Performing the Demonic: Witchcraft, Skepticism and Gender Constructions in Michel de Montaigne's "De la force de l'imagination" and "Des Boyteux."

by Kirsten Kramer, University of Cologne, Germany

Abstract:
In both essays, the textual representation of the processes that govern communal attitudes is accompanied by the narrative enactment of the fashioning of male selfhood and identity which concentrates on sexual psychopathology and is deeply rooted in the Renaissance discourse of sexuality and gender identity. In Montaigne's apparently skeptical account of demonic agency the figure of the witch not only turns out to be an emblem that epitomizes central attitudes and practices structuring the field of cultural exchange but also serves as a model for the male subject's relation to woman, which leads to a reformulation of the narrative project underlying the writing process.

I.

1 The rise and development of the "witch craze," which for a period of more than two hundred years profoundly influenced the cultural economy of symbolic practices and institutional operations in European societies, coincides historically with the emergence of the early modern age. It is during the Renaissance that inherited popular beliefs relating to acts of "white magic" and healing or to deviant sexual practices combine to construct a phantasmal "witchcraft stereotype,"[1] whose multiple articulations affect the entire cultural field and eventually come to produce the very phenomenon they pretend to name or describe. Representing the site and the product of symbolic encounters which involve all cultural groups and authorities and which largely rely on the extensive accumulation and circulation of theological, juridical and medical knowledge, the witch craze of the late sixteenth and the early seventeenth century appears to provide a public stage that presents "a dramatization of the social, religious, philosophical, and political wars of the period" (Certeau, "Discourse Disturbed" 245) and offers ritualized performances that parallel early modern theatrical practices in the field of art.[2]

2 In the essays "De la force de l'imagination" ("On the force of Imagination") and "Des Boyteux" ("Of the Lame or Cripple"), Montaigne's discussion of contemporary witchcraft

[1] For an account of the historical development of this "witchcraft stereotype," see Klaits. On the phantasmal and imaginary dimension inherent in the historical controversy concerning witchcraft and demonic or supernatural agency, see particularly Closson.

[2] Certeau's comparison of the "diabolical scene" (245) with early modern theater refers in particular to a series of possessions which appeared in France in the years 1610-1630, but applies equally to earlier instances of possession which reveal similar structural elements. For an analysis of sorcery and possession which metaphorically links early modern witch trials or persecutions with the theatrical genre of "comedy," see Foucault, "Médecins" 122.

beliefs, witch prosecutions and court trials of his own day assumes the form of a thorough-going skeptical critique that embraces both ruling popular assumptions associated with supernatural agency and learned treatises which set out to confirm these. In explicitly or implicitly responding to views revealed in numerous demonological tracts, Montaigne seeks to establish the principle of skeptical doubt, to speak in defense of the victims and sets out to disclose the hidden presuppositions underlying the very constitution of a learned discourse of witchcraft.

3 Inspired by the essayist's famous assertion of an essential consubstantiality between author and text, more recent Montaigne criticism, however, has increasingly focused on the ways in which the literary texts reflect and enact a forming of the self and an acquisition of gender identity.[3] Upon closer examination, Montaigne's preoccupation with issues related to the discourse of witchcraft and demonology indeed appears to be inextricably linked with the constitution of the self through the act of writing. In both essays, the textual representation of the processes that govern communal attitudes is accompanied by the narrative enactment of the fashioning of male selfhood and identity which concentrates on sexual psychopathology and is deeply rooted in the Renaissance discourse of sexuality and gender identity.

4 The convergence of apparently unrelated perspectives, however, demonstrates vigorously that for Montaigne identity and selfhood, far from denoting stable categories or points of reference, represent mutable products of a pre-existing set of discursive codes and institutional practices that organize and regulate the cultural field. Viewed from this perspective, Montaigne's essays situate themselves within the tradition of a literary "fashioning" or construction of the self which, in the early modern period, implies the author's submission to authorities operating in the cultural environment while simultaneously compelling him to engage in the antagonistic confrontation with figures that embody a strange and threatening "other."[4]

5 Taking into account the early modern subject's involvement in the intricate interplay of historically interrelated processes of cultural exchange or "negotiations" which impose constraints and yet open up the space for individual "improvisations" and performances,[5] my analysis of Montaigne's essays will focus on the equivocal ways in which the demonic occurs in the texts. I will argue that in Montaigne's apparently skeptical account of demonic agency

[3]For a choice of gender-oriented analyses of Montaigne's essays, see the literature quoted in Section III below.
[4]For a detailed account of Renaissance techniques and modes of literary self-fashioning, which, however, focuses on English literature and does not take into account the narrative genre of the essay, see Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-fashioning*. For a critical discussion of Greenblatt's description of literary self-fashioning, with reference to early modern Spanish poetry, see Teuber, "'Vivir quiero'" 179-189.
[5]For a concise description of culture which relies on the notions of "constraint," "mobility" and "negotiations," see Greenblatt, "Culture."

the figure of the witch not only turns out to be an emblem that epitomizes and condenses central attitudes and practices structuring the field of cultural exchange but also serves as a model for the male subject's relation to woman, which deeply affects the literary fashioning of the self and ultimately leads to a reformulation of the narrative project underlying the writing process.

II.

6 In "Des Boyteux," written in 1585, Montaigne's discussion of witchcraft appears as part of a general skeptical investigation into the epistemic status of allegedly monstrous or miraculous actions and events. Montaigne's polemic critique challenges in particular the fatal habit of ascribing supernatural causes to unpropitious yet natural facts and events, which either transgress the pattern of ordinary experience or escape the narrow scope of human knowledge and reasoning and should consequently be left to the judgment of God alone (see 1026/316).[6] In perfect accordance with the author's skeptical attitude, his accounts of contemporary witch cases and court trials ironically insist on the striking discrepancy between the presumed demonic power of accused persons and their low social status as well as lack of education, which turns them into privileged victims of the fantasies generated by the force of the imagination. The story about a young villager who counterfeits the voice of a spirit and is joined in his activities by a "fille de village, du tout stupide et niaise" (1029; "a country maiden who [...] was seely and harmelesse" 320) significantly ends with a mocking remark about the "visions et mouvements si niais et si ridicules qu'à peine y a-il rien si grossier au jeu des petits enfans" (1029; "visions and strange gestures, so foolish and ridiculous that there is scarce anything more grosse and absurd used among Children in their childish sports" 320-321); the description of one of the witches who confess their "evil deeds" ("une vieille entre autres, vrayment bien sorciere en laideur et deformité, tres-fameuse de longue main en cette profession" 1032/"an olde beldam witch, a true and perfect sorceresse, both by her ugliness and deformity" 324) in a similar vein ascribes these confessions to insanity which should be cured by "helleborum" rather than by "hemlock" (1032/324),[7] and in "De la force de l'imagination," written in 1572, the essayist explicitly points to the role of the imagination in the formation of popular superstitions:

[6]Quotations of passages from "De la force de l'imagination" and "Des Boyteux" are taken from Montaigne, Les Essais. English quotations are to The Essays.

[7] This observation on the insanity of witches and magicians seems to approach the position taken by J. Weyer and other physicians in the learned debate over witchcraft. In his treatise De praestigiis daemonum et incantationibus et veneficiis (1563), which was responded to by Bodin's Démonomanie (1580), Weyer claims that the alleged witches' visions and hallucinations are due to insanity or to a melancholic disposition. While for Weyer, however, insanity is still linked to diabolical intervention, Montaigne, by contrast, radically denies the possibility of supernatural agency. On Weyer's position see Foucault, "Les déviations religieuses." For a brief account of the Weyer-Bodin controversy, see also Closson 42-43.

> Il est vray semblable que le principal credit des miracles, des visions, des enchantemens et de tels effects extraordinaires, vienne de la puissance de l'imagination agissant principalement contre les ames du vulgaire, plus molles. On leur a si fort saisi la creance, qu'ils pensent voir ce qu'ils ne voyent pas. (99)
>
> (It is very likely that the principall credit of visions, of enchantments, and such extraordinary effects, proceedeth from the power of imaginations, working especially in the mindes of the vulgar sort, as the weakest and seeliest, whose conceit and beleefe is so seized upon, that they imagine to see what they see not. 98)

If Montaigne takes great care to play down the allegedly miraculous power of witches, magicians and healers whose cure is aided by their patient's irrational beliefs, it should be noted, however, that he lays much more serious emphasis on the fact that it is the learned discourse of witchcraft and demonology which brings about factual accusations, court trials and ensuing murderous prosecutions: "Les sorcieres de mon voisinage courent hazard de leur vie, sur l'advis de cháque nouvel autheur qui vient donner corps à leurs songes" (1031; "The witches about my country are in hazard of their life upon the opinion of every new authour that may come to give their dreames a body" 322).

