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The hegemony of language - literary writing and the quest for subjectivity in the works of Michel de Montaigne and Charles Ferdinand Ramuz

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THE HEGEMONY OF LANGUAGE
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LITERARY WRITING AND THE QUEST FOR SUBJECTIVITY
IN THE WORKS OF
MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE AND CHARLES FERDINAND RAMUZ

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"Sans doute y a-t-il à l'origine une certaine défiance envers le langage. Mais cette défiance, cette gêne, qui sont imposées à tant d'hommes de l'extrême périphérie du domaine linguistique français, il faudra savoir leur faire jouer un rôle salutaire."

Jean Starobinski
Le « Contre » 1945[1]

"One does not inhabit a country; one inhabits a language. That is our country, our fatherland – and no other."

Emil Cioran
Anathemas and Admirations, 1987[2]

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[1] Jean Starobinski, Le «Contre» in *Lettres,* numéro 6. (Genève: Cailler, 1945), 97.
[2] Emil Cioran, *Anathemas and Admirations*. (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1998).

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Abstract

Starting from the premise that one's identity is first and foremost construed in language, this dissertation argues that language is the fundamental site of resistance for writers who define themselves through linguistic difference. Recognizing also that language and literary production frequently fall under the control of complex authorities, this thesis examines literature as a site where confrontation is played out aesthetically. Literary writing, in other words, is exposed as a point of intersection between writers whose language draws its sources from a peripheral location and the centers of authority that regulate and dictate what is accepted as artistically and culturally valuable. Read as such, at the core of literary writing, we find nothing less than the Self and the Other engaged in a competing struggle for affirmation.

The two authors considered in this study are Michel de Montaigne and Charles Ferdinand Ramuz. By going as far back in history as the French Renaissance and then shifting focus to the Swiss Francophone, this project explores historical processes and literary creation from the viewpoint of relationships of hegemony and resistance that call to mind the conceptual definitions of postcolonial theory. Reading Michel de Montaigne and Charles Ferdinand Ramuz through a postcolonial theoretical lens, this dissertation reveals that power dynamics, imbalanced power relations, and struggles over cultural control can be discerned in other settings than those most frequently associated with postcolonial theory.

Introduction

As Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin advance in their influential

collection *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, "language provides the terms by which the

world may be 'known'. Its system of values – its suppositions, its geography, its concept

of history, of difference, its myriad gradation of distinction – becomes the system upon

which social, economic and political discourses are grounded."[3] Language also provides

the terms by which individual identity is construed, for – if we agree with the French

psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan – the site of subjectivity, of selfhood, is none other than

language. Through language we also discover that selfhood is plural and always

constituted in relation to a fundamental alterity. For this reason, literary writing can be

read as the point of intersection between the Self and the Other,[4] as a field of

confrontation between languages and subjectivities.[5] If we examine literary writing

produced at the crossings of linguistic and geographic borders, language can then be

assessed as a strategic tool in a writer's quest for subjectivity and authorial affirmation.

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[3] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. (New York: Routledge, 1995), 283.
[4] Spelled with a capital O, the Other designates Jacques Lacan's notion of a radical alterity, an otherness that cannot be assimilated through identification. It is unique, a linguistic dimension, a law that is particular for each subject and that mediates the subject's relationship with the lowercase 'other.' In this sense, Lacan's non-capitalized 'other' is not really an 'other' but a projection of our own Egos, a counterpart but also something different that can be negotiated. The lowercase "other" always refers to imaginary others that we treat as reflections of ourselves. The "other" belongs to the Imaginary order. It is deceptive and ultimately alienating.
[5] Lacan's Subject/Other rapport explains identity formation as a mechanism where the Subject engages the Other in a contest for authority, in a process of exchange and rejection that is triggered by the interplay occurring between identification, desire, and the pursuit of difference.

The two authors considered in this dissertation project, Michel de Montaigne and Charles Ferdinand Ramuz, engage in just such a quest for definition.

This dissertation aims to demonstrate that in their pursuit of subjectivity and, even more specifically, in their search for authorial confirmation, Michel de Montaigne and C.F. Ramuz discovered that language and cultural experience are mutually constituted and generated by an individual's contact with history, with educational and cultural institutions, and with particular localities. Through their personal experiences, Montaigne and Ramuz ultimately recognized that aesthetic and cultural values cannot be confirmed and promoted to the detriment of lesser forms of expression. For this reason, their quest for authorial authentication can be summed up as a struggle to dismantle "the claim that a particular language has an essential and exclusive capacity to convey cultural truth."[6]

Montaigne's and Ramuz's search for authorial subjectivity engaged them in a negotiating process with a symbolic center of power that is culturally and literarily articulated. Our authors seized and displaced their language from this figure of authority, to the periphery, to a discursive space that better defined them. By progressively detaching themselves from this force, Montaigne and Ramuz forged an autonomous literary voice that speaks not only of their individualities but also reflects that of the periphery to which they relocated. Consequently, Montaigne and Ramuz transformed language into an instrument of power through which literary and, by extension, cultural domination was subverted. Moreover, through language, they transformed intellectual and literary creation into a homecoming experience that confirmed their particular

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[6] Bill Ashcroft. "Constitutive Graphonomy." *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. Ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. (New York: Routledge, 1995), 300.

localities as unique and valuable sites. They validated the margin as an original locus of

power, a rejuvenating new center of creative possibilities. Read through Jacques Lacan's

theoretical lens, Montaigne and Ramuz' resistance to privileged forms of linguistic and

creative values ultimately exposes a larger difficulty. Their struggle reveals the

opposition of the Symbolic order[7] to radical and real innovations, to the emergence and

recognition of singularities.

Delineating language as a site of confrontation where subjectivities are formed

and through which various forms of power are expressed, challenged, and overturned

inevitably leads us to consider language from the theoretical viewpoint of postcolonial

studies. Few intellectual domains are at once as active and as difficult to explicitly

describe as the postcolonial field. This difficulty has led to many debates over

terminology and its applicability. The dilemmas inherent within the postcolonial

discipline emerge from the multiplicity of histories, cultures, geographies, and economic

and political issues that are subsumed under the colonial and postcolonial logos.

I would like to add my voice to these debates by elaborating on the notion that, as

Bill Ashcroft affirms, "the colonial process begins in language."[8] Starting from this

premise, postcolonialism is interpreted here as a conceptual theory that exposes the

interplay between various forms of hegemony and resistance that materialize through the

contact between different cultures and people. In his epilogue to *Postcolonial*

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[7] The Symbolic order is the site of Lacan's big Other, the absolute otherness that we cannot fully incorporate within our subjectivity. As such, the Other is a foreignness that we must learn to articulate. It is the desire and discourse of those around us. The Other is where unconscious desire surfaces and is shaped by language. Consequently, the Symbolic order is the site of social and linguistic communication, of relations, the acceptance of laws and ideological conventions.
[8] Ashcroft, 283.

Approaches to the European Middle Ages, Ato Quayson reformulates postcolonialism along the same lines, while also acknowledging that "even though empire and colonialism established the parameters of [the postcolonial] dynamic, […] it is also evident that the encounters [described by imperialism and colonialism] persist in miniature in various other contexts."[9] It is this notion – the persistence "in miniature and in various contexts" of forms of hegemonic power – that this study aims to investigate.

Hence, I propose that we must question and analyze postcolonial and colonial systems from a position that would allow us to glimpse the difference between colonization as a course of action and colonialism as a linguistic, social, cultural, economic, and political system, as an ideology at whose core is the individual subject. I am not arguing against colonialism or postcolonialism's historical, political, economic, or cultural frameworks of definition. My intention is to explore these terms' modes of operation within parallel correlations that are not automatically recognized as colonial or postcolonial.

With the help of Michel de Montaigne and Charles Ferdinand Ramuz, this dissertation endeavors to demonstrate that the power dynamics implicit within colonialism and postcolonialism's definitional structures extend to contexts other than those usually associated with these terms. This project's essential purpose can be expressed as the desire to explore the cultural mode of operation before, throughout, and after what is specifically understood as colonialism. Thus is justified the emphasis placed

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[9] Ato Quayson. "Translations and transnationals: pre- and postcolonial." *Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages – Translating Cultures*. Ed. Ananya Jahanara Kabir and Deanne Williams. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 253.

on language and cultural identity instead of on chronology or the customary economic

and political policies associated with postcolonial theory.

As Stephen Slemon elaborates in his exposé "The Scramble for Post-

colonialism," colonialism and postcolonialism are ambivalent concepts. "Post-

colonialism […] de-scribes a remarkably heterogeneous set of subject positions,

professional fields, and critical enterprises."[10] Because of this, the term has been used to

critique totalizing forms of Western historicism, as a subset of post-modernist and post-

structuralism critical theories, as a narrative tool, and as an expression of political agency.

Similarly, colonialism is first and foremost defined as "direct political and economic

control."[11] Yet, colonialism also represents "differing concepts of ideological

regulation."[12] As such, it represents "a vast semiotic field of representations. [It has been

used] in literary works, in advertising, in sculpture, in travelogues, in exploring

documents, maps, and so on."[13] Slemon's purpose is to emphasize the foundational

ambivalence inherent within colonialism and postcolonialism and to recognize that "for

some critics, this ambivalence bankrupts the field. But for others, [the terms' indefinite

nature has become] an indispensable tool in securing our understanding of ideological

domination."[14]

Slemon's evaluation of the terminology brings to mind Barbara Johnson's

provocative 1980 article "Nothing Fails Like Success." In her essay, Johnson states that

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[10] Stephen Slemon. "The Scramble for Post-colonialism." *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. Ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. (New York: Routledge, 1995), 44.
[11] Idem, 46.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Idem, 47.
[14] Slemon, 50.

"as soon as any radically innovative thought becomes an '–ism,' its specific groundbreaking force diminishes, its historical notoriety increases, and its disciplines tend to become more simplistic [and] more dogmatic […] at which time its power becomes institutional rather than analytical."[15]

Following in the footsteps of Johnson's warning vis-à-vis "-isms" while keeping in mind Slemon's emphasis of terminology's multivalent potential, I intend to further explore both the constraints as well as the unstable aspects of the terms colonial, postcolonial, and Francophone. Francophone is a concept that I identify to be inherently tied to the former two. It is only by investigating these terms' relevancy that we will uncover how Michel de Montaigne and Charles Ferdinand Ramuz' quest for authorial subjectivity does indeed mirror the postcolonial and the Francophone writer's literary task.

My interest in this topic – in deciphering the terminology, the mechanisms of power dynamics, the hegemonic capacity of language and culture – is not only academic, but also personal. As a foreigner who has traversed geographic, linguistic, and cultural borders, I frequently find myself either in the position of having been assigned an identity that fails to truly represent me or having to specifically spell out my identity, to describe my background, my past. I continue to struggle to be understood in the environment and language that I choose to appropriate. As a linguistic exile, I experience my own foreignness and so I intuitively identify with the conflicts outlined in this introduction.

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[15] Barbara Johnson. "Nothing fails like success" in *Deconstructive Criticism: Directions*, Seattle: SCE Reports #8 (fall), 1980: 7.

"Postcolonialism"

As already detailed by Stephen Slemon, "post(-)colonialism" is a notoriously difficult concept to grasp. Not even thirty years old, the term was first used by Gayatri Spivak in her 1990 compilation of "interviews and recollections called *The Post-Colonial Critic*."[16] As conceptualized by Spivak, postcolonialism builds on Edward Said's famous study[17] of power representations and was primarily used to refer to "cultural interactions within colonial societies in literary circles."[18] Spivak's treatment of the term was concerned with the study of Commonwealth literature and New-Literatures produced in English. It was thus predominantly used in reference to the British Empire and its ex-colonies.

However, the term's potential application for the examination of broader imperial and colonial powers, as well as in the study of other discursive operations – such as those detailed by Slemon earlier – was quickly recognized. As Elleke Boehmer defines it in Patricia Waugh's *Literary Theory and Criticism: an Oxford Guide*, postcolonialism is presently understood as:

> a name for a critical theoretical approach in literary and cultural studies [that] designates a politics of transformational resistance to unjust and unequal forms of political and cultural authority which extends back across the twentieth century, and beyond. The postcolonial is that which questions, overturns, and/or critically refracts colonial authority – its epistemologies and forms of violence, its claims to superiority. Postcolonialism therefore refers to those theories, texts, political strategies, and modes of activism that engage in such questioning [and] that aim to challenge structural inequalities and bring about social justice.[19]

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[16] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies – The Key Concepts*. (New York: Routledge, 1998), 186.
[17] The work referenced is Said's 1978 *Orientalism*.
[18] Ashcroft, 186.
[19] Elleke Boehmer in Patricia Waugh, *Literary Theory and Criticism: an Oxford Guide*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2006), 340-342.

Although this definition is both comprehensive and straightforward, debates still abound around postcolonialism's focus, given that the term is complicated not only by its numerous functions but also by its semantic overtones. It is obscured by the complex nuances derived through the prefix "post," from the frequent inclusion of the hyphen, because of the adjective "colonial," and even because of the suffix "-ism." It is these nuances that, as Stephen Slemon emphasized, render the term both fluid in meaning and thus potentially charged, as well as weak in its discursive capacity. Additionally, it is precisely because of such gradations in meaning that, as Robert Young explains in his *Postcolonialism – an Historical Introduction*, "few of those coming to postcolonial theory, whether as students or as academics, find it easy to negotiate the syncretic topographies of its vocabulary."[20] If we attempt to uncover parallel postcolonial connections in Michel de Montaigne and Charles Ferdinand Ramuz' literary projects, we must then decipher the complex subtexts implicit within the general hypothesis advanced by postcolonial theory. For this reason, let us carefully evaluate its constituent members – the prefix, the adjective, the hyphen, the suffix "-ism." This dissertation is, after all, concerned with the power of the word.

"Postcolonialism" – Plurality of Meaning

Highlighting a temporal quality that denotes the time after something has ceased, the prefix "post" implies the end of a period and passage into a new phase of development. When coupled with the adjective "colonial," "the post's" immediate

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[20] Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism – an Historical Introduction*. (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 67.

meaning directs us to the time after colonization has ended as well as to the stage following the inauguration of a state's independence and subsequent severance from another government. Because it is chronologically marked, the "post" comes across as inflexible in its range and framed by the official end of colonialism. As such, we locate postcolonialism's origins within the first half of the twentieth century, after the conclusion of the Second World War – an event by which most colonies had acquired official independence.[21]

The inherent problem associated with a chronological rendition of postcoloniality is that it deliberately separates time in a "pre" versus a "post" colonial stage. What results is a classic binary opposition that maintains the "pre" versus the "post" colonial delimitations clearly localized in time. Because of this, Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge emphasize that the prefix "has marginality and obsolescence built in."[22] It is marked by a dangerous limit that ends up duplicating the centrality of the colonial experience and reinforces a "narrative of progression in which colonialism remains the central point of reference in a march of time neatly arranged from the pre to the post, but which leaves ambiguous its relation to new forms of colonialism."[23]

Additionally, if the hyphen is included in post(-)colonialism's spelling, the "post" is only further reinforced in its ability to distinguish itself from the historical period preceding it. The hyphen redirects our attention to the binary oppositions implicit within the prefix since it too highlights a temporal framework. Reinforcing the notion of a

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[21] Namibia is the last African colony to have been officially recognized as independent. It gained its independence in 1990 from South Africa.

[22] Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge. Was Was Postcolonialism? *New Literary History*. Vol. 36 (2005): 379.

[23] Ella Shohat, "Notes on the 'Post-Colonial,'" *Social Text* 31/32 (1992): 107.

severance, of a move beyond a neatly closed-off time period, the hyphen essentially speaks of the same fundamental difference as the prefix does. It marks the end of colonization, carrying with it the implication that colonialism is clearly a matter of the past. For this reason, many critics have argued that the prefix and the hyphenated spelling "post-colonial" gloss over contemporary globalizing forces currently at work the world over. Simultaneously, the term ignores colonial structures that belong to the distant past.

Alongside this chronologically linear trait, the term postcolonial unveils a definite spatial reference. It highlights a range of geographical locations most frequently associated with Third World countries that had gained their independence in the aftermath of World War I and World War II. Postcolonialism is thus most frequently linked to Africa, the Caribbean, and Asia. The counterpart to such an amalgamate space is generally condensed to being First World European countries. Postcolonialism's geography is thus perceived as rooted in a West versus East or a North versus South conflict.

The second part of the master term postcolonial – the adjective "colonial" – signifies "the control or governing influence of a nation over a dependent country, territory, people, or the system and policy by which a nation maintains or advocates such control or influence."[24] Since the adjective does not openly specify what type of colonial practice it references, identifying its discursive force presents us with a complex task. Let us first consider the word's original meaning.

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[24] www.dictionary.reference.com

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As Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge explain, the noun colony "comes [to us] via French from the Latin *colonia* and *colonus*, farmer, from *colere*, [meaning] to cultivate and dwell."[25] Colonial thus first designates the individuals who where transplanted from one location to another so as to inhabit and cultivate new lands. More interesting, though, is that the root for *colonia, colonus,* and *colere* is none other than the word *colo*, a word which Mishra and Hodge are surprised to discover is the root for "culture." As they explain, "from this meaning, [colony] developed a set of related meanings: to work (the earth), to cultivate it and hence metaphorically to work the mind and soul"[26] of those with whom the colonists came in contact. This metaphorical nuance must be carefully considered for it can help us understand how cultural ideologies can be disseminated and enforced.

Consequently, if we emphasize *colo*'s metaphorical undertone as "working the mind and soul," we can see that colonization divulges an individual contact, the interaction between the Subject and an external force. This external force constitutes an authority that sanctions the transmission of meaning from one entity to another. In other words, at its deepest level, *colo* reveals the relationship of exchange and exclusion that is fundamental for the constitution of the individual Subject. As already noted, this is the Lacanian rapport that maintains the Self and Other in a perpetual struggle for affirmation and is carried out in the domain of language.

This is not, however, the connotation one immediately associates with colonial or colonialism. As Mishra and Hodge note, this exacting yet full meaning of *colo* has been

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[25] Mishra and Hodge, 378.
[26] Idem, 378.

lost and thus colony refers "primarily to invasive settlements."[27] The word *colo* lost its

deep roots and "it is now less rich, less adequate to the complexities of the present as well

as [of] the past, missing surprising connections and contradictions that are still current.

Meaning has slowly seeped out of the term [but] the realities have not changed."[28] What

the two critics ultimately tell us is that we should return to the word and investigate it in

all of its multiplicities. Hence, the task outlined by this dissertation: to examine cultural

rapports and forms of domination that may not be overtly expressed or easily recognized

by master terms such as "postcolonial."

Further scrutinizing the word *colo* helps uncover colonialism's link to the distant

past. Going back to its Latin origins, it is again important to recognize that *colo*'s initial

meaning was to cultivate lands and people. One of the most comprehensive examples of

just such a form of colonization comes to us via the Roman Empire – once the Romans

conquered a territory, they would establish settler communities by offering uncultivated

plots of lands to their veterans. The veterans were free tenant farmers and were known as

coloni. Roman colonization was thus continued through agriculture.

If we revisit once more *colo*'s metaphorical undertone, we come to see that the

implementation of agriculture and the formation of settler communities ultimately

facilitated the propagation of a particular type of "culture." I am referring here to the

Romanization process through which the Roman civilization and the Latin language were

disseminated all throughout the conquered territories. As Charles Camproux states in his

book *Les Langues Romanes*, it critical to understand that Romanization was first and

foremost accomplished through "les soldats des régions romanes et les veterans [qui ont

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[27] Idem, 379.
[28] Ibid.

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introduit] avec eux le latin comme langue officielle, langue de l'administration, de l'école, du commerce, [et plus tard,] de la liturgie chrétienne."[29]

Reading colonization as a process through which Roman civilization was circulated is essential for understanding how languages become instruments in the proliferation of particular values. Through Romanization, Latin became an imperial language that, in due course and because of various factors – geography, wars, population displacements, human psychology, ethnic and linguistic crossings – led to the birth of Romance languages. These dynamic processes expose nothing less than the confrontation of hegemony and resistance that forms the core of the encounter between different cultures and people. For this reason, Romanization can be appraised as a different facet of colonization.

Consequently, as Bill Ashcroft points out, it must be recognized that "not every colony shares every aspect of colonialism, nor it will share some essential features"[30] of this process. Because of this, colonialism must be appraised as a multivalent force that operates differently according to the period in which it occurred. As Robert Young adds, some critics have taken an even stronger stance. "Modernity critics such as Ernst Gellner have objected that colonialism does not merit particular attention in itself, in that its forms of oppression were really no different than those of any other conquest or assertion of power in the past, or indeed from those practiced within […] modern societies."[31]

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[29] Charles Camproux, *Que sais-je? Les Langues Romanes*. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1979), 45.
My translation: The roman soldiers and the army veterans introduced Latin as the official language in administration, schools, commerce, and later, as the language of the Christian liturgy.
[30] Ashcroft, 191.
[31] Young, 5.

In his exposé on "Post-colonial Critical Theories," Stephen Slemon reveals yet another perplexing aspect of colonialism. As the critic posits, the word colonialism is problematic because it "is already predicated within the larger concept of 'imperialism'."[32] Yet, the original meaning of imperialism "was not the direct or indirect domination of colonial or dependent territories by a modern industrial state. [Imperialism referred to] the personal sovereignty of a powerful ruler over numerous territories, whether in Europe or overseas."[33] Since imperialism has subsumed the notion of colonialism, colonialism's inferred chronology, as well as the term's emphasis on territorial expansion across established borders, is modified.

Imperialism's own meaning is also frequently altered. As Slemon explains, "for Vladimir Lenin, for example, imperialism meant a late stage in European capital expansion, a stage in which capital accumulated domestically [and ultimately forced] Europe to seek out foreign markets and foreign sources of labour. [In contrast to Lenin,] Karl Marx did not even use the term imperialism"[34] for his ideological formulations. The slippage in the concept is all the more accentuated since Edward Said's definition of imperialism modified the term yet again. Said used imperialism to specifically mean "the practice, theory, and attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory."[35]

Slemon's appraisal of imperialism's complex nuances brings to mind his earlier review of postcolonialism's ambiguities as profitable features. Slemon subtly draws our

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[32] Stephen Slemon. "Post-colonial Critical Theories" in *New National and Post-Colonial Literatures – An introduction*. Ed. Bruce King. (Oxford: Clarendon Express, 1996), 179.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Idem, 180.
[35] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), 9.

attention to colonialism's inherent pitfalls. By its connection to imperialism "without a specific theory of how imperialism [itself functions,] it remains unclear how colonialism actually operates politically, economically, culturally, and how colonialism and colonization are [in fact] related."[36] Ultimately then, Slemon re-emphasizes the multiple historical, economic, political, and cultural rapports that can be subsumed by theoretical concepts. It is through this spectrum that this dissertation aims to uncover parallel connections between Michel de Montaigne, Charles Ferdinand Ramuz, and postcolonial writers in general.

Finally, a comprehensive analysis of postcolonialism's implied nuances would not be complete without an examination of the final remaining element of (post)(-)(colonial)(ism) – the suffix "-ism". This suffix further disrupts the ideological assumptions associated with postcolonialism since it simultaneously renders the term more amorphous in meaning as well as more challenging.

Originally derived from the Greek "-izein, -ismos, -isma," the suffix "-ism" is used to form nouns that denote an action, a principle, a state, a condition, a theory or a doctrine. As such, on a first level, "-ism" adds an active and energetic nuance to the word to which it is attached. It becomes a potentially charged suffix, opening up endless discursive possibilities for interpreting and re-evaluating the master term it modifies. Attached to postcolonialism, "-ism" concurrently highlights the material potential brought forth by the end of colonization while also accentuating postcolonialism's own regenerative ability to constantly shift its spectrum of definitions.

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[36] Slemon, 180.

However, the suffix also underscores the possibility that the term to which it is affixed may become indoctrinated and dogmatic. In this case, the suffix comes across as negative in meaning. And so, if we stress this particular connotation, we are inevitably brought back to Barbara Johnson's warning that as soon as something "becomes an -*ism*, its specific groundbreaking force diminishes."[37] Coupled with the limited temporal and spatial subtexts permeating through the prefix "post," the suffix's inflexibility is only further reinforced.

What is intriguing, though, is that the coexistence of these two meanings reveals that disciplines are ultimately successful as much through their inclusion as well as through their exclusion of certain factors. Postcolonialism is indeed burdened by the many conflicting characterizations seeping through its constituent elements. Yet, it is precisely these nuances that reinforce the term's ambiguity and thus the many challenges and differing responses that critics take to assessing this term's definitional capacity. For this reason, I would like to focus on further interpretations and positions through which the slippery meanings associated with postcolonialism are reworked.

To begin, in her article "Notes on the 'Post-Colonial," Ella Shohat analyzes a range of twentieth century colonial exploits which go beyond the customary timeline and geography most frequently associated with postcolonialism. Shohat's argument can be summed up as promoting the term "neocolonial" as a replacement for "postcolonial". As Shohat explains, history teaches us that formal independence for colonized countries rarely entails a complete demise of the colonial condition, a distinctive halt to colonial interests. On the contrary, the official end of colonial rule does not prevent the

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[37] Johnson, 7.

continuation of colonial interests in the ex-colonies or the emergence of new forms of colonial appeals in parts of the world that had never before been officially colonized. The first example Shohat examines is Egypt.

As the critic explains, "Egypt's formal independence in 1923 did not prevent European, especially British domination"[38] from continuing. In fact, Egypt's 1952 revolution is traditionally seen as a direct consequence of Britain's continued hegemony in the region. Likewise, Egypt's President, Anwar Sadat's[39] decision to open up to the Americans and to negotiate with Israel during the Camp David accords of the 1970s can similarly be interpreted as a political event envisioned and controlled by American and European concerns in the area. Shohat insists that this example is neither unique nor specifically localized to North Africa.

As she describes, hegemonic confrontations also developed in Latin America where "formal creole independence did not prevent Monroe Doctrine-style military interventions, or Anglo-American free-trade hegemony"[40] from covertly taking over. In fact, "formal independence did not obviate the need for Cuban and Nicaraguan-style revolutions, [nor did it thwart the rise of] Independista movements in Puerto Rico."[41] On the contrary, each and every one of these revolutionary acts can be understood as a direct response against neo-colonial interests resurfacing in the area.[42]

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[38] Shohat, 104.

[39] Anwar Sadat was the third president of Egypt and a key political figure during the Camp David Accords of the 1970s between Egypt and Israel. Sadat's recognition of Israel signified a major step towards peace efforts in the Middle East. However, following Israel's recognition, Egypt was expelled from the Arab League and Sadat assassinated in 1981. Nevertheless, Sadat was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979.

[40] Shohat, 104.

[41] Idem, 105.

The last example to which Shohat alludes is just as complex of an issue and speaks of the United States' current military policy. To understand how this case resonates with the conflicts listed above, Shohat asks us to consider the United States' past and current problematic relationship with the Middle East, and the extent to which economic factors – oil interests, to be specific – have continued to reshape the West's relationship with the East along the lines of a colonial rapport of dominance. Shohat's consideration of US military and economic policies leads us to deliberate yet another factor. To what extent, for example, can we read the United States of America as a postcolonial nation founded in the 1770s out of a revolutionary war of independence? Can we consider the United States as simultaneously postcolonial as well as a purveyor of neocolonial conflicts? As Shohat advises in her article, because of the diverse chronologies and locations associated with "postcolonialism," it is imperative that we take account of the tensions continuing to exist between the official end of colonial rule and its lingering authority; between the official end of colonial hegemony and new instances of colonial interests.

Drawing from Shohat's work, we see that the examples she puts forth do not call attention to the act of physical colonization but more so to the operating mechanism associated with colonization. Shohat's examples reinforce the claim that colonization is part of a much larger political, economical and ideological system – a system that cannot

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[42] Consequently and unsurprisingly, I would add, beginning in the 1950s and continuing until the early 1980s, small and large-scale revolutions became the 'de facto' response against these re-emerging colonial symptoms. As Shohat explains, once "initiated by official independence, but [frequently] suffocated by neo-colonial hegemony" the term "revolution" itself re-assumed its post-colonial momentum during this period (105).

easily be framed by temporal or geographical borders since it is an organism that speaks

of extensive and skewed power relations.

Bill Ashcroft's seminal 1989 work *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* also recognizes postcolonialism's many troubling nuances. Ashcroft's call is on behalf of a more adaptable and more balanced examination of postcoloniality. Accordingly, postcolonial theory should include all literary productions put forth by any society that has been affected by some form of domination. As such, postcolonialism should address:

> the literatures of African countries, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, [the] Caribbean countries, India, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, [the] South Pacific Island countries, and Sri Lanka. […] The literature of the USA should also be placed in this category [even if] because of its current position of power, and the neo-colonizing role it has played, [the United States'] postcolonial nature has not been generally recognized. […] What each of these literatures has in common beyond their special and distinctive regional characteristics is that they emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and assert themselves by foregrounding the tension with [an] imperial power, and by emphasizing their difference from the assumptions of the imperial center.[43]

While potentially accounting for "the globalizing gesture of the postcolonial condition,"[44] Ashcroft's formulation is not without fault since it rather easily distills a variety of national or racial identities as equally postcolonial and thus, as having suffered through very similar processes of colonization. To conflate the multiplicities Ashcroft cites as more or less equal is evidently misleading – the United States, India, and Australia cannot all be analyzed with the same postcolonial parameters in mind since their circumstances are unique and multifaceted.

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[43] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. (London: Routledge, 1989), 2.
[44] Shohat, 104.

Ashcroft's amendment of the term does nevertheless demand recognition since it draws our attention to the generalizing aspect of the tensions regulating the "center/periphery" dynamic, the "dominating/dominated" relationship. In other words, even though Ashcroft reduces multiplicities of location and temporality rather superficially, his globalizing "postcoloniality" nonetheless highlights the common denominator that is at the core of all rapports: the Subject/Other dynamic.

In *The Pre-Occupation of Postcolonial Studies*, Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks goes a step further; by specifically targeting postcolonialism's troubled temporality and objective, Seshadri-Crooks calls for a negation of all its limits. As she declares:

> Unlike other area studies, postcolonial studies [must have] no identifiable object. It would be impossible to suggest that [postcolonialism] pertains to one or the other area of the world or that it is confined to a [specific] period, genre, or theme. From this perspective [then] it may be acceptable to claim that postcolonial studies is concerned more with the analysis of the lived condition of unequal power sharing globally and the self-authorization of cultural, economic, and militaristic hegemony rather than with a particular historical phenomenon such as colonialism. [Subsequently, postcolonialism should be] interested above all in materialist critiques of power and how that power or ideology seeks to interpellate subjects within a discourse as subordinate and without agency.[45]

As Seshadri-Crooks defines it, postcolonial studies should engage a multitude of perspectives, temporal, and geographical diversities. Its ultimate intent should be to better negotiate relationships of difference and sameness, of rupture and continuity, and not propagate the conflicts that are innate within binary oppositions.

Frantz Fanon's argument from his famed work *The Wretched of the Earth* further resonates with Seshadri-Crooks' criticism since he similarly declares that "colonialism is

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[45] Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, *The Pre-Occupation of Postcolonial Studies*, ed. Fawzia Afzal-Khan and Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks. (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2000), 19.

not simply content to impose its rule upon the present and future."[46] Fanon was

specifically describing French colonialism. Yet, he nevertheless argues that time and

history should be themselves understood as always and already colonized. Hence, the

beginning and ending of colonial time and relations, of the conflicts developed between

cultures, between the Self and Other, can never be evaluated as inert, chronologically

exact or immobile. Instead, relationships of dominance must be assessed as perpetually

in motion, always adjusting, merging, and ultimately fluid and regenerative in nature.

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha describes "postcolonial criticism [as

that which] bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation

involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world

order."[47] What is interesting in Bhabha's definition is that he accentuates the everlasting

imbalance, the struggles and difficulties associated with the cultural representation of the

marginalized. Additionally, in the passage cited above, Bhabha's generalizing tone

undermines postcolonialism's temporality and reveals instead its applicability. As a

result, through his focus on "the modern world order," the critic invites us to rethink the

temporal boundaries associated with postcoloniality. If we accept that the modern world

is defined as beginning around the 1500s, Bhabha's revision of postcolonialism's

beginning is extended much further than the term's constituent elements imply.

