trans. James Strachey, Vol. 21 (London: Hogarth Press, 1966-74) 151.
[322] Ibid. 156.

that he produce a split within his own ego. What Ewald sees in Alicia, and what he will presumably be seeing in the android, is merely his own desire reflected back to him. It might even be fair to say that the immense amount of psychic work that Ewald is forced to do in order to disavow the reality of Alicia's very existence[323] proves out Freud's observation that in the case of the fetishist, "very energetic action has been undertaken to maintain the disavowal."[324] James Strachey, in his preface to the Standard Edition of "Fetishism," notes that the essay is the first time that Freud "puts forward reasons for supposing that this 'disavowal' necessarily implies a split in the subject's ego." and also remarks that Freud ultimately concludes in two later works[325] near the end of his life that "splitting of the ego is not peculiar to fetishism but is in fact to be found in many other situations in which the ego is faced with the necessity of constructing a defence, and that it occurs not only in disavowal but also in repression."[326] Strachey's gloss of Freud's observation would seem to offer a possible way of thinking the connections between fetishism and the previously discussed regressive quality of Villiers' novel. If the novel's regressive gestures represent an attempt to return to an earlier historical moment prior to knowledge of loss, then Hadaly-as-fetish would attempt to repress a certain kind of traumatic knowledge—the knowledge of death and decay brought on by the passing of time.

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[323] In his initial presentation of Alicia to Edison, Lord Ewald explains the enormous effort he was forced to undertake in order to satisfactorily explain to himself the mystifying disparity between Alicia's physical beauty and the banality of her speech. The account of the fictional drama that he creates in his own mind comprises two and a half pages of text that present a soliloquy attributed to Alicia, in which, having already been once abandon by a man she loved, she develops a way to test the purity of Ewald's love for her in playing the role of a vapid woman: "À l'œuvre, donc! Soyons ressemblante à leurs femmes, à celles qu'ils désirent et qu'ils préfèrent, les grossiers passants familiers! Qu'aucune lumière natale ne transparaisse en moi! Que la nullité médiocre emmielle mes discours! Comédienne, voici ta première création. Noue ton masque: tu joue pour toi. --Si tu es une puissante artiste, ici le triomphe ne sera point la gloire, mais l'amour." (Villiers, *L'Ève future* 805-806).

[324] Freud, Fetishism 153.

[325] "Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence" (1940) and *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis (1940)*

[326] Strachey, James "Editor's Note to "Fetishism," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud.* Ed. and Trans. James Strachey, Vol. 21 (London: Hogarth Press, 1966-74) 151.

Elissa Marder explores the connection between fetishism, mourning and the technological drive in her book *The Mother in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. In her reading of Avital Ronell's *The Telephone Book*, Marder observes, “Technology is the result of a fantasy to make artificial life more lifelike than life by denying death, absence, disconnection, the improper and sexual difference.”[327] I have already discussed many ways in which artificial life Villiers' novel appears to work in the service of just this sort of denial. She continues, “the technological urge aims to deny the reality of the body's vulnerability and mortality by replacing (or supplementing) it with a body that does not know death; a body of “pure life.”[328] But she reminds us that this “pure life” is inherently repressive and monstrous for the way it manifests an “absolute resistance to change or difference.”[329] In short, she says, this pure life resembles death without decay, and in light of this important observation we begin to understand how Hadaly comes to stand in for Ewald's ideal “dead woman.” It is not merely Hadaly's arm that is a prosthesis, if we consider this word in its usage as a supplement or replacement. She exists (if one can call it that) to replace and deny change, difference and death. Faced with the possibility of loss, Ewald's acceptance of the gift of Hadaly ultimately stems from an attempt at preservation or, more correctly, from an attempt at a double preservation (the effort to preserve both one's belief and one's ego) that is perhaps best symbolized by the figure of the tomb.

Images of tombs certainly abound in Villiers' novel. Hadaly herself can only travel in an ebony coffin “à la manière des morts,” emphasizing her connection with death, and her subterranean abode is on various occasions referred to as a “sépulcre” and a “magique tombeau.” The fantasy is that this tomb, being *magique,* could preserve indefinitely and render life and death indistinguishable, as opposed to a more

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[327] Marder 116.
[328] Ibid.
[329] Ibid.

typical burial that would leave behind only decomposition and decay.

The most stunning example of this later form of burial is found in the chapter entitled "Exhumation," where Edison lays bare before Ewald the various articles that composed the toilette of the deceased femme fatale Evelyn Habal, and which in themselves constituted the entirety of her beauty. He shows Ewald the cosmetics that perfected the dancer's skin and the false *fourmes* that gave shape to her body, but the language used to refer to this exhumation evokes the natural rather than the artificial. Edison treats the objects as if they were Evelyn's bones, the drawer as if it were her tomb:

> Ayant ainsi terminé sa nomenclature, le sinistre ingénieur referma de nouveau, et pêle-mêle, dans le tiroir, tous ce qu'il en avait exhumé; puis, en ayant laissé retomber le couvercle comme une pierre tombale, il le repoussa dans la muraille" (206). "Je comprends, à la rigueur, qu'on puisse encore s'agenouiller devant une sépulture ou un tombeau, dit-il; mais devant ce tiroir, et devant ces mânes!...C'est difficile,-- n'est-ce pas?-- Pourtant ne sont-ce pas là ses vrais ossements?"[330]

The take-away from this particular episode would once again seem to be that false women, by whom Edison means women who deceive by not being in perfect correspondence with themselves, are both dangerous and deadly. However, the irony of Edison replacing this sort of woman with a future Eve made entirely of artificial parts should not be forgotten. Deborah Conyngham argues in her book *Le Silence Éloquent: Thèmes et structure de l'Ève future de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam* that Edison's justification for this seemingly paradoxical situation is related to the idea of disillusionment. She claims, "En Evelyn le naturel est toujours là derrière l'artificiel,

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[330] Villiers, *L'Ève future* 903.

l'accusant de duplicité, tandis que pour Hadaly, l'artificiel est sa nature même. Evitant ainsi le risque de la désillusion telle que Lord Ewald l'avait subie en voyant la "danse macabre" d'Evelyn, Edison a rendu préférable l'artificiel total."[331] Like any good fetish (or any good prosthesis), Hadaly, in her consistency, eliminates the unease and anxiety produced at the moment of disillusionment.

It should be noted that while images of feminine hands dominate the novel, male hands are also featured in the explicitly Faustian pact between Lord Ewald and Edison. It is a contract from which all the female figures in the text are excluded. At the moment where Ewald and Edison say their definitive goodbyes, as the young Englishman prepares to depart for his home country with Hadaly already snuggly nestled in her ebony coffin, the narration informs us that, "il y eut donc, entre Edison et Lord Ewald, encore un dernier serrement de main."[332]

It should also be recalled that, in theory, it is through the action of Ewald's hands that Hadaly will move and act. It is his touch that will move the various rings on her hand that consequently animate her form. After all, we are speaking about a new Eve rather than say, a new Lilith, who is also alluded to in Edison's opening monologue. Whereas Lilith's mythology recounts how she defied Adam and proclaimed herself his equal, Eve was created from Adam's rib to be subservient to him. Like Eve, Hadaly is initially conceived of as a masculine creation of masculine desire. And, if the novel stopped here, the fantasy of Hadaly as fetish might succeed. But instead, the text introduces a distinctly feminine intervention that constitutes Hadaly's subversive power. I am referring to Sowana, whose *deus-ex-machina* appearance in the final version of Villiers' novel causes all of the preceding fantasies of masculine creation to become utterly unworkable.

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[331] Conyngham, Deborah, *Le Silence éloquent: thèmes et structure de l'Ève future de Villiers de l'Isle-Adam* (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1975) 127.

[332] Villiers, *L'Ève future* 1014.

Marie-Hélène Huet argues that Sowana should be read as Hadaly's “other parent,” her feminine creator or “maternal figure” that allows for the erasure of Edison's paternal and authorial signature.[333] In my mind this unlocatable figure cannot be pinned down by this traditional and gendered classification. After all, even the human generator of Sowana's consciousness, Any Anderson, is not easily gendered in this way. Whereas all the other female bodies in the text are referenced as “Miss,” which identifies them as women that do not act but rather are acted upon, Any Anderson is given the title of “Mistress.” I would mark here that this Anglicism is not the translation of Madame, a clearly feminine appellation, but rather of “maîtresse,” which, beyond the word's sexual connotation, also represents a feminized form of “maître.” Consequently, I would like to argue that Sowana/Any Anderson's hands are perhaps the most important set in the entire novel, as these hands are the only pair of feminine hands in the text that, rather than being created, are themselves responsible for creation.

It is Any Anderson's physical pair of hands that take the measurements and figures that help Edison to transpose Alicia's physiognomy onto Hadaly's body, under pretense of Mistress Anderson being the world renown sculptor that will render Alicia immortal with her artistic talents. Following Ewald's disconcerting encounter with Hadaly in the gardens of Menlo Park, he returns to question Edison about the mysterious means of the android's creation and learn her final secrets. He explains to Edison that Alicia Clary has spoken to him of a woman, “entre deux âges, peu parleuse, toujours en deuil, ayant dû être fort belle” who, during the three weeks of Hadaly's creation, “l'a “comme pétrie des pieds à la tête”, silencieusement, ainsi qu'une masseuse de bains russes. Elle ne s'arrêtait, à des instants, que pour “crayonner

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[333] Huet 81-82.

des chiffres et des lignes sur des feuilles de papier."[334] Alicia has also informed him that "un long "rayon de flamme," dirigé sur la nudité de la patiente, semblait suivre les mains glaciales de l'artiste "comme si celle-ci êut dessiné avec de la lumière."[335]

Marie Lathers, who like Huet attributes a maternal role to Sowana, concludes that, "As the novel itself can be read as a birth story, so Sowana's illness can be read as a (hysterical) pregnancy," and surmises that these many creative gestures constitute Sowana's "labor" in both senses of the word.[336] I would counter that while the novel may indeed be read as a birth story, what makes this birth story so uncanny is that it takes place in a text free of functioning wombs. A hysterical pregnancy would assume the presence of a body capable of falsely mimicking the signs of gestation, and while Any Anderson may indeed have a physical body, Sowana, prior to the completion of Hadaly, does not. Even once the android is complete, there is no indication that Sowana is bound to this new technological form any more than she was to her former organic one. Lacking such a body, she is the one female presence in the text that cannot participate in the misrepresentations to which the other women, both flesh and mechanical, fall victim. The labor of her hands, I would argue, cannot therefore be collapsed into maternal labor.

In addition to manual acts of construction and creation, Sowana, in her somnambulistic state, uses her hands to mentally control the movements of the android— to incorporate herself into the body of the machine and bring it to life, thus creating its consciousness. Edison explains,

> Étendue à l'abri des feuillées ombreuses et des mille lueurs fleuries du souterrain, Sowana, les yeux fermés, perdue hors de la pesanteur de tout

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[334] Villiers, *L'Ève future* 1002.
[335] Ibid.
[336] Lathers, Marie. *The Aesthetics of Artifice: Villiers's L'Eve future,* (Chapel Hill: U.N.C. Department of Romance Languages, 1996) 101.

> organisme, s'incorporait, vision fluide, en Hadaly! En ses main solitaires, comme en celles d'une morte, elle tenait les correspondances métalliques de l'Andréide; elle marchait, en vérité, dans la marche de Hadaly, parlait en elle,--de cette voix si étrangement lointaine qui, durant son espèce de sommeil sacré, vibre sur ses lèvres![337]

It is Sowana, then, that through her touch and her own artistic creation has ultimately provided Hadaly with her soul, rather than Edison with all of his scientific knowledge. I therefore agree with Marie Lathers when she writes of Sowana that she "usurps [Edison's] creation, thereby appropriating the capacity for sublimation denied to women in traditional economies of representation."[338] However, the story of Sowana's uncanny intervention does not end with Hadaly's initial animation, but rather climaxes after the android's departure.

Upon Lord Ewald's exit from Menlo Park, Edison discovers that this magnificent artist and animator has in fact managed to escape him, and it should not be surprising that such a discovery comes in the form of Mistress Anderson's now lifeless hand. When the physical body of Any Anderson fails to respond to his interpolation of "Sowana," the text informs us that "Comme la voyante ne répondait pas, l'électricien lui prit la main: la main, glacée, le fit tressaillir; il se pencha; le pouls ne battait plus, le cœur était immobile."[339] Just as with Hadaly's artificial arm, imbued with an uncanny and unexpected human animation, it is once again the figure of the hand that serves as a trope to establish the boundaries between life and death. Edison attempts frantically to revive his helper from her magnetic trance, but is eventually forced to concede that,"celle qui semblait dormir avait définitivement quitté le monde

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[337] Villiers, *L'Ève future* 1007.
[338] Lathers 101.
[339] Villiers, *L'Ève future* 1014.

des humains."[340] Sowana is the one female figure of the novel that appears to successfully subvert the possessive and fetishistic male gaze. She is capable of breaking the novel's cycle of endless reproduction and artifice through a unique form of creation that is distinctly feminine in nature while at the same time being divorced from maternity. She is also the only one capable of breaking through the mimetic element of feminine speech portrayed in the novel in order to engender a unique and original discourse. Ewald is amazed when he hears Hadaly speaking to him in the gardens of Menlo Park, asking himself, "Depuis quand Dieu permit-il aux machines de prendre la parole?"[341]

To return to an earlier point, Edison's discovery of Mistress Anderson's body appears to be another attempt on the part of Villiers to answer the question he poses in "Le secret de L'échafaud," since the reader is led to assume that even though Any's physical form is now empty and "dead," her spirit, in a form altered by its contact with *l'Infini*, lives on in the android, proving that human consciousness continues to exist after the moment of physical death. However, as if afraid of his own audacity, or handicapped by his own misogyny, Villiers chooses once again to leave the question in suspension. When the *Wonderful* sinks and Hadaly is lost, the reader is left with no way of knowing if Sowana did in fact manage to escape and exist within the android's form. We are robbed of the moment of Hadaly's reanimation, just as Dr. Velpeau is robbed of definitive proof that the brain is in fact the seat of human consciousness in "Le Secret de l'échafaud." The fatal shipwreck and Edison's shivering final glace at the bejeweled hand become akin to the M. de la Pommerais' lowered eyelid—something that forever defers the question of life or death.

[340] Ibid.
[341] Ibid. 994.

3.3- Frozen Desire: La Vénus d'Ille

Another 19th-century text that deals with questions of life and death through the trope of touch and the hand is Prosper Mérimée's 1837 novella, *La Vénus d'Ille.* Like Villiers' novel, Mérimée's text builds on the classical Pygmalion structure of a work of art animated by the viewer's desire. However, in direct contrast with Villiers' insistence on the startling physical warmth of his artificial maid, a detail that would more closely align with the original Ovidian myth of the work of art brought to life, Mérimée provides us with an altogether more glacial Galatea.

One could argue that *La Vénus d'Ille* is a text that reveals in Mérimée an obsession with the hand that rivals that of Maupassant, for hardly a page goes by in the *nouvelle* where it does not become a question of the significance and, more importantly, use of the hand. Nor is the importance of this trope for Mérimée limited to *La Vénus d'Ille*. There are also frequent allusions in many of his other writings to the hand as an instrument of death. It is with his left hand that Fortunato betrays the bandit in "Mateo Falcone," and Colomba's *balata* in *Colomba* demands as vengeance for her father's death "la main qui a tiré."[342] Like these hands, those of the metal Venus in *La Vénus d'Ille* seem to be the enactors of a certain kind of deadly justice, but this justice is made all the more uncanny when enacted by a body of bronze miraculously come to life.

In this fantastic *récit*, recounted by an anonymous first person narrator from Paris, a statue seemingly comes to life and murders the young man foolish enough to have placed a ring upon her finger. The earliest written version of this legend of the young man who marries a statue by mistake is generally thought to be by Guillaume de Malmesbury in 1125. However, as Antonia Fonyi explains in her preface to the

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[342] Mérimée, Prosper, *Columba, Théâtre de Clara Gazul, Romans et nouvelles,* Ed. Jean Mallion and Pierre Salomon (Paris: Gallimard, 1978) 771.

1982 Flammarion edition of the text, "la légende...était fort répandue au Moyen Age et à l'époque de la Renaissance. Aucune des nombreuses versions étudiées par les critiques ne s'impose, cependant, comme la source unique ou sûre de Mérimée."[343] She goes on to explain that Mérimée himself seemed uninterested in the origins of his text, and frequently gave contradictory responses as to his source material, claiming to have borrowed from Freher, Lucien and Pontanus.[344] Whatever the inspiration for the text, Mérimée considered it to be his best work and personal favorite.[345]

Just as in *l'Ève future*, we are first introduced to the text's eponymous figure through her hand. Only in this case, rather than the hand exuding life and ontological fullness, the reader is confronted with a limb that is easily mistaken for the hand of a corpse. The hand appears to be dead, jutting forth from the roots of an olive tree. This hand, it is later explained, belongs to a Roman statue, and is oddly positioned, as if the goddess attached to it were playing at *mourre*, a roman game of chance involving the fingers, perhaps better known to English readers as "Evens and Odds." It is on this same hand that a bridegroom, Alphonse de Peyrehorade, will place a ring destined for his bride—a family heirloom dating from the middle ages and portraying two hands laced together—in order to join a game of *paume*. *Paume* was a precursor to tennis that, as the name clearly suggests, was originally played without racquets, but rather with the flat of one's hand. When Alphonse goes to retrieve the forgotten ring later in the text, he reports to the narrator that the statue has closed its fingers over the ring, making it impossible to remove. Alphonse retires in a troubled state to his wedding bed, where he is found dead the next morning with livid marks around his torso that suggest he has been squeezed to death in a very strong grasp, and with the missing ring by his side. The events of the *nouvelle* seem to suggest that the statue of Venus

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[343] Fonyi, Antonia, "Notice," *La Vénus d'Ille* (Paris: Flammarion, 1982) 27.
[344] Ibid 28.
[345] Raitt, A.W., *Prosper Mérimée.* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1970*)* 182.

has come to life in order to reclaim her *droits d'épouse*, but the lack of a credible witness or any physical evidence once again, as in Villiers' text, leave the question of the boundaries between life and death, animate and inanimate, forever in suspension.