7 The insistence on the pernicious influence exercised by cultural authorities implicitly recurs in Montaigne's reference to the famous Martin Guerre trial (see 1030/322).[8] Confronted with contradictory testimonies in the case, the court was about to declare innocent the impostor Arnaud du Tilh, who had been on trial for impersonating Martin Guerre. When the crippled Martin Guerre suddenly reappeared, Arnaud du Tilh, who finally confessed his crime, was found guilty and sentenced to death. Montaigne himself had attended the public sentencing and read the 1561 edition of Coras's Arrest Memorable, which offered an ambivalent account of the legal case. In "Des Boyteux," Montaigne's observations about the Martin Guerre case confirm on the surface once more his skeptical position, as they condemn the death sentence in mysterious cases that resist human understanding, and recommend following the example of the Areopagites who were said to defer the final sentence in ambivalent cases (see 1032/322). Following the narrative of the villagers' imprisonment, and preceding the critique of the learned discourse of demonology, the short allusion to the public sentencing of Arnaud du Tilh, who was accused of having invoked evil spirits, includes once more a critique of the legal practices that govern contemporary witch persecutions. It has been suggested, however, that Montaigne's reference to the court trial also implicitly points to the imprisonment and lynching of judge Coras, who was known to sympathize with the Protestants, and that, in general, his protests against court trials link Protestant heresy to witch

[8] For a detailed account of the development of the legal case and Montaigne's reactions to it, see Davis. See also Greenblatt, "Psychoanalysis."

heresy. They mirror the decisive discursive shift by virtue of which in the sixteenth century accusations of "maleficia" were increasingly supplanted by more disquieting accusations of heresy which underscored the witches' pact with the devil and which had for the first time been dogmatically theorized in the enormously influential Malleus Maleficarum (Horowitz 87-88).[9] We may infer from the link Montaigne establishes between heretical Protestants and sorcerers that his skeptical stand enables him both to disclaim the epistemic status of supernatural or demonic intervention and to unmask the appearance of witchcraft as a primarily discursive phenomenon which emerges at the center of the contemporary theological debate taking place between Protestants and the Catholic League. Rather than presenting magicians and sorceresses as a threatening force at the margins of a disabused society, Montaigne surreptitiously traces out the demarcation lines of a heterogeneous social field relying on intricate processes of cultural exchange which enact antagonistic confrontations between opponents belonging to rival camps. In the essayist's narrative account, then, the phenomenon of witchcraft or demonic agency proves to be produced or constructed by the efforts of the same learned authorities that set out to annihilate it.[10]

8 It is important to note, however, that Montaigne is far from ascribing visions and fantasies only to those who lack the degree of education and learning necessary to distinguish fiction from truth. In the description of the young villagers' counterfeiting the voice of a spirit, it is significant that the startling term "imposture" is used to characterize the attitudes of the alleged sorcerers (1029/320). As the title of the essay and numerous further allusions suggest, Montaigne's use of the term in the context of an account of witchcraft practices refers to Ambroise Paré's popular treatise Des monstres et prodiges, whose author recurs to the same term to designate demons and evil angels abusing their power, as well as witches or magicians who are misled by the slyness of the devil (Paré 81-83 and 91-92).[11] In Montaigne's text, to be sure, the term is stripped of its diabolical connotations, but it still denotes the self-delusory force of the visions and fantasies that eventually lead to the villagers' imprisonment. Yet the

[9]On the importance of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, which was prefaced by a Bull of Pope Innocent VIII, see also Closson 16-17.

[10] This is also confirmed by Montaigne's critical allusions to the persecution of skeptical opponents of the belief in demonic agency, which goes along with the persecutions of witches and magicians: "Je vois bien qu'on se courrouce, et me deffend on d'en doubter, sur peine d'injures execrables. Nouvelle façon de persuader" (1031; "I see that men will be angry, and am forbid to doubt of it upon paine of execrable injuries. A new manner of perswading" 323). Montaigne's narrative description of antagonistic cultural encounters anticipates to some extent the 'genealogical' approach that prevails in twentieth-century accounts of the historical phenomenon of witchcraft and demonology. An instructive example for such a genealogical analysis is provided by Michel Foucault, who outlines the changing role of the medical discourse on witchcraft in sixteenth and seventeenth-century France in describing the strategic shifts inherent in the power struggle going on between the Church, the Royal power and regional parliaments. See Foucault, "Médecins".

[11] On Montaigne's references to Paré's treatise, see also Horowitz 83.

same self-delusion and folly that turns the young people into victims of justice also characterizes both the learned judge who sets out to condemn the accused and the crowd who assist the trials and approve of their murderous outcome: "Ces pauvres diables sont à cette heure en prison, et porteront volontiers la peine de la sottise commune; et je ne sçay si quelque juge se vengera sur eux de la sienne" (1030; "The poore seely three Divels are now in prison, and may happily e're long pay deere for their common sottishnesse, and I wot not whether some cheverell judge or other will be avenged of them for his" 321).

9 This hint at the omnipresence of folly bridges the social distance separating unlearned sorcerers and erudite judges and suggests very strongly that social relations on the whole are deeply pervaded by illusory beliefs and superstitions which organize and structure communal life. This is more obvious still in a number of passages in which Montaigne discusses in a more general way the limits of human knowledge and the deficiency of reasoning as such. In the paragraph which follows the anecdote of the villagers and immediately precedes the description of another court trial, the essayist uses the equivocal term "inquisition" to describe the progress of human knowledge: "L'admiration est fondement de toute philosophie, l'inquisition le progrez, l'ignorance le bout" (1030; "Admiration is the ground of all Philosophy; Inquisition the progresse; Ignorance the end" 321). Yet the same act of reasoning which, in Montaigne's view, bears a close affinity to the violent practices of the inquisitors, previously revealed itself to build simultaneously upon the very hollowness and "inanity" that also inhabits the witches' dreams and fantasies (1027/316) and leads Montaigne to the natural conclusion that "demonic" folly and "inquisitorial" reason, fiction and truth are inseparably bound up with each other:

> La vérité et le mensonge ont leurs visages conformes, le port, le goust et les alleures pareilles: nous les regardons de mesme oeil. Je trouve que nous ne sommes pas seulement láches à nous defendre, mais que nous cerchons et convions à nous y enferrer. Nous aymons à nous embrouiller en la vanité, comme conforme à nostre estre. (1027)
>
> (Truth and falsehood have both alike countenances; their port, their taste, and their proceedings semblable. Wee behold them with one same eyes. I observe that we are not onely slow in defending our selves from deceipt, but that we seeke and sue to embrace it. Wee love to meddle and entangle our selves with vanity, as conformable unto our being. 317)

What is striking, then, in Montaigne's account of the witch craze of his own day is the fact that he does not simply view sorcerers and magicians as the victims of communal scapegoating, of exclusionary practices which marginalize the weak and the defenseless. In Montaigne's representation of witchcraft, quite on the contrary, the figure of the witch turns

out to be an object and an agent in the process of cultural exchange and negotiations; she appears both as a victim and a central representative of a "demonicized" social order which fatally succumbs to the omnipresent play of hollow fantasies and delusions.

10 This is confirmed by a short episode appearing at the end of "De la force de l'imagination" where Montaigne retells a story of the healing of a merchant suffering from the "disease of the stone." In contrast to the extraordinary and miraculous healing of a crippled patient narrated in "Des Boyteux," here the reader is confronted with a perfectly ordinary disease which does not necessarily involve the patient's belief in the efficacy of otherwise absurd healing practices. Having ordered and thoroughly tested the enemas necessary for the cure, the patient, however, undergoes a rather peculiar procedure:

> Apportez qu'ils [les clisteres] estoyent, il n'y avoit rien obmis des formes accoustumées: souvent il tastoit s'ils estoyent trop chauds. Le voylà couché, renversé, et toutes les approches faictes, sauf qu'il ne s'y faisoit aucune injection. L'apotiquaire retiré apres cette ceremonie, le patient accommodé, comme s'il avoit veritablement pris le clystere, il en sentoit pareil effect à ceux qui les prennent. (104)
>
> (Which [the glisters] being brought him, no accustomed forme to them belonging was omitted, and would often taste whether they were too hot, and view them well, and lying along upon his bed, on his bellie, and all complements performed, only injection excepted, which ceremony ended, the apothecarie gone, and the patient lying in his bed, even as if he had received a glister indeed, he found and felt the very same effect which they doe that have effectually taken them. 104 f.)

What is emphasized in the anecdote is the fact that the efficacy of the cure relies entirely on the strict observation of a purely formal procedure ("formes accoustumées"), a sanctioned ritual or simulation which necessitates the patient's imagination or mental commitment and eventually brings about the same effect the actual application of the medicine would have entailed. The characterization of the patient, whose profession indicates that he is actively engaged in the exchange of money and goods, suggests that the anecdote, far from being an arbitrary example, allegorizes the central mechanisms which regulate cultural relations and, in fact, secure the very functioning of the social order. The delusions generated by an all-pervasive imagination assume the form of superstitious belief and of the blind submission to rituals which, in "Des Boyteux," reveal themselves to be at the center of the contemporary field of cultural practices that enact and uphold the early modern witch craze.

