

**THE ECHO OF SOLITUDE IN THE ROMANTIC REPRESENTATIONS OF THE SEA:  
MULTIVALENCE OF A MOTIF IN ROMANCE LITERATURES.**

by

Djehane A. Hassouna

BA, The Catholic University of America, 1967

MA, Vermont College of Norwich University, 1993

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FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

This dissertation was presented

by

Djehane A. Hassouna

It was defended on

October 12, 2005

And approved by

Dr. Yves Citton

Dr. Gerald Martin

Dr. Giuseppina Mecchia

Dr. Francesca Savoia

Dr Phillip Watts

Dr. Giuseppina Mecchia and Dr. Yves Citton  
Dissertation Co-Directors

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Writers have relentlessly acknowledged the influence of water on their poetic vision. The Romantic “malaise” found its solace in the proximity of a body of water. Offering the same ambiguity as the human character, the influence of the sea can be both beneficial and detrimental.

My dissertation discusses the multivalence of a Romantic Sea in French, Italian and Spanish Literatures. Through a thematic as well as a comparative approach, I study numerous transnational examples revolving around the importance of the sea in the lives of a series of protagonists. The vicinity of the sea induces either an implicit or explicit dialogue between the character and the liquid element, triggering a deeper understanding of self, and providing an alleviation of the pressures burdening the psyche of the protagonist.

Since the sea can represent death as well as salvation, the first chapter describes its ambiguity in the representations of a series of writings. Holding in its depths the power of Good and Evil, the sea can either save or threaten. The second chapter indicates how the unrestrained freedom of the waves could motivate the characters to liberate themselves from the burden of social constraints while recovering their own identity. The liquid element, assuming the role of a mentor, guides the character on the path of an emotional recovery. The third chapter focuses on the reflective properties of the water, which at times leads to a symbiosis, highlighting the communion between the character and the sea. The fourth chapter shows how the sea appeases

the nostalgia of exile by filling the void left by the “destierro” from one’s native land, thus bridging the gap of memory. The fifth and last chapter studies the sea as an agent of transcendence, going beyond the limitations of mortality, perception, as well as cognition.

The human being and the Sea have a lot in common: depth, ambiguity, and ultimately, irrationality. Just like humans, the sea represents a mysterious realm, whose incommensurable depth triggers endless suppositions.

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## PREFACE

“We are born alone and we die alone”,<sup>1</sup> says Mexican author Octavio Paz (1914-1998) in his book El Laberinto de la soledad, where he discusses the human condition in general and that of the Mexican people in particular. Italian author Cesare Pavese (1908-1950) also expresses the same concept in La Casa in collina: “Si nasce e si muore da soli”<sup>2</sup>. Is solitude an inevitable aspect of the human condition?

The everpresent solitude, which accompanies human beings in different stages of their lives, often drives them towards the sea, seeking answers to their questions, solutions to their problems, consolation from their pain, as well as a tenacious hope to be relieved from despair. Before the advent of Romanticism countless authors expressed their predilection for water, confirming their affinity with it. In Le sentiment de la nature en France, Daniel Mornet conveys Rousseau’s (1712-1778) love for water as a source of inspiration, which also liberates the mind as it pushes it towards a state of “rêverie”.

L’eau surtout, avec la face monotone et transparente des lacs, le murmure rythmé des ruisseaux, la fuite toujours pareille des rivières, les bruits alternés des flots qui déferlent, le glissement souple d’une barque, nous affranchit puissamment de la vie physique. Rousseau l’adora: “J’ai toujours aimé l’eau passionnément, nous dit-il dans Les Confessions, et sa vue me jette dans une rêverie délicieuse, le plus souvent sans objet déterminé.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Octavio Paz, The Labyrinth of Solitude and other writings, (New York: Grove Press, 1985) 196.

<sup>2</sup> Cesare Pavese, La casa in collina, (Torino: Einaudi Tascabili, 1990) 46.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Mornet, Le sentiment de la nature en France de J.-J. Rousseau à Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, (Paris: Hachette, 1907) 190

Maupassant (1850-1893) also confirms his attraction to the water as he states in his short story “Amour”: “J’aime l’eau d’une passion dédordonnée.”<sup>4</sup> In his verse, Lamartine (1790-1869) described the enigmatic attraction of his protagonist, Jocelyn, to the water as dictated by the very nature of the liquid element:

Je ne sais quel attrait des yeux pour l’eau limpide,  
Nous faisait regarder et suivre chaque ride,  
Réfléchir, soupirer, rêver sans dire un mot,  
Et perdre et retrouver notre âme à chaque flot.<sup>5</sup> (v. 42-46)

Lamartine’s words are framing the solitude of the poetic activity: “Réfléchir, soupirer, rêver”, as he underlines the quest of the poet for a conscious or unconscious symbiosis with the waves.

In five consecutive chapters, this study will focus on the role and importance of the image of the sea in the feelings of solitude expressed by French, Italian and Spanish authors and their protagonists. Surveying some of the texts that describe the sea in the literature and poetry of several nations, I will try to answer the following questions: Is there a correspondence between the “solitude des profondeurs” of the sea and the solitude of the human soul? How does the poetic vision of the writer interpret the various images of the sea in order to express his feelings of solitude?

The longer Spanish quotations are the only ones to be translated, since the meaning may not be very clear to all members of the Department of French and Italian.

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<sup>4</sup> Guy de Maupassant, “Amour”, *Contes et nouvelles*, vol. 1 (Paris: Albin Michel, 1967) 737.

<sup>5</sup> Alphonse de Lamartine, “Quatrième époque”, *Jocelyn*, (Paris: Garnier, 1960) 84.

## I. **From Cradle to Grave**

Described either as father or as mother in different languages and by different authors, the sea symbolizes the solitude of a cradle as well as that of a tomb. Yet, water is not simply a source of inspiration, its prominent role in human life starts as early as the cradle. It justifies the study in the first chapter of a life-giving sea portrayed in the characters of Saint-Amant's (1594-1661) Moïse, Vigny's (1797-1863) Moïse, Ibn Tufayl's (circa 1110-1185) Hayy Ibn Yakzan, Balzac's (1799-1850) Etienne d'Hérouville, and finally Rosalía de Castro's (1837-1885) Esperanza.

The ambiguity of the sea requires an examination of its nefarious aspect, as its depth engulfs countless lives. It could be a form of punishment when inflicted by others, an instrument of justice when decreed by fate, or a refuge when sought by suicidal characters attempting to evade the ordeal of living. People who commit suicide by drowning, an ultimate solitary act, are seeking solace from the hardships of a lonely life where they find themselves treated as castaways or misfits. Why do they choose drowning rather than any other form of death? Because water seems to have a link with eternity, with infinity, its depth appears filled with mystery and myth, and the human being's imagination has inevitably been attracted to these aspects of supernatural life.

## II. **Identity and Liberation**

The next step in man's life deals with the development of his personality or identity. When numerous obstacles stand in the way of this development, obstructing a wholesome upbringing, the protagonist seeks liberation by following the example of the sea, whose freedom of movement, of sound, of unrestrained energy represents a powerful inspiration. Elsa Morante's

(1918-1985) L'isola di Arturo, Pirandello's (1867-1936) Il fu Mattia Pascal, and Maupassant's (1850-1893) Pierre et Jean, portray a quest for identity reached in the proximity of the sea. However, Le Clézio's (1940- ) literary children Lullaby and Daniel, Camila in Asturias' (1899-1974) El Señor Presidente, as well as Donoso's (1924-1997) Aunt Mathilde in "Paseo" will seek liberation from stifling social rules, which hinder the fulfillment of their potential, and seek motivation in the power of the sea.

Underlining the importance of the water, Italian poet Giuseppe Ungaretti (1888-1970) reassesses his past in connection with the rivers which marked his evolution in life from childhood to adulthood: the Nile, the Seine, the Isonzo and the Serchio. Rather than mentioning the land where those rivers run: Egypt, France, Northeastern Italy and Tuscany, he stresses the influence of these rivers on his intellectual and emotional development.

### III. **From Reflection to Symbiosis**

This chapter will study the reflection of nature, of self, of sound in the water as well as an intellectual reflection culminating into a symbiosis with the sea. How can the human soul be reflected by the different moods of the sea? As Baudelaire (1821-1867) states in his verse:

Homme libre, toujours tu chériras la mer,  
La mer est ton miroir, tu contemples ton âme  
Dans le déroulement infini de sa lame  
Et ton esprit n'est pas un gouffre moins amer.<sup>6</sup> (v. 1- 4)

Confirming Baudelaire's opinion, Vigny underlines the similarity between the sea and the human heart: "Les tumultes du coeur comme ceux de la mer."<sup>7</sup> (v. 58) Hugo's (1802-1885)

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Baudelaire, "L'Homme et la mer", Les Fleurs du mal (Paris: Pocket, 1989) 41.

<sup>7</sup> Alfred de Vigny, "La Maison du Berger", Poèmes, (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1966) 219.

feeling of solitude, combined with the image of the sea, recurs in most of his poetry, imposing his own vision to the following centuries: “La nuit tombait, les eaux se changeaient en miroir.”<sup>8</sup>

(v. 1)

The poetic vision of French, Italian and Spanish authors will concur into completing this exploration of the mirror-like properties of the sea, developing into a desire to become one with it. Approaching the sea as a sensory experience: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory and tactile, the poet commingles with his reflected image, absorbs the sound of the waves, breathes the saline air, fills his body with the taste of salt, feels the touch of the water surrounding him as he swims. Concurring with the physical symbiosis, the cognitive process creates a more explicit bond of similarity between man and sea.

#### IV. A Sea of Exile

Just as people in the desert dream of water and end up being fooled by a mirage, so the sailors lost at sea dream about land and could also be fooled by the vision of an imaginary island. How could the exiles, while experiencing uprootedness and solitude, see the reflection of their beloved country mirrored on the surface of the water? Such was Victor Hugo’s experience, related in his book Pendant l’exil, when he evoked Paris and its buildings emerging from the depth of the sea as a cherished illusion recurring in his solitude.

How did Napoleon (1769-1821) relive the past when he was exiled on the island of Saint Helena? How did he reconcile his past glory with his present downfall? Did the liquid walls of his prison monitor his contemplation of Past and Present? Did the sea help in diluting the bitterness of his solitary days, or did the movement of its waves renew the pain by bringing back vivid images of his lost Empire? Hugo’s poem “Lui”, Manzoni’s (1785-1873) “Il Cinque

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<sup>8</sup> Victor Hugo, “Océan”, Victor Hugo, un poète, (Paris: Gallimard, 1981) 32.

Maggio” and Heredia y Heredia’s (1803-1839) sonnet “Napoleon” will not be the only ones to immortalize Napoleon’s plight. Napoleon’s autobiography, Les Mémoires de Sainte-Hélène, as well as other memoirs or memorials compiled by persons of his entourage such as Las Cases and Gourgaud stand as a testimony to the last days of an agonizing French Empire. Vigny’s Admiral Collingwood, a prisoner of the sea in Servitude et grandeur militaires, and Albert Camus’ obsession (1913-1960) with Neptune’s kingdom, will round up the sequence of lovers and haters of the sea.

## V. Transcendence through the Sea

According to Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962) in L’eau et les rêves, the dimensions of depth and infinity offered by the sea can trigger a feeling of transcendence in some people as well as a sensation of terror in others. Courage and cowardice, dignity and degradation are revealed during a challenge where human beings can test their endurance and their dedication to a cause whatever it may be... In a chapter entitled “Pureté et purification”, Bachelard, who deals with the subject of water from the point of view of psychoanalysis and phenomenology, states: “Par bien des voies, la contemplation et l’expérience de l’eau nous conduisent à un idéal.”<sup>9</sup> Bachelard, who describes dreams as being “solitaires”, also stresses their primordial impact on the human psyche. Victor Hugo joined the image of the sea with that of the infinity in order to evoke the mystery of the unknown: “Le muet infini, sombre mer ignorée.”<sup>10</sup> (v. 104) The use of “muet” suggests a lack of communication, a disconnection, and thus a deep solitude. The writings of Ibn Tufayl, Hugo, Vigny, Diderot (1713-1784), Chateaubriand (1768-1848),

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<sup>9</sup> Gaston Bachelard, L’eau et les rêves, (Paris: José Corti, 1973) 200.

<sup>10</sup> Victor Hugo, “A La fenêtre pendant la nuit”, Les Contemplations, (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1972) 422

Maupassant and Bernardin de Saint Pierre (1737-1814) will provide examples of transcendence through the sea as their protagonists attempt reaching for the infinite.

## **Conclusion**

“The water brought us here, the water will take us back” used to say the slaves of the Georgian Sea Islands, comforting themselves as they placed their hopes for returning home in the super power represented by the sea. If it is capable of causing the solitude of uprootedness, then it must also be capable of causing the tenderness of a reunion.

By its very nature, and by its impact on people and their environment, the sea presents an array of contradicting images, which appeal to both their poetic streak and their eternal quest for knowledge. Viewed at times as a masculine element, and at times as a feminine one, it offers the polarity of Good and Evil. The water symbolizes life as well as death, separation as well as reunion, triumph as well as defeat. Danger and salvation, absence and presence, isolation and communication are all present in the sea. Both mysterious and volatile, it offers two sides of a coin, which fascinates and mesmerizes poetic minds. It represents a great source of inspiration as well as an enigma, which sets solitary minds and souls into motion...



## INTRODUCTION

### **Thematics, Comparative Studies and neo-Romanticism in Today's Literary Field**

Wherever we turn our gaze in the romantic literary world, we see solitary poets leaning over water in order to catch a reflection of their soul, recover a shred of memory, or attempt to freeze a fleeting hope. Hovering like a seagull on the sea, trying to feed on the substance contained within its depth: poetic or philosophical substance, the writer, in solitude, seeks the answer to numerous questions in the liquid and mobile surface, whose depths vibrate with an inner life similar to his own.

I will survey texts describing the water in the literature of several nations, studying the following issues: the correspondence between the “solitude des profondeurs” and the solitude of the human soul, as well as the writers’ poetic vision in interpreting the various images of water that relate to their feelings. Through a comparative method I will examine the personal vision of different poets as they internalize the image of the water, before recreating it poetically in their works.

While expressing their solitude, writers favored the use of water metaphors for conveying their vision of the universe. In the nexus of solitude and sea, is the poet’s endeavour a passive or an active one? How does he choose to express his vision? Is he seeking inspiration, consolation, reminiscence or forgetfulness? Is he reaching for a deeper comprehension of self and universe? These are a few of the questions I am attempting to answer in my study.

Although I was inspired by Françoise Peyrègne's book, L'expression du sentiment de solitude chez cinq poètes espagnols de la génération de 1927,<sup>1</sup> which focuses on solitude, and touches upon the link between sea and solitude, my study differs in its scope and purpose. Whereas Peyrègne discusses the presence of the sea in the works of five Spanish poets, I have a more ambitious goal: examining the importance of water in a thematic, semantic, and comparative study of a series of writers of Romance literatures, from the 18th to the 20th century. I observe the role of the sea as a source of inspiration, filling a void in the solitude of the poet's soul as he explores the various conceptualizations of its multiple aspects.

Since my study revolves around Thematics and Comparative Literature, dealing with Romanticism in particular, I will retrace the critics' assessment of each of these areas. In my introduction, I will investigate the dismissal and the revival of Thematics, as well as its importance in Comparative studies. Because Romanticism deals with sensibility, and explores the "paysage intérieur" of man, its timeless nature will be explored from the early beginnings of preromantic ideas to contemporary neo-romanticism.

## **I. Decline of Thematics**

Since Thematic Studies have had their ups and downs in the past decades, it may prove useful to consider the views of several critics about the matter. Werner Sollors' encompassing book, The Return of Thematics,<sup>2</sup> is an indispensable guide for such purpose. The author recapitulates the saga of Thematics, while exploring the dissension around this subject and compiling the different opinions of critics around the controversial problem of the status of

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<sup>1</sup> Françoise Peyrègne, L'expression du sentiment de solitude chez cinq poètes espagnols de la génération de 1927, (Paris: Centre de recherches Hispaniques, 1981)

<sup>2</sup> Werner Sollors, Ed., The Return of Thematic Criticism (Cambridge, Mass & London, England: Harvard University Press, 1993)

thematics: “‘Thematic’ has become a rather pejorative term in literary studies, typically coupled with the adverb ‘merely’.” [...] Thematics is simply considered ‘old’ and hopelessly outmoded, and hence discussions of ‘literary treatments of’ themes tend to call themselves by other names.”<sup>3</sup>

Sollors’ point of departure is the bias that Thematics had to face in the 1970’s and 1980’s. He decries the fact that this disparagement is not in the least justified. “Thematics is regarded so passé that it does not even seem to deserve a rationale for its undesirability.”<sup>4</sup> He argues that several disciplines conceal the fact that they are, actually, thematic studies, fearing to be branded as “outmoded” by the critical literary current of their time. According to the author, Thematics staged an unsuspected comeback with the advent of fields of studies such as Feminism and Political Criticism.

At this moment, then, thematics may be an approach to literature that dares not speak its name. “The critical traditions stemming from Women’s Studies, Black Studies, Ethnic Studies, Cultural Studies, Ideological Criticism and New Historicism also show more than faint traces of (largely undeclared) thematic approaches. Interdisciplinary work that includes literature may, for obvious reasons, be particularly drawn to thematic approaches, as literary texts may be asked questions relating to historical, social, or cultural themes.”<sup>5</sup> [...] For example, though key works in American Studies may be considered exemplary of

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<sup>3</sup> Sollors xiii.

<sup>4</sup> Sollors xiii.

<sup>5</sup> Sollors xiv.

the thematic method, few Americanists today seem to understand or define their work in the context of thematics.<sup>6</sup>

Exploring “le pour et le contre” in the controversy revolving around Thematics, Sollors mentions several studies, not necessarily reviewed in depth in his book, but nevertheless advocating the importance of Thematics:

“Does Thematics have to be an anathema? Claude Bremond and Thomas Pavel quite appropriately entitled their afterword to a special thematological issue of *Communications* “*La fin d’un anathème.*”<sup>7</sup> Dividing critics into two teams: those who are for or against thematic criticism, Bremond and Pavel discuss the different points of view presented during two colloquia dedicated to the study of theme, “Pour une thématique I,” and “Pour une thématique II,” held in 1984 and 1986 respectively. Describing the deductive as well as the inductive approaches of “l’analyse thématique”, Bremond and Pavel highlight the importance of thematic criticism as “un moment privilégié de la démarche critique”, encouraging such studies by stating: “autant s’y consacrer sans fard”<sup>8</sup>. They thus agree with Sollors who also criticizes the tendency to disguise it under different labels.

## II. Revival of Thematics

In his essay “Thematics and Historical evidence”, Thomas Pavel observes the rehabilitation of Thematics, which comes as an amendment to the bias surrounding it: “Here, I will begin by claiming that one of the most significant changes in literary criticism in the last decade has been the shift from the antithematic bias of the 1970s to a renewal of interest in

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<sup>6</sup> Sollors xiv.

<sup>7</sup> Sollors xiv.

<sup>8</sup> Claude Brémont and Thomas Pavel, “La fin d’un anathème”, *Communications* 47 (1988): 219.

thematics.”<sup>9</sup> Pavel’s declaration is buttressed by Trousson’s opinion, expressed in “Reflections on Stoffgeschichte”. Trousson attributes this shift to the rising interest in Comparative Literature, as well as the development of new methods of study in this field.

These last few years have witnessed, it seems to me, a clear revival of interest in theme studies in response to the diversification of interests and of research methods in comparative literature. [...] We should first call attention to the effort to add the study of form to the study of content. Aesthetic comparison of the various treatments of a theme illuminates the creative process both by analyzing the work itself and by placing it into a chain of texts.<sup>10</sup>

Confirming the importance of the theme in comparative studies, Trousson also highlights the creative process, accompanying thematic studies; he is preceded in his claim by Gabriele D’Annunzio (1863-1938) who, as early as 1898, exalted the presence of “motif” in a work as well as in the author’s mind:

Not long before on the bridge of Rialto I had found a *motif* (motivo). I had translated the words of the elements into notes... Do you know what a *motif* is? It is a small spring that may give birth to a flock of streams, a small seed that may give birth to a wreath of forests, a small spark that may give birth to an endless chain of conflagrations: a nucleus producing infinite strength. There is no more powerful thing in the world of ideal origins, nor more virtuous organ of

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<sup>9</sup> Sollors 121.

<sup>10</sup> Trousson quoted by Sollors, 290.

generation; and there is no greater joy for an active mind than that which may be given him by the development of that energy.<sup>11</sup>

Enthused by the inherent potential of the motif, D'Annunzio illustrates it as a rewarding endeavour for the creative mind of the writer, who can thus witness its development. Attributing to the motif, a power comparable to forces of nature, the Italian poet encourages writers to guide and promote its expansion. D'Annunzio's assertion is later overtaken by T.S. Eliot's (1888-1965) statement, quoted and discussed by Trousson as he examines the relation between a creator and his creation.

Le créateur ne saurait donc oublier le respect que lui impose le thème et, à travers lui, la tradition littéraire collective; c'est que, si l'homme crée des oeuvres, il ne tarde pas à devenir le produit des oeuvres qu'il a créées. Pour reprendre les termes de T. S. Eliot, "il y a donc, en dehors de l'artiste, quelque chose dont il est vassal."<sup>12</sup>

Trousson quotes other, more recent critics who highlight the role and importance of the theme in the creative process, and are therefore favorable to thematic studies: "Dès 1967, Cl. Pichois et A.-M. Rousseau consacraient plusieurs pages favorables aux études de thèmes et concluaient: "Si nous définissons le thème comme le point de rencontre d'un esprit créateur et d'une matière littéraire ou simplement humaine, la thématologie reprend tous ses droits."<sup>13</sup>

In the introduction to The Return of Thematic Criticism, Sollors also quotes Harry Levin, who discusses the use of the word "theme" in Shakespeare: "Themes ... can never be avoided:

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted by Sollors, 9.

<sup>12</sup> Raymond Trousson, Thèmes et mythes. Questions de méthode, (Bruxelles: Editions. de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1981) 82.

<sup>13</sup> Trousson, Thèmes et mythes, 12.

they must be incidentally mentioned--- must indeed be continually evoked--- in any discussion of any writer, whenever his writing is described or paraphrased or critically evaluated.”<sup>14</sup>

Confirming the indispensability of themes, this quote bolsters their necessity as well as their comprehensive effectiveness, not only for the evaluation of Shakespearean writing, but also for that of writing in general. Similarly, Trousson raises his voice in favor of thematics, predicting its brighter future as an essential genre whose autonomy will soon be established.

... la thématologie se définira, espérons-nous, non plus comme une discipline auxiliaire ou secondaire, non plus comme un amusement de l’esprit ou une collation de disparates arbitrairement réunies, mais comme un genre en soi, qui s’inscrit évidemment dans les cadres de la littérature comparée, mais contient cependant ses exigences particulières et peut prétendre à l’autonomie.<sup>15</sup>

As Trousson, siding with Sollors, in his rehabilitation of of thematics, had predicted, Thematic Studies are presently intrinsically linked to comparative approaches. They play a crucial role in the study of Comparative Literature, brought about by the emergence of Feminism, Ethnic Studies as well as Political Criticism. In his article “Thematics and Historical Evidence”, Thomas Pavel, explaining the relevance of thematics in the study of modern and novel subjects, states: “One of the strengths of feminist and Third World readings consists in discovering specific thematic elements until now neglected or considered innocuous.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Sollors xviii.

<sup>15</sup> Raymond Trousson, Un problème de Littérature comparée: les études de thèmes. Essai de méthodologie, (Paris: M.J. Minard, Lettres Modernes, 1965) 91.

<sup>16</sup> Sollors 125.

### III. The Theme as a Uniting Principle

Now that the importance of thematics has been reexamined, and more or less reestablished, we are still faced with the task of sorting the diverse meanings of the “thème”. In his article “Theme and Interpretation”, Menachem Brinker interprets the theme as the uniting principle linking the common elements in different texts, without excluding their differences. This common link can thus be traced through an “analyse thématique”, such as comparative literature studies.

The theme is understood as potentially uniting different texts. Various stories and poems are written on one and the same theme, and most often so are various additional texts other than poems and stories. A theme is, therefore, the principle (or locus) of a possible grouping of texts. It is one principle among many since we often group together texts considered to have a common theme, which are importantly and significantly different in many other respects.<sup>17</sup>

Brinker’s opinion does not diverge from that of Klein’s and Trousson’s as far as the importance of the theme in the field of comparative studies. However, John Burgos, reversing Brinker’s title, writes an article entitled “Thématique et herméneutiques ou le thématicien contre les interprètes”<sup>18</sup> Burgos warns against the labyrinth of definitions in which thematics could be lost while searching for its own identification.

One defining use and function of the theme is identified by Theodor Wolpers in “Motif and Theme as Structural Content Units”, where he declares that:

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted by Sollors 21-22

<sup>18</sup> John Burgos, “Thématique et herméneutiques ou le thématicien contre les interprètes”, La Revue des Langues Vivantes 43.5 (1977)



[...] literary motifs seem to play an important part in the creative process. Here their main function is to supply, if only for a limited period of time, a pattern or schema, a kind of visualized outline helping the author to anticipate, as if in a rough draft, what he is going to invent and arrange in detail. <sup>19</sup>

As presented by Wolpers, the theme is thus facilitating an outline or schema for the content of the work. Keeping with the same pace as Wolpers, Trousson, in Un problème de littérature comparée, likens the study of theme to mosaïcs, where each fragment contributes to the meaning as a whole. “Ainsi l’étude d’un thème apparaît-elle comme une mosaïque compliquée, où chaque pierre a sa place et sa signification.”<sup>20</sup>

A thematic study can thus be a delineation of both structure and content of the message of a text in a comparison with other texts. As Brinker states in his article “Theme and Interpretation”, the theme is “a meeting point” where “texts encounter other texts”. We now see a further reason why the fates of Thematics and Comparative Literature are entwined. And we need to explore their solidarity even further in the case of European and Romance literatures. Raymond Trousson highlights the common link between the literatures of Europe: “Les grands thèmes littéraires font partie, nul ne le contestera, d’un patrimoine européen dont la première vertu est sans doute d’ignorer les frontières nationales.”<sup>21</sup> Not only does Trousson confirm the importance of comparative literature as a way of conserving a legacy, but he also emphasizes the value of thematics as a uniting agent between nations in the intellectual domain: “C’est peut-être

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<sup>19</sup> Sollors 88.

<sup>20</sup> Trousson, Un problème, 90

<sup>21</sup> Trousson, Un problème, 68

au niveau des thèmes que se fait le mieux sentir la fraternité ou du moins le cousinage intellectuel des peuples.”<sup>22</sup>

According to Etiemble, a thematic study should cover “non seulement les relations entre les différentes littératures de l’époque moderne et contemporaine, mais dans son ensemble, l’histoire de ces relations, dût-elle remonter au passé le plus ancien.”<sup>23</sup> Trousson’s vision, as well as his diapproval of insularism is a precursor of globalism, which is a current penchant in the economic and literary fields.

#### **IV. National Versus Global**

In this day and age, where boundaries between nations are being eradicated, globalism emerges as the new tendency revolving around what Octavio Paz has highlighted as “a secret unity: man”. Nationalism pushed to the extreme can turn into insularism. In the controversy of national versus comparative approaches, Trousson denounces a potential danger of insularism that cannot render justice to either Thematics or Comparative Literature, two critical approaches that encourage the understanding between different nations and civilizations.

D’aucuns ont soutenu que l’étude d’un thème devait servir à faire ressortir les caractéristiques d’un peuple à l’exclusion de celles du voisin: aussi, écrivait E. Sauer, “il faut que la thématologie se dissocie de la littérature comparée, car, en réalité, il n’y a pas grand-chose à gagner à incorporer l’étranger dans les cas où il ne s’agit pas de la situation particulière où un thème a manifestement subi, sous une influence étrangère, une transformation décisive. [...] La thématologie sera

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<sup>22</sup> Trousson, Un problème, 68

<sup>23</sup> Trousson, Un problème, 70

donc, au premier chef, exploitée sur le plan national<sup>120</sup>. Ce qui instaure, à propos des littératures, un nouvel insularisme!<sup>24</sup>

Trousseau's protest against insularism will be backed by the new inclination towards globalization, which is a trademark of the XXIst century. In 2001, Ian Baucom's article "Globalit, Inc.; or the Cultural Logic of Global Literary Studies" wagers a parallel between globalization and global literary studies. Referring to Giovanni Arrighi's doctrine on global economy, Ian Baucom establishes an analogy between global capital and global literary studies, as he mentions: "globalization theory and its occasional analogue global literary studies."<sup>25</sup>

Baucom suggests the existence of a relationship between postmodern or contemporary neo-romanticism and its attempt at an examination of the global: "David Simpson, Alan Liu, and James Chandler have all recently identified one or another version of contemporary thought as a neo-Romanticism. Here, however, Romanticism and its reappearance in the thought world of the postmodern signal engagements with the global that resist."<sup>26</sup> Dividing the field of global literary studies into both project and method, Baucom analyzes his own approach to the study of literature, in the light of globalism:

Two modes of globalized literary study have achieved dominance of late: global literary study as project and as method. By *project* I intend the appeal to reconfigure literary study as the study of something called global literature. By *method* I mean the global spread of particular ways of studying something called literature.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Trousseau, Un problème 90-91

<sup>25</sup> Ian Baucom, "Globalit, Inc.; or the Cultural Logic of Global Literary Studies," PMLA 116 (2001): 167.

<sup>26</sup> Baucom, "Globalit, Inc.", 160-161.

<sup>27</sup> Baucom, 162

Although global studies do not share the same aesthetic and psychological premises as Comparative literature, nevertheless the comparative method becomes necessary and relevant as a consequence of the social and political concerns of the former. Could this new comparative field be depicted as neo-comparability?

The revival predicted by Trousson is indeed taking place: a significant shift in the attitude towards Thematics and Comparative Literature has occurred, helping to find new applications for these approaches in the twenty-first century. The newly developed interest in global literary studies, supported by an important institution such as the MLA, confirms this revival: “The notion that something called global literary study has altered contemporary literary study and can be glimpsed as the future of literary study has gained a fair currency. Indeed the call for papers for this special topic in PMLA proceeds on the assumption that that future has, for the most part, arrived.”<sup>28</sup> As the predilection for globalization becomes more obvious, Baucom envisions its legitimacy, thus asserting the importance of the comparative approach.

## V. The Emergence of Comparative Studies

Although the stakes of Comparative Literature did not appear very high lately, contemporary critics are making efforts to refurbish its image. Supported by the concept of the Archipelago that Massimo Cacciari explored in his book *L'Arcipelago*, published in 1997, Bertrand Westphal, from the Université de Limoges, sang the praises of Comparative Literature:

La littérature comparée est interagissante; elle est à l'intersection; elle figure en un centre abstrait, toujours mobile, ponctuel, qui fédère toutes les tensions concrètes. Dès lors que l'on intègre l'incompressible écart du parallèle dans un

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<sup>28</sup> Baucom, 168

discours global de fragmentation, on isole un peu mieux l'utilité--la nécessité-- d'une approche comparatiste. Grâce à sa nature profondément hétérogène, le comparatisme est coextensible à l'hétérogène archipelagique.<sup>29</sup>

In an issue dedicated to the discussion of Belgium as a comparative space, the same *Revue de Littérature Comparée* offered several articles examining the importance of polyglotism in comparative studies. Jean Weisgerber, de Université Libre de Bruxelles, declares that: "Le polyglottisme peut s'ériger en un incomparable moyen de communication, d'entente et d'enrichissement spirituel."<sup>30</sup> Although Comparative Studies are taught in Belgium, the University does not offer a specific diploma in this field. Weisgerber also claims that a multilingual nation like Switzerland, Canada, Belgium, and several others from the Third World, could set the practice of a comparative dialogue open to diversity.

Another issue of *la Revue de Littérature Comparée* (300) (No 4/ Octobre-décembre 2001) features "Comptes rendus", a Book Review by Daniel Madélnat, in which he commends the appearance of several new publications in Comparative Literature, highlighting a renewed interest in a subject so often disparaged by critics: "En quelques mois, trois ouvrages collectifs: une salve qui semble fêter la fin d'un siècle où la littérature comparée s'est théorisée, diversifiée, et installée dans le cursus universitaire;"<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Bertrand Westphal, "Parallèles, mondes parallèles, archipels", *Revue de Littérature Comparée*, 298 (2001): 241

<sup>30</sup> Jean Weisgerber, "Un pays ouvert aux quatre vents", *La Revue de Littérature Comparée*, 299 (2001): 358

<sup>31</sup> Daniel Madélnat, "Comptes rendus", *La Revue de Littérature Comparée*, 300 (2001): 585. The celebrated works are: Le Comparatisme aujourd'hui. Textes réunis par Sylvie Ballestra-Puech et Jean-Marc Moura (1999); Littérature Comparée. Théorie et Pratique. Textes réunis par André Lorant et Jean Bessière (1999); and Perspectives comparatistes. Etudes réunies par Jean Bessière et Daniel-Henri Pageaux (1999). (p. 585) In addition to Fin d'un millénaire. Rayonnement de la littérature comparée. Textes réunis par Pascal Dethurens et Olivier-Henri Bonnerot. (2000) (p. 586) These works highlight the fact that Comparative Literature is still held into consideration despite the critics' attempts to terminate it. Since they were recently published, in 1999, 2000, and 2001, they mark the ascending significance of this field.

The history of comparative studies is relatively unknown. In La littérature comparée, Paul Van Tieghem discusses the social and historical causes, which led to the founding of Comparative literature. The displacement of numerous writers as a consequence of wars and revolutions led them to a multilingual knowledge and ultimately to comparative study:

Enfin, au XIXe siècle, sous l'influence des révolutions, des guerres, des émigrations — d'abord la grande émigration française, puis les diverses émigrations d'intellectuels qui jalonnent la période 1808-1850: espagnole, portugaise, italienne, polonaise; — sous l'impulsion des études historiques et philologiques, de celles qui fondent l'histoire du droit et la connaissance des traditions populaires, et surtout par l'action du romantisme, beaucoup de critiques considèrent les littératures modernes de l'Europe comme un ensemble, dont les diverses parties présentent des contrastes ou des ressemblances.<sup>32</sup>

Like Trousson, Van Tieghem depicts a Romantic Cosmopolitanism, which integrates national differences and, more than its predecessors, strives to understand as well as to accept them. He cites Goethe's (1749-1832) interest in "la littérature universelle"<sup>33</sup>, which appears in his correspondence with Eckermann in 1827.

A few titles of literary critics' works indicate an intellectual link or relationship between the literature of one country and another. In order to show that there is a mutual intellectual voyage or exchange, Philippe Van Tieghem's Les influences étrangères sur la littérature française traces back certain themes to a foreign influence or source. Within La République des lettres, one finds a capital of common themes and myths that could be retraced through several

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<sup>32</sup> Paul Van Tieghem, La Littérature comparée, (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1946) 27.

<sup>33</sup> Van Tieghem, La Littérature, 27-8.

cultures and countries. And if Thematic Studies tend to transcend borders, it is due to their reflection of universal experiences shared throughout space and time by many writers across “the human community”.

Trousseau analyzes the universality and timelessness of the study of theme:

Découvrir comment et pourquoi un thème a, pendant des siècles, hanté la conscience humaine, ce qu’il a exprimé chez chaque artiste et à chaque époque, de profondément pensé ou de douloureusement vécu, c’est là le rôle d’une thématologie consciente de sa place et de sa fonction véritables.<sup>34</sup>

Beyond the boundaries of time and history, the study of theme was a useful tool for retracing and regrouping the meanderings of human sensibility, as Octavio Paz will also attempt to illustrate it in his book Los hijos del limo. Describing the nature of theme, Trousson emphasizes its role as a linking agent, joining eras and epochs in an effort to preserve the essential aspect of the human legacy.

Le thème est un fil conducteur, éternel à travers la durée, qui se charge, au long des siècles, de tout le butin artistique et philosophique amassé, sur sa route illimitée, par l’aventurier humain; c’est pourquoi il préserve et restitue à travers ses innombrables transmutations, quelques constantes, quelques préoccupations fondamentales, en un mot quelque chose de l’essentiel de la nature humaine.<sup>35</sup>

The utterance “l’aventurier humain” describes perfectly the intellectual search of authors pursuing human concerns across the labyrinth of centuries, and converting the legacy of the past

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<sup>34</sup> Trousson, Un Problème, 88.

<sup>35</sup> Trousson, UnProblème, 91.

into a new vision for the future, while redefining the present and being guided all along by the “fil d’Ariane” which is the theme.

In “Le thème selon la critique thématique”, Michel Collot certifies the importance of theme in conveying the world of emotions to the reader. Quoting Jean-Pierre Richard’s L’univers imaginaire de Mallarmé, Collot attests to the effectiveness of a thematic approach for a study of the protagonist’s innermost feelings, sensations as well as reactions.

L’image du monde sensible que la critique thématique découvre dans une oeuvre reflète donc un ‘paysage’ intérieur: ‘l’objet décrit l’esprit qui le possède, le dehors raconte le dedans’; elle constitue ‘l’univers imaginaire d’un écrivain’, fait de tout ce que, dans le monde, il adopte ou rejette, parce qu’il s’y reconnaît ou cherche à s’en distinguer.<sup>36</sup>

A focus on the inner world of emotions being one of the trademarks of Romanticism, it is appropriate to use a thematic approach to explore the imaginary world of romantic authors. Romanticism is thus the era, par excellence, when writers expressed their innermost feelings, exploring the solitude of a newly discovered self as well as a new vision of the world; and avoiding the adherence to a set of principles imposed upon them from the outside. My study examines the conflict between an elected and an inherited vision of self and world, as the writer attempts to seek solace in the proximity of Neptune’s kingdom.

## **VI. Romanticism and the Analysis of “le monde intérieur”**

In “Sul romanticismo: lettera al marchese Cesare d’Azeglio”, written in September, 1823, while Romanticism was still struggling for acceptance in Italy, Manzoni, referring to the debates

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<sup>36</sup> Michel Collot, “Le thème selon la critique thématique”, *Communications* 47 (1988): 83.



around it, deploring the fact that it is viewed in a negative manner. Manzoni's sarcastic tone expresses his concern about the critical opinions surrounding Romanticism. His lament reminds us of Werner Sollors' regretting the devaluation of thematics in the introduction to his book The Return of Thematics.

Il romanticismo? Se n'è parlato qualche tempo, ma ora non se ne parla più; la parola stessa è dimenticata, se non che di tempo in tempo vi capiterà forse di sentire pronunziar l'epiteto *romantico* per qualificare una proposizione strana, un cervello bislacco, una causa spallata; che so io? Una pretesa esorbitante, un mobile mal connesso.<sup>37</sup>

Far from being forgotten, or expiring as Mario Praz's book The Agony of Romanticism seems to suggest, Romanticism is in fact experiencing a new contemporary revival labeled neo-romanticism. What is Romanticism? Defining Romanticism is no easy task. In his book Nineteenth-Century French Romantic Poets, Robert T. Denomé devotes an entire chapter, entitled "Towards a Definition of Romanticism", to this issue. Surveying the different personal approaches of the Romantic poets, their adherence or rejection of certain ideas, the author finally commends Baudelaire's definition: "Romanticism does not rest precisely in the choice of subject matter, nor in the particular truth that it may impart; rather, it rests in the manner of expressing human feelings."<sup>38</sup>

The Mexican author Octavio Paz highlights the common bond between diverse civilizations as well as consecutive eras. In his own words, Paz affirms the existence of a unity appearing also in art and literature:

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<sup>37</sup> Alessandro Manzoni, *Scritti di teoria letteraria*, "Sul romanticismo: lettera al marchese Cesare d'Azeglio", September 22nd, 1823, (Milano: Rizzoli, 1981) 189.

<sup>38</sup> Robert T. Denomé, Nineteenth-Century French Romantic Poets, (Carbondale and Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press, 1969) 41.

But the differences between civilizations hide a secret unity: man. Cultural and historic differences are the work of a single author who changes very little. Human nature is no illusion: it is the constant factor that produces the changes and the diversity of cultures, histories, religions, arts.<sup>39</sup>

According to Octavio Paz, despite the changes and the diversity of expression, some ideas are reflected by several schools of thoughts pertaining to different eras. Both Baudelaire and Paz identify the common link that brings together civilizations, overcoming historic and cultural differences. Whence, the need for the indispensable Comparative studies, and consequently for Comparative Literature, as man at large inscribes his voice as a testimony of his sensibility as well as his feelings.

Paz refers to Rousseau who, preceding the Romantics, brought forth sensibility, a constant aspect of human nature, into fashion:

A new force, sensibility, upsets the constructions of reason. Not a new force, but rather a very old one, it predates reason and history itself. Against the new and the modern, against history and its dates, Rousseau opposes sensibility. It was a return to our origins, to the beginning of beginnings: sensibility lies beyond history and dates.<sup>40</sup>

This force advocated by Rousseau and emphasized by Paz lays at the foundation of Romanticism, which started where the French Early Romantics, Rousseau, and Bernardin de

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<sup>39</sup> Octavio Paz, Children of the Mire. Modern Poetry from Romanticism to the avant-garde, (Cambridge Massachussets & London England, Harvard University Press, 1991) 8.

<sup>40</sup> Paz, Children 33.

Saint-Pierre left off. They led the way to Romanticism, which followed in their footsteps. As far as Paz is concerned, “The Romantics turned sensibility into passion.”<sup>41</sup>

If asked the persistent question “What is Romanticism?” Octavio Paz would answer in his own poetical manner: “Critical reason depopulated heaven and hell, but the spirits returned to earth, to air, to fire, and to water – they returned to the bodies of men and women. This return is called Romanticism.”<sup>42</sup> This quote is particularly relevant to this study since Octavio Paz links Romanticism to the elements, and thus to water.

Justifying their attraction to the sea, the social Romantic poets, or Les Mages romantiques<sup>43</sup> as Bénichou calls them, dedicating his book to the study of Lamartine, Vigny and Hugo, find themselves facing the task of establishing a new literary movement able to convey the emotional feelings of a new society. Rocked by a sea of change, diverging from the philosophy of Classicism and of the Enlightenment, the new Romantic movement struggled to find its balance, looking back towards the Middle Ages, and echoing German and English ideas and practices.

“Le mal du siècle”, comparable to a kind of “mal de mer”, or seasickness, defines the individual’s uneasiness in his world. Whether this malaise is due to certain conditions incompatible with the individual’s temperament, or to his own dissatisfaction with life, it pushes him to withdraw into a solitary corner. “Le mal du siècle”, resulting from the social and political turmoils occurring in nineteenth-century France, is described by Alfred de Musset (1810-1857) in La Confession d’un enfant du siècle as the alienation caused by the immensity of an unsteady sea separating two different worlds, the old and the new.

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<sup>41</sup> Paz, Children 33.

<sup>42</sup> Paz, Children 35.

<sup>43</sup> Paul Bénichou, Les Mages romantiques, (Paris: Gallimard, 1988)

...quelque chose de semblable à l'Océan qui sépare le vieux continent de la jeune Amérique, je ne sais quoi de vague et de flottant, une mer houleuse et pleine de naufrages, traversée de temps en temps par quelque blanche voile lointaine ou par quelque navire soufflant une lourde vapeur; le siècle présent, en un mot, qui sépare le passé de l'avenir, qui n'est ni l'un ni l'autre et qui ressemble à tous deux à la fois,[...] <sup>44</sup>

Musset was part of a generation of young writers whose romantic tendencies lead to an obvious unsteadiness in their behavior in life and whose existence was, consequently, characterized by an overwhelming solitude. Throughout the thesis, we will have the opportunity to closely observe several examples of “le mal du siècle” as it unfolds its convoluted layers in the Romantic literary production of the XIXth century.

As the literary French milieu, in an enthusiastic endorsement, named the year 2002 “l'année Victor Hugo”, films, documentaries, books and exhibits celebrated the impressive legacy of the French writer. To commemorate the bicentenary of the French writer, Marie-Laure Prévost compiled manuscripts and drawings from the Bibliothèque nationale de France, dedicating her book to: Victor Hugo, l'homme-océan. Using the author's own expression to describe him, Prévost acknowledged the influence of the sea on his life and works. More often than not, the writer's solitude is shared with a sea, a lake, an ocean or a body of water. In 1856, Victor Hugo describes both his solitude and his fascination with the sea in a letter to a friend, quoted by Barrère in La fantaisie de Victor Hugo: “Je vis dans une solitude splendide, comme perché à la pointe d'une roche, ayant toutes les grandes écumes des vagues et toutes les grandes

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<sup>44</sup> Alfred de Musset, La Confession d'un enfant du siècle, (Paris, Flammarion, 1993) 31.

nuées du ciel sous ma fenêtre. J’habite dans cet immense rêve de l’océan, je deviens peu à peu un somnambule de la mer,”<sup>45</sup>

My study will observe and analyse the experience of writers and protagonists who, like Victor Hugo, shared their solitude, their feelings and their thoughts with the sea, acquiring a new knowledge of the physical and spiritual world, as well as a deeper understanding of themselves.