Suspension is perhaps doubly appropriate when speaking of this text, since the Venus seems to exist in a state of suspended animation. Her form, repeatedly described as icy cold, remains frozen until she is called back to life. As readers, we are of course unsurprised by the characterization of a bronze statue as cold. It is part of the nature of an immobile statue, a figure that seems to speak to life that has been arrested or frozen, that it be cold. Additionally, a bronze statue, being made of metal, would conduct heat and cold better than say, a stone or wooden one. Ovid's Pygmalion dreams of breathing warmth into his statue in order to banish her innate coldness and, in so doing, animate her form. What is interesting about *La Vénus d'Ille* is the way in which this convention is turned on its head. It is not the living persons in the text that infuse the statue with their warmth, but rather the coldness of the idol that permeates and transforms the living. Kenneth Gross explores what he calls the statue's "infection" of the narrative's other characters in the chapter of *The Dream of the Moving Statue* entitled "Crossings." He notes,

> The lure of the text, however, is not only that the statue remains at all times contradictorily if aggressively alive, the focus of violence, accusation, and regressive fear; it is as much that the statue in turn renders uncanny or problematic the life of others that inhabit the world around it. This uncanniness comes out most subtly in the way that the figurations of the "statue" manage to infect so many other crucial characters in the story, as if it enfolded their lives, or helped to give them birth (at least within the space of

the fiction).[346]

While I believe Gross is absolutely correct in his observations concerning the transferential nature of the Venus which leads to an uneasy exchange between life and death, I would like to focus more specifically on the way in which the trope of freezing and cold serve to illustrate that exchange. The contagious quality of the statue's *froideur* seems particularly ironic when one considers that the typical role of the goddess of love is to inflame and excite the passions. If Mérimée borrows Racine's observation of "Vénus toute entière à sa proie attachée"[347] to express the malicious expression of the bronze statue (and to foreshadow her deadly grip that will appear in the later half of the text), then it would seem important to recall that this same soliloquy from *Phèdre* makes prodigious use of fire metaphors to describe the queen's consuming passion, and the ways in which Racine's play conceives of love as a contagious element that the various characters attempt to flee.[348] However, the diabolical Venus of Ille freezes and petrifies, seeming to check rather than incite animation. As the Venus begins to take on life, those around her inversely become more and more statuesque.

To return to the subject at hand, so to speak, the text frequently implies that it is through the statue's touch that this immobilization—this icing over of life— takes place. When the narrator's guide recounts the initial discovery of the antique, he explains that it was found buried beneath a frozen olive tree. Once the guide and another villager named Jean Coll begin their work, the first part of the idol they unearth is an outstretched hand. The guide explains, "nous piochons toujours, nous

[346] Gross 117.

[347] Mérimée, Prosper, *La Vénus d'Ille, Théâtre de Clara Gazul, Romans et nouvelles,* Ed. Jean Mallion and Pierre Salomon (Paris: Gallimard, 1978) 739.

[348] "Mes yeux ne voyaient plus, je ne pouvais parler;/ Je sentis tout mon corps et transir et brûler; / Je reconnus Vénus et ses feux redoutables, / d'un sang qu'elle poursuit tourments inévitables" (I.3.275-278). (Racine, Jean, *Phèdre* Ed. Anne Régent and Laurent Susini (Paris: Editions Larousse, 2006). See also Roland Barthes, *Sur Racine* for Barthes' analysis of love as contagion in *Phèdre.*

piochons, et voilà qu'il paraît une main noire, qui semblait la main d'un mort qui sortait de terre. Moi, la peur me prend. Je m'en vais à Monsieur, et je lui dis:-- Des morts, notre maître, qui sont sous l'olivier! Faut appeler le cure."[349] Before moving to further examine the explicit role played by touch in the text, we must take a minute to carefully read the preceding quote, and examine the ways in which the reader's initial introduction to the idol already begins to trouble our assumptions about the status of life and death.

The statue is solid bronze— an inorganic substance sculpted to resemble an organic form. However, the language of the passage seems to clearly portray the Venus as having been given a bizarrely human burial beneath the olive tree (after all, the guide explains that M. de Peyrehorade had discovered her "en terre," leading one to assume that she was at some point *enterrée*), and through the guide's recollection we become present at her exhumation. Frank Paul Bowman observes in his article "Narrator and Myth in Mérimée's "Vénus d'Ille" that this particular statue is no Venus of love and fertility. He explains, "Mérimée is at pains to insist that this ancient copper statue, long buried in the earth, is black. This is Aphrodite androphonos, the man-slayer. She is a jealous goddess who punishes those who betray her; she is intimately associated with death."[350] This association with death is critical to Jacques Chabot's understanding of this burial scene in *L'autre moi: Fantasme et fantastique dans les nouvelles de Mérimée*, where he goes somewhat further than Bowman in exploring the statue's relationship to mortality. He explains, "M. de Peyrehorade viole un tabou sacré entre nous, celui des morts. Au moins par métaphore ou figure—mais peut-il en être autrement dans un texte littéraire—l'honnête catalan s'adonne à la

[349] Mérimée, *La Vénus d'Ille* 730.
[350] Bowman, Frank Paul, "Narrator and Myth in Mérimée's "La Vénus d'Ille," *The French Review* 33.5 (Apr. 1960) 477.

nécrophilie."[351] For Chabot, not only does M. de Peyrehorade (whose name, incidentally, translates in Occitan to "pierre trouée"), exhume a grave, he commits an unspeakable act in the process, and the events of the narrative that unfold as a result can all be traced back to the breaking of this first taboo. He explains, "Le récit commence par l'extraction de ce qui avait été enfoui, c'est-à-dire par une image comparable au "retour du refoulé."[352] M. de Peyrehorade's actions bring to light what would have been better left buried.

In any case, the statue is certainly corpse-like enough to frighten the poor guide, and to convince him that she at one time enjoyed the status of *vivante* or rather, as the text would have it, *vivant*. It is interesting that the guide initially assumes the appendage that has sprung forth from the roots of the olive tree is a masculine one. While his use of the masculine "un mort" to describe the hand's owner may simply be a generalization, it is one of a number of ways in which the text troubles and subverts gender classification where this particular Venus is concerned. As we shall soon see, *La Vénus d'Ille* contains at least one other crucial moment where the goddess of love becomes conflated with a masculine figure in the text. For now, however, let us return to that black hand in the earth, and the implications that Venus being "raised from the dead" will have for the other figures in the text.

When this hand is eventually exhumed with the rest of the statue, its position in relation to the whole of the bronze body takes on an important role in the *nouvelle*. The Venus unearthed by M. de Peyrehorade is described by the archeologist narrator as follows: "la main droite, levée à la hauteur du sein, était tournée, la paume en dedans, le pouce et les deux premiers doigts étendus, les deux autres légèrement ployé…peut-être avait-on voulu représenter la déesse jouant au jeu de mourre." The

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[351] Chabot, Jacques, *L'autre moi: Fantasmes et fantastique dans les nouvelles de Mérimée* (Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, 1983) 122.
[352] Ibid. 123.

association of the Roman goddess with this particular game of *mourre* is typical of Mérimée the historian and archeologist, since the *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIXe siècle* defines it as a game that constituted "les délices de la plèbe romaine."[353] The game is therefore as ancient as the statue itself. It is a game of luck in which the fingers are the only objects required for play, and it is usually played in pairs, so that the outstretched arm of the bronze idol seems to invite the involvement and challenge of another, an invitation that her "expression d'ironie infernale" seems to confirm.[354] One is led to think of the French proverb "jeux de main, jeux de vilains." It is on these beckoning outstretched fingers that the young Alphonse will place the diamond ring intended for his fiancée, and with this act that he will unknowingly "demander la main" of the bronze idol, apparently bringing her to life while simultaneously inscribing his own death.

After the frozen olive tree, the next mention of the statue's *froideur* comes at the wedding of Alphonse de Peyrehorade, where the idol is invoked as the foil to his Catalane bride, whom the narrator has previously remarked upon as bearing an disquieting resemblance to the Roman goddess (right down to "une légère teinte de malice" that suggests a frailer, more human copy of the "diabolique" expression of her bronze predecessor).[355] In this scene, M. de Peyrehorade advises his son to cast his lot with the more traditional of the two Venuses. He proclaims, "Mon fils, choisis de la Vénus romaine ou de la catalane celle que tu préfères. Le maraud prend la catalane, et sa part est la meilleure. La romaine est noire, la catalane est blanche. La

[353] "mourre," *Grand Dictionnaire Universel du XIXe siècle.* V.11, 641.

[354] Mérimée, *La Vénus d'Ille* 739.

[355] A nearly identical comparison between a woman and statue will be employed by François Truffaut in his film *Jules et Jim.* As in *La Vénus d'Ille,* it is a slightly cruel smile that causes the protagonists to equate Catherine with her stone double. Kenneth Gross gives a full reading of the film in *The Dream of the Moving Statue* (119-21).

romaine est froide, la catalane enflamme tout ce qui l'approche."[356] In the juxtaposing of these two feminine figures, the text highlights the way in which it is the living woman that should excite desire. The irony of the father's well-intentioned verse is that the son has, of course, already chosen the colder Venus through the gift of his ring; or perhaps it is the *joueur de mourre* who has cast her lot with him. In any case, a contract has been ratified at the moment when the ring is placed on the statue's hand, and we will discover that this goddess appears unwilling to loosen her grip.

Antonia Fonyi explains the nature of this contract in her introduction to the Flammarion edition, "C'est trop tard, anneau donné ne se reprend pas. Fuir l'émissaire de la divinité, c'est trahir sa foi, la foi, et le renégat sera puni au nom de cette justice éternelle qui est au-delà de la morale."[357] The cold of the Venus then, it would seem, represents not only her closeness to death, but also her complete indifference to human life. For Fonyi, at least, she represents a mode of justice unconcerned with morality or compassion, a justice whose only concern is the execution of the agreed upon contract. This justice is not merely represented by the idol's grasping hands, it is inscribed upon them. When M. de Peyrehorade takes the narrator to examine the statue, he points out the two Latin inscriptions engraved upon her— one on her pedestal and the other on the inside of her outstretched arm. The inscription on the pedestal reads "CAVE AMANTEM," for which the narrator delivers two possible interpretations: "Prends garde à celui qui t'aime, défie-toi des amants." or "Prends garde à toi si elle t'aime."[358] The engraving on the statue's arm reads "VENERI TVRBVL... EVTYCHES MYRO IMPERIO FECIT." With some of the letters in the second word erased by time, the narrator can only guess that the second word might

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[356] Mérimée, *La Vénus d'Ille* 750.
[357] Fonyi, "Introduction" 5.
[358] Mérimée, *La Vénus d'Ille* 739.

be “TURBULENTA? Vénus qui trouble, qui agite...”[359] As in *L'Ève future*, where the missing arms of the Venus di Milo or Ewald's rewording of Alicia's bourgeois sentiments erase the warning that should be present, the message of danger the statue contains becomes garbled due to difficulties in translation. Because the idol speaks a dead language from an ancient civilization, and because the passage of time has erased part of the text, the two modern men are unable to interpret her warnings with any certainty. Ultimately, since the concrete justice of *La Vénus d'Ille* seems incapable of even reading the gift of the ring as a symbolic gesture, this execution of justice will take on a most literal form as well.

After the wedding banquet, Alphonse reports that his attempts to recover his wedding ring are thwarted by an alteration in the position of statue's much-cited right hand. He explains to an incredulous narrator, “Le doigt de la Vénus est retire, reployé; elle serre la main, m’entendez-vous? C’est ma femme, apparemment, puisque je lui ai donné mon anneau… Elle ne veut plus le rendre.”[360] While the narrator believes Alphonse is merely drunk, his immediate response to this declaration is nonetheless a sudden chill, a “frisson subit” and a moment of “la chair de poule.”[361] Already, the statue’s *froideur* is starting to spread to other figures in the text, but it is with the young bridegroom that something approaching a full transfer of energy occurs. As the statue appears to thaw enough to live, Alphonse will be frozen into death.

The narrator awakens the morning after the marriage, having twice during the night heard what he describes as “des pas lourds” coming up the stairs, accompanied by a “craquement de l'escalier,” which he assumes to be M. Alphonse. Forced from his bed by sounds of excitement and confusion, his first thought is “Mon ivrogne aura

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[359] Ibid. 741.
[360] Ibid. 751.
[361] Ibid.

mis le feu quelque part!"[362] However, he will soon discover that quite the opposite is true. Far from being ablaze, the house has been overtaken by the same deathly cold that killed off the olive tree under which the statue was found. Upon entering the newlyweds' bedchamber he discovers the lifeless body of the bridegroom:

> Je m'approchai du lit et soulevai le corps du malheureux jeune homme; il était déjà roide et froid. Ses dents serrées et sa figure noircie exprimaient les plus affreuses angoisses. Il paraissait assez que sa mort avait été violente et son agonie terrible. Nulle trace de sang cependant sur ses habits. J'écartai sa chemise et vis sur sa poitrine une empreinte livide qui se prolongeait sur les côtes et le dos. On eût dit qu'il avait été étreint dans un cercle de fer.[363]

Alphonse's body appears to have been infected by the cold and black qualities of the statue of Venus. Like the statue he is "roide et froid." Earlier in the text the narrator has described Alphonse's features as "belle et régulière, mais manquant d'expression."[364] In death, the expression that was missing in life is now excessively present, recalling the striking quality of expression attributed to the idol. The description of the marks on his chest as those of a "cercle de fer" evoke not only the crushing grip of the Venus's arms, but also that other circle of metal— the wedding band, that the young man so carelessly placed upon the statue's finger. Justice has been executed, but rather than the traditional eye for an eye, one finds a ring for a ring, and by extension a hand for a hand.

The ensuing investigation into the death of the young bridegroom provides yet another attribution of masculine qualities to the statue that is sculpted in an objectively feminine form. The most likely suspect questioned in relation to the murder is the Spaniard that was Alphonse's rival in the *jeu de paume*. He is described

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[362] Ibid. 753.
[363] Ibid. 754.
[364] Ibid. 732.

as having many of the same physical qualities as the bronze Venus. The narrator paints him as “un homme d'une quarantaine d'années, sec et nerveux, haut de six pieds, et sa peau olivâtre avait une tente presque aussi foncée que le bronze de la Vénus.”[365] The fact that the statue is explicitly likened not only to the beautiful bride but also to the vanquished Spaniard suggests her to be something more complicated than a mere phallic woman. Rather, it suggests a particular kind of hermaphroditism or bisexuality. Antonia Fonyi contends in her essay “La Passion pour l'Arché” that bisexuality is a common theme in Mérimée's writing, and that it represents the ultimate power of the character to which it is attached. She writes,

> Cette bisexualité, omniprésente dans les récits, est un attribut des grandes divinités de la nature, capables de créer la vie par parthénogenèse. C'est suivant cette logique que la bisexualité mériméenne n'est pas à interpréter comme homosexualité ni comme indétermination sexuelle, mais comme complétude de la puissance. Césaire, admirable dans ce domaine aussi, “faisait l'amour sans préjugé avec les deux sexes.”[366]

Following Fonyi's argument, it would seem that the power of this bisexuality is linked to questions of reproduction and generation. There would appear to be some kind of wishful desire linked to the idea of “having it all”—the power of both male and female genitalia allowing for the fantasy, as in *L'Ève future*, of reproduction untainted by sexuality. However, this is by no means the only wish expressed in the nouvelle.

In some ways, Mérimée's narrative would seem almost to function as a kind of dream-work, in the sense that Freud insists that the ultimate purpose of dreaming is wish-fulfillment.[367] Indeed, dreams are explicitly mentioned in the text in relation to

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[365] Ibid. 747.

[366] Fonyi, Antonia, “La Passion pour L'Archè,” *Prosper Mérimée: Écrivain, Archéologue, Historien,* Ed. Antonia Fonyi (Genève: Librairie Droz,1999) 202.

[367] “If we adopt the method of interpreting dreams which I have indicated here, we shall find that

the supposed animation of the statue. A *procureur du roi*, having taken the statement of the traumatized young widow, tells the narrator "elle dit qu'elle a reconnu … devinez-vous? La vénus de bronze, la statue de M. de Peyrehorade... Depuis qu'elle est dans le pays, tout le monde en rêve."[368] This invocation of the dream-like qualities of the text is also a helpful way of thinking about the various forms of doubling and even the bisexual components of the Venus presented in the text, since Freud contends, "The alternative "either—or" cannot be expressed in dreams in any way whatever. Both of the alternatives are usually inserted in the text of the dream as though they were equally valid."[369] If Mérimée makes multiple allusions in the text to Racine's *Phèdre*, in the form of M. de Peyrehorade's citation and through the narrator's observation that the marriage of M. Alphonse constitutes "La plus honnête fille du monde livrée au Minotaure,"[370] it is certainly no happy coincidence. Nor is it merely due to the fact that both texts share an obsession with the figure of a turbulent Venus that enacts an uncompromising justice. Rather, it seems to be linked to this dream-like quality and the similar way in which the two works deal with questions of desire and wish-fulfillment. I would like to argue that if the characters of *La Vénus d'Ille* and we as readers find it tempting to draw parallels between Racine's masterpiece and Mérimée's, it is because the two literary works seem ultimately to share the same tragedy— a refusal of metaphor that means everyone gets exactly what it is they wish for, and that these wishes will ultimately prove deadly.[371]

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dreams really have a meaning and are far from being the expression of a fragmentary activity of the brain, as the authorities have claimed. *When the work of interpretation has been completed, we perceive that a dream is the fulfillment of a wish."* (Freud, Sigmund, *The Interpretation of Dreams,* Ed. and Trans. James Strachey (New York: Avon Books 1998)154).