11 If, in Montaigne's view, the witch craze of his own day proves to be the product of superstitious beliefs and if, at the same time, the act of reasoning itself relies on the "inanity" of delusory fantasies, how then are we to account for the position and the critical gesture of the writing subject who ironically challenges the social practices observed in his time and seeks to reveal the absurdity of dogmatic positions which legitimize public sentencings? In

persistently questioning the contemporary habit of establishing causal connections between facts or events which cannot be sufficiently explained by reason or experience, the essayist quite ostentatiously adopts the gesture of the Pyrrhonian skeptic who radically denies the reliability of human judgment or sense knowledge and deliberately refuses to articulate truth.[12] Positing both the pragmatic acceptance of social norms, traditions and values provided by the cultural environment and an ethical attitude which relies on the subject's indifference towards reality, Pyrrhonian skepticism presupposes an external viewpoint from which the skeptical subject views the surrounding world.[13] In "Des Boyteux," Montaigne's critical account of contemporary beliefs in demonic or supernatural agency, indeed, appears to claim the same privileged position for the writing subject that characterizes the epistemic viewpoint of the Pyrrhonian skeptic. The description of the all-pervasiveness of a delusory imagination whose operations involve the entire cultural field and affect all processes of social exchange, however, strongly suggests that it is precisely this external viewpoint guaranteeing the independence of his observations which cannot be adopted by the writing subject. To account for this paradox underlying the narrative account and to recover its significance with regard to the essayist's project, we need to turn to the essay "De la force de l'imagination," which offers another variant of Montaigne's preoccupation with witchcraft and demonic agency.

III.

12 In "De la force de l'imagination" the relationship between witchcraft and the operations of the imagination is primarily viewed from a different angle. Starting out from a demonstration of the force of the imagination, Montaigne's text focuses in particular on gender relations and on instances of male sexual impotence which relate to the issue of diabolical agency in that they are organized around a discussion of the popular belief in the "nouements d'aiguillettes," according to which sorcerers are invested with the power "d'empescher la loy de Mariage ordonné de Dieu" ("to prevent the law of marriage ordained by God to be accomplished;" Paré 100).

13 It has been argued that in Montaigne the constitution of masculine or feminine identity appears to be the result of an internalized set of culturally coded mental inclinations rather than the corollary of a fixed biological determination (see Kritzman passim). In "De la force

[12]For a brief account of the role of Pyrrhonian skepticism in "Des Boyteux," with reference to earlier criticism on the essay, see Horowitz 90-91.

[13] For a comprehensive description of the presuppositions underlying the philosophical system of Pyrrhonian skepticism, see Hossenfelder. For a substantial analysis of Montaigne's famous "Apologie de Raimond Sebond" ("An Apologie of Raymond Sebond"), in which fundamental techniques of Pyrrhonian skepticism are adopted and transformed, and for an extensive discussion of earlier Montaigne criticism on this issue, see Kablitz.

de l'imagination," the essayist, indeed, establishes a close link between the acquisition of sexual identity and the activity of the imagination. Accordingly, he concludes the first narrative example relating to a factual sex change operation with an explicit hint at the force of desire which has brought about Iphis's change of sex narrated in Ovid: "Et par vehement desir de luy et de sa mere, 'Iphis acquitta garçon les voeux qu'il avait faits étant fille" (98-99; "And through a vehement desire of him and his mother. [...] Iphis a boy, the vows then paid, Which he vow'd when he was a maid" 97). Foregrounding the force of mental representations, the episode obviously functions as an early illustration of the central thesis the entire essay seeks to prove: "'Une imagination forte produit l'événement' [...]" (97; "A strong imagination begetteth chance'" 95).

14 This concise definition offered at the very beginning of the essay locates Montaigne's text within the context of Renaissance thought relating to the imagination. While Scholasticism primarily conceives the imagination as an intellectual faculty projecting inner images and transcending the data arising from mere sensual experience, sixteenth-century thought - building on medical and Neo-platonic writings as well as on occult philosophy - views it both as a corporeal faculty and as a dynamic materializing force whose images and phantasms may obtain the status of physical reality.[14] The narrative example of Iphis's sex change, then, demonstrates that for Montaigne the imagination, indeed, seems to represent a materializing force which, in his text, even proves capable of bringing about the re-constitution of sexual identity.

15 However, cases in which the dynamic force of the imagination generates opposite effects are far more frequent in the essay. Most anecdotes narrated by Montaigne do not center on the productive force of the imagination but rather underscore its devastating influence on the minds of male individuals who, as a consequence, prove incapable of affirming their virility in the encounter with their female partner. Instead of giving rise to a sense of sexual pleasure, fantasies and mental dispositions generated by the imagination produce psychic tensions and provoke a loss of self-control, which most often, in the essay, results in temporary impotence. In focusing on this loss of self-mastery, Montaigne seemingly refers again to basic assumptions which inform the medical and demonological discourse of his own day. Yet he also indicates that there is a further frame of reference on which his narrative preoccupation with male sexuality relies:

[14] For a detailed description of sixteenth-century accounts of the imagination see Dubois, *Essais* 13-34. See also Dubois, *L'imaginaire* 17-48. For an account of conceptualizations of the imagination in the field of medicine and demonology, see Foucault, "Les déviations religieuses". On the distinction between the internal, intellectual imagination and its external, corporeal counterpart, see briefly Closson 27-28.

> On a raison de remarquer l'indocile liberté de ce membre, s'ingerant si importunement, lors que nous n'en avons que faire, et defaillant si importunement, lors que nous en avons le plus affaire, et contestant de l'authorité si imperieusement avec nostre volonté, refusant avec tant de fierté et d'obstination noz solicitations et mentales et manuelles. (102)
>
> Men have reason to checke the indocile libertie of this member, for so importunately insinuating himselfe when we have no need of him, and so importunately, or as I may say impertinently failing, at what time we have most need of him; and so imperiously contesting by his authority with our will, refusing with such fiercenes and obstinacie our solicitations both mentall and manuall. (102)

16 This observation marks the beginning of a lengthy passage in which the essayist mockingly defends the male member against the accusation of disobedience raised by the other organs of the body. The whole passage ironically recalls the theological argument formulated by Augustine in Book XIV of De civitate Dei. According to Augustine, the implantation of a sexual instinct in man represents the Divine punishment for the original sin of disobedience and functions as a sign which indicates the fallen nature of man. In Augustine's view, the shameful affection of lust not only exceeds all other psychic affections in intensity, but also provokes the disobedient movements of the penis which escape and counteract man's free will and therefore suspend his capability for self-mastery (see Saint Augustine, vol. 2 45-47).

17 Montaigne, to be sure, eliminates the theological context and hilariously subverts the Augustinian line of argument by refusing, at first, to attribute to the male organ the exceptional status assigned to it in De civitate Dei. Yet the passage quoted suggests that for Montaigne, too, the sexual instinct implies a loss of self-control which is not only due to the temporary impairment of the natural functioning of the male member but can equally be ascribed to the unruly erection of the penis which powerfully resists any voluntary effort of self-mastery.[15] Thus, instead of affirming phallic power, potency, if provoked by the force of the imagination, can on the contrary turn out to be but a variant of its opposite, sexual impotence. This affinity of sexual strength and weakness is evoked in a short example in which the reader learns about an Italian king who, after having seen a bullfight and dreamt about it, experiences a strange physical transformation:

[15] Eventually, this resistance leads to a division of man's will itself, which disintegrates into antagonistic forces struggling against each other: "Mais nostre volonté, pour les droits de qui nous mettons en avant ce reproche, combien plus vraysemblablement la pouvons-nous marquer de rebellion et sedition par son desreglement et desobeissance! Veut-elle tousjours ce que nous voudrions qu'elle voulsist?" (103; "But our will, by whose privilege we advance this reproch, how much more likely, and consonant to trueth may we tax it of rebellion, and accuse it of sedition, by reason of its unrulinesse and disobedience. Will shee at all times doe that which we would have her willingly to doe?" 103). For the intertextual reference, see Saint Augustine, vol. 2 45.

> Et encore qu'il ne soit pas nouveau de voir croistre la nuict des cornes à tel qui ne les avoit pas en se couchant: toutesfois l'evenement de Cyppus, Roy d'Italie, est memorable, lequel pour avoir assisté le jour avec grande affection au combat des taureaux, et avoir eu en songe toute la nuict des cornes en la teste, les produisit en son front par la force de l'imagination. (98)
>
> And although it be not strange to see some men have hornes growing upon their head in one night, that had none when they went to bed: notwithstanding the fortune or success of Cyppus King of Italie is memorable, who because the day before he had with earnest affection assisted and beene attentive at a bul-baiting, and having all night long dreamed of hornes in his head, by the very force of imagination brought them forth the next morning in his forehead. (96)

The horns that grow on Cyppus's forehead are not only outward signs that symbolize the genital and thus evoke sexual potency, but they also point to its reverse, sexual impotence, since it is ordinarily the impotent husband who is turned overnight ("la nuit") into a cuckold. In a similar vein, Montaigne observes that an excess of sexual desire, if combined with respect, may bring about the effect of impotence, an observation from which the essayist draws the paradoxical conclusion that potency requires a certain degree of impotence to fulfill itself:

> J'en sçay, à qui il a servy d'y apporter le corps mesme commencé à ressasier d'ailleurs, pour endormir l'ardeur de cette fureur, et qui par l'aage se trouve moins impuissant de ce qu'il est moins puissant. (100)
>
> I know some who have found to come unto it with their bodies as it were halfe glutted else-where, thereby to stupifie or allay the heat of that furie, and who through age, finde themselves lesse unable, by how much more they be lesse able. (99)