Not only does Romanticism draw from the literary legacy of past sources, all the way to Antiquity, but it anticipates on our era as well: “By their admission of the complexity of human experience, these writers of the nineteenth century ushered in the age of Modernism which has continued to our time.”<sup>46</sup>

As a matter of fact, Romanticism will persist in some of the most prominent literary works of the following centuries, up to our days. My study will focus mainly on nineteenth-century Romanticism, while allowing the possibility of either going back to past sources of a particular theme or investigating its projection into future literary currents. Transcending the temporal frame of Romanticism, I will refer to paradigms of literary characters turning towards the sea as they search for solutions to their problems in the unfathomable depths of the liquid universe.

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<sup>45</sup> Jean-Bertrand Barrère, La Fantaisie de Victor Hugo, 1802-1851, (Paris: José Corti, 1960) 151.

<sup>46</sup> Denomé, French Romantic Poets, 41

## 1. CHAPTER ONE: FROM CRADLE TO GRAVE.

“Ils lui attribuèrent pour père Saturne ou le Temps, pour berceau l’Océan...”

(B. De Saint-Pierre, Paul et Virginie)

Elemental studies discussed and illustrated extensively the characteristics of the fourth element: water. Literature, however, is mostly responsible for the colorful array of metaphorical representations of the aquatic domain. The present chapter, “From Cradle to Grave”, features the nurturing aspect of the sea, as it is represented as a cradle for infants entrusted to its care; its perilous aspect as a dangerous abyss, as a tool of justice symbolizing some form of fair or unfair punishment, and finally its morbid aspect as a grave will also be examined. The reader will witness the literary characters’ triumphs or failures as they confront a humane or inhuman sea, either being carried to safety by its waves, or drowned in its incommensurable depths. He or she will navigate the Romantic sea or ocean, starting from the pre-romantic period and reaching beyond Romanticism.

Since this is above all a thematic, comparative, and semantic study whose nexus is sea and solitude, I will not limit myself to any genre in particular, but rather move from poems to novels and short stories. I’m choosing those most representative of an imaginary sea, and most indicative of its mysterious appeal as well as its powerful presence in Romance Literature. In these works, the topic of an ambiguous sea recurs in its most essential dichotomy, as a life giving or death-causing element. Going back to Biblical sources, I study Saint Amant’s poem “Moïse sauvé”, and Vigny’s poem “Moïse”. Ibn Tufayl’s novel Hayy Ibn Yaqzan will be studied as a

replica of the story of Moses, and compared to Bernardin de Saint Pierre's Paul et Virginie. The mythological source will be explored in the section "Venus Born of Seafoam". Before death, trumpeting its solitude in a most unusual crescendo, the section entitled "The Last Song of the Swan," conveys the laments of his impending death through songs and music. Moving to more worldly subjects, such as social or historical ones, I explore Musset's play Lorenzaccio, Victor Hugo's novel l'Homme qui rit, his poem "Clair de Lune" from Les Orientales. Last but not least, Balzac's short stories "Un drame au bord de la mer", and "L'enfant maudit" as well as his novel La Duchesse de Langeais, which present this author's powerful representations of the sea. Rosalía de Castro's la Hija del mar is discussed as the embodiment of both aspects of the sea, as it serves as a transition between cradle and grave.

Several works studied here will be re-examined in subsequent chapters, as they may offer a crucial perspective on the different aspects of the sea, or on the various issues addressed in this study. Whenever possible, the continuous echo of solitude will be highlighted either through songs and music music, or through any action or behaviour conveying the author's personal vision of the sea.

### **1.1. The Sea as a Cradle**

Sharing a common interest in the aquatic domain, writers chose the sea as a setting for their novels and short stories, while expressing themselves according to the characteristic features of their literary school, be it from a pre-romantic or a romantic standpoint. As it became a source of inspiration as well as a marker of identity for writers, the sea also represented a cradle for several infants and children, whose endangered lives were entrusted to the waves. Numerous S. O. S. were adressed by mothers to a mighty river or sea, which was not to be

invoked in vain, and proved to be a trustworthy ally. Rather than a message in a bottle, the cry for help was enclosed in a box in the form of a child. It was indeed a “mayday” in a basket, pleading for the life of an innocent child to be spared.

In the introduction to her book, Les visages de l’enfant dans la littérature française du XIXe siècle, Marina Bethlenfalvay discusses the ambivalent image of the child whose positive aspect is nearly always counterbalanced by a negative one.

Presque toujours l’archétype “positif” de l’enfant divin, futur héros ou Messie se double d’un aspect négatif: annoncé par les oracles comme celui qui renversera l’ordre établi, il est ressenti dès avant sa naissance comme menace. Maudit et interdit, il est abandonné, exilé, enfermé dans une nacelle et voué à la mort. Mais il triomphe de tous les dangers et revient de “l’autre monde”, pour transformer celui qui voulait l’exclure.<sup>1</sup>

Since ancient days, there were several instances in which those “children of destiny” come to mind: Oedipus, Moses, St. Julien L’Hospitalier. Their legends proved that fate could not be averted by the attempt to get rid of them. As a matter of fact, disturbing the established order of things was considered to be the greatest crime of all. Bethlenfalvay’s description fits perfectly the examples of Moses and Hayy Ibn Yaqzan, which are discussed in the present chapter of this study. There is a pattern of departure from society as well as a return to it, enriched with an experience that these predestined children have acquired through their unique adventure.

The French word for sea is “mer”, while “mère” in French means mother. Pronounced almost exactly in the same manner, those two homonyms end up suggesting a symbolic synonymy as well. The nurturing characteristics of the sea, its life-giving attributes could be the

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<sup>1</sup> Marina Bethlenfalvay, Les visages de l’enfant dans la littérature française du XIXe siècle, Esquisse d’une typologie, (Genève: Librairie Droz, S.A., 1979) 13.



cause of a recurring poetic and semantic equation leading to a plethora of metaphors in most Romance languages. For a mother, the ultimate solitude is to be separated from her child; and for an infant the greatest vulnerability lies in being deprived of a mother's protective arms. The sea also served as a maternal substitute in several historic and literary instances.

### **1.1.1. Moses: Cradled by the Sea.**

In patriarchal societies, women have often been considered passive, inactive, and unable to make a decision or to take charge of their lives. However, a few women had the courage to challenge the customs, the laws, and to defy the ancient social rules in order to protect their newborns. As early as the era of the Pharaohs, Moses' mother, Jocabel, trusted the river Nile with her most precious belonging: her infant son, Moses, who later on overpowered the sea as Prophet of God. And the sea proved to be worthy of this trust: the boy was saved and was revered by humanity throughout the ages. With the sea as an ally, Jocabel was able to defy the tyranny of the Pharaoh's orders. The sea comforted the solitude of both the mother and the child, and showed clemency to their plight. There is solidarity between the mother/mère and the sea/mer: one gave birth and the other saves the child from a certain death thus generating a new rebirth for him. As a matter of fact, this alliance appears to endow the child, who escaped death in his cradle, with a superior life. The floating cradle was similar to a coffin, yet in the struggle between life and death, the child comes out victorious, and in Moses' case, comparable to a superhero.

In 1653, poet Antoine Girard de Saint-Amant published a biblical and pastoral epic: "Moïse sauvé", which was inspired by Nicolas Poussin's painting "Moïse sur le Nil". Departing somewhat from the idyllic poetic genre usually recurrent in Saint-Amant's works, this poem,

dedicated to Marie de Gonzague, Queen of Poland and Sweden, deals with the image of the infant Moses.

Saint-Amant's poem portrays the infant Moses, whose mother abandoned him to the river in order to save him from an imminent death dictated by the Pharaoh's decrees. Modeling his poem on Virgil's Aeneid, Saint-Amant divides it into twelve books, and echoes the beginning of that epic in his opening stanza:

Je chante hautement la première aventure  
D'un héros dont la gloire estonna la nature;  
Je descriis les hasards qu'il courut au berceau;  
Je dy comment Moyse, en un fresle vaisseau  
Exposé sur le Nil, et sans voile et sans rame,  
Au lieu de voir couper sa jeune et chère trame,  
Fut, selon le decret de l'arbitre éternel,  
Rendu par une nymphe au doux sein maternel.<sup>2</sup> (I, v. 5-12)

The poem's incipit is a summary of Moses' miraculous salvation. The reader is informed of the dangers threatening the infant's cradle on an unpredictable river. Moses is under a divine protection to whom he owes his safety, and who leads him out of the solitude and perils of the voyage, and back into his mother's arms. The child's vulnerability is highlighted by the expressions "fresle vaisseau", "hasards", "sans voile et sans rame", "exposé sur le Nil". The image of death, "voir couper sa jeune et chère trame", is counterbalanced by the soothing final image of life-giving tenderness "rendu ... au doux sein maternel." In antithesis to danger and death, the figure of the mother is evoked as a harbor for the child. Contrasting with the

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<sup>2</sup> Antoine Girard de Saint-Amant, "Moyse sauvé", Oeuvres, t. v, (Paris, Honoré Champion, 1979) 27-28.

description of the helpless infant abandoned on the water without oars, without sails, and with no chance for salvation, is the mention of the mother's embrace, which doesn't need any other qualification than "doux". Symbol of sacrifice, of tenderness, of unconditional love, the depth of maternal love is seen as equal in magnitude as the perils of the sea. The reader is presented with a double paradoxical image: a hazardous sea of danger, as well as a maternal sea of abnegation and redemption.

As the poem progresses, the mother, addressing her son, expresses her concerns about his innocence and her inability to protect him from the threat of death. She focuses all her hopes on her offspring: "Las, dit-elle, tu ris, ô ma gloire dernière, / Tu ris, mon seul espoir, et tu ne connais pas / Que peut-être ta vie est proche du trépas."<sup>3</sup> (I, v. 322-24)

The fluidity of the rhythm of the verses expressing the mother's hope and love clashes with the abrupt rhythm of those describing the threat of an imminent danger lurking around her child. The helplessness of the mother, unable to convey her worries to her carefree and smiling son, indicates that she is alone with her fear and torment. A skillful enjambement expresses her inner conflict as she passes from the elated feeling of love and tenderness to the terrifying premonition of a possible death. The presence side by side of the contrasting words "vie" and "trépas" in the same verse conveys the ambiguity of the role of the sea in the infant's life. Is it a life-giving sea or death-giving one? The dilemma is resolved by Alain Cabantous in Le ciel dans la mer: "Reflet d'un monde manichéen, espace qui attire et qui repousse, la mer des cosmogonies anciennes est porteuse de mort et de vie."<sup>4</sup> In order to describe the lonely mother abandoning her son to the

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<sup>3</sup> Saint-Amant, "Moyse sauvé", Oeuvres, 39

<sup>4</sup> Alain Cabantous, Le ciel dans la mer. Christianisme et civilisation maritime (XVIe-XIXe siècle) (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1990) 19.

waves, Saint-Amant chooses the graceful image of the doe, worried and concerned about her fawn, and forced to relinquish him for his own good:

Telle que dans l'horreur d'une forest espesse  
Une biche craintive et que la soif oppresse,  
Quitte à regret son fan, depuis peu mis au jour,  
Quand pour chercher à boire aux fosses d'alentour,  
Ayant au moindre bruit les oreilles tendues,  
On la voit s'avancer à jambes suspendues,  
Faire un pas, et puis deux, et soudain revenir,<sup>5</sup> (I, v. 425-431)

The doe is unable to step away from her fawn. The poet describes her as she goes back and forth, performing a minuet of fear, all her senses tense toward any possible source of danger threatening her offspring. Her hesitation to leave is the sign of her love and her solitude. As much as possible, she delays making this lonely decision isolating her from her fawn. Through the image of the doe, we can see the solitude of the mother as her child is cradled by the waves rather than by her arms. Her protective role and maternal duties are thus transmitted to the water. She stands there desperately, as she is forced to create such a great distance between her child and herself. This sacrifice means life for her son, while his nearness to her would mean a premature death for him. Torn between her reason and her emotions, praying for his safety, she accomplishes, tearfully, this ultimate gesture of renunciation: letting him go with the current. In spite of the dangers it represents, the water could mean a new lease on life for him.

Toward the end of the poem, the mother is finally reunited with her child, and happily brings him back home. Saint-Amant's idyllic and pastoral style in his description of family life

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<sup>5</sup> Saint-Amant, "Moyse sauvé", Oeuvres, 42

pushed him to label this poem as an idyll rather than an epic: “L’une porte en ses bras le saint et cher enfant, / L’autre charge le sien du berceau triomphant.”<sup>6</sup> (XII, v. 431-32) Because the cradle has conquered the river, overcoming all its perilous snags, and made a triumphal return ashore, it has earned the attribute of “berceau triomphant”. Delivering the infant safely ashore, it also represents the triumph of life over death.

The infant depicted with tenderness by Saint-Amant is totally absent from Vigny’s poem “Moïse”, published in 1826, which rather portrays the centenary Prophet as he carries alone the burden of his nation, while yearning for a well-deserved rest. The following two alexandrins, which recur three times as a refrain in Vigny’s poem, in a nearly identical form, emphasize the superhuman stature of Moses along with his solitude among men. He appears uttering this invocation to God, and emerges in front of the reader as superior to the natural elements, but also as an extremely lonely being, whose power has determined his solitude: “Seigneur, j’ai vécu puissant et solitaire, / Laissez-moi m’endormir du sommeil de la terre.”<sup>7</sup> (v. 105-06)

Although Moses finds in water a powerful ally in his infancy as well as in his maturity, he appears as a solitary figure throughout his life, in the poems of both Saint-Amant and Vigny. Twice the water acts as an agent of deliverance: at first, the lonely child is carried by the Nile to safety, and, later on, the Red Sea, which splits up at Moses’ command, again saves him and his people from danger. This alliance between Moses and the water is sought at first by a helpless mother, and ultimately ordered by a Divine decree.

The greatness of the river and of the sea is evoked as to give prominence to that of the prophet in Vigny’s “Moïse”.

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<sup>6</sup> Saint-Amant, “Moyse sauvé”, Oeuvres, 241

<sup>7</sup> Alfred de Vigny, “Moïse”, Poèmes antiques et modernes, Poèmes (Paris: Union Générale d’Editions, 1966) 31.

In a powerful image, Vigny weighs Moses' power against that of the sea: "Le fleuve aux grandes eaux se range quand je passe, / Et la voix de la mer se tait devant ma voix."<sup>8</sup> (v. 82-83) Moses imposes his rule upon the mighty river, and his voice is raised above that of the sea. Vigny's "fleuve aux grandes eaux" is the River Nile, whose waters are tame in Moses' presence, while "la mer" is the Red Sea, which falls silent at Moses' powerful voice.

Vigny underscores the solitude of the leader, which can be observed throughout his poem "Moïse".

Les hommes se sont dit: "Il nous est étranger." (v. 92)

J'ai vu l'amour s'éteindre et l'amitié tarir; [...] (v. 95)

J'ai marché devant tous, triste et seul dans ma gloire, [...] (v. 98)

Aussi, loin de m'aimer, voilà qu'ils tremblent tous,

Et quand j'ouvre les bras, on tombe à mes genoux.<sup>9</sup> (v. 103-104)

As Joseph Bianco notices in his article "A moveable Exile: Alfred de Vigny's Moïse"<sup>10</sup>, the Hebrew Prophet's solitude is in regard to society but not in regard to God who has given him the power to overcome the elements, and the sea in particular. Once more, the lonely Prophet, the man of God will have a power that no one else has. Because he has received from the Creator what is only given to the chosen ones, his solitude is seen as a consequence as well as a determining factor of his power. Even the unruly and unleashed forces of nature have to yield to their Maker, or the one representing Him.

Both Saint-Amant and Vigny borrowed the main details of their story from Biblical sources, but each poet added his own personal trademark as well as that of his era: literary genre,

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<sup>8</sup> Vigny, "Moïse", Poèmes, 30.

<sup>9</sup> Vigny, "Moïse", Poèmes, 30-31

<sup>10</sup> Joseph Bianco, "A moveable Exile: Alfred de Vigny's 'Moïse'", Modern Language Studies, 3, (1990): 82.

style, and meter. Saint-Amant's "Moÿse" appears as a cherub in a pastoral setting, surrounded by nymphs and flowers, while Vigny's "Moïse" has all the characteristics of a stoic who forgets his own interests for the sake of his people, and whose main concern is their salvation. He endures a lifetime of solitude in order to accomplish a divinely decreed destiny.

### **1.1.2. Inspired by Moses: The story of Hayy Ibn Yakzan.**

Saint-Amant's use of the doe's simile to represent a mother worried about her infant is a reminder of another child raised by a gazelle: Hayy Ibn Yakzan. The story of Hayy Ibn Yaqzan is similar to that of Moses. They were both abandoned on the water in a wooden box and a basket, respectively. Their mothers feared for their lives, and the only hope for their survival resided in entrusting them to the sea. The Pharaoh's sister discovers Moses floating on the water and adopts him, whereas a gazelle raises Hayy Ibn Yakzan, whom she finds on a deserted island.

A detailed view of the Story of Hayy Ibn Yaqzan is given here because the novel and its author do not occupy a prominent position in the literary History of the West; but since this is a thematic study, such a relevant topic should not be neglected. This story was written in Spain by an Andalusian author; its subject is the solitude of a child on an island; and above all, this child was found floating on the sea, as it happens with the protagonist of Saint-Amant and Vigny.

In the 12th century, the Andalusian writer Abou Bakr Ibn Tufayl wrote The story of Hayy Ibn Yakzan, or Le philosophe autodidacte (the self-taught philosopher). A desperate mother, fearing the wrath of her brother, since she had married without his consent, and worried about her son's fate, put him in a box and abandoned him to the waves. The box landed safely on a secluded island, and Hayy Ibn Yaqzan, who was raised by a gazelle and shaped by solitude, ended up as a hermit-philosopher.

Born in Guadix around 1105, Ibn Tufayl studied in Seville and Cordoba, and acquired extensive scientific and literary knowledge. Little is known of Ibn Tufayl's life except for the fact that he was a medical doctor as well as a diplomat. He was the personal doctor and advisor to the Caliph Almohade Abou Yacoub Youssouf, and was later succeeded by his friend and protégé Averroès (Ibn Rushd). The story of Hayy Ibn Yakzan was first translated from Arabic into Hebrew in 1349, and then into Latin by E. Pococke in 1671, under the title of Philosophus Autodidactus. The Latin translation was followed by a series of English, Dutch, German, Spanish and Russian ones. The most reliable translation was that of Léon Gauthier in 1900 in Algiers. Two sources are known for The Story of Hayy Ibn Yaqzan: firstly, Ibn Tufayl borrowed the names of his characters from the renowned Persian physician and philosopher Avicenna's Recital of Hayy Ibn Yaqzan, an allegorical tale of a few pages, which lacks the dazzling poignancy of Ibn Tufayl's story. The second source of inspiration was an elder Spanish contemporary, Avempace, who wrote The Hermit's Régime. Hayy Ibn Yaqzan may have inspired the series of Robinsonades, which sprouted all over Europe in different languages. For Robinson Crusoe, however, the challenge was to readapt to life without civilization, for Hayy Ibn Yaqzan, it was the greater challenge of reinventing civilization or more exactly surviving without it. Ibn Tufayl's story could also have inspired the adventures of Tarzan who was raised by apes in a total absence of civilisation. Like Tarzan, Hayy Ibn Yaqzan learned to express himself in the language of the animals surrounding him. It may not be by mere coincidence that E. R. Burroughs, the XIXth century American writer, chose for his hero a name rhyming with Yaqzan!

Two different versions are given of the birth of Hayy Ibn Yaqzan: the first one which we have already mentioned is similar to the story of Moses, the second one, most unusual, attributes



Hayy's birth to a spontaneous generation from a fermented clay on the island. The reader is reminded of Gérard de Nerval's (1808-1855) famous verse: "Celui qui donna l'âme aux enfants du limon."<sup>11</sup> (v. 70), that Octavio Paz cites as the opening quotation as well as the title of his book on Romanticism, Los hijos del limo. Yet both versions report that the child was fed and protected by a gazelle who surrounded him with solicitude, and assumed the role of a mother: feeding him, protecting him from the inclemency of the weather, and filling his solitude with her comforting presence. She only left him when she needed to graze; and the child became so used to her that he cried whenever she was absent. Inevitably, the child learned the language of gazelles in order to express his needs. His life from now on was a constant observation as well as the contemplation of a world he was attempting to comprehend on his own, without the help or the obstacles provided by civilization.

While, in Saint-Amant's poem, Moses's mother was only concerned for her son's safety, Hayy's mother is also worried about her own fate should her secret be divulged. Her solitude and despair can be perceived in the following passage:

Craignant que son secret ne fût divulgué, après avoir allaité son nourrisson, elle l'enferma soigneusement dans un coffre, elle l'emporta vers le rivage de la mer à la nuit tombée, accompagnée de serviteurs et d'amis de confiance. Le coeur brûlant d'amour et de crainte, elle lui fit ses adieux...<sup>12</sup>

She is torn between her maternal feelings and her fear, yet she has to act. The separation must take place: the mother cornered by circumstances has no choice but to overcome her love, and hope for the best. Just as the sea offers the dichotomy of life and death in the story of Moses

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<sup>11</sup> Gérard de Nerval, "Le Christ aux oliviers", Les Chimères, (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1965) 244.

<sup>12</sup> Abou Bakr Ibn Tufayl, Le philosophe autodidacte, trad. Léon Gautier, (Paris: Editions mille et une nuit, 1999) 28.

previously discussed, so does the abandoned cradle, representing a lifesaver as well as a possible tomb for the child. But in the context of this particular story, the social element carries a lot of weight. As a fruit of a marriage disapproved by the mother's family, if found, the child could be killed; abandoned on the water, he may drown or, if saved, he may face a symbolic death, which is death to the civilized world: "Elle livra l'enfant aux flots. Un courant puissant le saisit et l'emporta la nuit jusqu'au rivage de cette île dont on a parlé."<sup>13</sup> Survival depends on his escape from the society in which he was born, but which would not hesitate to put him to death since he represents a threat to its established rule. Thus society is portrayed as lifegiving as well as deadly at the same time.

As the child examines life around him, wondering about its ways, so does the reader, observing Hayy Ibn Yaqzan as he survives in the wilderness with the sole help of his heart and his intellect. The following tender scene, full of visual details, recalls similar instances upon which Saint-Amant lingered in his poem, although Ibn Tufayl's narrative prose proves more incisive and offers sharper and more powerful images:

Pressé par la faim, l'enfant se mit à pleurer, à pousser des cris d'appel et à se débattre. Sa voix parvint à l'oreille d'une gazelle qui venait de perdre son faon. Elle suivit cette voix, croyant que c'était celle du faon, et elle arriva au coffre. Elle tenta de l'ouvrir avec ses sabots pendant que l'enfant poussait de l'intérieur, si bien qu'une planche du couvercle céda. Alors émue de pitié et prise d'affection pour l'enfant, la gazelle lui offrit son pis et l'allaita à discrétion. Elle revenait sans cesse le voir, l'élevait et veillait à écarter de lui tout danger.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibn Tufayl, Le philosophe, 29.

<sup>14</sup> Ibn Tufayl, Le philosophe, 30.

The gazelle, trying to open the box, while the child attempts to evade the prison in which he is trapped, sends a suggestive message of survival and compassion. The gazelle is grieving over the loss of her fawn, and her loneliness merges with that of the vulnerable infant who happens to cross her path, and thus they both fill a void in each other's life. Although the gazelle's interest in the box is instinctive, since she believes the voice to be that of her fawn, she quickly becomes fond of to the child and closely bonds with him: "Elle demeurait près de lui et ne le quittait que lorsqu'elle y était forcée par le besoin de paître. L'enfant de son côté, s'habitua si bien à la gazelle, qu'il éclatait en larmes lorsqu'elle tardait à revenir. Elle accourait."<sup>15</sup> The image of an animal nourishing a child is not at all new, since a she-wolf suckled the Roman twins Remus and Romulus in ancient times.

Is The Story of Hayy Ibn Yaqzan a pedagogical novel such as Rousseau's l'Emile? Or is it a philosophical novel such as Voltaire's (1694-1778) Micromégas? Or perhaps the story of a child surrounded by nature, animals and uncorrupted by civilization such as Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's Paul et Virginie? Undoubtedly, Ibn Tufayl's novel could fit into all these categories, but above all it illustrates the "roman d'apprentissage", with the child being initiated into life and learning to survive on his own. After the death of his mother the gazelle, his efforts to comprehend the mystery of mortality to which he is exposed for the first time, magnifies his solitude. His relentless contemplation of the sea around his island prompts him to sharpen his perceptive skills in order to discover life.

The character of Hayy Ibn Yaqzan, or "Vivens, filius Vigilantis"<sup>16</sup> in Latin, "Alive, son of Awake" in English, or finally in French: "Vivant, fils de l'Eveillé"<sup>17</sup>, or perhaps "Vivant, fils

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<sup>15</sup> Ibn Tufayl, Le philosophe, 37.

<sup>16</sup> Henri Corbin, Avicenna and the Visionary Recital, (Kingsport, Tennessee: Kingsport Press, Inc., 1954) 33.

<sup>17</sup> Ibn Tufayl, Le philosophe autodidacte, 150.

du veilleur”<sup>18</sup>, embodies the image of man before civilization described by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Not only does Hayy represent the innocence given by natural surroundings, but also the mechanical perfection of a brain unadulterated by social corruption, which, like a clock, moves in the right direction, as he sets out to discover the enigma of the Universe. A brain, unspoiled by envy, ambition, hatred or prejudice, guides the protagonist on the road to survival, leading him to perfect the useful techniques for self-defense, as well as the search for food.

In his pedagogical treaty: Emile ou de l'éducation, Rousseau recommends a single book to be given to his imaginary pupil: Daniel Defoe's (1660-1731) The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe! But why did Rousseau choose Robinson Crusoe? Because it is the story of a man alone on an island, who tries to survive on his own, without any help from civilization, keeping the purity of his soul intact, and relying on self-sufficiency; and because nature is the best school and the most reliable source of knowledge. Here is how Rousseau describes Robinson Crusoe's life: “Robinson Crusoe dans son île, seul, dépourvu de l'assistance de ses semblables et des instruments de tous les arts, pourvoyant cependant à sa subsistance, à sa conservation, et se procurant même une sorte de bien-être...”<sup>19</sup> Has Rousseau heard about The Story of Hayy Ibn Yaqzan? Has he read E. Pococke's Latin translation of it? His relentless praise of solitary life seems to portray the very life of Ibn Tufayl's hero: “Le plus sûr moyen de s'élever au-dessus des préjugés et d'ordonner ses jugements sur les vrais rapports des choses, est de se mettre à la place d'un homme isolé, et de juger de tout comme cet homme en doit juger lui-même, eu égard à sa propre utilité.”<sup>20</sup> Hayy Ibn Yaqzan had no choice but to be concerned with

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<sup>18</sup> A. – M. Goichon, Le Récit de Hayy Ibn Yaqzan, (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1959) 10.

<sup>19</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Emile ou De l'éducation, Introduction par Michel Launay, (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1966) 239.

<sup>20</sup> Rousseau, Emile, 239.

the usefulness or the “utilité” of his actions, since no pretentious vanity was involved in his struggle for survival. Isolated from any source of corruption, his very solitude was the source of his innocence and purity.

A lifelong friend of Rousseau’s and a believer in his idea of a simple and natural life unspoiled by civilization, XVIIIth century author Bernardin de Saint-Pierre exemplified those beliefs in his exotic novel Paul et Virginie. The similarities between the latter and Abou Bakr Ibn Tufayl’s Hayy Ibn Yaqzan can be readily identified. The same simple and natural setting is present in both novels, although in Paul and Virginie a secluded spot on an island is where two mothers are able to love and raise their children with the help of two slaves who become part of the family. The presence of the sea surrounding the island is a protection from the rest of the world. Paul and Virginie are both born on this island, frail and vulnerable, alienated from society because their mothers have broken the established moral and social orders. Solitude is not as total as it is in Ibn Tufayl’s novel: we have indeed the model of an alternative society which thrives on love, understanding, pity, equality, justice, self-sufficiency, all positive feelings which promote growth and prosperity.

Marina Bethlenfalvay, whose study we mentioned in an earlier section of this chapter, describes the child who represents the golden age of human life, as the symbol of innocence: “Il est pieux, aimant, plein de pitié pour les malheureux et les animaux, plein de confiance envers les hommes et la vie, car il ignore le mal.”<sup>21</sup> Paul and Virginie represent such innocence. Bernardin de Saint-Pierre applies Rousseau’s concept of the ideal society in his novel. Like Rousseau, he claims for his literary children the “transparence” of nature, having removed from their path “l’obstacle” of social corruption, as Jean Starobinski observes in his comprehensive

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<sup>21</sup> Bethlenfalvay, Les Visages, 20.

book Jean-Jacques Rousseau: la transparence et l'obstacle.<sup>22</sup> While their mothers, Marguerite and Mme de La Tour, are both helpless victims of civilization, and the two slaves, Marie and Domingue, are unwilling victims of a social order created by man's greed and cruelty, Paul and Virginie appear immune from the evils of society.

"Ma solitude flottante"<sup>23</sup>, says Maupassant, alluding to a trip on his ship: "Le Bel-Ami". Is there anyone more solitary than a child abandoned on a floating cradle, living in the isolation of an island, surrounded by the infinite immensity of the sea? Although dead to the world, yet able to reinvent an ideal society where virtue, kindness and equality reign, such as Moses, Hayy Ibn Yakzan and Paul and Virginie did? The sea has a prominent role as a life-giving source in the works we've just discussed. Saint-Amant, Vigny, Ibn Tufayl, Rousseau and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre illustrate the beneficial aspect of the sea in the lives of their characters. We will eventually refer to the same works to examine other aspects of a multivalent sea, such as danger, punishment and death.

### **1.1.3. Venus, Born of Seafoam**

Venus, one of the most cherished figures of Antiquity, is present in every literary era, incarnating beauty in verse as well as prose. One of artists' most favorite subjects, she embodies beauty throughout the ages. Since this chapter is focusing on the image of the sea as a cradle, it would be difficult to omit the birth of Venus. Many a writer celebrated in their works the myth of the sea giving birth to the goddess of beauty. Her marine birth surrounded her with a mysterious aura, rendering her as elusive and evanescent as seafoam. Studying the beliefs as well as the

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<sup>22</sup> Jean Starobinski, Jean-Jacques Rousseau: la transparence et l'obstacle, (Paris: Gallimard, 1971)

<sup>23</sup> Guy de Maupassant, Sur l'eau, (Paris: Albin Michel, 1972) 159.

behaviour of sailors in Le ciel dans la mer, Alain Cabantous, declares: “Si l’on suit Erasme, la Vierge se serait simplement substituée à Vénus: ‘Jadis Vénus était la protectrice des marins parce qu’on la croyait née de l’écume de la mer. Depuis qu’elle a renoncé à protéger ceux qui naviguent, La Vierge mère a succédé à cette mère qui n’était pas vierge.’”<sup>24</sup> So, according to Erasmus, Venus renounced her protective role in order to keep that of embodiment of Love and Beauty. What gave her this protective power was her mythical birth out of seafoam. Illustrating Cabantous’ statement, in Balzac’s La Duchesse de Langeais, which we will examine later in this chapter, the protagonist goes from being viewed as a passionate noblewoman under the sign of Venus to becoming a nun under the protection of the Virgin Mary.

In the “Préambule” to the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of his book Paul et Virginie, (1788), Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s summary of how the ancients assigned divine powers to the diverse elements surrounding them, includes Venus:

Enfin ils donnèrent à la déesse qui réunissait tous les charmes de la femme le nom de Vénus, plus expressif sans doute que celui d’aucune divinité. Ils lui attribuèrent pour père Saturne ou le Temps, pour berceau l’Océan, pour compagnons de sa naissance les jeux, les ris, les grâces, pour époux le dieu du feu, pour enfant l’amour, et pour domaine toute la nature.<sup>25</sup>

In the poetry of many Italian writers: from the baroque poet Giovan Battista Marino (1569-1625), in the early 1600s, to Ugo Foscolo (1778-1827) and the young Alessandro Manzoni, at the dawn of Romanticism in Italy, as well as in the works of Victor Hugo and

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<sup>24</sup> Cabantous, Le Ciel dans la mer, 149

<sup>25</sup> Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Paul et Virginie, (Paris: PML, 1995) 65.

Rosalía de Castro, we find significant references to Venus' birth from the sea or, specifically out of the sea foam, which in its effervescence seems to represent the very essence of the goddess.

Venus appears to be almost ubiquitous in the poetry of Marino, serving as the term of comparison par excellence in beauty and amorous exploits. One particular sonnet in his Rime marittime, "A Venere" is entirely devoted to her. Invoking Venus, the poet describes her birth amidst "le salse spume" or sea foam, and refers to the Aegean Sea as her "cuna" or cradle:

Deh, s'egli è ver che fra le salse spume  
la cuna avesti in su l'Egeo nascente,  
e s'or, che n'apri il giorno in oriente,  
bagni ne l'onde il tuo ceruleo lume,<sup>26</sup> (v. 5-8)

Marino treats the sea as a privileged space from which beauty originates and springs forward, replendent with light. His poetry is indeed populated with water-nymphs, often described as emulating Venus, and emerging in all their beauty from the liquid, crystal-like element: "lucenti e liquidi cristalli" is one of Marino's favorite definitions of the water, to fill the onlooker with delight or with awe.

Marino is not alone in celebrating Venus's birth out of seafoam. In his famous sonnet "A Zacinto", where he celebrates his native island, Foscolo writes that the very sea, "the Greco mar" which surrounds Zacinto has also witnessed the birth of Venus, thus illustrating the characteristics of a life-giving sea. Because this beautiful poem is focused on the heartbreak of exile, it will be studied in depth in the fourth chapter. Here, I still feel that the powerful evocation of Venus' birth in the Aegean Sea deserves to be mentioned on its own.

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<sup>26</sup> Giambattista Marino, "A Venere", Rime Marittime, (Ferrara: Edizioni Panini, 1988) 93-94.



Rather than just revisiting classical myths, Foscolo liked to create his own: in his verse, his birthplace on a Greek island is the cradle of divine life and beauty, as well as the site of Odysseus' adventures, the very birthplace of poetry, as such it represents the ideal merger of his artistic and patriotic feelings and aspirations. Unlike Foscolo, Marino does not have the luck of sharing the same birthplace with Venus: that very "Greco mar" which reflects the beauty of Zacinto, has also witnessed the birth of Venus.

Zacinto mia, che te specchi nell'onde  
Del Greco mar da cui vergine nacque  
Venere, e fea quelle isole feconde  
Col suo primo sorriso, onde non tacque<sup>27</sup> (v. 3-6)

According to Foscolo, Venus's first smile embellished his native island, bestowing its beauty upon Zacinto, which is reflected in the waters of the Aegean Sea. In a poetic metaphor, the island of Zacinto is cherished by both the poet and the goddess of Beauty. Foscolo also portrays himself, implicitly, as a product of the "Greco mar". Moreover, in two famous odes, and in the first "inno" of Foscolo's incomplete poem Le Grazie, Venus' apparition is always accompanied by the motif of the Greek sea. In such a way, it indicates the poet's belief in the power of myth; in the possibility of restoring, through poetry, hope, beauty and harmony to the human existence otherwise ridden with anxiety and plagued by solitude.

Inspired by the poetry of Foscolo and Parini, perhaps by certain lines of Marino, in 1802-1803, a young Alessandro Manzoni wrote an "ode amorosa" for the sister of his friend Ermete Visconti, the "angelica Luisina" with whom he had fallen in love. This ode includes the motif of Venus' birth from the ocean; in fact it treats it as the most essential ingredient in a love poem,

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<sup>27</sup> Ugo Foscolo, "A Zacinto", Ultime Lettere di Jacopo Ortis, Poesie e Carmi, (Milano: Rusconi, 1987) 273-74.

especially if the beauty and graces of one's object of affection are exalted. Love, says Manzoni, does not want me to sing of the bloody battles being fought at the moment, such as the Napoleonic wars in Italy, but rather expects me to describe Venus emerging from the water, and surveying the sea with her bright eyes: "Ma a dir m'insegna, come / Trasse dai gorgi del paterno Oceano/ Le ruggiadose chiome, / Sul mar girando i rai lucenti Venere [...]"<sup>28</sup> (v. 55-58)

Unquestionably, most writers compared extremely beautiful women to Venus. Victor Hugo did not desist from this rule, since the Duchess Josiane is described as Venus in L'Homme qui rit. Like his predecessors, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Ugo Foscolo and many others, Hugo associates Venus to seafoam. Describing a sleeping Josiane, he writes: "aussi fièrement assoupie sur ce lit de boudoir que Vénus dans l'immensité de l'écume."<sup>29</sup> Whereas Foscolo and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre are concerned with the descriptive aspect of Venus, Hugo explores the dual nature of his protagonist: Venus as well as Medusa: "On était femme le jour et goule la nuit."<sup>30</sup> The oxymoronic effect of this combination of opposites is common among Romantic writers and will also be evident in Rosalía de Castro's La hija del mar, where the protagonist loses her sanity as the result of several traumatic events, while her beauty remains unaltered. In L'Homme qui rit, Hugo doesn't limit himself to the physical description of Josiane as a marine divinity, but attempts to sketch her moral portrait in the same manner:

Le roi l'avait faite duchesse, et Jupiter néréide. Double irradiation dont se composait la clarté étrange de cette créature.

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<sup>28</sup> Alessandro Manzoni, Tutte le poesie, 1797 – 1812, a cura di Gilberto Lonardi, commento e note di Paola Azzolini, (Venezia: Marsilio, 1987) 101.

<sup>29</sup> Victor Hugo, L'Homme qui rit, (Paris: Gallimard, 1978) 367.

<sup>30</sup> Hugo, L'Homme, 260.

A l'admirer, on se sentait devenir païen et laquais. Son origine c'était la batârdise et l'océan. Elle semblait sortir d'une écume. [...] Elle avait en elle de la vague, du hasard, de la seigneurie et de la tempête.<sup>31</sup>

The birth of Venus is such a renowned poetic topos that it is sometimes redundant to mention her name, thus Victor Hugo's mere suggestion that: "Elle semblait sortir d'une écume." is equivalent to stating that she is a replica of Venus. Outcome of a worldly as well as a divine power, Josiane seems to represent the idol of a pagan cult. Presenting both a regal countenance and the turbulence of a tempest in her character, she could easily unsettle the onlooker. Enforcing the metaphor of Josiane being a daughter of the ocean, Hugo declares: "elle avait la sécurité d'une olympienne qui se sait fille du gouffre, et qui peut dire à l'Océan: Père!"<sup>32</sup>

A more obvious filial relationship with the sea can be found in Rosalía de Castro's novel La Hija del mar, (1863) where the circuitous saga of her protagonist, Esperanza, begins with her discovery as an infant in the sea, and ends with her suicide by drowning. Again, the author suggests that her protagonist could be born of seafoam: "[...] ésa es Esperanza, la hija del mar, la que arrojada sobre una pelada roca, no sabemos si es aborto de las blancas espumas que sin cesar arrojan allí las olas, o un ángel caído que vaga tristemente por el lugar de su destierro."<sup>33</sup>

([...] that is Esperanza, daughter of the sea, the one who was cast up onto a bare rock, the one whom we do not know if she was miscarried by the white foam eternally dashed there by the waves, or if she is a fallen angel who wanders sadly through her land of exile.)<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Hugo, L'Homme, 259.

<sup>32</sup> Hugo, L'Homme, 367.

<sup>33</sup> Rosalía de Castro, La hija del mar, (Madrid: AKAL, 1986) 47.

<sup>34</sup> Rosalía de Castro, Daughter of the Sea, trans. by Kathleen, N. March, (New York: Peter Lang, 1995) 28.

The mystery surrounding Esperanza's birth, upon which the author will shed light only towards the end of the novel, is explored by De Castro in order to define the unusual essence of her protagonist whose whole existence is, to say the least, out of the ordinary. Esperanza is a daughter of the sea, as well as a sister to the waves, since her great love for the marine element is comparable to a family relationship: "Un rayo de sol cayendo sobre los cerrados ojos de Esperanza la hizo despertar a la hora en que despiertan las olas, sus frescas hermanas."<sup>35</sup> (A ray of sun falling on Esperanza's closed eyelids made her awaken when her cool sisters, the waves, awoke.)<sup>36</sup>

Along with the waves, Esperanza has indeed a place in the sea where she belongs. She is bonded to the sea by a great love, which is probably more instinctive than voluntary. She is attracted to it by an inborn impulse as if the sea were indeed the source of her existence. The author attempts to convey to the reader the reason behind this visceral relationship: Esperanza's existence is deeply rooted into the sea: "¡ Esta es la hija del mar, la esencia de sus bellezas, su más rico tesoro! El mar es su elemento, su felicidad, el sueño de sus sueños, y la ilusión que embellece las horas de su infancia."<sup>37</sup> (This is the daughter of the sea, the essence of its beauties, its richest treasure! The sea is her element, her happiness, her dream of dreams, and the illusion, which adorns her childhood hours.)<sup>38</sup>

The extent of this great love is described as going beyond a common love of nature: a deep love towards the cradle of her infancy, which will later on become her grave: "Ella ama el mar como otros han amado a las flores o el río que pasa silencioso bañando la yerbas de la

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<sup>35</sup> De Castro, *La hija*, 152.

<sup>36</sup> R. de Castro, *Daughter of the Sea*, 104

<sup>37</sup> De Castro, *La hija*, 76.

<sup>38</sup> R. De Castro, *Daughter of the Sea*, 49

pradera; pero su amor es tan grande como el amor que lo produce.”<sup>39</sup> (She loves the sea like others have loved flowers by the river that silently passes, bathing the grassy meadows. But her love is as great as the love that produces it.)<sup>40</sup>

Esperanza afflicted by the loss of her friend, Fausto, is no longer the radiant divinity rising from the depths of the water to adorn the earth with her sweet smiles. One cannot compare her “a la diosa, en fin, salida del fondo de los mares para alegrar la tierra con sus dulces sonrisas,”<sup>41</sup> (...the goddess who emerged from the depths of the sea to brighten the earth with her sweet smile,)<sup>42</sup> She is so depressed by the death of Fausto, whose body was thrown into the sea before her very eyes, that she almost loses her sanity.

#### **1.1.4. The Last Song of the Swan**

Now that visual harmony, embodied by Venus, has been examined in several literary works of the French, Italian and Spanish traditions, it might be appropriate to move on to another type of harmony such as songs. Between the cradle and the grave there is an interlude where the swan utters his last song. The solitude of the characters in many a novel reaches a pinnacle when they feel the need to sing, unloading their “mal de vivre” in the space around them. Just as the swan is inseparable of the water he glides upon, so are these heroes connected to a nearby sea or ocean. The last song of the swan, a literary Romantic topos par excellence, represents a crescendo in solitude, the outcome of an extreme malaise similar to “le mal du siècle”, and perhaps the profound despair preceding an imminent death. In the novels examined in this section,

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<sup>39</sup> De Castro, *La hija*, 76.

<sup>40</sup> R. De Castro, *Daughter of the Sea*, 49

<sup>41</sup> De Castro, *La hija*, 122.

<sup>42</sup> R. De Castro, *Daughter of the Sea*, 83.

protagonists have chosen to express their solitude by singing. Echoing the melody of the waves as well as the moanings of an unleashed sea, their songs alleviate their soul from its torments. It may well be the anticipation of an impending death of which they are unaware, or a death they are able to feel and predict just as the swan does. In both cases, the swan utters his last song either as a testimony of his past and short life, or as an attempt to leave a legacy like a vestige of immortality: “El cisne antes cantaba solo para morir.”<sup>43</sup> (v. 2) Is Rubén Darío’s (1867-1916) bird surrendering to death or rejecting it? Is he singing to delay the fatal moment, pushing it back into the unknown? Is it the solitary expression of a protestation against death? As the Nicaraguan poet writes: “Sobre las tempestades del humano oceano / Se oye el canto del cisne; no se cesa de oír,”<sup>44</sup> (v. 5-6) The romantic characters studied in this chapter also try to overwhelm the rumors of the tempest just as they try to overcome their own fatal destiny. Will the swan’s fate inevitably be to have its neck wrung, as Enrique González Martínez (1871-1952) wishes in his poem “Tuércele el cuello al cisne”?<sup>45</sup>

Balzac’s “l’Enfant maudit”, as well as La Duchesse de Langeais; Hugo’s L’Homme qui rit, and Rosalía de Castro’s La hija del mar among others, offer paradigms of solitary songs, precursors of an imminent death.