[368] Mérimée, *La Vénus d'Ille 755.*

[369] Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* 351.

[370] Mérimée, *La Vénus d'Ille 752.*

[371] Racine discusses the literal quality of speech in *Phèdre* in his preface to the play, explaining "La seule pensée du crime y est regardée avec autant d'horreur que le crime même. Les faiblesses de l'amour y passent pour de vraies faiblesses" ("Préface" *Phèdre,* 25) Additionally, I am greatly indebted to Professor Elissa Marder's reading of *Phèdre* in her graduate seminar "Literature and

Monsieur Alphonse enacts a wish he did not even intend to express at the moment when he places his ring on the outstretched hand of the statue. After all, the word *vœu* in French expresses both the idea of a wish and a vow. In placing on her outstretched hand a ring engraved with the images of two hands interlaced and bearing the inscription "Sempr' ab ti, c'est-à-dire, toujours avec toi,"[372] Alphonse effectively makes a *vœu* in both senses of the word— a vow/wish to the statue of the Roman goddess that they will always be together. As in a dream, the wish is an unconscious one, one that can only be fulfilled once everyone has gone to bed. However, Alphonse is not the only character in the text whose wish apparently transforms into a reality. One of those most fervently wishing would appear to be the narrator himself.

Frank Paul Bowman notes the narrator's degree of responsibility for the tragic denouement of the novella, stating that he is the figure in the text best placed to understand the threat posed by the statue and avert the murderous consequences. He observes that the narrator is the only character that correctly interprets the statue's Latin inscriptions, exposing her malefic nature, and that he is also the only character besides Alphonse himself who was aware that the statue had taken possession of the young man's ring. For Bowden, the narrator's culpability is thus caused by the fact that he is "more than a mere witness to these events, he is in a negative sense responsible for them."[373] The narrator's responsibility is one of failing to act in response to his knowledge and observations. He causes Alphonse's death by doing nothing to prevent it. Bowman's analysis is astute, but I would argue that the text also

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Psychoanalysis" (Emory University, Spring 2009), which was essential to my understanding of the performative and literalizing power of language in Racine's play, as was her chapter entitled "The Mother Tongue in Phèdre and Frankenstein" in her book *The Mother in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Psychoanalysis, Photograph, Deconstruction* (Fordham University Press: 2011).

[372] Mérimée, *La Vénus d'Ille* 744.

[373] Bowden 481.

gives multiple indications of a more active responsibility on the part of the narrator in his fervent wishing.

There are numerous moments in the narrative demonstrating that the otherwise intellectual and detached narrator is far from objective in his feelings about the marriage of M. Alphonse. In addition to the allusion to *Phèdre* ("Voilà la plus honnête fille du monde livrée au Minotaure!"), the narrator continues his reverie in thinking to himself, "Une femme peut-elle jamais aimer un homme qu'elle aura vu grossier une fois? Les premières impressions ne s'effacent pas, et j'en suis sûr, ce M. Alphonse méritera bien d'être haï..."[374] Hated by whom, we might ask, the bride or the narrator? Finally, in hearing the wedding party on the stairs as they lead the young bride to bed, he thinks to himself, "Que cette pauvre fille, me dis-je, doit être troublée et mal à son aise! Je me tournais dans mon lit de mauvaise humeur. Un garçon joue un sot rôle dans une maison où s'accomplit un mariage." [375] While on a basic level the narrator's protests and frustrations concerning the hero's nuptials merely express Mérimée's own thoughts on the institution of marriage as recorded in his correspondence (a fact noted by nearly every reader of the text), there still seems to be something particularly troubling about the intensity with which these reflections keep him tossing in his bed.

Could one argue that this apparent desire on the narrator's part for the beautiful Madame Alphonse is in fact a displacement of his desire for the statue to whom he has specifically compared her earlier in the text? Jacques Chabot argues that the narrator is the one character in the text who appears somewhat capable of sublimating his desire, content to create an image of the statue through his drawing rather than to possess her.[376] Whether these observations on the part of the narrator are motivated by desire for Mme. Alphonse or scorn for her husband, it seems clear from these

[374] Mérimée, *La Vénus d'Ille* 752.
[375] Ibid.
[376] Chabot 128.

passages that the narrator wishes to see her liberated from her current situation. Whatever the nature of this desire, it seems subject to the same powers of wish-fulfillment as the *vœu* of M. Alphonse; the narrator awakes the next morning to find the young newlywed forever rid of her Minotaur of a husband, with the unfortunate side effect that she has lost her reason as a result of what she has or believes to have seen on her wedding night.

If there is another important theme that *La Vénus d'Ille* shares with both *Phèdre* and *L'Ève future*, it is that of *méconnaissance*: mistaken identity. Just as Lord Ewald mistakes Hadaly for her human double, and Alicia naively mistakes the statue for herself, (in both instances only realizing their errors because of the appearance of the hand), *La Vénus d'Ille* is frequently confused with other figures in the text. These moments of mistaken identity are different from those passages where another character is specifically described as resembling the idol. Rather, they are moments like the statue's initial discovery beneath the olive tree, where she is mistaken for being something or someone else (a bell, a cadaver). This same phenomenon of *méconnaissance* can be found in the deposition of the frightened young bride following her husband's murder. Here is the account she gives to the *préfecture du roi de Perpignan*:

> Elle était couchée, dit-elle, depuis quelques minutes, les rideaux tirés, lorsque la porte de sa chambre s'ouvrit, et quelqu'un entra. Alors Mme Alphonse était dans la ruelle du lit, la figure tournée vers la muraille. Elle ne fit pas un mouvement, persuadée que c'était son mari. Au bout d'un instant, le lit cria comme s'il était chargé d'un poids énorme. Elle eut grand ‘peur, mais n'osa pas tourner la tête....elle sentit le contact de quelque chose de froid comme la glace, ce sont ses expressions. Elle s'enfonça dans la ruelle tremblant de tous

> ses membres. Peu après, la portes'ouvrit une seconde fois, et quelqu'un entra, qui dit: Bonsoir, ma petite femme. Bientôt après on tira les rideaux. Elle entendit un cri étouffé.[377]

Upon hearing this cry, the young woman finally turns her head and claims to see the statue of Venus strangling her husband. However, this third body is not originally recognized as such. Both Mme. and M. Alphonse believe themselves to be alone in the room with their spouse. Madame mistakes the statue for her husband, and he in turn appears to mistake it for his wife. It is only at the moment of death that they realize a third has come between them.[378]

The final image of the *nouvelle* is yet again one of contagious cold. The narrator learns after his departure from Ille that the statue has seemingly continued to exercise its glacial influence, if in a somewhat altered form. He records in the postscript of the *nouvelle*,

> Mon ami M. de P. vient de m'écrire de Perpignan que la statue n'existe plus. Après la mort de son mari, le premier soin de Mme de Peyrehorade fut de la faire fondre en cloche, et sous cette nouvelle forme elle sert à l'église d'Ille. Mais, ajoute M. de P., il semble qu'un mauvais sort poursuivre ceux qui possèdent ce bronze. Depuis que cette cloche sonne à Ille, les vignes ont gelé deux fois.[379]

The final image highlights Mérimée's skill in the highly structured form of the *nouvelle* by bringing the narrative full circle, back to the moment when Jean Coll and the Catalan guide first discover the Venus under the frozen olive tree, when the guide

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[377] Mérimée, *La Vénus d'Ille* 755.

[378] Chabot points out that a verbal equivalent of this visual or tactile confusion, a *quiproquo*, occurs in the opening pages of the *nouvelle*, when the guide speaks to the narrator of the statue for the first time, and the narrator assumes firstly, due to the guide's description of her as a *Idole en terre,* that she is made of clay rather than buried, and secondly, that she is *quelque bonne vierge* rather than a pagan deity (122).

[379] Mérimée, *La Vénus d'Ille* 757.

says of Jean Coll, “il donne un coup de pioche, et j'entends bimm... comme s'il avait tapé sur une cloche.”[380] The toll of the bell sounds the death-knell of M. Alphonse, who has taken the statue's place in the frozen earth. If, as Chabot contends, the *nouvelle* begins with a “retour du refoulé,” then it closes with a *refoulement*. This strange process of substitution, by which the narrative closes as it opened with yet another graveside scene, seems to suggest the possibility that the freezing qualities of the Venus's touch, in addition to being representative of the indifferent and concrete nature of the statue's justice, could also indicate a regressive element similar to the one present in *L'Ève future.* The frozen vines and olive trees and the frozen body of M. Alphonse all seem to indicate a pervasive desire to arrest growth and freeze time, as well as a desire to preserve certain objects in a particular state— and in so doing introduce a perpetual confusion between life and death.[381]

3.4- Conclusions

In conclusion, while both of the fantastic 19th century narratives discussed in this chapter make use of the trope of an artificial hand to raise the question of the boundaries between life and death, both texts also appear to ultimately leave the question unresolved. Additionally, it could be said of both texts that the intrusion of death into the narrative is precisely what renders impossible any resolution of this question. In *La Vénus d'Ille*, Alphonse de Peyrehorade's death and his bride's subsequent insanity rob the reader of any credible witness who could testify to an exhumed statue coming to life, and the shipwreck of the ocean liner *Wonderful* in

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[380] Ibid. 730.

[381] Elissa Marder examines the connection between frozen bodies and frozen time in *The Mother in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.* Exploring a recent case of a French mother who was found guilty of murdering her newborn children and preserving them in the freezer, Marder remarks “The babies are preserved in their newly born and newly dead state; the event of their death almost coincides with the moment of their birth. The freezer accentuates this radical confusion between birth and death.” (26).

L'Ève future similarly prevents any knowledge as to whether Hadaly/Sowana can be brought back from the dead. The strange double gesture by which both works claim to move towards the future (either through technological advances or through the renunciation of antiquated superstition) while simultaneously remaining preoccupied with feminine figures of ancient myth, can ultimately produce nothing more than an uncanny and unsettling sort of stasis.

At the same time, the apparently willful misreading of these deadly female hands by the male figures in these works poses provocative questions about the role these artificial women play in sustaining masculine desire. Do these statues and androids, explicitly posited by these texts as idols, work to sustain a male fantasy of the feminine ideal or, conversely, to undermine it? Despite attempts by various masculine characters to animate these aesthetic objects with their own desire, both the statue and the android appear to take on an uncanny and independent form of life that results in the death of their would-be Pygmalions. The end result perhaps best resembles Alphonse's *jeu de paume*. Jacques Chabot notes the boomerang effect this particular game has on Mérimée's narrative, transforming Venus into an opponent who sends back what she receives and injures by ricochet.[382] We might similarly claim that this same dynamic is at work in both Mérimée and Villiers' texts, where the modern, masculine hands in the narrative *renvoie la balle* towards the hands of their respective artificial Venus, only to have it returned to them by a sort of ricochet— the consequence of which is a never-ending redrawing of the boundaries between life and death.

[382] Chabot 127.

Chapter 4: The Bound Hand

While the figures of the criminal masculine hand and the feminine artificial hand presented in the preceding chapters might seem to be diametrically opposed, they are in fact intimately bound up with one another, so to speak—joined together through a third and final manifestation of the severed hand that haunts 19th and 20th century French literature. This hand, which I will call "the bound hand," occurs under various guises in all the hand-texts we have encountered, linking these hands that have been severed from one body to the body of another. These linking devices range from social contracts of marriage in *La Vénus d'Ille*, to bonds of magnetic telepathy and more earthly forms of communication (the telegraph and the telephone) in *l'Ève future,* to figures of chains and cords in Maupassant. What these diverse forms of attachment share is an overarching purpose of containment and control. It is as if by tying a hand to a doorbell, taking it in marriage, or simply making it "hold the line" on the other end of a telephone wire, the protagonists of these literary works attempt to subjugate or channel the dangerous energy of these phantom limbs in an effort to manifest their own desires. Without fail, however, the hands in question break free of these restraints and turn on their would-be captors, or simply escape them entirely. Frequently, attempts to control these wandering limbs end with the protagonists becoming ensnared by the same fetters they themselves had created, resulting in an endless cycle of breaking and binding.

As if in a strange acknowledgement of this circular logic (a logic that already seems to follow the regressive and repetitive nature of these hands exposed in earlier chapters), in several of these works the initial figure of a chain or cord loops back upon itself to form a ring. Whereas a line or tie presupposes the possibility of transmission between two subjects, or a subject and an object, due to their shared

connection, the figure of the loop introduces a closed circuit, demarcating which subjects are included in a given exchange, and which are excluded. It exchanges only with itself and effectively blocks transmission. Additionally, this motion of looping back is often portrayed as a specifically regressive gesture— a return towards an earlier historical moment or point of origin that betrays the desire to correct these failures in transmission. The repeated appearance of these rings alongside other forms of binding and attachment causes us to wonder about the ways in which these hand-texts, which initially seem so violent and destructive, might ultimately function as narratives of reparation or reconstruction, or the ways in which they fail to do so. Consequently, in an attempt to better understand this regressive gesture, I will have to go back myself. In circling back to a re-examination of the texts from preceding chapters, this time with an eye towards their status as "bound hand" texts rather than masculine or feminine hand-texts, I hope to demonstrate that the severed hand takes part in a fantasy of correcting previous failure by returning to an earlier historical moment.

However, in moving back we must also move forward, since a discussion of what is perhaps the most comprehensive and nuanced representation of the bound hand necessitates the introduction of a new narrative and a new medium— film. In Maurice Tourneur's 1943 film *La Main du diable*, which contains elements of both *La Main Enchantée* and *Faust*, one finds not only an explicit chain of intertextuality with the hand-texts of Nerval and Maupassant, but also carefully presented ties of debt and fraternity. A young artist sells his soul to the devil in return for an enchanted hand that provides him with the talent he lacks, only to discover that he is but one in a long line of dupes who have traded eternity for short term, earthly happiness. As we will see, Tourneur's film subscribes to the same circular and regressive logic as its literary

predecessors, by means of a long flashback sequence that traces the film's eponymous figure through the annals of French history. Additionally, it is not the only severed hand narrative that alludes to the binding power of the law through the use of an explicitly Faustian framework. In Mérimée and Villiers' texts as well, we find protagonists who enter into contracts with another figure in the text in exchange for fortune, love or power. In so doing, the heroes of these works, knowingly or unknowingly, indebt themselves to the other. These Faustian elements have the effect of calling into question which hand holds the strings and who is truly in control of the severed hand's uncanny movements, and pose intriguing questions about our relationship to gift and debt. While such questions will be explored in the final section of this chapter, let us begin by re-examining the texts themselves through the lens of the *lien.*

4.1 Maupassant's Hands Tied

Of all the 19th century representations of the bound hand, it seems certain that nowhere is the trope expressed more literally or more frequently than in the *œuvre* of Guy de Maupassant. While his texts are not the first of those we will examine in terms of their chronology, they may rightly be said to be “first” in terms of the frequency with which the figure of the bound hand appears. The flayed hands we encounter in Maupassant's work are found hanging from ropes or shackled with chains. And yet, this obsession with attachment is not a characteristic unique to Maupassant's supernatural hand-texts. From early analysis in Micheline Besnard-Coursodon's influential *Étude thématique et structurale et l'œuvre de Maupassant,* to later contributions by scholars such as Mary Donaldson-Evans, Antonia Fonyi and Philippe Bonnefis, the phenomenon of linking figures in Maupassant has not gone unexplored.

Philippe Bonnefis dedicates the first portrait in his *Sept Portraits*

Perfectionnés de Guy de Maupassant to a discussion of "Guy de Maupassant, l'Entravé." He associates the overwhelming presence of ties that bind in Maupassant's work with the author's questioning of the status of his own origins, by which these individual *fils* lead back to a common Norman *racine*. He writes, "Etre Normand, c'est être de nulle part, c'est être de partout. C'est n'avoir aucune attache et en avoir cent mille."[383] The genealogical nature of these ties is made all the more clear when one considers the persistent ways in which Maupassant's work links forms of attachment to the feminine/maternal body. Women in Maupassant are, as Bonnefis reminds us:

> Adorables crampons, bien faits à cet égard pour renvoyer à leurs masculines victimes l'image la plus vive, en même temps que la plus cruellement ressemblante, de l'état de dépendance où un Dieu mauvais, et mauvais sans doute parce que féminin, mauvais parce que maternel, sort d'ogre ou d'ogresse qui se tient "embusqué dans l'espace", a voulu placer sa créature.[384]

And yet, the three hand-texts discussed in this dissertation ("La Main," "La Main d'écorché," and "En Mer"), are among the few in Maupassant's corpus in which a woman has no significant role in the story. Where then, do the protagonists in these tales look for that all-important reflection of their own dependence and helplessness?