What these examples demonstrate is that biological potency does not necessarily entail masculine strength. Far from being a sign of masculinity, the uncontrollable erection of the male member, on the contrary, denotes an unsettling autonomy of the corporeal in that it inhibits the coincidence of the subject's desire or will and his physical capacities. Both potency and impotence are viewed as uncontrollable natural-unnatural movements of the penis which provoke fascination as well as anxiety.[16] The recourse to the Augustinian view of

[16] That the autonomy of the corporeal may arouse anxiety is suggested in a passage which immediately precedes the account of an ejaculation provoked by the imagination and in which only the physical responses to feelings of shame or fear are evoked: "Nous tressuons, nous tremblons, nous pallissons et rougissons aux secousses de nos imaginations et renversez dans la plume sentons notre corps agité à leur bransle, quelques-fois jusques à en expirer" (98; "Wee sweat, we shake, we grow pale, and we blush at the motions of our imaginations; and wallowing in our beds we feele our bodies agitated and turmoiled at their apprehensions, yea in such manner as sometimes we are ready to yeeld up the spirit" 96). Death is also evoked at the end of the humorous enumeration of "rebellious" movements of the body: "Joint que j'en sçay un [= un pet] si turbulent et revesche, qu'il y a quarante ans qu'il tient son maistre à peter d'une haleine et d'une obligation constante et irremittente, et le menne ainsin à la mort" (103; "Seeing my selfe know one [= a scape] so skittish and mutinous, that these fortie yeares keepes his master in such awe, that, will he or nill he, he will with a continuall breath, constant and unintermitted custome breake winde at his pleasure, and so brings him to his grave" 103).

sexuality and of the importunate obtrusion of the penis thus takes on a double meaning within the logic pursued in the text: On the one hand, the theological account serves as a model which enables the essayist to untie the neat cause-effect relation which traditionally links biological sex to cultural or symbolic gender;[17] on the other, it announces a significant destabilization of the conventional gender role associated with masculinity.[18]

18 If Montaigne's remarks about the disobedience of the penis and the corresponding narrative examples rely to a large extent on the Augustinian argument, it is still important to note that, in the essay, Montaigne primarily considers the destabilization of masculine gender from a radically different perspective. As we have seen, Augustine regards sexuality in general and the disobedience of the genital in particular as a defect inherent in man and constitutive of his fallen nature. Montaigne's examples suggest, on the contrary, that male fantasies of fear and anxiety as well as the unsettling experience of the uncontrollability of the penis do not at all originate in the internal psychic structure of the subject, but rather emerge as the product of an interaction with woman, a process of cultural exchange which is largely contingent upon the particular gender differentiation and valorization underlying the Renaissance discourse of sexuality. Thus it is no accident that in the example of Amasis and Laodice the phantasmal anxiety and ensuing impotence of the Egyptian king appear to be inextricably linked with the presence of his wife, whose disquieting character is evoked by the accusation the despairing husband raises against her:

> [...] luy, qui se montroit gentil compagnon par tout ailleurs, se trouva court à jouïr d'elle, et menaça de la tuer, estimant que ce fust quelque sorcerie. Comme és choses qui consistent en fantasie, elle le rejetta à la devotion [...]. (101)
>
> [...] he that before had in every other place found and shewed himselfe a lustie gallant, found h imselfe so short, when he came to grapple with her, that he threatned to kill her, supposing it had beene some charme or sorcerie. (101)

19 Yet the ultimate reason for man's incapacity to control the movements of his member and to affirm his masculinity in the presence of woman is provided by another episode, in which Montaigne describes a miraculous sex change previously depicted in Parés Des monstres et prodiges:

> Passant à Victry le Françoys, je peuz voir un homme que l'Evesque de Soissons avoit nommé Germain en confirmation, lequel tous les habitans de là ont cogneu et veu fille, jusques à l'aage de vingt deux ans, nommée Marie. Il estoit à cett' heure-là fort barbu,

[17] On the causal connection between sex and gender, see Butler 22-23.

[18] The dissociation of symbolic gender and biological sex has also been described by Kritzman. Kritzman, however, does not take into account the reference to the Augustinian view of sexuality and the importunate obtrusion of the penis; he therefore fails to notice the destabiliziation of masculine gender which is focused on in the majority of the narrative examples quoted by Montaigne (see Kritzman 188-195).

> et vieil, et point marié. Faisant, dict-il, quelque effort en sautant, ses membres virils se produisirent: [...]. (99)
>
> My selfe traveling on a time by Vitry in France, hapned to see a man, whom the Bishop of Soissons had in confirmation, named Germane, and all the inhabitants thereabout have both knowne and seene to be a woman-childe, untill she was two and twentie yeares of age, called by the name of Marie. He was, when I saw him, of good yeares, and had a long beard, and was yet unmarried. He saith, that upon a time, leaping, and straining himselfe to overleape another, he wot not how, but where before he was a woman, he suddenly felt the instrument of a man to come out of him: [...]. (97)

If we read this tale as a complement to the narrative of Iphis, we may infer that in Montaigne's re-writing of Paré's episode the sex change transforming the girl Marie into the man Germain is due to a deliberate transgression of a culturally sanctioned and gender-oriented behavioral code, a transgression which reflects the desire of woman to become man. From this perspective, both narrative descriptions of sex change processes appear to be firmly rooted in the sixteenth century medical discourse of sexuality, which recurs to Galen's account of human anatomy and posits both an analogical relation between the human microcosm and the macroscosm of the physical world and an inverted homological relation between male and female sexual organs. The assumption of an inverted homology, however, also bears the implication of sexual difference and gives rise to normative judgments which refer to the providential order of generation and conceive the female body as an imperfect copy of the male. The medical discourse of sexuality thus strongly relies on a gender hierarchization according to which the female, determined by weakness and defectiveness, is placed in an inferior position in relation to the male, which, in turn, is associated with strength and perfection.[19]

20 In proposing to implant once and for all the biological sign of masculinity in the female body, Montaigne's moral comment following the narration of the factual sex change spells out the gender implications inherent in contemporary accounts of sexuality and apparently confirms the author's belief in the Renaissance "patriarchal" code of gender asymmetry:[20]

> Ce n'est pas tant de merveille, que cette sorte d'accident se rencontre frequent: car si l'imagination peut en telles choses, elle est si continuellement et si vigoureusement attachée à ce subject, que, pour n'avoir si souvent à rechoir en mesme pensée et aspreté

[19]For an account of the late medieval medical discourse and the corresponding gender hierarchization, see Thomasset. - For a broader description of Renaissance discourses involved in acts of determining sexual identity, with reference to the implications underlying the contemporary discussion of the Marie/Germain case, Greenblatt, "Fiction" (on Montaigne, see 41).

[20]For an analysis of Montaigne's "phallocentrism," which withholds consent to plain physiological explanations while, at the same time, reiterating the gender norms inherent in these, see Kritzman 190-191.

> de desir, elle a meilleur compte d'incorporer, une fois pour toutes, cette virile partie aux filles. (99)
>
> It is no great wonder, that such accidents doe often happen, for if imagination have power in such things, it is so continually annexed, and so forcibly fastened to this subject, that lest she should so often fall into the relaps of the same thought, and sharpnesse of desire, it is better one time for all to incorporate this virile part unto wenches. (97)

If, throughout the entire essay, adherence to "patriarchal ideology," to a gender hierarchization which favors the male principle, on the surface seems to be indeed at the center of Montaigne's preoccupation with sexuality and gender identity, it is important to note, however, that the narrative account of the Marie/Germain case does not at all legitimize Montaigne's moral advice following it. While the essayist attempts to persuade his readers that an all-pervasive feminine desire hides behind the sex change operation, an apparently incidental remark unveils the different nature of feminine emotions: "[...] et est encore en usage, entre les filles de là, une chanson, par laquelle elles s'entreadvertissent de ne faire point de grandes enjambées, de peur de devenir garçons, comme Marie Germain" (99; "[...] and to this day the maidens of that towne and countrie have a song in use, by which they warne one another, when they are leaping, not to straine themselves overmuch, or open their legs too wide, for feare they should bee turned to boies, as Marie Germane was" 97). If, according to the girls' voice, it is fear rather than euphoric excitement which determines the women's reactions to Marie's sex change, Montaigne's final evaluation of the case, far from offering an accurate account of female inclinations, turns out to be a mere projection, a male construction which transforms into desire what is actually felt to be resistance. Yet if the female desire which is thought to aim at an adoption or incorporation of the "perfect" male principle proves to be non-existent, the "phallocentric" norm itself, on which Montaigne's comment relies and which secures the superiority of the masculine, equally reveals itself to be a construction which does not conform to experience. The episode thus illustrates the failure of the male subject to "domesticate" woman and to assume for himself a stable position within the cultural field of gender negotiations by positing a feminine desire which renders her inferior to man. Far from fguring as a weak and essentially deficient being, woman's reluctance to conform to the "phallocentric" construction transforms her, on the contrary, into both an enigmatic and threatening force the male subject has to comply with.