Similarly, the end of postcolonialism is thwarted, for we are still living in "the modern

world order." Recalling Stephen Slemon's arguments, instead of enclosing

postcolonialism within specific borders, Homi Bhabha also directs our attention to the

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[46] Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 210.
[47] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 171-197 (the essay "The postcolonial and the postmodern: The question of agency").

possibility of a fluid and amorphous colonial time and space. He ultimately implies that a nontemporal and geographically fluid postcolonial theory could imagine and speculate on the globalizing nature of the postcolonial lived condition.

Equally cautious when evaluating terminology, but taking a rather different stance vis-à-vis postcolonialism's linguistic composition, Stuart Hall has suggested that the adjective postcolonial is not confounded by its linguistic connotations since it does not necessarily denote the end of colonization. Instead, Hall stresses that postcolonialism follows "after a certain *kind* of colonization – it is what it is because something else has happened before, but it is also something new."[48] He thus also encourages us to extend postcolonialism's definitional boundaries and urges us to speculate on the various forms colonialism as well as postcolonialism may take.

Capitalizing on this fluidity of meaning in the volume *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen proposes that postcolonialism could venture to explore and study the distant past(s) – the Roman and Greek Empires, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance – all for the purpose of giving voice to "traumas, exclusions, [and] violences enacted centuries ago [but which] still linger in contemporary identity formations."[49] In this manner, postcolonial studies opens to the possibility that, however distant, premodern histories permeate our contemporary foundations and are "multiple and valuable enough to contain and be contained within alternative presents and futures."[50] Simultaneously, postcolonial theory could turn its gaze towards internal forms of colonization such as the conflicts between Europe's dominant cultures and the minorities

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[48] Stuart Hall in Mishra and Hodge, 377.
[49] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 3.
[50] Ibid.

that coexisted within the same territory. Colonialism as well as postcolonialism's conjectural faculties could be broadened to account for continuities, ruptures and hybridities even beyond those implied so far.

In light of the multiple definitions reviewed here, we can now imagine postcoloniality not in an absolute sense but more so as a passage, as a fluid middle. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen advances, this notion of "middle" is a positive force since it does "not stress difference (the past as past) or sameness (the past as present) but [points out a] temporal interlacement, the possibility of choosing alterity and continuity."[51] This "middle ground" may just be the best location to negotiate sameness and difference. For this reason, Cohen proposes to replace the term postcolonial with midcolonial.

Nontemporal in meaning, midcolonial would reflect "an intermediacy that no narrative can pin to a single moment of history in its origin or end."[52] Cohen's innovative new term accounts for colonialism's "real-time" and perpetuating nuances that make it an interminable event. Stressing neither its beginning nor its end, the "midcolonial" is a regenerative location which opens up both to what has been – the past – as well as to what shall be – the future. Envisioning it as rhizomic in nature and without an acknowledged, static object of study, "midcolonial" theory could thus become a model representation for an a-temporal lived condition, one which would highlight above all contact, communication and exchange, a "center/periphery," "dominating/dominated" interaction and dialogue, and not necessary a dichotomy between the two.

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[51] Idem, 5.
[52] Idem, 3.

As stated in the beginning of this introduction, this dissertation project aims to explore historical processes and literary creation from the viewpoint of relationships of hegemony and resistance that are expressed through language. Having dissected postcolonialism's linguistic nuances and having discovered both the constraints and the ambiguities that they project, we can now conclude that, as Robert Young expounds, "postcolonial theory is always concerned with the positive and negative effects of the mixing of people and cultures. Its own language that it uses to analyze these phenomena is similarly mixed: it constitutes a theoretical creole."[53] Such a revision of postcoloniality recalls Edouard Glissant's poetic definition of creolization as "the contact, conflict, attraction, harmony, repulsion, dissemblance, and resemblance between cultures of the world that come together in the world-totality, that come together, cling together, repel each other, and yield unprecedented outcomes."[54]

As will be demonstrated, the literary projects of Michel de Montaigne and Charles Ferdinand Ramuz are forged precisely at the interstices of Young's redefinition of postcoloniality and Glissant's poetic creolization. It is for this reason that, through their search for subjectivity and authorial confirmation, Montaigne and Ramuz mirror the task of postcolonial writers. Yet, given that both Montaigne and Ramuz write, work, and live in/through French, aligning them with postcolonialism inevitably demands that we examine yet another term – the term "Francophone."

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[53] Young, 69.
[54] Edouard Glissant. "The French Language in the Face of Creolization." *French Civilization and its Discontents – nationalism, colonialism, race.* Ed. Tyler Stovall and Georges Van Den Abbeele. (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2003), 107.

"Francophone" – Meaningful Pluralities

Coined in 1878 by the French geographer Onésime Reclus, the terms "Francophone" and "francophonie" were first envisioned as a means of defining individuals primarily by their language. At its most basic level, Francophone thus signifies "French-speaking." Francophonie delineates the community of people who use French as their quotidian language of communication. In this sense, French can function as a mother tongue, as a secondary language, in an official capacity, or as an international language of culture. What is unmistakable is that Francophone and francophonie refer to communities, regions, and nations united by French. The terms thus embody a tangible social, linguistic, and geographic context. As Xavier Deniau suggests, because of their encompassing capacity, Francophone and francophonie "pourraient aussi caractériser […] la solidarité naissant du partage de valeurs communes 'véhiculées', justement, par la langue française."[55]

In response to Deniau's amplification of the terms, the critic Michel Tétu warns us that we must be careful when discussing the notion of "shared values" transmitted linguistically. Tétu's reply hints that, as Bill Ashcroft posited, "the colonial process begins in language." Francophone's semantic content thus complicates the term's ideological and political implications. As Emily Apter argues in the article "Theorizing Francophonie," "'French' as the name of a language contains the predicate of a national subject that is silently enunciated. Read as a problem of nominalism, 'French' replaces

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[55] Xavier Deniau in Michel Tétu, *Qu'est-ce que c'est la francophonie?* (Vanves: Edicef, 1997), 15.
My translation: Francophone and francophonie could also characterize the solidarity of shared values transmitted precisely through the French language.

linguistic and national heterogeneity with an abstract generality."[56] As a simple synonym

for "French-speaking," Francophone thus reduces multiple chronologies, histories, and

geographical locations to the common link of speaking the same language – and, if we

consent to Deniau's extension of the term, to sharing the same cultural values.

Having identified the connotations that permeate this term, we now see that they

ultimately problematize its primary implied meaning – as representing a unified

community of French speakers. Clearly, we cannot assume that all members of la

francophonie speak French because of or for the same reasons. La francophonie is an

imagined community instituted by cultural and linguistic exchanges between France and

its neighbors, as well as by France's history of colonization and decolonization. By

extension, what matters most is not specifically defining the term Francophone as much

as identifying the relationship between France – as a center that intentionally regulates

and promotes its language – and the communities, regions, or nations that are defined as

Francophone. In other words, we must investigate each Francophone subject's

positioning in respect to the center. We must pragmatically evaluate each Francophone

case as a matter of who is speaking back to the center, from what location, and for what

purpose.

In his *Cambridge Introduction to Francophone Literature*, Patrick Corcoran

exposes the term Francophone as fraught by the same undertones as those outlined above.

In his own investigation of who is speaking, for what purpose, and from what location,

Corcoran proposes that when contextualizing this term we must approach it while bearing

it mind two different settings.

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[56] Apter, Emily. "Theorizing Francophonie." *Comparative Literature Studies*, Vol. 42,
Number 4, 2005, p. 299.

Francophone's first context of usage could be summed up as "France looking outward – embracing the Francophone world within a unifying vision and a homogenizing discourse that says more about itself than it does about the world it embraces."[57] Such a definition maintains France as the center of reference and thus as a dominating authority. Consequently, as Corcoran concludes, stating that "one is 'French' [is now synonymous with claiming] a particular identity whereas the fact of being 'Francophone' merely indicates a relationship to an 'identity' that belongs to someone else or, at best, to locate oneself in terms of a culture that is not one's own."[58] In this case, "difference" transpires from the realm of the center and propagates a top-bottom line of definition that maintains the Francophone in a peripheral, inferior position.

Corcoran's second appraisal of Francophone can be summed up as a reversal of the first. In this sense, Francophone is delineated "as a marker of difference and diversity which intrinsically values and celebrates [multiplicity] for its own sake and consequently challenges the authority of the center. 'Difference' [now] reflects the [wide] heterogeneity of the various types of Francophone identity [and ultimately] calls into question the stability and homogeneity of Frenchness itself."[59] As Corcoran explains, this second approach is more of a cultural practice than a specific political assertion; it is the method used by Francophone writers in their undermining of the center, which they frequently critique but from which they also seek validation. Corcoran ultimately tells us here that the Francophone, regardless of how it has come into contact with the French authority, will always be inscribed in a transaction, in a multidimensional space where

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[57] Patrick Corcoran, *The Cambridge Introduction to Francophone Literature*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 9.
[58] Idem, 9-10.
[59] Ibid.

the positioning or repositioning of the subject in respect to authority can simultaneously portray the Francophone as a dominated figure as well as an assertive one. As Apter similarly argues, "the contingency of the subject suggests that French speakers who are French nationals constitute one possible world of French speakers among many. Once the national predicate is dislodged, no speaker maintains exclusive ownership of language properties; the right to language is distributed freely."[60]

This transaction is done through language itself, the principal link bridging "frenchness" and "Francophone-ness," so to speak. In this manner, the Francophone author who writes from a subordinate location and, even more so, in his own variant of French, can ultimately transform his peripheral location, challenge the center, and reverse hierarchical structures. The key to deciphering the Francophone subject's positioning is the emphasis on difference – the inherent misunderstanding that comes through language itself, the otherness that we all encounter in our contact with the foreign Other.

What is surprising is that, frequently trapped between the center and periphery, the Francophone subject can encounter this otherness from both the center as well as from the periphery itself. Subsequently, "whether this 'otherness,' this difference, is seen as a threat or as a resource, as desirable or undesirable, as something to be preserved or something that should be allowed to be gradually assimilated and reduced, will depend on the perspective of the parties involved."[61] Ultimately then, since it belongs to the subject, language is not just a literary tool but also inevitably a political instrument. Language speaks of one's struggle for individuality, of a subject's definition in reference to other subjects, and of one's position as a member of a community, region, or nation.

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[60] Apter, 302-303.
[61] Corcoran, 12.

As will be demonstrated, evaluating language from this perspective helps justify Montaigne and Ramuz' quests for authorial subjectivity as predicated on a departure from the endorsed linguistic and aesthetic norms that were promoted by various centers of authority. Both Montaigne and Ramuz worked within a center's language, but by privileging their own peripheral languages, they ultimately challenged and transformed the center's hegemony. To understand how French specifically can be used as an instrument for cultural, political or individual affirmation, we must explore French's own process of authentication. Thus, in the next section, I will investigate the major events associated with the birth of French, its promotion as a language of culture and civilization, and, by extension, its dominating authority.

The French Language – History, Formation, Conflicts

The development of the standard French language is the result of a rather long history. It is not my purpose here to reiterate its journey. I would however like to take a brief moment and examine some of its earliest stages. I will begin by examining the Ordinance of Villers-Cotterêts as a proclamation instituted in response to Latin's ever increasing hegemony. This event constituted an essential step in establishing Paris as a linguistic, aesthetic, and literary center of authority that reshaped the French realm and that has affected generations of French and Francophone writers.

Signed into law by François Ier on August 10th 1539, the 192 articles composing the Villers-Cotterêts edict revised a vast number of governmental, judicial, and ecclesiastical matters. The edict's general mission aimed at better regulating and

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controlling the French territory, all for the purpose of establishing a unified and centralized French nation. The decree's linguistic policies are of particular interest since they summoned up past royal edicts from as early as the 1490s,[62] all calling for the promotion of French as a stable and dignified language, and even more so, as a language whose import would be comparable to that of Latin. Why though this preoccupation with Latin?

As Dennis Ager illustrates in his book, *Language Policy in Britain and France: the processes of policy*, "in Roman Europe, the use of Latin as lingua franca developed as political control was established by Rome. [However,] as the Roman Empire collapsed, the need for a common official language disappeared as political communities became smaller. [As a result, individual] dialects developed and were used for all purposes [but were restricted to functioning within] smaller geographical areas."[63] Conversely, as populations and communities began to increase in size after the end of the Middle Ages, efficiency of communication and linguistic control over larger territories became an ever-increasing political concern. From then on, achieving linguistic unity demanded the consolidation of dialect driven communities with the interests of the larger political units.

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[62] I am thinking here of the *Ordonnance de Moulins* – a linguistic proclamation instituted by Charles VIII which "decreed that witness statements in court cases in the Languedoc area could be written either in French or in any other mother tongue [but not] in Latin." (Anne Judge, *Linguistic policies and the Survival of Regional Languages in France and Britain*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2007, p.16). Although this decree was passed more so for legal reasons than as a means to promote a unified linguistic policy, the *Ordonnance de Moulins* emerges nevertheless as the first move in the direction of a unified linguistic system. That is to say, it constituted a first instance where a regional dialect, French, was promoted at the detriment of Latin's established authority.
[63] Dennis Ager, *Language Policy in Britain and France: the Processes of Policy*. (Cambridge: Biddles Ltd., Guildford and King's Lynn, 1996), 29-30.

The rapport between speech and political communities is of the utmost importance if we are to understand the processes by which a particular language can come to dominate all others. The term 'speech communities' refers to communities that are united by a standard language or by a dialect that is regionally pertinent. This language responds to the community's desire and need to function efficiently. By comparison, a 'political community' is a much large structural order that is regulated by an officially sanctioned language. This "official language responds to the need for prestige, [and enables] the political community to be and remain unified, to mark its boundaries [vis-à-vis] other communities, and to have a basis for its ideas of correctness."[64] The discrepancy felt between political and speech communities lines up with the center versus periphery dilemma that is one of the preoccupations of postcolonial studies. In other words, political communities are more or less synonymous with the center, while speech communities align with the periphery. Returning then to Dennis Ager, the critic concludes that the history and development of the standard French language can be summed up as a "process of matching, more or less, speech and political communities through geopolitical, functional and chronological links."[65]

With the introduction of the Villers-Cotterêts ordinance in August 1539, François Ier seems to have accomplished precisely this task. Infused by a detailed and definite linguistic project, articles 110 and 111, in particular, had an immediate and profound request imposed on the French administration. Their charge is briefly outlined in the following paragraph as the need to replace Latin's prevalent application in administrative as well as religious duties with the French maternal vernacular. Specifically, they

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[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.

stipulated that all judicial decisions as well as public and private deeds be written and

read in French only:

> Nous voullons et ordonnons qu'ilz soient faictz et escrits si clerement qu'il n'y ait
> ne puisse avoir aucune ambiguïté ou incertitude, ni lieu à en demander
> interpretacion. Et pour ce que telles choses sont souventesfoys advenues sur
> l'intelligence des motz latins contenuz esdictz arretz, nous voulons que
> doresenavant tous arretz ensemble toutes autres procedeures, soyent de nos cours
> souveraines ou aultres subalternes et inferieures, soyent de registres, enquestes,
> contractz, commissions, sentences, testamens et aultres quelzconques actes et
> exploictz de justice ou qui en dependent, *soient prononcez, enregistrez et delivrez*
> *aux parties en langage maternel francoys et non aultrement*.[66]

As can be inferred from the passage cited above, the two articles' functional and political

purpose was to recognize French as the native speech par excellence, diminish Latin's

liturgical and theological circulation, and affirm French as the sole language used in

communication between the Sovereign and his subjects.

Paradoxically, the task outlined by the edict seems to have been rather easily

accomplished given that articles' 110 and 111 indirect insinuation is that the particular

vernacular they impose is a maternal tongue whose practice was already and equally

distributed across the totality of the French territory. Thus is justified the official

summons "Nous voullons et ordonnons qu'ilz […] soient prononcez, enregistrez et

delivrez […] en langage maternel francoys et non aultrement." This statement seems

misleading given that the negative "non aultrement" coupled with the singular "en

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[66] http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/histoire/villers-cotterets.asp
My translation: We wish and command that they be done and written so clearly that there
can be no ambiguity or incertitude, no reason to demand interpretation. And because
these things are often done through the intelligence of Latin words, we want that from
now on, all judgments as well as all procedures, either from our sovereign courts or from
other subaltern and inferior, either registers, investigations, contracts, commissions,
maxims, testaments and any other such acts and writs of justice, be pronounced,
recorded, and delivered to the parties concerned in French maternal language and not
otherwise.

langage maternel francoys" dismisses the reality that the native French so firmly underscored by the proclamation was in fact a regional language. Specifically, "le langage maternel francoys" promoted by Villers-Cotterêts was le francien, the Frankish lingo in use throughout the Île-de-France, Parisian region, but not a widely accessible language outside this central area. Inevitably then, the question that comes to the fore is: how was this particular vernacular selected out of the many regional dialects still spoken throughout France at the beginning of the sixteenth century?

If we consider the variety of languages in use throughout the French territory after the demise of the Roman empire it becomes evident that, in comparison with le picard and le normand spoken in northern France or the southern langue d'oc and lemousin, le francien was initially neither as well known nor as culturally rich. As Dennis Ager explains, anglo-normand was the language of the English court, which at this point in time still laid claim to the French throne. In the same manner, the southern langue d'oc was at "the point of becoming the preferred choice both for literature and for administration."[67] Yet, what both le normand and la langue d'oc lacked was the support of a clearly established administrative center. By comparison, le francien – interestingly dubbed "the King's French" – was the language of the Parisian elite. Most certainly, le francien was backed up by the "cultural pre-eminence of Paris, with the royal court acting as a magnet for poets, and the Sorbonne attracting prestige as a center of education. [Consequently,] the eventual selection [of le francien over other regional languages] was carried out by the prestige of power rather than by its actual exercise."[68]

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[67] Ager, 30-31.
[68] Idem, 31.

Demographics and economics played a further critical role in confirming this particular language. The Parisian/Ile-de-France region was one of the most densely populated areas in France during the first half of the sixteenth century. Coupled with the agricultural and commercial wealth transpiring from this center, these factors ultimately transformed le francien into the language of the privileged and the powerful, of prestige and of authority. Simply put, le francien was elevated to the role of native French speech not because of its indisputable dissemination but more so for being the language of a center, the language of power and of the elite, of a dominant authority. Hence, the Villers-Cotterêts ordinance reveals itself as having not merely allowed but actually as having prompted the expansion and transformation of a regional Île-de-France/Parisian vernacular into an officially sanctioned national language. Clearly, le francien was customized and manipulated for the benefit of the political community.

The relationship between French and its predecessor/ancestor can now be evaluated as juxtaposing two disproportionate entities: on one hand, a novel, regional language – le francien – challenging, on the other hand, a firmly acknowledged institution – Latin. Articles 110 and 111 can thus be summarized as having introduced a definite linguistic binary opposition – the young French language versus Latin – by simultaneously performing two momentous operations: the prohibition of the use of Latin in all matters public, judicial, and ecclesiastic by officially demanding Latin's replacement with French and the institutionalization of a regional language as the state's official language. At first glance, the two articles thus draw our attention to the sharp contrast existing between a powerful yet localized language and the universality of Latin. At a deeper level, though, through the implementation of an official decree, what used to

be a regional language successfully subverted a previously dominating entity and repositioned itself as the new authority. It is from here on that the French language will assume its political role as one of the most important symbols of the French nation-state. Read as such, Villers-Cotterêts not only foreshadowed but in fact authorized the late Renaissance's objections to Antiquity, its promotion of individuality.

If examined once more in light of binary conflicts, the decree can then be generalized as juxtaposing the French state against the power of the Holy Roman Empire. Triggered by the founding of an officially sanctioned language and responding to a master entity – to Latin and to Antiquity – the task put forth by articles 110 and 111 is thus evocative of a postcolonial response. Latin and its ideology fulfill the role of the colonizer, of a dominating force, while French, the newly recognized national language under whose authority the territory has just been symbolically unified, takes on the role of the colonized. Freed from the Ancients' command, the founding of the early modern French state can consequently be interpreted as a post-independence act played out in the domain of language.

This is not to say that the origins of the modern French state should be equated with the frequently bloody revolutions that led to the founding of many post-colonial democracies. The binary relationship pairing Antiquity vis-à-vis the newly founded French nation could never grasp the First-world/Third-world colonizer/colonized relationship. It does nevertheless expose a timeless dominance rapport pairing the remnants of the Ancient Roman Empire against the early modern French state, a rapport at whose core we find a linguistic and cultural entity – Latin – being overturned by a novel authority – le francien. As Dennis Ager affirms, replacing Latin with French

constituted a liberating accomplishment born out of a "process of ideological and cultural

domination rather than one of political or military domination."[69] Moreover, by having

aligned the political and speech communities through the official authorization of a

maternal language, Villers-Cotterêts triggered the foundation of French national identity

as we know it today.

What must also be noted, though, is that given le francien's regional origins and

deliberate promotion, this language's position in respect to remaining regional dialects

still must be evaluated. As William Safran details in his article, "Language, Ideology,

and State-Building: A Comparison of Policies in France, Israel, and the Soviet-Union,"

"language has [always] been a major element in the development of a community's

political consciousness and a tool of state-building. Conversely, languages have often

been manipulated, elevated, and transformed in the interest of the state."[70] Even more

importantly, as Safran emphasizes, when a particular language is elevated to the role of a

national language, "the choice of language and the question of whether minority

languages should be maintained or discouraged go beyond the matter of mere political

integration and touch upon the legitimacy of the national culture and the ideology upon

which the political system is based."[71]

Safran's commentary elucidates Villers-Cotterêts' impact on the remaining

regional dialects of France. It is true that the proclamation did not go so far as to

formally declare le francien the sole language of the country. Yet, it did nevertheless

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[69] Ibid.

[70] William Safran, "Language, Ideology, and State-Building: A Comparison of Policies in France, Israel, and the Soviet-Union," *International Political Science Review/Revue internationale de science politique*, Vol. 13, No. 4, Resolving Ethnic Conflicts/La solution des conflits ethniques, Oct. 1992, pp. 397-414.

[71] Idem, 398.

open up the French linguistic space to a discordance that continues to exist to this day

between the state's newly recognized language, the King's French – the center – and

regional dialects – the periphery. In order for the language of the French court to

displace Latin and truly establish itself as the new authority, le francien simultaneously

had to secure its political and literary superiority over the remaining languages still in use

throughout the French territory, in particular over the northern langue d'oïl and the

erudite southern langue d'oc. Consequently, we can now understand the Villers-Cotterêts

edict as having announced from its inception a deep desire for a cultural and ideological

restructuring that shaped French national identity by means of a controlled linguistic

agenda. This linguistic restructuring was accomplished via a monolingual policy that

mirrors a process of "internal colonization"[72] through which inequalities and

discrepancies between the state and its various regions are revealed. Subsequently, we

can now argue that while Villers-Cotterêts overturned one linguistic authority it

nevertheless replicated the system it had just annulled by replacing Latin's authority with

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[72] Born in the early 1960s in the United States as a way to promote Black Nationalism, internal colonialism speaks of various forms of institutional oppression. As Robert Blauner illustrates in his article, "Internal Colonialism and Ghetto Revolt," (*Social Problems*, Vol. 16, No. 4, Spring 1969, 393-408) internal colonialism unveils the skewed relationship existing between dominant and subordinate communities. Specifically, it speaks of the manner in which the dominant community or culture establishes political, social, and economic institutions within smaller communities. Blauner's definition of internal colonialism is at origin nuanced by a specific ethnic component. Drawing from Blauner, the term was completely revised by Michael Hechtner's 1975 publication of *Internal Colonialism: the Celtic Fringe in British National Development* (Berkeley: University of California, 1975). Hechtner reworked the idiom by enlarging its geographical scope to include the relationship between the British Empire and the Irish, Scottish, and Welsh peripheral territories that make up the British domain. Hechtner's emphasis was on the social and cultural components inherent within internal colonialism rather than on race. Cultural similarity and linguistic unification are two of the chief foundations upon which political and national organization rest. In this sense, Hechtner's interpretation of "internal colonialism" helps explain Villers-Cotterêts' functioning mechanism.

le francien's clout. Interestingly, as Anne Judge comments in *Linguistic Policies and the Survival of Regional Languages in France and Britain*,[73] Villers-Cotterêts' immediate impact on the French linguistic sphere was seen through La Pléiade's and, in particular, Joachim du Bellay's extensive work towards the codification of the nascent French language. Judge is evidently referring here to Du Bellay's famous *Défense et illustration de la langue française*.

Published in 1549, just ten years after Villers-Cotterêts went into effect, Du Bellay's *Défense et illustration de la langue française* starts out as a linguistic manifesto that claimed that the French language lacked authority when employed for writing ambitious literary works. Consequently, rather than defer incessantly to Latin in the process of literary creation, Du Bellay called for a genuine and active enrichment of the French language. Specifically, he called for augmenting France's linguistic capital both internally, through a revision of its own sources, as well as externally, through circumspect borrowings from neighboring languages. Given its mission, Du Bellay's *Défense* is frequently read as a nationalistic call to action whose primary endeavor was to build up the immature French language in order to elevate it to the prestigious ranks of Greek and Latin. The manifesto thus continued the linguistic missions outlined by Villers-Cotterêts with the major addendum that Latin was now to be replaced in all areas of communication and not just in judicious and religious matters.

As Pascale Casanova advances in her volume *The World Republic of Letters*, the importance of Du Bellay's *Défense* cannot be underscored enough for it was in fact "a revolutionary text, an assertion of strength [based on a particularly outlined] program for

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[73] Anne Judge, *Linguistic Policies and the Survival of Regional Languages in France and Britain*. (New York: St. Martin's Press), 2007.

the enrichment of the French language. It was a frank declaration of war against the domination of Latin [while it concurrently] laid the foundations of a unified French literary space."[74] Following Du Bellay's lead, many other grammars, lexicons, and treaties on language were published. Most of them were concerned with the promotion of French to the disregard of internal linguistic variations while some challenged foreign languages.[75]

With regard to regional dialects, the vernaculars still in use throughout France started being challenged towards the end of the sixteenth century into the beginning of the seventeenth. The seventeenth century poet, critic, and translator François de Malherbe is a pertinent figure to our discussion on the impact of Villers-Cotterêts on regional languages; even though he was opposed to La Pléiade's aesthetic program, Malherbe nevertheless continued Du Bellay's agenda for the enrichment of French by focusing on codifying and purifying the French language. In his book *Languages and Communities in Early Modern Europe*, Peter Burke in fact describes Malherbe as "an outsider who came from the South [but whose main interest was] to 'degasconize' French, to continue reforming the language by excluding from polite usage […] regionalisms [and] foreign words."[76] As Judge similarly states, by rejecting "foreign words, archaisms, Latinisms, and, in particular, dialectical expressions, Malherbe set out rules of style and grammar which were to have a lasting impact" on the French linguistic

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[74] Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*. (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2007), 52-53.

[75] As Casanova explains, the main external threat posed to French was Tuscan.

[76] Peter Burke, *Languages and Communities in Early Modern Europe*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 99.

and creative field.[77] Malherbe's ideas were institutionalized and carried out by Cardinal

Richelieu's Académie Française, the newly established royal center of knowledge and

power that came into existence under King Louis XIII in 1635.

By specifically promoting the French of the court, the linguistic purification

carried out by Malherbe and by the French Academy became a decisive moment in the

exaltation of the center's language to the detriment of peripheral dialects.[78] What is even

more essential to note, though, is that, in regards to literary creation, these processes of

purification and standardization "cannot be reduced to a simple need for improved

communication or political centralization."[79] They must also be recognized as "a matter

of gathering the various sources – theoretical, logical, aesthetic, rhetorical – necessary for

creating literary value and for forming the 'langue françoyse' into a literary language."[80]

In other words, this is precisely the moment that leads to the crystallization of French and

Paris as linguistic and aesthetic entities to which future Francophone writers will respond.

As a result, we can now assess both the Villers-Cotterêts proclamation and Du

Bellay's *Défense* through the prism of Benedict Anderson's argument from his tome

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[77] Judge, 24.

[78] From here, the culminating point of dialectal disintegration is reached during the eighteenth century with the work of Abbé Henri Grégoire who, after having been asked to produce a map of dialects in France, compiled a "Report on the necessity and means to annihilate the patois and to universalize the use of the French language." Clearly, as Grégoire's title suggests, his "language survey was carried out not to support dialect[s] but to destroy them" (Burke, 38). Grégoire's account thus confirms the country's ever-increasing "francisation" tendencies. We can then infer that, two centuries after the inauguration of the Villers-Cotterêts proclamation, France's growing concerns vis-à-vis the usage and status of its national language were not only in line with but amplified the linguist sanctions introduced by François Ier's edict.

[79] Casanova, 64.

[80] Ibid.

Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism[81] where the

critic posits that the expansion of particular vernaculars at the detriment of other

linguistic forms is of capital importance for the consolidation of a nation state around a

common denominator. It is through a distinctive linguistic link that nation states can

begin to identify and project themselves as administrative, political, and intellectual

entities. Anderson's emphasis on the relationship between the formation of the nation

state and the promotion of specific languages at the loss of others is essential for

understanding how literary fields are developed given that this common denominator –

the language that consolidates the state – will become a marker of difference through

which the nation will affirm itself culturally vis-à-vis other regions or other states. A

language's capacity to assert itself as a marker of difference is thus fundamental not only

for a state's political affirmation but also for the state's cultural attestation.

France's linguistic integration is an interesting case for deciphering political and

cultural confirmations given that, as Casanova concludes, "the nascent political space and

the literary space [that appeared in sixteenth century France] came into existence at the

same time."[82] Thus, the paradoxical result of the interplay between politics and language

is that "the birth of [French] literature grew out of the early political history of the nation-

state."[83] As a result, French's successful promotion to the rank of national language, and

thus its recognition as representative of the country's political and cultural identity, hints

at this language's capacity for conflict, for rivalry with other linguistic forms and by

extension with other discursive literary fields. In other words, if we agree with Anderson

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[81] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. (New York: Verso, 1991).
[82] Casanova, 35.
[83] Ibid.

and Casanova, we must accept that there is an inherent link between national and literary/cultural spaces. This notion is directly applicable to Michel de Montaigne and to Charles Ferdinand Ramuz' positions given that linguistic and cultural domination are precisely the authoritarian forms from which the two authors will endeavor to claim their independence.

Returning to Villers-Cotterêts and its impact on regional languages, we can now better understand this event as having opened up the French linguistic space to an obvious hostility vis-à-vis the lexical plurality of France. In fact, as Safran advances, Villers-Cotterêts opened up the doors to the deliberate promotion and use of the elite's language "as a vehicle for political socialization and ideological diffusion [by propagating] a widely shared belief on the part of the political and cultural elite that the toleration of competing languages would serve to undermine national unity."[84] By extension, the proclamation authorized French's future power to colonize other languages – regional dialects by means of an internal colonization process carried out through linguistic codification and standardization and foreign languages by means of overt colonization.

In what concerns this secondary aspect, Peter Burke and Pascale Casanova stress that French's forthcoming international dominance was indeed created by the Villers-Cotterêts decree. Thus is justified the fact that, from as early as the beginning of the seventeenth century, French became the language "whose speakers made the strongest bid for European [linguistic] hegemony" and whose application "in the political domain was [intentionally] extended to conquered provinces where it was not the mother

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[84] Safran, 398.

tongue."[85] With respect to the domestic arena, Villers-Cotterêts' impact can be summed

up as having introduced two linguistic binary oppositions: a first of which, as we have

seen, pairs off two reputable centers of power – Paris/French versus Antiquity/Latin; and

a second which hinges on a brand-new disproportionate rapport – Paris/French/the King's

sphere of influence vis-à-vis regional dialects/the periphery. The proclamation's

linguistic agenda is thus exposed as overtly invested by a political task whose aim was to

attain a controlled alignment of political and speech communities via the exercise of a

monolingual policy, regardless of whether or not a monolingual system accounted for the

country's actual linguistic diversity. What results is an expanded and centralized French

nation, confirmed by a national language whose sources now transpire from a newly

recognized locus of power, from none other than Paris and the King's environment.[86] In

comparison with this newly established authority, peripheral linguistic pluralities will

ultimately be invalidated.