Mary Donaldson-Evans notes of Maupassant's obsession with the female form, "Indeed, of all the stories written by Maupassant, one finds fewer than sixty from which women are absent or in which their role is purely episodic."[385] With the exception of the ladies to whom M. Bermutier relates his story in "La Main," and a passing allusion to Javel cadet's wife, women are entirely absent from these

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[383] Bonnefis, Philippe, *Sept Portraits Perfectionnés de Guy de Maupassant* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 2005) 57.
[384] Ibid. 36.
[385] Donaldson-Evans 13.

narratives. These texts are therefore grouped together by more than merely the uncanny figure of the severed hand. They are also bound together as texts from which women are apparently excluded. However, as we have seen from our previous study of these works, and as Donaldson-Evans points out in relation to other works in the corpus, this apparent absence does not exclude a maternal presence represented by destructive forces both natural and supernatural. It would be most apt in the case of these texts to evoke the presence of *la mère nature*, an all-consuming and inescapable maternal body from which the subject is born and to which he must unceasingly return.

Micheline Besnard-Coursodon, while she does not evoke a specific connection to the maternal, does forge an explicit link between the various forms of attachment in Maupassant's work and the equally symbolic object of the severed hand. She writes:

> Si le bras et la main semblent non seulement destinés à attacher mais à prendre, la main considérée isolément a une fonction différente: elle étrangle... L'anneau, la chaîne, font de la main un objet prisonnier, lié; leur taille, leur solidité, insolites, s'accordent avec sa nature d'objet fantastique. La main liée se délie, seule, grâce à sa puissance surnaturelle et retournement archétypal, va étrangler l'Anglais.[386]

In this quotation we see not only the double function of a hand that may either attach or strangle, depending on what it is attached *to,* but also the double function of the attachment itself. The ring or chain not only imprisons the hand, but also inscribes the possibility for its escape, affirming the severed hand's status as a floating, fantastic object. It allows, therefore, for a *va-et-vient* that will always, ultimately, *revenir.*

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[386] Besnard-Coursodon, Micheline, *Etude thématique et Structurale de L'œuvre de Maupassant* (Paris: Editions A.G. Nizet, 1973) 233.

For most of these scholars, including Besnard-Coursodon, these cords relate intimately to the problematic of "the trap"— the narrative logic by which the Maupassantian subject attempts to establish independence and break free from all forms of attachment, only to be ensnared and killed. I do not disagree this this assessment; I would only reassert the frequently ambiguous distinctions between guilt and innocence in Maupassant's narratives that require us to view the Maupassantian subject as something more than a blameless victim of this trap. Additionally, I would link the inescapable nature of the trap with a compulsion to return to a point of origin. This qualification will perhaps become clearer if we return to Maupassant's own originary text, "La Main d'écorché."

In "La Main d'écorché," Pierre's decision to tie up the criminal's hand by using it as the pull cord for his *sonnette* proves to have very sinister consequences. He explains to the narrator that during the night, "un imbécile quelconque, sans doute pour me faire une mauvaise farce, est venu carillonner à ma porte vers minuit."[387] In this quotation, the *sonnette's* rope does double duty as both a means of incarceration and a means of communication. Through the power of the cord, the hand becomes capable of transmitting a signal (we might say of striking a chord). However, it is a signal that Pierre misinterprets. Attributing the ringing to a simple "mauvaise farce," he fails to recognize that it is in fact a call to arms— a call that demands a response. It is this failure in interpretation that ultimately leads to Pierre's death.

Following this discussion, Pierre's landlord suddenly enters and demands, "je vous prie d'enlever immédiatement la charogne que vous avez pendue à votre cordon de sonnette, sans quoi je me verrai forcé de vous donner congé."[388] The description of the hand as a *charogne* that has been *pendue* seems to transform the otherwise

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[387] Maupassant, "La Main d'écorché" 4.
[388] Ibid. 4

harmless doorbell into a hangman's noose. Pierre answers gravely, "vous insultez une main qui ne le mérite pas, sachez qu'elle a appartenu à un homme fort bien élevé."[389] This response once again seems to evoke the connection between this *main d'écorché* and the *main de gloire* in Nerval's earlier tale, recalling Maître Gonin's observations on Eustache's future: "Chose bizarre... qu'une existence si simple dès l'abord, si bourgeoise, tende vers une transformation si peu commune, vers un but si élevé!" by which he means that the young tailor will finish hoisted high in the gallows.[390]

Hanging, both as murder and suicide, is of course a common motif in Maupassant's corpus, appearing in *contes* such as "Une Veuve," "Promenade" and "Le Petit." It is, as Besnard-Coursodon points out, yet another way in which death is scripted as strangulation.[391] Citing a passage from "Sur L'eau," in which Maupassant writes, "chacun s'imagine avoir des droits; les rapport deviennent des devoirs, et les liens qui nous unissent semblent terminés avec des nœuds coulants,"[392] Besnard-Coursodon explains that the figure of the slipknot differs from the other linking figures that one finds in Maupassant by the way it combines two prevailing Maupassantian themes— attachment and strangulation.[393] To this I would add that hanging also represents, in a certain way of thinking, the antithesis of a second form of death alluded to in these hand-texts through the focus on amputation— death by guillotine. Whereas the guillotine's severing blow produces a fragmented body eternally separated from itself, the hangman's noose ensures a death in which the corpse remains intact, and the rope itself becomes a symbol of this morbid union. It serves as a defense against the constant displacement and fragmentation that threaten

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389 Ibid. 5

390 Nerval, "La Main enchantée" 13.

391 Besnard-Coursodon 236.

392 Maupassant, Guy de, "Sur L'eau," qtd. in Besnard-Coursodon.

393 "Plus encore que les "câbles, ou les "chaînes", ou simplement les "liens", les "nœuds coulants" représentent explicitement le piège qui étrangle." (Besnard-Coursodon 183).

to overwhelm the Maupassantian subject.

This ability to remain intact becomes very important for the narrative when one considers that Pierre has brought the hand from his motherland of Normandy. Philippe Bonnefis, in thematizing the different forms and significance of attachments in Maupassant's work in *Sept Portraits Perfectionnés de Guy de Maupassant*, demands “Est-ce qu'on ne s'attache pas à des lieux aussi bien qu'à des personnes?”[394] For Maupassant, place and person are ultimately one and the same. This *lieu* could be none other than the Normandy that features so prominently in his literary corpus. Normandy is what places the author's work into contact with the mother and the motherland. However, Bonnefis also observes how, in Maupassant work, the formation of such a strong attachment is only possible in the wake of a prolonged period of *errance*— a wandering that is brought on by incestuous desire and that ultimately returns to the same source. He writes of this return, “Et c'est la boucle de l'errance, c'est son cercle vicieux.”[395] This vicious circle of departure and return is, as we have already seen, firmly established in “La Main d'écorché.”

I argued in a preceding chapter for a reading of Pierre's funeral scene as a return to the *terre-mère,* the motherland. To this should be added the obvious fact that such a return is only made possible by an initial displacement. The story begins with Pierre's departure from Normandy and finishes with his posthumous return: *la petite pierre normande* has now become a *pierre tombale*. In returning to be buried within the maternal womb/tomb, he repairs the broken body of the mother earth, repairing the absence opened up by his departure. What's more, as the narrative's slippery language exposed in chapter one, Pierre's death is accomplished *by his own hand.* In this sacrificial and suicidal gesture, what was once a mere *lien* returns towards the

[394] Bonnefis, *Sept Portraits Perfectionnés de Guy de Maupassant* 34.
[395] Ibid.

past— and the narrative consequently comes full circle.

And yet, as comforting as this fantasy of reparation and return might appear, the narrative's sleight of hand is only partially effective. Were the circuit truly closed at the end of "La Main d'écorché," there would be no need for the severed hand to return with such alarming frequency in Maupassant's *oeuvre.* The hand, as we know, refuses to remain buried. Rather, there is something at the end of the narrative that keeps transmitting— that keeps demanding a written response in the form of all the later texts in which this gruesome appendage takes center stage. Perhaps this is because the substitution of one body for another that closes the text, while nearly perfect, is not exact enough. Let us return to the graveside in Normandy, where the body of the hand's original owner appears to have usurped Pierre's place:

> Tiens! S'écria un des hommes, regardez donc, le gredin a un poignet coupé, voilà sa main." Et il ramassa à côté du corps une grande main desséchée qu'il nous présenta. "Dis donc, fit l'autre en riant, on dirait qu'il te regarde et qu'il va te sauter à la gorge pour que tu lui rendes sa main.--Allons mes amis, dit le curé, laissez les morts en paix et refermez ce cercueil, nous creuserons autre part la tombe de ce pauvre Pierre.[396]

While Pierre's friend and the assembled gravediggers find another body in his tomb, they do not displace this body, frightened as they are to violate the taboo of disturbing the dead. Yet, in closing the tomb, they fail to close the circle. Pierre's body is displaced so that he does not, ultimately, take the place of the guilty criminal. He does not make reparation for his crime of departure from the motherland.

Furthermore, there is an additional figure of return in this passage— a return to be understood in the sense of an exchange or a giving back. The body already

[396] Maupassant, "La Main d'écorché" 8.

occupying the grave seemingly solicits the return of his hand, with the verb *rendre* implying a financial return— as one might *rendre la monnaie,* for example. The central question of this passage is therefore economic in nature. Does the assembled funeral party in fact make reparation? Do they in fact manage to *rendre la main?* If we read carefully, we will see that once again, the hand seems to have disappeared. There is no mention of placing it back in the open grave. The hand escapes reburial and becomes free to resurface again and again in all the later Maupassantian hand-texts. In all of these later narratives it will remain intimately associated with death, burial and a return from the grave, as one can plainly see from its reappearance eight years later in "La Main."

In "La Main", the narrator, M. Bermutier, notes the Englishman Sir John Rowell's strange method of chaining his severed hand to the wall. While fascinated and repelled by the hand itself, his gaze is subsequently drawn with parallel interest to a second and equally troubling object. He explains, "une énorme chaîne de fer, rivée, soudée à ce membre malpropre, l'attachait au mur par un anneau assez fort pour tenir un éléphant en laisse."[397] The Englishman tells him "J'avé mis cette chaîne pour le tenir." Believing that his host is joking, the *juge d'instruction* responds, "Cette chaîne maintenant est bien inutile, la main ne se sauvera pas," to which Sir John replies, "Elle voulé toujours s'en aller. Cette chaîne été nécessaire."[398] M. Bermutier's observation to the eccentric lord bears examination. As Michel Serres reminds us, the etymology of the adverb "maintenant" reverts to the immediateness of holding something in one's hand—"tenant en main."[399] However, in Maupassant's tale, *maintenant* becomes a sort of adjective to describe the chain; It is a *chaîne main-tenant,* supposedly made superfluous by the fact that the dead hand no longer needs to

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[397] Maupassant, "La Main" 1120.
[398] Ibid.
[399] Serres, Michel, *Pantopie: de hermès à la petite poucette* (Paris: Editions le Pommier. 2014) 348.

be held. If Sir John Rowell believes the iron chain to be "nécessaire," it is not merely due to a fear that the hand will, in his words, "s'en aller." The greatest fear is not for the hand's power to escape, but rather its strength and propensity for retaliation. Sir John, more aware than his interlocutor of the hand's troubling past and desire for vengeance, worries that without the chain to hold it, the hand itself will become a *main tenant* that will strangle him to death. Where this adventurer who has "*beaucoup chassé"* was once the pursuer, he now becomes the pursued.

Like Pierre, Sir John Rowell is in a state of *errance.* In fact, Sir John's entire life has been an *errance,* as he travels the globe in search of sport and big game. He is an Englishman not merely abroad in France, but on the wild and remote island of Corsica, a detail that serves not only to establish the vendetta-like components of the text, but also to create a further degree of alienation between Sir John and his surroundings. Unlike Pierre, Rowell's body shares no connection with and makes no return to a maternal homeland. The text tells us of the hand that has mysteriously reappeared, "Le lendemain, on me l'apporta, trouvé dans le cimetière, sur la tombe de Sir John Rowell, enterré là; car on n'avait pu découvrir sa famille."[400] In contrast with the reparative/restorative narrative of "La Main d'écorché," the foreign protagonist of "La Main" dies in a state of intense and permanent alienation.

And yet, in spite of this apparent note of separation, the circular logic of the Maupassantian text remains in "La Main." The reader is once more presented with the clearly delineated and closed off narrative space of a frame story. However, rather than ending with a circling back, as in the case of "La Main d'écorché," the text instead begins with a circle: "On faisait cercle autour de M. Bermutier, juge d'instruction, qui donnait son avis sur l'affaire mystérieuse de Saint-Cloud."[401]

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[400] Maupassant, "La Main" 1121.
[401] Ibid. 1117

Philippe Bonnefis, in *Comme Maupassant,* cites this opening line from "La Main" among other examples of the closed and circular narrative style of the typical Maupassantian *récit.* He writes, "L'espace du narrer est homogène. Il est fermé. C'est d'ailleurs un cercle. Toujours le même. On s'en doutait un peu. Et ce cercle trace une figure de la protection. Rien ne doit venir briser une clôture qui est ce partage d'un dedans et d'un dehors."[402] From our discussions in chapter one, we are already beginning to suspect what is being protected by this closed circuit that negates the possibility for escape, freedom and change— the relationship to the mother necessary for literary production. Like Sisyphus, the Maupassantian hero is condemned to repeat the same eternal punishment. Having committed the crime of matricide upon which literature is founded, he reenacts the cycle of departure and death necessary for maintaining the ability to write.

It will seem clear by this point that the narrative I am constructing of departure and return bears many similarities to the logic of "le piège" identified by both Micheline Besnard-Coursodon and Antonia Fonyi as a structuring theme of the Maupassantian corpus. For Fonyi, the trap is a figure of punishment at the hands of the archaic mother. She explains,

> Voici donc le schéma complet de l'histoire. On se trouve dans une clôture supportable, à laquelle on s'est habitué. On désire en sortir. C'est autorisé. Dans l'espace ouvert, un incident—un accident— survient, dont la conséquence est le retour au clos, dans le même ou dans un autre, plus resserré qu'auparavant et presque toujours néfaste et définitif.[403]

While I certainly agree with this configuring of Maupassant's literary universe, I am attempting to build on this already important work by establishing the ways in which

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[402] Bonnefis, *Comme Maupassant* 23.
[403] Fonyi, *Maupassant 1993* 35.

the trap participates not only in the cycle of punishment, but also the cycle of reparation. Of course, one could argue that the trap is ultimately more a figure of *failed* reparation than true reparation. Were we to contrast the two omnipresent figures of the circle and the trap in Maupassant's work, we might say that the circle represents the longed for and complete closing-off that would ensure full reparation for the crime of matricide. However, this is never the case, and in place of the circle we get the trap, a punishing figure that must be unceasingly restaged in the absence of restitution and redemption. Additionally, we might remark that while the protagonists of these hand-texts certainly end up victims of the trap, the hands themselves always manage to escape, frustrating and defeating its closed logic. The hand thus becomes an ambivalent figure, portraying a simultaneous desire for union with and escape from the maternal body.

In his book *The Art of Rupture: Narrative Desire and Duplicity in the Tales of Guy de Maupassant,* Charles J. Stivale articulates a theory, framed by Maupassant's article “L'Art de Rompre,” of the conflicting desires for union and separation with the idealized feminine that are a driving force in the author's work. He writes,

> Maupassant's discourse of rupture thus presents the male-female relationship as a constant struggle, one in which male pleasure, comfort, and, above all, freedom are of utmost importance. However, these are ceaselessly threatened not simply by woman's grasping demand for fidelity, but also by the man's own desire to maintain these relations, to “keep them all.”[404]

As we have seen, the chains featured in both “La Main d'écorché” and “La Main” ultimately reveal themselves to be weak and breakable, incapable of holding on to the criminal hands they were charged with retaining. Despite its appearance of being

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[404] Stivale, Charles J, *The Art of Rupture*: *Narrative Desire and Duplicity in the Tales of Guy De Maupassant* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994) 5.

"assez fort pour tenir un éléphant en laisse," the chain in "La Main" is found at the crime scene, "brisée."[405] While we might read the weakness of these chains and the hands' ability to escape them as a particularly dexterous example of "l'art de rompre," the ambivalence towards this separation is manifested in the final moments of "La Main," where we learn that there is at least one knot in the story that remains untied: "Les femmes, éperdues, étaient pâles, frissonnantes. Une d'elles s'écria:- Mais ce n'est pas un *dénouement* cela, ni une explication!"[406] Ultimately, there can be no "unknotting" of this increasingly circular narration. The severed hands that break free and that act with such troubling autonomy circle back to rejoin the bodies they have destroyed. Their escape is only temporary, since they seem compelled to return to the strangled and mutilated body— the scene of the crime. This interplay of escape and return would therefore appear to be linked, as Stivale suggests, to the double desire to both sever and maintain a particular link or relation to the female form.

And yet, there are apparent exceptions to, or at least complications of, this basic paradigm. While the title of "En Mer," as was pointed out in chapter one, clearly evokes a relationship to the maternal body, and while Javel aîné reveals a tendency similar to that of other Maupassantian protagonists to use chains and cords as a means of containment and control, the most important bond severed in this text is not material or maternal, but rather, fraternal. In preserving the *chalut,* Javel aîné loses all relation to his injured brother. The older brother, in his capacity as captain of the boat, makes the decision to keep his younger brother's arm bound up as a way of also securing his fortune. Retaining the arm becomes the only way to retain the expensive *chalut* that the older brother fears to lose. It is in working to put this very *chalut* to economic profit that Javel cadet finds himself bound to his older brother's

[405] Maupassant, "La Main" 1121.
[406] Ibid. 1122. (Emphasis mine)

decrees: “Javel cadet, qui se trouvait à l'avant et dirigeait la descente du filet, chancela, et son bras se trouva saisi entre la corde un instant détendue par la secousse et le bois où elle glissait.”[407] Javel cadet's arm, unlike its fantastic predecessors, is still attached to a body, and therefore lacks the supernatural ability to free itself. He is reduced to a state of dependency, reliant not on his mother, but rather his brother.