21 It is woman's resistance to submitting to masculine appropriations of feminine desire, I would argue, which, in "De la force de l'imagination," accounts for the highly precarious relationship, between the male subject and an inscrutable female other, that lurks behind the

examples in which men prove incapable of affirming their masculinity.[21] This is confirmed by a series of narrative examples which more explicitly relate to contemporary cultural norms organizing gender relations. In the passage referring to Augustine, in which the essayist speaks in defense of the penis in a fictitious court trial situation, Montaigne concludes his argument by paradoxically conceding that the privileged position of the male member in relation to other organs of the body may, after all, be justified:

> Quoy qu'il en soit, protestant que les advocats et juges ont beau quereller et sentencier, nature tirera cependant son train: qui n'auroit faict que raison, quand ell'auroit doüé ce membre de quelque particulier privilege, autheur du seul ouvrage immortel des mortels. (103)
>
> Howsoever it be, protesting that advocates and judges may wrangle, contend, and give sentence, what and how they please, Nature will in the meane time follow her course; who, had she endued this member with any particular privilege, yet had she done but right, and shewed but reason. Author of the only immortall worke of mortall man. (104)

The hint at "nature's course" points to the act of procreation, which serves nature's ends by generating offspring and prolonging the existence of mankind. The observation relies on the implicit assumption that it is possible for man to master the disobedient male organ and thereby activate masculinity in marital intercourse. A similar argument is put forward in the essay "Sur des vers de Virgile" ("Upon some Verses of Virgil"), where Montaigne draws a distinction between love and marriage. In contrast to love, Montaigne argues, ideal marriage is exempt from the "extravagances de la licence amoureuse" (850; "the [...] extravagant humor of an amorous licentiousness" 78); it is built on institutionalized relations between man and woman ("un nombre infiny d'utiles et solides offices et obligations mutuelles" 851; "an infinite number of profitable and solid offices, and mutuall obligations" 80) and pursues the aim of procreation (850/78). The opposition of love and marriage clearly posits a difference between the domesticated, continent, almost asexual wife and woman in general (see Desan 248-255; Matalene 374), whose violent desire (857/88) potentially exceeds the ardour and vehemence of amorous passions in man (854/84). While this essay strongly suggests that marriage represents the site for a contractual conciliation of gender roles and practices, "De la force de l'imagination," however, illustrates that it is precisely the domesticated act of procreation in accordance with the law of nature which cannot be accomplished:

[21] In this respect, the essayist is far from corroborating traditional medical accounts of woman's "mystery;" quite on the contrary, he radically opposes these in underscoring and unveiling the cultural consequences which arise from the failure to provide adequate explanations for feminine anatomy and behavior. On the perception of woman's "mysterious" physiology, which, within the contemporary medical discourse, arises from contradictory assumptions relating to the principle of finality, see Thomasset 72-73.

> Les mariez, le temps estant tout leur, ne doivent ny presser, ny taster leur entreprinse, s'ils ne sont prests; et vaut mieux faillir indecemment à estreiner la couche nuptiale, pleine d'agitation et de fievre, attandant une et une autre commodité plus privée et moins allarmée, que de tomber en une perpetuelle misere, pour s'estre estonné [=paralysé] et desesperé du premier refus. (101 f.)
>
> Married men, because time is at their command, and they may go to it when they list, ought never to presse or importune their enterprise, unlesse they be readie. And it is better undecently to faile in hanseling the nuptiall bed, full of agitation and fits, by waiting for some or other fitter occasion, and more private opportunitie, less sudden and alarmed, than to fall into a perpetual miserie, by apprehending an astonishment and desperation of the first refusall. (101)

If here the inhibitive force of passion ("agitation," "fievre") seems to be confined to the wedding night only, the Egyptian king's impotence in the presence of his wife as well as the essayist's ensuing conclusion testify to the general impossibility of fulfilling nature's telos in the act of procreation, an impossibility which, the essayist now suggests, may be viewed as the result of the very coyness and continence that ideally distinguishes married woman.[22] The institution of marriage, which, according to "Sur des vers de Virgile," represents the most efficient instrument for organizing intersubjective relations, then, fails to guarantee a stable affirmation of masculinity and appears to threaten the entire cultural order which largely relies on contractually defined gender practices.[23]

22 Eventually, it is woman's enigmatic reluctance to conform to masculine appropriations of her sex and gender which may explain why Montaigne in "De la force de l'imagination" combines examples illustrating the male subject's failure to fulfill the "phallocentric" norm of strength with the discussion of contemporary beliefs relating to witchcraft and demonic agency. The association of a threatening female with the figure of the malevolent sorceress not only appears in the accusation the Egyptian king raises against his wife. It recurs significantly at the end of the essay, where Montaigne reports an ancient belief according to which enraged Scythian women were capable of killing men by their mere glance (105/106),

---

[22] "Or elles ont tort de nous recueillir de ces contenances mineuses, querelleuses et fuyardes, qui nous esteignent en nous allumant" (101; "Now they wrong us, to receive and admit us with their wanton, squeamish, quarrellous countenances, which setting us afire, extinguish us" 101).

[23] Montaigne's observations on the status of woman in society combine here with a critique of powerful public institutions which have been created by man. - On this critique see Leschemelle. - See also Bauschatz 99-100. Although Leschemelle's article offers a comprehensive survey of Montaigne's observations on women, the author's concern with Montaigne's alleged essentialist "misogyny" or "feminism" appears to miss the crucial point, since Montaigne himself explicitly concedes that woman's behaviour is to a large extent the product of social habits and institutional practices governing communal life. From this perspective, woman's disturbing character not only derives from her reluctance to conform to "patriarchal" ideology, but, paradoxically, also appears to be the product of a male educational system which prepares her for excessive sexual voluptuousness and lascivity. See "Sur des vers de Virgile:" "Nous les dressons dès l'enfance aus entremises de l'amour: leur grace, leur atiffeure, leur science, leur parole, toute leur instruction ne regarde qu'à ce but" (856; "Even from their infancy wee frame them to the sports of love: their instruction, behaviour, attire, grace, learning and all their words aimeth only at love, respects onely affection" 86).

and subsequently associates this belief with a commonly shared contemporary assumption about witches: "Et quant aux sorciers, on les dit avoir des yeux offensifs et nuisans [...]" (105; "And concerning witches they are said to have offensive and harme-working eies" 106). Although Montaigne signals his reluctance to accept the belief, the association of the malevolent power of the demonic sorceress with the equally threatening power of the Scythian woman suggests that the figure of the witch, produced both by discursive strategies and superstitious beliefs, nonetheless functions as a cultural emblem, a model which epitomizes the disquieting inscrutability of woman as such. It is for this reason that Montaigne, while taking care to distance himself from the belief in supernatural or demonic agency, ascribes the same inhibitive force to the imagination and to mental representations an actual demonic "nouement d'aiguillettes" would have brought about:

> Je suis encore de cette opinion, que ces plaisantes liaisons [...], ce sont volontiers des impressions de l'apprehension et de la crainte. Car je sçay par experience, que tel, de qui je puis respondre, comme de moy mesme, en qui il ne pouvoit choir soupçon aucune de foiblesse, et aussi peu d'enchantement, ayant ouy faire le conte à un sien compagnon, d'une defaillance extraordinaire, [...] l'horreur de ce conte lui vint à coup si rudement frapper l'imagination, qu'il en encourut une fortune pareille; [...]. (99 f.)
>
> I am yet in doubt, these pleasant bonds [...] are haply but the impressions of apprehension, and effects of feare. For I know by experience, that some one, for whom I may as well answer as for my selfe, and in whom no manner of suspition either of weaknesse or enchantment might fall, hearing a companion of his make report of an extraordinary faint sowning, [...] whereupon the horrour of his report did so strongly strike his imagination, as he ranne the same fortune, [...]. (98)

The implicit transfer of demonic power to the imagination and the recurrent metaphors of tyings and bindings suggest that for Montaigne impotence or the failure to affirm masculinity through the domination of the unruly male member is not the result of actual demonic intervention but derives from a "demonicized" imagination which maliciously "bewitches" the subject from within and subdues him to an irreducible authority.[24]

23 If the entire essay illustrates that intersubjective processes of cultural exchange between man and woman result in a disquieting destabilization of the masculine gender construction inherent in Renaissance thought, it is no surprise that, ultimately, the narrative

[24] Montaigne does not simply operate the same shift from demonic agency to mental representations that underlies contemporary conceptualizations of the materializing force of the imagination. In linking the literary account of demonic agency to representations of anxiety and fear, which result from a cultural exchange of gender practices and rely on woman's reluctance to confirm to a "phallocentric" gender economy, he rather indicates that the operations of the imagination form part of cultural signifying practices. The essayist thus offers a genealogical account which withdraws from the "belief" in the physical reality of imagined phenomena and ascribes to the imagination primarily a "symbolic" or a "ludic" function. For a description of "ludic" and "symbolic" manifestations of the imagination which increasingly supplant the Renaissance "belief" in the materiality of phantasmata, see Dubois, *Essais* 29-34.