To conclude, I stress that language is not only a tool for communication but also

an integral component of one's sense of identity and autonomy. The Villers-Cotterêts

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[85] Burke, 85.

[86] If we continue to trace Villers-Cotterêts' significance in respect to the French national
identity, we can argue that its effects culminated during the 1789 revolution when, as
Safran notes, the Jacobins insisted that "political unity [become] congruent with national
unity [which] in turn presupposed an undifferentiated mass of citizens not divided by
regional loyalties or regional languages" (399). The continuous pursuit of a monolingual
policy was only further reinforced after the Revolution when French comes to "occupy a
significant place among the concerns of public policy makers. This is reflected by the
fact that government agencies [will be from now on] heavily involved in setting the
norms of the language, subsidizing its cultural products, promoting its use globally and,
[as beseeched by Abbé Grégoire's program,] actively discouraging the use of rival
languages, even denying the existence of the ethnic minorities who used them" (399).
Clearly then, Villers-Cotterêts' long lasting outcome on the French national sphere can be
traced to its deliberate promotion of a vernacular – le francien – for the purpose of
crystallizing the nation-state as an indivisible community, both internally as well as
externally.

ordinance was an event of profound and enduring consequence. At its core we find two

sets of shifting power relationships that ultimately reveal how dominant and subaltern

linguistic identities are altered and manipulated by and for the benefit of specific

authorities.[87] Because of its external as well as its internal repercussions – its liberation

from the Past's authority and its subsequent objection to vernaculars – Villers-Cotterêts

mirrors a "colonizing/colonized" rapport. This rapport accounts for French's ability to

overrule regional forms developed not only within its natural borders but also beyond.

This is precisely the conflict encountered by Charles Ferdinand Ramuz, a French-

speaking Swiss national whose language was French but not the French of France.

In regards to Michel de Montaigne, Villers-Cotterêts problematizes the author's

preoccupation with one's "natural" language. Montaigne's quest for subjectivity

transpires through the linguistic predicament that positions him in contact with Latin and

French but also with a third factor, the Gascon language of his birthplace. Gascon is a

language that, because of its simplicity and authenticity, comes closest to the naturalness

Montaigne seeks. Yet, it is also a language that the Villers-Cotterêts events ultimately

undermine and relegate to an inferior position. Since Montaigne declares himself to be

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[87] Although clearly surpassing the scope of this dissertation project, I would like to draw
attention to the fact that linguistic policy in France remains to this day a politically
pertinent issue. One only has to consider the French Republic's current Constitution and
its recognition of French as its official national language. Juxtaposed to this is France's
position on linguistic matters as a member of the European Union. In its external
policies, France is a firm proponent of linguistic pluralism for the sake of diversity.
However, on the home front, the country is just as firm in its promotion of
monolingualism. The contradictions that emerge are not necessarily overt. They do
however clearly speak of a strong political desire to promote French in France as well as
throughout the rest of the world.

Gascon[88] above all, it is evident that the author sides with this language. As a result, Montaigne will choose to distance himself from the center of definition now upheld by Paris and French in favor of relocating to the periphery. As we will discover in the following chapter, the author's detachment from this new center of reference replicates his disengagement from Antiquity and Latin since it also occurs in language. By choosing the periphery and by capitalizing on Gascon's unmediated essence, Montaigne will end up transforming the margin into a middle ground from which he will more easily negotiate the linguistic multiplicities that make up his character and that delineate his subversive stance vis-à-vis recognized authorities. It is for this reason that Montaigne's quest for authorial subjectivity parallels that of the postcolonial writer in general. The essays that best portray his linguistic multiplicity and subversive response via-à-vis various centers of authority are: "On the education of children," "On presumption" and "On some verses of Virgil," which we will examine in detail in the next chapter.

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[88] Montaigne identifies himself as Gascon first and foremost in the essay on the "Affection of fathers" when he declares: "I am Gascon." Frame, 281.

Chapter 1 – Michel de Montaigne

I begin by looking at Michel de Montaigne as an analogous case for what many critics identify as the achievements as well as the drawbacks inherent within postcolonial theory. By starting with Montaigne, I am essentially making a historical claim: simultaneously situating the Renaissance author within a postcolonial environment and expanding the chronological and theoretical framework currently associated with the concept "postcolonialism." My goal is to demonstrate that Montaigne shares with postcolonial theory the same concerns over questions of authority and power dynamics, over imbalanced power relations and individual agency. Specifically, the affinities that connect the Renaissance author with postcolonial theory emerge through his reflections on language and on cultural control.

As a Renaissance author, Montaigne is unique in his independence from the influence of Parisian culture. By the start of the Renaissance period, Paris had emerged as not only a cultural capital but even more specifically, as a force regulating language and thus as the polestar of literary production. It is during this period that Paris begins to establish its hegemony as a source of prestige and recognition that will regulate the future of French and Francophone writers for generations to come. Yet, in contrast to most Renaissance authors, Montaigne positions himself not by Paris' standards but by those of his native province of Gascony. Montaigne's stance resonates here with the position adopted by the writers of the Middle Ages for whom the native province also constituted their principal definitional center. In this sense, Montaigne adopts their ideology. This is not to say that he positions himself within the canonical tradition of the Middle Ages.

What is remarkable is Montaigne's audacity to distance himself from the dominant norm of his own era.

As Charles Taylor surmises in his tome *Sources of the Self – The Making of Modern Identity*, Montaigne's aspiration throughout *Les Essais* has always been "to loosen the hold of […] general categories of 'normal' operation and [to] gradually prise […] self-understanding free of the monumental weight of […] universal interpretations, so that the shape of [one's own] originality can come to view. [His] aim [was] not to find an intellectual order by which things in general can be surveyed, but rather to find the modes of expression which will allow the particular not to be overlooked."[89] Building from Taylor, I thus argue that Montaigne's relativist philosophy, his understanding and representation of identity, are all predicated and complicated by his unusual upbringing and the complex relationship he entertained with his mentors – be it the Ancient writers he studied profusely throughout his lifetime or the few contemporaries he admired.

Specifically, my argument centers on the notion that even though Antiquity's philosophical and literary authority permeated Montaigne's childhood and his schooling, it did so in an altered manner through which the author successfully positioned himself as subversive vis-à-vis the contemporary cultural hegemony of Renaissance France. Montaigne's defiant position is sanctioned by two historical events: first, by the late Renaissance revisionist trend that posed a general challenge to Antiquity and secondly, on the linguistic field in particular, by the 1539 Ordinance of Villers-Cotterêts. Villers-Cotterêts' import cannot be overstated considering that it is not only one of the oldest

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[89] Taylor, Charles, *Sources of the Self – The Making of Modern Identity*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 182.

laws still existing in France but also an event that completely revised the French linguistic space; including our author's environment.

Connecting these two historical events allows me to argue that our author inhabited a triple linguistic climate built on the confrontation among the Past, his distinct regional locale, and a growing national identity. The Past and the nascent national identity constitute two main centers of reference whereas the regional locale represents a marginal setting. At the core then, Montaigne's identity and philosophical stance are confirmed by none other than the confrontation between the center and periphery, one of postcolonial theory's most prevalent preoccupations. In a similar manner to most postcolonial writers, for Montaigne, this confrontation is also carried out first and foremost in the domain of language and culture.

What are the languages that trigger our author's search for subjectivity, we may ask? The Past gives Montaigne an established linguistic authority: Latin. His national identity is sanctioned by the institutionalization of a vernacular, le francien – the dialect of the Île-de-France/Parisian region, also dubbed the "King's French" – as the national language of the early modern French state. And finally, the author's regional milieu emerges through the Gascon language of his birthplace, a language that, contrary to le francien, does not occupy a position of preeminence in sixteenth century France. Once again then, starting from the premise that Montaigne's entire *Essais* are a testament to his belief that the self is to be found first and foremost in language, Montaigne – the author, the man, the individual, the book – is to be found at the confluence of this complex linguistic triumvirate.

In exploring how Montaigne reconciles these multilayered linguistic and ideological settings while showing that he locates his selfhood precisely at the core of this intricate relationship I will direct our attention to the essay on "De l'éducation des enfants" with brief detours on "De la presumption" and "Sur des vers de Virgile." Additionally, in support of my argument that Montaigne's complex linguistic milieu simultaneously influenced his philosophical ideology, his relative and plural definition of otherness, I will also analyze the essays "De l'Amitié" and "Des Cannibales." It is precisely the challenges exposed in these essays, as well as the author's perpetually shifting position in respect to Antiquity and to his contemporaries, that expose Montaigne's definitional strategies as comparable to the main attributes of postcolonial theory.

Finally, Michel de Montaigne's linguistic predicaments and his questioning of cultural authorities genuinely resonate with the second author in this dissertation project, the Swiss novelist Charles Ferdinand Ramuz. In this sense, Montaigne and Ramuz are paired together not only because they both write from a peripheral location but even more so because through their works they similarly transform their aesthetic singularities into a norm that will influence future generations of French and Francophone writers.

Situating Montaigne – the Renaissance Shift

Born in 1533 in the Aquitaine region of France, not far from Bordeaux, Michel de Montaigne began his life and education under the guidance of his father, Pierre Eyquem de Montaigne. A French Roman-Catholic soldier and mayor of Bordeaux, Pierre de

Montaigne prescribed for his son a meticulous pedagogical instruction that emphasized a Latin, humanist education with a keen accent on the authority of the Ancients. Thus, under the guidance of a German tutor who could not speak French, the young Montaigne was raised entirely in Latin, with limited access to the vernacular and with a strong belief in the inherited authority of the Greek and Roman philosophers.

However, as Philippe Desan notes in his introduction to Hugo Friedrich's 1949 bestseller *Montaigne*, our author was also witness to "an era of contradictions and differences,"[90] a period of religious wars, changing political and social norms, and displaced moral systems. He lived in an epoch that saw "an ideology of labor, [accumulation and exchange] replacing an ideology based upon idleness and immediate pleasure."[91] Desan and Friedrich equate this "ideology of pleasure" with Antiquity while the "ideology of labor" is representative of the general state of affairs permeating the second half of the Renaissance.

What exactly are the features that distinguish these two ideologies? As the two critics explain, starting with the 1550s, "the authority of the Ancients [begins to be] questioned and submitted to the destructive work of 'the interpreter'. [Subsequently,] truth soon comes to be viewed as nothing more than the product of [individual] mental labor."[92] In one easy stroke then, Antiquity is challenged by the mercantilist and exchangist ideology sweeping through Europe during the second half of the sixteenth century.[93] As a result, by contesting Antiquity's supremacy, the later Renaissance

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[90] Desan, Philippe in Hugo Friedrich, *Montaigne*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), xiv.
[91] Idem.
[92] Ibid.
[93] The specific linguistic aspect of this challenge will be addressed later on in the chapter.

prompts the birth of a new philosophical mode, one that accentuates introspection and subjective truth in lieu of the Past's entrusted precepts.

Michel de Montaigne matured during this period, and his essays are a testament to these tumultuous changes. In fact, as Desan playfully observes, for once "the critics agree on one point"[94]: Montaigne's moral relativism has its sources precisely in the numerous "moral, political, scientific, philosophical, and cosmological crises"[95] pervading the late Renaissance. Once they challenged Antiquity's authority, these crises made it virtually impossible to continue believing in the Ancients' universalizing truths.

Yet, Montaigne's position vis-à-vis the Ancient Past is further complicated by the fact that in his challenge to Antiquity's precepts, our Renaissance philosopher drew directly from Antiquity itself. This notion is supported by the fact that Montaigne was a fervent student of Pyrrhon d'Elis,[96] the Greek philosopher who is credited as being the first skeptic thinker of classical Antiquity. As Jessica Berry argues in her article "The Pyrrhonian Revival in Montaigne and Nietzsche," in the *Apology to Raymond Sebond* for example, it is clear that Montaigne "borrows almost all of his best examples and arguments from Sextus's *Outlines of Pyrrhonisms*. In this sense, it is ancient skepticism [that] motivates [Montaigne's] naturalist [views vis-à-vis] human knowledge."[97] By virtue of his ambition then - to present himself as a unique individual, in the most simple,

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[94] Desan, xvii.
[95] Idem, xviii.
[96] The Greek philosopher Pyrrhon d'Elis was troubled by the impossibility of total knowledge and advocated that, because of doubt and ignorance, the wise man would do better to withdraw within himself, suspend judgment and work to attain ataraxia, i.e. "freedom from worry." Montaigne's entire essayistic project bears witness to precisely such a philosophical perspective.
[97] Jessica Berry. "The Pyrrhonian Revival in Montaigne and Nietzsche." *Journal of the History of Ideas*. Volume 65, Number 3, July 2004, p. 507.

ordinary, and truthful fashion possible, to uncover and investigate his own particular reality – it becomes evident that our author took full advantage not only of the crises pervading his epoch but also of his own knowledge, a knowledge built on Antiquity's teachings.

Through his essays, Montaigne is thus able to announce a revised concept of truth, one that "separates itself from the goal of a knowledge of things and existence and is transformed into the concept of personal truthfulness."[98] His project's singularity "consists in the precision of listening in on one's self"[99] instead of perpetually deferring to outside models for reference. As Desan concludes, if analyzed specifically from the perspective of the Renaissance, Montaigne's entire essayist undertaking can consequently be summed up as delineating the shifting and malleable history of the late Renaissance as a period where "the intention of the historian prevails over notions of objectivity and truth [precisely because objectivity and truth] no longer belong to the historical object itself but reside [now] in the interaction between the object and the interpretative subject."[100]

It is clear that Montaigne sides with this redefined notion of truth from the very first page of *Les Essais*, from his notice "Au lecteur" – a one-paragraph statement of purpose that is simultaneously conclusive in scope as it is open ended. The paragraph's conclusiveness emerges from the author's self-description not only as the matter of his book but concurrently as an introspective outsider and interpreter of his own work. Otherwise said, as he so loudly declares, Montaigne is in fact his own analyst:

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[98] Desan, xviii.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Idem, xvi.

> Je veux qu'on m'y voye en ma façon simple, naturelle et ordinaire, sans estude et artifice: car c'est moy que je peins. Mes defauts s'y liront au vif, mes imperfections et ma forme naïfve, autant que la reverence publique me l'a permis. Que si j'eusse esté parmy ces nations qu'on dit vivre encore souz la douce liberté des premiers loix de nature, je t'asseure que je m'y fusse très-volontiers peint tout entier, et tout nud. Ainsi, lecteur, je suis moy-mesme la matiere de mon livre.[101]

Knowing that for Montaigne "distinguo is the most universal member of [his] logic,"[102] we come then to understand that, as Hugo Friedrich describes him, our author stands apart as "a thinker on difference, on contradiction and the singular."[103] For him, "truth resides in the act of thinking and not in the product of the thought."[104] Montaigne's position thus resonates with the late Renaissance's charge toward individuality since he clearly outlines his desire to seize and define his subjectivity as essentially authorized by his own constitution.

Interestingly though, at the same time that he outlines the uniqueness of his project, he launches a second mission, somewhat more ambiguous yet just as progressive in form. Specifically, by drawing our attention to the generic nature of his opening appellation – "Au lecteur" – he puts himself in position to advance a social commentary directed at the general public.

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[101] Michel de Montaigne, *Les Essais de Michel Seigneur de Montaigne.* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 2007), 27.
Translation: I want to be seen here in my simple, natural, ordinary fashion, without straining or artifice; for it is myself that I portray. My defects will here be read to the life, and also my natural form, as far as respect for the public has allowed. Had I been placed among those nations which are said to live still in the sweet freedom of nature's first laws, I assure you I should very gladly have portrayed myself here entire and wholly naked.
Donald Frame, *The Complete Works of Montaigne – Essays, Travel Journal, Letters.* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1948), 2.
[102] Frame, 242.
[103] Desan, xiii.
[104] Idem, xiv.

As Montaigne states, his project is "dedicated to the private convenience of [his] relatives and friends."[105] We can assume that this group belongs to the same intellectual elite and nobility as he does. In fact, we can easily classify them as making up his intended readers. Yet, the singular and generic "Au lecteur" precedes this statement. Montaigne thus covertly conflates his elite readers with an undesignated crowd, whom he now recognizes as able to think and act on their own. Consequently, by surreptitiously taking note of his unintended addressees Montaigne ends up underscoring the broadly charged potential of the late Renaissance, the revisionist concept that there is no certain authority and that each reader, each recipient of his message – regardless of educational background – is a human being capable of thinking and acting as an individual.[106] In a general sense then, the author seems to tell us already what he had discovered during his essayist analysis: that each individual contains the whole of the human possibility within himself.

Les Essais confirm Montaigne's gradual improvement upon Antiquity's precepts and ultimately demonstrate his assertion vis-à-vis this super-structure that up until now had been privileged as the dominant authority. In other words, Montaigne's challenge to classical philosophy is synonymous with his desire to incorporate Antiquity's lessons and norms within a discourse of exchange that would allow him to engage with this radical alterity and thus to alter and improve upon his predecessors' message. As a Renaissance

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[105] Frame, 2.

[106] I will expand on this notion later in the chapter when, via his Gascon dialect, I will propose that Montaigne discovers that the naturalness of character and language – and thus of the Self – rests not so much with the educated but with the uncultured peasants, the simple men and women of his domains or the noble savages he describes in "Of cannibals."

writer whose priority was to strip himself bare,[107] to "[bring] himself down to the human level,"[108] his essential endeavor can thus be summed up as the desire to emphasize a positive and constructive divergence from a center of definition, from the Ancient past. From a peripheral position then – considering that by the time his first edition of *Les Essais* is published Montaigne was not yet established as a philosophical voice or even really as a well-known essayist – he nevertheless confirms his own subjective value.

Due to his skeptical nature, Montaigne's principal aim consisted in questioning the fallibility of privileged authorities and asserting that any "subject who aspires to reconstruct his world could found his own morality based upon personal experience."[109] In this manner, personal experience and the knowledge gained via this medium are made to be just as valuable as Antiquity's established authority. If read in light of a postcolonial theory that highlights imbalanced power relations and where the transaction between the center and periphery is mutually recognized, the general program advanced by *Les Essais* affirms the author's circumspect yet subversive attitude vis-à-vis Antiquity's controlled access to knowledge and truth. Subsequently, *Les Essais* are proof of Montaigne's repositioning from the rank of a student to an interpreter, and ultimately of his transformation into a self-reliant creator who asserts his voice as independent from Antiquity's upheld hegemony.

Before advancing further, I would like to stress though that in calling Montaigne "subversive" I am not arguing that the author denied his forefathers' impact on his own

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[107] In an interesting parallel Desan writes that Montaigne "made the 'all too human' the only philosophical category possible […] well before Nietzsche" came out with his existentialist motto "Here is Man stripped bare, and he is only that" (xxvi).
[108] Desan, xxv.
[109] Idem, xvii.

individuality or on the Renaissance at large. On the contrary – *Les Essais* could easily

pass for a tribute to his perpetual engagement with the Past; Seneca, Plutarch, Cicero and

Virgil are without a doubt the essayist's most respected models. In fact, as John O'Brien

argues in his article "Montaigne and antiquity: fancies and grotesques," it must be

emphasized that "antiquity [for Montaigne was] not of antiquarian interest. It [should]

not be perceived as a set of abstract propositions or an inert corpus of knowledge but as a

body of writing within a body of writing, woven piecemeal into the texture and text of the

Essais as part of the act of composition."[110] It is precisely because of this intertextual

relationship that I insist that Montaigne covertly exposes the tensions existing between

his two value systems: Antiquity versus the late Renaissance. Thus, while he does indeed

remain reverent vis-à-vis the domineering influence of the Past, by perpetually engaging

it in dialogue he is nevertheless critical and ends up posing a challenge to Antiquity's

recognized authority.

     To put it differently, Michel de Montaigne's favorite literary theme is to

investigate the daily and frivolous matter of what makes up the individual. As a result,

his body of works does not address "man" in an abstract form anymore, as it would be

handed down to him by the Ancients' ontology. Far from it – by grounding his

philosophy in his own tangible reality, Montaigne's definition of "man" stands as self-

sufficient and thus contains within itself a revolutionary and subjective truth.

Montaigne's altered interpretation of one's "self" aligns perfectly with the late

Renaissance's call in favor of personal labor precisely because his vision of the "self" can

only be arrived at via an individual and laborious process that necessitates an

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[110] John O'Brien in *The Cambridge Companion to Montaigne*. Ed. Ullrich Langer, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 54.

epistemological divergence from Antiquity. Furthermore, his position can now be read through postcolonialism's theoretical lens precisely because of the authorities he engages and of the power dynamics he reveals. It is through this spectrum that we are able to arrive at the core of Montaigne's project: the notion that his quest for subjectivity is driven by a sense of authorial preservation.

As it will be demonstrated in the next section, since the Ancient philosophers so thoroughly permeated his education and his work, they ultimately threatened to jeopardize his emerging writing subjectivity. And so, while still reverent to the Past, as an author, Montaigne is driven to assert himself in opposition to this powerful authority, to Antiquity's overwhelming textual presence. This notion is nowhere more clearly expressed than in the essay "On Friendship" to which I will now turn and which I interpret as representative of our author's desire for, yet simultaneous recognition that he must reject his literary patrons if he is to assert his individuality and secure his position as an independent writer.

"De l'Amitié"

Written as an homage and testimony of friendship to Etienne de la Boétie, Montaigne's essay "On Friendship" is deeply infused in both content and literary form by Antiquity. Antiquity's influence in respect to content is obvious through the assortment of ancient cases cited by the author as models for defining the perfect companionship. In this manner we learn of Cicero's observations concerning the bond between Caius Blossius and Tiberius Gracchus, of Lucian's depiction of the triplet Eudaminas,

Charixenus, and Aretheus, of the relationships between Achilles and Patroclus, Orestes and Pylades and many more. In terms of literary format, Antiquity's effect is perceived first and foremost through the Stoic nuances permeating the text via the multiple Latin citations included. Secondly, the Past's influence is further evidenced by Montaigne's dialectic methodology which is logically structured in steps and proceeds from introducing the Ancient models, to contrasting them, to dismantling them one by one, before the author finally launches his own revision of the core concept "friendship."

Keeping in mind the Renaissance's promotion of personal labor and individual affirmation, Montaigne's strategic comparisons pairing Antiquity vis-à-vis his personal experience of friendship offer a comprehensive insight into the author's tactic of elevating a range of authors, including Etienne de la Boétie, to the status of literary patrons only to ultimately reject their patronage. In this manner, while remaining unwaveringly reverent in his friendship, Montaigne nevertheless complicates La Boétie's link with Antiquity for his own benefit. Drawing from Patrick Moser's article "Montaigne's Literary Patrons: The case of La Boétie," we will thus come to see that the author purposely "undermines the potent figure [he creates of his friend so as] to protect the space he had cleared for both himself and his original work of art."[111] Subversively working to recognize an authority only to dismantle it in the end, Montaigne will thus establish his literary identity as not only distinct but in opposition to the many classical and contemporary sources that permeated his milieu.

Through the medium of personal experience and of his most sincere bond with La Boétie, Montaigne questions and contradicts the Ancients' heritage, an imposing center

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[111] Patrick Moser, "Montaigne's Literary Patrons: The Case of La Boétie." *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 31 No. 2 (Summer, 2000): 382.

of definition, and ultimately unveils that the Past's "authority [is losing] its a priori potency."[112] Faced with the Other of Antiquity and the Other of his friend, I posit once again that his affirmation as a singular subject, as an individual and as a writer is mediated and ultimately fabricated through the de-stabilizing of authorities. Because of this, the conflicts exposed by Montaigne as well as his subsequent assertion can be read as a cathartic declaration of independence that takes place in the domain of writing and of language.

To begin, "De l'Amitié" opens with a painting metaphor that unmistakably resonates with the title page introducing the 1588 edition of *Les Essais*. Both the metaphor and the title page expose a clearly delineated center that is surrounded by a variety of fantastic and strange elements. Their purpose becomes evident when Montaigne compares himself with an ordinary painter he employs and whom he avows a desire to imitate. Consequently, just as this artist had poured all his skill and knowledge to fill the center of his work, so does Montaigne plan to include a work of great esteem as the focal point on his œuvre.

Yet, immediately after comparing himself with the artist he employs, by declaring that "ma suffisance ne va pas si avant que d'oser entreprendre un tableau riche, poly et formé selon l'art,"[113] Montaigne admits lacking the abilities to undertake the task of creating such a rich and polished picture, a piece fashioned along the artistic standards of the day. I propose that via this rather honest confession the author is in fact introducing a

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[112] Barry Weller, "The Rhetoric of Friendship in Montaigne's Essais." *New Literary History*, Vol. 9, No. 3, Rhetoric I: Rhetorical Analyses (Spring, 1978): 510.
[113] Montaigne, 189-190.
Translation: "My ability does not go far enough for me to dare to undertake a rich, polished picture, formed according to art." Frame, 135.

first challenge to artistic authority. In other words, by recognizing his limitations vis-à-vis "the standards of the day," i.e. the classical ideals, Montaigne positions himself as humble. However, by the same token, he is concurrently announcing his difference – although, from what or from whom specifically we do not yet know.

Returning then to the text, Montaigne informs us that his solution is to borrow a reputable work of art, one "which will do honor to all the rest of [his own] work"[114] simply by its already established authority. In contrast with such a masterpiece, his essays, his grotesque additions and "monstrous bodies, pieced together of diverse members, without definite shape, having no order, sequence, or proportion other than accidental"[115] would simply function as the frame for this most refined of centerpieces. Relegated to the periphery, we come to see that Montaigne thus underscores his status as a literary novice. By extension, he indicates his *Essais'* deficiencies.

The reader may pause now and wonder who could be the illustrious figure to whom the author plans to allocate this most privileged of places, the center of his own creative endeavor. If it were not for his instant pronouncement in favor of his friend and contemporary Etienne de La Boétie's *Servitude Volontaire*, it is likely we might believe Montaigne was considering one of the masters of the classical age, one of the highly regarded writers or philosophers of Antiquity. Such a choice would confirm the visual metaphor introducing the essay since it would reflect the structured order and beauty prevalent in classical works and needed to fill the center of Montaigne's amalgamate composition. Justifiably then, Montaigne's decision in favor of La Boétie seems at first to be an unexpected alternative.

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[114] Frame, 135.

[115] Ibid.

The reader's surprise is immediately countered by the author's description of his friend as an exemplary model, an individual whose "natural gifts […] bring [him] very close to the glory of antiquity."[116] In one easy stroke, La Boétie's identification with the Past is already celebrated. As a result, by having selected his friend's *Servitude Volontaire*, a work of "great and well-merited commendation" as the centerpiece of his *Essais*, Montaigne would immediately elevate his own work to a higher status, to a position unreachable by his grotesque compositions on their own. Moreover, he would simultaneously fulfill the promise he had made to his friend upon his deathbed, the assurance to give him a "place" and thus guarantee his posterity.

What is of particular interest here is that the asymmetry introduced at the beginning of the essay between Montaigne as an ordinary painter and the work of great esteem he plans to incorporate is further accentuated now that La Boétie, a friend and contemporary, has deliberately been linked with Antiquity. The distance between the two friends is made all the more obvious by Montaigne's recognition that *Servitude Volontaire* was also written in essay format yet it preceded his own "unique invention" since it had been composed during La Boétie's youth. Furthermore, dedicated "à l'honneur de la liberté contre les tyrans,"[117] it can be argued that La Boétie's essay is ruled by a higher purpose than Montaigne's stated desire in "Au lecteur" to simply record his own faults and imperfections, his natural and ordinary existence.

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[116] Ibid.
[117] Montaigne, 190.
Translation: "in honor of liberty against tyrants." Frame, 135.

Figure 1 – The title page of the 1588 edition of Montaigne's *Essais* shows the author's name at the center of the frame surrounded by the grotesque figures to which he alludes in the painting metaphor opening the essay "On Friendship." After the 1588 edition this particular title page was removed from subsequently published editions.

Inadvertently then, Montaigne continues to highlight the discrepancy between his friend's established renown and his own emerging literary and philosophical affirmation. Furthermore, at this point in the essay we are unaware of our author's last-minute decision to not include *Servitude Volontaire* as the centerpiece of his literary project. We will become privy to this information only in the last paragraph of "De l'Amitié." Montaigne does nevertheless hint at the possibility that he might abstain from including his friend's work within his own. He does so by means of the incongruity he has introduced between himself and the linking of La Boétie with Antiquity. The question that develops now is: how is his decision accomplished and justified by the text? As proposed earlier, the answer emerges through Montaigne's recognition of his friend's alterity and of his preeminence followed precisely by the suppression of La Boétie's text. In the following pages, we will trace this reversal by identifying the author's affirmation and negation of his companion; his exaltation of La Boétie's role from that of a brother, to a double of his own self, and finally to a patron who must be overturned in order for Montaigne to affirm his own independent voice.

The essay "On Friendship" is not Montaigne's first testimony of his relationship with La Boétie. In fact, this essay was written more than a decade after the death of his friend - a moment of deep emotion the author had already preserved in a 1563 letter he had penned to his father. As it emerges from this letter, La Boétie is portrayed as more courageous, more reasonable, and more exemplary in death than anyone Montaigne had ever met before. His "tranquility and quiet assurance in the days prior to his demise, his concern that family members not mourn beyond the bounds of reason, his regret at not having done more for the state, his words of wisdom concerning virtue and duty, all

reflect aspects of the Stoic model [La Boétie had] admired."[118] In fact, as the young

Montaigne admits to his father, this older brother with whom he had so deeply identified,

was a true incarnation of his own aspirations for courage, talent, and recognition:

> I told him that I had blushed for shame that my courage had failed on hearing
> what he, who was suffering this illness, had the courage to tell me. That up to
> then I had thought that God gave us no such great power against human
> calamities, and I had had difficulty believing what I had come across on this
> subject in the histories; but that having felt such proof of it, I praised God that this
> had been in a person by whom I was so loved and whom I loved so dearly; and
> that this would serve me as an example, to play this same part in my turn.[119]

It is imperative that we recall here that La Boétie was a true benefactor to

Montaigne, in the constituent sense of the word. He was a patron who bequeathed upon

his younger friend his entire intellectual inheritance, his library and his books, by having

chosen Montaigne "out of many men in order to renew [the practice of] virtuous and

sincere friendship," the type of bond of which only old traces remain "in the memory of

antiquity."[120] Subsequently, the message that emerges from this passage is that

Montaigne's position in respect to his friend is that of an apprentice, of a disciple.

Although it is Montaigne who recounts and who writes about their bond, it is La Boétie

who speaks and who imparts knowledge to his younger brother. It is La Boétie who has

primacy and who is thus recognized as a model. It should come as no surprise then that,

by the end of the letter, Etienne de La Boétie becomes the metaphorical embodiment of

stability, knowledge, and plenitude. He is transformed into a quintessential exemplum, a

model to be emulated precisely because of his alignment with Antiquity's precepts.

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[118] Moser, 382.
[119] Frame, 1050.
[120] Ibid.

The essay "On Friendship" continues to celebrate La Boétie's exceeding qualities in the same tone as the letter had done except that now Montaigne shifts his gaze from La Boétie as an individual and, by underscoring the uniqueness of the bond he had shared with his companion, he includes himself in the celebration of his friend's uniqueness. In comparison with the letter he had composed earlier, he now makes himself out to be La Boétie's equal, his double. What is more remarkable is that he celebrates the singularity of this indivisible union by comparing and contrasting their bond to none other than Antiquity's models. If we recall his appropriation of the Renaissance's promotion of individual labor and personal truthfulness, we come to see that he essentially evaluates his personal experience against already established norms.