Once the younger brother's arm is finally freed of its restraints, another form of restraint is imposed on him in order to keep him alive. Noticing the hemorrhage of blood spraying forth from Javel cadet's arm, the other sailors work to stop the bleeding: “Alors ils prirent une ficelle, une grosse ficelle brune et goudronnée, et, enlaçant le membre au-dessus de la blessure, ils serrent de toute leur force. Les jets de sang s'arrêtaient peu à peu, et finirent par cesser tout à fait.”[408] Here, rope that is formed into a circle manages to have a healing rather than a harming effect.[409] In serving as a tourniquet, the rope as circle works at keeping on the inside that which should rightfully remain inside, saving the subject from the bleeding out of the self and his eventual annihilation. However, this act of sealing off also renders Javel cadet's broken body radically other both to itself and to the generally fraternal atmosphere of the *chalutier.* Javel cadet's separation and otherness is so upsetting that his older brother, out of guilt or unease, suggests to him “tu serais mieux en bas.” However, after a short period Javel cadet returns to the ship's deck: “Il descendit, mais au bout d'une heure remonta, ne se sentant pas bien tout seul.”[410] Despite the broken bond between the two Javels, the younger brother refuses to be completely amputated

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[407] Maupassant, “En Mer” 740.

[408] Ibid. 741.

[409] One could note the somewhat unexpected similarities between this story of sibling rivalry and the romantic rivalry that plays out in the conte “Une Veuve.” The young *collégien* Santèze, learning that the older cousin whom he adores has become engaged to a man her own age, hangs himself from a tree. His distraught cousin breaks her engagement and spends the rest of her life as a *fiancée-veuve,* trying to make reparation to the deceased by wearing a ring made from a lock of his hair. Philippe Bonnefis analyzes this movement from one form of attachment to another, from cord to ring, in his book *Sept Portraits Perfectionnées de Guy de Maupassant* (31-32).

[410] Maupassant, “En Mer” 742.

from the network of fraternity represented by the ship's crew, and he refuses to grant his brother the same control over his body that Javel aîné was able to exercise while his hand was caught between the boat and trawl.

Ultimately, despite his brother's attempts to keep the hand bound up, Javel cadet sets himself free by means of an incredibly painful bargain that, if it doesn't quite cost him an arm and a leg, most certainly comes as close as one could imagine: "Alors il se mit à couper lui-même. Il coupait doucement, avec réflexion, tranchant les derniers tendons avec cette lame aiguë, comme un fil de rasoir; et bientôt il n'eut plus qu'un moignon."[411] As the younger brother cuts the tendons, the final cords joining his hand to his body, with his brother's knife, he also cuts the fraternal bond holding them together. The text informs us that following this fatal voyage, Javel cadet "cessa de naviguer."[412] No longer in relation with *le frère,* one could argue that he obtains a sort of freedom and independence, but only at an immense cost. In this exchange, the former sailor not only loses a part of himself, in keeping with the Maupassantian obsession with the breaking apart of the self, but also his livelihood and his relation to *la mer(e),* a relationship that his brother is able to preserve. Javel cadet is transformed into the illegitimate and excluded son, but as the narrative comes full circle, we are reminded that his loss and exclusion may ultimately save his life. The opening of the text tells us of the violent shipwreck of a fishing boat captained by "le patron Javel" who is "mort peut-être sous les débris de son bateau mis en pièce."[413] *La Mer* punishes and kills those unable to cut the cord.

4.2- Church Bells and Wedding Rings: La Vénus d'Ille

In contrast with Maupassant's literal imagery, Prosper Mérimée's *La Vénus*

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[411] Ibid. 742.
[412] Ibid. 744.
[413] Ibid. 739

d'Ille frames the figure of the bound hand in terms of a marriage contract representing the binding together of two bodies. However, the events of the *nouvelle* quickly make clear that the desired union between Alphonse de Peyrehorade and Mlle de Puygarrig fails due to the fact that his union with the statue of Venus succeeds.[414] The ratifying of the earlier contract with the statue annuls the later one with the human woman. Since the Roman idol has given her hand to the young Catalan, he cannot enter into a circuit of exchange with any other. However, we must ask ourselves if both subjects are equally bound by this contract. M. Alphonse certainly keeps his word of "til death do us part," but the immortal Venus lives on in an altered form— as a church bell that extends her icy reach far beyond the nuptial bed, enfolding the entire town within her icy grasp. In order to better understand this uneven balance of power, let us return to the initial exchange of rings.

In the previous chapter, I noted that Alphonse de Peyrehorade expresses a *vœu,* in the sense of both a vow and a wish, at the moment where he places his ring on the statue's outstretched hand. That wish/vow that he unconsciously expresses is one of being forever joined with the statue. This interpretation is reinforced by Alphonse's choice of symbol for sealing his vow. In French, the word for a wedding band is *alliance.* The idea of marriage as creating an unbreakable bond between two spouses is thus further implied by the fetishistic attention the text pays to M. Alphonse's two wedding rings. When the young bridegroom speaks to the narrator of his impending wedding, he shows him first "une grosse bague enrichie de diamants, et formée de

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[414] For a detailed discussion on the role of marriage and union in 19th century Romantic and fantastic fiction, and particularly in *La Vénus d'Ille,* see Scott Sprenger, "Consummation as Catastrophe: Failed Union in Prosper Mérimée's "La Vénus d'Ille." *Dalhousie French Studies* 51 (Summer, 2000) 26-36. Sprenger points out the larger trend in 19th century fiction of portraying traditional marriage as a failed union resulting in catastrophe such as madness, destruction, or death. This literary trend demonstrates, he argues, "the simple historical fact that Christian mystical union is no longer a cultural possibility in nineteenth-century France. France's legal and symbolic rupture with its religious foundations destroyed it. Divine love, according to this cultural logic, will no longer unite souls or give life; its absence will prevent unions from occurring, destroy them or *give death."* (29).

deux mains entrelacées." The narrator compliments its beauty, but explains to the young *provençal, "*L'usage à Paris... est de donner un anneau tout simple, ordinairement composé de deux métaux différents, comme de l'or et du platine. Tenez, cette autre bague, que vous avez à ce doigt, serait fort convenable."[415] This second ring, we learn, was given to Alphonse by a young *Parisienne* during Mardi Gras.

In an unwitting gesture, Alphonse gives the ring intended for his fiancé to the menacing statue, effectively marking her as his *épouse.* Subsequently, he is forced to give his human bride the other ring, marking her as his mistress. As Michel Serres remarks in his article "Un dieu du stade: Monsieur Alphonse," this exchange of rings (a comical reinterpreting of the phrases' more traditional meaning) highlights a second hand in the narrative, one that will ultimately reveal itself to be just as essential to the narrative as the outstretched arm of the diabolical Venus—the hand of the bridegroom Alphonse. If the hand of Venus is the taking hand, the one that welcomes offerings and sacrifice, then Alphonse de Peyrehorade's hand becomes the giving hand and central point of exchange. Serres writes, "Ce transport, public, secret, de choses ou symboles, balle, bague, anneau, place, au jeu, celui qui les maintient au centre du groupe. Ouvrez donc la paume, Alphonse!"[416] As these various objects change hands, the careless Catalan who, as Serres notes, begins the tale with "la main pleine" and ends it with "la main vide," is revealed to hold all the strings.[417]

The binding power of the ring given to the statue is further reinforced by the inscription inside the band, "Sempr' ab ti, c'est-à-dire, toujours avec toi." Due to the text's literal conception of language, Alphonse's unintentional *vœu* creates a *lien* of

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[415] Mérimée, *La Vénus d'Ille* 744.

[416] Serres, Michel, "Monsieur Alphonse: Un dieu du stade," *Alphonse Juilland: D'Une Passion L'Autre,* Ed. Brigitte Cazelles and René Girard (Saratoga, Cal: ANMA Libri & Co.,1987) 23.

[417] Ibid. 23.

obligation and fidelity between himself and the statue. Rings are not the only form of adornment that the *nouvelle* employs to establish bonds of servitude between the statue and those who desire her. When the narrator and M. de Peyrehorade examine the statue for the first time together, the narrator draws his host's attention to a peculiar feature of the statue's right hand: “je vois sur le bras un petit trou. Je pense qu'il a servi à fixer quelque chose, un bracelet, par exemple, que ce Myron donna à Vénus en offrande expiatoire. Myron était un amant malheureux. Vénus était irritée contre lui: il l'apaisa en lui consacrant un bracelet d'or.”[418] This fantasied romantic exchange on the part of the narrator introduces an original offering for which Alphonse's unwitting gesture will prove a repetition, transforming the wedding ring into an offering designed to reverse the young man's fortune by buying favor from Venus.

Alphonse's gift of his ring does indeed effectuate the change in fortune that Myron desired in return for his own offering. Clarisse Requena, in her book *Unité et dualité dans l'œuvre de Prosper Mérimée,* observes in language echoing that of the narrator, “C'est pourquoi il ne paraît pas invraisemblable que la déesse guide la main du joueur de paume Alphonse, malheureux d'abord puis chanceux dès lors qu'il a passé son anneau au doigt de la statue, ce qui peut s'assimiler à une offrande dans le cadre d'un rituel religieux antique.”[419] The scene of the narrator's analysis of the statue closes with another remark whose irony will only be revealed when the text reaches its denouement. The narrator upholds his observation by arguing, “il est naturel qu'un amoureux voie Vénus en rêve, qu'il s'imagine qu'elle lui commande de donner un bracelet d'or à sa statue.”[420] Like the fabled Myron, Monsieur Alphonse will also

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[418] Mérimée, *La Vénus d'Ille* 742.

[419] Requena Clarisse, *Unité et dualité dans l'œuvre de Prosper Mérimée: Mythe Et Récit* (Paris: H. Champion, 2000) 267.

[420] Mérimée, *La Vénus d'Ille* 742.

encounter Venus in the text's nocturnal conclusion, but since the gift has already been given, it is a dream from which there will be no awakening.

As I noted in the previous chapter, the binding power of the ring is manifested for a final time at the end of the narrative, when the narrator discovers Alphonse's lifeless body, imprinted with the mark of a “cercle de fer” that appears to have squeezed him to death. In addition to the poetic justice of this image— a ring for a ring, the condition of Alphonse's body points to the ring's ability to restrict and contain. Rather than serving as a token of love and desire, the ring of the statue's grip becomes a shackle. Alphonse is bound and killed for his failure to understand the debt of gratitude and the vows of fidelity that he owes to Venus.

However, beyond the many rings that serve to establish bonds of debt and fidelity, there exists an additional form of attachment in the *nouvelle* that has yet to be noted, and that surfaces only once the bronze statue has been melted down and transformed into a *cloche d'église*— the bell cord that allows the statue-turned-*cloche* to ring out across the countryside, freezing the vines and the earth where Alphonse is buried. We see that even in death, Alphonse cannot escape the icy touch of Venus. In fact, this sound-producing cord (we might even say a vocal cord) is alluded to from the moment of the statue's excavation. The narrator's guide, having remarked of the statue, “elle vous pèse autant qu'une cloche d'église,”[421] and noted the sonority of her frame (“j'entends bimm... comme s'il avait tapé sur une cloche”), relates how four men from the village were needed to unearth the statue. He explains, “Nous nous étions mis à quatre pour la dresser debout, et M. de Peyrehorade, qui lui aussi tirait à la corde, bien qu'il n'ait guère plus de force qu'un poulet, le digne homme!”[422] The cord used to right the statue, pulled upon in the same way one would ring a church

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[421] Ibid. 730.
[422] Ibid. 731

bell, is also partially responsible for the statue's first malevolent act. The guide goes on to explain, "Avec bien de la peine nous la mettons droite. J'amassais un tuileau pour la caler, quand, patatras! La voilà qui tombe à la renverse tout d'une masse. Je dis: Gare dessous! Pas assez vite pourtant, car Jean Coll n'a pas eu le temps de tirer sa jambe..."[423] Like a bell, the Venus swings back (Jacques Chabot notes that her falling on Jean Coll is in fact a ricochet)[424] and this swinging back will continue as the statue's hand repeatedly returns throughout the narrative.

The comparison of the Venus to a bell resurfaces once the narrator arrives at the home of M. de Peyrehorade. His host explains to him, "Savez-vous que ma femme voulait que je fondisse ma statue pour en faire une cloche à notre église. C'est qu'elle en eût été la marraine. Un chef-d'œuvre de Myron, monsieur!"[425] The selection of Madame de Peyrehorade as the "godmother" for the village church bell would require that her name be inscribed into the bronze. Nineteenth-century historian Alain Corbin notes of this practice, "Sur aucun autre monument officiel la référence à la femme, autrement que comme symbole, n'apparaît avec autant d'insistance que sur le bronze sacré. Le plus souvent, elle y figure en position de subordination. Le nom de la marraine suit l'inscription de celui du parrain qui *l'a choisie.*"[426] The melting of the statue into a bronze bell would erase her troubling pagan inscriptions and replace them a more Christian text. Simultaneously, this action would replace the statue's own name of VENERI TVRBVLENTA with another feminine name subjugated to male authority.

However, rather than subjugating the statue's malevolent energies, her transformation into a bell conversely extends her reach far beyond the mere arm's

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[423] Ibid.
[424] Chabot 125.
[425] Mérimée, *La Vénus d'Ille* 734-735.
[426] Corbin, Alain, *Les Cloches de la Terre: Paysage sonore et culture sensible dans les campagnes au XIXe siècle*. (Paris: Editions Albin Michel S.A. 1994) 140.

length so crucial to the *nouvelle's* plot. As Jacques Chabot notes of Mme. de Peyrehorade's actions, “Elle n'a fait que la rendre plus redoutable encore, sa nouvelle voix d'airain *portant beaucoup plus loin* que sa démarche lourde: elle ne se contente plus désormais de glacer un ivrogne mais elle gèle toutes les vignes. Ainsi *l'expression sonore* de ce bronze retentissant se révèle plus *insaisissable* encore que son expression de visage.”[427] Chabot's highlighting of the word “insaisissable” that he takes from Mérimée's text, in addition to recalling the statue's voice and unique expression, also recalls the figure of the hand. The Venus's expression, both in the sense of her voice and her countenance, cannot be understood by the other figures in the text. It exceeds their grasp, and it is precisely this failure that allows the statue, in turn, to grip them so tightly.

So, while these various rings, cords and contracts might initially appear as an effort to retain or subjugate the wayward Roman goddess (a desire manifested by every male figure in the text, from Alphonse's rings to the narrator's drawing to a *polisson de la ville*'s empty threat of “si tu étais à moi, je te casserai le cou”) and return her to her proper place, ultimately the diverse forms of attachment in Mérimée's text have the opposite effect of extending the deadly reach of the statue's hand across space and time. Fifty years later, a similarly complicated spatio-temporal relationship to a far more modern Venus will manifest itself in Villiers de L'Isle-Adam's novel *L'Ève future.*

4.3- Magnetic Currents: *L'Ève future*

Villiers' text, like Mérimée's, exploits the ring not only as a symbol of fidelity and connection, but also of dominance and control. The initial relationship between Lord Ewald and the android Hadaly relies on the former’s ability to control the

[427] Chabot 152.

automaton by manipulating the many rings adorning her hands. However, *L'Ève future* also reinforces this traditional symbol of linking in the relationship between Edison and Any Anderson, by making the rings both characters wear the conduit for the magnetic energies that allow Edison to communicate with Sowana (Any Anderson's somnambulant personality) and, by extension, Hadaly. The 19th-century fascination with magnetism is well documented, appearing in texts by Maupassant and Edgar Allan Poe.[428] Laura Otis, in her book *Networking: Communicating with Bodies and Machines in the 19th Century,* links the allure of this psychic means of communication to an emerging cultural interest in other, more technological forms of transmission such as the telegraph. Magnetism however, was not simply about communication— its study focused on strength, domination and the power of competing wills. Otis writes, "When minds merged, it was likely that one would dominate and direct the other, so that the person with the stronger will operated the other via remote control."[429] However, in the case of Villiers' text, Sowana's unique escape at the novel's conclusion ultimately troubles Edison's fundamental conclusion throughout the narrative that his is the stronger will.

The chapter "*Explications Rapides,"* in which the true nature of Sowana is finally revealed, illustrates this pervasive desire for control when Edison explains his experiments with magnetism to a stupefied Lord Ewald:

> J'en vins donc à établir un courant si subtil entre cette rare dormeuse et moi, qu'ayant pénétré d'une accumulation de fluide-magnétique le métal congénère, et fondu par moi, de deux bagues de fer (n'est-ce point du magisme pur?), -- il

[428] Poe's text "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" is particularly relevant to many of the masculine anxieties addressed in *l'Ève future.* In this tale, a man is kept in a magnetic trance that keeps his body from aging and decomposing even though he is dead. This same desire for stasis, but transposed onto a female body, is exhibited by Ewald in his longing to contemplate Alicia Clary in death while still preserving her beauty. For examples of magnetism in Maupassant, see *Le Horla* and "Magnétisme."

[429] Otis, Laura, *Networking: Communicating with Bodies and Machines in the Nineteenth Century.* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2001)183.