### **L’Enfant Maudit: Echoing the Melody of the Waves**

Jeanne de Saint-Savin Comtesse d’Hérouville, the tormented mother in Balzac’s L’Enfant maudit, is suspected by her husband to be carrying the child of her cousin Chaverny. The violent

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<sup>43</sup> Rubén Darío, “El cisne”, Poesias completas, (Madrid, Aguilar, S.A. De Ediciones, 1952) 641.

<sup>44</sup> Darío, “El cisne”, Poesias, 641.

<sup>45</sup> Enrique González Martínez, “Tuércele el cuello al cisne”, Twentieth-Century Latin American Poetry, A Bilingual Anthology, Ed. by Stephen Tapscott, (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1999) 48.

count D'Hérouville is ready to strangle the child right upon his birth. Hearing from the doctor that the newborn is very frail and unlikely to survive, he decides to allow fate to take its course. However, he asks his wife to keep the child out of sight in a shack on the shore, and threatens to kill him if he ever sets foot into the château. Thus, Etienne grows up in solitude, with the sea “mer” as his sole companion, and separated from his mother “mère”. Suffering from the separation from his mother and fearing the ultimate abandonment, he conveyed his sadness and worry through his songs. His solitary melodies reached the countess on her deathbed, representing a powerful bond between mother and child as well as their last means of communication. They overcome the obstacle of separation, which deprives two beings from each other’s presence. “Ces chants me font vivre! disait la duchesse à Beauvouloir en aspirant l’air animé par la voix d’Etienne.”<sup>46</sup> They are life-giving melodies, which kept the communication flowing between mother and son, breaking the cruel rule set by the Count d’Hérouville, shattering the solitude of silence and reuniting mystically two beings in need of one another.

The fundamental role of the sea in the lives of the protagonists of Balzac’s “L’Enfant maudit” appears in the constant use of sea metaphors deriving from Antiquity. We find the sea constantly cited as an archetype of purity: “En ce moment, un chant frais comme l’air du soir, simple autant que la couleur de l’Océan, domina le murmure de la mer et s’éleva pour charmer la nature. [...] La voix s’unissait au bruissement de l’onde avec une si rare perfection qu’elle semblait sortir du sein des flots.”<sup>47</sup> The freshness of the evening air, the color of the ocean, and the sound of the voice are combined in a concomitant sensation and image. In fact, the harmony of the correspondance between Etienne’s voice and that of the sea waves is, according to Balzac,

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<sup>46</sup> Honoré de Balzac, “L’Enfant maudit”, Oeuvres complètes (Paris: Guy Leprat, 1960) 333.

<sup>47</sup> Balzac, “L’Enfant maudit”, 341-42

so perfect that the sound of the former seemed to proceed from the depths of the latter. Balzac describes the comforting and healing power of songs: “L’harmonie montait par nuages, remplissait les airs, versait du baume sur toutes les douleurs, ou plutôt elle les consolait en les exprimant.”<sup>48</sup> As Etienne comforted his mother during her illness by means of his songs, he is now comforting his own grief and loneliness with the same melodies. Etienne’s voice, this balm curing all ills, seems to be springing from the depths of the sea: “Au coucher du soleil, l’enfant de la solitude se mit à chanter de cette voix merveilleuse qui s’était produite, comme une espérance, dans les oreilles les plus sourdes à la musique, celles de son père.”<sup>49</sup> Etienne’s exceptional voice earned him the name of “le petit rossignol”, the little nightingale. All those around him knew of his singing except his father who finally ended up being touched by it after losing his younger and favorite son, Etienne’s brother. Little did the feared and revered Count d’Hérouville know that he would also lose Etienne, whose songs were to become the last songs of the swan!

Described as a “chant onduleux”,<sup>50</sup> Etienne’s song emulates the movement of the waves. Once more, these melodious songs will overcome Etienne’s solitude by introducing him to Beauvouloir’s daughter. Listening to a voice echoing his own song, Etienne finds a soulmate in Gabrielle, “un autre lui-même.”<sup>51</sup> A dialogue of songs brings love to these two lonely souls: “En ce moment, une voix qu’il fut tenté d’attribuer à quelque sirène sortie de la mer, une voix de femme répéta l’air qu’il venait de chanter,”<sup>52</sup> Beauvouloir himself compares his daughter to a

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<sup>48</sup> Balzac, “L’Enfant maudit”, 341-42

<sup>49</sup> Balzac, “L’Enfant maudit”, 362

<sup>50</sup> Balzac, “L’Enfant maudit”, 363

<sup>51</sup> Balzac, “L’Enfant maudit”, 336

<sup>52</sup> Balzac, “L’Enfant maudit”, 363



pearl sheltered in her shell. Not only does Gabrielle recall the characteristics of a pearl, but also the enchanting quality of her voice is similar to that of a mermaid's, whose song has been a poetic topos since Antiquity. Through songs and music, Etienne has just discovered his soul mate. Etienne and Gabrielle combine their solitudes to make a happy world for themselves. Once they discover the comfort of being together, they do realize as well that they cannot survive without each other. Their songs are an anticipation of their forecoming death: the last song of the swan!

Once Jeanne de Saint Savin, Etienne's mother is dead, the boy knows that he can still keep in contact with her through his songs. Although Etienne dies at the end of the story, he keeps comforting himself with his songs throughout his short and sad life. As if he knew that listening to his own voice was providing relief from the solitude and bitterness of abandonment, which no child should have to bear. His actual death, the result of a constant distress caused by his father's intransigent behaviour, turned each song into the last song of the swan.

### **Melodies of Passion in Balzac's *La Duchesse de Langeais***

Balzac's interest in music is evident in L'enfant maudit, but it also appears in La Duchesse de Langeais. The novel begins and ends in a Spanish convent situated on an island, the solitary setting par excellence. The echo of solitude here resounds in the voice of the former Duchesse de Langeais, who has become Sister Thérèse and sings in the church's choir. The spiraling structure of the "église marine", the convent described by Balzac in La Duchesse de Langeais, brings to mind that of a Nautilus. The convent is divided into solitary cells that recall the shell's inner divisions. As the sound of the organ fills the church, evoking the sound of the

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waves contained in the shell, it reverberates the echo of solitude. The connection between sea, solitude, songs, and death is the best example of the last song of the swan.

The story of La Duchesse de Langeais is the account of a double solitude. The solitude of two people who, in spite of their love are separated by the religious vows the Duchess has taken in a moment of despair. This work contains many autobiographical elements: the character of la duchesse de Langeais is a literary replica of Mme de Castries whom Balzac loved hopelessly.

In this novel, Balzac uses a liquid terminology to describe the flow of music, emanating from the church's choir as well as from the sea. The sounds of the sea accomplish a dual action. Firstly, they assert the presence of the sea in the enclosure of the convent, permeating the atmosphere with its vastness and openness, and encouraging the solitary characters to express their feelings of loneliness. Secondly, they remove the characters from their confinement as they generate a sense of hope, of love, of belonging, which is able to fight back the negative feelings of despair.

Armand de Montriveau, a French general, happens to attend a mass in the church of the Spanish convent set on an island. He is moved by the lovely voice singing Rossini's music "Mosé" in the choir. It reminds him of a voice dear to him, a voice from the past, singing Berlioz's "Le Fleuve du Tage". He is told that the voice he has just heard belongs to Sister Thérèse who joined the order of the Carmelites five years earlier. She turns out to be a Parisian Duchess whom he used to love, and who entered the convent as the result of a misunderstanding.

— C'est bien elle! se dit le général en relevant son front, en le dégageant de ses mains, sur lesquelles il l'avait appuyé: car il n'avait pu d'abord soutenir l'écrasante émotion qui s'éleva comme un tourbillon dans son coeur quand cette

voix connue vibra sous les arceaux, accompagnée par le murmure des vagues.  
L'orage était au-dehors, et le calme dans le sanctuaire.<sup>53</sup>

Rather than the devoted love of a mother to her son, or even the innocent love between Etienne and Gabrielle in L'Enfant maudit, the reader here witnesses a powerful passion, at odds with a social and moral code. Sister Thérèse has chosen a retired life for herself, and for Armand de Montriveau, the rules of religious life represent an unsurmountable barrier. While these two solitary figures struggle with their inner passion, the sea lays everywhere, lending its symbolic attributes to their love. The presence of the sea is overwhelming as it participates in the concert, accompanying the voice of the singing nun: “accompagnée par le murmure des vagues”. The sea is a witness to their impossible love, a witness also to the last song of the swan, since Sister Thérèse will soon be found dead in her cell.

Describing the emotional experience that Montriveau is going through, Balzac writes: “L'âme de la religieuse vola vers lui sur les ailes de ses notes, et s'émut dans le mouvement des sons. La musique éclata dans toute sa puissance; elle échauffa l'église.”<sup>54</sup> And further on: “Après quelques molles ondulations, sa musique prit, de teinte en teinte, une couleur de tristesse profonde. Bientôt les échos versèrent les chagrins à torrents.”<sup>55</sup> The expression “quelques molles ondulations” reminds us of “chants onduleux” used by Balzac to describe Etienne's singing in L'enfant maudit. In both cases words are chosen to express the movement of the sea waves while qualifying the nature of the sound; but in La Duchesse de Langeais, they have an even greater effect in representing the sea as an everpresent power truly ruling the senses.

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<sup>53</sup> Honoré de Balzac, La Duchesse de Langeais, (Paris, Flammarion, 1988) 26.

<sup>54</sup> Balzac, La Duchesse , 22

<sup>55</sup> Balzac, La Duchesse , 24

The reader is converted into a listener with no conscious effort on his part. He is subjected to the evocatory impact of the music through his senses, vision as well as hearing. In order to convey to both the listener and the reader the uncontainable grief of the protagonists, this last image “les échos versèrent les chagrins à torrents” pairs the impetuosity of a torrent with the irrepressible echoes of the musical notes. The words: “tristesse profonde” imply the sadness surrounding the impending death of the Duchess, thus turning her song into the last song of the swan. As her voice fills the church vaults, the solitude and devouring passion of the singer resounds, conveyed through the powerful language of music: “Le Français devina que, dans ce désert, sur ce rocher entouré par la mer, la religieuse s’était emparée de la musique pour y jeter le surplus de la passion qui la dévorait.”<sup>56</sup>

The reminder that the convent is isolated and surrounded by the sea “désert” and “rocher entouré par la mer” serves to suggest that the feeling of passion is kept alive by the surrounding presence of the sea as well as by music. Sister Thérèse expresses her passion and regrets through music, the only means permitted to her. Torn between her faith and her passion, she dies and the sea becomes her grave. As long as she was singing, Antoinette de Navarreins kept her memory alive; now the song has faded into an everlasting silence, she has been engulfed into nothingness, just as her body was engulfed in the sea. The sea, like an immense grave, has ended the hope, which lived through the songs, thus ending the ecstasy of “la symbolique entreprise d’Orphée”<sup>57</sup> as Balzac says in L’enfant maudit. This situation, as well as Montriveau’s admission that she no longer is anything but a poem, reminds the reader of Dea’s last words in Hugo’s L’Homme qui rit: “Tout cela s’en va et il n’y aura plus de chansons.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Balzac, La Duchesse, 25

<sup>57</sup> Balzac, L’Enfant maudit, 338

<sup>58</sup> Hugo, L’Homme, 414.

## **L'Homme qui rit: Conquering Solitude through Songs**

Hugo's L'Homme qui rit features a boy abandoned on the seashore by his kidnappers. A band of gypsies, the "comprachicos", who have already disfigured the boy by carving a wide grin across his face, are planning to sail on a barge, "the mattutina", without him. Searching his way through the night, the boy whose name is Gwynplaine, comes across an infant crying next to her dead mother. He saves the girl, and they are both sheltered by Ursus, a poor but charitable man whose companion is a wolf. The child, who is called Dea, grows up to be a beautiful girl, but unfortunately she is blind. Many years later, a public show staged by Ursus, entitled "le Chaos vaincu", features Gwynplaine and Dea, Ursus himself and his wolf, Homo, as characters, is advertised as follows: "Ici l'on voit Gwynplaine, abandonné à l'âge de dix ans, la nuit du 29 janvier 1690, par les scélérats comprachicos, au bord de la mer à Portland; de petit devenu grand, et aujourd'hui appelé 'L'HOMME QUI RIT'"<sup>59</sup> The show included music and songs. Just as Etienne and Gabrielle took turns singing for each other in Balzac's L'enfant Maudit, so Dea and Gwynplaine will take turns singing for the audience, as a means of earning their livelihood: "La voix, c'était elle. Voix légère, profonde, ineffable. D'invisible faite visible, dans cette aube, elle chantait. On croyait entendre une chanson d'ange ou un hymne d'oiseau."<sup>60</sup> Dea's voice compared to an angel or a bird recalls that of Balzac's Gabrielle and Etienne. Blind since birth, shielded from the ugliness of the Realworld, Dea was capable of singing with an indescribable purity, since she was constantly living in the beauty of a Dreamworld, visible to her heart only.

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<sup>59</sup> Hugo, L'Homme , 300.

<sup>60</sup> Hugo, L'Homme , 293.

Still singing in Spanish, another voice rose, deeper and softer but tinged with desolation, while accepting the fact that his stigmata be given in display to the crowd. It was Gwynplaine's voice, answering Dea's, the voice that promised him eternal bliss: "Alors une autre voix s'élevait, plus profonde et par conséquent plus douce encore, une voix navrée et ravie, d'une gravité tendre et farouche. Et c'était le chant humain répondant au chant sidéral."<sup>61</sup> The same song is heard at the end of the novel when Gwynplaine is reunited with the only family he has ever known: his father Ursus, and his beloved Dea. Bedridden and desperate, her solitude increased by Gwynplaine's absence, in a bout of delirium, or perhaps in a premonition of his unexpected return, Dea sings the same song she used to sing for the audience. And on the "maison qui remue"<sup>62</sup>, the boat heading for Rotterdam, the miracle happens: Gwynplaine's voice picks up the song as he used to; and both Ursus and Dea cry with joy. But the shock is too strong for Dea's sensitive heart, so she dies soon after Gwynplaine's return, leaving him with an incurable grief. Dying, Dea leaves Gwynplaine shattered by an incommensurable loss. Her last words are a beautiful love poem, which will make it impossible for him to go on living without this love:

Quoique aveugle, je reconnaissais que c'était le matin parce que j'entendais Gwynplaine, Je reconnaissais que c'était la nuit parce que je rêvais de Gwynplaine. Je sentais autour de moi une enveloppe qui était son âme. Nous nous sommes doucement adorés. Tout cela s'en va et il n'y aura plus de chansons.<sup>63</sup>

Indeed, there will be no more songs. Dea's last words are the most touching example of love conquering and overcoming solitude. Anticipating the protagonist's death from the very beginning, this final song is the last song of the swan. Like the bird unloading his solitude in the

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<sup>61</sup> Hugo, L'Homme 294.

<sup>62</sup> Hugo, L'Homme 410.

<sup>63</sup> Hugo, L'Homme, 414.

space around him, Hugo's lonely characters in L'Homme qui rit tried to delay the moment of their death by singing as they have always done. The last song of the swan indicates the moment of no return.

As an outlet for solitude and malaise, the songs preceding the death of the protagonists can be described as the last song of the swan. This last song have been observed in several novels such as Balzac's l'Enfant maudit, La Duchesse de Langeais, Hugo's L'Homme qui rit, and finally Rosalía de Castro's La Hija del mar.

### **La Hija del mar: Illusion and Reality of Laments**

In Rosalía de Castro's La Hija del mar, the reader is allowed to hear the last song of the swan as Fausto sings a popular song, thus attracting Esperanza's attention.

No sabemos el tiempo que hubiera permanecido embebida en aquel placer inocente si una voz sonora y melancólica, hiriendo de pronto su oído, no la estremeciera profundamente haciéndole volver la cabeza con más interés del que la hubieramos creído capaz en tales ocasiones.

Aquella voz era la de Fausto.

Distraído y entonando con acento triste un aire del país, que por sí solo encerraba ya toda esa monótona melancolía propia de los cantos populares del Norte, se acercaba a la playa el joven marinero.<sup>64</sup>

(We do not know how long she would have remained enraptured in that innocent pleasure if a deep, melancholic voice, suddenly piercing her ear, had not made her

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<sup>64</sup> De Castro, La hija, 77.

shudder intensely, forcing her to turn around with more interest than we would have thought her capable of on such occasions.

It was Fausto's voice.

Distracted and singing a regional song with a sad tune that contained all the monotonous melancholy typical of the popular songs of the North, the young sailor was approaching the beach.)<sup>65</sup>

Surprised and happy to meet Fausto, Esperanza calls him, and together they contemplate the sea and its waves, forgetting any danger that could come from this environment. Later on, deprived of his beloved and unable to protect her against Alberto, the rich and powerful owner of the mansion where she is imprisoned against her will, Fausto will helplessly die.

In the following instance, there is an exchange of echoes or more precisely, a mutual exhalation of desperate cries between a mother yearning for the daughter whose fate she is totally unaware of, and the daughter lamenting the maternal love and protection she has never experienced. Are those cries resounding in the atmosphere to be heard by everyone, or are they just uttered and heard internally? Both mother and daughter are not so sure after all. They both doubt the reality of the voices they hear around them and within themselves.

¡Hija mía, pedazo de mis entrañas, yo te busco anhelante, yo salvo los precipicios y los torrentes porque creo oír tu débil vagido entre el murmullo de los ríos, en el crujido de las secas ramas que estallan bajo mis plantas, entre el ruido que forma la barca del pescador al hendir las olas en una noche de verano!

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<sup>65</sup> De Castro, *Daughter of the Sea*, 50.



El eco de tu voz se mezcla a las brisas de la tarde que olean las flores en sus ligeros tallos, al rugido de la tempestad que azota las añosas encinas y hasta el arullo de las tórtolas que se acarician.<sup>66</sup>

( My daughter, flesh of my flesh, I search for you with all my strength, I leap over precipices and torrents because I think I hear your frail cry amid the rushing rivers, in the crackle of dry branches that snap beneath my feet, amid the sound of the fisherman's boat as it wedges through and splits the waves on a summer eve!

The echo of your voice mingles with the afternoon breezes rippling through the flowers on their slender stalks, with the roar of the tempest that whips through the ancient ash trees. It is even in the cooing of the turtledoves as they caress each other.)<sup>67</sup>

Candora listens to the echo of her daughter Esperanza's voice or more precisely, imagines to be listening to it. The expression "creo oír" signifies that Candora may be confusing illusion with reality. Her memory recalls the cries of her infant lost in the sea, many years ago. This echo is to be found everywhere by the desperate mother searching vainly for a daughter she believes to be dead. "¿Qué es sino tu voz la estraña música que escucho en mis sueños?"<sup>68</sup> (What else but your voice is that strange music I hear in my dreams?)<sup>69</sup> As the mother's voice falls silent, another voice, emanating from the daughter in search of the maternal comfort that she missed, rises on the shore:

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<sup>66</sup> De Castro, *La hija*, 235-36.

<sup>67</sup> De Castro, *Daughter of the Sea*, 165.

<sup>68</sup> De Castro, *La hija*, 236.

<sup>69</sup> De Castro, *Daughter of the Sea*, 166.

Calló la voz; [...] Entonces más sonora y vibrante llenó el espacio y entonó este canto:

¡Oh, madre mía! ¿En dónde estás que mi alma te busca y no te halla nunca? ¿Quién te ha robado mis infantiles caricias? ¿Quién te ha impedido que te arrullaras con tus dulces cantos?<sup>70</sup>

(The voice ceased, (...) Oh mother dear! Where are you? My soul searches for you but you are nowhere around. Who has stolen my innocent caresses from you? Who has stopped you from lulling me to sleep with your gentle song?)<sup>71</sup>

Lamenting the absence of her mother's sweet songs, most probably lullabies, Esperanza tries to solve the enigma of her destiny, which caused such a bitter separation. She regrets an affection that would have alleviated her solitude.

¡Oh, madre mía! Tal vez tú, como yo, fuiste arrastrada por la mano de la desgracia y rodaste, como las arenas impelidas por las olas, hasta el fondo del precipicio desde el cual llamaste a tu hija, como llamo ahora por tí, sin que a tua voz lastimera respondiese mi voz, resonando quizá en el espacio al otro lado del mundo que tú habitas [...].<sup>72</sup>

(Oh mother dear! Perhaps you, like I, were dragged by the hand of misfortune and you rolled like the sands pushed by the waves to the bottom of the precipice whence you called to your daughter, as I call now to you, my voice not

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<sup>70</sup> De Castro, La hija, 237.

<sup>71</sup> De Castro, Daughter of the Sea, 166.

<sup>72</sup> De Castro, La hija, 238.

responding to your anguished voice, perhaps in the space on the other side of the world where you reside [...])<sup>73</sup>

As she dwells over the rupture from a peaceful childhood, Esperanza deplors the lack of communication between her and her mother whom she believes to be dead. A call without answer, a silence, and the refusal of consolation is what leads to the final despair of the daughter who finally decides to step into another world where she believes her mother to be dwelling. And she announces her decision to the world around her through her disenchanting song. Echoing her mother's illusion of a cherished voice, Esperanza's use of "me pareció oír una voz y unos acentos que penetraron hasta lo más recóndito de mi alma"<sup>74</sup> (I thought I heard a voice and some sounds that reached the deepest recesses of my soul...)<sup>75</sup> expresses her doubts about the tangibility of its existence: "Cuando me acerco a la morada de los muertos, creo percibir en cada sepultura acentos melancólicos gemelos de mi alma que me dicen cosas segretas y lastimeras, y pienso entonces si serás tú la que me habla."<sup>76</sup> (When I approach the dwelling place of the dead, I think I can hear melancholic sounds in every tomb, reflections of my soul which tell me secret, painful things, and then I wonder if you are the one who is speaking to me.)<sup>77</sup>

Asking herself whether or not it is a dream, or perhaps an auditory hallucination, Esperanza concludes that it is a fact as she certifies that she has heard it, and is still hearing it up to this very moment:

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<sup>73</sup> De Castro, Daughter of the Sea, 167.

<sup>74</sup> De Castro, La hija 238.

<sup>75</sup> De Castro, Daughter of the Sea, 167.

<sup>76</sup> De Castro, La hija 238.

<sup>77</sup> De Castro, Daughter of the Sea, 167

Pero no..., al cruzar la selva, al vagar bajo los álamos frondosos, me pareció oír una voz y unos acentos que penetraron hasta lo más recóndito de mi alma... ¿Sería un sueño como los que tantas veces han perturbado mis mañanas de primavera? Yo no lo sé, pero he aligerado mi paso en pos de no sé qué sombra me llamaba... ¡Oh, sí, que me llamaba! Y creo que me llama todavía.<sup>78</sup>

(But no... when I crossed the jungle, when I was wandering beneath the leafy poplars, I thought I heard a voice and some sounds that reached the deepest recesses of my soul... Could it be a dream like those that so often have perturbed my spring mornings? I do not know, but I hastened my step in search of I know not what shadow that was calling me... Oh yes, it called to me! And I think it is calling still.)<sup>79</sup>

Again the reader is confronted with the last song of the swan, since Esperanza utters this song or lament just before deciding to step out of the unbearable solitude where she was drowning, and plunges into the sea, which then becomes her grave. The water yielded a promise of a reunion with her mother, and Esperanza did not hesitate...

### **1.1.5. From Mer/Sea to Mère/Mother and the Other Way Around**

#### **L'enfant maudit: The Sea for Companion**

As the count d'Hérouville, in Balzac's L'Enfant maudit, awaits impatiently the news of his wife's delivery, he elaborates plans to destroy the newborn by giving him the Ocean as a cradle. "Le Seigneur alla se placer au fond de l'embrasure de la croisée, où il joua du tambour

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<sup>78</sup> De Castro, La hija 238.

<sup>79</sup> De Castro, Daughter of the Sea, 167.

avec ses doigts sur le vitrage, en portant alternativement ses yeux sur son serviteur, sur le lit et sur l'Océan, comme s'il eût voulu promettre à l'enfant attendu la mer pour berceau.<sup>80</sup>

Suspicious and violent, the count d'Hérouville's represents the bad-tempered character of the jealous husband, whose first reaction at the thought of having been betrayed is to consider murder. Balzac's works abound with this type of obsessive behaviour, which reaches its peak in the short story: "Autre étude de femme". Balzac's describes the solitude and despair of Etienne's mother as she listens to her husband's cruel instructions:

Je vous engage ma foi de gentilhomme de ne rien entreprendre sur la vie de ce maudit embryon, pourvu qu'il demeure sur les rochers qui bordent la mer au-dessous du château; je lui donne la maison du pêcheur pour habitation et la grève pour domaine; mais malheur à lui si je le retrouve jamais au-delà de ces limites!<sup>81</sup>

Balzac gives voice to the mother's laments as she worries about Etienne, her frail child who is condemned to a life of solitude. She predicts a lonely future for him, since the powerful count d'Hérouville is ostracizing him: "Ange aimé de ta mère, qui t'aimera dans le monde? Qui devinera les trésors cachés sous ta frêle enveloppe? Personne. Comme moi tu seras seul sur terre. Dieu te garde de concevoir, comme moi, un amour favorisé par Dieu, traversé par les hommes."<sup>82</sup>

Realizing that her love is the only protection for the child, Jeanne de Saint-Savin feared the moment when she would no longer be around to cherish and look after Etienne. The countess faces a situation similar to Hayy Ibn Yaqzan's mother, whose son had to be sacrificed to her brother's tyranny. Although several centuries had elapsed between those two stories, women

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<sup>80</sup> Balzac, *L'Enfant maudit*, 309.

<sup>81</sup> Balzac, *L'Enfant maudit* 322.

<sup>82</sup> Balzac, *L'Enfant maudit*, 320.

were still manipulated by the will of men. Most of them had to crush their hearts and their feelings in order to survive. “Que deviendra mon pauvre enfant sans moi! était une pensée que chaque heure ramenait comme un flot amer.”<sup>83</sup> Balzac describes the waves of sadness, which overcome the bereaved mother. For the mother as well as the son, the sea became a refuge, a companion, a friend, and a counselor: “L’Océan m’a parlé.”<sup>84</sup>, would say Etienne overwhelmed by sadness. They would both cast the same glance on the ocean, as they would both share the same fate.

De là, ses yeux bleus comme ceux de sa mère, semblaient étudier les magnificences de l’Océan. Tous deux restaient alors des heures entières à contempler l’infini de cette vaste nappe, tour à tour sombre et brillante, muette et sonore. Ces longues méditations étaient pour Etienne un secret apprentissage de la douleur.<sup>85</sup>

Etienne’s relationship with the Ocean was of a particular type: it helped sustain an affection, which would alleviate the loneliness of the child, soon to become an orphan. The sea appeared to be a witness to the powerful bond between the child and his mother; it seemed to approve of their reunion and to disapprove of their separation. Like a “créature vivante”, it seemed to share the sadness of the child’s misfortune, and even to warn him about its outcome by its desperate howling.

Enfin arriva le moment où devait commencer un long deuil pour l’enfant maudit. Déjà plusieurs fois il avait trouvé de mystérieuses correspondances entre ses émotions et les mouvements de l’Océan. [...] Pendant la fatale soirée où il allait

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<sup>83</sup> Balzac, L’Enfant maudit, 333.

<sup>84</sup> Balzac, L’Enfant maudit, 334.

<sup>85</sup> Balzac, L’Enfant maudit, 320.

voir sa mère pour la dernière fois, l'Océan lui paru agité par des mouvements qui lui parurent extraordinaires. C'était un remuement d'eau qui montrait la mer travaillée intestinement; elle s'enflait par de grosses vagues qui venaient expirer avec des bruits lugubres et semblables aux hurlements des chiens en détresse. Etienne se surprit à se dire à lui-même: — Que me veut-elle? elle tressaille et se plaint comme une créature vivante! Ma mère m'a souvent raconté que l'Océan était en proie à d'horribles convulsions pendant la nuit où je suis né. Que va-t-il m'arriver?<sup>86</sup>

Having previously observed that “mère” and “mer,” are homonyms, it may be useful to observe how this connection is leading Balzac to establish the parallel between the convulsions of the sea, and the excruciating pains of childbirth. The expressions “intestinement”, “horribles convulsions” as well as “s'enflait” and “tressaille” describe the movements of a sea giving birth; while the complaints uttered by a suffering sea are expressed by the following expressions “se plaint comme une créature vivante” and “bruits lugubres et semblables aux hurlements des chiens en détresse.” This last expression is an evocation of the howling of wolves or dogs when faced with death. It is also connecting the act of birth with a possible death of the mother or the child.

To whom is the sea giving birth? To Etienne d'Hérouville, “l'enfant maudit”, rejected and threatened by his own father, living as a castaway in a shack on the seashore, having the sea for guardian and companion, and looking forward to one joyful moment in life: the few minutes he is able to spend with his mother. In her absence, the Ocean is keeping him company and filling the solitude of his life with its immensity, its beauty, and its music. His solitary silhouette

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<sup>86</sup> Balzac, *L'Enfant maudit*, 333.

standing near the window of his hut, trying to interpret the Ocean's message, the boy frets until he receives notice of his mother's decline. Shifting his gaze from the window of his mother's room to the ocean howling nearby, he wonders about his future: "Cette pensée le fit rester debout à la fenêtre de sa chaumière, les yeux tantôt sur la croisée de la chambre de sa mère où tremblait une lumière, tantôt sur l'Océan qui continuait à gémir."<sup>87</sup>

In the meantime, prevented from setting foot into the mansion, suffering from the separation and fearing the ultimate abandonment, as we have already observed, he conveys his sadness and his worries through his songs. Acknowledging the tempestuous manifestations of the sea during birth and death, reunion and separation, cradle and grave, Etienne's mother reassesses the solitary sadness of a life in which her son's presence was the sole joy: "Chère fleur de ma vie, dit Jeanne de Saint-Savin en baisant son fils au front, tu fus détaché de mon sein au milieu d'une tempête, et c'est par une tempête que je me détache de toi. Entre ces deux orages tout me fut orage, hormis les heures où je t'ai vu."<sup>88</sup> In this moment of ultimate solitude where their destinies are about to diverge, the mother and the child, fully conscious of their despair, bid adieu to each other. Jeanne de Saint-Savin, realizing that she can no longer comfort Etienne who is predestined to a life of solitude, and fearing the wrath of her husband had he come to know that she had broken her agreement of keeping the child out of the château, cries: "Emmenez-le! emmenez-le!"<sup>89</sup> Such a cry pretends to reject the child for the sake of protecting him. Following the footsteps of Moses', Hayy Ibn Yaqzan's, and Virginie's mother in Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's novel, Jeanne de Saint-Savin accepts willingly a painful separation from her son who

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<sup>87</sup> Balzac, *Enfant maudit*, 333.

<sup>88</sup> Balzac, *Enfant maudit*, 334.

<sup>89</sup> Balzac, *Enfant maudit*, 335



insists to accompany her in death: “Laisse-moi te suivre,”<sup>90</sup> From the depths of solitude, the both of these cries expressed the love of these beings for each other, as well as the need of the mother to protect her child up to the last moment, even if it meant depriving herself from his sight. Etienne d’Hérouville is placed once more under the protection of the ocean, detached for ever from the only person who cared profoundly about his well being: his mother.

### **Esperanza: An Infant Floating on the Waves**

Like Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, Rosalía de Castro is considered to be a transitional poet, between Spanish “Romanticismo” and “Modernismo”. La hija del mar, already mentioned earlier in this study, features many autobiographical elements. The solitude, which was part of her life, is discussed at length in this novel where the sea represents the origin as well as the end of life.

A mysterious bundle in a sailor’s arms is attracting everyone’s attention: “Por fin, tocó ésta la orilla y algunos marineros saltaron a tierra llevando uno de ellos en sus brazos un bulto cuidadosamente cubierto.”<sup>91</sup> (It finally touched the shore and some sailors jumped on land, one of them carrying a carefully covered bundle.)<sup>92</sup> A newborn baby’s cry puts an end to the suspense overwhelming the crowd on the shore. Competing with the nearby thunder and lightning, the infant’s soft moaning stands in contrast with the roaring of the elements, while her innocence is also contrasting with the strong arms of the sailor holding her: “El quejido de una criatura recién nacida, lánguido, dulce y suave como una melodía, se dejó oír al mismo tiempo que el zumbido del trueno que resonó cercano, así como la luz fosfórica del relámpago iluminara antes la imagen

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<sup>90</sup> Balzac, Enfant maudit, 334

<sup>91</sup> De Castro, La hija, 28.

<sup>92</sup> De Castro, Daughter of the Sea, 12.

de la inocencia reposando en brazos de la fuerza.”<sup>93</sup> (The whimpering of a newborn baby, languid, sweet, and soft as a melody, could be heard at the same moment as the smack of thunder rumbled nearby, just as the phosphorescent glow of lightning before it has illuminated the image of innocence resting in the arms of strength.)<sup>94</sup>

An infant is discovered on the waves just like Moses and Hayy Ibn Yaqzan, mentioned earlier in this chapter. The child is named Esperanza, standing as a promise of life defeating death, as a symbol of survival against all odds. How was she found? What is her secret? Lorenzo, the sailor who discovered her, relates the details of her rescue, displaying an overwhelming tenderness:

Doblábamos el pico de la Peña Negra [...] cuando nos pareció percibir, entre el rumor del viento, el débil y apagado llanto de un niño,... [...] Llegamos, y a nuestra vista se apareció una niña, recostada sobre el musgo húmedo, la más hermosa que he visto en mi vida, y que tiritaba de frío, la pobrecilla, a pesar del calor sofocante que se iba extendiendo por la costa. La cogí entonces para acercarla a mi pecho y darle el calor que su madre le había negado...<sup>95</sup>

(‘We were rounding the point of Black Crag, (...) when we thought we heard the weak, muffled cry of a child over the sound of the sea, (...) When we reached it there was a child lying on the damp moss, the most beautiful little girl I’ve ever seen, and the poor thing was shivering from the cold, despite the suffocating heat

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<sup>93</sup> De Castro, La hija, 29.

<sup>94</sup> De Castro, Daughter of the Sea, 13

<sup>95</sup> De Castro, La hija, 30.

that was gathering along the coast. I picked her up then to give her the warmth her mother had denied her...’)<sup>96</sup>

The sailors, assuming that the child is an orphan, take her along like a most treasured possession. Throughout the text, the frailty of the child is underscored, so is the futile strength of the sailor, as well as the benevolent aspect of the sea. In this instance, among others, the sea is depicted as a life-giving element, replacing the real mother who failed the child: “¡ Su madre!... prorumpieran todos los que allí había. ¿ Es posible que esa pobre criatura tenga madre?”<sup>97</sup> (‘Her mother!’ all those who were there interrupted him. ‘Could that poor creature have a mother?’)<sup>98</sup> What could be better than finding a home, if not a maternal embrace for the child? Since the beauty of the miraculous child is overwhelming, the fishermen decide to rely on luck, or to cast the dice, so to speak, in order to choose a mother for the orphan. The choice finally rests on Teresa, who becomes the depositary of the precious child: “Por fin se decidieron a aceptar el fallo de la suerte. Decidióse ésta por Teresa la expósita, y así se vió a la vagamunda tomar bajo su amparo a la pobre desheredada como ella.”<sup>99</sup> (Finally they decided to draw lots. The lot fell to the orphan Teresa, and so they saw the wandering lass take one who was a poor waif like herself under her wing.)<sup>100</sup> Lorenzo tearfully hands over the baby to Teresa, requesting her to love and care for the child, and begging Teresa to teach the child his name, as soon as she starts mumbling her first words:

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<sup>96</sup> De Castro, Daughter of the Sea, 14.

<sup>97</sup> De Castro, La hija, 30

<sup>98</sup> De Castro, Daughter of the Sea, 14

<sup>99</sup> De Castro, La hija, 32.

<sup>100</sup> De Castro, Daughter of the Sea, 15.

— He aquí una perla de gran valía, yo te la cedo a condición que seras para ella una buena madre; pero también yo quiero llamarme a mi vez su padre, y que cuando empiece a balbucear tu nombre, le enseñes el mío, para que de este modo me conosca y me quiera poco menos que a ti? ¿lo entiendes?<sup>101</sup>

(‘Here is a pearl of great worth. I give her to you on the condition that you be a good mother to her. But in my own way I too want to be her father, and when she begins to babble your name, I want you to teach her mine, so that in this way she will come to know me and love me almost as much as she loves you. Do you understand?’)<sup>102</sup>

The lonely woman thus joins her solitude to that of the orphan child. Rosalía de Castro explores the facets of this double solitude, as she has constantly done in her verse. The little orphan discovered on the waves has thus found a mother as well as a father. Like Gabrielle, in Balzac’s L’Enfant maudit, Esperanza is described as a pearl, grown and found in the sea. As a matter of fact, the second part of Balzac’s story, published for the first time on October 9, 1836 in La Chronique de Paris, was entitled “La perle brisée”. Symbol of purity and innocence, the pearl has fascinated poets and writers all over the world. An image of radiance springing from the darkness of the abyss, the pearl grows more beautiful day after day. What the French Romantic poet Alfred de Vigny had to say about the pearl is worth mentioning:

Chaque vague de l’océan ajoute un voile blanchâtre aux beautés d’une perle;  
chaque flot travaille lentement à la rendre plus parfaite; chaque flocon d’écume  
qui se balance sur elle lui laisse une teinte mystérieuse, à demi dorée, à demi

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<sup>101</sup> De Castro, La hija, 32.

<sup>102</sup> De Castro, Daughter of the Sea, 15-16.

transparente, où l'on peut seulement deviner un rayon intérieur qui part de son coeur.<sup>103</sup>

According to Vigny, the beauty of the pearl does not happen overnight: it is a long and arduous process of incubation by the sea. This continuous perfecting is the reason behind the pearl's beauty and flawlessness. Vigny recounts the role of the waves, as well as the seafoam, which contribute in rendering the pearl lustrous from the inside out. Such inner light or "rayon intérieur" evokes the moral beauty of the pearl reflected by its radiant aspect. Inner and outer beauty is thus the result of the sea's slow and perseverant efforts. The reader cannot help noticing the elusive beauty and modesty of the pearl suggested by the vignyan vocabulary.

By comparing Esperanza to a pearl, de Castro confirms her unique relationship to the sea. Teresa, who is fortunate enough to become Esperanza's mother, has to live up to the expectations of those who discovered the child. But being fortunate has its drawbacks: one wins some, and loses some... Esperanza is not just any little girl, she is "la hija del mar", with all its implications of beauty, virtue and mystery.

## **1.2. The Sea as a Grave**

### **1.2.1. "La mer mauvaise": A Nightmare for Mothers**

The life-giving sea, which saved Esperanza from a certain death in order to give it to Teresa, has also its nefarious aspect. As it gives, it also takes. Giving the woman a precious gift, it robbed her of another life: that of her own son! The adventurous child, playing on the seashore, gets closer and closer to the waves, without realizing the peril awaiting him. Attempting to seize

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<sup>103</sup> Quoted by Jean-Pierre Richard, Etudes sur le romantisme (Paris, Editions du Seuil, 1970) 170.

the shiny waters reflecting the sunlight, he is dragged by the current and dies. De Castro describes the fatal attraction of the sea as well as the vulnerability of the child.

Su hijo, rosado, rubio, hermoso y sobre todo travieso, se entretenía en andar todo el espacio posible con sus débiles piececitos y cayendo a cada paso sobre la arena. Pero adelantóse tanto hacia la orilla, tal vez para coger con sus pequeñas manos aquellas verdes olas que brillaban fosfóricas a la luz de las exhalaciones, que era inminente el peligro en que le exponía su inocencia.<sup>104</sup>

(Her son, rosy, blond, beautiful, and above all mischievous, was amusing himself by toddling about with his tiny little feet and falling on the sand at every step. But he was going so close to the water, perhaps to grab those green waves in his hands because they shone so phosphorescent in the misty light, that his childish play put him in imminent danger.)<sup>105</sup>

The tragic scene described is that of an unforeseen death. Every sight and sound highlights the frailty of the child facing an abruptly violent sea. Lost amidst the roaring of the sea, the muffled sounds of a life being spent were heard as the boy finds himself dragged by the whirlpool.

De repente un viento fuerte sopló sobre todas las olas y las empujó hacia la playa: la mar lanzó terribles rugidos, pareciendo querer salvar la débil muralla de arena que se oponía a su paso y debordarse.

Las olas se agolparon tumultuosas y se adelantaron hacia los que estaban en la playa?

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<sup>104</sup> De Castro, La hija, 33.

<sup>105</sup> De Castro, Daughter of the Sea, 16.

Entonces un leve quejido, ahogado por el rumor de la tempestad, hendió el espacio; suspiro lastimero que penetró en el corazón de los que lo escucharon, sucediéndose a este suspiro un grito desgarrador, profundo, intenso, que hizo helar la sangre en las venas.<sup>106</sup>

(Suddenly a strong wind blew over the waves and pushed them towards the shore. The sea gave several terrible bellows, as if trying to leap over the slender barrier of sand that stood in its path and cover everything.

The frenzied waves clapped together and rushed towards the people who were standing on the shore.

Then a tiny moan, muffled amid the noise of the storm, split the air. It was a painful cry that penetrated the hearts of those who heard it, a sigh followed by a wrenching, deep, intense scream that chilled the blood.)<sup>107</sup>

Louder and fiercer than the sound of the sea, was Teresa's scream of agony as her son disappears in front of her eyes. Assessing knowingly the strength of the enemy, Teresa knew that the child did not stand a chance for salvation: "Era Teresa que acababa de ver a su hijo arrastrado por aquel torbellino de agua, fiera implacable que no devuelve nunca lo que una vez se ha sepultado en su fondo de arena."<sup>108</sup> (It was Teresa, who had just seen her son dragged off by the swirling water, implacable beast that never returns what has once been buried in its sandy floor.)<sup>109</sup> The reader beholds maternal love rendered helpless by the cruelty of the "fiera implacable". The sea is represented as a wild beast devouring its prey. The beast's den is the abyss in which it buries

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<sup>106</sup> De Castro, *La hija*, 33

<sup>107</sup> De Castro, *Daughter of the Sea*, 16.

<sup>108</sup> De Castro, *La hija*, 33-34

<sup>109</sup> De Castro, *Daughter of the Sea*, 16.

its victims. The sea appears here as a grave for maternal love, for the hope of a youthful life, as well as for any chance for salvation. Teresa's pain is overwhelming as she tries in vain to save her son. Her helplessness as she faces an implacable and powerful enemy leads to collapse on the shore. At the sight of her child disappearing in the sea, trying to throw herself after him in order to save him, Teresa utters this cry: "—¡Mi hijo! ¡Mi hijo! —balbuceó delirante queriendo arrojar al mar para socorrerlo.—¡Mi hijo..., mi pobre niño inocente..., el hijo de mis entrañas! Y cayó sin sentido sobre la arena."<sup>110</sup> ('My son, my son!' she babbled deliriously, trying to throw herself into the sea to save him. 'My son! ... My poor innocent boy! ... My dear, dear child!' And she fainted, falling upon the sand.)<sup>111</sup>

As Teresa's despair reaches its highest point, she loses consciousness, thus being spared momentarily the brutality of her affliction. The phrase "el hijo de mis entrañas!" encountered in many literatures across the world, suggests a visceral link between the child and his mother, which is more powerful than the lament over the boy's youth and innocence. It evokes an indissoluble bond, which goes beyond life and death.

Balzac discusses the despair of mothers losing their child in many instances: L'Enfant maudit, Jésus-Christ en Flandre, as well as Drame au bord de la mer, among others. In every instance, the sea plays a role in their despair. Un Drame au bord de la mer is a short story recounting the drowning of a boy by his self-righteous father. The mother, unable to bear the sorrow, surrenders to her grief within a few days. Jésus-Christ en Flandre features a young mother holding her infant and worrying about his salvation from drowning. The following quote demonstrates an awareness of maternal feelings that few men have grasped: "Elle montrait,

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<sup>110</sup> De Castro, La hija, 34

<sup>111</sup> De Castro, Daughter of the Sea, 17.



comme disait Pierre de Sebonde, que la mère est un être double dont les sensations embrassent toujours deux existences.”<sup>112</sup> A mother can only be a complete human being when she is reassured about her child, otherwise she will be torn between her love and her anxiety. The locution “être double” seems to hint at the fact that while the mother is pregnant, she carries a double life, which doesn’t necessarily end upon the delivery of the baby. She remains, emotionally, “un être double” who cannot stop worrying about her offsprings no matter how grown they are. Relying on its own logic, and confirming the perpetual relation between mother and child, the following statement enforces Balzac’s image of two joined existences. “—¡ Yo debo morir porque también mi hijo ha muerto!”<sup>113</sup> (Because my son has died, I should die too!)<sup>114</sup> Teresa cannot comprehend living without her child: it is either life or death for the both of them: Teresa not only loses her son, but she also loses Esperanza to the sea, later on. The repeated emotional shock she undergoes magnifies the cruelty of the situation, and intensifies the loneliness and devastation of the distraught mother.