questioning of gender roles also affects the successful reconfiguration of masculinity. In the example relating to the "ligatures," the restoration of phallic potency is due to the eventual "untying" or relaxation of the malicious imagination ("sa pensée desbrouillée et desbandée" 100; "his thought being cleared and unmasked" 98). The central anecdote of "De la force de l'imagination," however, concerns a case in which the disease of impotence is cured by opposite means. The reader learns about a Count of Montaigne's acquaintance who, fearing the "sorcellerie" a rival might use against him, finds himself incapable of consummating the union with his wife on his wedding night and agrees to follow Montaigne's prescriptions in observing a curative procedure that enables him to overcome his temporary impotence. It is important to note that, in contrast to other examples, here the "healing" of the "disease" consists in providing a "contrebatterie d'enchantements" (100; "counter-battery of forcible enchantments" 99) that involves the same "ligatures" which are thought to be the cause of the disease: "Il avoit eu l'ame et les oreilles si battues, qu'il se trouva lié du trouble de son imagination [...]" (101; "[...] his mind was so quailed, and his eares so dulled, that by reason of the bond wherewith the trouble of his imagination had tied him, hee could not run on poste: [...]." 100).[25] The description of the "miraculous" healing procedure the Count has to undergo to be relieved from his ailment furthermore evokes diabolical ceremonies and rituals practiced by sorcerers and magicians:

> [...] quand nous serions sortis, qu'il se retirast à tomber de l'eau; dist trois fois telles oraisons, et fist tels mouvemens; qu'à chascune de ces trois fois, il ceignist le ruban que je luy mettoys en main, et couchast bien soigneusement la médaille qui y estoit attachée, sur ses roignons, la figure en telle posture [...]. (101)
>
> [...] when we should be gone out of the Chamber, he should withdraw himselfe to make water, and using certaine jestures I had shewed him, speake such words thrice over. And every time hee spake them he should girt the ribband, which I put into his hands, and very carefully place the plate thereto fastened, just upon his kidneyes, and the whole figure, in such a posture. (100)

While the other examples in the essay foreground the devastating effects of a "tied," demonicized and threatening imagination, here the phantasmal belief in the efficacy of the ridiculous procedure brings about the opposite effect in that it leads to the eventual coincidence of the individual's desire to perform the sexual act and his physical ability to act accordingly.

24 Yet the affirmation of masculinity, the fulfillment of nature's telos in the act of marital intercourse, presents itself as the result of the same ceremonial performance, the same

[25] Montaigne points explicitly to the affinity between demonic workings and the fantasies generated by the imagination, when he writes: "Resverie germaine à celle de quoy nous parlons" (100; "A fond doting conceit, and cosin-germane to that we now speake of" 99).

demonic ritual on which the phantasmal cure of the merchant suffering from the disease of the stone relies. The central episode in "De la force de l'imagination" demonstrates most vigorously that it is not the withdrawal from an essentially "demonic" imagination but the very reliance on its force, the internalization of the demonic, which brings about the reconfiguration of the masculine gender role. The eventual affirmation of masculinity points to a fundamental deficiency in the "phallocentric" construction itself, an inherent void that is supplemented and externalized in the material medium of the gold medallion on which the Count's delusory faith is based. This is also suggested by Montaigne's reference to his own bathrobe which, according to his prescription, is to cover the couple during the marital act and which implicitly alludes to the cynic's coat that, in Augustine's De civitate Dei, conceals the simulated performance of the shameful sexual act.[26] Restored masculinity, the return to the "nature" of masculine gender, thus reveals itself to be built on a ritualized performance devoid of substantial content and generated by the all-pervasive power of a "demonicized" imagination whose operations both organize and threaten the functioning of the cultural order.[27]

IV.

25 Starting out from a critical questioning of superstitious beliefs and learned stereotypes, Montaigne's narrative account of witchcraft describes sorceresses and magicians as victims and representative members of a cultural economy of negotiations which bridges the gap separating unlearned villagers and erudite urban authorities. If the essayist's criticism of the witch craze of his own day unmasks the normality of the demonic, his preoccupation with the constitution of gender, in turn, discloses the "demonicization" of the normal, the unsettling incorporation of an otherness epitomized in the figure of the demonic sorceress and metaphorically transferred to the enigmatic character of woman as such.

26 Yet Montaigne's narrative account of the contemporary witch craze and of cultural gender negotiations also deeply affects the literary fashioning of the self and bears important

[26] A certain tradition has it that the ancient cynics, according to whom sexual intercourse was essentially lawful, did not feel ashamed to perform the act of copulation in public. Augustine, for whom sexuality is inherently shameful, expresses his disbelief in the legend and declares that the cynic Diogenes, covered by a cloak, only simulated the sexual act since he himself was not able to rid himself of the feeling of shame (see Saint Augustine, vol. 2 50).

[27] Taking into account Montaigne's hint at the simulation of the act, it is difficult to follow Kritzman's analysis, which does not mention the function of the bathrobe and tries to demonstrate that the episode testifies to Montaigne's attempt to "neutralize difference" and to "controll nature" (Kritzman 194). For a similar account of Montaigne's view of difference and alterity, with reference to the alleged "naturalization" of miracles operated by the imagination, see Mathieu-Castellani 237-240.

consequences for the scriptural project described at the end of "De la force de l'imagination." As is signalled by the refusal to answer for the narrative examples borrowed from ancient and contemporary authors, the essayist's discursive task apparently consists in applying reason to establish truth: "[...] les Histoires que j'emprunte, je les renvoye sur la conscience de ceux de qui je les prens./Les discours sont à moy, et se tienent par la preuve de la raison, non de l'expérience: [...]" (105; "The histories I borrow, I referre to the consciences of those I take them from. The discourses are mine, and hold together by the proofe of reason, not of experiences" 107). His own narrative, however, integrates the same "fabulous" tales from which the author throughout the essay seems to distance himself: "Aussi en l'estude que je traitte de nos moeurs et mouvemens, les tesmoignages fabuleux, pourveu qu'ils soient possibles, y servent comme les vrais" (105; "So in the studie wherein I treat of our manners and motions, the fabulous testimonies, alwaies provided they be likely and possible, may serve to the purpose, as well as the true" 107). The insertion of these tales, whose mere verisimilitude takes the place of historical truth not only indicates that the genre of the essay operates a conflation of the Aristotelian concepts of poetry and history and now figures as the site of a historiographical discourse which bears an utterly fictitious character (see Regosin), but it also implies a strict adherence to the "tesmoignages fabuleux" and thereby appears to presuppose on the part of the essayist the very "superstitious" attitude that his narrative ordinarily ascribes to witches and magicians.[28] A similar paradox occurs in "Des Boyteux." Here the essayist strongly expresses his doubts regarding the "imposture" of delusory fantasies and the inanity of human reason, which determine the mechanisms structuring cultural exchange. Despite his affirmation to disclose truth, Montaigne, however, confesses a liability to fall prey to the same "folly" that characterizes both witches and judges and subsequently does not fail to indicate the danger of turning into an "impostor" himself:[29]

> Moy-mesme, qui faicts singuliere conscience de mentir et qui ne me soucie guiere de donner creance et authorité à ce que je dis, m'apperçoy toutesfois, aux propos que j'ay en main, qu'estant eschauffé ou par la resistance d'un autre ou par la propre chaleur de la narration, je grossis et enfle mon subject par vois, mouvemens, vigueur et force de parolles, et encore par extention et amplification, non sans interest de la verité nayfve. (1028)

[28]Montaigne significantly uses the term "religion superstitieuse" to describe this adherence to reported tales: "Il est justement permis aux escholes de supposer des similitudes, quand ilz n'en ont point. Je n'en fay pas ainsi pourtant, et surpasse de ce costé là en religion superstitieuse toute foy historialle" (106; "It is justly allowed in schooles, to suppose similitudes, when they have none. Yet doe not I so, and concerning that point, in superstitious religion, I exceed all historicall credit" 107).

[29] This is suggested by the use of the term "battelage" ("jugling tricke") which not only denotes the villagers' delusions (1030/321), but also serves to describe the essayist's own attitude towards truth: "Et me faut ordinairement bateler par compaignie à traicter des subjects et comptes frivoles, que je mescrois entierement" (1027; "And I most commonly juggle for company sake, to treate of idle subjects and frivolous discourses, which I believe nothing at all" 317).

> My selfe who make an especiall matter of conscience to lie, and care not greatly to add credit or authority to what I say, perceive, nevertheles, by the discourses I have in hand, that being earnested, either by the resistance of another or by the earnestnesse of my narration, I swell and amplifie my subject by my voice, motions, vigor and force of wordes; as also by extension and amplification, not without some prejudice to the naked truth. (318)

It is significant that these paradoxical assertions regarding the essayist's narrative practice do not simply reiterate the gesture of the Pyrrhonian skeptic. The skeptic denies the possibility of achieving truth through human reasoning, but he posits a distant viewpoint that serves to secure his epistemic relationship with the outward world. In obfuscating the boundary between fantasy and reason, fiction and truth, while at the same time associating this skeptical gesture with the sorcerers' and judges' "imposture," Montaigne, however, deliberately abandons the privileged position of an external observer of the world and signals, on the contrary, his own complicity with the cultural formation he seeks to criticize.