Predictably then, the examples he cites from Seneca, Aristotle, Plutarch, Horace, and Virgil all amount to a somewhat pessimistic description of the concepts of friendship, love, and even marriage. In fact, all the classic pairings cited by the author as exemplary models of friendship are uniformly found to be lacking in both balance and proportion in comparison with his own relationship with La Boétie. For example, the Greek model[121] Montaigne cites is inappropriate because of its homosexual content and insufficient because it is founded on external beauty.[122] Similarly, Cicero's model[123] is inadequate since it does not fulfill the author's constraint of "reciprocal confidence and complete equality."[124] Lucian's proposal[125] is equally rejected for the simple reason that it includes

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[121] Harmodius and Aristogeiton
[122] Eve Sedgwick's treatment of homosexual desire in *Between men* and in Gary Ferguson's *Queer re-reading* call to mind Montaigne's friendship models.
[123] Caius Blossius and Tiberius Gracchus
[124] Moser, 384.
[125] Eudamidas, Charixenus, and Aretheus

too many variables – there are three friends involved in the union, thus making their friendship common, and by no means desirable.

In contrast with such models, Montaigne's ideal companionship is more refined, more complete, its prerequisites demanding a degree of equality such as does not exist in the classical ideals. Thus is explained his qualification of La Boétie as a brother and, more specifically even, as an other who is both a projection as well as a reflection of his own ego, and thus ultimately a doubling of our author. This notion is nowhere more clearly expressed than in the following paragraph:

> Au demeurant, ce que nous appellons ordinairement amis et amitiez, ce ne sont qu'accoinctances et familiaritez noueés par quelque occasion ou commodité, par le moyen de laquelle nos ames s'entretiennet. En l'amitié dequoy je parle, elles se meslent et confondent l'une en l'autre, d'un meslange si universel, qu'elles effacent, et ne retrouvent plus la cousture qui les a joinctes. Si on me presse de dire pourquoy je l'aymoys, je sens que cela ne se peut exprimer, qu'en respondant: Par ce que c'estoit luy, par ce que c'estoit moy.[126]

Once again then, because of its singularity, because of its distinctiveness from the ancient archetypes, Montaigne's rapport with La Boétie is elevated to a superior rank. In fact, as the author proclaims, "our friendship [had] no other model than itself, and can be compared only with itself."[127]

Robert Curtius' brilliant analysis of *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* reveals that "on the basis of a comparison with famous examples provided by tradition, the superiority, even the uniqueness, of a person or thing to be praised is

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[126] Montaigne, 194-195.
Translation: For the rest, what we ordinarily call friends and friendships are nothing but acquaintanceships and familiarities formed by some chance or convenience, by means of which our souls are bound to each other. In the friendship I speak of, our souls mingle and blend with each other so completely that they efface the seam that joined them, and cannot find it again. If you press me to tell you why I loved him, I feel that this cannot be expressed, except by answering: Because it was he, because it was I. Frame, 139.
[127] Frame, 139.

established."[128] Examined through Curtius' perspective, it becomes evident that by

having evaluated his individual experience against the models of Antiquity, Montaigne's

aim was to surpass the Past's models detailing the perfect friendship. Additionally, if we

stress once more that "distinguo is the most universal member"[129] of Montaigne's logic,

we discern that he is motivated in his quest by yet another ambition: he is concomitantly

attempting to surpass his literary patrons. He literally means to outdo the Past's

representations of the perfect friendship in order to promote not only his drastically

different bond but even more so the method through which he is recording this

experience.

Subsequently, it should come as no surprise that while continuing to praise the

uniqueness of his fraternity in comparison with Antiquity's ideals, Montaigne diverts our

attention from the actual relationship to his means of preserving this unique encounter.

Thus is explained his declaration that he should "like to talk to people who have

experienced what [he feels]. But knowing how far from common usage and how rare

such a friendship is, [he does] not expect to find any good judge for it. For the very

discourses that antiquity [had left] on this subject seem […] weak compared with the

feeling [he has]."[130]

If we return to Curtius's theory that the superiority of a "thing" can be established

by "comparison with famous examples," it stands that by means of this puzzling

declaration, instead of dismissing the Ancients' inadequate models in full, Montaigne is

in fact dismissing their particular discourse on friendship. In this manner, he calls our

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[128] in Moser, 384.
[129] Frame, 242.
[130] Idem, 143.

attention to Antiquity's form of writing as incapable of capturing and communicating the sentiments of true closeness. Thus, by having established the exceptionality of his relationship with La Boétie, the author simultaneously praises and promotes his own style's suitability, none other than the essay's capacity to render the uniqueness of the experience. In other words, where Antiquity had failed to capture the true essence of companionship, Montaigne tells us that he succeeds. He does so precisely by means of the doubling of selves he shared with Etienne de La Boétie and by rigorously following Antiquity's methodology only to ultimately turn it against itself. In his article "The Rhetoric of Friendship in Montaigne's Essais," Barry Weller arrives at the same conclusion when he declares that, as soon as Antiquity's ordinary models are casually rejected by having followed the expected "Aristotelian procedure of distinguishing [his] friendship from other sorts of affinities […] Montaigne [becomes] free to speak from the fullness of his own experience."[131]

Unsurprisingly then, in the remaining few pages of "De l'Amitié" the author will continue to praise his rapport with La Boétie. Yet, interestingly, he does so through confronting and textually representing the sheer inexplicableness of his friend's demise. The last few pages are thus permeated by a deep sense of loss and rupture. Nonetheless, it is precisely through this rupture that Montaigne ends up once again asserting his own voice. In the process of praising his bond with La Boétie, Montaigne comes to recognize that in order to seize his subjectivity and move beyond his position as a novice to La Boétie, he must disengage himself from his friend just as he had distanced himself from Antiquity's models. Consequently, by acutely emphasizing his loss he ultimately

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[131] Weller, 514.

justifies his detachment from his companion. As we are about to find out in the last

paragraph of his essay, this disengagement takes the form of his decision to withdraw La

Boétie's *Servitude Volontaire* from the body of his *Essais.*

As Montaigne avows right before the end of essay:

> Car à la verité si je compare tout le reste de ma vie […] aux quatre années, qu'il
> m'a esté donné de jouyr de la douce compagnie et societé de ce personage, ce
> n'est que fumée, ce n'est qu'une nuict obscure et ennuyeuse. […] J'estois desjà si
> faict et accoustumé à estre deuxiesme par tout, qu'il me semble n'estre plus qu'à
> demy. […] Il n'est action ou imagination, où je ne le trouve à dire, comme si eust-
> il bien faict à moy: car de mesme qu'il me surpassoit d'une distance infinie en
> toute autre suffisance et vertu, aussi faisoit-il au devoir de l'amitié.[132]

In this most candid of confessions, we unquestionably feel the author's sorrow.

Subsequently, we do not doubt that Montaigne embodies La Boétie's loss as a rupture

since, as he declares it, he went from having and being a double to now only being a half.

What is particularly striking about this passage is not so much his identification as

a "half" but more so as a "second self" who had been "surpassed in every other ability,"

including friendship. We are left to ponder what exactly had been Montaigne's position

in his relationship with La Boétie. During the four years they shared, had he grown

indeed to be an equal to his friend or had he remained in the position of an apprentice, the

position he detailed in the letter he wrote to his father after the death of his friend?

This question seems all the more pertinent given the author's exceptional

description of La Boétie in the aforementioned letter and given that the essay "On

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[132] Montaigne, 200.
Translation: For in truth, if I compare all the rest of my life […] with the four years
which were granted me to enjoy the sweet company and society of [La Boétie,] it is
nothing but smoke, nothing but dark and dreary night. […] I was already so formed and
accustomed to being a second self everywhere that only half of me seems to be alive
now. […] There is no action or thought in which I do not miss him, as indeed he would
have missed me. For just as he surpassed me infinitely in every other ability and virtue,
so he did in the duty of friendship. Frame, 143.

Friendship" culminates with Montaigne bestowing upon his friend the highest of compliments when he describes him as having his "mind molded in the pattern of other ages than his."[133] Montaigne is clearly referencing the Ancient Past. And so, if we had any doubt before, we come to see that La Boétie is elevated once more to a status outside Montaigne's reach, to a voice and authority that has primacy over the author's, precisely because this friend, this brother, this double is in fact a reincarnation of the Ancient models. We cannot help but be reminded here of the discrepancy introduced by the painting metaphor opening the essay "On Friendship."

Already recognized by his contemporary milieu[134] and concurrently linked with the Ancient Past, La Boétie is made to be as much of an intellectual and literary patron to Montaigne as are Seneca, Plutarch, Cicero and Virgil – none other than our author's textual fathers. Yet, as demonstrated in the previous section, these are the same textual fathers who threaten to jeopardize our author's emerging subjectivity and whose dominating authority Montaigne will need to challenge if he is to assert his authorial independence. Consequently, as Patrick Moser surmises, "the 'brother' who helped Montaigne distinguish himself from the ancients [via the unique friendship they shared] must not be allowed to take their place and overshadow the essayist's emerging identity."[135] In addition, as Barry Weller proposes as well, it is inevitable that "within the

[133] Frame, 144.

[134] As Moser explains, by the time Montaigne was first composing 'Of Friendship," La Boétie's name [was already carrying more weight] among men of learning than Montaigne's" was (384).

[135] Moser, 388.

supposed equality of friendship, a tacit struggle for priority [had] emerged"[136] between Montaigne and La Boétie.

Threatened by such an overwhelmingly dominant presence, after having praised his friend above and beyond, Montaigne must now extricate himself from this relationship so as to succeed in asserting his subjectivity and thus validate his own literary project. By extension, if we consent to Moser's and Weller's conclusions, Montaigne's excuse that he has "changed his mind" and decided not to include *Servitude Volontaire* within his own work because it had been used "with evil intent by those who seek to disturb and change the state of our government"[137] cannot truly be accepted as valid. His true reason for ousting La Boétie from the text is that his much-revered friend must become an absence so that Montaigne himself can affirm his independence as an author. Does this reneging of the promise he had made to his friend to "give him a place" within his own essays discredit the exceptional character of their friendship?

Contrary to expectations, Montaigne's rejection of his friend is neither a negative nor a violent act. In fact, it is an affirmative move through which Montaigne asserts his subjectivity while concurrently ensuring that La Boétie's individuality is indeed recognized and celebrated. As Alexandre Leupin advances in his work *Barbarolexis – Medieval Writing and Sexuality*, "ousting the other [La Boétie] from the book is tantamount to recognition of his absolute otherness, and not a token of obliteration."[138] In addition, as other critics have advanced, such an absence simultaneously creates a negative space that attests to Montaigne's deep sorrow after the loss of his friend. And

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[136] Weller, 509.
[137] Frame, 144.
[138] Alexandre Leupin, *Barbarolexis – Medieval Writing and Sexuality*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 216.

so, by promising his readers a text that at the last moment is denied, Montaigne lets us perceive the emptiness, the meaninglessness he must have felt in the wake of his friend's demise. He has thus managed to secure our participation in celebrating both La Boétie as an individual as well as the idyllic bond they had shared. Nevertheless, by having been metaphorically identified as the incorporation of Antiquity's recognized supremacy, through his absence, La Boétie ends up allowing Montaigne's own unstable and fluid nature to now flourish. Ultimately then, the friend's absence sanctions our author's new stylistic discourse as well as his novel language to reign free.

To come full circle, if we return to the painting metaphor that opens the essay, we now see that La Boétie's *Servitude Volontaire*, through its alignment with Antiquity, stands in stark contrast to Montaigne's "monstrous" compositions. The distinction between Montaigne's and La Boétie's literary subjectivities is all the more apparent if we consider the 1588 title page, which visually replicates the opening of the essay. Clearly, it is Montaigne's name and the product of his own labor – *Essais de Michel Seignevr De Montaigne* – that figure prominently at the center of the distorted figures that make up this page. It is only in this manner that Montaigne "manages to occupy both center and periphery, relegating his writings to the margins in the form of grotesques that also claim center stage through their linguistic equivalent ESSAIS."[139] Our author thus loudly proclaims his independence from Antiquity's inherited ideals as well as from his contemporary models.

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[139] Moser, 392.

In summary then, in "De l'Amitié," Michel de Montaigne is just as Jean

Starobinski's tome[140] regards him to be: perpetually in motion, navigating between the

center of reference occupied by the Ancient Past and by La Boétie, and his own emerging

writerly voice, a peripheral position in reference to that of Antiquity and to that of his

companion. The conflict that emerges takes place in the domain of writing and of

authorial confirmation. For Montaigne though, this is precisely the domain of his

subjectivity – the realm where, without openly rejecting his patrons, he nevertheless

challenges and overturns the threat they pose.

As demonstrated in this section, through the concurrent celebration and rejection

of "the doubling of the self" Montaigne shared with La Boétie – whom he had elevated to

a position beyond his reach, a status replicated only by his ancient forefathers – the

author ended up revealing a skewed power relation, a power struggle. As Weller

concludes, this identity conflict, the otherness that emerges from Montaigne's contact

with the Past as well as with his friend "must be mastered, deformed [and] annihilated [so

as] to permit reentry into the self."[141] Consequently, Montaigne subversively overturns

his patrons' authority when their otherness threatens to engulf his own individuality. He

negates Antiquity's as well as La Boétie's patronage[142] in favor of celebrating his own

writing, born with him and "sans patron." In other words, Montaigne seizes the

opportunity to fill the void left by La Boétie's death and by Antiquity's diminishing

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[140] I am referring here to Starobinski's 1982 seminal study *Montaigne in Motion*.

[141] Weller, 520.

[142] I would like to underscore here the etymological resonance between patron and pater. Antiquity's writers as well as La Boétie are Montaigne's philosophical and textual fathers. In the next section I will advance that Montaigne continues to distance himself from them but also from his own father via his rejection of Latin, Antiquity's language to which he gained access precisely through his father.

supremacy – brought about by the revisionist attitude of the later Renaissance – with a new authority: his own voice and his own subjectivity. His pursuit of subjectivity resonates here with that of the postcolonial writer in general precisely because Montaigne too struggled against dominating authorities. Just as in the case of the postcolonial writer, his authorial quest also demanded a complete immersion, mastery and ultimately, a reversal of established power structures.

Moreover, as I will demonstrate in the following sections, in order to truly secure his literary success it is not only the Ancients' textual control that Montaigne must combat. He must also disentangle himself from Antiquity's language, from Latin. Consequently, I argue that his subversive attitude regarding Antiquity occurs first and foremost on the linguistic plane. In this sense, *Les Essais* stand as proof of a philosophical affirmation precisely because they also reveal the author's linguistic authentication.

In his presentation of Hugo Friedrich's tome, Philippe Desan indirectly confirms this thesis by stating that for Montaigne "the whole question of knowledge can be summed up under the notion of truth."[143] I say "indirectly" because what is most intriguing about Montaigne is that, in a way Lacanian before Lacan, our Renaissance author discovered that "language alone is the basis of truth."[144] However, locating Montaigne's original, natural or native language via which he would gain access to this truth and knowledge presents rather complex challenges given his fabricated introduction into language, i.e. the artifice of having learned Latin as a mother tongue.

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[143] Desan, xvi.
[144] Ibid.

I find Montaigne's position to be rather intricate because as his first language, Latin introduced the young Montaigne into the symbolic order and, by extension, positioned him in line with his father's desire and command. As will be demonstrated though, since his father's own precepts align with the Ancient Past, when Montaigne is ready to seize his voice, his language and thus his subjectivity, he will be forced to do so not only in opposition to Antiquity's authority but also to his father's. In addition, because of his engagement with the other two languages highlighted in the introduction – le francien and Gascon – Montaigne's assertive stance vis-à-vis the radical alterity of his father and of Antiquity will only be further accentuated.

On this account, in the following section of this chapter, while continuing to determine Montaigne's subversive disentanglement from the Past, I will focus on his introduction into language and his relationship with his father as a parallel for his bond with his educational mentors, Antiquity's writers and philosophers as well as Etienne de La Boétie. It seems only fitting then to return to his education and earliest contact with Latin, a language he declares to be his mother tongue even though it is neither the language of his mother nor of his country.[145]

Montaigne's Conflicted Rapport with Latin and Antiquity

One of the first glimpses we get into Montaigne's formative years emerges from "De l'institution des enfants," an essay where the author counsels Madame Diane de Foix, Comtesse de Gurson on the education of her own son. Considered one of his more

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[145] Richard Regosin expresses a similar idea in his volume *Montaigne's Unruly Brood – textual engendering and the challenge to paternal authority*.

optimistic and self-confident pieces, Montaigne explores within this essay his own

linguistic rearing and its possible consequences. He thus declares that having been raised

under the inviolable rule of *only Latin* had the following effect:

> C'est merveille du fruict que chacun y fit: mon père et ma mère y apprindrent
> assez de Latin pour l'entendre, et en acquirent à suffisance, pour s'en servir à la
> nécessité, comme firent aussi les autres domestiques […]. Somme, nous nous
> latinizames tant, qu'il en regorgea jusques à nos villages tout autour, où il y a
> encores, et ont pris pied par l'usage, plusieurs appellations Latines d'artisans et
> d'utils. Quant à moy, j'avois plus de six ans, avant que j'entendisse non plus de
> François ou de Perigordin, que d'Arabesque: et sans art, sant livre, sans
> grammaire ou precepte, sans fouet, et sans larmes, j'avois appris du Latin, tout
> aussi pur que mon maistre d'escole le sçavoit.[146]

Although Montaigne begins this passage by underscoring how greatly everyone –

from his parents to the servants to the villagers – had profited from his father's penchant

for Latin, we cannot help but sense that his tone is rather playful and ironic given the

emphasis on the process of having "Latinized" themselves so greatly that it "overflowed"

beyond their immediate household, spilling all the way to their villages. Knowing that

for Montaigne "pedantic niceties must [always] be secondary to the 'luster of a simple

and naïfve truth,'"[147] propels me then to advance that in the passage cited above, even

though the author emphasizes his prowess in Latin, he lets us catch sight of a possible

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[146] Montaigne, 180.
Translation: It is wonderful how everyone profited from this. My father and mother
learned enough Latin in this way to understand it, and acquired sufficient skill to use it
when necessary, as did also the servants […]. Altogether, we Latinized ourselves so
much that it overflowed all the way to our villages on every side, where there still remain
several Latin names for artisans and tools that have taken root by usage. As for me, I was
over six before I understood any more French or Perigordian than Arabic. And without
artificial means, without book, without grammar or precept, without the whip and without
tears, I had learned a Latin quite as pure as that my schoolmaster knew. Frame, 128.
[147] James B. Atkinson. "Naïveté and Modernity: The French Renaissance Battle for a
Literary Vernacular." *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (April – June,
1974), p. 179-196.

first justification for his eventual linguistic shift from Latin to the vernacular. How is he doing this though, we may ask?

As he declared in "Au lecteur," while writing *Les Essais*, Montaigne strove to present himself in a "simple, natural, and ordinary fashion, without straining or artifice."[148] Subsequently, we can infer that the language he needed in order to accomplish this task must meet certain requirements. Specifically, it must be just as frank, unadorned, and open to innovation as is his task is. The excerpt included above seems to lead us precisely toward such a language since, by having satirized his parents', the servants' as well as the villagers' "Latinization," Montaigne hints at Latin's artificial construction and the juxtaposing effects this language has in comparison with a much simpler and congenial lingo, possibly with the vernacular of his village. Indirectly then, he tells us that the artificial and totalizing system that is Latin could not have met the simplicity and naturalness of language he sought for his chef d'œuvre. Additionally, as he affirms later in the essay, he could never have written his works in Latin for the simple reason that his father's project to educate him solely in the Ancients' tongue had failed. This rather ironic allegation supports my claim that his quest for subjectivity is accomplished in language and sanctioned by a disengagement from the Past. The clues are revealed by his relationship with his father, particularly by the differences that distinguish the young Montaigne from his parent.

Returning then to the essay, we see that Montaigne tells Madame de Foix that "[mon] exemple suffira pour en juger le reste, et pour recommander aussi et la prudence et l'affection d'un si bon père: Auquel il ne se faut prendre s'il n'a recueilly aucuns fruits

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[148] Frame, 2.

respondans à une si exquise culture."[149] The author's father, Pierre Eyquem de

Montaigne, emerges from this passage as an exemplary paternal figure who, as the author

continues to stress, could not have done more for his son's upbringing: "il n'est possible

de rien adjouster au soing qu'il eut […] et à toutes les circonstances de ma nourriture."[150]

In fact, as Montaigne so candidly concludes, it was not his father's fault that he "reaped

no fruit corresponding to [the] excellent cultivation" he gave his son in Latin, so much as

"the sterile and unfit soil"[151] on which he had planted the 'learning' seeds. Interestingly,

if contrasted to the father's example, Montaigne does not portray himself as an exemplary

son or student. Throughout the rest of the essay, the author in fact reiterates this

difference by insisting that his educational failures are due to nothing more but his own

character's inert and lazy tendencies. He thus justifies how his naturally lax attitude,

even if indeed bolstered by his father's decision to enroll him at the age of six in the

Collège de Guyenne, constituted the principal factor concluding his Latin education.

Indirectly then, when referring to his childhood experience and education, the

author ends up opposing his father's positive attributes against his rather discordant

character. Yet, by having directed our attention to his own fallowness, Montaigne

simultaneously underscores the inadequate nature of the pedagogical curriculum laid out

by his father and in particular of the language he was pushed to acquire, Latin. In support

of this claim, we have to look no further than Richard Regosin's prominent study

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[149] Montaigne, 181.
Translation: [My] example will be enough to let you judge the rest, and so to commend both the prudence and the affection of so good a father, who is not at all to be blamed if he reaped no fruit corresponding to such an excellent education. Frame, 129.
[150] Montaigne, 182.
Translation: nothing could be added to the care he took. Frame, 129.
[151] Ibid.

Montaigne's Unruly Brood – Textual Engendering and the Challenge to Paternal authority.

As Regosin elucidates, Montaigne's *Essais* articulate a "pedagogical program that
[…] consists above all in giving the child the right language, in teaching him *how* to
speak."[152] Accordingly, when counseling Madame de Foix on the education of her son,
the author insists that proper language acquisition necessitates proper schooling, which in
turn implies a certain degree of straining and artifice. On the one hand then, he thus
confirms his father's and by extension Antiquity's educational agenda. However, if this
is true, Montaigne's advice seems rather puzzling considering that "straining" and
"artifice" are the exact mechanisms against which he has cautioned us from the beginning
of "Au lecteur." Justifiably then, we are left to ponder what exactly is his message
regarding a child's education and in particular, in respect to language?

As a possible answer, I posit that Montaigne's message comes across as
contradictory and ambiguous precisely because he finds himself trapped between the
necessity for a correct language, an educated speech and the natural lingo he seeks so as
to present himself in the subjective and truthful manner he had outlined in his address to
the reader. In his volume *Montaigne in Motion*, Jean Starobinski arrives at a similar
conclusion. Starobinski stresses that in the essay "On the education of children," while
Montaigne does indeed draw our attention to the "costly artifice that enabled him to
acquire [the Latin] language"[153] – the sacrifice imposed on the entire household by his

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[152] Richard Regosin, *Montaigne's Unruly Brood – textual engendering and the challenge to paternal authority*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 19.
[153] Jean Starobinski, *Montaigne in Motion*. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 117.

father's order – Montaigne is ultimately underscoring that, while Latin introduced him into language, it nevertheless gratified the Other's desire without any regard to his own. Specifically, as Starobinski points out, "to master [the Latin] language was to gratify [the] father's desire and to furnish proof of the productivity of an investment that sacrificed sumptuary considerations to pedagogical and moral ones."[154]

Yet, as we have seen, the father's precepts and desire are counteracted by Montaigne's innate rebellious nature, by his sluggish and lax character that leads to his failed attempts at learning Latin past the age of six. Subsequently, as Starobinski concludes, the conflict generated by the artifice of having learned Latin in an environment that was not naturally conducive to acquiring this foreign language presented Montaigne with the first opportunity "to adopt an external stance [and thus] assert his independence vis-à-vis what had once 'lured' him."[155] Drawing from Starobinksi, we can now surmise that Montaigne turned Latin against itself by surreptitiously divulging to his father that he had failed to provide him with the right language to meet his quest for subjectivity and thus to address his own desire. Montaigne thus rebels against his parent as well as against a master language that is not only the domain of his father but also of Antiquity.

The linguistic ambush – so to speak – in the midst of which Montaigne finds himself is further elucidated later on in the same essay when, as if confessing, the author tells Madame de Foix that, contrary to having learned Latin, "je voudrois premierement bien sçavoir ma langue, et celle de mes voisins, où j'ay plus ordinaire commerce. C'est un bel et grand agencement sans doubte, que le Grec et Latin, mais on l'achepte trop

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[154] Ibid.
[155] Idem, 120.

cher."[156] Almost cryptic in nuance, this particular excerpt is subtly revelatory and, again, in direct contrast not only to his earlier advice to the Countess but also to his father's educational program and thus to Antiquity.

If we stress the second phrase of the citation referenced above, Montaigne underscores the high costs of occupying oneself with the study of Greek or Latin given the possibility that, while such pursuits may indeed lead to a proper academic cultivation, such an education will nevertheless end up being inept in respect to one's quest for subjectivity. This assumption is duplicated in his later essay "On Presumption" when the author avows that unfortunately "education's goal is not to make us good or wise but learned [and] it has attained this goal [by choosing] for our instruction not the books that speak the soundest and truest opinions, but those that speak the best Greek or Latin, [and thus pour] into our minds the most inane humors of antiquity."[157] Via yet another pessimistic evaluation of education, Montaigne thus further strengthens his independent position from the Past's authority. Still, we remain puzzled by his attitude knowing that throughout *Les Essais* he had maintained a close intertextual relationship with his Ancient forefathers. In other words, we are perplexed by his simultaneously reverent yet subversive stance. How are we then to explain Montaigne's motivation or better yet, how does he justify such an ambiguous stance vis-à-vis Antiquity and language in particular?

The answer to this question is to be found back in the essay "On the education of children," specifically in the first phrase of the passage included above and where

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[156] Montaigne, 179.
Translation: I would want first to know my own language well, and that of my neighbors, with whom I have the commonest dealings. There is no doubt that Greek and Latin are great and handsome ornaments, but we buy them too dear. Frame, 128.
[157] Frame, 501.

Montaigne plainly tells us that his distancing from Antiquity is validated by a very specific desire: he wishes to know best his own language and his own historical context. We can infer that if these conditions were met he could then unbiasedly construct his personal moral code and thus succeed in analyzing and displaying himself in the simple, truthful, natural, and ordinary fashion he had outlined at the onset of his literary project. Ultimately then, when considering the passage in its entirety, we cannot help but sense that the tensions which lie at the heart of the author's desire counterbalance the high costs associated with Latin or Greek – and thus with his father and Antiquity – against the original language(s) of his milieu. By extension, if read in light of binary oppositions, Montaigne introduces us here to yet another juxtaposition: one that pairs off an artificial linguistic system against his natural heritage.

In spite of this clarification, if we recall Montaigne's multilayered linguist environment to which I alluded in the opening of the chapter, we still do not know what exactly is his authentic language. What does he imply by proclaiming that what he desires most is to know his *own* language and the language of his neighbors? As we have seen, his father's Latin cannot fulfill Montaigne's quest for subjectivity given his artificial introduction into this language as well as the fact that his lethargic character halted his Latin education rather quickly. If Latin cannot satisfy his quest for subjectivity, what language could he turn to? Are we to infer that in wanting to know his *own* language he is referring to the French vernacular that will become France's national language? If not, is he evoking the language of his birthplace – Gascon – or is he pointing us in the direction of a fluid linguistic mélange? What is the "natural" language

he so deeply desires? Richard Regosin's research offers a possible insight into this dilemma.

As the critic points out, "in one of the [most] important paradoxes of the *Essais*, Montaigne glorifies the uninstructed masses as the model for proper speaking [since their] discussion is spontaneous, forceful, true to its purpose [...] and unmediated by a traditional high culture that distorts and perverts."[158] Thus, it is the illiterate, the provincial, the barbarous, the peasants and villagers, the masons and coachmen, the cannibals even who are truly authentic and who embody the natural essence of language he so deeply desires. This amalgamate group inhabits an authentic speech precisely because, by not having access to a rigid curriculum – to the structured education Montaigne himself received, - their language escapes mediation by a higher authority. Therefore, because it is malleable and unregulated, their language – a peripheral oral discourse – is a "natural" tongue.

As Regosin continues, the opposite of such linguistic geniality is none other than rhetoric, a technique that belongs to Latin and that "Montaigne treats as [the] dominant aspect of traditional learning." Because of its emphasis on form, rhetoric "exploits the 'natural' [and by extension] becomes the site of untruth and artifice."[159] Regosin concludes by emphasizing that throughout *Les Essais* Montaigne capitalizes on this "natural" trope – be it the peasants' oral language or the cannibals he so delights in describing in the essay "Of cannibals" – precisely for the purpose of supplanting an established authority. In other words, the author exploits the natural "in order to argue

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[158] Regosin, 19-20.
[159] Idem, 20.

against all forms of cultural and intellectual artifice, against hegemonic practices, [and thus] against all surfaces that might mask and distort"[160] the truth.

Montaigne's first linguistic binary opposition can consequently be extended to juxtaposing traditional pedagogy, rhetoric and Latin against a transparent language, orality, and the unschooled. Subsequently, through his focus on language, Montaigne reveals a much larger and more encompassing duality: an antagonism pairing off the two centers of power described in the previous section: the Ancients' authority against the schismatic proposal advanced by the late Renaissance. Given the mission of his literary project – to assert his authorial subjectivity – we come to see once more that Montaigne stands against the authority of the Ancients and is undeniably agreeing with the late Renaissance's defiant assertion. The historical context thus validates his essayistic journey of self-discovery.

Nonetheless, precisely because Montaigne's self is to be found in language, it must be stressed that in a rather ironic twist, the author remains entangled within the conflict he reveals since both his literary project and his subjectivity are ultimately dependent on Latin and Antiquity. Montaigne cannot directly engage in the natural language, the subversive and transparent entity he recognizes in the masses, even though this is a language he prefers for its ability to disrupt Antiquity's inculcated authority. That is to say, while he can promote and "write about a nonrethorical 'natural' language, he cannot *write* in it in the absolute sense."[161] He can only represent it in his essays. He still needs the Ancients' tools, rhetoric in particular, if he is to successfully exemplify both the oral lingo of the peasants as well his own subjectivity.

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[160] Ibid.
[161] Idem, 21.

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Paradoxically then, the author is trapped by his own project. He is destined to turn language against itself and to use rhetoric against rhetoric throughout the entirety of *Les Essais*. This is his only option if he is to gain access into and assert his individuality in respect to the dominant Other, be it his father or the thinkers of Antiquity. What is undeniable is that Montaigne's quest for subjectivity brings him face to face with a dominant alterity that he must incorporate and rework before being able to affirm his autonomy. It is precisely because of this engagement with a dominant alterity that Montaigne's quest is analogous to that of the postcolonial writer who is just as frequently trapped between established structures of power that continue to dictate one's sense of individuality. Again, in Montaigne's case, from a purely linguistic perspective, it is Latin that stands apart as a first authority since this language does not innately belong to our author. From an aesthetic and cultural perspective, it is Antiquity that threatens Montaigne. In this sense, both structures constitute a perpetually foreign material our author cannot fully absorb.

Nevertheless, as Starobinski explains, by attempting to appropriate but ultimately repudiating this foreign material, Montaigne ends up transgressing these two structures. He goes from the "priority of Latin [and thus Antiquity] to its relegation to a secondary rank."[162] He thus "gains the independence he desires [but] only at the cost of recognizing his obligatory dependence" on the Other. He is able to become free "only by accepting the fact that he had not always been so and that his freedom remained imperfect"[163] to the end. Montaigne's stance resonates with that of the postcolonial writer in general specifically because of his discovery that knowledge and truth reside within language, but

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[162] Starobinski, 120.
[163] Ibid.

within a "natural" language he cannot access directly or reproduce textually. It is for this reason that, left with no alternative, Montaigne will be forced to continue mediating his language and subjectivity through what Starobinski sees as the perpetual "foreign material" – nothing else but the speech of the Other.

In concluding this section, by having concentrated on Montaigne's relationship with his father, I have located the author's overturning of established power structures in his linguistic education and thus in his earliest contact with the established authority of the Ancient Past. Moreover, as a writer who appropriated the late Renaissance revisionist program, I emphasized that Montaigne's position was validated and reinforced by his historical context. I would like now to direct our attention to the "natural" language that seems to dictate our author's sense of selfhood, none other than his regional Gascon.