> suffit à Mistress Anderson, --à Sowana, plutôt, -- de passer l'une d'elles à son doigt (si j'ai l'autre bague, aussi, à mon doigt), pour, non seulement subir, à l'instant même, la transmission, vraiment occulte! De ma volonté, mais pour se trouver, mentalement, fluidiquement et véritablement, auprès de moi, jusqu'à m'entendre et m'obéir-- son corps endormi se trouvât-il à vingt lieues."[430]

In this quotation, Edison's description of Sowana reveals his belief that the connection between them exists exclusively for his benefit. Edison uses the rings to transmit his *volonté,* and Sowana is expected to obey. Just as Lord Ewald will manipulate Hadaly's jewelry to control the android's movements, Edison foresees manipulating his own jewelry in order to transmit his will to Sowana through the bonds of their magnetic attachment.[431] Naomi Schor examines this phenomenon of control of the female form within the universe of 19th century realism in her book *Breaking the Chain: Women, Theory and French Realism.* She writes in the introduction, "I am led to conclude that the binding of female energy is one of (if not) the enabling conditions of the forward movement of the "classical text."[432] While *L'Ève future* certainly cannot be described as a realist or "classical text," Schor's evocative use of the term "energy" seems all the more apt for this fantastic novel in which electricity and magnetic current are, as we shall see, intimately associated with the female form.

The linking figure of the magnetic rings is further emphasized by another technological object that plays an important role in the exchange between these two figures— the telephone. Mistress Anderson, we are told, holds a telephone receiver in

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[430] Villiers, *L'Ève future* 1004.

[431] For more on the control function of Hadaly's jewelry, see Jennifer Forrest's article "The Lord of Hadaly's Rings: Regulating the Female Body in Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's "L'Eve future", South Central Review 13.4 (Winter, 1996). Drawing parallels between Hadaly and her human model, Forrest writes, "whereas the jewels offered to a "living" woman represent gambles on rather than guarantees of feminine submission, in androids they function like a remote control, working to ensure possession of the desired object while at the same time triumphantly securing male authority and control" (34).

[432] Schor, *Breaking the Chain XI.*

her hand (the same hand that will ultimately animate Hadaly the android) that allows Edison to hear her voice during their telepathic communications. The inventor explains, "Sa main tenant l'embouchure d'un téléphone, elle me répondra ici, par voie d'électricité, à ce que je me contenterai de prononcer tout bas."[433] Once again, we see an example of how the "main tenant" allows for an instantaneous communication, a communication of "maintenant."[434] In *The Telephone Book,* Avital Ronell theorizes the way in which the invention of the telephone forever changed humanity's concept of the distance between the hand and the mouth. She writes:

> For, if speech classically has been subsumed under the paired concept of voice/ear, and writing under eye/hand, then telephony puts a third term on the table, a third hand which in the first place is a hand and nothing more. A new complicity, the assignment of the hand to the mouth, invades the boundaries marking the essential relationship of writing to speech, though after the raid the hand often finds itself left behind. The hand grasps the telephone, designs and signs it, spinning the wheel of fortune, attaching to the voice/ear couple, thus disturbing the domestic tranquility of a strict logocentricity. The hand disrupts, manipulates, it slams down the house of logos."[435]

Ronell's use of the word "manipulate" in this passage is of course intentional. The etymology of the word traces back to the Latin word *manipulus:* handful. When the hand is full of the telephone receiver, it cannot be used for writing, and enters instead into the realm of speech. Yet, in so doing it simultaneously disrupts the understanding of the hand and writing as strictly separated from and subordinated to speech. The hand no longer participates in a delayed form of communication, but rather in an instantaneous one. This fantasy of instant communication subsequently allows for a

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[433] Villiers, *L'Ève future* 1004.
[434] Serres. *Petite Poucette* 348.
[435] Ronell, Avital, *The Telephone Book* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989) 254-255.

fantasy of instantaneous wish-fulfillment similar to Edison's: that one's speech might be heard and obeyed by the listener on the other end of the line.

Of course, this fantasy of omnipotence over the feminine body and consciousness is just one more illusion among the many that the novel perpetuates at both a conscious and self-conscious level. The irony is that these rings and telephone lines, created with the express purpose of enabling communication, in fact become symbols of radical intransmissibility. Rather than allowing Edison to understand Sowana, these ties have the effect of severing communication and making her more mysterious than ever. Edison tells Ewald, "si je connais Mistress Anderson, *je vous atteste* QUE JE NE CONNAIS PAS SOWANA."[436] The reader discovers that it is, in fact, Sowana who holds in her very capable hands the strings in this puppet show: "Sowana, les yeux fermés, perdue hors de la pesanteur de tout organisme, s'incorporait, vision fluide, en Hadaly! En ses mains solitaires, comme en celles d'une morte, elle tenait les correspondances métalliques de l'Andréide; elle marchait, en vérité, dans la marche de Hadaly, parlait en elle."[437] The power for the android's animation, despite Edison's lengthy explanations of Hadaly's rings, ultimately derives from a woman's touch rather than a man's.

In this substitution, Sowana becomes the one who gives Hadaly life, rendering Edison sterile. I am not being fanciful with my word choice; the novel's staging of the final interaction between Edison and Any Anderson authorizes this imagery of impotence: "Edison s'aperçut, au bout d'une heure d'anxiété et d'efforts de volition devenus *stériles*, que celle qui semblait dormir avait définitivement quitté le monde des humains."[438] In this passage, it is not merely Edison's creative power that has been circumvented, but also his previously omnipotent power to enact his *volonté.*

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[436] Villiers, *L'Ève future* 1007.
[437] Ibid.
[438] Ibid. 1014 (emphasis mine).

Thanks to Sowana's intervention, bringing *l'Infini* to bear on Hadaly's mechanical form, both the *voyante* and the android are able to escape the fate of subjugation to masculine will and desire. Sowana is perhaps aided in this endeavor by Hadaly's unique nature. Despite Edison's repeated assurances that Hadaly is incapable of reproduction, we will discover that her form nonetheless is capable of a certain kind of generative power.

Magnetic correspondences are not the only invisible *liens* at stake in this novel. Christina Parker analyzes the important network of *fils électriques* that crisscross the narrative, noting their linguistic connection in French to the masculine (*fils* as opposed to *fille),* and the way in which this masculine energy leads directly back to Edison and his new Eden in Menlo Park. She writes, " Villiers conducts the reader outside the hubbub of New York along these very *fils électriques* to the source of their electrical power."[439] However, whereas men in the novel must rely on modern technology to generate and subsequently use the electricity required for their creative impulse, women are figured as *generators* of this same power. Edison explains to Ewald of Hadaly, "Songez: *elle ne sera qu'un peu plus animée par l'Électricité que son modèle: voilà tout."* Seeing the young Englishman's surprise, Edison continues:

> N'avez-vous jamais admiré, par un jour d'orage, une belle jeune femme brune peignant sa chevelure devant quelque grand miroir bleuâtre, en une chambre un peu sombre, aux rideaux fermés? Les étincelles pétillent de ses cheveux et brillent, en magiques apparitions, sur les pointes du démêloir d'écaille, comme des milliers de diamants fluant d'une vague noir, en mer, pendant la nuit. Hadaly vous donnera ce spectacle, si Miss Alicia ne vous l'a pas déjà donné.

[439] Parker, Christina, *Artificial Generation: The Hybridization of Female and Form in Gautier, Villiers, Wilde, Hitchcock* (Diss. Emory University, 2010) 72.

Les brunes ont beaucoup d'électricité en elles[440]

This generative power once again subverts the novel's apparently clear-cut distinctions between men as creators and women as creation. Jennifer Forrest, in her article "The Lord of Hadaly's Rings," similarly observes how even the novel's narration is complicit in establishing the connection between woman and machine. She writes, "The narrator, an adept accomplice in Edison's project, subtly suggests that women possess a constitutional link to machines, as for example, when Alicia's blue dress, brushing over some batteries, gives off sparks."[441]

The idea that women's bodies could be generators of electrical power, and that an android would merely take advantage of this capacity in a magnified sense, appears less strange if one considers the overlap between 19th century conceptions of technological systems and the human nervous system, both of which were viewed as networks. Laura Otis writes, "Throughout the nineteenth century, scientists' electrophysiological understanding of the nervous system closely paralleled technological knowledge that allowed for the construction of telegraph networks."[442] The idea of the nervous system as a network, capable of transmitting information between the different parts of the body, would similarly seem to open up the possibility, as in mesmerism, that this network could communicate with and influence the body of another. As Otis points out in her reading of George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, there is a particularly tempting connection to be drawn between women's electrical power and their erotic power. Both produce attraction and reaction, generating a series of "shocks" that have the ability not only to incite, but to destroy as well. [443]

The many ways in which the bound hands of Villiers' novel undermine or

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[440] Villiers, *L'Ève future* 843.
[441] Forrest 23.
[442] Otis 12.
[443] Ibid. 238.n31

reverse efforts to control them seems to speak to the failure of modern technology to accomplish the historical re-write evinced by the novel's title. Rather, these same modern mechanisms allow for a different sort of re-writing, one in which the feminine hands of the novel break free of their chains and forge their own future. In continuing with this forward momentum, let us end by considering a final and still more modern manifestation of the bound hand that similarly hopes to restore the future by rewriting the past— the 1943 film *La Main du diable.*

4.4 Les Maillons de la Chaîne: Maurice Tourneur's *La Main du diable*

Perhaps nowhere is the theme of the bound hand more explicit than in Maurice Tourneur's 1943 film *La Main du diable.* This film, which combines elements of Nerval's *La Main Enchantée,* Maupassant's *La Main* and Goethe's *Faust,* was one of the five films Tourneur produced for the German-run Continental studios during the German occupation of Paris.[444] It is generally conceded to be Tourneur's best film of the period, one of the few to capture the originality of his earlier silent films, and is marked by lighting and décor suggestive of the German expressionist movement.[445] The film, in addition to consciously positing itself as a decisive link in an intertextual chain, also theorizes the figure of the bound hand in terms of social contracts, economic obligations and the transmission of a particular history. While the titular *main du diable* is not physically restrained in the manner of Maupassant's fantastic hands, we discover that it instead poses a number of restraints on the body to which it is bound. Ultimately, it serves to inscribe its temporary host in a lineage of previous owners, mimicking on a textual level the intertextual heritage of this literary motif,

[444] Waldman, Harry, *Maurice Tourneur: The Life and Films* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Co, 2001) 35.

[445] Ehrlich, Evelyn, *Cinema of Paradox: French filmmaking under the German occupation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985) 52.

inserting specific allusions to the texts of both Maupassant and Nerval.

The narrative, as in Maupassant's text, begins with a frame story. One night a man in black, a *manchot,* arrives at a small ski chalet in the *Auvergne,* carrying a small wrapped package. When he sits down to dinner with the other guests, there is a sudden blackout during which this package is stolen. Panicked and accusatory, he tells the assembled crowd that his very life depends on the stolen item, and begins to recount his story. He is Roland Brissot (Pierre Fresnay), a painter who was unlucky in both love and in art. Unable to sell his paintings or win favor with Irène, the woman he loves, he purchases a severed left hand from a desperate Italian chef. He is warned that while the hand will bring him incredible fame and fortune, giving him access to all he desires, he must sell it to another before he dies or be eternally damned.

Roland accepts the terms for purchasing this *main de gloire* that, true to its name, will open for the painter all the doors previously closed to him: those of art galleries, of beautiful mansions and of Irène's bedroom. He begins to paint macabre but inspired works with his left hand, signing them as “Maximus Leo, and becomes the darling of critics. On the day of Roland's first grand exhibition, he is visited by the devil, portrayed as a small, unassuming businessman in a bowler hat dressed all in black (Palau). The devil offers Roland the chance to buy back his soul but warns him that he will have to give back the magical hand and with it, all the talent and advantages the hand has given him. Roland decides to keep his talisman, and the devil takes his leave, telling Roland that he may still buy back his soul at any point, but that the price will double for each day the painter retains the hand. This Faustian bargain introduces a *lien* of financial obligation between Brissot and the devil— a *lien* that is reinforced each day, becoming stronger and more restrictive as the price of liberation continues to skyrocket. Living under the constant threat of this bargain, Roland

becomes irritable and increasingly violent, until Irène leaves him out of desperation.

When Brissot finally decides to repay his debt, he finds it impossible to accumulate the required sum. In a series of events reminiscent of the Maupassantian *piège,* every time he acquires the money, an accident or happenstance causes him to lose his funds. Irène, still in love with him despite their estrangement, telephones to inform him that she has acquired the money he so desperately needs. However, when Roland arrives at her hotel, he finds a crowd outside, as well as the police, who inform him that Irène has been strangled to death. In another seeming nod to Maupassant, Tourneur has the officer explain to Roland that Irène has been strangled by a hand so strong that it was possible to "compter les doigts." Panicked, Roland flees Paris for a hotel on the Riviera, where he first wins and then subsequently loses all his money at the gambling table.

Destitute, the painter eventually comes to the realization that he is linked not only to the devil, but also to the previous owners of the hand. He exclaims, "moi aussi, je dois faire partie d'une chaîne de plusieurs hommes." Upon entering the hotel's dining room, he encounters the hand's other victims sitting masked around the table. One by one, they remove their masks and tell their stories, and we notice that each man wears a hook or wooden prosthesis on his left hand. Each previous "renter" of the hand, after being forced to "donner sa main" in the contract, now finds himself a *manchot* after breaking his lease. In another obvious allusion to Nerval, the hand's first victim is a *mousquetaire* who buys the talisman from a magician. From the long line of victims who made their living with their hands (a juggler, a magician, a counterfeiter, a surgeon, a boxer and a chef), Brissot realizes that he is part of a very specific *confrérie,* but is no closer to saving his soul. Finally, he recalls his artistic pseudonym and calls upon Maximus Leo, a 15th century monk who appears and

confirms that he is the original owner of the hand, which the devil had stolen from him after his death. He informs Roland, "On ne peut pas vendre quelque chose qui ne vous appartient pas. Le diable lui-même ne le pourrait pas." Maximus Leo charges Roland to seek out his tomb in the *pays dauphinois* so that the hand may at last rejoin its true owner. However, he warns the painter that while his soul may now be safe, his life is still in danger, as the devil will continue to pursue him in an effort to stop Brissot from joining the two ends of the chain.

Throughout the film, Tourneur and scriptwriter Jean-Paul Le Chanois insert several elements placing *La Main du diable* in a direct textual lineage with the works of both Nerval and Maupassant. Roland, as a struggling painter, expresses his yearning for "la gloire, le seul but valable," recalling the original title of Nerval's 19th century *histoire macaronique,* which was *La Main de Gloire.* Irène, who works as a *vendeuse de gants,* tells the painter when he enters her shop "je veux simplement savoir votre pointure, pas votre avenir," her words recalling Nerval's scene of chiromancy on the Pont Neuf. However, the introduction of the devil and a Faustian pact contributes a specifically Germanic element to the plot. In Nerval's tale, the bargain between Maître Gonin and Eustache is made on a purely corporeal level— the magician wants only the tailor's hand, and not his soul. Contrastingly, Roland Brissot's deal with the devil is closer to Faust's— he bargains his soul for love and knowledge.

Brissot, whose last name recalls the French verb *briser,* appears to be the only figure in the film capable of breaking the *lien* between the hand's current and previous owners, and the hand and the devil. Ironically, it is through a gesture of return towards the past and a gesture of reconciliation that Brissot is able to break this chain of obligation. In the film's final scenes, Roland runs from the chalet out into the

darkness, chasing after the devil and struggling with him to regain possession of the coffer containing the *main de gloire.* The painter eventually loses his footing and falls to his death, onto the hidden tomb of Maximus Leo. The innkeeper, rushing to the scene, informs the other guests, "C'est fermé. Le dernier maillon de la chaîne a rejoint le premier." This image of a closed circle, rather than an open chain to which more links may be added, represents not only death and a return to a point of origin, but also a closed system without beginning or end— a ring. This ring, holding the subject together while marking what is both interior and exterior to the self, appears to present the only remedy for the phenomenon of alienation that is one of the film's most enduring themes.

Despite the fraternal elements of the film, *La Main du diable* overwhelming focuses on alienation from both self and others. There are numerous scenes that exploit the tension of a hand that simultaneously is and is not a part of the self. Roland's first paintings are completed while he is in a somnambulant state, and he retains no memory of having painted them. He tells Irène he does not even know what he wanted to represent. As with Nerval's *La Main Enchantée,* the film's magic talisman is enacting not the *volonté* of the body to which it is attached, but rather the body of another (or several others, as the case may be). What Roland is actually painting is the life story of the hand as it is passed down from generation to generation. The subjects of his canvases include a duel on the Pont Neuf and the cloister of a monastery. Finally, the painter's signature of "Maximus Leo" which, he tells Irène, "j'ai signé comme ça, sans réfléchir," points to the foreignness of the hand as an object and its uncanny distance from the painter even in its state of absolute proximity. As if to verify this paradox for himself, Brissot uses ink to take the fingerprint of his left hand and compares it to the one on his *carte d'identité,* and is

forced to conclude, “ce n'est pas ma main.” His statement is further confirmed when he stops to have his left palm read by an old woman, asking her to tell him of the hand's past. Upon examining his hand, and presumably discovering its history to be far longer than that of the body to which it is attached, she tells the painter “Sortez, sortez.”