Balzac’s examples are concerning mothers losing their child to the sea, which represents a greater cruelty, since the image of the sea switches from a caring “mère” to that of a harmful and evil “marâtre”. The sea, which supposedly represents a maternal presence, becomes all of a sudden an instrument of death. In these examples, the mother is either entrusting the sea with her child’s life, or trying to protect the child from a devouring sea. In Baudelaire devant l’innombrable, Antoine Compagnon discusses the ambiguous image of the sea as “la bonne mer”

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<sup>112</sup> Balzac, L’Enfant maudit, 326.

<sup>113</sup> De Castro, La hija, 73

<sup>114</sup> De Castro, Daughter of the Sea, 46.

and “la mer mauvaise.”<sup>115</sup> In the case of La hija del mar, the former is the one who saved Esperanza’s life, and the latter is the one who dragged Teresa’s son into the abyss. Willingly or unwillingly, Fausto and Esperanza will also be engulfed into the depths. Suspected of being “endemoniado”, Fausto’s body is cast into the sea at night by a group of sailors whose superstitious beliefs are beyond rationality. Esperanza witnesses this scene, which will remain in front of her eyes forever: “Esperanza vió todo esto, Esperanza se abalanzó hacia el cadáver, pero al mismo tiempo se oyó el ruido de un cuerpo que caía al agua que no debía devolverlo más.”<sup>116</sup> (Esperanza saw all this, Esperanza lunged towards the cadaver, but at the same time there was the sound of a body falling into the water, never to return.)<sup>117</sup>

Here the sea is portrayed as a greedy beast, grasping its prey, and never giving it back. The sea does not cease to be cruel to Teresa: after giving her a daughter to love and to get attached to, it will take her back, leaving the wretched mother more distraught than ever. Anticipating the final “denouement” which culminates with Esperanza’s suicide by drowning, Teresa utters these words: — “¡Voy a darle el último beso! ¡Pobre Esperanza!”<sup>118</sup> Her prediction comes true, when at the end of the novel Esperanza, shaken by her beloved Fausto’s death, throws herself in the water. Teresa’s heartbreak reaches its apogee as she places a final kiss on Esperanza’s cheeks: “Y luego besó con transporte el cadáver más frío que las olas... Era Teresa que besaba por última vez las hermosas mejillas de Esperanza.”<sup>119</sup> (And then she lovingly kissed the cadaver, colder

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<sup>115</sup> Antoine Compagnon, Baudelaire devant l’innombrable, (Paris: Presses de l’Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2003) 104.

<sup>116</sup> De Castro, La hija, 167

<sup>117</sup> De Castro, Daughter of the Sea, 116.

<sup>118</sup> De Castro, La hija, 73

<sup>119</sup> De Castro, La hija, 240

than the waves... It was Teresa who was kissing Esperanza's beautiful cheeks for the last time.)<sup>120</sup>

Esperanza's final journey has taken place. Coming from the sea, she returned to the sea, escaping a life of unbearable suffering and solitude, confident that her final place of rest will put an end to her ailments and tribulations: "El mar del Rostro dejaba oír allí sus eternos bramidos; *La Hija del mar* volvió a ser arrastrada por las olas sus hermanas, hallando en su lecho de algas una tumba que el humano pie no huella jamás."<sup>121</sup> (The Sea of Reflection gave its eternal roar. The Daughter of the Sea was dragged off again by the waves, her sisters, to find a bed of seaweed, a tomb never tread upon by human foot.)<sup>122</sup> Coming from the sea, and returning to the sea, such is Esperanza's destiny: her cradle as well as her tomb are a bed of seaweed.

### 1.2.2. L'Homme qui rit: The Abyss

What is the role of the ocean in Gwynplaine's life and death, according to Victor Hugo? The author of Les Misérables, adding one more character to his gallery of unfortunate ones, loading the conscience of the reader with an additional burden of guilt, describes the mysterious and solitary fate of the orphan child from cradle to grave: "L'océan se faisant père et mère d'un orphelin,"<sup>123</sup> The author highlights the role of the sea in Gwynplaine's destiny, assuming a preponderant role, nurturing him, protecting him, resurrecting him from poverty to riches all the way to nobility. It intoxicated him with power and pride, pushing him to cry: " Et c'est de là que

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<sup>120</sup> De Castro, Daughter of the Sea, 168.

<sup>121</sup> De Castro, La hija, 240

<sup>122</sup> De Castro, Daughter of the Sea, 168.

<sup>123</sup> Hugo, L'Homme, 342.

je sors! c'est de là que je remonte ! c'est de là que je ressuscite! Et me voilà. Revanche!"<sup>124</sup> The Sea finally reclaims the life it gave him as it attracts him towards its uncommensurable depth like a giant octopus catching its prey. Switching from maternal kindness to evil cruelty, the ambivalence of the sea is reflected in the upheavals in Gwynplaine's destiny of inexorable solitude: "la mer changeant de rôle comme une panthère qui se ferait nourrice, et se mettant à bercer, non l'enfant, mais sa destinée, pendant qu'il grandit ignorant tout ce que le gouffre a fait pour lui,"<sup>125</sup> In this vast Neptunian conspiracy where the kingdom of the sea challenged the Kingdom of Great Britain, where Poseidon competed with the Queen of England, using all the power of the elements at his disposal against man's cruel and greedy social system, Gwynplaine acknowledges the role of the sea: "Le cadavre de ma destinée a flotté quinze ans sur la mer, et tout à coup il a touché la terre, et il s'est dressé debout et vivant! Je renais! Je nais!"<sup>126</sup>

Dea being blind, the sound replaces the visual image, which has no impact whatsoever on her. Thus, Dea, securing her own immortality through her voice and her songs, requests to remain alive in Gwynplaine's memory: "Tu te souviendras de ma chanson. N'oublie pas mon son de voix, et la manière dont je te disais: Je t'aime!"<sup>127</sup> Where will Gwynplaine ever hear those words again? "Tu es si est beau!"<sup>128</sup> At that very moment, the man who, since childhood, faced with courage and faith, a life of solitude, humiliation, poverty, and fear, without ever giving up, without breaking, could only ask for divine mercy, repeating: "Grâce!"<sup>129</sup> Leaving Ursus fainting near a lifeless Dea, obsessed by her last request: "Viens me rejoindre le plus tôt que tu pourras.

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<sup>124</sup> Hugo, L'Homme, 348.

<sup>125</sup> Hugo, L'Homme, 342.

<sup>126</sup> Hugo, L'Homme, 347.

<sup>127</sup> Hugo, L'Homme, 414.

<sup>128</sup> Hugo, L'Homme, 285.

<sup>129</sup> Hugo, L'Homme, 414-15.

[...] Ne me laisse pas trop longtemps seule, mon doux Gwynplaine!”<sup>130</sup> Converting absence into presence, he answers Dea’s plea by a word, which he immediately turns into action: “Je viens”<sup>131</sup>. Guided by Dea’s ghost, or by an invisible star, smiling, he continues his monologue or perhaps his dialogue with the unknown, stepping near the edge of the boat. Gwynplaine walks towards the abyss:

‘J’arrive, dit-il, Dea, me voilà.’ [...]

Il tomba.

La nuit était épaisse et sourde, l’eau était profonde. Il s’engloutit. Ce fut une disparition calme et sombre. Personne ne vit ni n’entendit rien. Le navire continua de voguer et le fleuve de couler.

Peu après le navire entra dans l’océan.

Quand Ursus revint à lui, il ne vit pas Gwynplaine, et il aperçut près du bord

Homo qui hurlait dans l’ombre en regardant la mer.<sup>132</sup>

Just as the ocean was howling in Balzac’s L’Enfant maudit, forecasting the death of Etienne’s mother, here, Homo the wolf is howling, lamenting Gwynplaine’s death. But Gwynplaine is not able to hear him anymore...

Unfolding before the reader’s eye the multiple facets of the sea, Hugo depicted it as a symbol of justice when the boat carrying the criminals who had stolen and then abandoned the child, sank. Once more, the justice of the sea manifested itself when it helped Gwynplaine recover his identity and regain his titles of nobility through a message in a bottle. However at the very end, the sea will become a grave, accepting the body of Gwynplaine, the orphan who

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<sup>130</sup> Hugo, L’Homme, 414.

<sup>131</sup> Hugo, L’Homme, 415.

<sup>132</sup> Hugo, L’Homme, 415.

rejected the darkness and solitude of a life without Dea. Whenever Gwynplaine “perdait pied”, felt lost or sinking, the mere thought of Dea used to brighten his heart. Hugo describes her beneficent influence on Gwynplaine as that of a radiant star of the sea: “et au-dessus du coeur orageux de Gwynplaine, Dea resplendissait avec je ne sais quel inexprimable effet d’étoile de la mer.”<sup>133</sup>

This double death was all a matter of surrender: just as Dea could not conceive life without Gwynplaine, so does Gwynplaine as he cries: “Mourir! c’est qu’alors tu ne te figures pas ce que je deviendrais après ta mort.”<sup>134</sup> Just before his mother’s death, Balzac’s Etienne’s cry: “Que va-t-il m’arriver?”<sup>135</sup>, seems to be the echo of Gwynplaine’s lament. Since the loss of a soulmate makes life unbearable, there is an inability to go on living without the other, the one whom nature or fate set up in order to heal the solitude of the rejected orphan. Hugo discusses here Gwynplaine’s lonely destiny: “Mais cette ruine, la nature l’avait reprise comme elle reprend toutes les ruines; cette solitude, la nature l’avait consolée comme elle console toutes les solitudes;”<sup>136</sup>

And Gwynplaine, having lost his unique consolation, drowned his solitude, seeking refuge in the immensity of the ocean...

### **1.2.3. A Passion Ending in the Sea**

The sea was also a grave for the Carmelite Sister Thérèse, former Duchess of Langeais. Although Balzac keeps her death a mystery, the reader is left to wonder about the cause of her

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<sup>133</sup> Hugo, L’Homme, 322.

<sup>134</sup> Hugo, L’Homme, 414.

<sup>135</sup> Balzac, L’Enfant maudit, 333.

<sup>136</sup> Hugo, L’Homme, 286.

untimely demise. Her body, found in a coffin during a funeral service in the convent is transported to Montriveau's ship anchored in the sea surrounding the island. The latter, who had planned, with the help of several of his friends, to kidnap her while she was still alive, ends up spending a few hours with her corpse. The reunion is not exactly the expected rendez-vous; but fate had decided otherwise: "Montriveau resta seul dans sa cabine avec Antoinette de Navarreins, dont, pendant quelques heures, le visage resplendit complaisamment pour lui des sublimes beautés dues au calme particulier que prête la mort à nos dépouilles mortelles."<sup>137</sup>

Balzac makes it a point to underline the difference between "passion" and "amour". Since his was a passion rather than the love of a lifetime, the French general will get over it with time: "...la passion cesse quand l'espérance est morte. Hommes et femmes peuvent sans se déshonorer, concevoir plusieurs passions; mais il n'est dans la vie qu'un seul amour."<sup>138</sup>

Now that the duchess is dead, hope has also died with her: the hope of being chosen in spite of everything, the hope of defying social and moral customs, of breaking rules, of having her lose her soul for him; it's all gone! Well, she lost her life, and he lost her...It's the end of the story, as well as the end of the love poem!

— Ah! çà, dit Ronquerolles à Montriveau quand celui-ci reparut sur le tillac, c'était une femme, maintenant ce n'est rien. Attachons un boulet à chacun de ses pieds et jetons-la dans la mer, et n'y pense plus que comme nous pensons à un livre lu pendant notre enfance.

— Oui, dit Montriveau, car ce n'est plus qu'un poème.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Balzac, *La Duchesse*, 162

<sup>138</sup> Balzac, *La Duchesse*, 123-24

<sup>139</sup> Balzac, *La Duchesse*, 162

A practical mind, Ronquerolles, who was not romantically involved with the deceased, finds it reasonable and wise to throw the body overboard, making sure that it would sink to the bottom of the sea. But Montriveau's friend is not satisfied to only get rid of the body, he would also like to get rid of her memory altogether: "Et n'y pense plus". By saying these words, he is erasing her both physically and morally. Montriveau's acquiescence to his friend's suggestion proves the superficiality of passion, thus justifying Balzac's judicious analysis of love. It is also the end of the song. As long as she was singing, Antoinette de Navarreins kept her memory alive; now the song has faded into an everlasting silence, and she will be engulfed into nothingness, just as her body has been engulfed in the sea.

#### **1.2.4. Justice through the Sea**

#### **1.2.5. The Verdict: Death by Drowning**

In the play that bears his name, Musset's solitary hero, Lorenzaccio, sacrificed his life as well as his peace of mind, in order to save his native city Florence from the evil rule of Alexander of Medici, at the height of the Medici's absolute power. He led everyone to misunderstand his motives and to accuse him of debauchery. Lorenzaccio's death occurred as he was beaten then drowned by a crowd unable to recognize his sacrifice and the tyranny of the Duke Alexander. Pretending to be a friend of the Duke of Florence, he shared his evil plans and amusements, until the moment of truth when he was finally able to kill the tyrant. But his image was so sullied by his behaviour, that the people of Florence drown him in the water as a punishment for his alleged crimes. The river reclaims his body in a final act of purification.

Laughing and crying at the same time, as Gwynplaine appears to be, Lorenzaccio was able to fool everyone around him into believing that he was the evil genius by whom the Duke of



Florence was ill advised. Even his mother and his aunt misunderstood him. He thus created a vacuum around him, alienating family and friends, except for Philippe Strozzi, whose respect and consideration he was determined not to lose. Yet, despite his knowledge of the truth, Philippe could not save him. Anticipating his death, Lorenzaccio tells his only true friend Philippe: “Veux-tu que je m’empoisonne, ou que je saute dans l’Arno?”<sup>140</sup> This is the cry of a solitary man who finds no one who could believe or trust him, and who contemplates suicide as a refuge from a solitary life. The portrayal of solitude has seldom been rendered in the subtle manner in which Lorenzaccio compares his attitude to that of Philippe Strozzi:

Lorenzaccio — Ah! vous avez vécu tout seul, Philippe. Pareil à un fanal éclatant, vous êtes resté immobile au bord de l’océan des hommes, et vous avez regardé dans les eaux la réflexion de votre propre lumière. Du fond de votre solitude, vous trouviez l’océan magnifique sous le dais splendide des cieux. Vous ne comptiez pas chaque flot, vous ne jetiez pas la sonde; vous étiez plein de confiance dans l’ouvrage de Dieu. Mais moi, pendant ce temps-là, j’ai plongé... tandis que vous admiriez la surface, j’ai vu les débris des naufrages, les ossements et les Léviathans.<sup>141</sup>

Lorenzaccio accuses Philippe of casting a superficial glance upon life and men, while he, Lorenzaccio, dived deep into murky waters, discovering the unpleasant reality of men’s true nature similar to the bottom of the sea, where shipwrecks, skeletal remains, and sea monsters can be found. According to Musset’s hero, Philippe’s life was merely a utopia, while his own life was a search for the truth. Philippe was thus able to preserve the purity of his own soul, while

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<sup>140</sup> Alfred de Musset, *Lorenzaccio*, III, 3, (Paris, Larousse, 1991) 137.

<sup>141</sup> Musset, *Lorenzaccio*, 131.

Lorenzaccio's attitude led him to grasp the more unpleasant side of things. Both solitary beings, Philippe is attracted to the surface of the ocean, while Lorenzaccio is examining the abyss. They are nevertheless united by a likeness, which Lorenzaccio describes in the following manner: "C'est parce que je vous vois tel que j'ai été, et sur le point de faire ce que j'ai fait que je vous parle ainsi."<sup>142</sup> Deploring the loss of his purity, which is symbolized by Philippe self-righteousness, Lorenzaccio speaks with the authority of someone who has been through an ordeal, since he has chosen to renounce his honor and risk his reputation in order to get close to the tyrant. He understands Philippe's solitude, and unveils his own to Philippe, since the latter is the only person to earn his respect and friendship. We are given to examine two aspects of the sea, as a metaphor for humanity: the beautiful and misleading surface reflecting the sky as opposed to the desolation of the bottom of the sea which is presented as a graveyard.

#### **1.2.6. Drowned by His Own Father**

Building upon the classical tradition of French tragedy, where the sea represents justice by drowning criminals, Romantic authors Musset, Hugo and Balzac for instance adapted this topos to their works. Powerful, mysterious, capable of generating monsters such as those sent by Neptune to punish Hyppolite in Racine's (1639-1699) Phèdre, the sea was seen as a stage for displaying human emotions in a dramatic setting. In Racine's tragedy, Thésée, a desperate father, bequeathed Neptune, the divinity of the sea, to punish his son Hyppolite before verifying his guilt or innocence.

The title of Balzac's short story "Un Drame au bord de la mer," suggests a tragic death. It is the story of Pierre Cambremer who drowns his own son in the sea, on account of his morally

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<sup>142</sup> Musset, Lorenzaccio, 131-132.

reprehensible behaviour: he steals from his mother then lies about it, among other things. The mother does not survive the death of her son; so, left alone to contemplate his crime, the father sits on a rock, focusing his gaze endlessly on the spot where his son was engulfed by the sea. Guilt and solitude are thus intermingled in this example of merciless paternal justice. Reporting the story in the popular regional language of the area, Balzac describes one of the cruelest scenes in a few sentences:

Il est jugé, qu'il a dit, tu vas m'aider à le mettre dans la barque. Elle s'y refusa. Cambremer l'y mit tout seul... Il y avait de la lune, elle a vu le père jetant à la mer le fils qui lui tenait encore aux entrailles, et comme il n'y avait pas d'air, elle a entendu blouf! puis rien, ni trace, ni bouillon; la mer est d'une fameuse garde, allez!<sup>143</sup>

This, in fact, is the story of a double crime: the death of the son triggers the death of the mother, who has witnessed the senseless punishment. The sea is now siding with the father against the mother. Her love stands helpless in front of the system of justice which unites the sea to her husband, Pierre Cambremer, whose name seems to suggest that he can submit the sea to his will: “La mer a toujours plié sous eux”.<sup>144</sup> Represented once more as a grave in Balzac’s short story, the sea is the setting for three different types of solitudes. Firstly, the reader can observe the solitude of the son who tried in vain to escape death by drowning. Secondly, there is the solitude of the mother who could not face life without her son, as Balzac’s powerful image “Le fils qui lui tenait encore aux entrailles,” conveys. And finally, appears the solitude of the father, which was triggered by his own intransigence. He judged and executed his son without any

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<sup>143</sup> Honoré de Balzac, “Un Drame au bord de la mer”, *Oeuvres complètes*, (Paris: Guy Leprat, 1960) 575-576.

<sup>144</sup> Balzac, “UnDrame”, 570.

consideration for his wife's despair. The real victim here is the mother, who died twice, once by being deprived of her son, and once more when she actually died from intolerable torment.

In a similar image, French poet Paul Valéry (1871-1945), intoxicated by his love for the Mediterranean, describes his relationship to the sea as if a chain were linking his heart to it. These are the closing lines of a speech Valéry gave at his College in Sète, fifty-seven years after entering it as a student himself: "Si, d'évènements en évènements, et d'idées en idées, je remonte le long de la chaîne de ma vie, je la retrouve attachée par son premier chaînon à quelqu'un de ces anneaux de fer qui sont scellés dans la pierre de nos quais, l'autre bout est dans mon coeur."<sup>145</sup> This image could very well suggest the idea of an umbilical cord tying the child to his mother. In this case the sea would project a maternal representation rather than that of a graveyard.

Tormented by guilt, Pierre Cambremer spends his days facing the sea, speechless and motionless. Half dead himself, he remains buried in his solitude and remorse, all his being tensed towards the depth. Balzac's study of Cambremer's solitude can be a reminder of the wooden puppet Pinocchio, as well as Gwynplaine, l'homme qui rit, who were both different from the rest of humanity. "Pourquoi cet homme dans le granit? Pourquoi ce granit dans cet homme? Où était l'homme? Où était le granit?"<sup>146</sup> Solitude turned Cambremer into a block of stone. The inner vacuum created by remorse and despair led him to the solitary life of a deserted block of granite. As Balzac's hero searches for the reason behind this attitude, he explains the petrification of the soul, which is triggered by solitude. A petrification, which takes over the whole life of man, leaving him similar to a statue carved in granite. He focuses on the sea, which becomes the symbol of his self-righteousness.

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<sup>145</sup> Gabriel Faure, Paul Valéry Méditerranéen, (Paris: Horizons de France, 1954) 120.

<sup>146</sup> Balzac, UnDrame, 569.

### 1.2.7. The Welcoming Abyss

The disastrous consequences of solitude have been previously observed in many novels and short stories. Both men and women could become victims of an extreme despair triggered by solitude. Since Hugo's poem deals with women, it may prove interesting to consider a woman's valuable opinion. In her book L'albero della solitudine, contemporary Italian author, women's advocate, journalist and psychologist Gabriella Parca observes the presence of an inner as well as an outer solitude. Linking the concepts of solitude and death, she underlines how sometimes one leads to the other: "La solitudine è una sorte di morte interiore, un sentirsi staccati dagli altri, ogni comunicazione interrotta, è il deserto. [...] E spesso alla base di un suicidio c'è questa sensazione, portata alle sue estreme conseguenze."<sup>147</sup> Gabriella Parca's reflections on solitude could apply to the confined women described by Hugo, and serves well as an introduction to Victor Hugo's poem "Clair de lune". The poem, which is part of the poetic collection Les Orientales, describes with compassion the sadness of women's fate in the Turkish harem. With the silent complicity of the moon and waves, a muted thud strikes the muted echoes: "Un bruit sourd frappe les sourds échos."<sup>148</sup> (v. 6) A series of successive questions follows, attempting to identify the nature of that sound. Each hypothesis is eliminated until the final answer is reached. Like parentheses enclosing a usual fact, the opening verse and the closing one are the same: "La lune était sereine et jouait sur les flots." (v. 1 & 20) The vagueness of the description, as well as the casual indifference suggested by Hugo's style and approach, frames and highlights the horror of the situation. It is an effective way of showing the futility of this customary action in the eyes

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<sup>147</sup> Gabriella Parca, L'Albero della solitudine, (Milano: Sugar, 1974) 10

<sup>148</sup> Victor Hugo, "Clair de Lune", Poésies, t. 1, (Paris: Hachette, 1962) 62.

of those committing it. It confirms Gabriella Parca's assertion about the marginality of women's problems, which nobody mentions. "[...] non se ne parla, non se ne scrive", although, as Parca goes back to affirm forcefully: "non è un fatto marginale."<sup>149</sup>

The Romantic poet's sensitivity and concern for social issues appears in this poem, as sad as a muted elegy. There is a latent refusal to comprehend what is going on, which magnifies the awful implication of the crime. It is a "requiem" for the victims, and Hugo's verses have the fluidity of tears shed on their behalf. The poet creates a mysterious atmosphere, which culminates into a tragic sadness. The solitary figure of the Sultane playing on her guitar, as she admires the beauty of the sea surrounding her makes her a witness of these events. The reader can visualize a captive behind the window, whose only freedom is to look: "La sultane regarde," (v. 3) All the images that follow are embraced by the "regard", which is an attempt at understanding the world. The solitude is immense, and the beauty of the sea is a breach in this solitude. In the following verse, "La fenêtre enfin libre est ouverte à la brise"<sup>150</sup> (v. 2), the reader senses the musicality, the rebellious outrage experienced by the poet, the immense despair of solitude, which emanates from this situation as the veil is lifted little by little, letting in the breeze of knowledge through "la fenêtre enfin libre". Without this "fenêtre", no one would have guessed the awful truth. It is a window opened on the world, on the atrocities committed casually. A soft music as sad as tears is embodied in the rhythm of this poem. "De ses doigts en vibrant s'échappe la guitare: [...]"(v. 5) The guitar, which seems to refuse to play, escapes from the Sultane's fingers in a voluntary act of "s'échapper". Had Hugo used the verb "tomber", its

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<sup>149</sup> Parca, L'Albero, 10.

<sup>150</sup> Hugo, Poésies, t. 1, 62.

impact would have been different. It seems to express the guitar's refusal to be part of this camouflaged death scene.

“Elle écoute...”<sup>151</sup> (v. 6) After the sense of sight, follows the hearing sense. The sultane is now listening, all her senses in alert. She hears a splash that she cannot readily identify. Her inquisitive mind is guided by a series of hypotheses suggested by the author. Following the sound trajectory of something heavy falling in the water, the author rules out that it could have been a bird, such as a cormoran plunging in the water, or perhaps a mischievous djinn throwing pieces of the crenels of the tower in the sea. The reader, who shares the same “regard” as the sultane, knows that this sound is produced by something dropped in the sea from a certain height. The next verse will bring more light to the situation as the location, “le sérail des femmes”, is spelled out.

Qui trouble ainsi les flots près du sérail des femmes? –

Ni le noir cormoran, sur la vague bercé,

Ni les pierres du mur, ni le bruit cadencé

D'un lourd vaisseau, rampant sur l'onde avec des rames.<sup>152</sup> (v. 13-16)

Evoking André Chénier's (1762-1794) most famous poem: “La jeune Tarentine”, where the young bride Myrto falls into the sea and drowns, Hugo's “Ni. Ni,” echo the recurrent negatives in Chénier's poem. An accumulation of leisurely expressions such as “promène” and “jouait” contrasts with the justified situation of mourning. The beauty of the sea is antithetical to the sadness permeating the atmosphere.

Hélas! Chez ton amant tu n'es point ramenée,

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<sup>151</sup> Hugo, Poésies, t.1, 62

<sup>152</sup> Hugo, “Clair de Lune”, Poésies, 63.

Tu n'as point revêtu ta robe d'hyménée,  
L'or autour de tes bras n'a point serré de noeuds,  
Les doux parfums n'ont point coulé sur tes cheveux.<sup>153</sup> (v. 27-30)

The poetic chiasmus used by Chénier reinforces the tragic sadness of the situation: “Pleurez, doux alcyons! ô vous oiseaux sacrés! / Oiseaux chers à Téthys! doux alcyons, pleurez!”<sup>154</sup> (v. 1-2) Inspired by Chénier’s poem, Hugo refrains from repeating “pleurez”, although the situation in “Clair de lune” requires tears.

In his study on André Chénier, Richard Smernoff’s subtle analysis of “La jeune Tarentine” could possibly apply to Hugo’s “Clair de lune”: “In uniting the musical language of the elegy with the plastic beauty of the idyll, Chénier evoked at once the art of the musician, painter and sculptor.”<sup>155</sup>

The solitude of these voiceless and faceless victims is internal as well as external. Their death is the end of a miserable life where no search for identity was ever possible. They die as they have lived, without any importance or self-worth: “Ce sont des sacs pesants, d’où partent des sanglots. / On verrait, en sondant la mer qui les promène, / Se mouvoir dans leurs flancs comme une forme humaine.”<sup>156</sup> (v. 17-19) The compassion as well as the deep bitterness of the poet appears in the light manner he treats the subject, as if this outrageous behaviour should be condemned by the reader rather than by the poet. Thus, leaving the judgement to the reader, Hugo triggers his repulsion by a suggestive vocabulary: “sanglots”, “forme humaine”, implying that there is a human being trapped in these bags; and that actually some monsters are perfectly

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<sup>153</sup> André Chénier, “La jeune Tarentine”, *Poésies*, (Paris: Nelson, 1916), 60.

<sup>154</sup> Chénier, “Tarentine”, *Poésies*, 61.

<sup>155</sup> Richard A. Smernoff, *André Chénier*, (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977) 80.

<sup>156</sup> Hugo, “Clair de Lune”, *Poésies*, t. 1, 63.



at ease while ordering these crimes. These women drowned in bags in the sea were not only mentioned in Les Orientales, but also in “Sultan Mourad” in La Légende des siècles, where the same scene is repeated suggestively: “Dans des sacs convulsifs que la houle profonde / Emporta, se tordant confusément dans l’onde.”<sup>157</sup> The presence of human bodies in these bags is obviously frightening. They were probably gagged in order to remain silent, which explains their inability to scream. Unable to voice their torment, they can only express their rejection of death and their attachment to life by convulsions and erratic movements. Once more Hugo refrains from making any judgement, letting the reader share his repugnance as he guesses what is really going on.

## Conclusion

As Françoise Peyrègne states:

Tout sort de la mer et tout y retourne. C’est le lieu des naissances et des engloutissements, l’image de la vie et celle de la mort. Mais elle revêt aussi une valeur symbolique moins essentielle. Lorsqu’on s’imagine une présence humaine perdue dans son immensité — un bateau luttant contre la tempête, un nageur au milieu des vagues, un îlot loin de la terre ferme — alors la mer s’unit au sentiment de solitude.<sup>158</sup>

In this chapter entitled “From Cradle to Grave” we surveyed the different aspects of the sea in a thematic study of several poems, novels and short stories, from the 17<sup>th</sup> century with Saint-Amant’s poem “Moyse sauvé” to the Romantic era with Vigny’s poem “Moïse”, Musset’s play Lorenzaccio and Hugo’s novel L’Homme qui rit. We reach beyond Romanticism with Balzac’s L’enfant maudit, “Drame au bord de la mer”, and La Duchesse de Langeais. A

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<sup>157</sup> Quoted in Victor Hugo, Les Orientales, (Paris: Hatier, 1950) 43.

<sup>158</sup> Françoise Peyrègne, L’expression du sentiment de solitude, 305.

medieval text, The story of Hayy Ibn Yakzan, origin of the “robinsonades” which sprouted all over Europe, was also considered. All these works portray sea and solitude, which is the nexus of this study. The parallel drawn by writers between songs and the sound of the sea was also explored in more than one instance, emphasizing the liberating effect of solitary songs as they echo the voice of the sea. The last song of the swan was examined as the premonition of a forthcoming death.

We have studied examples where the sea is viewed as a mother, protecting infants and children, such as Moses, Hayy Ibn Yaqzan, Etienne d’Hérouville, and Gwynplaine. But in other instances, we have observed how the sea comes to be viewed and addressed as a father. Long before Hispanic writer Pablo Neruda (1904-1973), and French author Lautréamont (1846- 1870) respectively addressed the paternity and the fraternity of the sea, the Italian Ugo Foscolo called the Ocean: “il gran padre Oceano”<sup>159</sup>, or “great Father Ocean”. Around 1805, when he was serving in Napoleon’s army in France, Foscolo took some notes in preparation for a poem “All’Oceano”, which he would never complete. In those notes he wrote: “Io nato in Grecia piena di avventure [...] ora dal fatto medesimo mi veggo esigliato [...] Io parlo a te Padre Oceano, io t’ho ammirato percorrendo l’onda di Teti [...] io t’ho veduto nell’Ionio e nell’Adriatico, e nel Mediterraneo [...]” While it remains prisoner of the body, reasons Foscolo in this fragmentary text, human intellect is freed by the imagination which, challenged and empowered at the same time by the vastness of the ocean, can cover huge distances: “Alta è la mente mia Padre Oceano; posso contemplare le stelle e percorrere con l’imaginatione I tuoi vasti mari, e imaginare co’ filosofi la diva natura, ma l’intelletto è imprigionato nel corpo il quale è servo degli uomini.”<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Ugo Foscolo, “Dei Sepolcri” Ultime Lettere di Jacopo Ortis, Poesie e Carmi, a cura di Mario Puppo, (Milano: Rusconi, 1987) 319, v. 291.

<sup>160</sup> Ugo Foscolo, Tragedie e poesie minori, a cura di Guido Bezzola (Firenze: le Monnier, 1981) 345.

The second chapter of this study, entitled “Identity and liberation”, will explore the various possibilities for recuperating identity and achieving liberation through the sea. In Hugo’s poem “Clair de lune”, the very sea that the women contemplated from their windows as a symbol of liberation, has become their grave, as their protests are trapped in the anonymity of bags. For them, there is neither identity nor liberation...

## 2. CHAPTER TWO: IDENTITY AND LIBERATION

“Sabe el mar como se llama, que es el mar?” (Salinas: Nombre)

“Quién es el mar, Quién soy?” (Borges: El mar)

The sea or ocean can define an identity in several possible ways: geographical, historical or personal. In his poem “I fiumi”<sup>1</sup>, Giuseppe Ungaretti divides his life according to the rivers he lived nearby: the Nile, the Seine, the Serchio and the Isonzo. Reconstructing his origins according to the map, the Italian poet looks back at his roots as he mentions the fact that his parents’ life was influenced by the proximity of the Serchio River. Witnessing his birth, the Nile was the river that most affected his childhood, as a symbol of the cultural elements surrounding it. Then, as a student, came the trip to Paris where the presence of the river Seine inspired his ideas, his way of thinking and helped him come to terms with his personality. Later on, his Italian identity was recovered near the Isonzo River in the course of World War II. In another poem: “Mio fiume anche tu”, Ungaretti addresses the River Tevere, historic witness of Rome’s ancient splendour, as well as its current reign of cruelty and terror during the Fascist regime.

How can rivers have such an influence? Sharing their solitude with the water, inspired by its proximity, poets and authors seem to reflect deeply, to question issues, to somehow create either a dialogue with the body of water conveying their personal interpretation of its different aspects, or more specifically their own vision of things. They may find immediate answers to

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<sup>1</sup> Giuseppe Ungaretti, *Poesie e prose liriche*, 1915-1920, (Milano: Mondadori, 1989) 29-30.

their questions, or they may wait for the answers to appear at a later stage. One of the most common quests sought is the quest for identity: the desire to define oneself, to determine one's stand in life, which is of the utmost importance. As Isidore Ducasse, Comte de Lautréamont, stated in his posthumous work Les Chants de Maldoror: "Vieil océan, tu es le symbole de l'identité: toujours égal à toi-même. Tu ne varies pas d'une manière essentielle, et si tes vagues sont quelque part en furie, plus loin, dans quelque'autre zone, elles sont dans le calme le plus complet."<sup>2</sup>

The everchanging image of the sea already awakens the curiosity of the poet, causing him to search for an interpretation. These observations will lead him to establish a comparison between himself and the sea:

Souvent je me suis demandé quelle chose était le plus facile à reconnaître: la profondeur de l'océan ou la profondeur du coeur humain! Souvent, la main portée au front, debout sur les vaisseaux, tandis que la lune se balançait entre les mâts d'une façon irrégulière, je me suis surpris, faisant abstraction de tout ce qui n'était pas le but que je poursuivais, m'efforçant de résoudre ce difficile problème! Oui, quel est le plus profond, le plus impénétrable des deux: l'océan ou le coeur humain?<sup>3</sup>

The aspect of the thinker, the philosopher is characterized by a recurring gesture: "la main portée au front", which is a common feature of someone lost in his thoughts. Similarly, standing on the banks of the Thames, Hugo's hero Gwynplaine or "l'Homme qui rit", already mentioned in the first chapter of this study, reflects upon the loss of his family, and the perspective of facing a

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<sup>2</sup> Isidore Ducasse, Comte de Lautréamont, "Les chants de Maldoror", Oeuvres complètes (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1970) 24.

<sup>3</sup> Lautréamont, "Maldoror", Oeuvres, 27.

solitary life without them. “Il demeura ainsi quelques instants penché sur cette eau;”<sup>4</sup> It is this reflection or deep meditation that will guide the character into discovering his true identity, the one he feels comfortable with, while shedding an unwanted identity that was imposed by social rules and expectations. Such choice is in itself an act of liberation. The role of the sea is merely inspirational, as the protagonist is the one making his choices in life. Yet, many a poet or writer responded to an impetus given by the sea as they delved into the unrestrained freedom of its waves, reminding them of their own depth and unpredictable behaviour. The proximity of the sea thus triggers a desire for self-discovery, which is part of the process towards liberation. The initial step is precisely this revelation of self, inspired by the sea. The purifying effects of the water can, figuratively speaking, cleanse the human personality from any fake influence imposed upon him by social constraints, and eventually liberating him.

## **2.1. Identity**

### **2.1.1. A Masked Identity: Angel Or Devil?**

Ursus saved the two orphans Gwynplaine and Dea from a certain death, sharing with them his food and shelter and rearranging his own life around their presence. His deep love for Gwynplaine is expressed by his silence about the boy’s stigmata. Although Ursus shares with the reader his knowledge of the criminal behaviour of those who mutilated Gwynplaine, he spares him the suffering of knowing the truth. For Gwynplaine, alas, life has not been very kind. His family was his only identity: unable to locate them, he felt engulfed by a monstrous solitude that he would not have the strength to face. Gwynplaine’s identity was shaped by Dea’s love; yet, it

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<sup>4</sup> Hugo, *L’Homme*, 406.

was also shaped by Josiane's feelings for him. In Dea's loving eyes Gwynplaine was an angel, while in Josiane's capricious eyes, he was a monster. She was attracted to the monstrous side of him: his aspect. The dichotomy of the sea is reflected in this love story: Dea's peaceful love, and Josiane's unruly feelings. Described as "une étoile de la mer"<sup>5</sup>, linking both sea and sky in a spiritual realm, Dea offered a total contrast with Josiane, the "néreïde"<sup>6</sup>, who attracted him to the darkness of the depths. Which of those represented Gwynplaine's true identity? As Hugo describes it, Dea embodied Gwynplaine's identity as much as he incarnated hers, and neither of them could face life without the other. When Dea's death robbed him of his wholeness, he threw himself in the water, putting an end to a threatening solitude. "Gwynplaine, égaré et tragique, posa fermement sa main sur le parapet, comme une solution, et regarda le fleuve. [...] l'ombre lui offrait le grand lit tranquille, l'infini des ténèbres. Tentation sinistre."<sup>7</sup>

In Gwynplaine's case, a message in a bottle overturned his life topsy-turvy; Homo the wolf prevented him from jumping into the sea the first time. As a matter of fact Gwynplaine's death was a "suicide à deux temps", where he had his own way at the second attempt. The sea rejected Gwynplaine before the Matutina was drowned, thus sparing his life; but later on, it reclaimed that very life, when he jumped willingly, unable to face a devastating solitude without Dea.

Both Jean Starobinski in Portrait de l'artiste en saltimbanque, and Jean-Pierre Richard in Etudes sur le Romantisme, mention Hugo's "le gouffre d'en haut" in which Gwynplaine was pulled in order to follow Dea, his "étoile de mer". Rather than a "mise en abyme", it is an ascent, a flight, "a noyade ascensionnelle" a kind of salvation from one of the most unforgiving

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<sup>5</sup> Hugo, L'Homme, 322.

<sup>6</sup> Hugo, L'Homme, 259.

<sup>7</sup> Hugo, L'Homme, 406.

hardships in life: solitude! According to Victor Hugo, solitude and death are one and the same thing: “Seul a un synonyme: mort. Il était seul.”<sup>8</sup>

As he drowned, Gwynplaine managed to preserve Dea’s ideal image of him: “Tu es si beau! lui disait-elle.”<sup>9</sup> He was also preserving her voice and her words of love. He knew he could never hear these words again. What would his world be without Dea’s beauty, without her love? What would his identity be? A solitary monster ridiculed by society! That’s why he followed her into death: in order to preserve her love, her songs, and her belief in his inner beauty. Being a British Lord could not compensate him for being unique and beautiful in Dea’s eyes. Her presence was his identity, and he was hers. His suicide was an objection against the loss of an identity he needed to preserve. It may well be a fictitious identity in his case, but it didn’t matter! This was the way he needed to be seen and loved. This was also the way “la Providence” meant it to be for his own protection, and finally this was the way he wanted to last forever. Without the protection of Dea’s love, his identity was crumbling... Yes, Gwynplaine’s identity as a human being was reflected only in Dea’s blind gaze: without her he would be labeled as a monster as well as an object of ridicule. His suicide by drowning is the refusal of a monstrous identity. Gwynplaine recovers Dea's love momentarily. When she dies, he drowns himself in order to keep his true identity alive: the genuine inner radiance of his soul that only Dea's blindness can glimpse, whereas everyone else saw only the hideous mask carved upon his face.

Not only does Gwynplaine reject life as a physical monster, but he also rejects moral monstrosity as well as fortune and honors. Once he became a noble, he was expected to forget

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<sup>8</sup> Hugo, *L'Homme*, 401.

<sup>9</sup> Hugo, *L'Homme*, 285.



the suffering and misery of the lower classes. Barkilphedro, a dubious character who lived in the shadow of the nobility and the court, planned to separate Gwynplaine from his less fortunate past by exiling Ursus and Dea forever. He did not realize that this separation would lead him to his death. He did not expect him to relinquish the fame of his new identity as Lord Firmain Clancharlie. As a matter of fact, that which Gwynplaine truly needed was the identity which Nature and Heaven, in their infinite wisdom, had given him, protecting him from a frightful solitude: the beautiful reflection of his image in Dea's blind eyes.

Gwynplaine's first suicidal attempt was accompanied by a note signed "Firmain Clancharlie, Lord d'Angleterre."<sup>10</sup> Faced with the choice between his past identity as Gwynplaine the "saltimbanque", and his newly recovered one as a British lord, Gwynplaine does not hesitate for a moment. He wants his old identity back: the life he normally leads with the only family he has ever known; his usual happiness with Dea and Ursus; he wants all the blessings he had, and without which he cannot live. He gladly abandons the new identity that Fate bestowed upon him. The pride of being Lord Firmain Clancharlie may have given him a temporary satisfaction. For a moment he was drunk with glory: when Barkilphedro asked him to forget about his past, he answered: "Oui."<sup>11</sup> But he was not warned about the solitude involved in facing the world on his own, even as a British Lord. He was not aware of Barkilphedro's sinister plan to chase away his family and make them disappear. His longing for his previous identity and his disarray without it was expressed by his first suicide attempt. When he actually jumps in the water later on, he does it in order to recover his fundamental identity, as Dea's other half. His identity could not be complete without Dea, so he jumps in the water in order to recover

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<sup>10</sup> Hugo, *L'Homme*, 406.

<sup>11</sup> Hugo, *L'Homme*, 347.

it by following her into death: “Je viens! [...] Il tomba.”<sup>12</sup> In Victor Hugo et Dieu. Bibliographie d'une âme, describing the death of Gwynplaine and Dea, Emmanuel Godo, states that: “La mort n'est pas tragique, elle est le moment de l'épiphanie, de la rencontre mystique avec l'au-delà et de la révélation ultime. A la fois offrande et réunion, elle n'a de chute que l'apparence.”<sup>13</sup> According to Godo, Gwynplaine's death is not a loss, but rather a gain. He regains his identity by following Dea. She was the only one capable of seeing the beautiful aspect of his nature, while the rest of the world had their eyes focused on the stigmata he was cruelly afflicted with. Dea cherished his soul, while the rest of the world made fun of his face. Dea's presence represented his beautiful identity, while others such as Josiane just saw his monstrous image. Gwynplaine needed to see his beautiful reflection into Dea's eyes. He could not live without it. He followed her into death by jumping into the abyss in order to recuperate an identity he needed, while avoiding an identity that could only surround him with an endless solitude. Godo describes Gwynplaine's fall into the abyss as a “noyade ascensionnelle”, thus emphasizing the ascensional aspect of his suicide.

### **2.1.2. Identity Crisis: A Wooden Puppet Or A Real Live Boy?**

Carlo Lorenzini's (1826-1890) Pinocchio: Le avventure di un burattino, was first published in 1883, in a book form, after appearing as a series of episodes in a children's magazine from 1881 to 1883. According to Giovanni Gasparini, despite an obvious pedagogical content, Lorenzini's book goes beyond the simple purpose of an amusement book for children. In this respect, Gasparini refers to another book in French literature, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's Le

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<sup>12</sup> Hugo, L'Homme, 415.

<sup>13</sup> Emmanuel Godo, Victor Hugo et Dieu. Bibliographie d'une âme, (Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 2001) 206.

Petit Prince, who also featured a deeper message, exceeding the juvenile “façade”. Stressing the modernity of Pinocchio, Gasparini states:

“Anche *Pinocchio*, al di là delle apparenze di un semplice racconto dallo sfondo pedagogico, è un classico, [...] *Pinocchio* è un capolavoro e un classico anzitutto perché racchiude in sé accenti e dimensioni archetipiche, ed è in grado di destare ancora oggi, in un ambito letterario e sociale ben diverso da quello in cui ebbe origine, sentimenti, riflessioni, e connessioni nuove.”<sup>14</sup>

The wooden puppet Pinocchio is going through an identity crisis, which stems from his being different from other children he encounters. Can he survive as a puppet in a society established to accommodate humans?

Another child, Gwynplaine, the protagonist in Hugo’s *l’Homme qui rit*, is also different from his fellow men. He was kidnapped and disfigured by the “comprachicos” who carved a perpetual grin on his face, preventing him from being able to express sadness in the most tragic situations. Hugo intended *l’Homme qui rit* as a sermon to humanity exposing the cruelty and ruthlessness of mankind.