Yet Another Conflict - Gascon and French

Montaigne first describes his Gascon language in an essay we have already reviewed: the "Education of children." While continuing to advise Madame Diane de Foix on the best modes of instruction and on her child's initiation into language, our author perseveres in promoting his own views on language and subjectivity. This essay's pertinence for our discussion on forms of authority can now be summed up as Montaigne's indirect response to the challenges posed by The Ordinance of Villers-Cotterêts, by Joachim du Belly's *Défense et illustration de la langue française*, and ultimately by La Pléiade's promotion of a specific language at the detriment of regional ones.

As Montaigne declares:

C'est aux paroles à servir et à suivre, et que le Gascon y arrive, si le François n'y peut aller. Je veux que le choses surmontent, et qu'elle remplissent de façon l'imagination de celuy que escoute, qu'il n'aye aucune souvenance des mots. Le parler que j'ayme, c'est un parler simple et naïf, tel sur le papier qu'à la bouche: un parler succulent et nerveux, court et serré, non tant delicat et peigné, comme vehement et brusque […] plustost difficile qu'ennuieux, esloigné d'affectation: desreglé, descousu, et hardy.[164]

As depicted in this passage, Gascon stands out as bold, expressive and powerful. In contrast to French, a language that through its codification and standardization is rather "dainty and well-combed," Gascon is stark, naturally dynamic, irregular, almost raw in essence. It is an organic linguistic experience predicated on the fusion between the mind and the body. It is a natural language that fills "the imagination of the listener" to the extend that it succeeds in doing away with the signifier. As a "natural speech [that is] the same on paper as in the mouth," this regional language seems in fact to have effortlessly merged the speaking/writing subject with the act of thinking. Hence, Gascon recalls Montaigne's earlier warning against pedantic formalities and artificial systems that are promoted by and in the name of upheld authorities.

Our author follows this first exposé on Gascon by a rather circuitous comparison between fabric, fashion, healthy bodies, and the general function of language. As he avows once more:

Je n'ayme point de tissure, où les liaisons et les coustures paroissent: tout ainsi qu'en un beau corps, il ne faut qu'on y puisse compter les os et les veines. Qui

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[164] Montaigne, 178.
Translation: It is for words to serve and follow; and let Gascon get there if French cannot. I want the substance to stand out, and so to fill the imagination of the listener that he will have no memory of the words. The speech I love is a simple, natural speech, the same on paper as in the mouth; a speech succulent and sinewy, brief and compressed, not so much dainty and well-combed as vehement and brusque […] rather difficult than boring, remote from affectation, irregular, disconnected and bold. Frame, 127.

soigne son discours, si ce n'est celui qui veut parler avec affectation?
L'eloquence faict injure aux choses, qui nous destourne à soy. Comme aux
accoustremens, c'est pusillanimité de se vouloir marquer par quelque façon
particulière et inusitée. De mesme au langage, la recherche des frases nouvelles,
et des mots peu cogneuz, vient d'une ambition scholastique et puerile.[165]

Here too, Montaigne's message is clear: the qualities that should be appreciated in
language are simplicity and naturalness, precisely the kinds of attributes that he has just
described as belonging to Gascon.

What is remarkable about this passage is that by condemning outlandish fashion,
Montaigne ends up surreptitiously declaiming French and the way this language is
employed by the King's courtiers. He thus reminds us of Joachim du Bellay's and La
Pléiade's efforts to augment French's prominence both through a revision of its internal
structures as well as externally, through borrowings from neighboring languages,
particularly Italian. Moreover, while discrediting French he concurrently distinguishes
Gascon as a language whose capacity for truth is inherently authentic. If we recall that
his intention in *Les Essays* was to present himself in the most honest and unadorned
manner possible, we can argue that Montaigne intimates now that the truthful and simple
Gascon is, in fact, his default language.

He does not proclaim that Gascon was his first acquired language. Such a
declaration would contradict his earlier admission that Latin was his mother tongue – up

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[165] Montaigne, 179.
Translation: I do not like a fabric in which the seams and stitches show, just as in a
handsome body we must not be able to count the bones and veins: *Let the language
devoted to truth be plain and simple. Who speaks carefully unless he wants to speak
affectedly?* The eloquence that diverts us to itself harms its content. As in dress it is
pettiness to seek attention by some peculiar and unusual fashion, so in language the
search for novel phrases and little known words comes from a childish and pedantic
ambition. Frame, 127.

until the age of six, at least. What he draws our attention to is an inherent Gascon quality that resonates with his quest for subjectivity. Because of its naturally raw character, Gascon contrasts with Latin's superior status as the language of culture and education. Similarly, it contests French precisely because of this language's purposely regulated structure. By siding with the unmediated and uncorrupted Gascon, Montaigne linguistically relocates himself at the periphery while simultaneously elevating this marginal language to a rank beyond the reach of Latin or French.

His position is clearly stated in the essay "On presumption" where, in a rather short paragraph, he confesses his linguistic and, by extension, his aesthetic identity in the following manner:

> Mon langage François est alteré, et en la prononciation et ailleurs, par la barbarie de mon creu. […] Il y a bien au dessus de nous, vers les montagnes, un Gascon, que je treuve singulierement beau, sec, bref, significant, et à la verité un langage masle et militaire, plus qu'aucun d'autre, que j'entende: Autant nerveux, et puissant, et pertinent, comme le François est gracieux, delicat, et abundant. Quant au Latin, qui m'a esté donne pour maternel, j'ay perdu par des-accoustumance la promptitude de m'en pouvoir servir à parler […]. Voylà combien peu je vaux de ce costé là.[166]

The very first line of this paragraph describes Gascon as a language that has infiltrated, infused and altered the author's spoken and written French. Juxtaposed against the delicate and elegant language of the court – a language whose qualities Montaigne does indeed recognize as gracious and abundant – or against his vanished mother tongue of

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[166] Montaigne, 677.
Translation: My French is corrupted, both in pronunciation and in other respects, by the barbarism of my home soil. […] To be sure, there is above us, toward the mountains, a Gascon dialect that I find singularly beautiful, dry, brief, expressive, and indeed a more manly and military language than any that I understand: as sinewy, powerful, and pertinent as French is graceful, delicate, and abundant. As for Latin, which was given for my mother tongue, I have lost through lack of practice the ability to use it quickly in speaking […]. That is how little I am worth on that side. Frame, 484.

Latin, Gascon asserts itself once again as a substantial language, manly, military and brief. What is it that truly makes this language resonate with Montaigne's quest for subjectivity, though?

As the author informs us, to answer this question we have to look no further than to his "barbaric home soil". His expression "la barbarie de mon creu" points us exactly to Gascon's essence since the word "creu" signifies "region" while it simultaneously resonates with the word "cru," the French for "raw" or "natural," precisely the qualities our author seeks. Gascon's sources are thus to be found in the earth, in the mountainous region of his peripheral province, a location far removed from Paris and its sphere of influence. The key to locating Montaigne is this very emphasis on the word "barbaric."

It must be emphasized though, that his use of the adjective "barbaric" when describing his locale and his language is not to be understood as graceless, boorish or brutal, disturbing or awful. Quite the contrary, Montaigne assigns this adjective a positive value judgment by stressing its historical meaning of primitive, foreign, uncivilized, and closest to origins. Knowing that for Montaigne the law of nature rules above all, Gascon's untamed and original essence is thus not only ideal but also ultimately superior to French and Latin. We can then deduce that by exploiting the trope of the natural, the author exemplifies the Gascon language as utopic and uncorrupted by the artful and indoctrinating nuances of recognized linguistic authorities such as Latin or French.[167]

From a general perspective then, if we return to Montaigne's assertion from the essay on the "Education of children" that it is the duty of words to "serve and follow" and

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[167] Following the rhetorical topos of the noble savage, Montaigne's "barbaric" Gascon anticipates the essay "Of Cannibals."

to let Gascon achieve this mission if French is failing, it is clear that our author

challenges Villers-Cotterêts' promotion of French as a maternal speech par excellence.

On a personal level though, as Dudley Marchi surmises in his article "Montaigne among

the Postmoderns: Chaillou and Sollers Reading the Essais," Montaigne's intention is to

"[transgress] fixed discursive systems, ("le Français") [in order] to put to use a marginal

discourse, ("le Gascon [which is] metaphorically his own unprecedented style.)"[168] It is

only in this manner that he could produce an authentic work of art.

By means of a regional language, Montaigne thus not only challenges French's

assumed authority but he also promotes that which is naturally his: his regional language

and his unparalleled style as an essayist. Through the domain of language and always

because of his desire to claim his independent voice, he once again critiques established

discursive systems and juxtaposes his individual principles against the authority of an

Other. Whereas earlier he had claimed his independence from Antiquity and Latin, he

has now successfully disentangled himself from Paris and French.

Montaigne's linguistic and stylistic detachment is actually replicated by his 1571

departure from Paris and subsequent relocation to his lands near Bergerac and Saint-

Émilion, in the region of Bordeaux. It is not surprising that he rejects Paris in favor of

this peripheral location. This region is home to a people and language in whose

simplicity our author delights.

As he recounts in the essay "Of presumption," he was "born and brought up in the

country […] in the midst of farming," in a region that Tom Conley describes as "à

l'équart, in a self-mortgaged parcel, […] a hilly countryside, dry [and of a] sustained

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[168] Dudley M. Marchi. "Montaigne among the Postmoderns: Chaillou and Sollers
Reading the Essais." *The French Review*, Vol. 68, No. 4 (March, 1995), p. 588.

beauty"[169] whose singularity is replicated by its people and its language. These people are the peasants whose naturalness directly contrasts with the studied and cultured character of the schooled and educated. They are the ones who match Gascon's vehement and raw orality and whom Montaigne declares himself as wanting to know first and foremost in the "Education of children."[170]

Montaigne's love of the peasants' uncorrupted character is further detailed in the essay "Of presumption" where the author declares that: "La moins dedeignable condition des gents, me semble estre, celle qui par simplesse tient le dernier rang […]. Les mœurs et les propos des paysans, je les trouve communement plus ordonnez selon la prescription de la vraye philosophie, que ne sont ceux de noz philosophes."[171] Ultimately then, in contrast to those who hold that virtue and reason require careful cultivation and proper schooling, Montaigne endows the peasants with a natural nobility that is superior to artificial learning.[172] As Richard Regosin has already instructed us, this is one of the most important paradoxes of *Les Essais* given that Montaigne intentionally employs the trope of the natural so as to underscore the primacy of original naturalness, of the peasants' language, of their lands' authenticity and unmediated composition.

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[169] Conley, Tom. "Montaigne's *Gascoingne*: textual regionalism in 'Des Boyteux'." MLN, Vol. 92, No. 4, French Issue (May, 1977) p. 710.

[170] I am referring here to the passage from on the "Education of children" where Montaigne says: "I would want first to know my own language well, and that of my neighbors, with whom I have the commonest dealings." Frame, 128.

[171] Montaigne, 691, 700.
Translation: The least contemptible class of people seems to me to be those who, through their simplicity, occupy the lowest rank […]. The morals and the talk of peasants I find commonly more obedient to the prescriptions of true philosophy than are those of our philosophers. Frame, 501.

[172] In the following chapter I will propose that Charles Ferdinand Ramuz takes a similar stance vis-à-vis the people of his regional canton.

As a result, by reemphasizing his Gascon language and the community that embodies it, a community to which he belongs by birth and to which he returns to retire, the author essentially contrasts his peripheral origins against the center of reference that was initially upheld by Antiquity and Latin, but is now occupied by Paris and French. His position is textually rendered in the essay "On some verses of Virgil" where Montaigne not only justifies but blatantly emphasizes his linguistic and artistic autonomy as well as his self-imposed removal from Paris:

> Quand j'escris, je me passe bien de la compagnie, et souvenance des livres: de peur qu'ils n'interrompent ma forme. […] Pour ce mien dessein, il me vient aussi à propos, d'escrire chez moy, en pays sauvage, où personne ne m'aide, ny me releve: où je ne hante communément homme, qui entende le Latin de son patenostre; et de François un peu moins. Je l'eusse faict meilleurs ailleurs, mais l'ouvrage eust esté moins miens: Et sa fin principale et perfection, c'est d'estre exactement mien. […] Quand on m'a dict ou que moy-mesme me suis dict: Tu es trop espais en figures, voylà un mot du cru de Gascongne; voylà une phrase dangereuse […] Ouy, fais-je, mais je corrige les fautes d'inadvertence, non celles de coustume. Est-ce pas ainsi que je parle par tout? me representé-je pas vivement? Suffit. J'ay faict ce que j'ay voulu: tout le monde me recognoist en mon livre, et mon livre en moy.[173]

An obvious declaration of independence, this passage builds on the previously cited ones and is a culmination of our author's assertive voice. Let us consider it in detail.

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[173] Montaigne, 917-918.
Translation: When I write I prefer to do without the company and remembrance of books, for fear that they may interfere with my style. […] For this purpose of mine it is also appropriate for me to write at home, in a backward region, where no one helps me or corrects me, where I usually have no contact with any man who understands the Latin of his Paternoster and who does not know even less French. I would have done it better elsewhere, but the work would have been less my own; and its principal end and perfection is to be precisely my own. […] When I have been told or told myself: "You are too thick in figures of speech. Here is a word of Gascon vintage. Here is a dangerous phrase." […] "Yes, I say, but I correct the fault of inadvertence, not those of habit. Isn't this the way I speak everywhere? Don't I represent myself to the life? Enough, then. I have done what I wanted. Everyone recognizes me in my book, and my book in me. Frame, 666-667.

To begin, the authenticity of Montaigne's project can only be secured by extracting himself from "the company of books." This statement is at first more than puzzling, knowing that Montaigne not only possessed one of the most famous libraries of his time, but that he cherished his books, many of which had been bequeathed to him by his dear friend Etienne de la Boétie. And so, by emphasizing his desire to write without "the company of books," he once again draws our attention to his predecessors' overwhelming presence, to the aesthetic forces that threatened to suppress his style and his budding authorial subjectivity. We must not forget that Montaigne neither wants nor needs a model. His style and his language are born with him and "sans patron."

His intention to withdraw from "the company of books" exposes his desire to circumvent the languages that make up these manuscripts. By relocating himself "in a backward region," while simultaneously rejecting "the company" and thus the lessons of his authorial forefathers, he also distances himself from contact with the languages of these authors. He thus warns us that Latin and French are not only aesthetic but also linguistic entities that could jeopardize his project.

As he continues, he stresses that it is possible that he could have written a better work had he chosen a different location than his peripheral domains. However, his work would have been less his own and he would thus have failed to truly seize and represent himself in his creation. It is for this reason that there is no need for him to correct[174] "the

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[174] In his letter to Monsieur de Pelgé, Estienne Pasquier, a minor member of the Pléiade movement and one of Montaigne's contemporaries, goes to great lengths to describe and analyze Montaigne's Gasconisms which he qualifies as detracting from the overall quality of the *Essais* since they contrast with "l'infinité de beaux traits françois." Consequently, he suggests that Montaigne correct these linguistic indiscretions. Unsurprisingly, Montaigne does nothing of the sort, having avowed never to correct but only to add. Marie de Gournay, Montaigne's fille d'alliance, under whose supervision

Gascon vintage" that has seeped into the French of his *Essais*. As master of his own words and master of his own domain, Montaigne simply speaks and writes from the position of what he truly is: Gascon above anything else. By recognizing his origins, he thus capitalizes on his singular location and validates the pledge he had made to himself and to his readers in "Au lecteur": to seize and represent his subjectivity in its natural form, with all of its detours and complexities.

In summary then, by virtue of an unmediated vernacular and of a peripheral locality, Montaigne's essays divulge his contact with a radically different Other whom he has engaged, but from whom he has ultimately distanced himself. He has surreptitiously exposed the skewed balance of power that pairs off his two main centers of reference – Antiquity/Latin and Paris/French – against the periphery that is naturally his – Bordeaux/Gascon. Via language, Montaigne thus exposes precisely the contacts and binary oppositions that form the core of the center/periphery dynamic.

However, there is however one question that remains. How is Montaigne's subjectivity ultimately shaped by this center versus periphery interaction? In other words, given that our author inhabits a multiplicity of languages and locations, can his Gascon identity truly be reconciled with his Past, with Latin and Antiquity as well as with his contemporary French national particularity?

The answer is yes, but it is so only because it is partly justified by the fact that Montaigne simply does not have a choice. As demonstrated earlier, the author remains

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the author's first edition is published, does not correct his Gascon vintage either. It is only in subsequent editions that these corrections occur. This explains why in the versions that are currently available to us there are so few Gascon examples remaining in the text. (Estienne Pasquier, *Choix de letters sur la littérature, la langue et la traduction*. Ed. D. Thickett. Genève: Librairie E. Droz, 1956)

trapped by the naturalness of language he discovers in the "barbarous" and the uneducated, given his recognition that he cannot truly appropriate this fluid medium. He cannot write in it. As a result, his remaining choice for writing *Les Essais* is French – a language that, although mediated by a higher authority, is nevertheless unstable and fluid enough to respond to his particular character. Montaigne had no choice but to appropriate this middle ground as the only option that could allow him to satisfy his need for authorial subjectivity as well as his desire to bolster his difference from the Other of Antiquity and the Other of his French national identity.

The secret of his tactics, so to speak, rests in his ability to negotiate the Past's influence, his regionalism as well as his national context. For this reason, Hugo Friedrich's assessment of Montaigne as a motor whose "force comes from below, from words into which the French meanings of all levels of the people have been deposited, what they say, hear, taste – but its harnessing comes from above, from a taste that has been ennobled by its contact with the ancients"[175] is strikingly apt. As such, we come to see once more that Montaigne's location is indeed a dynamic confluence where the Ancient Past encountered his Gascon self-determination seeping into a novel domain that comes through his French national identity. His essays are the grounds through which he negotiates this multilayered environment.

In his book *Barbarolexis – Medieval Writing and Sexuality*, Alexandre Leupin states that Montaigne's "entire project is played out in the interstices, and this absent/present position, [or what I would call his negotiating between the two centers of reference outlined above] is perhaps the most troubling and subversive aspect of his

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[175] Friedrich, 364.

work, [since] writing in the middle region, in that hinterland governed by neither law nor infraction, means to elude classification [and thus] to retain the privilege of one owns singularity while shirking the dominance of general categories."[176] By "eluding classification" Montaigne is able to give in freely to the joys of self-discovery and self-presentation, ultimately capitalizing on all of his sources. He is able to declare his independence from what will always remain an Other.

Yet, he must accept that, as Starobinski concludes, "he had not always been [independent] and that his freedom remained imperfect."[177] We can thus justify his subjectivity's location at the confluence between three languages: the Gascon that was naturally his, the language that was given to him by the artifice of education, Latin, and all ultimately mediated by a new force, French.

Clearly then, for Montaigne, the question of being and subjectivity is inseparable from language and location. In Gascon's case, both the language as well as the peripheral locality from which it emerges, are glorified for their capacity to diverge from the norm, to deform upheld linguistic correctness and ingrained rhetorical modes. In this manner, as Leupin concludes, "these infractions allow [Montaigne's] work to reinforce its own difference and particularity."[178]

As we have seen, though, given the conventionality of language and of the written word, Montaigne cannot truly communicate his self through Gascon's linguistic singularity. Consequently, he must perform a series of relocations and dislocations that keep him perpetually in contact with the authority of the Other. However, he always

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[176] Leupin, 225.
[177] Starobinski, 120.
[178] Leupin, 219.

emerges in motion, as an in-between, hybrid identity. It is because of this motion, because of the difference and particularity that come through his Gascon, as well as because of his constant negotiating with the inherited clout of the Ancient Past and the newly established authority of Paris, the court and French, that I see Montaigne inhabiting a charged environment that speaks of shifting power relations similar to those exposed by postcolonial theory.

The last essay I consider in support of this claim is Montaigne's "Of Cannibals." In the remaining section of this chapter, I advance that through this essay, Montaigne solidifies his difference from established authorities and thus mirrors once more the postcolonial paradigm. Just as in the previously analyzed essays, here too he will continue to perform the kind of dislocations and relocations that sustain him perpetually in motion, trapped in an unending yet constructive compromise with the Other.

"Des Cannibales"

Montaigne's essay "Of Cannibals" is without a doubt the author's most often analyzed, debated, and anthologized piece. One of the most critically acclaimed yet controversial studies of this essay is Tzvetan Todorov and Pierre Saint-Amand's 1983 article "L'Etre et l'Autre: Montaigne."[179] Todorov and Saint-Amand claim that, in his encounter with the foreign other, Montaigne failed miserably to objectively depict this unknown alterity. His failure is grounded in the "projection upon the other of an image

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[179] Tzvetan Todorov and Pierre Saint-Amand. "L'Etre et l'Autre: Montaigne." *Yale French Studies*, No. 64, Montaigne: Essays in Reading (1983), pp. 113-144.

of the self – or more precisely – of an Ideal Ego"[180] that still incarnates the norms and precepts of Greek and Roman Antiquity. Since Montaigne does not actually praise the cannibal's singularity in and of itself but rather the false discovery of his own values in this otherness, the cannibal, the foreign other can "never [be] apprehended [and] never known."[181] Todorov and Saint-Amand thus assert that Montaigne is not the relativist he thinks he is but, quite on the contrary, he is a Universalist.

Ironically, in his essay, the two authors reprimand Montaigne while simultaneously crediting him with not knowing that he comes across as a Universalist. Therefore, our author is made to be an "unconscious Universalist [who] cannot be attacked since he pretends to be a relativist. It is in good faith that [Montaigne] assimilates [the other] because he has [simply] not recognized the difference of others."[182] Yet, if this were the case, Todorov and Saint-Amand's Montaigne succumbs to superficiality and ignorance, to an unawareness of others and of his own self that runs counter to his entire essayist project.

Contrary to Todorov and Saint-Amand's assessment, I propose that in a similar manner to the previously analyzed essays, through the shifting perspectives of the word "barbare," Montaigne performs in "Des Cannibales" yet another series of discursive dislocations and relocations. Montaigne's shifting perspectives reveal a profound sensibility to the other's alterity as well as the his continuous challenge to established authorities. Montaigne's aspiration in this essay is to provoke and question his audience's strongest prejudices and cultural expectations. To achieve his mission, he

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[180] Idem, 125.
[181] Ibid.
[182] Ibid.

turns to dialectical tactics as a means of juxtaposing established interpretations of what

the cannibal alterity is against his "personal experience" with this barbaric entity.[183] The

provocation he launches is once again enacted through language.

In this sense, the author's depiction of the cannibals and of their ritualistic custom

parallels his own textual incorporation of his sources. Evoking the essay "On

Friendship," Montaigne recognizes the foreign alterity that is thus predicated once more

upon a double movement of internalizing and digesting the other's dissimilarity followed

by this recognition and its embracement. He does not universalize that which is alien but

engages and communicates with this otherness. Moreover, by comparing and contrasting

the natural/barbarous trope with civilization, he questions Europe's assumed authority as

a civilized society. He is thus able to criticize both the barbarism he encountered on the

home front in the form of the destruction and discrimination brought about by the Wars

of Religion as well as Europe's capacity for exploitation and intolerance, for brutal

colonization and cultural genocide of those who are found to be threatening civilization's

norms.

This interpretation is supported by Dudley Marchi's article "Montaigne and the

New World: The Cannibalism of Cultural Production." As the critic concludes,

Montaigne's aim in "Des Cannibales" was to "refuse ethnocentrism and subvert

Eurocentric intolerance by counteracting hegemonic ideologies, [and] thus providing a

direction that could be taken toward a reformation of what he considered to be the moral,

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[183] In his article "Dialectical Structure and Tactics in Montaigne's 'Of Cannibals,'"
Steven Rendall advances a similar interpretation. "Personal experience" is used in
quotations marks because Montaigne's personal contact with the cannibals remains
debatable.

religious, and political decay of his time." [184] His entire essay is thus a dialectical

experience that speaks of an intellectual and cultural liberation.

In essence, Montaigne's support of fluid and open-ended cultural dialogues

mirrors a postcolonial assessment of cultural rapports. His assault of Eurocentric

intolerance is already hinted at through the essay's title. Let us look at it carefully. In a

similar manner to most of the *Essais'* titles, "Of Cannibals" also announces its purpose

right away: the essay will discuss the custom of anthropophagy and those who practice it.

Keeping in mind Montaigne's Renaissance audience demands that we investigate the

meaning of the word 'cannibal' in respect to how sixteenth century Europeans would

have interpreted it. And so, as Martin Lefebvre explains in his article "Conspicuous

consumption," we owe the term 'cannibal'

> to the first encounters between Columbus and his crew and the inhabitants of the
> New World, as the former translated the name of the Carib people of Martinique, St
> Croix and St Vincent into 'Canib' and, eventually, into 'Cannibal'. The idea that
> these people were man-eaters may have come from the inhabitants of the northern
> islands […] – the Arawaks – whom Columbus first met, and who apparently
> despised and feared the Caribs of the southern islands. [185]

In support of Lefebvre's explanation, Marchi adds that it is certain "Columbus was

well versed in [Antiquity's] accounts of the legendary dog-faced anthropophagic

Cyclopes. [Thus,] in first encountering and naming the anthropophagous Caribs […]

Columbus seems to have confused the word cariba […] with the Latin canis (dog.)" [186]

As a result, when the word 'cannibal' entered the European lexicon it did so as a

rhetorical tool denoting the bloodthirsty mythical monsters Europeans already feared.

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[184] Dudley M. Marchi. "Montaigne and the New World: The Cannibalism of Cultural
Production." *Modern Language Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (autumn 1993), p. 35.
[185] Martin Lefebvre, "Conspicuous Consumption." *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 22,
No. 3, 2005, p. 46.
[186] Marchi, 42.

What is remarkable about this entire process is that it is essentially a question of

(mis)translation and ideology. As Bill Ashcroft and his collaborators detail in *Post-*

Colonial Studies – The Key Concepts, "Columbus' 'record' is far from being an

observation that those people called 'cannibales' ate other people. It is a report of other

people's words, spoken in a language of which [Columbus] had no prior knowledge, and

associated with [Antiquity's] dubious report of people with one eye in their forehead."[187]

Yet, Columbus's testimony deeply resonated with Europe's struggle as to how to depict

the New World: as idealized or as primitive and debased. Since the "the discourse of

savagery triumphs"[188] in Columbus' account, the association of man-eating cannibals

with primitivism is thus easily crystallized in the European psyche.

We can then argue that it is because of the instability of language that the New

World inhabitants were qualified as subhuman and consequently, as Lefebvre asserts, "fit

only to be enslaved."[189] Authenticated thus by language, Columbus' inscription of the

word 'cannibal' into the European imagination engendered an imperial discourse that

merged "'cannibal' and 'primitive' into a virtually synonymous relationship [that]

extends to the present day as the pre-eminent sign of the power of 'othering'."[190] In other

words, the operational definition of cannibalism gave birth to the incomprehensible fear

of the radical other and to the colonial pursuits that ensued.

Returning then to Montaigne's title, we see that by announcing its purpose, "Of

Cannibals" provokes an immediate reaction in the reader who is instantaneously

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[187] Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies – The Key Concepts*. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 30.
[188] Ibid.
[189] Lefebvre, 46.
[190] Ashcroft, 30.

confronted by the mythical cruel and ferocious savage. Again, for the sixteenth century reader, this image is highly negative in its depiction of the taboo of cannibalism. Yet, the negative reaction it provokes concurrently affirms the reader's difference from such a barbaric practice since, there is no question that civilization is anything but the repudiation of the cannibalistic taboo. Simply through his title, Montaigne has comforted and reassured his audience in their alleged superiority vis-à-vis the people of the New World while simultaneously promising them a safe yet vivid report on the cannibals and their customs.

Surprisingly though, the essay does not proceed as presumed. The very first line introduces us not to the cannibals we were expecting but to the Greek King Pyrrhus and his appraisal of the Roman armies drawing up before him on the battlefield. The reader's anticipation is thus immediately spoiled. Moreover, the audience's entire value system is scrutinized since after having surveyed the Roman legions, the Greek general is quoted as saying that there is nothing barbaric – in the modern sense of 'uncivilized' – about the foreign Romans he was about to engage in battle. It must be noted that for Montaigne's Renaissance public, the Roman army embodied courage, efficiency, and organization; it was the very product of a civilized society. Consequently, just as the great King Pyrrhus is forced to revise his bias against the Roman legions, so is the reader now challenged in his convictions past and present.

The author's provocation is reinforced when, following this anecdote, Montaigne interjects his personal opinion as to how one should examine and judge various situations. As he declares: "il se faut garder de s'attacher aux opinions vulgaires, et les

faut juger par la voye de la raison, non par la voye commune."[191] His message is

unmistakable: in the encounter with the foreign other and with the unknown, one should

rely upon one's reason and not on ordinary opinion when assessing the cultural divide

introduced by the other's alterity. Considering his warning, it is not surprising that

immediately after this declaration, Montaigne returns to the announced purpose of the

essay and introduces us to "a man who had lived for ten or twelve years in that other

world."[192] This "man" will become his chief source of information regarding the

cannibals until the very end of the essay when the author begins recounting a "long

talk[193] he himself had had with a cannibal during this individual's visit with King Charles

IX at Rouen in 1562.

Interestingly though, just as quickly as Montaigne had introduced this veritable

source of information, he dispenses with his man and diverges to a series of accounts that

speak of Antiquity's own rapport with a radical alterity. He begins by first recounting

Antiquity's appraisal of the island of Atlantis. After a rather lengthy report on the perfect

society of Atlantis and its subsequent destruction, Montaigne wonders if it may be

possible that the newly discovered world of the Americas could be a remnant of this

island. He drops this subject quickly though, suggesting that it is unlikely Atlantis and

the New World have anything in common due to the great distances that separate them.

Just as unpredictably, he follows the account of Atlantis by turning his attention to

the Dordogne River of his Gascon region, a river he recognizes as an extraordinary

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[191] Montaigne, 208.
Translation: Thus we should be aware of clinging to vulgar opinions, and judge things by
reason's ways, not by popular say. Frame, 150.
[192] Frame, 150.
[193] Idem, 150 and 159.

source of power and whose force had eroded many strong foundations. If the Dordogne continues on the same path, Montaigne declares, "the face of the world would be turned topsy-turvy."[194] After this yet another seemingly out of place detour, he once again changes subjects and turns his focus to a comparison between the discovery of the New World and that "other testimony of Antiquity with which some would connect this [event.]"[195] He is referring here to a book attributed to Aristotle via which he now speculates whether or not it is possible that the inhabitants of the New World may be the descendants of "certain Carthaginians, [who] after setting out upon the Atlantic Ocean […] at last discovered a great fertile island […] and began to settle there."[196] As expected, he dismisses this hypothesis just as quickly as all the others. Inevitably, we are puzzled by these rather abrupt digressions. What purpose do these detours serve?

As advanced earlier, they are a necessary step for Montaigne's formulation of a dialectic discourse whose aim is to demonstrate "the precariousness of all attempts to interpret one culture from the perspective of another."[197] Mirroring his essay "On Friendship," the author thus incites us once again to scrutinize established opinion when comparing or evaluating a particular subject matter. Unsurprisingly, just as he had rejected Antiquity's models of the perfect friendship in order to establish the singularity of his relationship with La Boétie, he now discredits Antiquity's remarks on the New World and follows them with his personal judgment. He solidifies his position via a return to the "crude fellow," the eyewitness we had met in the opening of the essay but whom he had quickly dismissed.

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[194] Idem, 151.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Marchi, 35.

This "crude fellow" is a rather interesting rhetorical tool given that, because of his simple character, Montaigne informs us that he does "not have the stuff to build up false inventions"[198] and thus bend the truth. In fact, because of his uncorrupted nature, this individual replicates the naturalness of the peasants admired by Montaigne and described earlier. Just as in the peasants' case, our author recognizes his witness as the embodiment of truth and knowledge, transforming him from a "crude fellow" into a locus of wisdom and veracity. Such a transformation allows Montaigne to be more than confident in his eyewitness' description of the cannibals. Subsequently, fully trusting his witness, Montaigne assures us that the savages are human beings very much like ourselves. They are living close to nature. They are happy, strong, and honorable, never sick, spending all days in dancing and merriment. They are religious and reverent to their elders, they love their wives and children, and more than anything else, they are valiant and resolute in war. He can thus confidently attest that "these nations seem […] barbarous in [the] sense that they have been fashioned very little by the human mind, and are still very close to their original naturalness."[199] It should come as no surprise then that, so far in the essay, there has been no mention, no account of the actual practice of cannibalism. How are we to reconcile this fact with the essay's title?