In addition to this self-alienation, the film also problematizes the same bonds of fraternity it pretends to champion. The various “maillons de la chaîne” reveal themselves to be very weak links indeed, each one having earned his place in this dubious brotherhood at the expense of another's soul. Their offers to help Roland prove ineffectual and in the morning the painter awakes to find himself alone, in an empty room with seven empty place settings. Roland's disconnection from those around him is signaled in the film by still another cord— the telephone cord. In the opening sequence of the film, Roland is called to the telephone, only to discover there is no one on the other end of the line. Similarly, when Irène telephones her estranged husband with a desperate offer of money, she exclaims with irritation “Oh, il y a quelqu'un sur la ligne! Retirez-vous, Monsieur!” Through a series of phone calls, Roland learns that he has also been abandoned by the contemporary friends he believed he had made along with his fortune. When he appeals to these men to lend him money in the face of his mounting debt, a montage reveals one after the other abandoning him to his troubles. The fragility of this false fraternity is juxtaposed against the ever-strengthening bond of débiteur-créancier between Brissot and the devil, demonstrating the film's equally strong investment in a different form of return–– financial return.

Perhaps in part because of this negative portrayal of French solidarity, film critic Jacques Aumont argues against those who would read the occupation-era film as

a subversive allegory for a French victory over the German occupation. He writes of the long narrative flashback in which the hand's previous owners recount their fates, "l'impression laissée est amère : lorsque se referme la parenthèse du long flash-back, c'est un groupe de Français moyens très moyens qui commente la fin d'une histoire de pauvres gens séduits par la gloire facile. Il fallait vraiment vouloir espérer pour lire, dans cette fable plutôt pessimiste, une allégorie de la victoire."[446] Aumont's critique is certainly fair if one regards the chain of *manchots* in a strictly linear fashion, a reading encouraged by the prominent historical markers in this scene.

Because the film's decor, costumes and dialogue clearly delineate different political eras of French history (a *mousquetaire du roi* who kills his best friend in a duel, a petty thief turned finance minister who is displaced by the Revolution, a hypnotist who puts the daughter of a Napoleonic prince into a magnetic trance and fails to awaken her), the viewer is left with the sensation that these historical moments also constitute links in a chain that has culminated in the current global conflict and occupation. The scene traces the process of France becoming a nation, and ends with the petty thief's declaration that the 20th century is the era of crooks, thieves and swindlers. This interpretation seems reinforced by Roland Brissot's sentiment that he will be left holding the bag for his predecessors bad decisions. He asks, "Moi, le dernier maillon, est-ce que c'est juste que je dois payer pour tous les autres?" However, what Aumont's reading ignores is the concurrent fantasy of regression and closure that also strongly marks the film. When one recalls that this much-referenced chain eventually becomes a circle, it reveals a desire to return to a specific historical moment and a particular narrative very much marked by French greatness and victory.

Maximus Leo, the hand's original owner, is revealed to be a monk born in

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[446] Aumont, Jacques, "La Main du diable" de Maurice Tourneur," *Jeu de Paume* (14 April, 2013) Web.

1422 in the *pays dauphinois.* His left hand, while it remained a part of his body, was blessed by God with extraordinary talent that he refused to exploit, instead choosing to live in reclusion and employ his hand only in prayer. It is only once the devil mutilates the monk's body post-mortem and steals the hand that it begins to take on malicious qualities. As in Nerval's earlier work *La Main Enchantée*, the hand appears to be acting out against those who are not its true "maître." While it momentarily brings success and fortune to the various links in the chain, it just as quickly causes their downfall and results in their deaths. After all, the financial agreement between Roland and the devil, in which the devil declares himself the painter's *créancier,*[447] reminds us that the hand has been and always will be merely "on loan." This description of the hand as property already implies the necessity of an eventual return. Still, Maximus Leo's *deus-ex-machina* appearance in the film's conclusion is essential for many reasons beyond a mere explanation of the hand's mysterious origins.

In addition to the obviously Latin resonances of the monk's name, underlining his connection to Romantic rather than Germanic language, both the time and place of his birth would appear significant. To begin, 1422 marks the year that Charles VII should have inherited the throne of France after the death of his father. However, he was unable to officially ascend to the throne due to the presence of occupying English armies in Paris and Northern France, and thus was relegated to the part of the country not currently under English control, causing him to be derisively known to the English and their French allies as the "Roi de Bougres."[448] Five years later, in 1429, a teenage girl appears in his itinerant court, claiming a divine mission to place him on the throne. The young girl was, of course, none other than *Jeanne d'Arc,* who would go

[447] This term is of course also present in Maupassant's "La Main d'écorché," where it is once again associated with the figure of a *lien.* Pierre's decision to tie the hand to his *sonnette* stems from the hope that it will frighten his *créanciers* (4).

[448] Neillands, Robin, *The Hundred Years War* (London: Routledge, 1990) 253.

onto to reverse the tide of the Hundred Years War, be burned at the stake as a martyr and eventually become one of the patron saints of France. Her involvement in the conflict, which remains symbolic even today of French greatness, was also responsible for giving Charles VII the name under which he would rule: *Le victorieux.*

As Robin Neillands explains in *The Hundred Years War,* for many *Jeanne d'Arc* remains the quintessential symbol of French valor and patriotism. He writes:

> Jeanne d'arc, St Joan, *La Pucelle,* the Maid of Orleans was, however, much more than a romantic creation, or a useful tool of kings. She was and remains the embodiment of patriotic France. Her chief appeal lay not with the King and his court, who first used her, then ignored her, and finally abandoned her, but the common people and the common soldier. In Jeanne, people saw the hand of God, fulfilling all their hopes; hopes of an end to this interminable war, the final expulsion of the English and the Free Companies, and the creation of a France in which they, too, might have some share in the future peace and prosperity[449]

Neilland's observations remind us how Jeanne d'Arc, despite her role in a very specific military conflict, ultimately transcended her historical narrative to become a unifying symbol of nationalism for France. We might ask, what more fitting adversary for *la main du diable* than the “hand of God?” By placing the film's redemptive figure, a monk who himself has been given a “hand of God,” squarely within the context of the decisive moment of the Hundred Years War, Tourneur's film could be seen as promoting hope for the ending of another seemingly “interminable war” that had once again left France in foreign hands.

It is this historical moment to which that the film literally returns when the

[449] Ibid.

monk demands of Roland to allow his hand to "remonter le cours des âges jusqu'à moi," so that it passes through the hands of each previous barer, moving backwards through history until it reaches its true owner. The gesture towards temporal regression that marks so many severed hand texts receives a helping hand in this particular case from film's unique ability to visually indicate temporal movement through the cinematic techniques of flashback and flash forward. This ability to move rapidly and seamlessly between past and present helps the viewer to better establish the severed hand's current role in rewriting its past criminal history.

Finally, Maximus Léo's connection to the historical narrative of Charles VII is further reinforced by the reference to the *pays dauphinois,* traditionally the territory of the heir to the French throne, and from which he derived his title, *le dauphin.* This territory, located in the east of France, was an independent territory within the Holy Roman Empire until 1349, when it was annexed to the French throne.[450] Therefore, in addition to representing the French crown, it represents a reversal of the power relations between Germany and France during the Second World War, with the French laying claim to German territory.

Evelyn Ehrlich argues in her book *Cinema of Paradox: French Filmmaking Under the German occupation,* that the ability of Tourneur's film to introduce any kind of subversive message of French nationalism is ironically only made possible by its status as the product of a German controlled film house. In addition to noting how the Jewish script-writer Jean-Paul Le Chanois continued to work at the studio, despite a warrant for his arrest under his birth name of Jean-Paul Dreyfus, Ehrlich argues for other ways in which Continental frequently undermined the very ideology it was supposed to represent. She writes, "Because Continental was owned by the Germans,

[450] "Dauphiné," *Encyclopédie Larousse* (Paris: La Société Editions Larousse) Web.

some filmmakers who worked for the company were accused by their countrymen of collaboration with the enemy. Yet, by virtue of its being German, Continental provided filmmakers with more economic and political freedom than did any other production company in France."[451] She points out that Continental films were not subject to the same strict standards of censorship as those produced by the Vichy government, making it possible for "veiled messages of nationalism and even resistance" to be inserted into the studio's pictures.

Consequently, we might argue that the provocative severed hand of *La Main du diable,* in addition to participating in fantasies of reparation and historical regression, also makes use of the hand's criminal potential for subversion, trickery and evasion. In this it joins its nineteenth century brethren. Additionally, Tourneur's film, on both the narrative level and the level of its production, provides still another example by which the ties that encircle the severed hand serve not only as a means of containment, but also as a means of communication. In the hand-texts of Mérimée, Maupassant and Villiers, as well as Tourneur's film, bell cords and telephone wires help the hand to acquire a voice and transmit a signal. In *La Main du diable* in particular, the German production house that should have censored and stifled such a film does just the opposite. What initially appears to be a form of restraint or control ultimately allows the hand to extend its reach and touch a much wider audience. How are we to understand this double function of the *lien?* It is my hope that psychoanalysis may offer some important insights on the way in which these links and chains relate to the central figure of anxiety present in these otherwise diverse texts.

[451] Ehrlich 55.

4.5- String Theory: Psychoanalysis and Attachment

Through this study we have established that the severed hand participates in a seemingly endless cycle of disappearance and reappearance. The texts of the 19th century figure return primarily as a supernatural haunting, while the later works of Blaise Cendrars and Maurice Tourneur appear to conceive of it in terms of the repetition of a previous historical moment. In all cases, the gesture seems best described, in my opinion, as a circling back— a return towards an origin.

From Lacenaire gesturing back towards the Revolution and Maupassant's reaching back across Nerval and Gautier to the traces of Lacenaire's legacy, from the displaced Roman roots of Mérimée's Venus and Villiers' return to Eden to the “on loop” nature of Cendrars complicated *Prochronie,* the characteristic which seems to most clearly define the severed hand is its ability to return. In these texts, the hand in question does not merely reappear in the text with uncanny frequency, refusing to stay buried— it also reaches back temporally, most often in an effort to repair the damage done in an earlier historical moment. As I have argued in the preceding chapters, Maupassant and Cendrars' works seek to repair the maternal body destroyed through the fantasies of aggression and destruction that are a necessary precondition for the creative act. Contrastingly, while Villiers and Mérimée's texts also go back in time with the intention of repairing the female form, in their narratives it is with the mission of rewriting history so that the contemporary counterparts of these ancient goddesses— the modern woman— might better correspond with the ideal object of male erotic desire. Each time that the temporal return fails, the severed hand is forced to return in the second sense of the word, reappearing in the narrative in an uncanny repetition that generates still more anxiety. The function of this capacity for return, both in the sense of reappearance and in the sense of circling back, and its connection

to anxiety in these severed hand narratives, might be better understood if we turn to one of Freud's most difficult works on the subject*, Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety,* and it's subsequent *remaniement* by later thinkers.

Freud writes in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* that what distinguishes fear from anxiety is the fact that anxiety lacks a definite object. He writes, “Anxiety [*Angst*] has an unmistakable relation to *expectation*: it is anxiety *about* something. It has a quality of *indefiniteness and lack of object.*”[452] This remark would appear to provide some insight as to the reason why these literary limbs that cannot be tied down evoke such feelings of *inquiétude*. Even in the cases where the hand is not simply a floating signifier, but rather associated with a particular body, there are still displacements at work in the text (such as the appearance of doubles) that make it impossible to say with certainty who is responsible for the hand's deadly actions. It would appear that this undecidability about the hand's origin or role within the text is that which subsequently evokes anxiety in those who encounter it. Since these uncanny limbs are constantly changing, doubling, disappearing and reappearing, they are never able to achieve the standing of a full object that could stand as an object of fear. Furthermore, in a later passage Freud evokes a temporal model related to anxiety that will subsequently prove important for the work of Melanie Klein:

> The signal announces: 'I am expecting a situation of helplessness to set in', or: 'The present situation reminds me of one of the traumatic experiences I have had before. Therefore I will anticipate the trauma and behave as through it had already come, while there is yet time to turn it aside.' Anxiety is therefore on the one hand an expectation of a trauma, and on the other a repetition of it in a mitigated form. Thus the two features of anxiety which we have noted have a

[452] Freud, Sigmund, *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* Ed. and Trans. James Strachey, Vol. 21 (London: Hogarth Press 1966-74) 165.

> different origin. Its connection with expectation belongs to the danger-situation, whereas its indefiniteness and lack of object belong to the traumatic situation of helplessness—the situation which is anticipated in the danger-situation.[453]

As I had noted in chapter one, Melanie Klein associates the repetition compulsion with a need to control and manage "pressure exerted by the earliest anxiety situations," and also with the ego's need to protect itself against an anticipated punishment of such severity that it could destroy the ego.[454] This seems consistent with Freud's assertion that anxiety is the repetition of a trauma in a mitigated form. And yet, we can also note that Freud links repetition to an effort not only to evade punishment, but also to *buy time.* The way to defend against being frightened is to anticipate the frightening event "while there is yet time to turn it aside."

All of this brings us back to the figure of the bound hand and the temporal model of return present in these 19th and 20th century texts. As Freud says, "on the one hand" anxiety anticipates and "on the other" it repeats. However, since the hands in these texts are singular, they must do double duty. If chains, strings and rings initially serve as a means of containment and control, we might relate them to an effort to transform these floating limbs into fixed entities that would give anxiety an object and transform it into a knowable fear. But, since these hands prove unceasingly capable of breaking all ties, the narratives are compelled to act out an endless cycle of anxious repetition and return as an alternate means of control.

Elissa Marder, in "Back of Beyond: Anxiety and the Birth of the Future," explores how the inherent contradictions of Freud's text serve to radically dislocate our pre-conceived notions of origin and return, of time as a linear progression from

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[453] Freud, *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* 166.
[454] See Melanie Klein, "The Origins of Transference" and "Infantile Anxiety Situations Reflected in a Work of Art and in the Creative Impulse."

birth to death. She writes:

> To the extent that it recalls the trauma of birth "automatically," "automatic anxiety" lies both "beyond" and "before" the ego. It lies "beyond" the ego, marks a potential beyond for the ego *because* it comes before it, precedes it, calls it into being although it remains radically other to it. Anxiety is the first "sign of life," and it is the most irreducible form of life's relationship to that which lies "beyond." Anxiety has no proper time.[455]

If anxiety is always that which both comes before and lies beyond, if it is, as Marder suggests, a response that is also a call,[456] then the only way to properly conceive of anxiety is through the image of a circle with no beginning or end.

The corpus of psychoanalytic theory reveals many examples of patients making use of cords or ties to create just such a circle, as a way of communicating psychic pain and diffusing anxiety arising out of a fear of abandonment or loss. The most famous example of this linking phenomenon is perhaps Freud's description in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* of the young child and his game of "Fort/Da," in which the child, playing with a reel attached to a string, would repeatedly throw the reel into his cot, while proclaiming it "fort" (gone). Next, says Freud, "he then pulled the reel out of the cot again by the string and hailed its reappearance with a joyful 'da' ['there']. This, then, was the complete game-- disappearance and return."[457] The child, Freud argues, has created this game as a way of mastering the unpleasant feelings associated with his mother's departure, transforming her leaving into a pleasant experience in so much as it is a necessary condition for her eventual return.

Freud goes on to explain how the pleasure of the game for the child did not

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455 Marder 88.

456 Marder 85.

457 Freud, Sigmund, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* Ed. and Trans. James Strachey, Vol. 18 (London: Hogarth Press, 1966-74) 14.

rely exclusively on its cyclic nature and his power of making the toy reappear. He continues, "But against this must be counted the observed fact that the first act, that of departure, was staged as a game in itself and far more frequently than the episode in its entirety, with its pleasurable ending."[458] Freud argues that this pleasurable ending may be explained by the child's ability, in his game, to switch from a passive role to an active one. In choosing to send the spool-surrogate away from him, he declares his independence from the mother, revenging himself upon her by showing just how little he needs her. This fantasy of omnipotence, then, is the violent backhanding that exists in these texts alongside the pervasive desire to keep and control these phantom limbs. As much as the protagonists profess a conscious desire to possess these severed hands, their actions over the course of the narrative express an equally strong desire to escape the hand's malevolent actions and to free themselves of its influence.

However, while the child's game of fort/da was played with a variety of objects, it was only the use of the string and spool combination that made possible the staging of the "fort" game as its own pleasurable activity. While Freud may be correct that the child gained pleasure from his revenge fantasy of independence, this action could only be tolerated as long as it remained just this— a fantasy. The presence of the string, real or imagined, is what provided the child with his active role. He could not only send the mother away, he could make her reappear at will. The string provided reassurance that the mother could, and would, eventually return, and this reassurance made possible an experience of independence that would otherwise have been perceived merely as abandonment. This understanding of the fort/da game will perhaps become clearer in light of a somewhat parallel clinical example taken from the work of British psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott.

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[458] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 15.

Winnicott similarly observed ligature and binding being used as a means of anxiety control in one of his young patients. In “Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena,” Winnicott relates the story of a seven-year-old boy who had become obsessively preoccupied with string, tying together furniture and even tying a string around the neck of his infant sister. He observes that the boy's mother had suffered from severe depression that had necessitated her hospitalization, something her son viewed as abandonment, and he interprets the use of string as the child's attempt to remain connected to her by denying their separation. He writes, “As a denial of separation string becomes a thing in itself, something that has dangerous properties and must needs be mastered.”[459] In Winnicott's formulation, we see that through the use of string, what began as a reaction to powerlessness in the face of separation from the mother has been transformed into mastery and an ability to control these distressing circumstances through the magical power of the string as transitional object.

This anecdote fits in with what Winnicott holds to be a necessary quality for the transitional object, something that both is and is not the mother.[460] In a healthy psychic scenario, Winnicott explains, the child derives comfort from the object's consistency and eventually becomes less reliant on the object as he develops a greater relationship to external reality.[461] However, in the case of this patient, the object failed to become decathected with time, remaining “tied-up,” as Winnicott notes, with the mother's depression. The result of this failure to detach from the object can eventually have serious consequences for the adult psyche; Winnicott worries in the initial case

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[459] Winnicott, D.W., “Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena,” *Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge, 2005) 26.