What are the similarities between Pinocchio and Gwynplaine? The protagonists were both laughing as the reader discovered them: Pinocchio started laughing as soon as Geppetto carved a mouth for him; while Gwynplaine had an artificial laughter carved on his face and disfiguring him for life. As a matter of fact, Gwynplaine’s solitude as well as that of Pinocchio’s was triggered by the fact that they were different from the rest of society. Indeed they belonged to the human race, but they were also secluded from it: the former by his stigmata, and the latter by his wooden body. Uncertain as far as their identity was concerned, they went through hardships until

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<sup>14</sup> Giovanni Gasparini, *La Corsa di Pinocchio*, (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1997) 4.

they were able to reach a confident understanding of themselves. Although they both had kind hearts, grateful feelings and an extremely vulnerable sensitivity, they were ridiculed and turned into derision by a cruel society that pushed them towards the sea, in an effort to seek the knowledge of their true selves.

In his book La Corsa di Pinocchio, Giovanni Gasparini suggested that in spite of the bond between them, Geppetto is considered to be just an adoptive father to Pinocchio.

Pinocchio, pur sperimentando un legame molto forte con Geppetto, ha in lui un genitore che si può considerare soltanto un padre adottivo; ed è orfano di madre, dal momento che la fata, e solo da un certo punto del racconto (cap. XXX) diventa per lui “una specie di mamma”, non una madre vera.

Ma Pinocchio non è solo un orfano dei genitori; egli è anche un figlio unico, senza fratelli (e sorelle).<sup>15</sup>

Gasparini’s appraisal of the situation encourages us to assume that Gwynplaine and Pinocchio were both orphans, both deprived from maternal love, and raised by adoptive fathers, Ursus and Geppetto respectively. Both could not have survived without the little family that an attentive Providence gave them: Ursus and Dea for Gwynplaine; Geppetto and the blue haired Fairy for Pinocchio. Although Geppetto created Pinocchio out of a piece of wood, he was more or less considered to be his father. He loved the puppet in a paternal way, enjoying his presence and suffering from his absence; Ursus saved the two orphans Gwynplaine and Dea from a certain death, sharing with them his food and shelter and rearranging his own life around their presence. His deep love for Gwynplaine is expressed by his silence about the boy’s stigmata. Although Ursus shares with the reader his knowledge of the criminal behaviour of those who mutilated

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<sup>15</sup> Giovanni Gasparini, La Corsa di Pinocchio, (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1997) 107-108.

Gwynplaine, he spares him the suffering of knowing the truth. Both protagonists were tempted by vanity: Gwynplaine, when he was lured by Fortune and Nobility; and Pinocchio when he was tempted by laziness and adventurous yearning, believing time and again in the land of the Balocchi as well as the words of the Fox and the Cat. Both thought that they had landed on the winning side of life! Pinocchio's pride and happiness when he becomes a real live child is no less than Gwynplaine's amazement when he sees himself in the mirror wearing the elegant clothing of British Nobility. It seems to Gwynplaine that this is the end of his woes, while, in fact, he is still at the beginning of his troubles. And finally both Hugo's and Collodi's heroes came back to their senses; but the former met a tragic end and committed suicide by jumping into the sea, while the latter lived happily ever after and had his dreams come true when he turned into a real live boy. It is therefore natural that these "renversements" would cause one to have a happy ending and the other to encounter a tragic end.

In both stories, Fate had its decrees as well as its messengers: a bird carried Pinocchio on its back; a dog saved him from the green Fisherman; a fish saved him and Geppetto from drowning after their escape from the monstrous shark. Gasparini mentions the key role of the sea in Pinocchio's life. Be it a smooth and calm sea or an agitated one, it represented a challenge to the fears of the little puppet. Pinocchio overcame his fears, showing once more his courage, as he emerges victorious from this confrontation.

La valenza eroica o epica del monte è probabilmente sostituita nel racconto collodiano dal mare (9) deserto d'acqua che svolge un ruolo chiave nelle avventure di Pinocchio e che, presentatoci di volta in volta nelle due versioni del mare calmo e del mare agitato, è pur sempre una materia foriera di pericolo, nonostante il burattino in esso galleggi e nuoti agilmente: in questo senso, l'acqua

rappresenta l'elemento della prova di Pinocchio, specialmente di quella prova finale da cui egli uscirà vittorioso.<sup>16</sup>

Just like Gwynplaine, Pinocchio was trained to perform in a circus where people cheered the dancing donkey. Whenever he brays, he triggers laughter. Lord Firmain Clancharlie's words in the Chamber of Lords, as well as Gwynplaine's performance as a saltimbanque, will prompts similar hilarious applause within the crowd as Pinocchio the donkey does when he brays. In order to escape death, Pinocchio is turned once more into a puppet. Swallowed by a giant shark, the monstrous "Pesce-cane", he comes across his old father Geppetto who has been living there for nearly two years. In both cases the sea played a preponderant role: evil at times, and benevolent at others. The ambivalent aspect of the sea can trigger life as well as death: life for Pinocchio and Geppetto; life also, temporarily, for Gwynplaine, until the moment of truth, when the life giving element turns into a grave for him.

As a puppet or a donkey, Pinocchio exhibits several unfavorable aspects of the child whose disobedience is the main source of his problems.

[...] e soprattutto quello della morte per acqua, che ricorre tre volte. È nell'acqua del mare che Pinocchio rischia di affogare una prima volta come asino a cui è stata legata una pietra al collo e una seconda volta quando sta portando a riva Geppetto a nuoto; ed è nell'acqua che Pinocchio viene inghiottito dal Pesce-cane.<sup>17</sup>

Pinocchio does not attempt to take away his own life, but he wishes for death in order to assuage the guilt he feels after disobeying those who love him, and causing them distress.

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<sup>16</sup> Gasparini, Corsa di Pinocchio, 61-62.

<sup>17</sup> Gasparini, Corsa di Pinocchio, 96.

Oh! sarebbe meglio, cento volte meglio, che morissi anch'io! Sì, voglio morire!”  
(Cap. XXIII) Al colmo della solitudine della disperazione, Pinocchio invoca quella morte di cui ha tanta paura e contro la quale si ribella ogni volta che essa lo sfiora o si avvicina; Pinocchio, forse, pensa un momento al suicidio.<sup>18</sup>

Although Giovanni Gasparini underlines the existentialism as well as the post-modernism of the famous puppet, it appears that Pinocchio was above all a Romantic who did not feel comfortable in his own skin, and whose moods and different states of mind helped shape his life and adventures. The Romantic hero is often portrayed as an “enfant terrible”: this term was applied to the French poet Rimbaud, whose romantic feelings are expressed throughout poetry. We find in Pinocchio the perfect example of the puppet-child following his whims, led by his capricious nature and restless sense of adventure. Feeling ill at ease in his wooden body, he experiences the romantic malaise, which is described as “le mal du siècle”. Just as the Romantics broke the rigid mold of Classic discipline, so does the romantic puppet, breaking one rule of obedience after the other, roaming free until the moment comes for him to atone for his sins. Led by his dreams, Pinocchio, as restless as Chateaubriand's René, follows persistently his inner impulses. The sea being a romantic topos, Pinocchio confronts his solitude with an omnipotent sea, and reclaims the one parent he loves from the stomach of the monstrous pesce-cane, at the risk of his own life:

Invece, è un “mare cattivo” descritto con il realismo che può esprimere chi conosce bene le burrasche che si abbattono sul mare Tirreno, quello in cui si gette

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<sup>18</sup> Gasparini, Corsa di Pinocchio, 96.

Pinocchio per andare in soccorso di Geppetto, la cui barchetta viene ad un certo punto sommersa da ‘una terribile ondata.’<sup>19</sup> (Cap. XXIII)

Thus Gwynplaine and Pinocchio, realizing that their identity is to be reunited with their loved ones, Gepetto and Dea respectively, search the sea, measuring their strength against its power until they were able to rob it of its victims. Pinocchio finds the father he was looking for, and Gwynplaine recovers Dea's love momentarily. When she dies, he drowns himself in order to keep alive his true identity: the genuine inner radiance of his soul that only Dea's blindness can glimpse, whereas everyone else saw only the hideous mask carved upon his face.

A ogni modo se sarà scritto in cielo che dobbiamo morire, avremo almeno la gran consolazione di morire abbracciati insieme (cap. XXXV) L'amore – in questo caso l'amore filiale, che nel racconto collodiano rappresenta con quello paterno la forma più alta di affetto.<sup>20</sup>

The theme of paternity, as an indicator of identity, will be explored in depth in the following stories by Guy de Maupassant: “Le Papa de Simon”, and Pierre et Jean. The sea plays a primordial role in these quests for identity.

### **2.1.3. An Issue of Identity: The Theme Of Paternity.**

According to Edward D. Sullivan in Maupassant the Novelist, “The central idea of the novel [Pierre et Jean] is the theme of paternity.”<sup>21</sup> Sullivan takes into account René Dumesnil's classification by subject of all of Maupassant's stories. Dumesnil state that:

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<sup>19</sup> Gasparini, Corsa di Pinocchio, 61-62.

<sup>20</sup> Gasparini, Corsa di Pinocchio, 106-107.

<sup>21</sup> Edward D. Sullivan, Maupassant the Novelist, (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1954) 104.



Maupassant est hanté par certains sujets et principalement par celui qui trouvera dans *Le Champ d'Oliviers*, son expression définitive et parfaite; l'enfant, l'enfant ignoré de son père, l'enfant abandonné sciemment ou non, et qui a poussé comme une mauvaise graine livrée aux caprices des saisons. Sous ses formes les plus diverses, ce problème de la responsabilité morale du père revient près de trente fois dans les quelques deux cent cinquante nouvelles que Maupassant a laissées.<sup>22</sup>

(Dumesnil, Chroniques, Etudes, Correspondance (Gründ), p. xv.)

Maupassant's short story "Le papa de Simon" as well as his novel Pierre et Jean, both display the author's favored theme, as their protagonists embark on a quest for identity. This quest for identity takes place in the proximity of the sea, which is the ideal setting for such an introspective expedition. In "Le papa de Simon", the identity of a fatherless child is discussed. For a reason he cannot comprehend, a child is beleaguered by his peers: "Je vais me noyer car je n'ai point de papa."<sup>23</sup>, says Simon. A ten-year old boy, tired of being different from other children who have both father and mother, Simon feels that he has no identity. Doesn't society identify a person by his/her last name, more specifically the father's last name? "On s'appelle Simon quelque chose ... c'est pas un nom ça ... Simon."<sup>24</sup>, cry his schoolmates when he gives only his first name. For the child this "quelque chose" is missing, and Simon suffers from this lack of identity, from this void in his life. "Pas de papa! Pas de papa!"<sup>25</sup>, repeat the children like a refrain while dancing around him, without any consideration for his pain. The cruelty of his peers drives the child to attempt drowning himself in the sea. Addressing his helpless mother

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<sup>22</sup> Quoted by Sullivan, Maupassant the Novelist, 105.

<sup>23</sup> Guy de Maupassant, "Le Papa de Simon", Contes et nouvelles, (Paris, Albin-Michel, 1967) 17.

<sup>24</sup> Maupassant, "Le Papa de Simon", 15.

<sup>25</sup> Maupassant, "Le Papa de Simon", 16.

condemned to bearing the sight of his distress and unable to comfort him, Simon says: “Non, maman, j’ai voulu me noyer parce que les autres m’ont battu ... m’ont battu parce que je n’ai pas de papa.”<sup>26</sup> The child feels that his existence is a stain that should be purified by the water. By drowning himself, he would be dismissing his haunting problem of identity.

At the last moment, coming out of nowhere, Philippe Rémy, a carpenter newly arrived in town, accepts to be the child’s father, thus providing Simon with the identity he’s searching for, and at the same time giving stability to the child’s world. This generous offer fills the child with joy: his problem is solved. Like everyone else he has a father: a kind, generous, courageous father, respected by the community, and he already feels his protective shadow hovering over him. As a matter of fact, Simon’s new identity under the “égide” of his new father, Philippe, seems to impose respect and consideration among his schoolmates. He is able to share the aura of respect given to his adoptive father by the social environment, in which young and old alike admire Philippe.

In La Modernité de Maupassant, Gérard Delaisement underscores Maupassant’s protective attitude towards the fatherless child: “Retenons que Maupassant a su parler sans haine de l’enfant bâtard...”<sup>27</sup> At a time when society in general shunned the fatherless child, Maupassant endorses his blameless position. Young Simon is not the only victim in this instance, Pierre, another hero of Maupassant’s, discovers later on, after becoming a doctor, that his brother is not his father’s son. As a matter of fact, Maupassant’s novel Pierre et Jean is a study of the same problem of identity, but on a much deeper scale. Facing the world as a new man whose brother is but a step-brother, and worst of all, whose mother is not the immaculate, faithful

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<sup>26</sup> Maupassant, “Le Papa de Simon”, 19.

<sup>27</sup> Gérard Delaisement, La Modernité de Maupassant, (Paris, Editions Rive Droite, 1995) 149.

woman he believed her to be, Pierre tries to deal with the problem of his new identity, as his whole world deteriorates from stability to chaos. An unexplained inheritance befalling his brother Jean upon a friend's death reveals to him the reason for his constant and inexplicable jealousy of his brother.

Attempting to deal with the loss of the maternal image of purity and perfection, and trying to adjust to this new situation, Pierre's suffering turns him towards the sea. The sea, his only true and reliable friend, constant and faithful, everlasting and comforting, still reflecting the image of the ideal woman, becomes a substitute for the ideal mother, giving him consolation when he most needs it. His first impulsion, after being shaken by the reversal of his peace of mind, is to apply for a job on a ship, the "Lorraine", which will be sailing for several months, rocking his sadness and his disillusion to sleep. Was this an act of despair on Pierre's part? Perhaps, but it was also an attempt at dealing with a situation which turned his familiar world heels over head as it robbed him of the stable and serene identity of belonging to a closely knit family, which was firmly anchored in his subconscious. As the well-defined and clearly delineated reflection of his world became loose and vague, he lost ground. He became hostile and cruel, trying to treat others as life had treated him. He tried to shake their beliefs just as his own had been shaken by Fate; to kill their joy and their happiness; to turn his brother against his mother in order to force him to replace the image of the faithful mother with a new unflattering image of her.

Maupassant carefully reports this struggle for identity in a novel whose setting is the sea, the everchanging and everlasting sea, the Atlantic Ocean, which framed his childhood with its mysterious and beautiful presence. The nearly magical appearance of Philippe Rémy, snatching Simon from the grasp of death by drowning, and offering him his name, cannot work in Pierre et

Jean, where the bitterness of a grown man betrayed by Fate is studied in depth, down to the darkest recesses of his soul. Although he is a man, deep inside Pierre is still a little boy at grips with the image of his mother as a possession. The sullied image of the mother coincides with the budding distrust of the wife or the woman in general. There is also the jealousy he feels towards his brother Jean who got a better deal in life than he himself did. Pierre turns to the sea in order to find solutions to this fundamental problem: purity. As Gaston Bachelard observes in his book: L'eau et les rêves, water is a purifying element that could help him find peace within himself.

Pierre faces a psychological dilemma, which is as deep as an abyss. He goes from rejection to acceptance and vice versa. His refusal to accept others as they are, with their imperfections, is causing his distress. Along with Maupassant's protagonist, the reader finds himself pulled apart by contradictory situations, and forced to deal with controversial feelings. The reader finds himself pulled into this ambiguous situation as a witness, as a judge, as a soul brother of Pierre, of Jean, and finally of the mother. The reader goes from understanding Pierre's jealousy of Jean, to blaming him for his ruthlessness towards his brother; from sharing Pierre's torment, to criticizing his cruelty towards his mother.

Pierre is clinging to his stable past; he is rejecting a new unpredictable future, which no longer has a firmly established foundation. In order to put an end to his solitude, he would have to rework his priorities and his understanding of life. He would have to accept people as they are, as human beings with their limitations. He would come to comprehend the solitude of others as he deals with his own solitude. He would have to focus on their feelings as he tries to understand his own. Who will carry him to that extent of fluidity but the sea? Since his childhood the sea that has been comforting his solitude. It also helped in appeasing his jealousy of a brother who seemed to surpass him in everything. The sea that has answers to many questions, the sea that

could be the symbol of many things at once, representing the many moods of man. Yes! The dichotomy of an everchanging sea will help him understand the world and discover his new identity in spite of the circumstances. Another “nid flottant” will be possible for Pierre as it was possible for the author himself, Maupassant, who conveyed his impressions of the sea in his book: Sur l'eau.

Pierre's dialogue with the sea is a masterpiece of psychological inquiry, as he seeks answers to his troubling questions. It is also the embodiment of a deep solitude, which goes from being a characteristic feature, to becoming a threatening force engulfing all man's humane concepts of civilized behaviour. Emerging within Pierre's soul were several layers of solitudes: social, familial, personal, conceptual, moral. Pierre had dealt with solitude when it was a tendency, an inclination, but when solitude became a rumbling abyss, threatening everything he has known and believed in, when things ventured on a more perilous ground, dark fears, then, clouded his sky, which used to be serene. Reflecting his torments, and at the same time offering soothing comfort, the sea offered him the image of the perfect mother. By confronting the double image of a calm or treacherous sea, Pierre was able to adjust to his new conditions in life, and to accept facts he could not change.

One's moral values are more deeply imbedded in one's conscience than anything else. One's physical surroundings might change without causing much damage; but the moral values, once shaken, trigger fundamental upheavals. This could very well be the reason behind people's acceptance of exile, so they could preserve their moral world intact. Pierre's exile was a moral one and those are the hardest ones to deal with.

In Maupassant's novel, the reader can observe Pierre as he takes refuge into the sea, in order to get rid of the obsessive image of his mother as an adulteress. Without going as far as

committing suicide, he chooses to work as a doctor on a sailing ship in order to evade his obsession. His jealousy of his brother is getting stronger: Jean is the son of the beloved and refined Maréchal, while he, Pierre, is the son of “Le père Roland” who is described in disparaging terms throughout the novel. The placidity of “le Père Roland”, his complacency, and his constant self-satisfaction: all these were images of an identity from which Pierre wished to escape. Either resenting his father for being who he was, or his mother for having had a more satisfying life with Maréchal, he suffered, and turned towards the sea in an effort to minimize his pain.

Pierre’s desire is to evade his identity as the son of the retired jeweler, owner of the boat “la Perle”. Pierre, as a matter of fact, would have preferred to assume Jean’s identity: he envied him, pretended to disdain him, but deep in his heart, he would have liked to be his brother. A series of symbolical events such as Jean renting the apartment which Pierre liked, or winning the love of the woman Pierre desired, increased the latter’s resentment and bitterness. After noticing Mme de Rosémilly’s preference for Jean, he affectedly pretended to disdain her as if she were not smart enough for him.

Parallel to the sea, hovering over the city, a layer of mist “la brume” is described by Pierre as “cette nuée humide et glacée”<sup>28</sup>. This is how Maupassant describes the misty weather: “Quand la barque reprit dans le port sa place accoutumée, la ville entière était ensevelie déjà sous cette vapeur menue qui, sans tomber, mouillait comme une pluie et glissait sur les maisons et les rues à la façon d’un fleuve qui coule.”<sup>29</sup> The mist ends up equating unshed tears, unable to express the depth of pain. This mist was present, active, yet it did not give the liberating relief

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<sup>28</sup> Guy de Maupassant, Pierre et Jean, (Paris, PML, 1995) 87.

<sup>29</sup> Maupassant, Pierre et Jean, 87.

that tears provide. This “brume” was rather similar to inner tears, held back, yet pervasive and overwhelming like a deeply buried pain.

As Pierre struggles against the doubts pervading his soul about his mother’s possible misconduct, the sirens of the ships coming into the harbour echo his cries of despair. He identifies his solitary and desperate state of mind with these sirens: “En approchant du port il entendit vers la pleine mer une plainte lamentable et sinistre, pareille au meuglement d’un taureau, mais plus longue et plus puissante. C’était le cri d’une sirène, le cri des navires perdus dans la brume.”<sup>30</sup> Pierre’s feeling of perdition is reflected in the metaphor of the lost ship, which doesn’t know where it stands. There is also the reference to a bull, possibly wounded, that is uttering cries of pain. The use of the word “meuglement” echoes and amplifies Pierre’s instinctive suffering.

Another image identifies Pierre’s heart to a sinking raft, and compares the blood flow to the waves shaking mercilessly his tormented heart: “Et une souffrance aigüe, une inexprimable angoisse entrée dans sa poitrine, faisait aller son coeur comme une loque agitée. Les ressorts en paraissaient brisés, et le sang y passait à flots, librement, en le secouant d’un ballonnement tumultueux.”<sup>31</sup> Similar to a sinking ship, Pierre’s heart falls prey to a tempest of doubt and solitude. The detrimental effects of stress and anxiety are depicted in this assault of his feelings on his body, as Pierre relates everything to the sea in a constant comparison. His desperate solitude is highlighted as he struggles with a pervasive uncertainty.

The following passage assimilates Pierre’s condition to that of the sea, in a more explicit statement:

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<sup>30</sup> Maupassant, Pierre et Jean, 93.

<sup>31</sup> Maupassant, Pierre et Jean, 95.

Un frisson remua dans sa chair, crispa son coeur, tant il avait retenti dans son âme et dans ses nerfs, ce cri de détresse, qu'il croyait avoir jeté lui-même. Une autre voix semblable gémit à son tour, un peu plus loin; puis tout près, la sirène du port, leur répondant, poussa une clameur déchirante.

Pierre gagna la jetée à grand pas, ne pensant plus à rien, satisfait d'entrer dans ces ténèbres lugubres et mugissantes.<sup>32</sup>

Seeking comfort in the lamenting darkness, which corresponds to his own suffering, Pierre identifies with the sea to the extent that he imagines having uttered this cry of despair himself. His whole being reacts to the cry of the sirens. The sound of the siren of the incoming ship is a cry of recognition; it is the announcement of the ship's identity: the ship needs to be identified in order to safely gain access into the harbour. Pierre witnesses the "veilleur" inquiring about the identity of each ship before admitting it into local waters.

The suggestiveness of Pierre's plight is so strong that with his eyes shut he evokes the ghost of Maréchal who is responsible for his suffering. Through this evocation, which utilizes to great effect the flashback technique the reader is allowed to see the aspect and personality of Maréchal as if he were still alive. The temporality here is switching from the present realm to the world of the past where Pierre has been transported through his tenacity at hunting memories in order to reach a verdict. His torment increases and culminates with the repetitious statements: "Il faut savoir. Mon Dieu, il faut savoir."<sup>33</sup> He turns to the sea for knowledge, for identity, for facts. Unable to discuss his plight with anyone, Pierre's suffering keeps mounting as he wrestles with past memories, requesting them to shed light on the events. The Past was expected to shed light

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<sup>32</sup> Maupassant, Pierre et Jean, 93.

<sup>33</sup> Maupassant, Pierre et Jean, 95.



on the Present, on the unstable Present, which is wavering from darkness to light, from affirmation to negation. Each recalled detail floods his memory: his mother's voice, her intonations, her smiles to Maréchal; it all seems to anchor Pierre's suspicions into a confirmed and desperate reality. Acting as the defense and the prosecutor at the same time, submerged by his love for his mother, Pierre falls prey to remorse, as he tries to convince himself that it would be madness to suspect his mother.

Je suis fou, pensa-t-il, je soupçonne ma mère.” Et un flot d’amour et d’attendrissement, de prière et de désolation noya son coeur. Sa mère! La connaissant comme il la connaissait comment avait-il pu la suspecter? Est-ce que l’âme, est-ce que la vie de cette femme simple, chaste et loyale, n’étaient pas plus claires que l’eau?<sup>34</sup>

The metaphor representing Pierre's heart as a sinking ship overwhelmed by waves of love and remorse highlights the crucial role of the sea in his life, and particularly during this moment of crisis. Another metaphore comparing the purity of his mother to the clarity of water indicates that for Pierre everything revolves around the sea: his torment, his doubts, his love, his trust, and his jealousy. Once he realizes that his worst fears are true, Pierre's fury turns into a vengeful desire for murdering everyone responsible for the turmoil in his life: “Et Pierre se leva en frémissant d’une telle fureur qu’il aurait voulu tuer quelqu’un! Son bras tendu, sa grande main ouverte avait envie de frapper, de meurtrir, de broyer, d’étrangler! Qui? Tout le monde, son père, son frère, le mort, sa mère!”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Maupassant, Pierre et Jean, 97.

<sup>35</sup> Maupassant, Pierre et Jean, 99.

Shaken by a brutal awakening to reality, Pierre listens to the ships exchanging their names and identities. He imagines himself leaving and never coming back, disappearing without leaving any traces, without ever writing to his family. Like waves, his imagination grows wild as he dreams about a liberating voyage that would free him of all his suffering and liberate him from his tormentor: his family, with whom he cannot share his distress: “Pierre marchait au milieu de ces gens, plus perdu, plus séparé d’eux, plus isolé, plus noyé dans sa pensée torturante, que si on l’avait jeté à la mer du pont d’un navire, à cent lieues du large.”<sup>36</sup> Just as Baudelaire’s poetry also discussed solitude in the midst of a crowd, Pierre’s suffering is isolating him from any happiness and even from the presence of others. Tortured by his own thoughts, he felt like a drowning man, far away from the safety of shore. Pierre’s cruelty reaches its pinnacle as he keeps tormenting his mother with questions, showing her that he suspects her. However, his cruel behaviour did not satisfy him, on the contrary, it distressed him to the point of considering suicide:

Et il souffrait autant qu’elle, lui! Il souffrait affreusement de ne plus l’aimer, de ne plus la respecter et de la torturer. Quand il avait bien avivé la plaie saignante, ouverte par lui dans ce coeur de femme et de mère, quand il sentait combien elle était misérable et désespérée, il s’en allait seul, par la ville, si tenaillé par les remords, si meurtri par la pitié, si désolé de l’avoir ainsi broyée sous son mépris de fils, qu’il avait envie de se jeter à la mer, de se noyer pour en finir.<sup>37</sup>

Pierre is tempted to end his own life because he despises himself for torturing his mother, yet he is not able to stop. He is punishing her for upsetting his world, for robbing him of his

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<sup>36</sup> Maupassant, Pierre et Jean, 109.

<sup>37</sup> Maupassant, Pierre et Jean, 124.

identity, for not remaining as pure as “l’eau claire”. Thus suicide could possibly signify the end of remorse, of torment, of suffering. Pierre holds his own behaviour in contempt: he denigrates his bitterness, his sarcasms, and his hostility, which he can no longer hide. In a nearly photographic image, the narrator compares Pierre’s body to a corpse: “Puis, quand elle se fut essuyé les yeux, où des larmes étaient venues, elle aperçut là-bas sur la plage un corps étendu sur le ventre, comme un cadavre, la figure dans le galet: c’était l’autre, Pierre, qui songeait, désespéré.”<sup>38</sup> The association of tears and a dead body suggests the idea of mourning. As a matter of fact, the mother mourns Pierre whose cruelty rendered him as good as dead in her eyes. It also emphasizes his otherness, as he becomes “l’autre”: the one who tortures her, who is no longer her son... And the sand on the shore appears to be his grave.

Pierre accepts willingly to work as a doctor on a ship for a long time, yet although he usually experienced a communion with the sea at the gravest moments of his life, nevertheless his departure triggers a feeling of rootlessness, which he has never been through before: “Ce n’était plus une douleur morale et torturante, mais l’affolement d’une bête sans abri, une angoisse matérielle d’être errant qui n’a plus de toit et que la pluie, le vent, l’orage, toutes les forces brutales du monde vont assaillir.”<sup>39</sup>

It is no longer the lack of identity that disturbs Pierre, but rather the lack of material stability as he stops feeling the security of a firm ground under his feet. The threat of the continuous swinging of the ship worries him. His moral torment is being transformed into a physical discomfort: “Plus de sol sous ses pas, mais la mer qui roule, qui gronde et engloutit. Plus d’arbres, de jardins, de rues, de maisons, rien que de l’eau et des nuages.”<sup>40</sup> The same sea or

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<sup>38</sup> Maupassant, Pierre et Jean, 139.

<sup>39</sup> Maupassant, Pierre et Jean, 175.

<sup>40</sup> Maupassant, Pierre et Jean, 176.

water that used to grant comfort is going to provide instability and discomfort: it lacks the stability of Mother Earth: “Et sans cesse il sentirait remuer ce navire sous ses pieds. [...] et sentirait fuir ce bateau qui le porte, d’une fuite continue, régulière, exaspérante.”<sup>41</sup>

The novel ends on a note of weariness differing from the rebellious turmoil that agitated Pierre. The healing process had begun and Pierre “laissait aller sa révolte à vau l’eau à la façon de son existence.”<sup>42</sup> The mother’s pain had also calmed down. Her feelings for her son, Pierre, had returned to being as they were. Forgiveness had taken place on both sides.

Sur ce bateau que rien ne pouvait arrêter, sur ce bateau qu’elle n’apercevrait plus tout à l’heure, était son fils, son pauvre fils. Et il lui semblait que la moitié de son coeur s’en allait avec lui, il lui semblait aussi que sa vie était finie, il lui semblait encore qu’elle ne reverrait plus son enfant.<sup>43</sup>

For Pierre’s mother, the sea represented absence and separation. Although Pierre’s presence inflicted pain and sadness to her soul, she will miss him, as if the water carrying him away had erased his past cruelty. Her worries are projected into a distant future where the image of the son is cleansed from any hostile behaviour; what is left is the loving tenderness of a mother for her son.

#### **2.1.4. Drowning An Unwanted Identity.**

Balzac’s short story: “Un drame au bord de la mer” which was discussed in the first chapter offers the perfect example of an unwanted identity that was drowned into the sea. Using the purifying virtue of the water to cleanse the image of his son as a delinquent, Cambremer,

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<sup>41</sup> Maupassant, Pierre et Jean, 176.

<sup>42</sup> Maupassant, Pierre et Jean, 181.

<sup>43</sup> Maupassant, Pierre et Jean, 188.

Balzac's hero, drowns him in the sea. In order to be able to cherish the image of the innocent son, he has to get rid of that of the thief and liar, which Jacques had turned out to be. Cambremer thus accomplishes two things: purifying Jacques' sins as well as cleansing his commemoration, since it is only after punishing him that he is able to mourn him in solitude. Driven by his self-righteousness, like a Grand Priest accomplishing the rites of purification, he drowns his only son; he then allows his paternal feelings to explode into a silent mourning for his beloved child. It is only after petrifying his paternal feelings in order to go through with the drowning, that he is able to start mourning his son lovingly: both stages involve a great deal of solitude. But the petrification of his soul does not end: he remains as a statue for the rest of his days, unable to move, unable to even feed himself and counting on Pierrette, his niece, to provide him with his daily sustenance. Focusing on one image and obsessed with his act of justice, he cannot detach his mind from the actual murder of his son. His heart, which he muzzled in order to go through with his act, will remain "emmuré", walled up forever. No amount of guilt, no remorse whatsoever can revive the man who went against nature in a moment of blindness. His solitude is as endless as his remorse.

French literature is not alone in offering examples of an identity that can dissolve into the depths of the sea. XXth century Italian author and playwright Luigi Pirandello presents the case of a man who assumes a new identity after being mistakenly reported dead in the town's local newspaper. In the novel Il fù Mattia Pascal (1904) the protagonist attempts to live a new life as Adriano Meis. Expressing his relief as well as his solitude for being the only one knowing the truth about him, Mattia Pascal celebrates the death of his past as well as the potential for a new life free of bonds, of obligations, and above all of the weight of his previous existence:

Ero solo ormai, e più solo di com'ero non avrei potuto essere su la terra, sciolto nel presente d'ogni legame e d'ogni obbligo, libero, nuovo e assolutamente padrone di me, senza più il fardello del mio passato, e con l'avvenire dinanzi, che avrei potuto foggiarmi a piacer mio.

Ah! un pajo d'ali ! Come mi sentivo leggero!<sup>44</sup>

He feels like a bird in flight, and enjoys this new lightness, which he comes to experience momentarily while he envisions a guiltless future. Mattia Pascal had no role in his “death”: freedom was handed to him by chance. He did not need to stage a suicide by drowning:

Si lascia il cappello e la giacca, con una lettera in tasca, sul parapetto di un ponte, su un fiume; e poi, invece di buttarsi giù, si va via tranquillamente, in America o altrove. Si pesca dopo alcuni giorni un cadavero irriconoscibile: sarà quello della lettera lasciata sul parapetto del ponte. E non se ne parla più! È vero che io non ci ho messo la mia volontà: né lettera, né giacca, né cappello ... Ma son pure come loro, con questo di più: che posso godermi senza alcun rimorso la mia libertà. Han voluto regalarmela, e dunque ...<sup>45</sup>

Little did he know that his newly found freedom would turn sour, and that he would come to the point of having to “kill” his own creation: Adriano Meis, in that same manner, by drowning. Later in the novel, he tells the reader how this idea matured into his mind. He contemplates suicide in the usual literary manner, on a bridge overlooking the river: “Ed ecco, alla fine, senza volerlo, quasi guidato dal sentimento oscuro che mi aveva invaso tutto, maturandomisi man mano, mi ritrovai sul Ponte Margherita, appoggiato al parapetto, a guardare

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<sup>44</sup> Luigi Pirandello, Il fù Mattia Pascal, (Milano, Mondadori, 1999) 88

<sup>45</sup> Pirandello, Mattia Pascal, 95.

con occhi sbarrati il fiume nero della notte.”<sup>46</sup> Imagining the end of the fictitious Adriano Meis as being similar to that attributed to Mattia Pascal, Pirandello’s hero decides to get rid of the life he has been leading for two years, and to reassume his old identity as Mattia Pascal. What would be a better way than leading Adriano Meis to commit suicide?

“Qua,” dissi quasi inconsciamente, tra me, “su questo parapetto... il cappello... Il bastone... Sì! Com’esse là nella gora del molino, Mattia Pascal; io, qua, ora, Adriano Meis... Una volta per uno! Ritorno vivo; mi vendicherò!” [...] Ed ora, ecco, Adriano Meis s’uccideva.<sup>47</sup>

Pirandello’s novel ends on the same note of dreadful solitude as Balzac’s “Le colonel Chabert”, who was believed to have died at Eylau during the French-Russian Napoleonic war. The French hero must, in the end, accept the fact that being considered dead has forever altered his existence, while the Italian protagonist resigns himself to his wife remarriage with Pomino, a friend of his. Both the Colonel Chabert and Mattia Pascal acknowledge their presumed death as they identify themselves respectively: “Celui qui est mort à Eylau”<sup>48</sup> and “Io sono il fù Mattia Pascal.”<sup>49</sup>

### **2.1.5. Wavering Towards a Mature Identity.**

The sea is at the limits of a quest for identity. It is a marker of identification, a spatio-temporal dimension able to trigger either the thought of a desired identity or the wish to do away with an unwanted one. Like the sea in its alternating tidal movements rises and falls, reaching for

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<sup>46</sup> Pirandello, Mattia Pascal, 229.

<sup>47</sup> Pirandello, Mattia Pascal, 231.

<sup>48</sup> Honoré de Balzac, Le Colonel Chabert, (Paris,: Librairie Générale Française, 1994) 75.

<sup>49</sup> Luigi Pirandello, Il fu Mattia Pascal, (Milano: Mondadori, 1999) 262

and pulling away from the Earth, so does man's mind as it fluctuates in an effort to stabilize his own identity. He looks at the sea whose changing aspect remind him of his ambivalent nature; whose soothing properties comfort his pains, whose sound seem to echo his feelings; whose beauty fascinates his eyes, filling him with awe, joy, hope and inspiration.

Described by Dominique Fernandez as "le plus beau livre, sans doute, de la littérature italienne contemporaine"<sup>50</sup>, Elsa Morante's novel L'Isola di Arturo (1957) portrays a young boy who bears the name of the legendary King of the Round Table. The motherless boy, Arturo, spends his childhood and adolescence on the island of Procida, a circumscribed and detached universe dominated by the figure of the father, Wilhelm, the boy's idol. The protagonist goes from worshipping his father's image to experiencing pangs of jealousy when the latter marries a sixteen-year old girl, to facing an Oedipal situation, as his feelings for his stepmother develop into a forbidden love. His solitude of unloved child or "mal aimé" drives him to the sea, where long boat rides represent an evasion from his daily life as well as an attempt to recover reality while stepping out of his fantasy. Upon learning the truth about his father, a homosexual who travels from port to port in search of adventures, Arturo finally leaves the island where he was prisoner of his past and gradually comes to terms with himself, facing the world as a grown-up man with a new identity. It may be worthwhile to mention that Arturo is a writer, as he declares himself to his friend Silvestro whom he sent to fetch his belongings: "Mi raccomando, eh: I fogli scritti prendili tutti, nonlasciarne nessuno, che quelli sono importanti, perchè io sono uno scrittore."<sup>51</sup> Arturo has been writing his Memoirs, in which he relates the events of his solitary life, with continuous flashbacks of his childhood. Arturo is a sharp observer and, in his Memoirs,

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<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Donatella Ravanella, Scrittura e Follia nei romanzi di Elsa Morante, (Venezia, Marsilio, 1980) 73.

<sup>51</sup> Elsa Morante, L'isola di Arturo, (Torino, Einaudi, 1957) 371.



reports everything he goes through, faithfully, without neglecting any detail. His attempt at suicide, his escape from home, and his night in the cave next to the sea express his need to leave the confined atmosphere of Procida where he is suffocating without any parental guidance, a prey to his instinctive feelings of jealousy and desire. The revelation of his father's true identity is a major factor in his development, since it triggers his detachment from the happiest childhood memories and mark the end of his illusions about life in Procida. So, as illusions disappear, the sea will lead him to a new fulfilled identity. If he ever comes back, Arturo will be a different person.

Arturo's mother has been dead for longer than he can remember: he is totally unaware of the bond between mother child until he watches his young stepmother, Nunziata, taking care of her newborn son Carmine Arturo. The sight of this maternal devotion, undisclosed to him, triggers a feeling of resentment and jealousy towards the infant. Arturo doesn't remember having ever been kissed in such a manner. Feeling sorry for himself, he starts realizing the sadness of being deprived of maternal love. His feelings for Nunziata become more and more confused: he doesn't know whether he wants her as a mother or as a lover. He has her wear her hair in a braid, the same way his mother does in the only portrait he has of her. He wants his share of the tenderness she has towards her baby. His jealousy of the child reaches the extent of wanting to kill him, but luckily he forgets about this dark desire of his.

This confined and confused life finds an expansion in the depth and immensity of the sea. Arturo takes his boat at sea and sets his imagination free to roam across the continents. His dreams of voyages and adventures are less harmful than the events he experiences within his confined family life. At sea, he remembers his father, Wilhelm Gerace, the long boat rides they had together, and the numerous secrets they shared... The mystery surrounding the figure of the

father, his unexplained absences, his disdainful behaviour, all this placed the childhood of the unloved boy in a magical atmosphere. It is only when confronted with the spectacle of motherly tenderness that he starts experiencing mixed emotions. Nunziata is only two years older than he, so how could she be a mother to him? Despite her young age, she is also married to his father, so how could she love the son? The presence of the sea comforts Arturo's lonely soul who cannot fulfill his potential and define his identity in the confinement in which he dwells. Meanwhile, he tries to draw Nunziata's attention by having an affair with a neighbour he does not really love. He succeeds in forcing Nunziata to admit that she loves him, but he leaves before things develop any further.

In Arturo's mind there was a strong resemblance between his father and the sea. Wilhem Gerace's personality reflected that of the sea: capricious, unpredictable, confident and charismatic. At times, one could substitute for the other. In his father's absence, Arturo turned to the sea for comfort, for advice, for encouragement. He needed to anchor his still immature self into something stronger and more powerful than his own uncertainties, overcoming the emerging personality of a young boy. Fascinated by the sea, as well as by his father, he mentally joined these two presences in order to break his solitude.

Arturo is described as being physically different from his father who is the typical Viking type: tall and blond, while he, Arturo, is dark and puny. Doesn't his father call him "Moro" or (Blackie)? Arturo envies his father and would like to emulate him in everything. Renowned prowess, geographical itinerary, imaginary wars and adventures populate Arturo's mind as he evokes his legendary father. The man is smart and realizes that he rules over his son's imagination and that the boy is smitten with him. He even boasts about it to his friends. Throughout the narration, Arturo mentions his admiration for his father:

La mia infanzia è come un paese felice del quale lui è l'assoluto regnante! Egli era sempre di passaggio, sempre in partenza; ma nei brevi intervalli che trascorreva a Procida, io lo seguivo come un cane. Dovevamo essere una buffa coppia, per chi ci incontrava! Lui che avanzava risoluto, come una vela nel vento, con la sua bionda testa forestiera, le labra gonfie e gli occhi duri, senza guardare nessuno in faccia. E io che li tenevo in dietro, girando fieramente a destra e a sinistra i miei occhi mori, come a dire: 'Procidiani passa mio padre!'<sup>52</sup>

Molded by the elements of Nature, and particularly by the sea, which is reflected in his blue eyes, Wilhelm moves like a sail in the wind, "come una vela nel vento", stands tall and straight, towering over the rest of the population of Procida. Constantly gone on an interminable Odyssey, the Viking leaves his lonely son wondering about his mysterious absence. A man-child following his whims, while the child-man Arturo, grown and raised in solitude along the seashore, has to balance his father's immaturity with an insight of his own. He does so patiently, until his father's true nature is revealed to him, shattering his trust and breaking his heart. Upon learning the truth, Arturo is mortified: his father's image disintegrates before his very eyes, leaving a painful void, where enthusiasm and admiration used to dwell. The transition from loneliness to nothingness is quite painful since the child cannot confide into anyone, because he has no one...

Arturo is not the only character in the novel to experience a devastating solitude. Wilhelm Gerace and his wife Nunziata are also solitary figures by the force of circumstances. The solitude of the father appears in Arturo's following remarks: "Era sempre taciturno,

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<sup>52</sup> Morante, *Arturo*, 28-29.

sbrigativo, ombroso, e mi concedeva a mala pena qualche occhiata. Ma era un grande privilegio, per me, che la mia compagnia fosse la sola da lui tollerata nell'isola.”<sup>53</sup>

Rather than the reflection of an image in the water such as is the case with Narcissus, we find the reflection of the voice in the form of echo. Arturo relates an instance when his father shouts in German in a cave by the sea, and relishes listening to the echo of his rantings. Wilhelm's solitude is contained in the language he alone speak in Procida, his native tongue: German. No one on the island speaks German, not even his own son Arturo. Like an overgrown child, Wilhelm enjoys listening to the echo of his own voice as he speaks German aloud near the sea. Even the young boy refrains from such childplay, whereas his father enjoys it tremendously. In an attempt to overcome his own solitude, Wilhelm challenges the sea with his voice, and with the use of his native language.

According to Arturo, there is a tacit understanding between his father and the sea, a resemblance, which the child constantly observes: “[...] I suoi occhi, erano d'un turchino-violaceo, che somigliava al colore di certi specchi di mare intorbidati dalle nuvole.”<sup>54</sup> Wilhelm's eyes reflected the color of the sea; his gate was just like that of sailors; his shirt reminded Arturo of sails blown by the wind. All those details increased the mystery suuounding him: “Col suo grazioso passo rapido, un poco oscillante come il passo dei marinai, nella sua camicia celeste che si gonfiava al vento, egli mi pareva il messaggero d'una avventura misteriosa, d'un incantevole potere.”<sup>55</sup>

As far as Arturo is concerned, his father's trips away from home were mysterious, adventurous, as well as tinged with a magical power that Wilhelm seemed to draw from the sea:

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<sup>53</sup> Morante, Arturo, 29.

<sup>54</sup> Morante, Arturo, 29-30.

<sup>55</sup> Morante, Arturo, 37.

“Quando Wilhelm Gerace si rimetteva in viaggio, ero convinto che partisse verso azioni avventurose ed eroiche: gli avrei creduto senz’altro se m’avesse raccontato che muoveva alla conquista dei Poli, o della Persia come Alessandro il Macedone;”<sup>56</sup>. It is through his voyages that Wilhelm Gerace became a heroic figure in his son’s eyes: “Dal momento che lasciava Procida, mio padre per me ridiventava una leggenda.”<sup>57</sup> The distance, the unknown destination of the father, the imaginary adventures lended a magical and enchanted aura to an ordinary man.

“Pari a mio padre!”<sup>58</sup> Could that be the boy’s leitmotiv and obsession? Is this why Arturo fell in love with Nunziata, in order to be in his father’s shoes? The orphan boy wanted to matter to someone, to anyone... The depth of his solitude appears when he brags about the love of his dog for him. Although his feelings for his father show a great admiration; yet also a deep feeling of inferiority emerges from Arturo’s description of himself: “Ma se lui levava gli occhi a guardarmi, il suo splendore silenzioso mi richiamava alla coscienza della mia piccolezza. E mi pareva d’essere un’alíce, alla presenza d’un grande delfino.”<sup>59</sup> Comparing his father to a great dolphin, and himself to a tiny insignificant fish indicates the polarity of two sea creatures whose power and gracefulness are at each other’s antipodes.