In truth, what Montaigne has done by focusing his attention on an account of the cannibals' society while ignoring the act of cannibalism itself, is to have once more sabotaged his readers' expectations. Montaigne's dialectic tactics have reached a pivotal point: by intentionally avoiding the essay's alleged topic, he has managed to return our attention to the lesson learned from King Pyrrhus and draw our attention to the falseness

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[198] Frame, 152.
[199] Idem, 153.

of prejudices. At the same time he emphasizes the Amerindians' superiority to the

Europeans; the Europeans have become far removed from the natural world, having

corrupted it through artifice and civilization. Montaigne's use of the word 'barbarous'

has now shifted meaning from Pyrrhus' synonym of 'uncivilized' to 'uncorrupted,'

becoming thus infused with a much more positive quality. His transformation of

'barbarous' also resonates with his application of the same term to the peasants,

language, and region of his Gascon heritage that, as demonstrated earlier, our author

praises above all.

It is only after having described the savages' idyllic relation to nature that

Montaigne finally turns to the nominal topic of the essay. Yet, the title's promised

account of cannibalism is once more overturned and comes across as rather anticlimactic

given that when he actually begins to portray them, Montaigne's cannibals are not the

subhuman brutes most sixteenth century readers would have expected. Quite on the

contrary, the author continues to construe them as exemplary. His strategy is particularly

discernible when describing the killing, the culminating encounter between the cannibals

and their prisoners. As he recounts:

> Après avoir long temps bien traité leurs prisonniers, et de toutes les commoditez,
> dont ils se peuvent adviser, celuy qui en est le maistre, faict une grande assemblée
> de ses cognoissans. Il attache une corde à l'un des bras du prissonier, par le bout
> de laquelle il le tient […] et donne au plus cher de ses amis, l'autre bras à tenir de
> mesme; et eux deux en presence de toute l'assemblée l'assomment à coups
> d'espée. Cela faict ils le rostissent, et en mangent en commun, et en envoyent des
> loppins à ceux de leurs amis, qui sont absents. Ce n'est pas comme on pense,
> pour s'en nourrir, ainsi que faisoient anciennement les Scythes, c'est pour
> representer une extreme vegneance."[200]

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[200] Montaigne, 215.
Translation: After they have treated their prisoners well for a long time with all the
hospitality they can think of, each man who has a prisoner calls a great assembly of his
acquaintances. He ties a rope to one of the prisoner's arms, by the end of which he holds

We are left to ponder once again Montaigne's purpose in presenting his readers with such an atypical account of cannibalism.

By highlighting the ritualistic components of their cannibalistic practice, the hospitality that is shown to the enemy, the complex process that leads to the sacrifice, as well as the communal sharing of the body, Montaigne purposely transforms cannibalism into a social discourse. He praises the cannibals' elaborate rituals to the extent that he elevates the anthropophagic ceremony of eating the prisoner's body to a symbolic moment. This social discourse is mandatory for the preservation of the cannibals' community in the same manner as European life and communities are regulated by other various discourses. He thus forces his readers to take a step further and recognize that this foreign other, the unsettling cannibal, is in reality a social being not all that radically different from his audience.

Simultaneously, being the social commentator that he is, Montaigne uses the cannibal's foreign alterity as a means to expose European barbarity for what it truly is. It is for this reason that he compares the New World cannibals with the ancient Scythians and with the colonizing Portuguese. Juxtaposed against the Scythians, the cannibals are no barbarians, for they do not consume human flesh for nourishment. Similarly, if measured up against the Europeans, they are nowhere close to the barbarism of the colonizing Portuguese who had refined cruelty to the extent that they became "great

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him […] and gives his dearest friend the other arm to hold in the same way; and these two, in the presence of the whole assembly, kill him with their swords. This done, they roast him and eat him in common and send some pieces to their absent friends. This is not, as people think, for nourishment, as of old the Scythians used to do; it is to betoken an extreme revenge. Frame, 155.

masters […] in every sort of wickedness."[201] Montaigne attains the climatic end of these

comparisons by declaring that: "Je ne suis pas marry que nous remerquons l'horreur

barbaresque qu'il y a en une telle action, mais ouy bien dequoy jugeans à point de leurs

fautes, nous soyons si aveuglez aux nostres."[202] Quite plainly then, he denounces our

internalized prejudices by making us see that not only were we wrong in our assumptions

of the cannibals' savage nature, but we were wholly blind and mistaken in not seeing our

own transgressions. Ultimately, by "claiming that the 'cannibals' are 'barbares' because

their social practices do not conform to Western standards of behavior […] and that the

Europeans are truly 'barbares' [because of] the atrocities committed during the religious

wars and by [the] colonialist savagery"[203] carried out in the name of the European ego, he

challenges his readers to reconsider the value of cultural relativism.

From this perspective, Montaigne's views correspond with the cultural

reevaluations put forth by postcolonial theory. As we have seen, Montaigne's

postcolonial analogy emerges through his subversive use of the word "barbarous" and

through his commentary on how this word could potentially be manipulated to justify and

serve specific interests, in particular the Europeans' desire to transplant their own values

onto that which does not align with the established norm. He thus reiterates his warning

against judging by vulgar opinion or popular say, entreating us to accept instead that

difference and culture are non-generalizable. Calling for an act of perpetual self-

interrogation, Montaigne ultimately tells us that we should always carefully evaluate our

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[201] Frame, 155.

[202] Montaigne, 216.
Translation: I am not sorry that we notice the barbarous horror of such acts, but I am
heartily sorry that, by judging their faults rightly, we should be so blind to our own.
Frame, 155.

[203] Marchi, 46.

position in respect to that which is different or distressing to accept. His viewpoint resonates with postcolonialism precisely because his method of examination exposes the self and the other as perpetually trapped within a binary structure.

However, if we return to Tzvetan Todorov and Pierre Saint-Amand's criticism of Montaigne, we are reminded that the critic had argued against Montaigne's recognition of the other's alterity. Todorov and Saint-Amand's conclusion was that Montaigne had never himself escaped his own preconceived ideals, none other than Antiquity's precepts. As has been demonstrated in the previous sections, though, Montaigne did alter this contact. Yet, he concealed it through his perpetual negotiating with the Other of Antiquity and of his French identity.

So as to prove that Todorov and Saint-Amand themselves have failed to recognize Montaigne's ingenuity we turn now to the cannibal's song as the definitive example of the author's rhetorical tactics, of his transformation of his textual forefathers and his contemporary sources into a reverent, yet assertive independence claim that manifests through language. In this sense, the cannibal's song recalls not only Montaigne's rapport with his friend Etienne de La Boétie but also his complex relationship with Latin, French, and Gascon; the linguistic triumvirate that, as we have seen, generates his perpetually fluid and shifting identity.

In the essay "Of cannibals," contrary to the essay "On Friendship" where Montaigne's challenge to Antiquity's models is well structured, the author does not present us here with as calculated of a strategy in dismissing Antiquity's account of the radical other. His descriptions of Plato's Atlantis, Aristotle's Carthaginians, the Greek general Pyrrhus and even the Scythians are all rather superficial. As is frequently the

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case in *Les Essais*, his daring challenge against Antiquity is concealed. It is hidden in his

unassuming criticism of Plato's *Republic* against which he indirectly compares the

cannibals' society, stating that the cannibals' nation "is a nation, I should say to Plato, in

which there is no sort of traffic, no knowledge of letters, no science of numbers […] no

political superiority, no custom of servitude, no riches or poverty, [...] no lying, treachery,

dissimulation, avarice, envy […] how far from this perfection would [Plato] find the

republic that he imagined."[204]

By engaging Plato in this manner, Montaigne is intentionally juxtaposing the

philosopher's rationality and intellectualism against the cannibals' inherent innocence

that remains uncorrupted by the written word or by any of civilization's assets.

Moreover, his commentary recalls his avowed preference for natural languages,

specifically for Gascon's orality. Consequently, reemphasizing his own linguistic

independence from his Ancient forefathers, the author re-confirms natural language and

orality as the sources of truth. As Dudley Marchi estimates, Montaigne's effort in the

essay "Of Cannibals" can thus be summed up as the desire "to restore in his writing the

breath of pure naturalness as found in the 'naïveté originelle' of the Tupinamba, which is

why he quotes their prisoner's execution song […] as the most striking example of

defiant lyricism."[205] By capitalizing on the cannibals' oral authenticity, Montaigne re-

affirms his own break from Latin and from the Ancients, from an outdated discourse that

is inappropriate in describing his independent subjectivity. Inevitably, though, he

remains entirely dependent on the written word as the vehicle for this message.

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[204] Frame, 153.
[205] Marchi, 39.

If we apply the same logic to deciphering Montaigne's rapport vis-à-vis the contemporary sources he includes in "Of Cannibals," we see that the author stands as much more directly assertive. His crude and simple-minded eyewitness serves as a rhetorical instrument through which Montaigne acknowledges, incorporates, and ultimately reworks his contemporaries. His primary sources were the works of the two most important explorers of his age:[206] the missionary Jean de Léry and André Thévet, France's official cartographer. These sources were essential to Montaigne's study of the New World since he himself did not have any direct contact with this newly discovered environment.

As Dudley Marchi advances, while Montaigne does not openly acknowledge it in his essay, it is evident that his "position is very much in line with Léry's journalistic account of what [the missionary had] experienced" while living with the Tupinamba Amerindians of Brazil. He is clearly opposed and critical of Thévet's account given that the cartographer had "produced a regularized series of moral lessons which associated motifs of an ethnographic order with correlative examples from Greco-Roman antiquity."[207] Thévet's account was not only in line with the established norm but was in fact based on the cartographer's travels to the Middle East and not to the New Continent. Consequently, by contrasting Léry's firsthand account against Thévet's insubstantial tales, Montaigne is able to reject the cartographer's manipulated report for being exactly that: fabricated. Thus is justified his following assertion:

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[206] Jean de Léry wrote *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil* while André Thévet wrote *Les Singularités de la France Antarctique*. As Marchi explains, "both works, particularly Léry's, provided Montaigne with the greater part of his information on the French experience in the coastal regions of Brazil during the 1550s" (37).
[207] Idem, 38.

Ils nous faudroit des topographes, qui nous fissent narration particuliere des endroits où ils ont esté. […] Je voudroye que chacun escrivist ce qu'il sçait, et autant qu'il en sçait: non en cela seulement, mais en tous autres subjects: Car tel peut avoir quelque particuliere science ou experience de la nature d'une riviere, ou d'une fontaine, qui ne sçait au reste, que ce que chacun sçait: Il entreprendra toutesfois, pour faire courir ce petit loppin, d'escrire toute la Physique. De ce vice sourdent plusieurs grandes incommoditez.[208]

Without a doubt, in this passage, our author openly denounces an authority for presenting a distorted and unverified version of the New World. As Marchi surmises, by incorporating but ultimately rejecting Thévet's work, Montaigne thus "critiques the French cultural hegemony and counters the many deliberately inflated accounts of cannibal buffets popular in the sixteenth century."[209] Furthermore, it is precisely because he had followed Léry's non-mediated journal instead of Thévet's fabrications, that Montaigne was able to invent his eyewitness and thus present us with a more veritable perspective on the cannibals and their custom. Through Léry, cannibalism is depicted not as barbaric but as a collective ritual, as an integral component of the tribe's functional mode, of their community's conservation and self-identification. Cannibalism thus becomes a signifying social discourse.

Interestingly too, this ritual has now become a semiotic transmission at whose core is replicated Montaigne's own relationship with his sources of knowledge, with his Past as well as with his contemporary peers whom, as we have seen in other essays, he

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[208] Montaigne, 211.
Translation: We ought to have topographers who would give us an exact account of the places where they have been. […] I would like everyone to write what he knows, and as much as he knows, not only in this, but in all other subjects; for a man may have some special knowledge and experience of the nature of a river or of a fountain, who in other matters knows only what everybody knows. However, to circulate this little scrap of knowledge he will undertake to write the whole of physics. From this vice spring many great abuses. Frame, 152.
[209] Marchi, 37.

had no choice but to incorporate and rewrite if he was to assert his authorial subjectivity as well as advance his reformulation of intercultural relations. Reminiscent of his rapport with Etienne de la Boétie, Montaigne's rendition of the cannibals eating human flesh is thus replicated by his own textual cannibalism. The eating of the flesh has become the eating of the word and of language; it will be regurgitated in the form of a new body, of a novel discourse and language that could more adequately speak of the Past's remembrance as well as of the necessary rupture from it, of the transmission of power and collective identification but also of self-assertion.

We are reminded here of Antiquity's concept of *philia*, which in Jean-Claude Milner's *Constats*[210] is defined as being "au fondement de tous les rapports"[211] and ultimately translates as the incorporation/absorption of one essence into another, with the two essences still retaining their distinctiveness. In its most extreme form, this "plaisir antique" of incorporation/absorption takes the form of cannibalism. What must be underscored though is that "l'incorporation du plaisir antique est affirmation – et non pas consequence – de la conaturalité."[212] Going back to the cannibal's song, we now recognize that, just as the prisoner defies his captors with his words by having absorbed his own sources, so does Montaigne. Thus, contrary to Todorov's assertion that our author had failed to understand the other because he still incarnated the precepts of

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[210] Jean-Claude Milner, *Constats*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1992).
[211] Idem, 78. My translation: the foundation of all rapports.
[212] Idem, 80. My translation: incorporation, in this sense, is an assertion – and not a consequence – of being connatural.

Antiquity, we see that because of his own textual cannibalism, Montaigne has once again maneuvered and transformed them.[213] He has become the other.

Montaigne is definitely aware of his transformation since, at the end of the essay he gives voice to one of the cannibals whom he declares having met at Rouen. Yet, in an ironic twist – and what I take to be a last effort to overcome all dogmatic ethnocentric intolerance – he once more castigates "la voye commune." The irony is that this time he draws our attention to the cannibals' own incomprehension of the French society given that, in their own encounter with the foreign other, with the European, the savages cannot help but judge the French otherness by their own system of values. Thus is explained their bewilderment at the many strong and grown men who showed obedience to a child king and their incomprehension of the French society's disparity between the rich and the poor.

In the end, Montaigne's essay is not so much about the condemnation of one entity or one behavior and the praise of another but an overall "denunciation of human separatism and exclusivism in general,"[214] a postcolonial reprimand of discrimination based on difference. In this sense, his sarcastic comment on the cannibals' lack of underpants – "All this is not too bad – but what's the use? They don't wear breeches"[215] – is not a return to his European cultural mode but simply, an exaggerated expression of

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[213] Milner's definition of *philia* helps justify Montaigne's recanting of his promise to include La Boétie's *Servitude Volontaire* within his own *Essais*. As I had concluded in the essay "Of Friendship," by going back on his word, Montaigne simultaneously affirms his independence and also relocates La Boétie and his death within himself. He thus simultaneously recognizes his friend's dissimilarity and avoids a displacement that would leave no trace of his companion. This can only happen through a double movement of internalizing the other while recognizing its alterity.
[214] Marchi, 47.
[215] Frame, 159.

that which is artificial and arbitrary since cannibalism, as a mark of division, has now been replaced by fashion.

Through this last comparison, Montaigne finally states what his intent had been throughout the entire essay: to shake his readers' prejudices while teaching them to see the other's difference in their own. Ironically though, just as Todorov and Saint-Amand had concluded, Montaigne's stance in "Of Cannibals" does indeed come across as a Universalist principle. However, the author emerges as such not because he reduces the other's difference to his own but because he shows us how to recognize that our construction of the other is never value neutral. His lesson, so to speak, tells us that the difference between the Self and Other is always and already interpreted through language and established cultural systems. Thus, regardless of our attempts, the Other can never be entirely reduced or generalized to our own identification. As Dudley Marchi concludes, "we should [then] pay greater attention to our own language and reconsider how past mistakes can be transformed into […] positive achievements."[216] Clearly then, our language is of the utmost importance because it is that which allows us to make sense, interact, and reconcile with one another. Montaigne's message should thus be interpreted as a call for a more flexible approach to cultural interactions, for an open-ended dialogue that would concurrently recognize and affirm our diverse identities.

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[216] Marchi, 49.

Concluding Remarks

In concluding this chapter, by having traced Michel de Montaigne's dislocations and relocations through language – through Latin, French, and Gascon – I have demonstrated that the author fought to secure his independent authorial voice by engaging and subverting two specific centers of authority: Latin/Antiquity and French/Paris. Simultaneously, we saw that rival languages and cultural modes competed for domination and that this, in turn, defined not only political and social spaces but also, at the most elementary level, one individual's sense of identity. It is for this reason that I emphasized the competitive interaction between Latin, French, and regional languages. This interplay exposed a reversal of powers and the establishment of Paris as a new cultural center, as an entity to which and against which future Francophone writers will respond.

In respect to Montaigne's position, the language that mattered most for our author was Gascon, a natural language which the author identified as a locus of knowledge and truth, and whose sources transpired from a peripheral location, from the earth and from the simple people of his birthplace. However, because Gascon was a regional language and thus not sufficiently powerful to be recognized as a linguistic and cultural authority, we saw that Montaigne was forced to compromise and chose French as the medium of his expression. Yet, precisely because of his various positions within language(s), he remained perpetually engaged in a transaction with his past, with his present, as well as with the various centers of authority that controlled linguistic, aesthetic, and cultural production. As demonstrated, he seized his authorial subjectivity through a gradual

rejection of these historical and literary authorities and by inventing a new discursive

mode and style: the essay.

It must be stressed, though, that he was able to assert his authorial independence

only by compromising and accepting that he was ultimately an in-between, a perpetually

shifting identity. His compromise is not a negative event but rather subversive. He

knows his *Essais* will shock his audience and the expected literary norm precisely by

being a composite work of art where language is borrowed from many locations and

sources are mixed and piled up. Yet, because he stands against the expected norm, his

Essais are organic and, as Edouard Glissant declares in his article "The French Language

in the Face of Creolization," his work is "magnificent and beautiful because [his

language] has not yet been purified."[217] Glissant's appraisal of Montaigne's work as

organic allows the critic to affirm that Montaigne's language is in fact creole since "it has

not yet been sifted through Malherbe's grim sieve,"[218] a notion that I will demonstrate to

be just as applicable in the case of Charles Ferdinand Ramuz.

In the end, via his rapport with the Other of Antiquity, with the Other of his peers,

and of the foreign cannibal, Montaigne discovered that there can be no certain or

complete definition of one's sense of identity. In fact, as Jean Starobinski's brilliant title

captures it, he tells us that identity is always in motion, marked by the absence of totality,

never static and always in contact with an authoritative Other that we are bound to

perpetually engage with in a struggle for affirmation. For this reason, I argued that the

essays analyzed in this chapter reveal similar dilemmas to those that preoccupy

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[217] Edouard Glissant. "The French Language in the Face of Creolization." *French Civilization and its Discontents – nationalism, colonialism, race*. Ed. Tyler Stovall and Georges Van Den Abbeele. (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2003), 107.
[218] Ibid.

postcolonial studies in general: the universal dominating/dominated rapport and the notion that we must live by self-interrogation and tolerance in our exchange with the other. Just as postcolonial writers advance everywhere, Montaigne also tells us that it is only by engaging the other that we can be certain to achieve a mutually beneficial interaction with that which will nevertheless remain foreign to ourselves.

In other words, as Montaigne has shown us in *Les Essais*, in our search for subjectivity and in our contact with the Other, "it is, after all not Reason [itself,] but the path to reason [that we must] follow – the attempt to achieve an enhanced relationship to difference and otherness."[219] As he did via his relationship with Etienne de la Boétie, with Antiquity's mentors,[220] with barbarism and cannibalism, Montaigne states and restates that we must always consider and evaluate the "many sides of the multifarious cultural codes of the world. [Suspending our] adherence to impossibly locked binarisms [is the only action that] could lead to improved human relations." [221] Even more importantly, the author has taught us that this is a task that can only be accomplished through language, not only because language engages us but even more so because selfhood is bound to language. In the following chapter we will see that this notion similarly pervades Charles Ferdinand Ramuz's reflections on identity.

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[219] Marchi, 49.

[220] It must be stressed here that Montaigne's work is based on yet another model provided by Antiquity, the model of the 'seven arts'. For this reason, for Montaigne it is natural to question and attack all aspects of his environment.

[221] Marchi, 49.

Chapter 2 – Charles Ferdinand Ramuz

In a series of interviews conducted with various Francophone writers and published in 1997 under the title *L'Ecrivain Francophone à la croisée des langues*,[222] the Canadian critic Lise Gauvin investigated the Francophone author's rapport with the standard French language, the language of a literary and intellectual center of definition to which in some form or another all Francophones respond. This center of definition is none other than Paris, while the standard French language is the once-upon-a-time francien dialect of the Ile-de-France/Parisian region now fully legitimized as the language of culture and literature.

As it emerges from the conversations Gauvin has with, for example, the Belgian Jean-Pierre Verheggen, with Gaston Miron who is from Québec or with the Martinican Patrick Chamoiseau, regardless of their particular location or historical background, Francophone writers are engaged in an ambivalent relationship with standard French. Their problematic rapport is born out of the inherent discord that exists between French as a center of reference reflecting a particular location, culture, and politics of identity and its frequent role as a maternal or secondary language to individuals who do not necessarily belong to the same specific location, culture, or politics. The Francophone writer is thus engaged in a dual struggle: against an established linguistic model and, even more significantly, against the aesthetic norm that is promoted through language and cultural attributes. Following Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, we can then sum up the Francophone's dilemma as representative of a larger issue: the resistance of the Symbolic

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[222] Lise Gauvin, *L'Ecrivain Francophone à la croisée des langues: entretiens*. (Paris: Editions Karthala, 1997).

order to radical and real innovations, to the emergence of singularities that conflict with and displace the privileged models.

The range of authors whom Gauvin engages is worthy of note especially because the critic does not stress a specific history, the history of colonialism for example, as leading to this conflict. Instead, she emphasizes the result of having come into contact[223] with a foreign linguistic and cultural alterity and the various processes through which the Francophone writer responds to this entity. She draws our attention to the contact with an Other that is found in language and hence, in culture, but that will always remain outside the grasp of the non-native Hexagonal French.

Lise Gauvin's observations renew the topics addressed in the previous chapters by now taking us beyond the geographical frontiers that mark the French territory and into the space of the Francophone. The critic now extends the linguistic and aesthetic complexities identified earlier to preoccupying all writers who inhabit a plural milieu where one language – French – is promoted as dominant. Evoking Michel de Montaigne's position, in what concerns the Francophone's dilemma, Gauvin also identifies linguistic and cultural authorities as leading to a clash between the Self and the Other, to a process of exchange and exclusion, a matter of identification with and desire for the Other, but ultimately a process where difference from the Other becomes the most important form of self-assertion.

As it emerges from Gauvin's work, all of the Francophone authors she interviews express a certain friction with Hexagonal French, a resistance that transforms these writers and their medium of expression. The novel entity that emerges speaks of

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[223] For additional work on "contact zones," see Mary-Louise Pratt's *Imperialized.*

linguistic compromise and innovation, as well as of the Francophone writer's recognition of an essential French otherness that remains a struggle to grasp. For self-assertion to succeed, the Francophone writer must incorporate and transform this otherness. In a sense then, just like Michel de Montaigne, all the Francophone authors Gauvin includes in her study find themselves in a subordinate position from which they challenge and alter their rapport with the French center of authority. Remarkably, the first author Gauvin recognizes as the epitome of this amendment to the center is none other than the Swiss writer Charles Ferdinand Ramuz.

While Charles Ferdinand Ramuz is indeed one of the most prolific French-speaking Swiss authors, he is also one of the most unknown and rarely studied Francophone writers. Frequently categorized as a regional novelist, C. F. Ramuz has in fact been relegated to the periphery of Francophone studies primarily for two reasons: first and foremost because of the provincial themes he treats – the peasant, the attachment to the native land and to the old; and secondly, because of the stylistic simplicity of his literary language which is infused by the dialectical and oral qualities of his Vaudois vernacular. Truthfully, C. F. Ramuz has been relegated to the periphery of Francophone studies because of yet another factor – his identity as a Swiss Francophone. What exactly are the implications of this statement?

Ramuz' Francophone characteristics do not reflect a past conflict with France. His Francophone identity was not born out of a colonizing/colonized discord. Quite on the contrary, his Francophone identification is first and foremost defined by his geographical and cultural contingence with the Hexagon. As a result, his entire literary production has frequently been reduced to representing a national literature that *happens*

to be influenced by France because of geographical proximity and hence because of the linguistic and cultural transfers occurring between Switzerland and its neighbor. It is for this reason that Ramuz has been frequently categorized as a regional writer.

Yet, such an assessment of Charles Ferdinand Ramuz, and of Swiss Francophone identity in general, is not only superficial but also rather erroneous. It is a false appraisal because it fails to take into consideration the possibility that Ramuz or the concept of "Swiss Francophone-ness," so to say, could in fact be read as born out of a problematic cultural rapport, out of skewed power relations that may have nothing to do with overt colonial ambitions but that are nonetheless just as representative of a dominating/dominated rapport. As argued in the introduction of this dissertation project, our failure to recognize Ramuz' predicament arises from the indoctrinating capacity of terminology which contents itself with restricting the meaning of "dominating/dominated rapports" to a specific colonial interpretation. Lise Gauvin's inclusion of Ramuz in the same spectrum as Miron and Verheggen – two authors who do not come from a specifically colonized environment – and Chamoiseau, who does, is one of the few contemporary studies that simultaneously calls attention to Ramuz' mislabeling as a "regionalist," and to his position as a forerunner Francophone author whose link to the Hexagon is complicated not by a past history of military or economic domination but by a history of cultural control and patronage.

Drawing from Gauvin, in this third chapter of my dissertation project, I will investigate Charles Ferdinand Ramuz' position as a dominated writer who, very much like Michel de Montaigne, seized his authorial subjectivity from a figure of authority that dictated the norms of literary and cultural production. Just as in Montaigne's case,

Ramuz' peripheral locality engages him in a power play where standard French and Paris occupy the main points of reference. Again, it is this very proximity that complicates Ramuz' Francophone identity for, as Pascale Casanova explains, it essentially "prevented [the Swiss author] from establishing himself in Paris. Because he spoke French with an accent [Ramuz] was too close – too provincial – in the eyes of the consecrating authorities to be accepted [and thus] not far away enough – not sufficiently foreign, exotic, [or] new – to arouse their interest."[224]

In spite of Paris' response, once Ramuz will become consciously aware of the center's attitude, he will refute its hegemony in a manner very similar to Montaigne's: by inventing an original literary discourse. Through this discourse Ramuz will build a discursive yet simplistic style that challenges the established authority of standard French while simultaneously allowing the Swiss author to reposition himself at a farther and thus, safer and more intriguing distance from the French center of authority. Ramuz succeeded in his task by capitalizing on the unique French Romande particularity of his native region. Because of this reposition, the Swiss author ultimately avoided assimilation by the French literary field and proclaimed his independence from the Parisian literary elites. Yet, like Montaigne, his affirmative stance also demanded a compromise.

On the grounds outlined above, Charles Ferdinand Ramuz' quest for authorial subjectivity calls to mind the difficulties and dilemmas confronting postcolonial writers everywhere. Just as Verheggen, Miron, and Chamoiseau teach us to go beyond a centralized French-speaking realm, so does Ramuz. He encourages us to celebrate

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[224] Casanova, 217.

intercultural dialogue, the periphery's transformational force, and consequently the non-hierarchical interdependency that may be achieved between different cultural environments.

The works that affirm his position the strongest are his literary manifesto *Raison d'être* and his famous letter to his French editor Bernard Grasset. Through these essays, the Swiss author continues Montaigne's work and aligns himself with other Francophones by exposing what Pascale Casanova calls a "Renaissance vaudoise," a label that could just as easily be read as "Swiss creolité." Before analyzing these two essays, it is necessary to first and foremost contextualize Ramuz as both Vaudois and Swiss. Thus, in the following sections, so as to better locate our author and consequently more easily identify his self-determinative attitude in *Raison d'être* and *Lettre à Bernard Grasset*, I will summarize C. F. Ramuz's relationship with his origins as well as with the French metropole.

Ramuz' Environment

Born in 1878 in Lausanne, in the canton of Vaud, to a father who was a small-time business owner and a mother who came from a long line of viticulturists, Ramuz spent his childhood and his early adolescence in the city. No great distinguishment marks his early years apart from the fact that, as David Bevan describes in his book *Charles Ferdinand Ramuz*, Ramuz embraced from an early age "nearly all available reading material [while being nevertheless] easily distracted from everything

'academic'."[225] He did not excel in school, demonstrating in fact rather mediocre aptitudes for most subject matters. There was however one exception – he excelled in French and not just any French – the standard French norm, the language of the French Academy, a language instituted by the Swiss administrative and educational systems as the primary norm to be taught in school.

Ramuz' proclivity for academic French is noteworthy because of this language's juxtaposing features vis-à-vis the Swiss French regional varieties that were deemed to be inferior given their lack of codification and regulation. These *patois*, at whose detriment standard French was imposed, existed mostly in oral form. Ramuz's French was thus regulated by the Swiss educational system through a formal methodology which attempted to cement linguistic value in the written form. Ultimately then, education not only maintained but intentionally promoted the hegemony of "good French" over the linguistic variations naturally developed in the Swiss Romands cantons but perceived as "bad." The discrepancy introduced between "bad" and "good" French reveals a Swiss reverence not only to the Hexagon but specifically so to the Parisian academic, literary, and cultural elites. In fact, as Jérôme Meizoz argues in his book *Le Droit de "mal écrire,"*[226] the Swiss administration actively pursued a policy of codification and standardization meant to align the Swiss French variants with the standard norm. Following such active measures, codification and standardization led to nothing short of a linguistic purification carried out at the detriment of the Swiss French vernaculars.

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[225] David Bevan, *Charles Ferdinand Ramuz*. (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979), 19.
[226] Jérôme Meizoz, *Le Droit de "mal écrire"*. (Carouge-Genève: Editions Zoé – Collection critique, 1998).

In what concerns literary language, this program's repercussions begin to be seen as early as 1829 through the works of such literary authorities as Alexandre Vinet, Virgil Rossel and Philippe Goded, who emphasized that Swiss literary production should conform in all aspects to the French model. As Virgil Rossel stressed in his *Histoire littéraire de la Suisse romande,* becoming an exceptional Swiss writer was tantamount to being a "fanatic of the best French,"[227] to taking language and stylistic lessons in Paris. The French capital and its language were thus distinguished as emblematic centers of literary and artistic production, as the symbolic headquarters of power and knowledge.

Inevitably, though, what was initially an aesthetic reverence to the norm can nevertheless be read as a political miscalculation – particularly if we consider that continuous reference to an external center of aesthetic definition can ultimately undermine the development of an authentic literary individuality that may or may not develop into a form of national literature. For this reason, Pascale Casanova draws our attention to the fact that it is precisely through language that "the literary world remains subject to political power."[228] In fact, because they are concealed by language, "forms of domination which are interlocking and superimposed upon one another are apt to merge and become hidden."[229] As a result, the position of the Francophone writer, regardless of his or her location or the process by which they have become Francophone, is both tragic and paradoxical. Francophone writers recognize that Paris and French are the very sources of linguistic, literary, and political domination that dictate and regulate their identities and creative endeavors. Yet, they simultaneously seek validation from

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[227] Rossel cited in Meizoz, 20.
[228] Casanova, 115.
[229] Ibid.

precisely these loci of power. Since this form of domination is not openly expressed,

writers who struggle against it are often left with few strategies to undermine it. Because

of this, Casanova concludes that "the methods [authors must] devise for escaping literary

destitution become increasingly subtle, on the level both of style and of literary

politics."[230] As we will discover in the essays selected for this chapter, this is the struggle

that Ramuz faces as well.