[460] “It is true that the piece of blanket (or whatever it is) is symbolic of some part-object, such as the breast. Nevertheless, the point of it is not its symbolic value so much as its actuality. Its not being the breast (or the mother), although real, is as important as the fact that it stands for the breast (or mother.” (Ibid. 8).

[461] “An infant's transitional object ordinarily becomes gradually decatected, especially as cultural interests develop” (Ibid. 19).

material that it may develop into a "perversion," by which we might assume he means a fetish. However, the final outcome of the case reveals a different turn (or rather, return) of events that, while perhaps bearing some relationship to fetishism in the refusal to abandon a particular object or belief, nonetheless varies significantly in other ways. Winnicott notes in the added material from 1969 that the boy eventually developed other addictions, but the ultimate result of this failure to successfully decathect was that no matter where the boy was placed for treatment, "he regularly escaped and ran back home."[462] In this instance, what initially manifests as flight (escape), in fact represents a return to the point of departure— the home and the maternal body. Like the heroes of Maupassant, Cendrars, Villiers and Mérimée's hand-texts and Tourneur's Roland Brissot, Winnicott's patient presented an obsessive desire to return.

I am not, in stating this, attempting to pathologize or diagnose the fictional protagonists of 19th and 20th century authors. I am simply noting the shared occupation of literature and psychoanalysis with a return towards the point of origin, a desire that, in these texts, is most often mediated by the female form. We have seen that in the case of Maupassant and Cendrars, the mother is figured as an eternally absent-present— an all-encompassing force frequently symbolized by natural elements such as water, earth or stars. The protagonists return to these sources again and again for inspiration and absolution— seeking a connection that will save them from their displacement and alienation. In the works of Mérimée and Villiers, the return to a feminine point of origin is symbolized by aesthetic objects, statues and androids, that are modeled on the classical feminine form of Venus, goddess of love, while also evoking Eve, the Virgin Mary and other elements of Christian mythology.

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[462] Winnicott 27.

These objects seemingly reveal a desire to return to an earlier historical moment—one prior to the fall of Rome, or prior to the Fall into sin, that would allow women to be redeemed as objects of desire.

While this element of return towards a female form might initially appear to be absent in Tourneur's film, one could argue that the film accomplishes a subversive gesture somewhat akin to Maupassant's “La Main d'écorché.” While the points of origin for the hands in both Maupassant and Tourneur's works are clearly identified as masculine (the hand of a criminal who murdered his wife, the peaceful monk), both hands ultimately appear to return towards and repair the *terre* from which they came. In Tourneur's film, what needs repairing is perhaps *la mère patrie,* who has been broken by the series of French political and social shake-ups that have led to the current military occupation.

When one considers these various forms of attachment that loop and coil back on themselves across the figure of a feminine or maternal body, there is of course a particular life sustaining cord that comes to mind. While I do not wish to diminish the complexity of these ties by collapsing them into a single figure, I would be remiss not to explore the obvious connection between these cords and cables and the most primal cord of all: the umbilical cord that links us to the maternal body. The ways in which these cords simultaneously nourish, preserve and strangle would seem to suggest the similarly duplicitous function of the umbilical cord for the infant in-utero. Nevertheless, such an association can only go so far, since the links between the severed hand and other bodies in these literary texts are not organic, but rather material objects that, in as much as they are products of handiwork, industry and production, are also already technological objects. Such a fact does not, however, necessarily negate a connection to the maternal body.

As Elissa Marder and Avital Ronell point out in *The Mother in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* and *The Telephone Book,* respectively, the technological and the maternal are intimately connected, especially when it comes to questions of absence and presence. In analyzing Freud's mise-en-scène for the origins of fetishism and the discovery of sexual difference, in which the young boy looks up his mother's skirt and so discovers her absent penis, Ronell writes:

> For what a child sees, were he to look behind the empirical curtains covering the "thing" in its not-being-there, comes down to something like an invaginated ear, or lips forming a mouth-- a mouthpiece and a receiver that have been kept in reserve, hidden, and virtually silent. We say virtually silent because Freud and others have heard the womb calling back the child. According to these sources, the second mouth never stops calling.[463]

In this passage, we have the same bodily triad that Ronell will posit later in relation to the telephone: the hand that presumably lifts the skirt away to discover the hidden ear and mouth. If telephone and telegraph wires allow for instantaneous communication across distances that cannot be bridged by the human voice or body, she argues, they are in many ways a technological effort to answer the call of this "second mouth," and in so doing erase the absence that begins with the initial cut— a cut predating even that of castration-—the disconnection from the maternal body. As Marder explains in her reading of Ronell's text, "Paradoxically, therefore, the technological drive emerges from an attempt to (re)produce a "mother" who would and could preserve the (philosophical, masculine) fantasy of full presence, life, and unending connection."[464]

However, while it seems likely that the cords in the narratives we have discussed do participate in just such a fantasy, these cords do not link naval to womb,

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[463] Ronell, 97.
[464] Marder 116.

or ear to mouth, but rather hand to hand. What difference does it make that the point of connection is anchored to the part of the body that holds, that takes and that gives? Hands, we might say, are meant to be joined. They join together with our other hand or the hand of the other without any necessary assistance from technological supports. And yet, it is not always clear that the uncanny hands in these texts work in the service of the narrative's logic of bringing together or bringing back. Whether right or left, these hands are always singular. They lack the counterpart that would allow them to join together in a true union. As if in place of these missing mates, the texts substitute the various material objects we have encountered— chains, strings and rings— in an effort to create such a closed circuit. More frequently, it is the case that these severed limbs interrupt the circuits in which the protagonists' actions attempt to inscribe them. As we have seen, the power of the uncanny and independent hand lies in its ability to break its chains and free itself, creating destruction and chaos in its wake.

For, in addition to a preoccupation with various modes of restraint and return, these diverse texts seemingly have in common a device we might term “creation anxiety,” be it artistic, literary or technological in nature. Far from being analogous to castration anxiety, which would be akin to a fear of impotence and an inability to create, these texts instead manifest its complete opposite: the fear that their power to produce succeeds far too well. The protagonists of these narratives are frequently the victims of their own creations. The works of Maupassant and Cendrars attempt to cope with the anxiety that their authorial production is responsible for the death of the mother. In morbid twists on the Pygmalion narrative, Mérimée's Monsieur Alphonse makes an unbreakable oath he did not intend, and Villiers' Edison and Ewald create an artificial woman that ultimately outsmarts her own creators. This anxiety of creation

run amok is perhaps best summarized in Nerval's *La Main Enchantée* and its later 20th century adaptation, *La Main du diable,* texts in which the hand responsible for physical strength and creative genius ultimately leads to the protagonists' deaths. Given the simultaneously destructive and creative powers embodied by these severed hands, one must ask how they relate to the extra-diegetic figure of the writing hand. What is the relationship between writing and attachment, and what is the relationship between writing and return? To answer this question, we would perhaps do well to turn to Jacques Derrida.

In *Donner le Temps,* Derrida implies that the only way to interrupt the circular logic of return is through the concept of the gift. He insists that the very definition of a gift is that it negates any possibility for return.[465] He writes, “Pour qu'il y ait don, il faut qu'il n'y ait pas de réciprocité, de retour, d'échange, de contre-don ni de dette. Si l'autre me *rend* ou me *doit,* ou doit me rendre ce que je lui donne, il n'y aura pas eu don, que cette restitution soit immédiate ou qu'elle se programme dans le calcul complexe d'une différance à long terme.”[466] If, as we have already observed, anxiety is that which has “no proper time,”[467] then it might also be said that the gift is also without a proper time.[468] Since the gift can never be repaid, it cannot be placed within a time frame of repayment. For, as has already been mentioned, *maintenant* is also the *main tenant*— the present that we hold in our hands. In all of the narratives discussed in this dissertation, one sees the evidence of an effort to *rewrite* the past in order to more securely hold on to the present and future. However, the circular motion of this false temporality is bound to fail, because it is also a false economy. We will see that in all cases, the circle that seeks to subjugate the hand, to maintain it in a limited logic

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[465] Derrida, Jacques, *Donner le Temps* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1991) 18-24.
[466] *Ibid.* 24.
[467] Marder 88.
[468] “On n'aurait jamais le temps d'un don.” (*Donner le Temps* 21).

of exchange and transmission (that is to say a logic of "dette") is broken, as Derrida says it must be, by the possibility of a "don."

In the case of Maupassant and Cendrars, the reappearance of the deadly, guilty severed hand must be continually restaged across the corpus of their work, accompanied by a return towards the point of origin, due to an unceasing effort to make reparation for a sacrifice that should have been understood as a gift— the gift of writing. The fantasy of matricide that allows for subsequent literary creation is not a debt that can be repaid, as evidenced by the severed hand that, unlike the bodies of the protagonists, never remains buried. In Villiers and Mérimée's return towards the past, there is also a gift that cannot be accounted for. Hadaly is a gift Edison gives to Lord Ewald, but she is a gift given to repay a debt— Edison attempts to save Lord Ewald's life as Ewald once saved his. She is therefore no gift at all. The true gift of the narrative is thus Sowana's decision to give voice and life to the android, a gift that allows her to break out of an otherwise condemning circle. In *La Vénus d'Ille*, it could be said that Monsieur Alphonse does perhaps make a gift, since the ring is a gift he does not intend to give. However, the ghastliness of the tale comes from the statue's archaic sense of justice—its interpretation of the gift as a binding legal contract that must be fulfilled and repaid. Finally, in Tourneur's film, we find that the *main du diable* spends the majority of the picture trapped in an endless cycle of economic exchange, always being sold "à perte" for an amount less than the price for which it was bought, or being bartered against an ever increasing debt to the devil. It is only in the final scenes, where Roland Brissot freely gives the monk Maximus Leo his hand, a gift that stretches across the centuries, that the hand is freed from the vicious circle of exchange and loses its power for harm.

Therefore, we might rightly follow Derrida in combining the temporal and

economic model to claim that what the hand-texts of various 19th and 20th century authors attempt to give, in returning towards the past, is the gift of time— the time needed to rewrite and repair time. Yet, as Derrida tells us, one cannot give time.[469] One cannot hope to make of it a present; for the gift is that which, by its very nature, interrupts not only the economic circle but the temporal one as well. Where there is time, there is no gift, and where there is gift, there is no time. It is not so much that a gift is an impossibility, as that it ceases to exist the moment its possibility is recognized, since such recognition creates obligation and debt, both of which re-inscribe the circle of exchange and the circle of time. For this reason, the gift of time seemingly offered by these out-stretched hands, were it to exist, would break apart the very cycle it was meant to establish, eventually transforming into another kind of *Gift,* this time in the German sense of the word— a poisonous present that can end only in death. The figure of the severed hand, we might say, derives its deadly powers from this fundamental misunderstanding. Since the protagonists of these texts misread the very nature of these hands, attempting to establish them in traditional circuits of temporality and exchange, the narratives can only stage continued miscommunications that lead to their tragic conclusions.

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[469] "Dès lors, le temps n'appartenant à personne en tant que tel, on ne peut pas plus le *prendre,* lui-même, que le *donner." Donner le Temps* 14.

Conclusion

To conclude, the function of the severed hand in modern French literature appears to be double. While initially embodying an uncanny figure of anxiety within the narrative, there are ways in which the hand also participates in attempts to undo or defend against the same anxiety it opens up. Additionally, the anxieties in question relate primarily to either the maternal or eroticized female body. Consequently, the aforementioned attempts at reparation may take the form, as in Maupassant and Cendrars, of reconstructing or resurrecting the body of a dead mother. Or, they might play a role, as in Villiers and Mérimée, in the Pygmalion fantasy of creating a perfect object of desire. Or, they may simply, as in the case of Lacenaire or Tourneur, enact the fantasy of writing one's own life and death so that one becomes the product of one's own creation, free from models of genealogical inheritance. The possibilities are multiple, and they cannot all be said to be analogous. Still, to the extent to which these severed hands attempt to undo the past and close back within their box the ills that Pandora, the first woman, loosed upon the world—ills, which as Elissa Marder reminds us, include birth, death, sexual difference and the inauguration of historical time itself[470] — these hands might appear to exercising a function similar to more traditional fetish objects. That is to say, in their double function of both provoking and tempering anxiety they become, as Angela Moorjani says of the classic fetish object standing in for the absent maternal penis, an object that "both points to and screens the loss."[471]

However, while there are certainly examples in this dissertation of hand-texts,

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[470] Marder 10.

[471] Moorjani, Angela, "Fetishism, Gender Masquerade, and the Mother-Father Fantasy," *Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Future of Gender,* Ed. Joseph H. Smith (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994) 22.

such as *L'Ève future* and *La Vénus d'Ille,* that appear to carry out the typical fetishistic mission of protecting oneself from the anxiety-arousing knowledge of sexual difference, the loss to which many of these hands gesture and for which they screen would not appear to be simply the loss of virility, as in the oedipal castration complex, but rather the loss of a relation. Works such as "La Main d'écorché" and *La Main Coupée* engage the hand in reparative fantasies to screen for the loss of the mother. In both scenarios, the regressive return of the severed hand would, it seems, work at defending against a chronologically-produced anxiety by collapsing the distance, both spatial and temporal, between masculine and feminine bodies and returning to an idyllic, pre-Pandora era without sexual reproduction and sexual difference, or an idyllic state of fusion with the maternal body.

Significantly though, we have also seen that such temporal fantasies of regression and return to a point of origin are impossible and doomed to fail. The hand as fantastic fetish ultimately cannot work to plug up anxiety-producing gaps in representation or feelings of alienation and loss because of the continued intrusion of the uncanny. The uncanny continuously digs up, like an open grave, everything that the fantasy of return and reparation attempts to bury. What the structure of the uncanny teaches us is that when the hand returns, it is always fundamentally altered in some way by this return. Like the lines on Cendrars' palm that were "en train de changer," each successive iteration of the hand, when it resurfaces in a text, is shifted and skewed by its burial and subsequent resurrection. These hands are transformed into constellations, bells and *objet d'art.* They double or mimic the hands of another figure in the text and displace themselves both spatially and temporally. In so doing, they produce rather than allay anxiety. In short, it is through the intervention of the uncanny that these hands emancipate themselves from the restorative role the text

hopes to force them to play, and this refusal to enter into symbolic contracts that would indebt or enslave them is perhaps more than anything else what makes them unique products of the 19th and 20th century.

I have noted elsewhere in this dissertation that the confusion and disorder the severed hand provokes stems in part from its linguistic overdetermination—the fact that it may simultaneously represent a state of being and the act of having. Such a duplicitous role necessarily, as we have seen, emphasizes the hand's connection to the possession of one's own body or the body of the Other. Jean-François Lyotard, in "La Mainmise," exploits this double signification as it relates to questions of emancipation and subjugation. Lyotard begins by noting that while the Latin *Manceps* designates one who takes, acquires, or possesses, the related word *mancipum* designates both the gesture of taking and the object or subject that is taken up. He writes, "Qui est sous la mainmise d'un *manceps,* il est *mancus,* manchot, il lui manque une main. Celui à qui la main manque. S'émanciper signifie, par cette voie, échapper à l'état d'un manque. En s'affranchissant de la tutelle de l'autres, le manchot reprend la main. Il croit cicatriser sa castration."[472] As we have seen in the preceding pages, castration anxiety need not refer only to a fear of losing the physical, sexual organ. Rather, the concept of castration anxiety and the various defenses that accompany it (disavowal resulting in fetishism, guilty mourning accompanied by fantasies of reparation and reconstruction) helps us to better understand our psychic response to multiple forms of traumatic loss. But who is the *manceps* and who the *mancipum* in these severed hand-texts? Frequently, the protagonists lay hands on these severed limbs, only to have the roles reversed. For Lyotard, such representations of self-emancipation are a unique possibility of the modern condition. If the hand can be said to serve as the

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[472] Lyotard, Jean-François, "Mainmise," *Autres temps: Les cahiers du christianisme social* 25 (1990) 20.

central point of contract and exchange, it is because such human uses of *manceps* and *mancipium* mimic and repeat the divine covenants of *Yahweh* with Abraham and, later, the early church in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Contemporary culture, Lyotard argues, breaks with the tradition of "waiting" for a liberator and instead takes up an ideal of self-liberation.[473] This battle for emancipation is linked to a desire to be free from the deferred promise of historical time.[474] He writes,"Que le temps soit l'éponyme du manque et, donc, l'adversaire à vaincre pour s'émanciper, la vie contemporaine l'atteste avec une évidence encore inconnue de la tradition moderne."[475] No longer subject to a law of waiting or of time, the severed limbs of the 19th and 20th century do not await their release by another and they reject the deferred promise of a handshake or other symbolic gesture for the immediacy of embodiment and presence.

To conclude, while we might, as a result of this dissertation, better understand the work that the trope of the severed hand is *trying* to do in modern French literature, we have equally come to understand that these hands have a mind of their own. While this study may perhaps claim, like a treatise on chirognomy, to have "typed" the hand, it can by no means claim to have buried it. Such an act would be beyond its power. We must therefore as readers content ourselves to prepare for its uncanny and inevitable return.

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[473] "Quant à ce point, que l'émancipation est l'écoute du vrai *manceps,* les juifs et les chrétiens sont d'accord, et c'est cet accord que rompt la modernité. Elle essaie de pense et d'effectuer une émancipation sans autre." (Lyotard 23).

[474] Ibid. 21.

[475] Ibid 20.

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