27 This is confirmed by the discussion of monstruous lameness which occurs at the end of the essay "Des Boyteux" and in which the essayist returns to a narrative description of gender relations. Montaigne here operates a reversal of Paré and other Renaissance authors' causal explanations for the appearance of monsters and miracles in reporting a belief according to which the mutilation of the legs, instead of being the effect of lechery or demonic agency (see Paré 3-5), represents, on the contrary, the cause for enhanced sexuality: "A propos ou hors de propos, il n'importe, on dict en Italie, en commun proverbe, que celuy-là ne cognoit pas Venus en sa parfaicte douceur qui n'a couché avec la boiteuse" (1033; "Whether it be to the purpose, or from the purpose, it is no great matter. It is a common Proverbe in Italie, that 'He knowes not the perfect pleasure of Venus that hath not laine with a limping woman'" 326). The image of the sexually powerful lame woman significantly recalls the ugliness and "deformity" of the witch Montaigne describes earlier in the essay and thus establishes a link between "demonic" appearances and excesses of sexual desire. What is yet more important to note is the fact that the writing subject uses both terms, "lecherous" monstrosity as well as "demonic" deformity, to define his own misshapen self, whose monstrous character exceeds all outward appearances:

> Jusques à cette heure, tous ces miracles et evenemens estranges se cachent devant moy. Je n'ay veu monstre et miracle au monde plus expres que moy-mesme. On s'apprivoise à toute estrangeté par l'usage et le temps; mais plus je me hante et me connois, plus ma difformité m'estonne, moins je m'entens en moy. (1029)
>
> All these miracles and strange events, are untill this day hidden from me: I have seene no such monster or more expresse wonder in this world than my selfe. With time and

> custome a man doth acquaint and enure himselfe to all strangenesse: But the more I frequent and know my selfe the more my deformitie astonieth me, and the lesse I understand my selfe. (320)

Montaigne's description of his monstruous appearance thus indicates that the constitution of his own gender role implies the same "demonicization" and the same experience of excessive sexuality that also characterize the precarious manifestations of masculine gender in "De la force de l'imagination." If, in this respect, the narrative examples quoted in "De la force de l'imagination" reveal themselves to be allegorical prefigurations of the writing subject who emerges in "Des Boyteux," it is no surprise that the affirmation of his "deformed" self equally appears to be contingent upon the presence of woman, as it is suggested by the only episode which explicitly relates to male voluptuousness and monstrosity:

> [...] la Royne des Amazonnes respondit au Scyte qui la convioit à l'amour: [...] le boiteux le faict le mieux. En cette republique feminine, pour fuir la domination des masles, elles les stropioient des l'enfance, bras, jambes et autres membres qui leur donnoient avantage sur elles, et se servoient d'eux à ce seulement à quoy nous nous servons d'elles par deçà. (1033)

> [...] the Queene of the Amazons answered the Scithian that wooed her to loves-embracements. [...] 'The crooked man doth it best.' In that feminine common-wealth of theirs, to avoyde the domination of men, they were wont in their infancy to maime them, both their arms, and legges, and other limmes, that might any way advantage their strength over them, and make onely that use of them that we in our World make of our Women. (326)

The example illustrates in the form of a political allegory woman's capacity to counteract and to reverse a gender hierarchy which guarantees the superiority of man. The monstrous and "demonic" character of Montaigne's own self thus also emerges within the precarious interaction with woman, who proves to be reluctant to conform to a culturally sanctioned norm. Far from reserving for the writing subject the privileged position of an external observer, the essay reveals, on the contrary, that both the construction of masculine gender and the fashioning of the self appear to be the product of a cultural economy of symbolic practices from which it is impossible to withdraw.

28 It is this constitutive involvement in the cultural formation of his own day which may ultimately serve to explain the specific nature of the essayist's project and the structure of the narrative text. It has been argued that the abolition of an external or olympic viewpoint as well as the transformation of techniques and arguments derived from Pyrrhonian skepticism relate to the fact that Montaigne's text reflects the presuppositions underlying the Christian notion of truth, which transcends the boundaries of human knowledge and compels the essayist to

multiply paradoxes and aporias within a discourse of fiction that no longer claims to master the contingency of reality.[30] In "De la force de l'imagination" and "Des Boyteux," Montaigne's preoccupation with the contemporary witch craze, however, does not primarily focus on issues which belong to the field of theory or epistemology.[31] In contrast to other essays, in which the act of writing is presented as the counterpole of practical and public action,[32] in "De la force de l'imagination" the narrative project appears to be intimately linked to the performance of ritualized acts, which repeatedly combine with medical therapies and the application of curative methods. This is most strongly revealed in the example relating to the merchant from Toulouse suffering from the "disease of the stone" whose treatment relies on the enactment of a purely formal procedure which brings about the curative effect. The episode re-actualizes and epitomizes a whole series of medical examples and figurations whose narrative function is anticipated in the metaphorical description of the essayist's discursive task provided in the very first paragraph of the essay: "Je visite plus mal volontiers les malades ausquels le devoir m'interesse, que ceux ausquels je m'attens moins, et que je considere moins. Je saisis le mal que j'estudie et le couche en moy" (98; "I am more unwilling to visit the sicke dutie doth engage me unto, than those to whom I am little beholding, and regard least. I apprehend the evill which I studie, and place it in me" 95). Read as a narrative illustration of the metapoetic description articulated at the beginning of the essay, the episode of the merchant suggests that the writing subject here implicitly assumes the role of the physician who pays a visit to his patient and effects the healing process.[33] By ascribing to the merchant the same "disease of the stone" Montaigne himself was known to be suffering from, the writing subject, however, equally appears to be embodied by the patient in the episode. Associating the essayist both with the physician and the patient of the ancedote, the narrative of the healing procedure thus presents the act of writing as the site of a ritualized performance that somehow resembles a theatrical stage on which the writing subject appears as an actor who plays a double role.

---

[30] For a detailed description of the implications of the Christian concept of truth in Montaigne, with reference to the "Apologie de Raimond Sebond," see Kablitz 517-533. Kablitz' analysis derives its central impulses from Hans Blumenberg's historical and epistemological analysis of the emergence of 'modernity' in the Western world (see Blumenberg).

[31] For an account of the scriptural project of "De la force de l'imagination," which also underscores the essayist's withdrawal from epistemological and "metaphysical" issues, see Dubois, Essais 74-88. In his suggestive reading of "De la force de l'imagination" Dubois, however, primarily focuses on the therapeutic character of the narrative project and does not take into account the context of Montaigne's preoccupation with the witch craze of his own day.

[32] On the distinction between writing and public action, with particular reference to the essay "De mesnager sa volonté" ("How one ought to governe his Will"), see Pfeiffer 90.

[33] This is also suggested by the fact that the anecdote of the merchant from Toulouse obviously recalls an episode which immediately follows the metapoetical comment and in which the essayist tells about his visit to a rich man living in Toulouse who is a patient of the famous physician Simon Thomas (98/95).

29 As we have seen, the episode which provides the scene for the "theatrical" role-playing on the part of the writing subject also gains a public dimension in that it discloses the operations of the imagination and allegorizes central cultural mechanisms which, in "Des Boyteux," are related to the formation of the early modern witch craze. Yet it is, above all, the particular narrative structure of the example that reveals a fundamental trait of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century "diabolical spectacle," which, according to Michel de Certeau, inaugurates in its modes of enunciation a "style of practice" that follows a predetermined set of rules and bears a close affinity to ritualized and theatrical performances. Being urged by exorcists or judges to reveal their identity and to fix on a proper name, in interrogations or trial situations "demoniac" women frequently quote a wide variety of names and engage in a plurality of identifications with diabolical figures which are commonly drawn from registers provided by the exorcists themselves. The possessed woman's "disturbing" enunciation, which persistently shifts the locus of speech, thereby enters into a theatrical "double play" that operates a significant inversion of traditional hermeneutics based on the Christian notion of truth. While the hermeneutic paradigm presupposes a known and stable interlocutor, God, whose language includes unknown secrets that need to be deciphered, the confession scene reverses this scheme by presenting a mode of enunciation in which the content is known, whereas it is the interlocutor himself who remains unknown.[34]

30 It is this theatrical mode of ritualized enunciation, I would argue, which largely informs Montaigne's art of writing. This is not only suggested by the tale of the merchant, in which the essayist engages in a "double play" by identifying both with the physician and the patient described in the episode. The specific status of the narrative enunciation is more obvious still in the passage in which the writing subject defends the male member against accusations raised by other organs of the body. At first sight, the whole passage provides one of the "discours" which belong to the essayist's own narration and which are explicitly set apart from the tales that are "borrowed" from ancient or contemporary authors. Upon closer examination, however, the essayist's ironic speech appears to be modelled on the fourteenth book of Augustine's De civitate Dei, whose central argument is both reiterated and transformed. Far from offering a personal comment which relies entirely on the essayist's own reasoning, his speech thus offers another "vérité empruntée" (106; "borrowed trueth" 108) and thereby represents a mode of enunciation which not only appears to disclose a content which

[34]On the "demoniac" mode of enunciation and its cultural implications, see Certeau, "Discourse Disturbed" passim. - For a broader account of ritualized schemas of actions or "tactics" that combine to form a "style" or "art of practice" which operates within a given cultural field and disturbs, displaces or subverts its dominant power "strategies," see Certeau, *Practice* 29-42. On the affinity between ritual and theatricality, see also Turner.

is determined in advance and with which the erudite early modern reader is already familiar, but which furthermore, in reiterating the Augustinian text while at the same time defending the male organ, in a double sense proves to be spoken in the name of someone other than the essayist himself. It is therefore no surprise that the essayist chooses a pragmatic frame for his speech that presents the same public "staging" on which is built the early modern witch craze: If the whole discourse reads as a political figuration, in which the rivalling organs of the human body allegorize the competing forces within the body of the state,[35] it also illustrates an oral mode of enunciation which quite obviously recalls the court trial situation underlying the ritualized "diabolical spectacle" of witch hunting and now assigns to the writing subject the public "roe" of a lawyer who speaks in defense of the accused victim.[36] Taking into account the changing roles the essayist assumes throughout the entire text, we may eventually infer that it is the central narrative technique itself, the insertion of examples or tales from ancient and contemporary authors, that initiates a literary "style" or "art of practice," a theatrical "double play" which parallels the demoniac woman's enunciation and reverses the traditional paradigm of hermeneutics and truth in endlessly reiterating a known and trivial content while at the same time relying on an unknown interlocutor who persistently removes the locus of his own enunciation.