Returning to our investigation of the author's background, the most notable event

to have marked his youth was his parents' decision to leave the city as soon as he passed

his baccalaureate and return to their provincial roots, to the countryside. As David Bevan

explains, this move constituted Ramuz' "true 'découverte du monde,' [a] moment of

radical and vigorously physical awareness which was to condition [his] future

itinerary."[231] Bevan underscores this event's importance, as this first contact with the

Vaudois countryside triggered in the young Ramuz an immediate appreciation for

unaffected simplicity, for the language of the common people, for the local and natural

and, as the critic concludes, for the "common essence in man."[232] These are precisely the

themes that will become Ramuz' chief creative preoccupations, permeating his entire

literary production from the very first poems he composed to the substantial novels of his

later career. In this sense, the relocation to the countryside provided Ramuz with all the

necessary materials for his artistic endeavors, including access to the patois of his region

– a language drastically different from the "good French" he had learned in school given

its essentially creole, amalgamate, and unregulated nature. It is precisely the incongruity

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[230] Idem, 177.
[231] Bevan, 18.
[232] Idem, 22.

between our author's two languages and the cultural material they carry that will precipitate his troubling relationship with the French metropole.

Returning to Ramuz' relocation to the countryside, this move was also to have a negative effect on the boy, since it led to a clash between the young author and his father. Ramuz' father wanted his son to pursue a more pragmatic and economically gratifying occupation than that of becoming a writer.[233] It is thus through conflict and through an assertion contrary to his father's desire that Ramuz declares for the first time his wish to become a novelist as well as his yearning to travel to Paris, the capital of all cultural production, the center that will sanction his authorial pursuits.

The consequences of Ramuz' move from the city to the province are of the utmost significance since this trajectory ultimately allowed the young author an imaginary return to his rural ancestors, to a lineage that had been purposely interrupted by his parents' rejection of their rustic origins in favor of a bourgeois lifestyle. The return to the countryside constitutes our author's first coming into contact with an otherness that is initially troublesome, but that will ultimately prove to be the very source of his authenticity and independence. This otherness is at first disconcerting because it situates Ramuz against his family and against his academic values. In fact, as he so candidly

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[233] Ramuz' assertion vis-à-vis his father's authority resonates with Montaigne's clever rejection of his own father's desire. It also indirectly highlights an important economic feature that distinguishes the two authors and that helps explain both their means of negotiating with the center, as well as their final concessions to this center. To clarify, we recall that given his status as a gentilhomme, Montaigne did not have to write for a living. Our Renaissance author actually despised his peers who made their living "de leur plume." In contrast, Ramuz does not have the financial flexibility to be as lax. This factor will affect his position vis-à-vis Paris since, after rejecting this literary center of reference – a stance he develops in *Raison d'être* – his literary qualities will nevertheless be recognized and he will accept to be published in the French capital, under none other than Bernard Grasset. For this reason, Ramuz' compromising can be justified economically, whereas Montaigne's was primarily aesthetic.

recounts in his journal, because of this clash, Ramuz saw himself utterly isolated and

completely misunderstood:

> On m'a jugé d'après mon milieu: je pense que personne ne m'a jamais connu. […] Mon entourage m'a jugé d'après lui-même, et je n'étais pas ce qu'il était. […] Un entourage embourgeoisé, et je n'étais pas un bourgeois. Moi, [je descends] au dessous de moi-même et en me défaisant des acquisitions de hasard que je dois à l'école, à mes etudes, à mon milieu, à mes parents. […] Je pense à ce que je dois faire, et que j'ai à me défaire. […] Je prétends redescendre à une nature qui subsiste par dessous. […] C'est une démarche éminemment naturelle, vers une nature, et mon seul mérite est d'avoir toujours distingué et recherché cette nature. […] Ce que je recherche, c'est l'intensité – celle d'en bas. […] Mes vrais compagnons m'ignorent, mais je ne les ignore pas.[234]

While this passage exposes his problematic relationship with his family and his

peers, it simultaneously reveals a *prise de conscience*. The 'true companions' who ignore

him, but whom he does not ignore are none other than the simple people of his Vaudois

canton, the only ones who are truly close to that 'eminently natural' essence he seeks.

Reminiscent of Montaigne's admiration of the peasants' inherent naturalness, Ramuz also

distinguishes these plain and common people. He celebrates them by contrasting them

against his immediate bourgeois environment – the fabricated path chosen by his parents

– as well as from anything that could corrupt their natural intensity – standardized

education, for example. By including himself in their class, it becomes evident that

Ramuz' aim is to differentiate himself from his parents as well as from his academic

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[234] C. F. Ramuz. *Journal 1896-1942*. Paris: Editions Bernard Grasset, 1945, p. 266. My translation: I was judged by my environment. I do not think that anybody ever knew me. […] My entourage judged me after itself and I was not what it was. […] A gentrified, middle-class group. I was not middle-class. I, I descend below myself and by undoing all the chance learning and acquisitions that I owe to school, to my studies, to my environment, to my parents. […] I reflect upon what I must do, and that I have to undo myself [...] I wish to go back to a nature that survives underneath. […] It is an approach eminently natural and my only merit is to have always distinguished and sought this nature. […] What I search for is the intensity that comes from down below. My true companions ignore me, but I do not ignore them.

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background. Consequently, because he recognizes it as implicitly his own, Ramuz'

intention is to seize the otherness he discovers in his ancestral origins.

Unfortunately, though, at this moment in Ramuz' development not only as a

writer but also as an individual, while he is indeed aware of the potential energy of this

otherness, he is nevertheless unable to genuinely access it as a wealth of knowledge, as a

veritable source of power. It is almost as if his juxtaposition against his family and the

education received in the canton are not challenging enough, not troublesome enough to

provoke an indisputable assertion and thus truly authenticate his return to the ancestors.

Ramuz will nevertheless encounter just such a challenge in Paris, an environment that

forces him to face his obvious foreignness not only as Swiss but also as a writer whose

creative preoccupations are judged as banal.

Regarding his introduction to the French capital, the young Ramuz first journeyed

to Paris under the pretext of pursuing a doctoral thesis. Yet, during the six or so months

that he was there, he did not actually pursue his dissertation and, in the end, his first

journey was rather brief and uneventful. By comparison, his next move to the French

metropole was to last over a decade and can be summed up as a period during which the

young author struggled to secure his place among the Parisian literary elites.

While in Paris this second time around, Ramuz wrote and published profusely.

His most notable works from this period are: *Aline, La Grande Guerre du Sondrebond,*

Les Circonstances de la vie, Aimé Pache, peintre vaudois and *La Vie de Samuel Belet*.

The common denominator linking these novels is an emphasis on solitude, nature,

happiness and tragedy, and an intense preoccupation with the countryside and its

residents. Ramuz' stylistic methodology consists in letting his modest protagonists, the

countrymen of his Vaudois canton, speak for and as themselves. As such, these novels make up the first examples of Ramuz' deliberate transposition of his "mauvais français" into the written form. Embodied by his characters, orality thus becomes an entirely functional narrative language through which Ramuz loudly proclaims his desire to promote and restore the linguistic authenticity of his native region. Unsurprisingly, given the aesthetic expectations and the literary norms upheld by Parisian writers and critics, he was harshly judged for having treated such trivial subject matters as the countryside and its people, and even more so, for having written in their uneducated language.

One of the more positive events to have marked Ramuz' life in the French capital, and one whose consequences is seen in most of his later works, was his introduction to painting. His love of painting is striking because, as Bevan notes, Ramuz' "affection for pictorial art impregnated his life and, inevitably, his [entire] creations."[235] Yet, this affinity constituted a further reason for which the Swiss author was repeatedly attacked as simplistic, as focusing too much on the superficial naïveté of the natural environment and of the people who inhabit it. Ultimately, because it helped bring in focus Ramuz' radically different artistic preoccupations in contrast to the Parisian values, his love of painting indirectly led to his decision to return back to Switzerland. And so, in 1914, right before the start of the First World War and after more than a decade of having lived in Paris, Ramuz returned to his Vaudois canton.

As David Bevan stresses once more, "the importance of this sojourn to the evolution of the young artist cannot be overstated, for it was above all in Paris that [Ramuz] became aware of himself. It was only in absence that [the author] became truly

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[235] Idem, 31.

aware of the quality and the significance of his own country,"[236] of the constructive

otherness of his own roots. In other words, it is only after his prolonged contact with the

French metropole – with a foreign Other that he can neither assimilate nor be accepted by

– that Ramuz can finally begin to access the wealth of knowledge that came through his

return to origins. In this sense, although Ramuz' contact with Paris was essentially a

drastic lesson in identity formation, the metropole's rejection and his subsequent return

home constituted the turning point in his quest for his veritable sources of identity and for

authorial independence.

La Voile latine and *Cahiers vaudois* – between National Identity and the Canton

Ramuz's *prise de conscience* was so abrupt that, immediately after his return

home, together with a group of young Swiss artists and writers, the author embarked on a

collaborative endeavor to create and publish a literary magazine whose purpose was to

draw awareness to their specificity as vaudois and to "their region as an exemplary

microcosm of the wider community of man."[237] Ramuz and his collaborators' desire was

to call attention to their productive literary space as distinct from, but just as valuable as,

the French literary field. The magazine they founded is none other than *Cahiers vaudois*,

a publication that dedicated its first number to Ramuz' *Raison d'être*, thus recognizing

this literary manifesto as its credo.

Before tackling the essay itself, I suggest we reflect a moment on this magazine's

mission given that its title, *Cahiers vaudois*, speaks not only of the writers' alleged

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[236] Idem, 21.
[237] Idem, 50.

purpose to diverge from the French literary field, but also announces their departure from a national discursive space. It thus reveals a double reversal of authorities, an external as well as an internal shift in power dynamics, a move that further complicates the concept of Swiss Francophone specificity.

Through its title, *Cahiers vaudois* implicitly comments on identity both from a national perspective as well as from a localized plane, from the site of a cantonal minority. The trouble is that Swiss national and cantonal identities do not easily align. This unease clarifies Ramuz' position vis-à-vis France by grounding our author very specifically within a region, within the canton of Vaud. Yet, precisely because of the canton's autonomous constitution, the region to which he belongs is not supported by an established national culture. Consequently, in matters of cultural and literary production, the canton is not easily recognized as a genuinely dynamic literary field. It is noteworthy that *Cahiers vaudois* was in fact born out of the demise of an earlier literary review, *La Voile latine*. *La Voile latine* had crumbled precisely because it had attempted to bridge Swiss nationality and cantonal affinities. Ultimately then, identifying first and foremost with the canton destabilizes Ramuz' position at the national level as well as in respect to France. A brief investigation of these two magazines will help elucidate his fractured relationship.

To begin, *La Voile latine* was first published in 1904 and Ramuz contributed to it right before he first journeyed to the French capital. As its title suggests, *La Voile latine*[238] was a magazine whose main focus was a return to traditions – a recognition,

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[238] Although not translated in English, the magazine's English title would be "The Latin Veil." Interestingly though, a "voile latine" is also a maritime term for a triangular sail known as a "Latin rig." I find it intriguing to note this equivocal meaning since we can

exposition, and defense of Latin's direct influence on French Swiss identity.

Simultaneously, *La Voile latine*'s intention was to portray French Swiss characteristics as

anchored in the canton. What is surprising is that the review also had a subtitle – *"revue

de culture Suisse"*[239] – a caption that problematizes the magazine's announced purpose.

The implicit discrepancy between the magazine's title and subtitle highlights

Switzerland's constitution as a federal state construed on radically different components

– a rugged topology, two distinct religions, a variety of ethnic bonds born out of the

country's link with its neighbors and, most importantly of all, four different languages.

These factors ultimately underscore Switzerland's recognition of territorial unity above

national identification.

     As André Siegfried illustrates in his book *Switzerland – A Democratic Way of

Life*, to better understand the antagonism that is at the core of the Swiss federal state, we

should remember that "Switzerland was not formed by unification but by aggregation.

She achieved her unity in diversity. [The country is thus] defined by a double character –

simultaneously complementary and contradictory – [by] an intense national sentiment

supported by a strong desire for independence, [but also by] a multiplicity of local,

communal and cantonal ways of life, each extremely jealous of its own individuality."[240]

As a consequence, Swiss national identity is predicated on the recognition of cantonal

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trace it all the way back to Roman navigation and to the Age of Discovery, the period
between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries during which this type of sail became the
standard rig for the ships setting out to explore and colonize the world. "La Voile latine"
was also the name given to ships carrying rocks and lumber from France to Geneva via
Lake Leman. Hence, through this title, the magazine's inferred connection between the
Roman empire/Latin and the Swiss latinized cantons is only further acknowledged.
[239] If translated in English, this subtitle would be "a journal of Swiss culture."
[240] André Siegfried, *Switzerland – A Democratic Way of Life*. (Westport: Hyperion Press,
Inc., 1979), 23-24.

autonomy above all. "The result is the formation of a positive nationality which is not French, or German or Italian but Swiss."[241] The negative aspect of such a peculiar national identity is that we cannot speak of a Swiss national culture in the same sense as we could in the case of France, for example, where nationality is predicated not only on a common territory but also on a common language.

Returning to *La Voile latine* then, the magazine's emphasis on Latin and French as integral components of a specific form of Swiss identity ultimately clashed with the position advocated by the journal's more generalizing subtitle – its status as a national cultural review. In this sense, while cultural difference is recognized for its unequivocal attributes, it also becomes a source of contention. We cannot speak of a unified Swiss cultural identity for the simple reason that there is no ethnic or linguistic unity that could equally account for all of the country's diverse members. Unsurprisingly, *La Voile latine* ceased publication in 1910, due to the conflicting interests of its founding members. There were those who wanted to specifically focus on a French and Romande identification and others who emphasized that French Swiss and Romande individuality belong within a larger Germanic medium of definition.[242] Ultimately, the competing interests tore the magazine apart.

Examining *Cahiers vaudois* and *La Voile latine* side by side helps ground Ramuz' literary stance within a power dynamic at whose core we find a conflict over language and cultural identification. Ramuz' emphasis on language as an essential component of identity clearly emerges in the aftermath of the *La Voile latine*'s demise. He declares:

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[241] Idem, 121.
[242] The Germanic stance was strongly advocated by Robert de Traz, who became the magazine's director in 1906.

"Le canton seul en définitive y a quelque identité. Une unité historique d'abord, puis celle des mœurs et celle du langage. Je ne connais pas de Suisse. Je connais des Bernois, des Valaisans et des Vaudois."[243] Clearly then, Ramuz does not believe in a totalizing Helvetic national identity but, quite on the contrary, on the uniqueness and independence of each canton.[244] Our author thus emphasizes cantonal traditions, historical continuation, and language as the fundamental components of one's sense of subjectivity.

Locating his own origins within the canton of Vaud, Ramuz stresses first and foremost his bond with French and his difference from the Germanic or Italian regions. Yet, his rapport with French speaks of an even more complex network of relationships given the political and cultural authorities that are revealed through this linguistic entity. In other words, because of French, Ramuz and his fellow compatriots who focus on the French and Romande particularity find themselves in a double bind. On the one hand, they clearly refuse integration within an all-encompassing Helvetic identity. Yet, on the other hand, their status as Francophone Swiss is predicated on a denatured rapport with their closest link to France, the French language. It is this cynical bind that Ramuz had encountered during the years he lived in Paris and that ultimately motivated him to join the founders of *Cahiers vaudois* as soon as he returned home.

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[243] Ramuz in Roger Francillon, *Histoire de la littérature en Suisse romande*. (Lausanne: Pavot, 1997), 234.
My translation: The canton by itself has unity. First, a historical unity. Then, a unity of customs and of language. I do not know any Swiss. I know people from Bern, from the Valais, and from Vaud.
[244] I find it rather ironic that, precisely because he recognizes the canton as an independent unit and because he does not support a national Helvetic identity, Ramuz has nevertheless been appropriated by the Swiss literary field as representing the country's federalist identity.

I qualify this rapport as 'denatured' because the French to which the Romande cantons are connected is a language that is rooted in a culture and a nation that is not only physically beyond their geographical frontiers but that is also ideologically incongruent with their peripheral Francophone specificity. Moreover, it is a language whose sources transpire from a center of authority – Paris – that does not recognize the canton's linguistic Francophone variant as just as authentic and valuable for literary production as the standard French norm is made to be. Given Ramuz' primary identification with the canton, it is not surprising that the French metropole rejected his publications. He lacked the support of an established literary patrimony that could have confirmed his value as both Vaudois and Swiss.

Interestingly, though, the same argument cannot be made for other Swiss writers who did indeed receive validation from the Parisian elites. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Madame de Staël, and Benjamin Constant are just a few of the ones who not only preceded Ramuz but whose talents were fully recognized by the center. Yet, as Belinda Jack argues, "It is in part the absence of obvious difference that explains the incorporation of [these] Swiss writers into the French tradition."[245] In contrast, Ramuz chose to exaggerate his difference from the French center of reference. He did this thematically as well as stylistically, all in the hope of creating an expression that authentically represented his milieu and subjectivity as first and foremost Vaudois, and only after as Francophone. It is for this reason that *Raison d'être* became the credo of *Cahiers vaudois*. *Raison d'être* is a call to action: that there exists "une fois, grace à nous, un livre, un chapitre, une simple phrase, qui n'aient pu être écrits qu'ici, parce que

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[245] Belinda Jack, *Francophone literatures: an introductory survey*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 42.

copiés dans leur inflexion sur telle courbe de colline ou scandés dans leur rythme par le

retour du lac sur les galets d'un beau rivage […] que ce peu de chose voie le jour, et nous

nous sentirons absous."[246]

Raison d'être

Published in 1914, Ramuz' *Raison d'être* could be summed up as a forty page

literary manifesto that is a lyrical testimony of the author's formation as an artist as well

as an attempt to generalize the encounters and detours that make up the foundation of all

creative activity. The manifesto is split into eight rather short chapters that replicate

Ramuz' itinerary from the city of his birth, to the countryside, his relocation to Paris, and

the final return to his origins. *Raison d'être* is thus a biographical account that details the

process of forging an identity and a literary style as predicated upon the contact with the

Other of education, culture, and Paris – entities that for the author are subsumed in the

Other of language.

At the core of Ramuz' essay, we find an exposition of the interplay between the

subject, the object of desire, and the Other. The object of desire is Paris, a center of

artistic reference and of authorial confirmation. Paris is also the site of the Other, the

authoritative force that denies the linguistic legitimacy of our author's Swiss Romande

specificity. Because of the conflicts that emerge from Ramuz' contact with this axis,

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[246] Charles Ferdinand Ramuz, *Raison d'être – Œuvres complètes*. (Genève: Editions
Rencontre, volume 2, 1967), 614.
My translation: That there exists, just once, thanks to us, a book, a chapter, a simple
phrase that could only have been written here. For it would be copied in the curve of our
hills or chanted in their rhythm, of a lake's return to a beautiful pebble beach. That this
little thing comes into being, and we would be absolved.

Raison d'être assumes the form of a poetic expression through which established

linguistic and aesthetic structures are challenged and overturned. Ramuz' chief ambition

is the recognition of his Vaudois dialect as a legitimate tool for literary production and

for the inauguration of a cultural patrimony that would exemplify his locality.

Ramuz' undertaking is very similar to that of Michel de Montaigne. For Ramuz,

the Self is also found in language, in a maternal French variant whose value is devalued

as provincial in comparison with the prestige held by standardized French. This disparity

between languages problematizes Ramuz' aspiration to present himself in the most

truthful and ordinary fashion possible since, just like our Renaissance author, the Swiss

Vaudois also finds himself under the symbolic heteronomy that transpires from the

French capital. Consequently, because of his contact with a literary and cultural

metropole, Ramuz will be faced with an unavoidably painful choice. He will either have

to affirm his difference from the French center of domination or accept assimilation by

this center of authority. His dilemma is compounded by the fact that writing in the

undistinguished oral language of his region is tantamount to an undeniable relegation

back to the periphery. Yet, denying his difference is nothing less than betraying his

desire to present himself and his heritage as veritable sources of knowledge and power.

By locating himself at the core of a dominating/dominated linguistic and cultural

rapport that sets a regional environment against a metropolitan center, the Swiss author's

quandary is akin to that of the postcolonial writer. This notion is confirmed by Ramuz'

generalization of his specific case as a Swiss Francophone to representing the condition

of minority writers in general. His manifesto thus functions as a means through which

Ramuz advances a common strategy that all minority authors – regardless of particular

conditions such as locality, economics, or political affiliation – could adopt in their disengagement from centers of authority. His mission is primarily an aesthetic engagement and his tactic is focused on language and on a return to origins. It is for this reason that *Raison d'être* functions not only as the credo of *Cahiers vaudois* but also as a call to action on behalf of all writers who find themselves trapped within a power dynamic of biased cultural and aesthetic forces.

Composed immediately after his return from Paris, Ramuz opens *Raison d'être* by recounting his experiences as a student, when he first encountered literature and classical philosophy. The experiences that stand out from these early school days are his discovery of Homer, Virgil, Flaubert, Hugo, and Michelet. These are precisely the encounters that will trigger his own desire to become a writer. Although Ramuz details how greatly he cherished his introduction into the works of these great authors and philosophers, it is evident that he nevertheless considers his educational experience to have been a disorienting moment. Education created an alienating rupture that juxtaposed his natural environment and his province's wealth of knowledge against a much larger domain, a cultural center whose seat was in Paris. As such, the first few chapters are permeated by conflicting emotions that expose Ramuz' pull towards Paris as both distressing and intriguing.

As he recounts in the beginning of his essay, Ramuz does not interpret this conflict as entirely negative given that education ultimately permitted him to "freely go about throughout the world."[247] Ultimately, it is because of contact with the Ancient authors, and even more so, with the French authors whom he admired and who came

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[247] Idem, 574. My translation.

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from such a close site to his own, that Ramuz gained access to the world of art and creation.

Yet, while reading his essay, we cannot help but sense that this initial contact with culture will become Ramuz' chief source of conflict considering that, although education granted him access to "freely go about throughout the world," this access was nothing more than an imaginary exploration and identification with cultural and literary values that were not truly his own. We can then infer that if this contact were to materialize into a tangible reality, it might not be so easily sanctioned. We already know that this is precisely what occurred once Ramuz relocated to Paris and, pursuing his literary ambitions, struggled to be recognized as a genuine member of the community of French writers.

A striking feature that emerges from Ramuz's account of his school years is his prevalent use of the plural subject pronoun "nous" and the impersonal third form "on." While Ramuz focuses on his personal experiences, by exploiting these pronouns, he simultaneously communicates as a multiple and as an impersonal voice. He thus informs us that contact with education and culture is a shared event that provokes in all individuals who come from a minority culture, a "dépaysement mortel,"[248] a fatal disorienting. By first focusing on his particular encounter and then expanding it with the aid of the plural and impersonal pronouns, Ramuz ends up generalizing his particular conflict. The message that emerges is that, in his case as a Swiss Francophone, the contact with the Other of the French center of authority triggered the author's sense of

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[248] Idem, 572.

solidarity with all those who confront the center and who transform their rejection into a potent form of assertion.

The subtle unease we felt reading Ramuz' first few chapters is still apparent as soon as the author recounts his realization that the writers and philosophers he had come to identify with so deeply, arose from a fascinating but remote entity that he must pursue if he is to satisfy his literary ambitions. He must reach the French capital, the center that is geographically and politically located beyond his realm, but that "nous appelait de si près dans notre langue qu'on n'a pas pu, qu'on ne peut pas ne pas l'entendre."[249] Paris – the much revered object of desire, the symbol of the Revolution, a center of tolerance, the source of political democracy and the architect of the rights of man, the capital of letters and arts, the arbiter of all good taste – clearly launches a challenge, a call to adventure and exploration. In describing the metropole's allure, Ramuz continues to employ the plural pronoun "nous" and the impersonal "on". He thus refocuses our attention on the shared experience, the collective fascination that binds the Francophones to this center of authority. Concurrently, he quietly hints at the inherent discord felt by all Francophones who recognize and value Paris as a center of reference but whom Paris restrains in an inferior position.

This incongruity is textually rendered in *Raison d'être* as soon as Ramuz begins recounting his first journey to the French capital. As he describes it, Paris' mirage is so intense that upon arrival, the visitor is initially blinded by a thousand years of history and civilization, and is thus rendered unable to immediately process the conflict that awaits

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[249] Idem, 576.
My translation: Paris called us from so closely and in our language that we could not ignore its call.

him. As Ramuz confirms through his own experience, because of his education and love of letters, upon arriving in the French metropole he felt "comme au milieu de ma famille."[250] Thus, at the onset, his advent into the capital is a most positive experience. The author is finally able to join "family members" he had met long before, none others than Hugo, Michelet, Flaubert – the immortals of French literature who had nurtured his youth.

Yet, as Ramuz poignantly describes, no matter how much he had cherished the almost tangible presence of all those who had shaped his artistic impressions, he nevertheless found himself isolated by the French metropole. He cries out that "on ne se nourrit pas d'archéologie ou d'histoire, ni de passé, ni d'hommes morts."[251] Paris is beginning to reveal its alienating capacity, and as a result, Ramuz becomes consciously aware that an imagined communication with his object of desire can support neither his construction of an artistic form nor his identity. Far from home and utterly alone, Ramuz experiences solitude in all of its forms: "la solitude de fait et matérielle, […] puis l'autre, la grade, terrible solitude d'hommes, quand on descendait dans la rue où il y a tant de visages et où pas un ne vous est connu."[252]

The reality is that, blinded by the capital's allure, once our author physically reaches Paris, this Other's essence still escapes him. The object so desired not only remains outside his reach, but it rejects him by pointing out that he is an outsider, a

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[250] Idem, 578.
My translation: As in the middle of my family.
[251] Idem, 579.
My translation: We do not nourish ourselves with architecture or history, neither from the past, nor from the dead.
[252] Ibid. My translation: A tangible and material loneliness, […] as well as the other, the heavy, terrible isolation from men - when you'd go down in the street where there are so many faces and yet, you meet not one that is known to you.

stranger. The final blow comes as soon as the foreigner begins to speak. Ramuz' prise

de conscience is so tragically rendered that we must recount it in its entirety:

> Rien ici ne m'appartient en propre et, en quelque manière, de droit, parce que je
> ne suis pas d'ici. […] Le ton de la conversation m'est étranger et j'y suis étranger.
> […] Je m'efforce en vain d'y participer, j'y suis maladroit, je m'en rends compte
> et ma maladresse s'en accroît. L'embarras où on est devient ridicule (on a vingt
> ans); on ne sait plus parler, on ne sais même plus marcher. De toutes petites
> différences d'intonation, ou dans l'accent, ou encore dans l'attitude, sont pires que
> les plus marquées et vous gênent bien davantage. L'Anglais reste un Anglais,
> l'Anglais n'étonne pas, il est "classé": moi, je suis presque pareil à ceux qui
> m'entourent, et, voulant l'être tout à fait, je n'échoue que d'un rien, mais
> terriblement voyant. […] Quelle humiliation profonde devant le rien qu'on est,
> qui voudrait être tout, et cette énormité du dehors qui vous nie, qui ne prend
> même pas la peine de vous nier, qui vous ignore, indifférente, - sourde, aveugle,
> qui ne vous voit pas, qu'on implore et qui n'entend pas.[253]

A decisive moment that will ultimately lead to Ramuz' resolution to return home,

this passage reveals the discord introduced by the author's status as a Swiss Francophone

who speaks the same language as the French metropole but not quite entirely so. Because

of his archaisms, because of his tone and his accent, Ramuz speaks a language that is

provincial and thus considered an inferior deviation from the norm. Moreover, as a Swiss

Francophone, he embodies the image of French at the frontiers. As Pascale Casanova

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[253] Idem, 580-581.
My translation: Nothing here truly belongs to me, and almost rightfully so since I am not
from here. The tone of the conversation remains strange to me for indeed I am a stranger.
[…] I force myself in vain to participate. I am tactless, and as soon as I become aware of
this clumsiness, my awkwardness only increases. The embarrassment we are in now is
ridiculous. (At the age of twenty) we know no longer how to speak, not even how to
walk. The least differences in intonation, in accent, or even more so in attitude are worse
than the obvious ones and thus embarrass one much more. The Englishman remains an
Englishman, there is nothing surprising about an Englishman, he is taken for what he is:
whereas I, I am almost the same as those around me, and wishing to be just the same, I
fail only by a bit. The gap is so terribly obvious. What a profound humiliation it is to
recognize one's worthlessness, one who wanted to be everything. Yet, this enormous
force that is beyond ourselves forbids us, does not even bother to deny us. It ignores us.
It remains indifferent - deaf, blind, it does not even see us. We implore it and yet it still
does not hear.

declared, he is thus too close, "not sufficiently foreign [and] exotic"[254] to captivate the center's interest. Ultimately, Paris teaches Ramuz to recognize his own otherness, a foreignness that is troublesome for being so similar and so close to the center of authority that enunciates it. The drastic lesson that Paris delivers reveals the Francophone's uncertainty.

Reiterating the *prise de conscience* that is so bluntly revealed to him by Paris, Ramuz lets us see that an anglophone in the French capital is not required to assert himself in any specific way. The anglophone is already taken and understood for what he truly is: foreign but independent. By contrast, the Francophone is made to feel not only foreign but even more so, he is made to feel invisible, and is ultimately rejected by the same entity with whom he shares the most precious of bonds: a common language. Tragically then, Paris' domineering force denies the Francophone "in the name of the universal belief in the universality of French letters and on behalf of the values of liberty promoted and monopolized by France itself."[255]

This paradox leaves us wondering how Francophone writers can make sense of the rupture they are made to recognize within their own identities. How can a Swiss Francophone, an African or Asian Francophone, process the metropole's denial and still cultivate and express an individuality that could adequately describe their unique situation? As Ramuz advances in the remaining chapters of his literary manifesto, a possible answer for the Swiss Romands who are so close to the metropole and yet made to feel so distant is to return home and accentuate their difference. The invisible Francophone's dynamism is his language. The intriguing aspect of Ramuz' *Raison d'être*

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[254] Casanova, 217.
[255] Idem, 124.

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from this point on is the second identity "apprenticeship" that the author ends up recounting via his return to origins.

Unfortunately, though, Ramuz' return home is not so simple. It is complicated by the fact that formalized education and Paris' lure had disrupted our author's access to the wealth of knowledge that inherently belongs within his native environment. To better understand this notion we must ourselves return to Ramuz' focus on education and its impact on a child's development as synonymous with a rupture between the self and nature. It is for this reason that Ramuz declared at the beginning of his essay that education leads to a "dépaysement mortel," to a traumatic exile and to a misrecognition of sorts that ultimately transforms the individual into a radical other vis-à-vis his innate locale, "the soil and the race,"[256] the primary elements of one's sense of subjectivity.

If read as such, Ramuz' return home amounts to yet another confrontation with a radically different alterity – none other than the lands and people of his canton, his true companions whom Ramuz had rebuffed in favor of joining the French metropole. The journey back is thus just as novel and disconcerting of a discovery as the arrival in Paris had been. This recognition is poignantly recounted by Ramuz when he declares that: "on avait quitté le pays avant d'avoir eu le temps de le voir, avant d'avoir été en mésure de l'envisager: l'imagination, de loin, l'avait reconstruit à sa guise. […] A présent qu'on revenait, c'est la réalité qui revenait du même coup, une réalité toute-puissante, une

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[256] Ramuz' usage of the word "race" should not be read as a political statement. While some of his works may have appealed to various propagandist programs – especially considering the eventful years during which he wrote – Ramuz himself was more or less apolitical. In this sense, "race" simply denotes that which is most familiar to him, the countrymen of his canton.

réalité où on ne comptait plus."[257] It is this profound angst that constitutes Ramuz'

second lesson in identity formation. It is a lesson predicated on acknowledging his

failure to have fully understood and incorporated his own country's identity before

leaving it. To make matters worse, this sense of discord is now compounded by the

country's progress in a direction that has left the land and its people even more

unrecognizable for the ex-patriate who returns home.