Insensitive to Arturo’s love for him, taking the boy’s feelings for granted, Wilhelm mattered only to himself, and tried to crucify the boy by calling him jealous and self-conceited, attributes, which could truly be self-descriptive. Arturo was simply unloved: the immense solitude that surrounded him drove him to misunderstand life. It’s a miracle that he managed to survive: no friends, no social circle, no one to love, to trust, to confide into, no family, no god to

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<sup>56</sup> Morante, Arturo, 38-39.

<sup>57</sup> Morante, Arturo, 45.

<sup>58</sup> Morante, Arturo, 44-45.

<sup>59</sup> Morante, Arturo, 29.

believe in, just nothingness everywhere.... Only a single comforting presence: the sea yielding a promise of fulfillment.

The sea is a witness to everyone's desires: Arturo, Wilhelm and Nunziata's. The lonely Nunziata, believing Arturo to be dead, shouts her love for him at the top of her lungs near the cave by the sea where he is hiding. The wind carries her voice and the admission of her love, a love she deems wrong, but which she cannot extirpate from her heart. The sea is there to collect all these confessions, these doubts, these fears, and these disarrays.

The issue of jealousy which was discussed in Maupassant's Pierre et Jean, is also a central theme in Elsa Morante's L'isola di Arturo. The young boy envies his father's looks and charisma. He nearly worships him. His father pinpoints his jealousy: "La mia opinione era che tu sei geloso! Sei geloso di lei, di Nunziatella, perché prima, qua sull'isola, potevi tenermi tutto per te, e ora, essa ti soppianta! Eh, che ne pensi, moro?"<sup>60</sup>

Arturo's jealousy of his baby brother Carmine Arturo is a source of torment throughout the novel. He expresses relief when his father does not show much interest in the baby, although the latter turns out to have his father's looks, while he, Arturo, does not. When Arturo develops a feeling of love for his step-mother, his jealousy of Carmine is magnified since the baby seems to possess what he, Arturo, was deprived of: the looks of the father as well as the constant love and attention of the mother. Arturo's bitterness is expressed in this manner as he watches Nunziata and the baby:

Troppi baci. Non sapevo che si potesse dare tanti baci al mondo: e pensare che io non ne avevo dati né ricevuti mai! Guardavo quei due che si baciavano come si guarderebbe, da una barca solitaria nel mare, una terra inapprodabile, misteriosa e

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<sup>60</sup> Morante, Arturo, 162.

incantata, piena di foglie e di fiori. [...] ...io mi ripetevo ch'è un'infamia questo mondo, dove qualcuno ha tanto, e qualcun altro, nulla; e mi sentivo pieni d'invidia, di trasporti e di malinconia.<sup>61</sup>

The sight of his baby brother being constantly loved and cuddled fills him up with bitterness and with a feeling of deprivation. He realizes the lack of love in his life as he watches someone who has too much of it. The reader can observe the jealousy of the unloved child torturing himself with every little detail he witnesses. His young age does not prevent him from being extremely perceptive, and his profound remarks indicate a sharp intelligence as well as a sensibility “à fleur de peau”. Arturo describes himself as being on “una barca solitaria nel mare” unable to reach the charming land where motherly love resides. The image of a solitary traveler stranded on a boat on the sea reflects the emotional desert in which he lives as well as his longing for the enchanted land full of flowers and foliage he watches from his standpoint: “Ormai, essa aveva questa nuova compagnia, e nessun'altra compagnia le serviva più. Contenta di stare con lui, non si ricordava di nessun'altra persona.”<sup>62</sup>

What is jealousy? It is the wish to be in someone else's shoes; to live the other's life! It is also a rejection of one's own identity as well as the desire to become the other. It represents a serious lack of self-esteem, because self-approval basically does not exist in this case. It is the desire to be someone else if only through wishful thinking. Jealousy is at best a rejection of one's identity, since choosing to assume someone else's identity is a demeanor of self. Arturo was in the process of becoming an adult and his identity was still in the formative stage. The unusual circumstances of his childhood, and the constant presence of the sea replacing one parent, such

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<sup>61</sup> Morante, Arturo, 235-236.

<sup>62</sup> Morante, Arturo, 235.

as in Balzac's L'Enfant maudit, accounts for an extreme sensitivity. Arturo deeply resents the fact that he is deprived of tenderness: he feels neglected, unwanted, and above all, he suffers from the unfairness of his lot in life. He closely observes his brother being cuddled and loved by his stepmother. He wishes to be in his place: but would that be as a son or as a lover? He does not know it himself. He is confused, and overwhelmed by the power of his jealousy. His imagination drives him to see Nunziata as his dead mother: he has her comb her hair in the same manner as the only portrait he has of the latter. Towards the end of the novel, Arturo's bitterness and feelings of insecurity will be transformed into a more mature judgement of self and others.

What is the role of the sea in Arturo's life? What does the sea mean to him? The sea is a solace to his solitude! The sea is the place where his father's absence begins. The sea allows him to have unlimited dreams. The sea is where his imagination can take its course. The sea is where he can live all the adventures that his sheltered and confined life does not permit. The sea nurtures dreams and encourages wishes. The sea yields a prospect of change: a better life and a better future. A different way of life! The sea's presence breaks the monotony of his days, fills the affective void in his heart, and helps him feel on top of circumstances. At sea, he can be a hero, and he can stop being the unloved child whose father called "moro", and did not know how to love, but rather treated like a loyal puppy. How gladly would Arturo have exchanged his life for someone else's! Doesn't he attempt suicide by taking a handful of pills in order to attract Nunziata's attention? Doesn't he manifest his love for a neighbour, Assuntina, in order to trigger her jealousy? Yet he does not think of drowning himself, because for him, the sea is a loving element, which can never be as cruel as life is. But how can Nunziata tell what is the boy going through? After all she is only two years older than he is, and she has not witnessed his early childhood, which seems to have been an emotional desert. She did not realize that each kiss she



gave her baby was stabbing the deprived child, who went around kissing every object in his possession in order to reenact this supreme gesture of love. How could she tell? She was too young, too overwhelmed by her new maternity, by her identity as a wife and mother, as well as sustained by her own self-righteousness and religious values. It is difficult to analyze other people's needs when one is not equipped for it. Neither his father Wilhelm Gerace, nor his stepmother Nunziata, seemed to have any deep psychological insight. They took their own way of life for granted, and expected everyone around them to do the same. Wilhelm Gerace's life as a perpetual traveler is similar to that of a pirate. Nunziata's life revolves around being a mother and homemaker. Where would Arturo, a growing boy, fit into these pre-designed patterns of life? Arturo goes on a trip of self-discovery as his feelings for his father switch from blind admiration to pity. This doesn't diminish his solitude, but it does help in shaping his identity. Arturo faithfully reports his feelings, his pain, his resentment, his envy, his jealousy, his wishes and his temptations to the reader, eliciting his compassion and forcing him to share his solitude, his sadness and deprivation. Loneliness and solitude are both one and the same for Arturo! No siblings to keep him company! No sweet memories of maternal love! Just the framed picture of a smiling woman! Just the sea for "mère"! But is it enough after all?

In Elsa Morante's novel the sea represents a promise: a compensation for the lack of affection; for the bitterness pervading Arturo's days. The sea marks the end of illusions, and the beginning of a reality with its voyages, its adventures, and its discoveries. Yes, the nurturing sea helped Arturo grow up and find his own identity as he rose above the bitter emptiness of a lonely childhood. In French Literature, Rimbaud, the child-poet who happens to share Arturo's first name, also looked for a meaning for his life in the liquid element. The soothing qualities of the sea, which gave a new life to Moses and to Hayy Ibn Yaqzan, can erase bitterness, purify the

soul, and make up for human mistakes or unawareness. The sea is the medium, which leads to a larger world, ending the confinement of life on Procida. The sea is the carrier of change, fortune, and fulfillment. The young Arturo imagines himself coming back with jewels and money for his beloved Nunziata. This would be the new identity granted to him by the sea. The sea will also help him secure people's approval and admiration. The steps toward his new identity will give him the courage to go from admiring his father to pitying him. He also realizes that he has to leave in order to stop hurting those around him, and to avoid being hurt as well. The voyage will form his judgement, his evaluation of self and others. It will establish the equilibrium between the inner life of self-dialogue, and the communication with others; it will put an end to feelings of inferiority, envy, helplessness, and mark the beginning of a new life of action and fulfillment. The sea appears as the anticipation of such a fulfilled and satisfied life where Arturo Gerace would stop being a grotesque young boy, jealous of his brother, crazy about his father, in love with his stepmother, flying from one fit of rage to the next. A soothing sadness replaces the dramatic feelings that had agitated him prior to the time he decides to flee:

Non mi davo pensiero del mio destino, neppure di quello delle prossime ore, come non appartenesse a me, ma a qualcun altro ch' io non conoscevo ancora, e che non mi importava molto di conoscere. E non odiavo più mio padre, non amavo più N. Al posto dei dolori drammatici che fino a poco prima mi avevano agitato, provavo una tristezza informe, senza più sentimenti per nessuno.<sup>63</sup>

Arturo's new identity is unknown to him, but he anticipates the changes he will probably go through. He mentions the destiny of someone whom he does not know yet: "a qualcun altro ch'io non conoscevo ancora,". This is an allusion to the changes which Arturo's personality undergoes

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<sup>63</sup> Morante, *Arturo*, 361.

as he grows up, and faces a new life in Silvestro's company, away from Procida. "Nessuno mi conosce, a me."<sup>64</sup> Arturo tells his father, highlighting once more the fact that his real identity was not clear yet, not because his personality was still undergoing mutations, as one could imagine at first glance, but because he can be as mysterious and elusive as his father. As a transition before the voyage at sea, is the night in the cave, which anticipates his departure, and facilitates his meeting with Silvestro, his much needed companion. Silvestro represents faithfulness while Wilhelm Gerace whose name was pronounced with devotion at first, but with pity and contempt towards the end of the novel, ends up representing betrayal. The sense of loss, which Arturo experiences as he demystifies his father's identity, is incommensurable.

Silvestro arrives just in time to carry Arturo on a sea of salvation, leaving behind the dark times spent on Procida. At the dawn of a new life, as the island recedes gradually into the distance, Arturo feels this rupture, or "déchirement" of going from an old life to a new one, from the stage of childhood to that of a young man, with the help of Silvestro, the shepherd. Silvestro's role is definitely that of a saviour: initially as a nurse for the child, and later as a mentor for the young man. The reader is relieved to see Arturo in safe hands: like Mentor, he is guiding Arturo / Telemachus while Wilhelm / Ulysses is out at sea....

Since we are discussing identity, the statement "quell' innominato"<sup>65</sup> appears just once in the novel, reminding the reader of Manzoni's novel I Promessi sposi. Manzoni's lonely "châtelain" is a somber and mysterious figure living on a mountain like an eagle on his rock; whereas in L'isola di Arturo, l'innominato is the mysterious prisoner arriving by sea, whose presence Wilhelm surrounds with secrecy, and who remains anonymous up to the end.

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<sup>64</sup> Morante, Arturo, 343.

<sup>65</sup> Morante, Arturo, 302.

The escape from Procida is indeed a salvation for Arturo. As he explains it to the reader, his only ties with Procida was the feeling that his father would eventually come back. Once the image of the father is tarnished and loses all of its appeal, Arturo no longer wishes to waste his life waiting for him: the valour he attributed to Wilhelm was washed off by the cruel reality of things. No more magic! No more rainbows! No more hope! The crashing of the Dreamworld brought about the necessity to do something about the realworld. The sea, which was always around, is still here, and will lead Arturo to a new place, where dreams and reality are not so far apart; where disillusion does not have the bitterness they had in Procida. The new horizon towards which he is heading will fulfill its promise of a better life as well as a more satisfying future.

The island disappears from view, and with it all it represents as far as loneliness, disappointment and confusion are concerned. The reader witnesses the young boy's departure as he heads towards a new dawn with the only person who truly nurtured him, and who came back to save him from despair: Silvestro! Silvestro, who seems to influence him positively, is the guardian angel, protecting him from the beginning to the end of the novel. It is Silvestro who encourages him to leave Procida in order to redefine himself. And they both set sail for the unknown, leaving the confusion of immaturity behind. As if captured by a camera, their departure is represented by the gradual vanishing of the island into the distance.

The sea represents both isolation and escape. It surrounds the island of Procida setting its boundaries, yet it offers the chance to go beyond the confinement of the island. It is an expansion of the inner confinement as well as a promise of a new and liberated life.

## 2.2. Liberation

### 2.2.1. Liberating a Repressed Identity

The need for liberation, as well as the escape from confinement are deeply embedded in the human psyche. As Maupassant claims in his writings Sur l'eau, inspired by a sailing journey: “O liberté! Liberté! seul bonheur, seul espoir et seul rêve!”<sup>66</sup> The literary characters studied in this section will undoubtedly adhere to Maupassant’s “profession de foi”. The following examples taken from Hispanic Literature with Donoso's “Paseo” and from French Literature with Le Clézio's “Lullaby” as well as “Celui qui n'avait jamais vu la mer”, seem to follow a pattern of “before and after” their encounter with the sea. The “before” image is that of confinement and repression, while the aftermath of the encounter is mostly an exhilarating liberation inspired by the unfettered freedom of the waves.

In his short story “Paseo”, Chilean author José Donoso portrays a pivotal change of identity revolving around the presence of a stray dog. Like Immacolatella, the dog who shared Arturo’s solitude on the island, the nameless white dog introduced Aunt Mathilde, the protagonist of “Paseo”, to a new and mysterious way of life, a “lugar sin límites”, an expression that provides the title of another of Donoso's short stories. Where did the stray dog lead Aunt Mathilde? No one seems to know... Perhaps the old lady relinquished her confined life for a much more liberated one, as she discovered the magic of the sea.

Aunt Mathilde, an extremely organized person, lived in a spotless house with her three brothers. Giving a great importance to details, her vigilant attention to household duties filled her

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<sup>66</sup> Maupassant, Sur l'eau, 113

life, which revolved around her brothers' comfort and wellbeing. Yet, her way of life somehow shaped her solitude, a solitude that would explode within her as she walked the little stray dog everyday. What had started as a tedious chore soon became a source of pleasure, and gradually, she seemed to spend more time taking care of the little stray dog. Aunt Mathilde's solitude was deeply buried, and as she laughed for the first time, her familial setting seemed to turn upside down: "Entonces sucedió algo sorprendente. Tía Matilde, comosi de prontos se deshiciera, estalló en una carcajada incontenible che la agitó entera durante unos segundos. Quedamos helados."<sup>67</sup> (Then a surprising thing happened. Aunt Mathilde, suddenly coming apart, burst out in uncontrollable guffaws that shook her whole body for a few seconds. We were paralyzed.)<sup>68</sup>

She relinquished her old confined notions of life and developed a new curiosity for things. She also discovered her hidden and real identity stifled by her solitary confinement into the austere role of the perfect housekeeper. As her dreams became unleashed, she probably imagined herself leaving on one of those huge vessels arriving from far away across the world. Yet, it is a weak and mute creature, which led her on the road to self-discovery by taking her out of her prison. Once she realized what a traumatic life she has been leading, she became more human, more fun loving, more vulnerable to things and events. Haughty as a prison warden, she presided over a household, where everyone refrained from expressing himself: "Había algo rígido en sus afectos, igual que en los hombres de la familia,"<sup>69</sup> (There was something rigid

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<sup>67</sup> José Donoso, "Paseo", Cuentos, (Barcelona, Seix Barral, 1971) 224.

<sup>68</sup> José Donoso, "The Walk", The Oxford Book of Latin American Short Stories, (N.Y., Oxford University Press, 1997) 378.

<sup>69</sup> Donoso, "Paseo", 209.

about her feelings, as there was about those of the men in the family.)<sup>70</sup> Such behaviour contrasted greatly with the free and easy lifestyle suggested by the nocturnal trip to the harbor!

Where did she go? Most probably to the harbor! Did Aunt Mathilde discover a new freedom in the vicinity of the sea? What happened exactly? No one knew for sure... Where did Aunt Mathilde go? No one could tell! She simply never came back... Probably because her rigid mode of life could not accommodate her newly recovered identity made of forgiveness, leniency and compassion for weaker creatures such as the little stray dog, or “the city’s inhabitants, or those nameless sailors”. She could have decided to become a cook on a ship, leaving for new countries and new people... She could also have been kidnapped, but why? She was neither young nor beautiful. Where did she go? No one could tell, definitely not the narrator, and probably not even the author... Since no one seems to know what happened to Aunt Mathilde, I would dare to suggest that she discovered freedom through the sea. Gathering the clues scattered throughout the text, the reader might reach the same conclusion as far as the whereabouts of Aunt Mathilde are concerned.

She was proud of her three brothers who were lawyers, and praised their ability to her nephew:

Me hablaba de la probidad absoluta de sus sagaces actuaciones como abogados en los más intrincados pleitos marítimos, comunicándome su entusiasmo por su prosperidad y distinción, que sin duda yo prolongaría. Me explicaba el embargo de un cargamento de bronce, cierta avería por colisión con un insignificante

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<sup>70</sup> Donoso, “The Walk”, 369

remolcador, los efectos desastrosos de la sobreestadía de un barco de bandera exótica.<sup>71</sup>

(She spoke of their absolute integrity and genius as lawyers in the most intricate of maritime cases, informing me of her enthusiasm regarding their prosperity and distinction, which I would undoubtedly continue. She explained the case of an embargo on a copper shipment, another about damages resulting from a collision with an insignificant tugboat, and another having to do with the disastrous effects of the overlong stay of a foreign ship.)<sup>72</sup>

Yes, Aunt Mathilde knew about ships, but her knowledge was restricted to their utility as far as her brothers were concerned, and her nephew noticed the lack of imagination, which appeared in her conversation. The narrator's judicious remark underlines the rigid confinement of her physical and intellectual space:

Pero al hablarme de los barcos, sus palabras non enunciaban la magia de esos roncos pitazos navegantes que yo solía oír a lo lejos en las noches de verano cuando, develado por el calor, subía hasta el desván, y asomándome por una lucarna, contemplaba las lejanas luces que flotaban, y esos bloques de tinieblas de la ciudad yacente a la que carecía de acceso porque mi vida era, y sempre iba a ser, perfectamente ordenada. Tía Matilde no me insinuaba esa magia porque la desconocía, no tenía lugar en su vida, [...] <sup>73</sup>

(But in speaking to me of ships, her words did not evoke the magic of those hoarse foghorns I heard on summer nights when, kept awake from the heat, I

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<sup>71</sup> Donoso, "Paseo", 211.

<sup>72</sup> Donoso, "The Walk", 371

<sup>73</sup> Donoso, "Paseo", 211-212.



would climb up to the attic and watch from a roundel the distant lights floating, and those darkened blocks of the recumbent city to which I had no access because my life was, and would always be perfectly organized. Aunt Mathilde did not evoke this magic for me because she was ignorant of it; it had no place in her life...)<sup>74</sup>

If Aunt Mathilde was searching for magic in her life, what better place than the sea could offer such irreplaceable magic? The confinement, the walls, the preset schedule, could be replaced by a world of versatility, of communication, of exchange, of voyages. A new self was revealed to her, who enjoyed travelling, experimenting, meeting new people, and appreciating different aspects of life. Why settle for a walk, if one could take a trip at sea and exchange an old way of life for a new one?

“Traía el sombrero en la mano, y su cabello, de ordinario tan cuidado, estaba revuelto. Observé que un ribete de barro machaba sus zapatos perfectos.”<sup>75</sup> (She carried her hat in her hand and her hair, ordinarily so neat, was disheveled. I noted that daubs of mud stained her perfect shoes.)<sup>76</sup>

Interpreting her nephew’s observations, the reader perceives her shoes that could have been muddied by a walk near the water. Her disheveled hair indicates the presence of a strong wind, probably in the vicinity of the sea. Comparing the robot-like gestures, the measured steps, the austere tone of voice, the serious facial expression, with the openness and easiness she enjoyed as she discovered a new identity, the young narrator reports: “... observé también que la tensión que jamás antes había percibido como tal en las facciones de mi tía – nunca sospeché que pudiera ser otra cosa que dignidad — se había disuelto y que una gran paz suavizaba su

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<sup>74</sup> Donoso, “The Walk”, 371

<sup>75</sup> Donoso, “Paseo”, 229.

<sup>76</sup> Donoso, “The Walk”, 381

rostro.”<sup>77</sup> (...I also observed that the tension I had never before recognized on my aunt’s face—I never suspected it was anything other than dignity—had dissolved, and a great peace was softening her features.)<sup>78</sup>

In El Simbolismo en la obra de José Donoso, Augusto César Sarrochi compares the affective void in Aunt Matilda’s life, “falta de afecto”, to a frozen winter season while her new recovered life is similar to the blossoming of spring. Summer is mentioned when Aunt Matilde decides to not come back, having discovered a new “dimensión vital, una nueva razón de ser y de existir, una fuerza que revela aspectos que estaban dormidos.”<sup>79</sup> Sarrochi’s study, based on symbolism, closely observes the two different worlds of Donoso’s protagonist, who chooses to follow a natural pattern of life rather than the artificial confinement of her traditional life, which denied her any emotional satisfaction.

Encontramos dos símbolos, como por ejemplo el de la estaciones: cuando se muestra a tía Matilde como integrante del orden establecido, una mujer fría y preocupado sólo del bienestar, la estación correspondiente es el invierno; en cambio cuando Matilde ha cambiado dejando paso a los sentimientos es la primavera; símbolo, lógico del florecimiento, y cuando tía Matilde desaparece, es el verano.<sup>80</sup>

The narrator notices his aunt’s eyes filled with the marvelous dimensions of the newworld she has just discovered. Mentioning docks and open spaces, he tries to imagine the landscapes she must have seen:

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<sup>77</sup> Donoso, “Paseo”, 224.

<sup>78</sup> Donoso, “The Walk”, 378

<sup>79</sup> Augusto César Sarrochi, El Simbolismo en la Obra de José Donoso, (Chili, La Noria, 1992) 74.

<sup>80</sup> Sarrochi, Obra de José Donoso, 80.

...percibí una animación en sus ojos, una alegre inquietud parecida a la de los ojos del animal, como recién bañados en escenas nunca antes vistas, a las que nosotros carecíamos de acceso. Esas dos eran compañeras. La noche las protegía. Pertenecían a los rumores, a los pitazos de los barcos que atravesando muelles, calles oscuras o iluminadas, casas, fábricas y parques, llegaban a mis oídos.<sup>81</sup>

( I perceived an animation in her eyes, a cheerful restlessness like the animal's, as if her eyes had recently bathed in scenes never before witnessed, to which we had no access. These two were companions. The night protected them. They belonged to the noises, to the foghorns that wafted over docks, dark or lamplit streets, houses, factories, and parks, finally reaching my ears.)<sup>82</sup>

The choice of the past participle “bañados” to describe what her eyes had seen, or more precisely had bathed in, suggests some scenery where the sea had a major role. Twice, the narrator uses the expression “nosotros carecíamos de acceso” to show that out there was a forbidden world where perfection and organization were not the law of life. Yet, it was this forbidden world, which gave Aunt Matilde her newly recovered youthfulness, as well as her peaceful expression. The rigidity, which used to permeate Aunt Mathilde's features and attitude, was replaced by an inner contentment caused by the discovery of the world at large.

The narrator wonders about the presence of the white dog in his aunt's life:

Pero cómo permanecer tranquilo frente a la curiosa relación entre mi tía y la perra blanca? Era como si Tía Matilde, después de servir esmeradamente y conformarse

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<sup>81</sup> Donoso, “Paseo”, 229.

<sup>82</sup> Donoso, “The Walk”, 381

con su vida impar, por fin hubiera hallado a su igual, a alguien que hablaba su lenguaje más inconfesado,<sup>83</sup>

(How could one remain calm in the face of the curious relationship that had arisen between my aunt and the white dog? It was as if Aunt Mathilde, after punctiliously serving and conforming to her unequal life, had at last found her equal, someone who spoke her innermost language.)<sup>84</sup>

Her nephew does not seem to realize the depth of her solitude. Maybe she did not realize it herself. It is only after opening her heart to a miserable creature that she starts feeling alive. He is surprised to hear her sing. Startled by the aspect of her new “*joie de vivre*”, he predicts her disappearance.

Una vez la oí subir muy tarde, y como me parecía oírle cantar una melodía suavemente y con gran dulzura, entrabrí mi puerta y me asomé. Al verla pasar frente a mi cuarto, con la perra blanca envuelta en sus brazos, su rostro me parecía sorprendentemente joven y perfecto, aunque estuviera algo sucio, y ví que había un jirón en su falda. Esa mujer era capaz de todo; tenía la vida entera por delante. Me acosté aterrorizado pensando que era el fin. Y no me equivoqué. Porche una noche, muy poco tiempo después, tía Matilde salió a pasear con la perra después de comida y no volvió mas.<sup>85</sup>

(Her face looked surprisingly young and perfect, although it was a little dirty, and I saw there was a tear in her skirt. This woman was capable of anything; she had her whole life before her. I went to bed terrified that this would be the end. And I

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<sup>83</sup> Donoso, “Paseo”, 225.

<sup>84</sup> Donoso, “The Walk”, 379

<sup>85</sup> Donoso, “Paseo”, 229-230.

wasn't wrong. Because one night shortly afterwards, Aunt Mathilde went out for a walk with the dog and never came back.)<sup>86</sup>

The new Aunt Mathilde made the unwavering decision never to go back to her old prison again. In order not to be found by her family, the best solution was to put the sea between them. She turned her back on the solitude in which she was walled up, and followed the white dog, her companion, so that she would never be alone again.

The previous two examples, taken from Italian and Spanish literatures, feature a liberated identity. This liberation is somehow accomplished through or near the sea. Whether it is Arturo who evaded the confinement of his life on Procida, or Aunt Mathilde who broke the rigid frame of life holding her prisoner of her routine, they both attained liberation by going near the sea. This liberation can be observed in several other instances, such as Jean-Marie Le Clézio's literary children, Lullaby and Daniel, portrayed in two different stories, entitled respectively Lullaby and Celui qui n'avait jamais vu la mer.

### **2.2.2. Sharing The Freedom of The Waves**

Escaping from the prison of school, Lullaby, a young girl, decides to go to the seashore. Writing to her father to whom she seems to entrust her feelings and ideas, she describes how miserable she was while in school: "J'avais vraiment l'impression d'être dans une prison. Tu ne peux pas savoir. [...] Imagine tous ces murs partout. Tellement de murs que tu ne pourrais pas les compter, avec des fils de fer barbelés, des grillages, des barreaux aux fenêtres!"<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Donoso, "The Walk", 382

<sup>87</sup> J.M. G. Le Clézio, Lullaby, (Paris, Gallimard, 1978) 24.

Obviously, she has had enough of school and needed the unbound immensity of the sea as well as the feeling of freedom transmitted by nature. She lets him know of her decision of never going back: “Je ne vais plus du tout au Lycée maintenant, c’est décidé, terminé. Je n’irais plus, même si on doit me mettre en prison. D’ailleurs ce ne serait pas pire.”<sup>88</sup>

Where did Lullaby go in order to counterbalance her feelings of confinement? Let’s follow her trail on the rocks overlooking the sea. “Au-dessous d’elle, si loin qu’on regardât, il n’y avait que cela: la mer. Immense, bleue, la mer emplissait l’espace jusqu’à l’horizon agrandi, et c’était comme un toit sans fin, un dôme géant fait de métal sombre, où bougeaient toutes les rides des vagues.”<sup>89</sup> From Lullaby’s description we can feel the sense of awe, which fills her at the sight of the sea. The freedom of the elements seems to convey a feeling of liberation to the young girl. Her father’s memory accompanies her constantly, setting her on the right track in her pursuit of liberty: “C’était le vent, la mer, le soleil. Elle se souvint de ce que son père lui avait dit, un jour, à propos du vent, de la mer, du soleil, une longue phrase qui parlait de liberté et d’espace, quelque chose comme cela.”<sup>90</sup>

How could the sea take over the mind of the young girl, erasing every unpleasant memory of her confinement at school? According to Lullaby, this is just the nature of the sea: “Lullaby ne pensait même plus à l’école. La mer est comme cela: elle efface ces choses de la terre parce qu’elle est ce qu’il y a de plus important au monde.”<sup>91</sup> Declaring the sea to be the most important thing in the world, Lullaby acknowledges its prominence as well as its power. It is not only the sight of the sea that fascinates Lullaby, but also its sound: “Les lames

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<sup>88</sup> Le Clézio, *Lullaby*, 25.

<sup>89</sup> Le Clézio, *Lullaby*, 50.

<sup>90</sup> Le Clézio, *Lullaby*, 54.

<sup>91</sup> Le Clézio, *Lullaby*, 17.

s'entrechoquaient en faisant une musique étrange, et Lullaby resta immobile pour l'écouter. C'était comme les cris des sternes et comme le murmure des vagues, une drôle de musique irréaliste et sans rythme qui vous faisait frissonner."<sup>92</sup> The impact of the sea has an unreal, maybe also a supernatural quality, which addresses not only the visual and auditory senses, but also the psyche.

The following passage describes the liberating effect of songs. It is as if "l'espace libre" was calling upon the soul to liberate itself by propagating its sound waves, thus creating a sphere of freedom all around: "Tout doucement d'abord, puis à voix de plus en plus haute, Lullaby chantait l'air qu'elle n'avait pas oublié, depuis tant d'années. Sa voix claire allait dans l'espace libre, la portait au-dessus de la mer."<sup>93</sup> Here, motion is determined by the voice of Lullaby, which carried her over the sea. The liberating feeling generated by the sea conveyed a sense of freedom to her whole behaviour. The gradual intensification of the sound of her voice indicates an increased feeling of self-confidence that overwhelmed the squashing of her identity in her daily life at school.

Her imagination running wild, Lullaby envisions the sea as a huge animal whose wild movements caused a commotion in the waves: "Le bleu, la lumière étaient immenses, le vent et les bruits violents et doux des vagues, et la mer ressemblait à un grand animal en train de remuer sa tête et de fouetter l'air avec sa queue."<sup>94</sup> This description suggests the scary sight of sea serpent or any other mythological creature springing right out of Lullaby's imagination. The ambivalence of the sea is underlined in the oxymoron "les bruits violents et doux des vagues,".

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<sup>92</sup> Le Clézio, Lullaby, 51.

<sup>93</sup> Le Clézio, Lullaby, 31-32.

<sup>94</sup> Le Clézio, Lullaby, 17.

The following image depicts Lullaby as she tries to fix the beauty of the sea in her eyes forever. Knowing deep in her heart that she will not see the sea very soon, she tries to absorb its beautiful and intoxicating sight so that she could recall it while far away. It could possibly signify an adieu: as if Lullaby anticipates the nostalgia she will feel once she leaves the sea.

Appuyée contre le rocher, Lullaby regarda encore une fois, très longtemps, la mer, comme si elle ne devait pas la revoir. Jusqu'à l'horizon, les vagues serrées bougeaient. La lumière scintillait sur leur crêtes, comme du verre pilé. Le vent salé soufflait. La mer mugissait entre les pointes des rochers, les branches des arbustes sifflaient. Lullaby se laissa gagner par l'ivresse étrange de la mer et du ciel vide. Puis, vers midi, elle tourna le dos à la mer et elle rejoignit en courant la route qui conduisait vers le centre-ville.<sup>95</sup>

Unlike Aunt Mathilde, Donoso's protagonist in "Paseo", who disappeared into her newly recovered world of freedom, Lullaby will go back to the familiar environment of her drab and dreary school life, carrying in her heart the immensity and the magic of the sea. The young Lullaby, who arrived at the sea shore searching for her true identity, is different from the more mature young girl who experienced freedom, if only for a few days. When she first approached the sea, all the unpleasant memories of her past confinement were eradicated by the beauty and magic that filled her soul. But as she leaves, she carries the sea within her, after being exposed to its liberating effect through a communion with the water. Her becoming a more mature and liberated person is determined by her experience near the sea: the danger lurking around her, embodied in a "vagabond hirsute", is also a factor in her return to her customary life. Although her experience is a farewell to her "insouciance" and her childhood memories: her father's letters,

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<sup>95</sup> Le Clézio, *Lullaby*, 59.



the bedtime songs, climbing on the rocks; she will nevertheless carry back the “charisma” of the sea all her life. The beauty of the sea could make her forget the prison of school, but nothing will be overwhelming enough to make her forget the sea.

### 2.2.3. Ultimate Liberation Through the Sea

In Celui qui n’avait jamais vu la mer, Le Clézio portrays Daniel / Sindbad’s obsession with a sea he has never seen. Dissatisfied with school, Daniel seeks an experience with no boundaries, and without set rules. Daniel’s line of flight is the evasion from the constraints of school life imposed upon him by society. His destination is the sea, pushed by his rebellion against social predetermination, and his attempt at recovering a new and satisfying identity. “Il s’appelait Daniel, mais il aurait bien aimé s’appeler Sindbad,”<sup>96</sup> It is obvious that the child was not given a choice as far as his name or his life was concerned. This is the first sign of protest: children are labeled as soon as they are born, without their consent. Daniel, however, will exercise his right to name his friend the octopus, “Wiatt”. Replicating Pedro Salinas’ inquiry about the sea being aware of its own identity, after greeting the octopus, Daniel states that the latter was not aware of his appellation: ““ Bonjour, Wiatt’, dit Daniel. Le poulpe s’appelait Wiatt, mais il ne savait pas son nom, bien sûr.”<sup>97</sup> In an issue of identity, the name occupies a crucial place. Rather than the given name, it is a matter of the preferred name, the one that was freely chosen. In Le Clézio’s story Lullaby, previously discussed, the young girl contemplates the sea as she imagines hearing the name her father used to give her:

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<sup>96</sup> J. M. G. Le Clézio, Celui qui n’avait jamais vu la mer, (Paris, Gallimard, 1978) 10.

<sup>97</sup> Le Clézio, Celui qui, 27.

La voix douce et un peu grave résonnait autour d'elle, dans la lumière chaude, et répétait son nom d'autrefois, le nom que son père lui avait donné un jour, avant qu'elle s'endorme.

“Ariel...Ariel...”<sup>98</sup>

From the very beginning of Celui qui n'avait jamais vu la mer, the reader learns of Daniel's solitude, as well as his powerful attraction to the sea. “Il n'avait pas d'amis, il ne connaissait personne, et personne ne le connaissait.”<sup>99</sup> One subject only attracted Daniel's interest: the sea! He avoided communicating with others except when they discussed his favorite topic. “Il ne se mêlait pas aux conversations des autres, sauf quand il était question de la mer, ou de voyages.”<sup>100</sup> Daniel was seeking the sea of his dreams, the sea, which had a powerful grasp on his desires, rather than the commonly mentioned sea, devoid of magic, and unable to appeal to a child's imagination: “Ce n'était pas de cette mer-là qu'il voulait entendre parler. C'était d'une autre mer, on ne savait pas laquelle, mais d'une autre mer.”<sup>101</sup> To him, the sea represented the magic of the unknown, as well as an element of power and beauty totally different than what people talked about in their conversation.

Just as Donoso's Aunt Mathilde turned her back on her customary life in order to seek a more liberated one, better suiting her newly recovered identity, so does Daniel in Le Clézio's novel. In Donoso's short story, Aunt Mathilde's destination is unknown; the reader does not get any definite answer as to her whereabouts. The reader will be faced again with the same

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<sup>98</sup> Le Clézio, Lullaby, 31.

<sup>99</sup> Le Clézio, Celui qui, 11.

<sup>100</sup> Le Clézio, Celui qui, 10.

<sup>101</sup> Le Clézio, Celui qui, 11.

dilemma: What happened to Daniel / Sindbad, the child seeking self-fulfillment by the sea? In this case, the narrator allows the reader to share Daniel's first experience with freedom as he reaches the landscape of his dreams: the sea. The reader will also witness Daniel's indescribable relationship to the sea, which goes beyond survival and self-preservation.

Daniel leaves school and the dorm in order to do the "école buissonnière" for an undetermined length of time. The child of a poor family, he is fascinated by the image of a sea he had never seen. When Daniel finally reaches his lifelong dream, he discovers that the sea, although fascinating, is not devoid of risks. The peril that he faces as he is surrounded by the tide allows him to evaluate the ambivalent power of the sea.

Elle était là, partout, devant lui, immense, gonflée comme la pente d'une montagne, brillant de sa couleur bleue, profonde, toute proche, avec ses vagues hautes qui avançaient vers lui.

'La mer! La mer!' pensait Daniel, mais il n'osa rien dire à voix haute.<sup>102</sup>

Mesmerized by the grandiose sight before him, by its depth and immensity, Daniel can only repeat silently the magic word: "la mer! la mer!" He is so overwhelmed by the beauty of the sea, by its color and its mouvement that he does not dare utter its name aloud.

"Au fond de lui-même, Daniel a répété le beau nom plusieurs fois, comme cela,

'La mer, la mer, la mer....'

La tête pleine de bruit et de vertige. Il avait envie de parler, de crier même, mais sa gorge ne laissait pas passer sa voix."<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Le Clézio, jamais vu la mer, 16.

<sup>103</sup> Le Clézio, jamais vu la mer, 16.

Since Daniel is physically unable to speak, he will compensate his aphony by an erratic movement along the shore. Daniel, in an instinctive need to express his exhilaration, starts running and jumping on the sand. Isn't that the manifestation of "une passion désordonnée"<sup>104</sup> for the water, proclaimed Maupassant in his short story "Amour"? Now that he has reached the sea, Daniel throws away the blue bag containing the book recounting the adventures of Sindbad. He no longer needs this book representing his line of flight, guiding him towards the sea, and helping him deterritorialize from a predetermined social setting.

Alors il fallait qu'il parte en criant, en jetant très loin son sac bleu qui roula dans le sable, il fallait qu'il parte en agitant ses bras et ses jambes comme quelqu'un qui traverse une auto-route. Il bondissait par-dessus les bandes de varech, il titubait dans le sable sec du haut de la plage. Il ôtait ses chaussures et ses chaussettes et pieds nus, il courait encore plus vite, sans sentir les épines des chardons.<sup>105</sup>

The sight of Daniel expressing his triumph and his delight through his agitation is comparable to drunkenness, well represented by the verb "titubait". It is a reminder of the substantif "ivresse" used to describe Lullaby's experience near the sea. "Lullaby se laissa gagner par l'ivresse étrange de la mer et du ciel vide."<sup>106</sup> Daniel has also his "ivresse", which drives him to an uncontrollable excitability similar to an electric current. In Icare ou l'évasion impossible. Etude psycho-mythique de l'oeuvre de Jean Marie Gustave Le Clézio, Jennifer Waelti-Walters, describing the protagonist of La Chute, describes a state of mind, which could also be applied to Daniel's: "Dans le texte, cette exaltation des sens est nettement soulignée, toujours suivie par une

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<sup>104</sup> Maupassant, "Amour", 737.

<sup>105</sup> Le Clézio, jamais vu la mer, 16.

<sup>106</sup> Le Clézio, Lullaby, 59.

descente à la mer.”<sup>107</sup> Isn't that “exaltation des sens” that drives Daniel towards the sea, overwhelming his being and regulating his behaviour? “Alors il y avait cette sorte d’ivresse, cette électricité qui vibrait, parce que le sel et la lumière ne voulaient pas qu’on reste en place; ils voulaient qu’on danse et qu’on coure, qu’on saute d’un rocher à l’autre, ils voulaient qu’on fuie à travers le fond de la mer.”<sup>108</sup> Daniel is mesmerized by the elements whose beauty is controlling his actions.

But much more than this sensation, it is a wish come true after long years of waiting. Daniel doesn’t know whether the sight filling his eyes belongs to the realm of dreams or reality. The narrator uses a verb, which is both common and extremely powerful: “il regarda”.

Il s’assit sur le sable mouillé, et il regarda la mer monter devant lui presque jusqu’au centre du ciel. Il avait tellement pensé à cet instant-là, il avait tellement imaginé le jour où il la verrait enfin, réellement, pas comme sur les photos ou comme au cinéma, mais vraiment, la mer tout entière, exposée autour de lui, gonflée, avec le gros dos des vagues qui se précipitent et déferlent, les nuages d’écumes, les pluies d’embrun en poussière dans la lumière du soleil, et surtout, au loin, cet horizon courbe comme un mur devant le ciel!<sup>109</sup>

The power of the “regard” is also explored in a subsequent image when Daniel attempts to control the tide with his eyes. Cornered in a cave, there is not much he can do except taming the sea with his eyes.

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<sup>107</sup> Jennifer Waelti-Walters, Icare ou l’évasion impossible: étude psycho-mythique de l’oeuvre de J.M. G. Le Clézio, (Québec, Canada, Editions Naaman, 1981) 33.

<sup>108</sup> Le Clézio, jamais vu la mer, 31.

<sup>109</sup> Le Clézio, jamais vu la mer, 18.

Maintenant Daniel avait le dos contre le fond de la grotte. Il ne pouvait plus reculer davantage. Alors il regarda la mer pour l'arrêter. De toute sa force il la regardait, sans parler, et il renvoyait les vagues en arrière en faisant des contre-lames qui brisaient l'élan de la mer.<sup>110</sup>

The image of the child creating psychic “contre-lames” or anti-waves in order to stop the flow from progressing any further is powerful and evocative. It suggests the vulnerability of the child as well as his unlimited imagination. In this imaginary duel where the ambivalence of the sea is described at its best, the child as well represents the polarity of strength and weakness. “C’est là que Daniel vécut, pendant tous ces jours, pour ainsi dire sans jamais quitter la mer des yeux.”<sup>111</sup> The reader sees Daniel focusing on the sea, watching it as if he is trying to avert some kind of danger, attempting to control the power of the sea from unleashing its fury against him, as he contemplates its beauty and transparency in the sunlight.

Next to the reality of its presence is the powerful magnetism of the sea that captivates both Lullaby and Daniel. How long will they be able to enjoy the feeling of liberation conveyed by the sea? “Ça ne pouvait pas durer toujours. Lullaby le savait bien.”<sup>112</sup> Lullaby realizes that she cannot avoid school in order to stay near the sea forever, enjoying its charisma; whereas Daniel, on the other hand, is aware of the fact that he cannot survive away from the sea.

C’était bien la mer, sa mer, pour lui seul maintenant, et il savait qu’il ne pourrait plus jamais s’en aller. Daniel resta longtemps couché sur le sable dur, il attendit si

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<sup>110</sup> Le Clézio, jamais vu la mer, 35.

<sup>111</sup> Le Clézio, jamais vu la mer, 24.

<sup>112</sup> Le Clézio, Lullaby, 57.

longtemps, étendu sur le côté, que la mer commença à monter le long de la pente et vint toucher ses pieds nus.<sup>113</sup>

As he tries to possess the beauty of the sea through his eyes, Daniel confirms his relationship to the sea by the possessive: “sa mer”. He is somehow bound to the sea forever, and cannot envision his life away from it. The tide approaching Daniel’s feet establishes a kind of connection or communion between him and the sea.

Waelti-Walters, describing the experience of Le Clézio's protagonists with the sea, declares that: “Le héros a connu un instant de lucidité; il peut maintenant sombrer ou, ou sortir de l’eau transformé par son expérience.”<sup>114</sup> According to Waelti-Walters, the sea offers a choice to Le Clézio's heroes who can thus make their own decision either for liberation or for returning to their previous life pattern. The following sentence describes the extent of the bondage between Daniel and the sea, as the child expresses a sense of belonging, which goes beyond time and temporality: “C’était comme s’il avait vécu ici depuis toujours,”<sup>115</sup> Daniel will create a dialogue with the sea, by which he will guide and coordinate its movements, as if he were conquering the sea, and guiding its progression:

Il regardait l’eau sombre, au loin, là où il n’y avait pas de terre ni d’écume mais seulement le ciel libre, et c’était à elle qu’il parlait, à voix basse, comme si elle avait pu l’entendre; il disait:

‘ Viens! Monte jusqu’ici, arrive! Viens!

‘ Tu es belle, tu vas venir et tu vas recouvrir toute la terre, toutes les villes, tu vas monter jusqu’en haut des montagnes!

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<sup>113</sup> Le Clézio, jamais vu la mer, 20.

<sup>114</sup> Waelti-Walters, l’évasion impossible, 38.

<sup>115</sup> Le Clézio, jamais vu la mer, 34.