31 Montaigne's answer to the witch craze of his own day, then, is not located within the field of theory and epistemology, but reiterates and displaces ritualized schemas of actions and practices which are situated at the center of the Renaissance diabolical stage. The cultural function of these performances, which are devoid of substantial content, is epitomized in the episode of the Count de Guerson, in which the writing subject himself appears in the role of a demonic conjurer who enacts a "monkey trick" whose very "inanity" accounts for its result and thus discloses a disturbing demonicization of the narrative project which does not escape the essayist's notice: "Ces singeries sont le principal de l'effect: nostre pensée ne se pouvant desmesler que moyens si estranges ne viennent de quelqu'abstruse science. Leur inanité leur

[35] For this reading of the passage, which focuses on Montaigne's parody of the theory of the "sacred" body of the state and views the defense of the penis as an emblematic model of the essayist's narrative project, see Teuber, "'Figuratio impotentiae'" 117-118.

[36] This is confirmed by the essayist's reference to scapegoating strategies which quite explicitly point to the communal witch hunting of his own day: "Si toutes-fois en ce qu'on gourmande sa rebellion [de ce membre], et qu'on en tire preuve de sa condemnation, il m'avoit payé pour plaider sa cause: à l'adventure mettroy-je en souspeçon noz autres membres, ses compagnons, de luy estre allé dresser [...] cette querelle apostée, et avoir par complot armé le monde à l'encontre de luy: le chargeant malignement seul de leur faute commune" (102; "Nevertheless if a man inasmuch as he doth gormandize and devour his rebellion [of this member], and drawes a triall by his condemnation, would pay me for to plead his cause, I would peradventure make other of our members to be suspected to have [...] devised this imposture, and framed this set quarrell against him, and by some malicious complot armed the world against him, enviously charging him alone with a fault common to them all" 102).

donne poids et reverence" (101; "These fopperies are the chiefe of the effect. Our thought being unable so to free it selfe, but some strange meanes will proceed from some abstruse learning: There inanitie gives them weight and credit." 100).

Works Cited

Bauschatz, Cathleen. "'Leur plus universelle qualité, c'est la diversité': Women as Ideal Readers in Montaigne's Essais." The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies. 19.1 (1989): 83-101.

Blumenberg, Hans. The Legitimacy of the Modern Age. Trans. Robert M. Wallace. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1983.

Butler, Judith. Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. New York: Routledge, 1990.

Certeau, Michel de. The Practice of Everyday Life. Trans. Steven Rendall. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

_____. "Discourse Disturbed. The Sorcerer's Speech." Certeau, Michel de. The Writing of History. Trans. Tom Conley. New York: Columbia UP, 1988. 244-268.

Closson, Marianne. L'imaginaire démoniaque en France (1550-1650). Genèse de la littérature fantastique. Geneva: Droz, 2000.

Davis, Natalie Z. The Return of Martin Guerre. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1983.

Desan, Philippe. "The Book, the Friend, the Woman: Montaigne's Circular Exchanges." Contending Kingdoms. Historical, Psychological, and Feminist Approaches to the Literature of Sixteenth-Century England and France. Ed. Marie-Rose Logan/Peter L. Rudnytsky. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1991. 225-262.

Dubois, Claude-Gilbert. L'imaginaire de la Renaissance. Paris: p.u.f., 1985.

_____. Essais sur Montaigne. La régulation de l'imaginaire. Ethique et politique. Caen: Paradigme, 1992.

Foucault, Michel. "Les déviations religieuses et le savoir médical." Hérésies et sociétés dans l'Europe pré-industrielle. 11e-18e siècles. Ed. Jacques Le Goff. Paris: La Haye Mouton, 1968. 19-25.

_____. "Médecins, juges et sorciers au XVIIe siècle." Médecine de France 200 (1969): 121-128.

Greenblatt, Stephen. Renaissance Self-fashioning. From More to Shakespeare. Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

_____. "Fiction and Friction." Reconstructing Individualism. Autonomy, Individuality and the Self in Western Thought. Ed. Thomas C. Heller/Morton Sosna/David E. Wellbery. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1986. 30-52.

_____. "Culture." Critical Terms for Literary Study. Ed. Frank Lentricchia/Thomas McLaughlin. C hicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1990. 225-232.

---. "Psychoanalysis and Renaissance Culture." Greenblatt, Stephen. Learning to Curse. Essays in Early Modern Culture. New York: Routledge, 1992. 131-145.

Horowitz, Maryanne C. "Montaigne's Doubts on the Miraculous and the Demonic in Cases of His Own Day." Regnum, Religio et Ratio. Essays presented to Robert M. Kingdon. Ed. Jerome Friedman. Kirksville: Sixteenth Century Journal Publications, 1987. 81-91.

Hossenfelder, Malte. "Einleitung." Sextus Empiricus, Grundriß der pyrrhonischen Skepsis. Trans. Malte Hossenfelder. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1993. 9-88.

Kablitz, Andreas. "Montaignes 'Skeptizismus.' Zur 'Apologie de Raimond Sebond' (Essais: II, 12)." Poststrukturalismus. Herausforderung an die Literaturwissenschaft. Ed. Gerhard Neumann. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1997. 504-539.

Klaits, Joseph. Servants of Satan. The Age of the Witch Hunts. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985.

Kritzman, Lawrence D. "Montaigne's Fantastic Monsters and the Construction of Gender" Writing the Renaissance. Essays on Sixteenth-Century French Literature in Honor of Floyd Gray. Ed. Raymond C. La Charité. Lexington, Ky.: French Forum, 1992. 183-196.

Leschemelle, Pierre. "Montaigne, misogyne et féministe." Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Montaigne 5.6 (1986): 41-57.

Matalene, H. W. "Sexual Scripting in Montaigne and Sterne." Comparative Literature 41.4 (1989): 360-377.

Mathieu-Castellani, Gisèle. Montaigne. L'écriture de l'essai. Paris: p.u.f., 1988.

Montaigne, Michel de. Les Essais. Ed. Pierre Villey. 3 vol. (1965). Paris: p.u.f., 21992.

_____. The Essays of Michael Lord of Montaigne. Trans. John Florio. 3 vol. (1603), London: Frowde, 1904.

Paré, Ambroise. Des Monstres et Prodiges. Ed. Jean Céard. Geneva: Droz, 1971.

Pfeiffer, Helmut. "Das Ich als Haushalt. Montaignes ökonomische Politik." Historische Anthropologie und Literatur. Romanistische Beiträge zu einem neuen Paradigma der Literaturwissenschaft. Ed. Rudolf Behrens/Roland Galle. Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1995. 69-90.

Regosin, Richard L. "The Boundaries of Interpretation: Self, Text, Contexts in Montaigne's Essays." Renaissance Rereadings. Intertext and Context. Ed. Maryanne C. Horowitz/Anne J. Cruz/Wendy A. Furman. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988. 18-32.

Saint Augustine. The City of God. Trans. John Healey. Ed. R.V.G. Tasker. 2 vol. London/New York: Dent, 1945.

Teuber, Bernhard. "'Figuratio impotentiae.' Drei Apologien der Entmächtigung bei Montaigne." Konfigurationen der Macht in der frühen Neuzeit. Ed. Rudolf Behrens/Roland Galle. Heidelberg: C.Winter, 2000. 105-126.

_____. "'Vivir quiero con migo.' Verhandlungen mit sich und dem anderen in der ethopoetischen Lyrik des Fray Luis de León und des Francisco de Aldana." Welterfahrung - Selbsterfahrung. Konstitution und Verhandlung von Subjektivität in der spanischen Literatur der frühen Neuzeit. Ed. Wolfgang Matzat/Bernhard Teuber. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000. 179-206.

Thomasset, Claude. "De la nature féminine." Histoire des femmes en occident. Ed. Georges Duby/Michelle Perrot. Paris: Plon, 1990. Vol. 2: Le moyen age. 55-81.

Turner, Victor. From Ritual to Theatre. The Human Seriousness of Play. New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982.