Nevertheless, it is now from the position of an 'in-between' – rejected by Paris

and a foreigner in his own country – that Ramuz accepts responsibility and announces his

stance: "Ce n'est pas en sortant de nous, c'est en descendant toujours plus en nous, que

nous prétendons atteindre à ce plan nouveau, où il faudra ensuite bâtir. Retour à un sol, à

une race (que ce soit matériellement ou non, en imagination ou en réalité, peu importe;

[…] mais agrandissement de soi par ses alentours naturels."[258] The identity lesson begun

by his parents' move to the countryside and that had carried him to Paris and back home

again is now complete. Having acknowledged his position at the periphery of the French

center of authority, Ramuz' second prise de conscience emerges as an unambiguous call

to action: naturalness and the innate values it possesses must be restored without further

delay.

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[257] Ramuz, 586.
My translation: We had left our country before having had the chance to see it, before
having been able to consider it. It is our imagination that reconstructed it as it so pleased.
[…] Now that we were coming back, so was the reality of the matter, an omnipotent
reality for which we no longer mattered.
[258] Ibid.
My translation: It is not by going beyond ourselves but by descending even more so
within ourselves that we can claim to reach this new plane from where we will then build.
We must return to a land, to a race (be it material or not, imaginary or tangible, it does
not matter). What matters is to grow in tune with our natural surroundings.

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that in remaining few chapters of *Raison d'être*, Ramuz turns his gaze precisely towards his country's attributes that education and culture had previously diverted him from: the simple people of his canton, the climate that regulates their behavior, and the geographical features that position his region at the interstices of Germanic, French, and Italian influences. By focusing on these features, Ramuz constructs a self-affirmative principle that replicates his country's topology. He denies history's impact on one's development of identity. Whereas in the first half of the essay Ramuz had willingly opened up to the world – wanting to transgress the Jura and the Alps that separate him from France – in the second half, having learned his lesson in Paris, he takes refuge within the natural borders that surround him and that he now recognizes as entirely autonomous. He thus returns to the themes developed in the novels he had published in Paris; by admitting that the natural, in all of its forms, is indeed his main preoccupation he proposes to reject the stigma Paris had made him feel "and to proclaim as a positive difference what had previously been condemned as provincial and incorrect."[259]

His definitive marker of difference is his language, his French Vaudois dialect, the oral tongue of his ancestors, the maternal "mauvais français" that contrasts with "le bon français" upheld through institutions. Considering then that *Raison d'être* was published as *Cahiers vaudois'* credo, we must note again that Ramuz' call to action is wide-ranging and openly launched. As he restates, in order to achieve a true expression of their identity, Romands writers must return to the source. They must rediscover and

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[259] Casanova, 297.

exemplify the patois' force as a literary tool, its capacity to give form to an expression of

identity that asserts itself precisely from its inferior position. As he so movingly affirms:

> Notre patois qui a tant de saveur, outre de la rapidité, de la netteté, de la décision, de la carrure (les qualités précisément qui nous manquent le plus quand nous écrivons en 'français,') […] C'est à lui qu'il faudra bien en revenir, lui seul pourra jamais nous servir de modèle […] Seul il constitue vraiment une forme pour nous, parce [qu'il est] préexistant, […] défini, […] sorti du sol même. […] Il faut que notre rhétorique, nous nous la soyons faite sur place, et jusqu'à notre grammaire, jusqu'à notre syntaxe.[260]

Clearly then, by having decided to capitalize on this oral language, Ramuz openly

expresses his "desire to overturn Parisian law and to invert the prevailing order of values

– to transform what until then had been a badge of inferiority into a proudly proclaimed

difference."[261]

As his entire literary corpus attests, he accomplished his ambition by working

both within his given as well as within his learned language, by bringing the oral into the

written, by including idiomatic expressions and even incorrect usage of vocabulary and

syntax into the standard form, by pushing his language beyond acceptable limits.

Ultimately, by amplifying his linguistic singularity, he subverted the standard norm and

secured his disengagement from the French capital. Ramuz' call to action on behalf of all

Francophone writers is thus revealed through his subversive yet unambiguous declaration

of independence from "le bon français" values that were upheld by metropolitan French

elites. If we recall Pascale Casanova's assessment that the Swiss author had been

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[260] Ramuz, 602 - 603, 605.
My translation: Our patois which has so much flavor, apart from its briskness, cleanness, decisiveness, straightforwardness (precisely the qualities that are most lacking to us when we write in 'French') […] It is to this language that we must return. It is the only one that could serve as our model. […] It is the only one that truly has form for us for it is pre-existing, defined, born from within the soil. […] We must create our rhetoric through it, our grammar and our syntax too.
[261] Casanova, 218.

rejected by Paris for being too close and thus not exotic or attractive enough to arouse the capital's interest, we can now see that by going far beyond the limits of accepted literary and stylistic norms, Ramuz increased his distance to the extent that it could no longer remain ignored. As we shall see through his *Lettre à Bernard Grasset*, his difference will indeed be acknowledged. Sadly, though, Ramuz' dissimilarity will once again be misunderstood by most of the French literary elite as a mark of regionalism and not as the reproachful affirmation of independence that it was.

In conclusion, *Raison d'être* is a lyrical summary of Ramuz' discovery of Paris, of his imaginary return to his ancestral genealogy, and the defiant artistic strike he will develop on his own as well as together with his *Cahiers vaudois* collaborators. Having written *Raison d'être* as both a plural and impersonal voice, the Swiss author transformed his singular experience into a shared event that uniformly depicts the condition of the Francophone writer who, because of the capital's lure, mistakenly identifies Parisian aesthetics and the standard French language as veritable definitional centers. In a way then, he has successfully transformed the particular into the universal, for he wrote in the name of all minority authors who find themselves under the hegemony of a center of authority. His proclamation of independence emerges just as strongly, if not more so, from the second essay I have selected for this dissertation project: the open letter he wrote to his friend and editor, Bernard Grasset. It is in this missive that Ramuz distinguishes between his linguistic challenge to the norm and his contestation of immutable aesthetic models.

Lettre à Bernard Grasset

Ramuz' open *Lettre à Bernard Grasset* was first published in 1928 and reissued in 1929 as the preface to his novel *Salutation paysanne*. This letter continues the arguments developed in *Raison d'être* in the form of a sociological and historical treaty whose focus is, once again, language and artistic creation. It serves as an answer to the many criticisms and attacks that had been published against the Vaudois author in Paris between 1923 and 1926, which were in due course compiled and published by Marcel Péguy under the title *Pour ou contre C. F. Ramuz – Cahier de témoignage*.

While this compte rendu does take account of the few French critics who defended Ramuz,[262] in order to better understand our author's position in his *Lettre*, we will turn to a critique that sums up all other judgments directed at the Swiss author. Thus, as the journalist Auguste Bailly writes in 1925, if he truly aspired to be a "French writer, Ramuz would do better to learn our language!"[263] Ironically, we cannot help but be reminded of the position adopted by Virgil Rossel in his *Histoire littéraire de la Suisse romande*, where the Swiss critic had counseled that Swiss authors would do better to take language and stylistic lessons in Paris rather than write in their own native French. This is precisely the general criticism, the offence that Ramuz will dismantle and transform into an assertive stance in his missive to Bernard Grasset.

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[262] The French poet Paul Claudel is perhaps Ramuz' most avid French defender. The director of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, Jean Paulhan, as well as the novelist Henri Barbusse also recognized Ramuz' contributions to the French literary field.

[263] Bailly writes: "Ecrivain français!… S'il veut l'être, qu'il apprenne notre langue!" Bailly in Jérôme Meizoz *Un passager clandestin des Lettres françaises*. (Carouge-Genève: Editions Zoé, 1997), 175.

Ramuz' thesis in this letter can be summed up as a reaffirmation of his identity as a Francophone writer whose native language is French and yet who is perpetually denied literary recognition by the Parisian center of authority because this language and the stylistic mode he builds through it do not align with the privileged aesthetic norm. Ramuz' quandary is straightforward. He demands to know: how are his critics justified in attacking him for writing in French given that he writes in nothing else but French? Clearly, Ramuz returns from the very beginning of his epistolary essay to the incongruity that he introduced in *Raison d'être* between "le bon français" learned in school and "le mauvais français" that is his native tongue but that is deemed inferior given that this oral language had not been specifically codified in written form. Ramuz' dual linguistic position could not be more clearly defended than when he writes: "mon pays a eu deux langues: une qu'il fallait apprendre, l'autre dont il se servait par droit de naissance; il a continué à parler sa langue en même temps qu'il s'efforçait d'écrire ce qu'on appelle chez nous, à l'école, le 'bon français'."[264]

Having reinforced once again the discrepancy between these two linguistic forms, Ramuz demands recognition by underscoring the multiple valid shapes that French may take depending on the particular environment where the language develops. The center that brings together these various dialects, be they outside the French frontiers or within

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[264] Charles Ferdinand Ramuz, *Lettre à Bernard Grasset – Œuvres complètes.* (Genève: Editions Rencontre, volume 3, 1967), 1194.
My translation: My country had two languages: one that it had to learn, the other which it used by birthright. [My country] continued to speak its language while it forced itself to write [in] that which we call at home, at school "the good French."

France itself,[265] is none other than Paris. Yet, the French metropole is also an authoritative site that controls and regulates language and cultural production via institutions such as the French Academy – and the schools, colleges and universities that circulate the Academy's agenda. For its role in this process, the French Academy can be appraised as a colonial institution that enforces specific ideologies and a patronage system through which some forms of culture are validated while others are denied. In their volume *Post-Colonial Studies – The Key Concepts*, Bill Ashcroft and his editorial partners define colonial patronage in precisely the same manner – as the recognition and institutional endorsement of "some kinds of cultural activities and not others."[266]

Ramuz' predicament is that he cannot reconcile the center's patronage with his maternal tongue. He cannot accept Paris' hegemony as ruling over his particular location. Ramuz' strategy in his *Lettre à Bernard Grasset* is to develop what Jérôme Meizoz calls in his book *Le droit de "mal écrire,"* "un méta-discours justificatif"[267] that is both reverent and assertive, and through which the author will underscore his position as a dominated writer whose language and style are falsely accused to be illegitimate for literary production. It is from this position that Ramuz will begin his counterattack.

He will do so by first dedicating a good portion of his letter to describing his particular region, the Vaudois canton. Ramuz thus returns to the themes developed in *Raison d'être* and emphasizes once more that the canton is an entirely autonomous political and cultural unit. The canton is strengthened in its independency precisely by

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[265] By emphasizing that "Il y a dans toutes les provinces de France un écart plus ou moins grand entre ce français d'école et le français de plein air" (1194) Ramuz stresses that his dialectical variant is not a singular example.
[266] Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin, 43-45.
[267] Meizoz, 68.

the geographical, topological, historical and political factors that both link and separate

this region from France, just as it separates it from its Germanic and Italian neighbors.

Ramuz calls our attention to his province as "un pays fermé; fermé du côté de la France

par une frontière, une frontière topographique. [En plus, c'est un] pays qui n'a jamais

appartenu historiquement à la France […] et socialement non plus."[268] Given its

constitution, his Vaudois canton is "complet [et] c'est pourquoi je l'aime."[269] Recalling

his discursive approach from *Raison d'être*, Ramuz reformulates his self-affirmative

principle through which he matches the canton's sovereignty with its topological

composition.

However, in comparison with his lyrical expressions in *Raison d'être*, the author

now goes a step further and adds that this topological self-affirmative definition is

bolstered by the very real fact that his canton de Vaud, and on a larger spectrum,

Switzerland itself, had never come under the overt political authority of the French state.

Nevertheless, this had not prevented France's cultural domination from permeating and

imposing itself in the French-speaking Swiss provinces. Unsurprisingly, French cultural

hegemony was inaugurated through the French metropole and its institutional promotion

of "le bon français" as the sole language that it would acknowledge as worthy for literary

production.

Ramuz finds this reality not only paradoxical but a dangerous event that he must

destabilize if he is to truly represent himself, his environment and its inhabitants, as the

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[268] Ramuz, 1186, 1190.
My translation: My country is a closed country; separated from France through a frontier,
a topological one. [Moreover, it is] a country that has never belonged to France either
historically or socially.
[269] Idem, 1189.
My translation: It is complete and that is why I love it.

independent vaudois that they are. Thus, while directly addressing his French editor, he will advance a self-evident axiom that is Swiss par excellence. As André Siegfried explains, given that he is both Vaudois and Swiss, Ramuz is "devoted to the Swiss democratic regime that is synonymous for him with individual liberty, a complete respect for minorities, cantonal and communal autonomy and national independence."[270] Consequently, just as he naturally proclaims his right to the components that make up Swiss identity in general, so is he now in his *Lettre à Bernard Grasset*, asserting his innate right to the French language that materializes from his Vaudois particularity. He re-emphasizes his dilemma as essentially due to the fact that while France – as a body politic – recognizes his freedom as Swiss, Paris – as the cultural capital of arts and letters – does not acknowledge the most essential component of his authorial identity, his language.

In his book *Poetics of Relation*, Edouard Glissant identifies this quandary as the "suffering of expression"[271] that is the peculiar mark of culturally dominated writers. Ramuz' dominated status is neither predicated on overt political or economical oppression nor on national colonization. As we have seen in *Raison d'être* and now in his letter to Grasset, the author's predicament emerges out of a confrontation with the authority of a linguistic, educational, and aesthetic Other. It is on these grounds that Glissant's "suffering of expression" helps elucidate Ramuz' conflict. By its implied recognition that Paris' appraisal of a Francophone writer's language and style is subjectively tied to the individual's sense of identity as well as to his culture at large, Glissant's remark re-links Ramuz' position to that of Francophone writers everywhere.

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[270] Siegfried, 53.
[271] Glissant in Casanova, 180.

Ramuz' case is a perfect illustration of "the suffering of expression" conflict that juxtaposes a Francophone's personal and cultural identity against an authority that enforces French quintessence as the privileged value.

Benedict Anderson's theory that nations are largely "imagined communities" juxtaposed against other nations further clarifies Ramuz' stance, even though the Vaudois author's message is not politically motivated. First, Anderson's thesis resonates with Ramuz' emphasis on geographical frontiers as mandatory for the constitution of a territory. Yet, where it truly supports Ramuz is in its capacity to explain a state's or a community's identity as culturally generated, confirmed, and altered by its contact with the civilizing Other of foreign nations. It thus re-validates Ramuz' conversion of his personal quandary into a much larger social dilemma. As we have seen in *Raison d'être* and now in his essay to Grasset, because of his emphasis on education and the role played by institutions in propagating a specific cultural agenda, Ramuz had transformed his personal conflict into a collective one. This transformation speaks of a state's, region's, province's or a community's own difficulties in achieving self-representation. His position is nowhere more clearly detailed than in the following excerpt:

> Nous avons été, nous autres Vaudois, Bourguignons, Savoyards, et Bernois, maintenant nous sommes Suisses. […] Nous n'avons jamais été les sujets d'un roi, […] des rois de France. Votre grand XVIIeme siècle que j'aime n'a donc pas été le notre […] et c'est précisément pendant ce temps que la langue "française" prenait sa forme definitive parmi tant de langages français par ailleurs subsistants; j'entends une langue littéraire parmi tant de langues qui auraient pu être littéraires, mais que la prééminence d'une d'entre elles et ses constants perfectionnements condamnaient à n'être plus que des dialects et des patois. J'aime votre XVIIeme siècle, j'aime le français, un certain "français" dont il a définitivement sanctionné l'usage, mais n'y puis voir pourtant (parce que je viens du dehors) qu'un phénomène tout occasionnel, tout contingent (qui aurait pu ne pas se produire), et qui précisément, pour ce qui est de nous et de moi, ne s'est pas produit. […] Précisément pour ces mêmes raisons je me refuse de voir dans cette langue "classique" la langue unique, ayant servi, devant servir encore, en tant que

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langue codifiée une fois pour toutes, à ceux qui s'expriment en français. […] Autrement dit encore, ce français "classique" […] n'est plus qu'un français académique […] ou parisien […]; il n'est reste pas moins que je ne vois pas très bien comment il serait valable pour moi, qui ne suis pas Parisien, qui ne l'ai jamais été dans mes ascendants, ni sujet du roi dans mes ascendants, qui n'ai jamais fait partie héréditairement ni de la cour, ni des salons. […] Cette langue, nous, nous ne l'avons connue que par l'école; nous ne la parlons pas naturellement […] il nous faut l'apprendre. […] Le pays qui est le mien parle "son" français de plein droit parce que c'est sa langue maternelle, qu'il n'a pas besoin d'apprendre, qu'il le tire d'une chair vivante. Il le parle de plein droit et en parfaite égalité sur ce plan-là avec tous les autres pays de France – mais, en même temps, étant séparé de la France politique par une frontière, il s'est trouvé demeurer étranger.[272]

Both pleading and assertive, Ramuz gives voice in this passage to his lyrical defense

from *Raison d'être*. By dismantling the authority of a specific form of French, of "ce

français 'classique'" that had been promoted through academic institutions, he justifies

not only his position as an authentic member of the community of French writers but also

his community's authentic independence. Let us closely evaluate his tactics.

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[272] Ramuz, 1191, 1192.
My translation: We have been Vaudois, Burgundians, Savoyard, and Bernese – now we are Swiss. […] We have never been subjects to the French Kings. Your seventeenth century that I love has thus not been our seventeenth century […] Yet, it is precisely during this time that the "French" language found its definite form from among remaining other languages. [By this] I mean that it has become a literary language among the many languages that could have been literary, but which were condemned to remain dialects or patois through the dominance of one of them and this language's constant improvements. I love your seventeenth century, I love French, a certain "French" which has imposed itself in use but, even so, I cannot see it (maybe because I am an outsider) but as a purely occasional event, contingent (that could have not occurred), and that especially because of this, has not occurred for us. Because of all these reasons I refuse to see this "standard" language as a unique form that should serve as language for all those who express themselves in French. In other words, this "standard" French is nothing but an academic French, Parisian. And so, I do not see how it would be valid for me given that I am not Parisian, and that neither me nor any of my ancestors have ever been subjects of the King. We know this language through school. We do not speak it naturally, we had to learn it. My country speaks "its" French by birthright, as a maternal language. There is no need for us to learn it. It is in our blood. In this sense, my country speaks French as an equal right with France and all of its other regions. Yet, separated from France by a political border, it found itself to be a stranger.

Calling to mind Barbara Johnson's essay that links academia to indoctrinating systems, Ramuz is arguing against privileged linguistic and cultural systems that claim exclusiveness and an inherent authority to recognize or deny creative production. Ramuz concedes that academic French is valuable, but he underscores that this standard is valid only within specific contexts. In other words, "le bon français" may indeed be exceptional for the Parisian bourgeois environment, but it is insufficient for Ramuz, given that – in respect to his physical and ideological position – this language is nothing more than an artificial system. It is a language that was specifically promoted through processes of standardization and codification, and that was crystallized during the seventeenth century. Yet, as he stresses, this was France's seventeenth century, not the seventeenth century of his country.

The standardization and codification processes that Ramuz opposes are the exact mechanisms I analyzed in the introduction as having been triggered by the Villers-Cotterêts proclamation and by Joachim du Bellay's *Défense et illustration de la langue française*. They are the same provisions Michel de Montaigne fought against and they are precisely the ones to which Francophone writers continue to respond to this day. Reminiscent of Montaigne and the Francophone writer's position in general, Ramuz ultimately argues that the standard French modus operandi was an "occasional phenomenon." It was both an exceptional as well as a random event that could have occurred just as well as it could have not. Given Ramuz' location outside the French national domain, given that neither him nor any of his ancestors had ever been subjects to the King's rule or of any French law, Ramuz insists that the intentional promotion of "le bon français" is incongruent with his environment. Concerning language specifically,

"son français" is a "living flesh," born of the earth, naturally active and developed within

and by his community. Reminiscent of Montaigne's Gascon, Ramuz also tells us that his

language is "the same in the mouth as on paper."

What is truly remarkable about his stance, though, is that Ramuz transforms his

attack against "le français 'classique'" into a strike against the arbitrary promotion and

uniformization of aesthetic norms. Just as Montaigne transformed and defended his

discursive style and peripheral position, so does Ramuz now transform his linguistic

singularity into a novel aesthetic model. Consequently, when he acknowledges "I love

your seventeenth century, I love French, a certain 'French' that has imposed itself in

use," he is not submitting himself to the linguistic norm, the proper French he had learned

in school. Ramuz is recognizing the aesthetic models, the singular writers of the

seventeenth century – Racine, Corneille, Molière, La Bruyère – who had also

transformed their own language in the process of literary creation and whom France has

not only recognized but epitomized as exemplar artists.

In this sense, Ramuz's fight against cultural uniformity is nothing less than a

struggle on behalf of emerging singularities, on behalf of radical and real innovations that

disturb and depart from the established norm. Few understood his message. Literary

giants in their own measure, Jean Paulhan, Paul Claudel, and Bernard Grasset fought to

transmit Ramuz' message and secure his position in Paris.[273] They had little success, for

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[273] For further reading on Ramuz' friendships and relationships in Paris, see *Jean Paulhan, C.F. Ramuz, Gustave Roud - Le Patron, Le Pauvre Homme, Le Solitaire – Lettres, articles et document* (Ed. Daniel Maggetti and Stéphane Pétermann. Genève: Editions Slatkine, 2007).

just as Montaigne had been criticized for his linguistic and creative infractions,[274] so was

Ramuz.

In the end, Charles Ferdinand Ramuz' extraordinary capacity to articulate his

dilemma from the viewpoint of his personal experience as well as a general state of

affairs, reveals an entire society's confirmation or denial through language and clearly

speaks of the Francophone's impasse. It underscores the Francophone's position as

trapped in a conflicting rapport with a locus of power that, through diverse means and

institutions, controls linguistic and cultural production, and consequently one's sense of

individuality. By anchoring himself in a clearly defined geographical and historical

space that factually validates his distinctiveness while juxtaposing his particular position

against the center of definition that transpires through Paris and "le bon français," Ramuz

ultimately takes a sociological approach to asserting not only his independence and his

unique authorial voice but also his canton's authenticity.

Yet, Ramuz succeeded in asserting himself only through compromise, given that

his entire letter to Bernard Grasset is essentially a justificatory metadiscourse. As argued

in the previous chapter, Ramuz' compromise recalls Michel de Montaigne's own

predicament. Yet, compared to the Renaissance author who rejected Paris in favor of

retiring to his provincial domains, Ramuz persisted in disputing and justifying his

position. Montaigne knew his value and did not care for validation – he states his

purpose in "Au lecteur." In contrast, Ramuz remained trapped between the genuine

independence he asserted and the need to affirm and validate it through the Other of the

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[274] As noted in the second chapter, Estienne Pasquier had criticized Montaigne in a series
of letters that have been compiled by D. Thickett under the title *Choix de lettres sur la
littérature, la langue et la traduction*.

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French metropole and of French universality. And so, after having defended and re-affirmed his independence over and over again, at the first signs of recognition by Paris, he gave in and rejoiced to be published in the French metropole.

In conclusion, given Ramuz' struggle to uncover and destabilize the superiority of French universality, his challenge mirrors the postcolonial writer's effort "to disassociate [the superiority of the French language] from the notion of the superiority of French culture and of [the] French social and political institutions"[275] that serve it. For his attempt, as Jérôme Meizoz concludes, the Swiss author has been judged and appraised to be "un passager clandestin des Lettres françaises." Ramuz's alignment with the postcolonial writer's position is also expressed through his hybrid identity and authorial voice as a Vaudois who belongs to the French community through his language and culture but who is nevertheless wholly independent from the French identity.

Concluding Remarks

In concluding this chapter, I would like to return to Ramuz' cynical Parisian apprenticeship – a drastic lesson in identity formation given that it was in Paris, that the young Ramuz discovered his own foreignness. It was this seminal moment that triggered the writer's quest for subjectivity and authorial independence, as well as his struggle to promote and validate his canton's authenticity. Ramuz' later conflicts developed out of a simple question. He demanded to know why he was denied recognition as an authentic member of the French community of writers given that his thematic subjects were

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[275] Corcoran, 15.

universal and his language nothing else but French. In response, the French critics

attacked him. He was attacked precisely for his divergence from the norm, for having

written in a gestured language[276] that contradicted the metropole's upheld values, for

having dared to transpose the oral character of "son français" into the written.

Because of his struggles, Ramuz can be paired alongside Michel de Montaigne.

What unites these two authors is not only an intense preoccupation with language but,

even more so, their negotiating with the Other of an authority that controls and dictates

this medium of expression. Both Montaigne and Ramuz challenged a recognized

linguistic and cultural locus of power. For Montaigne, this authority was represented by

Antiquity, Latin, and Paris. For Ramuz, the center of power was personified by the

French language, French institutional, cultural, and aesthetic values, Paris, and the

literary elites who embodied all of these factors.

As we have seen, in respect to our Swiss Vaudois author, Paris' clout was

problematic given Ramuz' location just beyond the frontiers of the French territory, close

enough to be under its sphere of influence yet not far away enough to stimulate the

center's curiosity. This paradoxical position proved tormenting for the young Ramuz

who, eagerly joined the metropole only to discover his foreignness. The conscious grasp

of his dissimilarity triggered Ramuz' return to origins and constitutes a further link with

Michel de Montaigne. It is a link that I have uncovered via their similar views in respect

to formalized education, "natural" language/orality, and the discursive style that can be

developed by allowing this tongue to seep into the controlled written form.

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[276] Translated from Ramuz' expression "un langue geste."

For this reason, just as Montaigne had declared "I am Gascon" and thus "I think and speak Gascon," so can we argue that Ramuz ultimately proclaims "I am Vaudois" and thus "I think and speak Vaudois." Nothing could be allowed to corrupt his affirmation. It is almost as if Montaigne precedes and Ramuz follows René Descartes' credo "I think, therefore I am" while they both adjust this principle by declaring: "I speak my language, therefore I am." Given that they locate their subjectivities in language, both Montaigne and Ramuz reproduce Jacques Lacan's theory that the Self is found precisely in language, that subjectivity can only come into being through others and in relation to the Other. It is from this position that Ramuz warns us against artificial and totalizing systems. His message can be summed up as a warning against the hegemonic capacity of the French culture that paradoxically fails to recognize the originality of the Francophone precisely through the universal claims it advances. It is for this reason that Charles Ferdinand Ramuz' position is analogous to that of Francophone writers everywhere, and more generally, to that of postcolonial writers.

Conclusion

This project opened with the premise that "language provides the terms by which the world may be known."[277] Language is our most precious asset since it not only differentiates us from the animal world, but even more importantly, it distinguishes us from each other. Through language we form our subjectivity and claim our place in society. Language is not painless, though. As a foreigner living in an environment and language that are not inherently my own, I should know. I feel the weight of language daily. We all do to some extent. My personal awareness has spilled into my academic interests and it is by such means that I arrived at this dissertation project.

Starting from the premise that language is a force that can be manipulated, my aim was to investigate how writers claim their authorial independence from centers of influence that control not only linguistic but also aesthetic forms. By linking the linguistic structure to the aesthetic, language is exposed as an instrument for the transmission of culture. Yet, as we have seen, culture itself is a polyvalent word. It is essentially in culture that Bill Ashcroft located colonialism when he declared that the colonial process first begins in language. I believe that the two authors considered in this project, Michel de Montaigne and Charles Ferdinand Ramuz, arrived at the same conclusion.

By locating their subjectivities in linguistic and aesthetic forms that deviated from the privileged modes both, Montaigne and Ramuz not only resisted the hegemony of the dominant language but also challenged and ultimately subverted the authorities that enforced it. They both paved the way for the future of French and Francophone

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[277] Ashcroft, 283.

writers.[278] For this reason, C. F. Ramuz is considered the architect of a Renaissance

Vaudoise. His *Raison d'être* was the credo for an entire generation of young Vaudois

writers and artists. Through *Cahiers vaudois* and through all of his novels, Ramuz

expressed a call to action. He called for the emancipation of the Swiss Vaudois literary

circles from Paris' linguistic and cultural hegemony. His stance ultimately constituted

the founding moment of a Francophone Vaudois literary patrimony whose primary focus

still is the canton and the oral language that personifies this locale.[279]

Similarly, although now recognized as one of the epitomes of French literature,

Michel de Montaigne forged a path that diverged from the standards of his age. Just like

Ramuz, he chose to accentuate his difference by returning to his origins and by

capitalizing on the natural force of his Gascon identity. However, while aiming to assert

their independent voices and highlight the inherent values of their peripheral

communities, both Montaigne and Ramuz discovered that domination can occur in the

realm of the imagination, of creativity, and of literary production. This is the crucial

feature that links them to the dilemmas that preoccupy Francophone as well as

postcolonial writers the world over. The domination that they all experience takes the

shape of an interplay between sameness and difference, of a relationship that engages the

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[278] Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence* presents an interesting perspective on the notion of 'influence.'

[279] Language policies, multilingualism, and cantonal specificities remain an ongoing preoccupation of the Swiss Federalist state. As an example, I would like to call attention to the recent publication of *Do you speak Swiss?* – a study commissioned by the Swiss Parliament in 2003 and recently issued in Zurich (by NNZ Libro in 2010) under the editorship of Walter Haas. This book reports not only the latest findings on linguistic diversity and language competence in Switzerland but also offers a wide range of recommendations on how to acknowledge and embrace multilingualism as an internal resource that is inherently Swiss but that can simultaneously benefit Switzerland internationally.

Self and the Other in a struggle for affirmation or assimilation, and that resonates through language itself.

From this perspective then, the Renaissance author, the Swiss Francophone and the postcolonial writer in general are joined through compromise. They are all trapped by and within language; in order to celebrate their specific cultural diversity while also affirming themselves as authors, they all succumb – albeit in different forms and to various degrees – to a language's hegemony. In Montaigne and Ramuz' case, the degree to which each of the authors succeeds in asserting his authorial independence depended very much on his particular circumstances. Personally, I am partial to Montaigne and, thus I believe that he succeeded in affirming his independence to a greater extent than Ramuz did. He thrived because he was able to identify and capitalize on the tumultuous changes occurring during his lifetime in a manner that few writers have done since. Montaigne has captured these changes through the language of his *Essais*.

For this reason, I find it gratifying to conclude this dissertation project by turning once again to Edouard Glissant's essay "The French Language in the Face of Creolization." As Glissant asserts: "I am going to shock you [but] Montaigne's language is a creole language, [for it is] still grappling with the world, [it is] not yet locked in its own purity and organicness. [In Montaigne's world] things happen: [he] borrows from all over the places, [he] piles things up, and it all comes out a certain way, leaving folks astonished. [His language] is magnificent and it is beautiful because it has not yet been purified."[280] As we have seen, precisely because of its creole nature, Montaigne's language engaged, challenged and subverted both a past authority – Latin – while also

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[280] Glissant, 107.

diverging from a nascent one – the early modern French language. Montaigne thus truly confronted the hegemony of privileged languages.

In sum, I would like to reiterate that the purpose of this dissertation project was to demonstrate that domination takes multiple forms that may not always be overtly expressed through a physical act but that nonetheless expose patterns of inequality and forms of control. As demonstrated here, precisely because they dare to question, challenge, or speak against an established authority that is both real and symbolically constraining, Michel de Montaigne and Charles Ferdinand Ramuz' writings parallel the conflicts and dilemmas shared by Francophone and postcolonial writers in general. They all illuminate that at the core of dominating/dominated relationships we find none other than the impasse of the Self versus the Other.

A recently published article in The Economist brings to light the timeless nature of the issues preoccupying this dissertation. Entitled "Prince of the absurd," The article pays homage to the Congolese author Alain Mabanckou who only recently became the first writer from Francophone black Africa to be published by the prestigious French house Gallimard. As the author of the article observes, Mabanckou is thus now published along-side Marcel Proust and Jean-Paul Sartre. Interestingly, a Légion d'Honneur award quickly followed Mabanckou's admittance to Gallimard. While presenting it to him, France's culture minister gushed over Mabanckou's writing, calling him a "shining ambassador for the French language."[281] Ironically, though, the article concludes, "Mr.

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[281] "Prince of the absurd." The Economist. July 9th-15th 2011, p. 81.

Mabanckou is a subversive, who views the language he learned aged six as a 'river to be diverted'."[282]

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[282] Ibid.

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