‘ Viens, avec tes vagues, monte, monte! Par ici, par ici!’<sup>116</sup>

Predicting the high tide when the sea will take over the whole earth, all the way up to the mountains, Daniel is unaware of the fact that he will also be conquered by it. What were the intentions of the sea? The sea is described as having its mind set on taking over everything, including Daniel who “dansait devant elle”<sup>117</sup>. “Il fallait courir vite! La mer voulait tout prendre, les rochers, les algues, et aussi celui qui courait devant elle. Parfois elle lançait un bras, à gauche, ou à droite, un long bras gris et taché d’écume qui coupait la route de Daniel.”<sup>118</sup> Daniel forces himself to keep on running without a halt, as he feels threatened by a dangerous sea whose long foamy arms could reach him any time.

Il tourna le dos pour fuir, et la vague le toucha aux épaules, passa par dessus sa tête. Instinctivement, Daniel accrocha ses ongles au sable et cessa de respirer. L’eau tomba sur lui avec un bruit de tonnerre, tourbillonnant, pénétrant ses yeux, ses oreilles, sa bouche, ses narines.<sup>119</sup>

As fascinating as it may be, the sea can also be perilous, as Daniel is able to find out while being overpowered by the waves. It is not the salty water that he resents as such, but rather the overwhelming vortex of the waves “tourbillonnant”, as well as its thundering noise “avec un bruit de tonnerre”.

After filling his eyes with the colors and movement of the sea, what would be a better way to communicate than filling his whole being with it, or more explicitly drinking its water,

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<sup>116</sup> Le Clézio, jamais vu la mer, 20.

<sup>117</sup> Le Clézio, jamais vu la mer, 22.

<sup>118</sup> Le Clézio, jamais vu la mer, 33.

<sup>119</sup> Le Clézio, jamais vu la mer, 23.



willingly on this occasion. Perhaps in this manner, Daniel will appropriate some of the freedom that the sea seems to enjoy.

Daniel avait soif. Dans le creux de sa main, il prit un peu d'eau et d'écume, et il but une gorgée. Le sel brûla sa bouche et sa langue, mais Daniel continua à boire, parce qu'il aimait le goût de la mer. Il y avait si longtemps qu'il pensait à toute cette eau, libre, sans frontière, toute cette eau qu'on pouvait boire pendant toute sa vie!<sup>120</sup>

Daniel overcomes the burning sensation that the salty water imparts to his mouth. What matters to him is the feeling of eternity that he acquires from this experience. The freedom of the water is emphasized by the repetition of "libre, sans frontière", as if the water differs from the child in this respect: there are no restrictions or constraints placed on the water.

The sound of the sea is a factor powerful enough to impress the child, pushing him to emulate its behaviour to the utmost. It is also an attempt at competing with the sea, in order to prove that one is worthy of it. Is his love for the sea turning to anger? Is he reacting to an unnatural way of life for a child? Is it malnutrition since he only eats the few tiny shrimps and shellfish he is able to catch?

Daniel se leva d'un bond. Il se mit à courir vers le rivage sans s'arrêter. Maintenant il n'avait plus sommeil, il ne craignait plus la lumière et le sel. Il sentait une sorte de colère au fond de son corps, une force qu'il ne comprenait pas, comme s'il avait pu briser les rochers et creuser les fissures, comme cela, d'un seul coup de talon. Il courait au-devant de la mer, en suivant la route du vent,

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<sup>120</sup> Le Clézio, jamais vu la mer, 19-20.

et il entendait derrière lui le rugissement des vagues. De temps en temps, il criait, lui aussi, pour les imiter:

‘Ram ! Ram !’

comme si c’était lui qui commandait à la mer.<sup>121</sup>

After a few days of fascination with the sea, Daniel’s body began reacting to a restless competition with the liquid element. Solitude becomes a burden, anxiety starts logging in: the sea is not as peaceful as he thought. He is neither a crab nor an octopus. All his roaming around starts taking its toll on his health.

Il sentit aussi la solitude, le silence des rochers nus usés par l’eau de mer, l’inquiétude qui sortait de toutes les fissures, de tous les puits secrets, et il se mit à marcher puis à courir. Son coeur battait fort dans sa poitrine, comme le premier jour où il était arrivé devant la mer.<sup>122</sup>

Are Daniel’s heartbeats triggered by his happiness to be freely contemplating the sea? Is it illness or excitement? Although he witnessed Daniel’s intoxication with the sea, the reader might find himself asking, along with his schoolmates: “Après cela, qu’est-il devenu? Qu’a-t-il fait, tous ces jours, ces mois, dans sa grotte, devant la mer?”<sup>123</sup> Yet he watched Daniel being exhausted from too much happiness. “Il avait tellement désiré cet instant-là qu’ il n’avait plus de forces, comme s’il allait mourir ou bien s’endormir.”<sup>124</sup> Confirming the widespread belief that no one could predict the time of his death, or whether one would live to see another sunrise, Daniel is unable to assess his fatigue. After fighting with the tide once more, and barely escaping death by

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<sup>121</sup> Le Clézio, jamais vu la mer, 33.

<sup>122</sup> Le Clézio, jamais vu la mer, 30.

<sup>123</sup> Le Clézio, jamais vu la mer, 35.

<sup>124</sup> Le Clézio, jamais vu la mer, 18.

suffocation in the cave that he was using as a shelter from the relentless assault of the waves, Daniel's resistance comes to an end.

Daniel comprit que c'était fini.

Il s'allongea sur les galets, à l'entrée de la grotte, la tête tournée vers la mer. Il grelottait de froid et de fatigue, mais il n'avait jamais connu un tel bonheur. Il s'endormit comme cela, dans la paix étale, et la lumière du soleil baissa lentement comme une flamme qui s'éteint.<sup>125</sup>

Shivering from cold and fatigue, Daniel knows that he has attained his goal. He has become part of the cycle of life and death in the Universe. Friend or foe, the sea's presence is essential to his existence. Alternating clear statements and hypothetical ones, the narrator creates a state of suspense where Daniel's fate is suspended in the realm of the unknown. The mention of "paix étale" and "flamme qui s'éteint" suggests the peace of a final rest as well as the flame of the spirit being spent.

Had he died, Daniel would still have attained his goal: he lived near the sea, and he shared its liberation; he also tried hard to be part of the landscape, and he is finally at peace with himself. He took this line of flight away from school in order to reach the object of his desire. Daniel has indeed achieved liberation from social constraints; but isn't death also some sort of liberation? This death was not a cowardly one, or an escape from hardships; it was not a self-induced death or suicide; it was a death by intoxication... If Daniel really died... Because Daniel was part dream and part reality, and dreams cannot die. So, Daniel / Sindbad will remain alive in his schoolmates' memory as well as in the reader's mind.

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<sup>125</sup> Le Clézio, jamais vu la mer, 35.

Although the sky and the light of the sun seemed to play a primary role in Daniel's enthusiasm, his main concern was the sea: "Il ne regardait pas le soleil, ni le ciel. Il ne voyait même plus la bande lointaine de la terre, ni les silhouettes des arbres. Il n'y avait personne ici, personne d'autre que la mer, et Daniel était libre."<sup>126</sup> The previous passage highlights the nexus of this chapter: Sea, Solitude, and Liberation.

Le Clézio's style and syntax are as close as possible to those of a child's. Since the child has never seen a marine landscape before, he likes to use images that are familiar to him. He has to explain his new perceptions by comparing them with objects he already knows, by association. In the whole cognitive process of the child, associations are as essential as logic is to adult cognition. The feelings, impressions and descriptions of the child are made available to the reader throughout the text, the constant reoccurrence of "c'était comme si..." or as if, preceding each association of the element being described with a corresponding element in the child's background. For example "les gros dos des vagues"<sup>127</sup> is a metaphor comparing the waves to a feline, which arches its back. Daniel's enthusiasm as he guides the sea with his voice gives him a feeling of power as if he were the one ordering the sea around: "comme si c'était lui qui commandait à la mer."<sup>128</sup> Limiting and expanding his poetic expression at the same time, the child relates the images he perceives to events from his daily life: "La mer battait toujours, lançait ses nappes blanches qui frémissaient sur les cailloux comme une eau en train de bouillir."<sup>129</sup> Daniel compares the seafoam hitting the pebbles to boiling water. He interprets the natural phenomena in his own limited way: "La mer avait disparu maintenant, elle s'était retirée

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<sup>126</sup> Le Clézio, jamais vu la mer, 23.

<sup>127</sup> Le Clézio, jamais vu la mer, 18.

<sup>128</sup> Le Clézio, jamais vu la mer, 33.

<sup>129</sup> Le Clézio, jamais vu la mer, 35.

jusqu'à l'horizon comme si elle avait coulé par un trou qui communiquait avec le centre de la terre."<sup>130</sup> According to Daniel, the low tide appears as if the water had been absorbed by a hole linked to the center of the earth.

As it reports faithfully the child's points of view, Le Clézio's approach also imparts a certain freshness and innocence to his work. The child is king: he is the center of the universe; nothing general or abstract interferes with the dynamic and spontaneous movement of his thoughts. He savours his newly recovered freedom in a similar behaviour to the movement of the sea: unfettered, unrestricted, and unrestrained...

#### **2.2.4. A Song of Liberation at Sea**

Donoso's Aunt Mathilde, Le Clézio's Lullaby and Daniel were not the only ones to sing in front of the sea, XIXth century Spanish poet José de Espronceda's (1910-1942) "La canción del pirata", which is a poetic celebration of freedom, portrays the pirate as he sings on his ship:

y ve el capitán pirata,  
cantando alegre en la popa.<sup>131</sup> (v. 13-14)

The pirate, who carves his own freedom at sea, is the example par excellence of liberation. The following verses represent the exaltation of a chosen identity as well as the culmination of liberation.

Que es mi barco mi tesoro,  
Que es mi dios la libertad,

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<sup>130</sup> Le Clézio, jamais vu la mer, 30.

<sup>131</sup> José de Espronceda, "La canción del pirata", Poesía lírica, (Zaragoza, Editorial Ebro, 1964) 41.

Mi ley, la fuerza y el viento,

Mi única patria, la mar.<sup>132</sup> (v. 31-34)

The chorus reoccurring throughout the poem is the “profession de foi” of the pirate. Intoxicated with freedom, he emphasizes the fact that his sole possession is his ship and the sea at large his homeland. The pirate equates his love of freedom to that of the sea to which no one imposes rules “a quien nadie impuso leyes.” He also boasts of a universal recognition of his audacity, which makes him king of the sea. His kingdom allows him to avoid the yoke of slavery, and gives him serenity as well as a peaceful sleep:

Yo me duermo,

Sosegado,

Arullado

Por el mar.<sup>133</sup> (v. 90-93)

The overall rhythm of the poem is triumphant, as it exhibits an unbound freedom from social and political rules. The verse, containing a single word at times, highlights the feelings of the pirate by isolating them. The rhythm of these verses evokes the movement of the waves as they rock the pirate to sleep. The use of both the feminine and the masculine article with “mar” is worth examining. “La mar” used at times by Espronceda, Garcia Lorca, and Unamuno among others, is a more poetic way than the commonly used “el mar”. It evokes the idea of maternity. The homophonic French pair mer / mère does not have an equivalent in the other Romance Languages. In the chorus of “La canción del pirata”, where the homeland is mentioned, the use of “la mar” turns the fatherland into a motherland or “la patrie-mère”, which Jean-Jacques

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<sup>132</sup> Espronceda, “La canción del pirata”, Poesía lírica, 45

<sup>133</sup> Espronceda, “La canción del pirata”, Poesía lírica, 44

Rousseau advocated as he praised and idealized Geneva. In other instances, the commonly used “el mar” is applied by Espronceda throughout the poem.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter examined the question of identity as it progresses from confinement to liberation, in a line of flight obviously connected to the sea. There are several types of refusal of an identity, some of which lead to a situation of hopeless limbo: Pirandello’s Mattía Pascal believed to be dead, tries to live under a different identity, and when he fails he cannot resume his past existence. There is also the petrification of Balzac’s Cambremer, overwhelmed with guilt after drowning his son Jacques in an act of self-righteous retribution. In other cases, the end result is rather positive: Maupassant’s Simon finds a line of flight in the unexpected irruption of Philippe Rémy in his life, providing him with the needed identity of a father and relieving him from the desire of drowning himself. Under the guidance of Silvestro, his mentor, Elsa Morante’s Arturo leaves his island to attain his maturity away from the confinement of Procida, while Donoso’s Aunt Mathilde, although a little late in life, goes on to discover the wide world, guided by the little white dog. As for Le Clézio’s Lullaby and Daniel, they both escape from the prison of daily life and school in a flight towards the liberating amplitude of the sea. Espronceda’s renowned poem “la canción del pirata” is the glorification of a boundless freedom reflecting that of the sea. In all these examples there is an effort at deterritorialization as well as an attempt at reterritorialization.

The processes of self-revelation and liberation are thus essential steps leading to a symbiotic relationship with the sea. The following chapter will study the communion of the characters with the sea as it is tightly woven into a symbiosis. Since Le Clézio’s examples depict

a flight to the seashore, Lullaby and Daniel will again lend themselves to the reader's minute observations.



### 3. CHAPTER THREE: REFLECTION AND SYMBIOSIS

“Les étoiles étincelaient au ciel, et se réfléchissaient au sein de la mer qui répétait leurs images tremblantes.”(Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Paul et Virginie,)

“Non sapevo più di carne ma d’acqua e di terra”  
(Pavese/Racconti in Feria d’agosto/ 1946/ Einaudi, 1982)

This chapter will focus on the various aspects of the mirror-like characteristics of the sea; it will examine the reflection of sound as well as that of images, the reflection of self as well as that of the universe. The sea is not only a reflecting surface for the image of man; but it also has a non-narcissistic role as a mirror for the universe. The attraction of the unknown has always been such, that through the poetic vision, the contemplating eye will become sea, or more precisely will share the properties of the sea in order to reflect a past event, a present or a future one about to happen. An image is stored into the memory, susceptible of being evoked it at will, just as Victor Hugo and Baudelaire who were able to evoke and create reflections through a mere effort of will power, or nostalgia. Offering man the realization of his wishes, the sea presented Balzac’s Etienne with the reflection of a woman’s face on the surface of its waves: a substitute mother perhaps, or the reenactment of a vital relationship. The water of a well offered Eugenio Montale the image of a woman’s face, a vision from the past, quickly disappearing.

In order to break his solitude, man has always been seeking his double: either in the form of a reflection such as his own mirrored image; or in the form of sounds, such as an echo or otherwise; or even in the form of an intellectual reflection. He has constantly carried on dialogues with nature or with himself as a means of better comprehending the universe. In

Lorenzaccio, the exchange between Musset's Lorenzo and Philippe Strozzi offers the example of man attempting to find himself in the movements, the sounds, and the limpidity of the water.

This chapter will discuss the reflective properties of the sea as they are presented in Victor Hugo's, Baudelaire's, and José Maria de Hérédia's poems. Short stories and novels, such as Maupassant's Pierre et Jean, as well as Sur l'eau, a book where the author himself is both the first person narrator and the protagonist, will be discussed. Alfred de Musset's Lorenzaccio, Elsa Morante's L'isola di Arturo, Asturias' "El espejo de Lida Sal", Proust's (1871-1922) A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs, and finally Camus' L'Etranger are also the subject of the first part of the chapter. Subsequently, in the second part, Victor Hugo's L'homme qui rit, Les Travailleurs de la mer, as well as passages from Baudelaire, Heredia y Heredia, and José Martí (1853-1895) will be examined. Finally, the third part will analyze extensively Hugo's Les Travailleurs de la mer, as well as Le Clézio's Lullaby and Celui qui n'avait jamais vu la mer, and D'Annunzio's "Meriggio", which are offering examples of symbiosis with the sea or ocean.

### **3.1. Reflection**

The story of Narcissus is a favored topos in Western Literature. Authors and poets have extensively utilized the image of the double on a reflecting surface, such as that of the water. Whereas the reflection is the repetition of one's image, the echo is the repetition of one's voice. There is also an intellectual reflection or "dédoublement de l'esprit". Maupassant, for example, rightfully claims that writing about the reality of things is a way of filtering them through one's mind: "je le regarde en moi-même, dans le miroir de ma pensée."<sup>1</sup> Inspired by the water on which his ship glides, and allowing his thoughts to float, Maupassant analyzes people and things

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<sup>1</sup> Maupassant, Sur l'eau, 74-75

around him, giving them a privileged place in his memory. The author, he writes, “S’il souffre, il prend note de sa souffrance et la classe dans sa mémoire;”<sup>2</sup>. Maupassant declares that the writer’s mind is built in such a way that the repercussion is more lively than the original “secousse”, and “l’écho plus sonore que le son primitif.”<sup>3</sup> The result of such an analysis produces an echo, which is more resounding than the original sound. Yet “l’homme de lettres” is not just observing his reflection, but that of others as well: “...et il vit condamné à être toujours, en toute occasion, un reflet de lui-même et un reflet des autres, condamné à se regarder sentir, agir, penser, aimer, souffrir,”<sup>4</sup> Such a composite endeavour turns him into an “Acteur et spectateur de lui-même et des autres,” which results in the ailing sensitivity of an “écorché vif”<sup>5</sup>. Developing even further the concept of “dédoublement”, Maupassant portrays the writer as a witness of his own feelings: “Il semble avoir deux âmes, l’une qui note, explique, commente chaque sensation de sa voisine, l’âme naturelle, commune à tous les hommes;”<sup>6</sup> According to Maupassant, the writer becomes a kind of pedagogue of his natural soul, constantly observing and jotting down every single impression he perceives. Akin to the sea in Baudelaire’s poem “L’Homme et la mer”, are the writer’s works truly a mirror where “l’homme libre” “contemple son âme”<sup>7</sup>?

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<sup>2</sup> Maupassant, Sur l’eau, 76

<sup>3</sup> Maupassant, Sur l’eau, 76

<sup>4</sup> Maupassant, Sur l’eau, 76

<sup>5</sup> Maupassant, Sur l’eau, 77

<sup>6</sup> Maupassant, Sur l’eau, 76

<sup>7</sup> Baudelaire, “L’Homme et la mer”, Les Fleurs, 41

### 3.1.1. Reflection of Sound

In Maupassant's novel Pierre et Jean, previously discussed in the first and second chapter of this study, Pierre, the eldest, could very well fit the description of an “écorché vif” since the newly discovered illegitimacy of his step-brother as well as his jealousy of him are skinning him alive. Attempting to soothe his anxiety, he seeks the vicinity of the sea as he heads towards the pier. The density of the “brouillard”, fog, and the constant presence of the “brume”, mist, represent the doubt, which is gnawing at Pierre's heart, threatening his sense of identity as well as his sanity. Feeling like a ship lost in a sea of contradictions, he dwells on his problems, as he identifies with the sirens of the ships entering the harbor of Le Havre, his hometown.

Un frisson remua dans sa chair, crispa son coeur, tant il avait retenti dans son âme et dans ses nerfs, ce cri de détresse, qu'il croyait avoir jeté lui-même. Une autre voix semblable gémit à son tour, un peu plus loin; puis tout près, la sirène du port, leur répondant, poussa une clameur déchirante.

Pierre gagna la jetée à grand pas, ne pensant plus à rien, satisfait d'entrer dans ces ténèbres lugubres et mugissantes.<sup>8</sup>

Anchored in his grief, he listens to the dialogue of the sirens: one coming from a lost ship screaming for help, as distressed as Pierre is; and the other, the guiding siren from the harbour, echoing and reflecting it, in an effort to lead it to safety. Pierre feels comfortable in “ces ténèbres lugubres et mugissantes”, an atmosphere reflecting the darkness of his own state of mind. As he listens to “ce cri de détresse, qu'il croyait avoir jeté lui-même”, he envisions himself screaming in order to release his mind from the doubt pervading it. The verb “retentit” suggests a

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<sup>8</sup> Maupassant, Pierre et Jean, 93

kind of repercussion of the sound, as well as a repetition suggested by the prefix “re”. In this instance, the sirens repeat the muffled screams, which Pierre is unable to fully utter, and he feels liberated as they echo his pain.

Another instance of the reflection of sound can be found in Balzac’s L’Enfant maudit, which was examined in earlier chapters. How did Etienne and Gabrielle meet? Believing to be alone, and wishing to fill his solitude with his songs, as he usually does, Etienne is surprised to hear a voice echoing his song: “En ce moment, une voix qu’il fut tenté d’attribuer à quelque sirène sortie de la mer, une voix de femme, répéta l’air qu’il venait de chanter,”<sup>9</sup> This voice was so beautiful that he thought it to be a mermaid’s voice, emerging from the sea. It was Gabrielle’s voice, which impressed Etienne even before they ever met. By echoing his song, she was expressing a feeling of admiration, immediately interpreted by Etienne. Both Gabrielle and Etienne’s voices appear to be springing from the sea, Etienne, who has been singing for many years, has an enchanting voice. Its simplicity and freshness is comparable to the crisp and cool evening breeze. The harmony between Etienne’s voice and the “bruissement” of the waves is such that one could believe it to be rising from the sea.

En ce moment, un chant frais comme l’air du soir, simple autant que la couleur de l’Océan, domina le murmure de la mer et s’éleva pour charmer la nature. [...] La voix s’unissait au bruissement de l’onde avec une si rare perfection qu’elle semblait sortir du sein des flots.<sup>10</sup>

Etienne’s song, as if reflecting the melody of the sea, symbolizes the purity of the voice as well as the purity of the soul: it is a criterion of perfection, which is capable of enchanting nature,

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<sup>9</sup> Balzac, Enfant maudit, 363

<sup>10</sup> Balzac, Enfant maudit, 341

“charmer la nature”. Compared to the sounds of the sea, the voices of Gabrielle and Etienne, echoing each other, seem also to be echoing the very whisper of the waves.

The call of a mermaid, in L'isola di Arturo, discussed in chapter two, is represented by Nunziata's declaration of love casted away to the winds, as Arturo listens, hidden in a cave by the sea: “Correva urlando “Artú ” in tutte le direzioni, con una nuova voce strana e carnale, di acutezza lacerante;”<sup>11</sup> Nunziata's piercing love call makes way for the siren of the steamer, which resonates once as it arrives, then once more as it departs, reminding Arturo of his plan to leave, and establishing some sort of temporality in the forsaken island of Procida. “Appena essa fu andata via, mi giunse, in mezzo al vento, il fischio del piroscavo delle tre, che entrava in porto.”<sup>12</sup> Morante's mention of the punctuality of the steamer whistling unmistakably at three o'clock, highlights Arturo's concern with the events of the port, and his familiarity with them. It is that same steamer, which carried his father to and from the island: Arturo's life revolves around the presence, as well as the absence of Wilhelm Gerace. Disappointed with his father and wishing to shut off his memory, the boy now attempts to distance himself from his life on Procida.

Il secondo segnale del piroscavo mi giunse come da secoli di distanza, da chi sa quali novelle favolose, che non volevo piú ascoltare. Vicino a me, alla porta della mia stanzetta usurpata, si mischiavano i rumori del vento e delle ondate, e questo coro naturale, senza nessuna voce umana, discuteva certo il mio destino, con un linguaggio incomprensibile come la morte.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Morante, Arturo, 362

<sup>12</sup> Morante, Arturo, 363

<sup>13</sup> Morante, Arturo, 363-64

Deliberately isolating himself in a cave, he reflects upon the unfathomable sound of the wind and waves reaching him: although unable to interpret them, they still assume a sinister presage. His fate is the object of discussion of the winds and the water. The absence of any human voice prevents Arturo from understanding the chorus of nature, from which he feels excluded. Portraying the same despair, Although much younger than Maupassant's Pierre, Arturo is as desperate and will leave his home and his customary life in order to achieve maturity and seek a peaceful acceptance of life's turmoil.

A similar passage from Camus' *l'Etranger*, also involving the sounds of sirens, confirms the fact that the legacy of Romanticism extends beyond the XIXth, and reaches into the XXth century. As Philip Thody asserts in his book *Albert Camus*, "One of the most powerful of these, and one which underlines how very closely linked Camus' work is to the Romantic movement, is the conviction that almost all forms of society are somehow bad."<sup>14</sup>

Meursault, who is the protagonist as well as the narrator in *l'Etranger*, embodies the solitude of a man misunderstood by his social environment. Associated with the feeling of the absurdity of life advocated by Camus, there is also the fear of an impending death lurking in the mind of the protagonist. Meursault, akin to Arturo hidden in a cave, evokes the sea to depict the unscrutable echoes of a senseless world. "La merveilleuse paix de cet été endormi entrain en moi comme une marée. A ce moment, et à la limite de la nuit, des sirènes ont hurlé. Elles annonçaient des départs pour un monde qui maintenant m'était indifférent."<sup>15</sup> Locked up in his cell, Meursault, who accidentally shot a man, is awaiting judgment. From his confinement, he hears the sounds of the outside world: the same sirens, which Elsa Morante's Arturo and Maupassant's

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<sup>14</sup> Philip Thody, *Albert Camus*, (N.Y., St. Martin's Press, 1989) 105

<sup>15</sup> Albert Camus, *L'Etranger*, (Paris, Gallimard, 1995) 185

Pierre used to hear. For Meursault, the situation is more hopeless, since he has just been sentenced to death. He thus strives to detach himself from a world, which no longer concerns him. The sounds of the sea can only be interpreted through his imagination.

Meursault's conception of peace is compared to the rising tide, which gradually submerges his fears and anxieties. Soothing and calming, this image is able to counteract the prisoner's anguish as he awaits his death. Is that peaceful feeling everlasting? As a matter of fact, it is not: it is shattered by the howling sirens of the ships, alluding once more to the ambiguity of the sea, which triggers tranquility as well as irritability. It also holds the power of causing both peace of mind and anxiety to a prisoner confined to a restrictive immobility in his cell, unable to rid himself of his fears through movements, which can be, at times, an emotional outlet.

### **3.1.2. Reflection of Self / Image**

In Maupassant's novel Pierre et Jean, a more conventional type of reflection, closer to that of Narcissus, is experienced by Pierre's younger brother Jean, as he fishes for "salicoques" on the seashore with his wife to be, Madame de Rosémilly, a beautiful young widow.

Puis, comme leurs deux visages se reflétaient, l'un contre l'autre, dans l'eau si claire dont les plantes noires du fond faisaient une glace limpide, Jean souriait à cette tête voisine qui le regardait d'en bas, et parfois, du bout des doigts, lui jetait un baiser qui semblait tomber dessus.<sup>16</sup>

Jean's peaceful attitude, seeking the transparency of the water, is standing in perfect contrast with Pierre's anguish and torment. While his brother is writhing in a mental agony, listening to the moaning of the sirens, Jean feels that life is smiling to him and he smiles back; but it is just

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<sup>16</sup> Maupassant, Pierre et Jean, 133.



an image. Unaware of his brother's identity crisis, he reaps the rewards of a successful life where every step seems to fulfill his dreams: love, money and the perspective of a bright career. Like Narcissus, Jean addresses his courtship to a mere reflection; yet unlike Narcissus, it is the reflection of his beloved rather than his own. The paradox of the double, reality and representation, re-enforces the prospect of a lifetime of happiness awaiting them. The sea is giving them the opportunity to isolate themselves from the rest of the family, and also to frame their love in a nature-made mirror, which happens to be there just for them. Becoming a willing accomplice, the sea helps Jean reach his goal by providing him with an opportunity to be playful as he pretends to direct his kisses to the reflection in the water. The freshness of this image is an echo of the "comédies pastorales" in which nymphs and naiads lived around the water in late Renaissance and early baroque literary productions. Mme de Rosémilly seems to incarnate a divinity of the water, or perhaps a mermaid.

In Balzac's L'Enfant maudit, another couple, Etienne and Gabrielle, observe their reflection in the ocean. Etienne, who has lost his mother, but found the love of his life in Gabrielle, Beauvouloir's daughter, watches his mood shift from despair to hope. "Comme deux zéphyrus assis sur la même branche de saule, ils en sont au bonheur de contempler leur image dans le miroir d'une eau limpide;"<sup>17</sup> The definition of the word "zephyr" offered by various dictionaries does not fit Balzac's poetic description. How can the west wind have a reflection? How could two flowers, "zephyr lilies", contemplate their image in the ocean? Further research offered a logical interpretation: Balzac could be alluding to butterflies of the "genus Zephyrus", which would then be an appropriate analogy since Etienne and Gabrielle's graceful frailty is comparable to that of a butterfly. The fluttering of a butterfly's wings is also a reminder of the

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<sup>17</sup> Balzac, Enfant maudit, 371

“frissons” or shudders, which undulate on the surface of a smooth sea. Its transient life reflects that of Etienne and Gabrielle who will both die, as their sensitivity confronts the cruelty of their surroundings. Investing their happiness into this fleeting satisfaction, they allow themselves to be reassured by an image. Their imaginary bliss, embodied into a mere reflection, is sufficient to shield them from the harshness of reality.

Threatened by a strict class system, by individual as well as social evil at large, by Etienne’s father himself, the powerful Count D’Hérouville, and by their innocence and lack of experience, both children enjoy the respite of a tender love before meeting their tragic end. Discovering the satisfaction of being together, of exchanging thoughts and ideas, of sharing their solitude, Etienne and Gabrielle spend their time watching their reflection in the transparent water of the ocean. Not only do they contemplate their physical image, but also the extent of their love, that finds its corresponding depth in the immensity of the sea: “...Ils devaient se rencontrer au bord de la mer qui leur offrait une image de l’immensité de leurs sentiments.”<sup>18</sup> Balzac chooses the appropriate setting for such an unusual love and commitment. Their solitude having brought them closer to one another, they compensate the emotional lack in their life by a love deeper still. The sea, therefore, reflects the magnitude of their feelings. As in Narcissus case, however, the reflection in the water raises the question of distinguishing reality from illusion. The image of happiness and communion, which they contemplate in the “miroir d’une eau limpide”, is simultaneously the truthful reflection of their real and strong love, and the deceptive promise of a fate, which will elude them.

While discussing the phenomenon of the reflection of one’s image, it may be difficult to ignore the Guatemalan writer Miguel Ángel Asturias’ “El espejo de Lida Sal” (1967). This short

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<sup>18</sup> Balzac, *Enfant maudit*, 366

story, based on a Mayan legend, deals with the reflection of self, and death as a consequence of being carried away by one's dreams. Lida Sal's story exemplifies the fusion of dream and reality as represented by her own reflection, a reflection she tries to make hers by all means, while overstretching the boundaries of her own safety. Lida Sal's Realworld is rather drab and tedious: a servant in a restaurant, she dreams of a better life, a Dreamworld that a blind customer offers her as an effect of magic. She can win the love of her life if she follows his instructions. All she has to do is wear the costume of the Perfected One, and watch her image in a full-length mirror, which she is too disadvantaged to own. All dressed up, Lida Sal goes searching for a large reflecting surface, whose size she is aware of, but obviously unaware of its depth: "y es un aguaje bien grande, casi una laguneta."<sup>19</sup> (It's a big pool, almost a lagoon.)<sup>20</sup>

Lida Sal does not recognize her new image. Dressed up and almost disguised, she wonders: "¿Era ella? ¿Era Lida Sal? ¿Era la mulata que fregaba los trastes en la comedería, la que bajaba por aquel camino, en aquella noche, bajo aquella luna, con aquel vestido de fuego y de rocío?"<sup>21</sup> (Was she Lida Sal? Was she the mulatto girl who scratched at leftovers in the restaurant, who had come down this road, on this night, under this moon, in this costume of flame and dew?)<sup>22</sup>

Feeling blessed with beauty and elegance, she bids the vegetation to let her go by, as she proceeds towards the lagoon. Hoping to fulfill the magic, she bends over a cliff trying to see her own reflection in the pool, but she falls down and drowns: "...dio su cuerpo contra su imagen,

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<sup>19</sup> Miguel Angel Asturias: "El Espejo de Lida Sal", Cuentos y Leyendas. (Madrid: Barcelona, Colección Archivos, 1a. ed., 2000) 246

<sup>20</sup> Miguel Ángel Asturias, The mirror of Lida Sal, Pittsburgh, PA., Latin American Literary Review Press, 1997) 31.

<sup>21</sup> Asturias, El espejo, 247

<sup>22</sup> Asturias, The mirror, 31

choque del que no quedó ni su imagen ni su cuerpo.”<sup>23</sup> (Her body joined her reflection with a splash, after which neither body nor reflection remained.)<sup>24</sup>

Lida Sal’s fall, as if attracted by her reflection, is described in great detail while the reader first watches the imaginary ascent to elegance, the fall, and finally the actual death, which gave the shore its name “The Mirror of Lida Sal”. Lida Sal illustrates the junction between the projected image or reflection and the ultimate symbiosis: the young woman reaches for her reflected image with such an eagerness that she ends up becoming one with the sea by falling down and drowning. The reflected image was not that of Lida Sal the homely waitress, but rather that of a beautiful apparition, all dressed-up and looking regal. Her desire to capture this image in order to turn it into a lasting reality pushed her toward the water, which holds the secret of this metamorphosis in its depths. Not only does the magic mirror reflect an image faithfully, yet it is also capable of imparting beauty to it, turning the reality into an attractive and fascinating image. Lida Sal falls to her death, in an attempt to pursue a dream, which she cannot realize in daily life: the dream of a beautiful identity. In order to reach a better image of herself, she will risk endangering her life. The dream will put an end to reality or to life itself. What was Lida thinking as she stared at her reflected image? She was probably admiring her new self, wishing that she could remain that way, and never go back to looking like her old self again. Fate answered her quest: she fell into the water, shattering her reflection, and at the same time immortalizing it in a symbiosis with the water. Dead or alive, she is now part of the water, part of the mirror that gave her the beauty of which she was dreaming.

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<sup>23</sup> Asturias, El espejo, 248

<sup>24</sup> Asturias, The mirror, 32

Had Lida Sal abandoned the shore of the water reflecting her image, could she have survived without this newly discovered image of herself? Absolutely not! She would have been obsessed by this reflection of beauty, emerging from the pond. In an effort to become one with her beautiful image, she merged with it, falling to her death, but salvaging the dream from ending. The dream will live forever in Lida Sal's eyes, which were fortunate enough to reflect a vision of beauty.

### 3.1.3. Reflection of the Intellect or Regard Intérieur

In Paul et Virginie, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre compares his soul to a transparent brook, is capable of reflecting nature. In this instance, the soul is like a mirror, catching glimpses of its surroundings and reflecting it. Perhaps such an image is suggesting the writer's interpretation of life, which is filtered through his soul.

“Je ne suis, par rapport à elle [la nature], ni un grand peintre, ni un savant physicien, mais un petit ruisseau souvent troublé, qui, dans ses moments de calme, la réfléchit le long de ses rivages. La nature se peint partout d'elle-même; et quand un de ses rayons tombe sur mon âme, je la reflète.”<sup>25</sup>

Maupassant's protagonists Pierre and Jean, Morante's Arturo and Camus' Meursault all experience the “audio-visual” reflectivity of the sea. So does Balzac's Etienne who spends his time next to the sea, admiring it, observing its various characteristics, exchanging his deepest thoughts and feelings with this sole companion of his solitude. The liquid surface imparts a particular magic to the object reflected, turning it into a subject matter of observation as well as intellectual reflection.

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<sup>25</sup> B. de Saint-Pierre, Paul et Virginie, 213

In an extensive study on Romanticism, Études sur le Romantisme, Jean-Pierre Richard mentions “cette glorification de la plasticité aquatique dans le beau poème en prose consacré à l’océan que Balzac a situé au centre de “l’Enfant maudit.”<sup>26</sup> Richard underscores Balzac’s ability to create variety: “La variété crée ici une multiplicité, donc, dans la mythologie balzacienne, une richesse. Au lieu de faire vieillir les choses la modification leur redonne une fraîcheur.”<sup>27</sup>

Etienne is fascinated by the transparency of the water as well as its mirror-like characteristics; such contemplation fills his days. The sea reflecting the sunlight is a source of beauty for the child:

Etienne demeurait pendant de longues journées couché sur le sable, heureux, poète à son insu. L’irruption soudaine d’un insecte doré, les reflets du soleil dans l’Océan, le tremblement du vaste et limpide miroir des eaux, un coquillage, une araignée de mer, tout devenait évènement et plaisir pour cette âme ingénue.<sup>28</sup>

The purity of Etienne’s soul finds its reflection in the limpidity of the water. Without being a writer, yet “poète à son insu”, Etienne is also experiencing what Maupassant called “le dédoublement de l’esprit”, that intellectual reflection mentioned at the beginning of the present chapter.

Etienne is going through an immense solitude, which is alleviated by his friendly alliance with the ocean, suggested by “sympathiser”, while perfectly expressing the mimicry inherent to the reflective process. “A force de chercher un autre lui-même auquel il pût confier ses pensées et dont la vie pût devenir la sienne, il finit par sympathiser avec l’Océan. La mer devint pour lui

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<sup>26</sup> J. P. Richard, sur le Romantisme, 121.

<sup>27</sup> J. P. Richard, sur le Romantisme, 121

<sup>28</sup> Balzac, Enfant maudit, 330

un être animé, pensant.”<sup>29</sup> Etienne is eager to share his thoughts with someone, yet there is no one around, no one but the ocean filling his range of vision. “Un autre lui-même” expresses the need for companionship, as it emphasizes the need for similarity or compatibility. What better place to look for another self than a mirror? For Etienne, the ocean will fill the role of a physical and intellectual mirror. It will be an exchange: as it offers the child friendship, the latter will lend it life and character.

Mourning the death of his mother, Jeanne de Saint-Savin, is a painful experience for the child who has no one but a father who represents such a great danger for him, that being orphan would be much safer.

Il demeura des journées entières accroupi dans le creux d’un roc, indifférent aux intempéries de l’air, immobile, attaché sur le granit, semblable à l’une des mousses qui y croissaient, pleurant bien rarement; mais perdu dans une seule pensée, immense, infinie comme l’Océan; et comme l’Océan, cette pensée prenait mille formes, devenait terrible, orageuse, calme.<sup>30</sup>

Balzac describes the child as a vegetation of the sea: “semblable à l’une des mousses qui y croissaient”. Similarly to Narcissus who was metamorphosed into a flower after his death, Etienne seems to have undergone a metamorphosis too: he has the immobility of algae. Had the author used the image of a shellfish or that of any sea creature, this feeling of immobility suggested by the image of Etienne fixed on the rock, “attaché sur le granit”, would have vanished somehow. The stillness of Etienne is increasingly deepening his grief: it is a silent and desperate mourning, almost lacking the consolation of tears, like a mist which floats around without ever

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<sup>29</sup> Balzac, *Enfant maudit*, 336

<sup>30</sup> Balzac, *Enfant maudit*, 335

turning into rain. He suffers mentally without any external demonstrations, nearly without the emotional outlet of crying or screaming. Etienne's immobility stands out in sharp contrast with the movements of his disconsolate "pensée". His emotional bereavement after the loss of his mother is as immense and mutable as the ocean itself. The various phases of his distress are similar to the movements of the ocean: in a decrescendo of intensity they go from "terrible" to "orageuse", and finally to "calme" which comes last, confirming the healing process of Time.

Comparing Etienne's image of innocence hit by Fate with that of Cambremer's remorse-struck attitude in Balzac's "Un Drame au bord de la mer", mentioned in both chapter one and two, the reader is impressed with the immobility of a petrified character: as if he were embedded in the granite. It is one of Balzac's favorite comparisons for suggesting immobility as well as immutability. Since historic buildings were made of granite, such as the Pyramids of Guizeh for instance, the fact of referring to this material of construction grants a greater impact to the notion of immobility, emphasizing its contrast with the fluidity of thought, which Balzac's protagonists, Etienne and Cambremer are experiencing.

#### **3.1.4. Reflection as an Extension of Memory**

As a follow-up to the intellectual process set in motion by the proximity of the sea, it would be likely to consider reflection as a vehicle for reminiscing. The evocative power generated by the reflective surface appears in several literary works such as Balzac's "L'enfant maudit", Montale's (1896-1981) Ossi di Seppia, Hugo's Pendant l'exil, and finally Heredia's (1842-1905) Les Trophées. Unlike Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's representation in the previous section, which merely depicted a mirror-like reflection, Balzac, on the other hand, presents the



reader with an array of possibilities. Balzac's Etienne imagines the more subtle reflection of a woman's face in the waves.

Par un calme parfait, il trouvait encore des teintes multipliées à la mer qui, semblable à un visage de femme, avait alors une physionomie, des sourires, des idées, des caprices: là verte et sombre, ici riant dans son azur, tantôt unissant ses lignes brillantes avec les lueurs indécises de l'horizon, tantôt se balançant d'un air doux sous des nuages orangés.<sup>31</sup>

Although the expression "par un calme parfait" evokes the flatness of a mirror, the unequivocal "semblable" confirms the power of imagination of the child. Having just lost his mother, Etienne is bereaved, and his solitude is endless. Could this "visage de femme", reflected by the water, evoke the identity of his mother's face? The reader tries to grasp a certainty whereas the narrator, evading a definite answer, is satisfied with offering suggestions, thus following the tidal movements of the sea. Missing a mother, who was present and absent at the same time by the force of circumstances, Etienne entrusts the sea with his filial love as well as his nostalgia. The image entertained by his imagination has a double role: it anticipates the presence of a woman in his life, by offering him an imaginary guardian angel as an alternative; and it also reflects the weather as well as the palette of colors in the sky. So this "visage de femme" is seen laughing at times as it reflects a blue sky; it appears melancholy where the water is dark and green, probably where a heavy cloud is shielding the sunlight. The orange hues of the clouds suggest a sunset when reflecting an orange sky, whereas the brilliance of its colors is a prerogative of daylight. Balzac's description varies according to time and place, expressed by the respective use of either "tantôt" or "ici" and "là".

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<sup>31</sup> Balzac, *Enfant maudit*, 336

Just as Balzac's Etienne, in "l'Enfant maudit", imagined the reflection of a woman's face emerging from the waves, so does Eugenio Montale in a poem entitled "Cigola la carrucola del pozzo".

Cigola la carrucola del pozzo,  
l'acqua sale alla luce e vi si fonde.  
Trema un ricordo nel ricolmo secchio,  
nel puro cerchio un'immagine ride.  
Accosto il volto a evanescenti labbri:  
si deforma il passato, si fa vecchio,  
appartiene ad un altro...

Ah che già stride  
la ruota, ti ridona all'atro fondo,  
visione, una distanza ci divide.<sup>32</sup> (v. 1-10)

Part of the collection Ossi di seppia, published in 1925, this poem describes the water rising from the darkness of a deep well, as it encounters daylight and becomes one with it, "vi si fonde". The water in the pail evokes a memory, "un ricordo": a smiling reflection appears in the small circle of water. Montale does not need the immensity of an ocean in order to evoke the past and extract an image from his memory: the reflection on the limited surface of a pail of water suffices to bring about a mental image. He simply allows his imagination to float backward as the vision emerges from his past experience.

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<sup>32</sup> Eugenio Montale, "Ossi di Seppia", Collected Poems 1920-1954, Bilingual Ed., translated and annotated by Jonathan Galassi, (N.Y., Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1998) 60.

There's a flashback in time and space: the Past catches up with the Present, and recedes again, afterward, into old time. Both approachable and elusive, the vision and the memory are reversed. As the pail falls back into the well, the vision disappears, creating a distance, which separates the onlooker from the reflection emerging from the Past. A circular movement is created as absence becomes presence, then retreats into absence again. Memories evolve through time and space, imposing their presence before receding once more into oblivion. The smiling face evoked by the poet as if engraved on the surface of the water lasts for a few seconds then vanishes. The wheel of the well drags down the memory to a deep abyss, obliterating it from the Present. In Montale's poem, the reflection is connected to the daylight. The interplay of presence and absence creates a chiaroscuro corresponding to the intensity of feelings: hope and despair, ecstasy and grief, as the depths of oblivion take over, generating an abyss of their own.

The density of Montale's short poem is remarkable. The imagery contained in this "strophe of ten verses is extremely suggestive, and although condensed, helps convey an elaborate poetic vision. Reading Montale's poem, a few questions come to mind. What is the powerful secret of the reflected image? Could the poet have succeeded in evoking his cherished memories without the help of the water?

The art of reconstructing a landscape through its reflection is not foreign to Hugo, who lived in exile for almost twenty years, in Belgium and in the Channel Islands. In a chapter entitled "Ce que c'est que l'exil", he expresses what Paris means to the exile he is: "Et Paris reste inoubliable, et Paris demeure ineffaçable et insubmersible,"<sup>33</sup> According to Hugo, nothing can obliterate what Paris stands for. It will always remain alive in his memory! The adjective "insubmersible" indicates the resiliency of the image of Paris, which, unlike a ship, cannot be

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<sup>33</sup> Victor Hugo, *Pendant l'exil*, (Paris: Nelson, 1912) 53.

submersed into oblivion. Hugo elucidates the process of memory as a retrospective dream attained through a tenacious memory. “Ce rêve en arrière, auquel s’opiniâtre la mémoire, est flottant comme le nuage, mais plus tenace. L’espace n’en fait pas ce qu’il veut.”<sup>34</sup> The poet refers to the persistence of the dream despite the fact that it has the lightness of a cloud. This phenomenon is presumably keeping the presence of Paris alive in the poet’s memory, just as it keeps its reflection on the surface of the ocean. With its buildings as well as its sounds, Paris is present in spite of the distance, since it imposes its presence upon the ocean like an apparition or a ghost: “l’immense fantôme de la cité immobile.”<sup>35</sup> The specter of the beloved city, like a computer image, gradually composes its resolutions in the water, as a product of the combined wishes of the memory and the eye of the beholder, with or without the compliance of the ocean.

“L’évocation se fait d’elle-même, les toits semblent surgir parmi les flots, la ville se recompose dans toute cette onde, et ce tremblement infini s’y ajoute. Dans la cohue des houles, on croit entendre bruire la fourmillière des rues. Charme farouche. On regarde la mer et on voit Paris.”<sup>36</sup>

Is it a dream? Is it a hallucinatory reproduction? A glow pierces the density of darkness as the presence of Paris emerges on the surface of the waves. It is indeed Paris with its crowds, and its noise. Generated from a need as well as willful evocation, the image appears on the surface of the water as if stamped by a dominant “souvenir”. It is indeed an extension of memory triggered by an emotional need for this particular reflection. Is it creativity or simply the act of reminiscing for Victor Hugo? It is probably the merging of both: creativity as well as memory. The latter representing a step backward in time, while the former would be envisioning a step forward,

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<sup>34</sup> Hugo, Pendant l’exil, 52

<sup>35</sup> Hugo, Pendant l’exil, 52

<sup>36</sup> Hugo, Pendant l’exil, 52

most probably linked to wishful thinking. Yet, even with his eyes closed, the poet can evoke the cherished image of a person or a building or even a historic occurrence, which he has not witnessed. Although memory is less of a reality, it is still a reflection of past or far away people, places and events.

Like Hugo, José-Maria de Hérédia, in his poem “Le prisonnier”, refers to the reflection of buildings in the river Nile. Following the Parnassian tradition of “la beauté plastique”, a painting of Léon Gerôme (1824-1904) inspired the author of Les Trophées. Exhibited in the Salon of 1863, the painting shares the same title as the poem. Another solitary prisoner watched the pointed minarets reflected in the Nile.

Car lié sur la barque et saignant sous l’entrave,  
Un vieux Scheikh regardait d’un air stupide et grave  
Les minarets pointus qui tremblent dans le Nil.<sup>37</sup> (v. 12-14)

The defeated old sheikh fastens his gaze on the reflection of the mosques, hoping for a divine intervention to save him from his ruthless captors. Just as Victor Hugo saw his dream reflected by the water, so does the old Sheikh, hoping to be freed by his party whose symbols are the minarets appearing on the surface of the water. Like Hugo who mentioned: “ce tremblement infini s’y ajoute.”<sup>38</sup>, Heredia acknowledges the movement of the water suggested by the verb “tremblent”. Could the speed of the boat impart its undulations to the reflection itself? Could the verb “tremblent” represent a symptom of old age? How to interpret the importance of such a detail? It is probably the only guideline indicating the presence of a reflection. It could either be an evocation recalled by the memory or an actual reflection. In addition to the image of the

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<sup>37</sup> José-Maria de Hérédia, Les Trophées, (Paris, Gallimard, 1981) 149.

<sup>38</sup> Hugo, Pendant l’exil, 52

mosques reflected in the Nile, there is also a reflection of the intellect. Will the prisoner be freed? Will he continue to remain a vanquished prisoner as long as the minarets are represented as being the symbol of the weakest party? It is an interaction of possibilities: victory and defeat, hope and despair, illusion and reality, while the stage of life where all these feelings converge is the Nile. Here the protagonist hopes for his dreams to become a reality as he stares at the images reflected by the river: a river able to predict the outcome of events. The reflected image thus becomes either a vehicle for reminiscing, or for carrying on an intellectual mental discussion thus leading to a reflection of the intellect. Memory versus oblivion is a recurring topic in poetry: Victor Hugo as well as Hérédia granted it importance in their verse. In “Oceano Nox”, a poem from “Les Rayons et les Ombres” Hugo compares oblivion to a burial. Addressing the sailors who have been engulfed into the abyss of the ocean, Hugo laments their actual death, which will be followed by oblivion.

“Puis votre souvenir même est enseveli.

Le corps se perd dans l’eau, le nom dans la mémoire.

Le temps qui sur toute ombre en verse une plus noire,

Sur le sombre océan jette le sombre oublié.”<sup>39</sup> (v. 27-30)

According to Hugo, oblivion is an abyss comparable to that of the sea: whereas the body is lost in the water, the name is lost to the memory. Time will throw its veil of forgetfulness on the dark ocean responsible for so many deaths. Reflecting upon their fate, the poet keeps the souvenir alive in the memory, as a force competing with “l’oubli”. Literature and poetry have thus helped immortalize the souvenir of these long gone sailors, allowing them an extension of memory during the process of a mental reflection.

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<sup>39</sup> Victor Hugo, Les Chants du crépuscule, Les Voix intérieures, Les Rayons et les ombres, (Paris, Gallimard, 1964) 337.

### 3.1.5. Distorted Reflection From The Abyss to The Eye of the Beholder.

In a vertical movement directed upwards, the abyss reaches out to the “contemplateur”, providing him with striking images in which the poet and nature set up a dialogue. The poet lends to the water and to the abyss the power of reflecting his fears or his hopes. The eye encounters a surface reflection, however, it also plunges into the abyss, analyzing, interpreting, and above all creating a distorted illusion of things.

Having previously introduced the reader to the poetic beauty of a sea reflecting the sun into a pair of Gemini, Hugo goes on to create an antithesis to the sun. In “Ce que dit la Bouche d’Ombre”, a major poem in Les Contemplations, contrasting with the sun generating an enchanting daylight, there will be “an affreux soleil noir”, an awful black sun generating the darkness of night.

Dans ce gouffre sans bord, sans soupirail, sans mur,  
De tout ce qui vécut pleut sans cesse la cendre;  
Et l’on voit tout au fond, quand l’œil ose y descendre,  
Au delà de la vie, et du souffle et du bruit,  
Un affreux soleil noir d’où rayonne la nuit!<sup>40</sup> (v. 182-86)

This poem expresses all of Hugo’s metaphysical beliefs: the “grand dialogue” between the Creator and the creation is reported by the poet as he struggles to convey to the reader the meanings of the Universe as well as the presence of Good and Evil. Since the sun as we know it, “ce globe d’or vivant” is found in the sky, its evil image or its dark version will be located “Dans ce gouffre sans bord”, or the unfathomable abyss. For Hugo, in spite of its beauty, the sea, at

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<sup>40</sup> Hugo, Contemplations, 490.

times, personifies evil, and manifests hostility towards human beings. In the same poem, the following verse whose two contradictory hemistichs attempt to describe Good and Evil as components of the necessary functioning of the Universe, the author is using a poetic chiaroscuro where plausibility is doubtful: “D’un monde éblouissant, miroir du monde obscur.”<sup>41</sup> (v. 150)

The duality of the abyss, reflecting star-like beams of light, is once more explored by Hugo in “A celle qui est restée en France” in order to express the mystery of the universe. This poem, mourning the death of his daughter Leopoldine, as well as his inability to visit her tomb, expresses his wish to send her his feelings through his verse: “Et regarde, pensif, s’étoiler de rayons, / De clartés, de lueurs, vaguement enflammées, / Le gouffre monstrueux plein d’énormes fumées.”<sup>42</sup> (v. 352-55) The word “pensif” shows the inner struggle of the father torn between the contradictory feelings of affliction and serenity.

The following verse represents the poet, trying to cope with grief as he contemplates the universe, interpreting its wisdom: “Le contemplateur, triste et meurtri, mais serein,”<sup>43</sup> (v. 347) Trying to be patient, to accept the decrees of fate, to find a glimmer of hope in the wisdom of the creation surrounding him, the poet feels despair and hope at the same time, which accounts for his alternating images of light and darkness, of elevation and descent. The poet’s feelings generate reflective images in a chiaroscuro corresponding to contradictory states of mind.

In his renowned play “Lorenzaccio”, Musset’s explores the contrast between the surface of the water and its depths. Musset’s protagonist Lorenzaccio is another “écorché vif” as stated by Maupassant in *Sur l’eau*. As a matter of fact, Maupassant’s description of “l’homme de lettres” or “l’écrivain”, could apply to Lorenzo di Medici: whether it is “Acteur et spectateur de

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<sup>41</sup> Hugo, Contemplations, 489

<sup>42</sup> Hugo, Contemplations, 524

<sup>43</sup> Hugo, Contemplations, 524



lui-même”, or “un reflet de lui-même et un reflet des autres, condamné à se regarder sentir, agir, penser, aimer, souffrir,”<sup>44</sup> Lorenzo has been through it all. Assuming an identity, which is not really his, pretending to be other than his true self, he unmask himself before Philippe Strozzi, the only friend he could trust. The following passage, already cited in the first chapter, describes Philippe’s solitude as the water reflects it:

Lorenzo — Ah! vous avez vécu tout seul, Philippe. Pareil à un fanal éclatant, vous êtes resté immobile au bord de l’océan des hommes, et vous avez regardé dans les eaux la reflection de votre propre lumière. Du fond de votre solitude, vous trouviez l’océan magnifique sous le dais splendide des cieux. Vous ne comptiez pas chaque flot, vous ne jetiez pas la sonde; vous étiez plein de confiance dans l’ouvrage de Dieu. Mais moi, pendant ce temps-là, j’ai plongé [...] tandis que vous admiriez la surface, j’ai vu les débris des naufrages, les ossements et les Léviathans.<sup>45</sup>

According to Lorenzo, Philippe’s assessment of reality is superficial because it is blurred by his own honesty. As it reflects Philippe’s perfection, the surface of the sea is misrepresenting reality, which is altogether different: one must plunge deep to the bottom to grasp the image of the sea as a graveyard full of skeletons and shipwrecks. Leading a secluded life, Philippe does not comprehend humanity as it really is: the brightness he sees is a self-reflection and a delusion. Lorenzo, on the other hand, plunged to the bottom of the sea and saw the other face of humanity: the evil one. The polarity of the sea or ocean is described in this passage, where the surface of the water represents a deceptive Good, while the reality of Evil is embodied in the abyss.

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<sup>44</sup> Maupassant, *Sur l’eau*, 76

<sup>45</sup> Musset, *Lorenzaccio*, 131

### 3.1.6. The Reflecting Eye

An inverted image of reflection is found in Hérédia's sonnet "Antoine et Cléopâtre", as Marc Anthony, the Roman soldier, sees the reflection of his downfall in Cleopatra's eyes. Here, the sea is reflected in her eyes, not as a simple reflection, but rather as a crystal ball which foresees the prospective naval defeat of the Roman fleet: "Et sur elle courbé, l'ardent impérateur / Vit dans ses larges yeux étoilés de points d'or / Toute une mer immense où fuyaient des galères."<sup>46</sup> (v. 12-14) What appears in this scene is the theme of love and death entwined in an embrace in which one of the protagonists gets close enough to the other, in order to observe what is reflected in her eyes. Here the eye share the properties of the sea, reflecting as well as predicting, offering a clear as well as an elusive image. The transparency of the eye rejoins that of the sea for the purpose of reflecting an imminent event.

In "El espejo de Lida Sal" a short story, which was discussed earlier in this chapter, Miguel Ángel Asturias depicts the reflection of a beautiful image, which will culminate into a symbiosis with the lagoon. Just as, in Heredia's sonnet, Cleopatra's eyes reflected the defeat of Mark Anthony's fleet before it ever happens, so do Lida Sal's eyes in Asturias' short story. Filled with anguish, before being forever closed, they reflect the immediacy of her demise, by assessing the increasing distance between her and a vanishing shore. While her eyes captures the ultimate view of the shore of the lagoon, the water itself immortalizes her reflection: "Lo último que cerró fueron las inmensas congojas de sus ojos que divisaban cada vez más lejos la orilla del pequeño lago llamado desde entonces el "Espejo de Lida Sal".<sup>47</sup> (Last to expire was the

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<sup>46</sup> Hérédia, *Trophées*, 103.

<sup>47</sup> Asturias, *El espejo*, 248.

enormous anguish of her eyes which were still able to distinguish the ever-retreating shore of the lagoon; the lagoon, which, from that time forward, has been called the Mirror of Lida Sal.)<sup>48</sup> As Asturias states in his short story, the eyes are the last to surrender to death. They keep the spark of life radiant up to the last minute: expressing their desire, their emotions, and reflecting the feelings of a lifetime in this ultimate look. A dying Gilliatt, about to drown voluntarily into the sea in Hugo's Les Travailleurs de la mer, will fasten his last gaze on the ship, which is carrying his beloved Déruchette to a new life. His eyes will remain focused on the object of his love until the rising tide covers them forever, preventing them from reflecting his emotions. The notion of the reflecting eye is also present in several of Baudelaire's poems. The poem "La Vie Antérieure" combines the reflection of a sunset in both the waves and the poet's eyes. Here, Baudelaire's reflecting eye is competing with the reflective properties of the sea.

Les houles, en roulant les images des cieux,  
Mêlaient d'une façon solennelle et mystique  
Les tout-puissants accords de leur riche musique  
Aux couleurs du couchant reflété par mes yeux.<sup>49</sup> (v. 5-8)

The poet alone can appreciate this audio-visual reflection since he is the only one capable of grasping the beauty of the color of the sky on the waves, in addition to the rich and powerful music of the sea. There is an overwhelming harmony between the movement of the sea, its music, the sky, and the sunset as the poet's eye reflects them. The quatrain begins with "the houles", then proceeds with the image of a conventional reflection, and finally culminates with the image the eyes taking over the role of the sea in order to reflect the sunset. The eye itself has

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<sup>48</sup> Asturias, Mirror of Lida Sal, 33.

<sup>49</sup> Baudelaire, "Vie antérieure", Les Fleurs, 40

become a place of fusion between the beholder and the “contemplado”, as if all external reality had vanished. The only reality of the reflection is the eye itself.

### **3.1.7. Reflection captured through Art.**

The memory of a past existence or past events can overcome forgetfulness, not only through Literature but also through Art, whose lasting recreation of things imparts a “déréalisation” or a loss of the sense of reality, similar to the reflection in the water motif. Painting the sea offers, through the representative delusion of Art, a lasting image of the ever changing and ephemeral seascape. Throughout the centuries, Art has relentlessly attempted to render the beauty of Nature. Expressing the artist’s vision of the world, various brushstrokes as well as diverse approaches created and offered sceneries to the eye of the beholder. Landscapes and seascapes have been reproduced in a splash of lively or subdued colors, each painter faithful to his own favorite palette. Painters, however, were not the only ones trying to reproduce nature, poets have also conveyed through their verses the magical array of scenes, which they witnessed in life or in paintings. “Un peintre”, a sonnet by José Maria de Hérédia, and a prose passage from Proust’s A l’ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs, are each a tribute to a painter whose art was successful in rendering the depth of their own vision. Hérédia’s sonnet is a tribute to Emmanuel Lansyer, whereas Proust devoted several pages to the description of Elstir’s, or more specifically Whistler’s artwork.

A friend of Hérédia’s, Emmanuel Lansyer, who died in 1892, was originally from Vendée. A student of Courbet, he specialized in marine landscapes, such as the Douarnenez Bay.

Il a vu, par les soirs tempétueux d’automne,  
Sombrier le soleil rouge en la mer qui moutonne;

Sa lèvre s'est salée à l'embrun des récifs.

Il a peint l'Océan splendide, immense et triste,

Où le nuage laisse un reflet d'améthyste,

L'émeraude écumante et le calme saphir;

Et fixant l'eau, l'air, l'ombre et l'heure insaisissables,

Sur une toile étroite il a fait réfléchir

Le ciel occidental dans le miroir des sables.<sup>50</sup> (v. 6-14)

In Hérédia's sonnet, the painter is portrayed like a conjurer, who is first of all a master of illusion. The succession of verbs in the passé composé analyses the gradual procedure necessary for the creation of a painting: "Il a compris", "Il a vu", "Il a peint", and finally "Il a fait réfléchir". It is thus a matter of grasping the reality of things, then, after internalizing it, to project it by one's own technique into the spectator's mind. The colors, starting with the most vivid of all, "rouge" will gradually fade into the purple, green, and deep blue colors of precious gemstones: "améthyste, émeraude" and "saphir". Hérédia's use of such images implies that the painter is turning into a craftsman, or a jeweler, as it lends the scene an aspect of mythical beauty. Hérédia admires the painter who succeeded in representing the beauty of the universe as it is reflected by the water.

The reflected image recurs twice in this sonnet: the first instance is "un reflet d'améthyste" which is a reminder of Homer's description of the Mediterranean. The purple color reflects the sadness of the ocean, mirroring a cloudy sky rather than a bright sunshine. The second instance is that of the sand reflecting the sky in the form of a mirage. A mirage is an

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<sup>50</sup> Hérédia, *Trophées*, 163.

optical illusion, which occurs through an aberration of the sight. A “miroir des sables” would ordinarily reflect an oriental sky, but the painter Lansyer is such a great artist, that he is able to have it reflect a western sky, while capturing this mirage in his work. In this instance, the reader can see the image, which does not really exist, of something no longer existing, except in the double illusion of the artistic and poetic creation.

Whereas Heredia’s painter Lansyer was a real person, Marcel’s friend, Elstir, is an imaginary character. In a chapter entitled “Les oeuvres d’art imaginaires chez Proust”, Michel Butor analyzes the profound veneration Proust had towards Elstir, which is the French anagram of Whistler, skipping the “wh”. Emphasizing the creative aspect of painting, Proust focuses mostly on his representation of reality.

The eye of the poet as well as the eye of the artist are able to capture and immortalize Art through their respective talent. In A la recherche du temps perdu, Proust, praising the innovation brought by the artistic vision, declares that it is capable of lifting one’s spirit, all the way to the stars. Taking Elstir’s vision as the example of a new outlook on life in the field of visual Art, Proust devotes many pages of his books to the study and presentation of the painter’s works.

“Le seul véritable voyage, le seul bain de Jouvence, ce ne serait pas d’aller vers de nouveaux paysages, mais d’avoir d’autres yeux, de voir l’univers avec les yeux d’un autre, de cent autres, de voir les cent univers que chacun d’eux voit, que chacun d’eux est; et cela nous le pouvons avec un Elstir, avec un Vinteuil, avec leurs pareils, nous volons vraiment d’étoiles en étoiles.”<sup>51</sup>

Marcel, the narrator of A l’Ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs, used to spend hours admiring the art of his friend Elstir, whose personal perspective he describes best. Those visual reflections

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<sup>51</sup> Quoted from A la recherche du temps perdu, by Malcolm Bowie, in Proust Among the Stars, (N.Y., Columbia University Press, 1999) xi.

represent a definite metamorphosis of reality monitored by the intellect of the artist. Elstir is exploring optical illusions in order to convey a new approach to Art, that of the laws of perspective. The following passage expresses the creative spirit of Elstir's innovative work: "...Elstir avait préparé l'esprit du spectateur en n'employant pour la petite ville que des termes marins, et que des termes urbains pour la mer."<sup>52</sup> In Proust Among the Stars, Malcolm Bowie describes this artistic vision as "the transpositional labour of Elstir's brush, which moves land-features seawards and sea-features landwards,"<sup>53</sup>. Moreover, Elstir created new buildings rising from the sea; a new sea, which was the reflection of the sky, emerged in the artist work, confirming Maupassant's statement about the representation being more vibrant than the original. Using his artwork to convince the onlooker with certain theories of art, exploring the contrasts of the "clair obscur", Elstir depicted reflections in which there was no demarcation between land and sea, but that were rather blending in a commingled effect of reality and representation.

D'autres lois se dégageaient de cette même toile comme, au pied des immenses falaises, la grâce lilliputienne des voiles blanches sur le miroir bleu où elles semblaient des papillons endormis, et certains contrastes entre la profondeur des ombres et la pâleur de la lumière. Ces jeux des ombres que la photographie a banalisés aussi, avaient intéressé Elstir au point qu'il s'était complu autrefois à peindre de véritables mirages, où un château coiffé d'une tour apparaissait comme un château complètement circulaire prolongé d'une tour à son faite, et en bas d'une tour inverse, soit que la pureté donnât à l'ombre qui se reflétait dans l'eau la

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<sup>52</sup> Marcel Proust, A L'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs, (Paris, Gallimard, 1988) 400

<sup>53</sup> Bowie, Proust Among the Stars, 78.

dureté et l'éclat de la pierre, soit que les brumes du matin rendissent la pierre aussi vaporeuse que l'ombre. De même au-delà de la mer, derrière une rangée de bois, une autre mer commençait, rosée par le coucher du soleil, et qui était le ciel.<sup>54</sup>

The contrast between the levity of light and the depth of darkness allowed Elstir to depict mirages, while imparting the solidity of stone to the reflection, and to the stone buildings themselves the vaporous qualities of the reflection. Reality and illusion thus culminate into a mirage, which is even more elusive than a reflection. The onlooker is unable to decide where the reality ends and where the reflection begins.

## **Conclusion**

The reflection in the water was thus able to take on several aspects: the simple reflection of one's image such as that represented by the myth of Narcissus, which is a blend of reality and illusion; the reflection of sound; the reflection of the Universe. Hugo's evocation of Paris during his exile represented a dream, as well as an extension of memory, which can also be performed through Art and Literature. Proust's title: A la recherche du temps perdu, is not only a retrospective journey into his own life, but it is also an attempt at capturing memories and reflecting them through the medium of writing.

The abyss is also capable of reflecting the inner struggles as well as the darker sides of man, just as the surface can reflect his image. Finally, the ultimate image of reflection is the mirage, which displays the aspect of a triple illusion. The mirage is the illusion of water that is absent, the illusion of a surface, which does not exist, and the illusion of an object of desire, which is created by the imagination, and perceived through an optical aberration. For the literary

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<sup>54</sup> Proust, Jeunes filles en fleurs, 403.



discourse, the illusory properties of the mirage are the ultimate ideal of reflection. Poetry, for instance, is similar to a mirage, where the beholder creates a mirror-like sea on which he projects his vision.

Reflection being a reduplication of one's image on the surface of the water, the character sees himself as another, and the other as himself. The reader will witness the subtle passage from reflection to symbiosis, as the poet or the protagonist blends with the sea, becoming one with it. However, the need arises to study the similarities between man and sea that leads to this ultimate fusion. The following section "Correspondance" will present a preview of the conditions leading to a Symbiosis.

## **3.2. Correspondance**

### **3.2.1. Either a Charismatic or a Repellent Sea**

Baudelaire has repeatedly compared the sea to the human soul and mind. Quoted from "L'Homme et la mer", the following quatrain, already cited in the "Preface" of this study, refers to the sea as reflecting both the joy and sadness of man. Baudelaire's apostrophe "*Homme libre*" could also be addressed to the various protagonists discussed in the previous chapter dealing with the issues of identity and liberation. Referring to mankind in its entirety, it needs not be altered to "*Femme libre*" in order to fit the examples of Donoso's Aunt Matilde, or Le Clézio's Lullaby.

Homme libre, toujours tu chéris la mer,  
La mer est ton miroir, tu contemples ton âme  
Dans le déroulement infini de sa lame,

Et ton esprit n'est pas un gouffre moins amer.<sup>55</sup> (v. 1- 4)

The immensity as well as the depth of the sea are evoked in Baudelaire's quatrain, pinpointing to the reflection by the word "*miroir*" and to the symbiosis by the negative comparison "*n'est pas un gouffre moins amer.*" Both the soul and the mind are equated to the sea, thus establishing a similarity between the human being and the liquid element. The tight bond between man and sea are expressed by the verb "*tu chériras*"; while the adverb "*toujours*" reinforces this bond by suggesting the idea of eternity.

The following lines, however, focus on man's bitterness in particular, as it is reflected and magnified by the sea. An obvious statement of hatred begins this quatrain, followed by an explanatory development of this feeling. In his poem "Obsession", which is part of Les Fleurs du mal, Baudelaire, describing the feelings inspired by the ocean, identifies the "correspondance" that occurs between man and the liquid element.

Je te hais Océan! Tes bonds et tes tumultes,  
Mon esprit les retrouve en lui; ce rire amer  
De l'homme vaincu, plein de sanglots et d'insultes,  
Je l'entends dans le rire énorme de la mer.<sup>56</sup> (v. 4 - 8)

In a poetic exchange, Baudelaire personifies the ocean and turns man into an element of Nature. Echoing man's behaviour, the ocean is also a living entity, which violently expresses its "malaises" through the chaotic motion of a tempest. A rebellious sea evokes the defiant revolt of man, as a common ground is established through an unleashed sea. Is the poet resenting an otherness of the self? Is Baudelaire's hatred directed towards the sea in particular or towards

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<sup>55</sup> Baudelaire, Les Fleurs, 41.

<sup>56</sup> Baudelaire, Les Fleurs, 99.

nature in general? The poet, whose darkest moods are the expression of a pathological “ennui” turning into despair, finds his laments expressed by the moaning of a tempestuous sea.

In a passage taken from the prose poem “Déjà”, which is part of Le Spleen de Paris, Baudelaire recounts an imaginary experience, proving the extent of his fascination, and perhaps analyzing man’s ambivalent feelings towards the sea. Reflecting both universality and timelessness, reflecting the diverse facets of man’s temperament, the sea seems to represent humanity in its entirety. In order to describe the saga of the human soul, the poet uses the verb “vivre” in the Past, Present and Future successively, attributing a consistent role to the sea as a representative of man’s extatic as well as depressive moods. Thus, the reference to temporality emphasizes the immutable characteristics of human nature.

Moi seul j’étais triste, inconcevablement triste. Semblable à un prêtre à qui on arracherait sa divinité, je ne pouvais, sans une navrante amertume, me détacher de cette mer si monstrueusement séduisante, de cette mer si infiniment variée dans son effrayante simplicité, et qui semble contenir en elle et représenter par ses jeux, ses allures, ses colères et ses sourires, les humeurs, les agonies et les extases de toutes les âmes qui ont vécu, qui vivent et qui vivront!<sup>57</sup>

Rather than being relieved to land on firm ground, the narrator of the prose poem “Déjà”, who was traveling by sea, expresses his sadness to be separated from the object of his veneration. The simile “Semblable à un prêtre à qui on arracherait sa divinité,” indicates the magnitude of his reverence towards the sea. Far from being monotonous, breaking his “ennui”, the various facets of an ever-changing element captivates the narrator’s attention to the extent that he cannot bear to be separated from it. The traveler is attracted to the sea for a very powerful reason: its

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<sup>57</sup> Charles Baudelaire, Le Spleen de Paris, La Fanfarlo, (Paris, Flammarion, 1987) 154.

similarity with man's soul through its depth and its capricious behavior. The opposite terms "colères" and "sourires" as well as "agonies" and "extases" highlight the contradictions inherent in both the sea and man's dispositions. In order to render the similarity more striking, Baudelaire uses a human terminology to describe the sea: "... ses jeux, ses allures, ses colères, et ses sourires". The perilous dimension of the sea is underscored by the oxymorons "monstrueusement séduisante" and "effrayante simplicité".

Highlighting the superiority of the ocean to man in every respect, controversial author Lautréamont goes from admiring the ocean to despising it. Do we have here an "anti-correspondance"?

C'est pourquoi, en présence de ta supériorité, je te donnerai tout mon amour [...] si tu ne me faisais douloureusement penser à mes semblables, qui forment avec toi le plus ironique contraste, l'antithèse la plus bouffonne que l'on ai jamais vue dans la création: je ne puis pas t'aimer, je te déteste.<sup>58</sup>

An unmistakable aversion towards the ocean is evident in Lautréamont's prose, which is an echo of Baudelaire's hate and love relationship with the sea. After claiming a devoted love for the ocean as well as an unlimited admiration for its superiority in all respects, Lautréamont, in an unexpected "volte-face" comes out with the same statement of hatred as in Baudelaire's poem: "Je te hais, Océan!"

In "Odio el Mar", the Cuban poet José Martí (1853-1895) joins Baudelaire and Lautréamont in the utterance of their dislike for the ocean. Although for totally different reasons than Baudelaire's, Martí despises the sea, because it exhibits characteristics different from his. In a display of "anti-correspondance", the poet highlights the inhospitable nature of the sea: cold,

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<sup>58</sup> Lautréamont, "Maldoror", *Oeuvres complètes*, 17.

unpleasant, ugly, amorphous, insensitive, and devoid of feelings or anger, in brief, dead. Among the alleged crimes of the sea, the poet claims that it cannot be a home for man, it can only be a means for transportation, and comparing it to the Earth, he deduces that it can only harm man, since it is full of gluttonous creatures. Insensitive and irrational, the sea is like a corpse who has no life of its own. During the Pre-romantic era, in his novel Paul et Virginie, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre underscored the goodness and stability of the Earth in contrast to the danger and instability of the Sea, leading to a feeling of insecurity. In this respect, despite their different epochs, Martí's opinion coincides with that of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre.

According to Martí, by being complacent and unaware of the notions of right and wrong, the sea is responsible for facilitating the arrival of the tyrant to the free land of Cuba, on a ship with music and flowers. In this instance, the sea is depicted as being untrustworthy and disloyal: "Odio el mar, que sin cólera soporta / Sobre su lomo complaciente, el buque /Que entre música y flor tre a un tirano."<sup>59</sup> (v. 54 - 56)

Going back to the Early Romantic era, another Cuban poet, José María Heredia y Heredia proposes a contradicting interpretation of the role of the sea. Heredia y Heredia expresses gratitude to the sea for protecting the freedom of Cuba from the proximity of the land of the tyrant. In Heredia's "Himno del Desterrado" the sea plays a significant political role: "Que no envano entre Cuba y España / Tiende inmenso sus olas el mar."<sup>60</sup> (v. 111-112) It is not vainly that the sea stretches its immensity between Cuba and Spain: it is for the purpose of forming a barrier between the land where a tyrant dwell, and a free one. As the reader can determine, the role of the sea differs greatly according to the views of Heredia and Martí.

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<sup>59</sup> José Martí, "Odio el mar", Ismaelillo, Versos libres, Versos sencillos, (Madrid, Classicos Universales, 1999) 86.

<sup>60</sup> José María Heredia, Antología Herediana, (La Habana, Imprenta El siglo XX, 1939) 52

### 3.2.2. Personification of the Sea

Baudelaire is not alone in discerning similarities between man and the liquid element; in several of his novels, Victor Hugo used an extensive terminology pertaining to man, in order to describe the sea. In Les travailleurs de la mer, L'Homme qui rit, as well as Les quatre vingt-treize, there is a constant reference to these common characteristics. The following examples, quoted from Hugo's L'Homme qui rit, are a reminder of Baudelaire's choice of expressions: "L'Océan s'amuse. [...] Quelquefois la tempête bâcle le naufrage; quelquefois elle le travaille avec soin; on pourrait presque dire elle le caresse. La mer a le temps."<sup>61</sup> Comparable to man, the ocean is having fun: portrayed like a student, who is careful at times and negligent at others, the sea is only doing its homework. The last expression "la mer a le temps" indicates the persistence of the ocean in reaching its goal: not being pressed by time, it will continue its work of destruction most probably aimed at the shipwreck of the boat "la Matutina". The vocabulary presenting this image concurs into personifying the sea by attributing human characteristics to it, such as patience, tenacity, attentiveness, playfulness, as well as frivolity. The use of this nomenclature establishes a sort of parity between man and sea as an indicative of where each of them stands. Is the struggle pitting them against one another a lost cause for man, whose vulnerability in front of an all-powerful sea turns him into an easy target; or is it just a struggle between two equal powers? The answer is still at a hypothetical stage, since no definite outcome has yet been reached. "La mer entend."<sup>62</sup>, the captain of the boat warns a passenger: the sea may wish to take its revenge in case it is offended by the passenger's unflattering remarks. The use of

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<sup>61</sup> Hugo, L'Homme, 233.

<sup>62</sup> Hugo, L'Homme, 219.

the verb “entendre” in conjunction with the sea is a pertinent way of personifying it. It is not man who can hear the sea, but rather the sea that is able to hear man’s offensive remarks. The narrator is trying to prevent a situation where the sea could be tempted to react as man would, whenever provoked.

Hinting at the unsteadiness of the sea, the following quotation compares it to a laborer who, after performing a strenuous effort, falls into a restful slumber. Although quoted from L’Homme qui rit, the following passage is also a reminder of Hugo’s novel Les Travailleurs de la mer, where men are assimilated to the sea itself through their perseverance, their endurance, and their exertion. “Comme un travailleur après une fatigue, le flot s’assoupit immédiatement...”<sup>63</sup> The upheaval of the tempest represents the “fatigue” which causes the sea to be exhausted and feels the need for repose and “s’assoupit”. The sea acts according to the logic of human demeanor: when it is tired from too much movement, it experiences the compulsion to rest. The word “fatigue” is joining man and sea into a similar pattern of behavior. The sailors and fishermen depicted by Hugo are confronting a temperamental sea at all times of day or night, either when they are traveling or trying to draw their daily sustenance out of the sea. Victor Hugo further explored this image in his novel Les Travailleurs de la mer, dedicated to the people of Guernesey.

Echoing the XIXth century Romantic characteristics of Hugo’s writing, a XXth author, Colette (1873-1954), will describe the sea as being “une mer mal éveillée”<sup>64</sup>, or a sea, which is not yet fully awake. The homophonic “mer/mère” recalls the maternal aspect of the sea. Colette, who is the narrator in this autobiographical novel or more specifically in this collection of essays,

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<sup>63</sup> Hugo, L’Homme, 233

<sup>64</sup> Colette, La naissance du jour, (Paris, GF Flammarion, 1984) 87

enjoys her “sieste” in the warm Mediterranean climate of Provence, in a farm near the sea. Depicting the nonchalant world of a well to do writer, she represents the sea as the replica of an older lady worn out from insomnia and yearning for some more rest. Standing in contrast with Victor Hugo’s sea, which is as exhausted as the “travailleur” or laborer working and toiling until they collapse, Colette’s sea is leisurely apathetic. Both Hugo and Colette’s contrasting depictions are attributing human characteristics to the sea, across the centuries.

### 3.2.3. Like Sea, like Passengers

The following equation confirms a “correspondance” between man and sea: “Tout cela, qui est dans l’abîme est dans l’homme.”<sup>65</sup> A title given by Hugo to one of the chapter secures the linkage between the ocean and the men on the boat. “Les hommes inquiets sur la mer inquiète.”<sup>66</sup> Men and sea share the same state of mind: their common feeling is “l’inquiétude”. Almost condensed into “maximes” or proverb-like statements that establish the suggested similarity between man and the liquid element, Hugo’s relentless insistence on this parallelism recurs in most of his prose and poetry.

A perfect example of this “correspondance” is found in Les Travailleurs de la mer, where Victor Hugo displays the spectacle of a tranquil sea, as well as that of a shipwreck. In both cases, the passengers’ behaviour matches that of the sea: relaxed and smiling in the first instance, carrying on a petty or insignificant conversation about a beautiful green fly, or cattle and horses. In the second instance, agitated and confused, anxious about their fate, displaying every sign of

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<sup>65</sup> Hugo, L’Homme, 322.

<sup>66</sup> Hugo, L’Homme, 216.



fear and distress, the passengers manifest an erratic behaviour, as the wounded ship slowly and inexorably fills with water.

a) Tout était paisible et presque riant au bord de la Durande, les passagers causaient. En fermant les yeux dans une traversée, on peut juger de l'état de la mer par le tremolo des conversations. La pleine liberté d'esprit des passagers répond à la parfaite tranquillité de l'eau.<sup>67</sup>

b) [...] la coque, ouverte, buvait l'eau avec un bouillonnement horrible. C'était une plaie par où entrait le naufrage. Le contrecoup avait été si violent qu'il avait brisé à l'arrière les sauvegardes du gouvernail, descellé et battant. [...] Les passagers couraient sur le pont éperdus, se tordant les bras, se penchant par-dessus le bord, regardant la machine, faisant tous les mouvements inutiles de la terreur. Le touriste s'était évanoui.<sup>68</sup>

The author seems to suggest that the passengers always share the temperament of the sea: peaceful or panicky. Rather than observing individuals, Hugo examines here the overall reaction of a shipload of passengers as the sea shifts slowly from the status of a reliable friend to that of an implacable foe. It is as if the sea conveyed its various moods to man in general. The reader will notice the similarity between the peace of mind of the sea and that of the passengers, indicated by the symmetrical expressions “pleine liberté d'esprit” and “parfaite tranquillité” describing the passengers and the sea respectively. The verb “répond” suggests an agreement or a “correspondance” between the conditions of both man and the element. It definitely is a keyword in this quotation.

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<sup>67</sup> Victor Hugo, Les Travailleurs de la mer, (Paris, Gallimard, 1980) 251.

<sup>68</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 264-65.

The second passage depicts a tumultuous sea matching the commotion of the panic-stricken shipwrecked. “Nous sommes perdus”<sup>69</sup>, cried desperately the passengers, discovering the hopelessly damaged condition of the “Durande”. Hugo’s visual portrayal of distress, manifested by the erratic gestures of the passengers, is echoing the dangerous situation they are facing. The water, penetrating the ship’s body, hastened the shipwreck. The steering wheel, already broken, and moving in all directions indicates the disorientation and instability of both ship and passengers.

In his book Victor Hugo, le visionnaire de Guernesey, Bernard Gros declares that “ Hugo songe. On voit les marées de l’océan, pas celles du coeur qui, rencontrant le flot de la pensée, forment un mascaret géant.”<sup>70</sup> The intellectual communion between sea and human thought is highlighted by Gros, as he compares the waves of the mind with those of the ocean. Using the marine terms “flot” and “marées” for both of them, he creates a connection between the tide and the human intellect, both gradually advancing towards a predetermined goal.

#### **3.2.4. Marine Terminology.**

Having used a human terminology to compare man and sea, Hugo will also use a marine terminology to describe man’s nature, highlighting its similarity with the sea: “Rien ne se calme plus vite que les gouffres. Cela tient à leur facilité d’engloutissement. Ainsi est le coeur humain.”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 264.

<sup>70</sup> Bernard Gros, Victor Hugo le visionnaire de Guernesey, (Paris, Collection Historique et Romanesque, 1975) 175.

<sup>71</sup> Hugo, L’Homme, 322.

The dichotomy of the human heart and soul, man's anger as well as his forgiveness is thus compared to the abyss, "le gouffre", which fluctuates between violence and appeasement. "Un homme peut être désemparé comme un navire."<sup>72</sup>, says Hugo in L'Homme qui rit, using the adjective "désemparé" or unprepared, which can describe both man and ship. He thus confirms the fact that man's state of mind can be analogous to a ship swinging restlessly on the sea. The following simile, striking by its simplicity, describes Gwynplaine's thoughts fluctuating like the sea: "La pensée de Gwynplaine est semblable à la mer."<sup>73</sup> Once more, comparing the turmoil of Gwynplaine's feelings to a tempest, as he struggles to adjust to his newly discovered identity as a British Lord, Hugo declares: "Il était en pleine tempête intérieure."<sup>74</sup> Another description still, dealing with Gwynplaine's mind as he attempts to sort out his life and make sense of what befalls him, relates it to the turmoil of a vortex: "Gwynplaine avait dans le cerveau le tourbillonnement vertigineux d'une foule de nouveautés,"<sup>75</sup> Comparing the Duchess Josiane to Venus, Jupiter's daughter, since she seems to be emerging from the sea foam, Hugo situates the origin of beauty in the sea. " Son origine c'était la bâtardise et l'océan. Elle semblait sortir d'une écume."<sup>76</sup> Ensuing his physical description with a psychological one, Hugo combines the beauty and fluidity of the sea with the harshness of the tempest: "Elle avait en elle de la vague, du hasard, de la seigneurie et de la tempête."<sup>77</sup> Just like the sea, Josiane presents an ambiguous personality, featuring paradoxical aspects.

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<sup>72</sup> Hugo, L'Homme, 368.

<sup>73</sup> Hugo, L'Homme, 368. ?

<sup>74</sup> Hugo, L'Homme, 349

<sup>75</sup> Hugo, L'Homme, 349

<sup>76</sup> Hugo, L'Homme, 259

<sup>77</sup> Hugo, L'Homme, 259

Quoting a verse from the Latin poet Horace, Hugo describes the mythological character of the mermaid whose torso ends in a fishtail.

*“Un beau torse de femme en hydre se termine.”*

“C’était une noble poitrine, un sein splendide harmonieusement soulevé par un coeur royal, un vivant et clair regard, une figure pure et hautaine, et, qui sait? ayant sous l’eau, la transparence entrevue et trouble, un prolongement ondoyant, surnaturel, peut-être draconien et difforme. Vertu superbe achevée en vices dans la profondeur des rêves.”<sup>78</sup>

Contrasting with Josiane, another character is also analyzed according to a marine terminology: it is no less than Ann, Queen of England, whose personality ranges from petty to insignificant. As the repulsive image presented by Barkilphedro appears before him, the reader gets acquainted with the Queen, who is far from being a clearly sketched character.

“Il voyait dans la reine comme on voit dans une stagnation. Le marécage a sa transparence. Dans une eau sale on voit des vices, dans une eau trouble on voit des inepties. Anne n’était qu’une eau trouble.”<sup>79</sup>

Despite the fact that she was the ruler of England, Barkilphedro scrutinized her character, using it to reach his evil goals. Once more, Hugo uses the water metaphor to describe the human character in a psychological perspective. Although the antagonism of both protagonists Anne and Josiane is clearly depicted in the novel, the author uses the same expression “trouble”, meaning cloudy or murky, in describing their character. Anne’s jealousy of Josiane’s beauty drives her to

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<sup>78</sup> Hugo, *L’Homme*, 259

<sup>79</sup> Hugo, *L’Homme*, 278.

use her power to destroy her life, while Josiane's resentment of Anne's authority is the motive for her rebellious behaviour.

### **3.3. Symbiosis**

#### **3.3.1. The Stranger in Town**

During his exile Hugo acquire an intimate knowledge of the Channel Islands, and wrote a novel, Les Travailleurs de la mer, (1866), dedicated to the people of Guernesey: "Je dédie ce livre au rocher d'hospitalité et de liberté, à ce coin de vieille terre normande où vit le noble petit peuple de la mer, à l'île de Guernesey, sévère et douce, mon asile actuel, mon tombeau probable."<sup>80</sup> Hugo links events of his personal life to the island of Guernesey. Following a short chapter entitled "L'Archipel de la Manche", Hugo's novel portrays man's struggle with the elements, and particularly with the sea.

According to Hugo, man is really one with the sea, in its calm and in its revolt. As they confront him, tempest, winds and fog control man's destiny. The reader can observe the example of Gilliatt as he challenges the elements leagued against him. Who is Gilliatt? Gilliatt is the stranger! Gilliatt's courage, his kindness, and his own beliefs, set him apart from the rest of the crowd, he is misunderstood as well as blamed for being different. He is an outcast.

Loyal and courageous, Gilliatt used the power of the elements to restore the truth, and return the fortune to its rightful owner, exerting himself, predicting the movement of the sea and winds in order to accomplish his titanic deeds. As strong as Prometheus, as Victor Hugo depicts him, Gilliatt forgets about his own human limitations in order to rise to the status of a will power,

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<sup>80</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 87.

of an element as inexorable the sea. In his struggle for survival and success, he focused on the safety of the steamboat “La Durande”, that he’d promised to bring back.

Standing up to the elements surrounding “le rocher des Douvres”, a rock overlooking the sea, Gilliatt became similar to a rock himself: insensitive to cold, rain, hunger, and thirst. Alone, as he attempts to undo the wrong and reestablish the truth, he overcomes the monster of the abyss, the octopus that wanted to have him for dinner, just as it has had Clubin ten weeks earlier. But since monsters should feed on other monsters, a kind and honest’s man’s blood was not for them, and this led the octopus to its own death. So the “sea vampire” lost its battle with the kind Gilliatt who protected the birds, refused to get paid for his help, and set out to bring back the steamboat “La Durande”, an endeavour which, to say the least, no one in his right mind would consider attempting.

Gilliatt’s majestic power and grandeur established a symbiosis, not only with the sea, but with the rock as well. His strength was also coupled with flexibility, as he ended up overcoming all the hazards of the sea. His exploits were proofs of his worthiness: he was the best sailor there could be, the most accurate thinker and planner, since he turned to his advantage every unpredictable surprise of the elements. He read the climate, and the changes of the sea like an open book, using them to his own benefit and putting them to his service. He would have asked the lightning to illuminate his path: “Une fois il se retourna et dit à l’éclair: ‘Tiens-moi la chandelle.’ ”<sup>81</sup>

He made use of darkness and light in order to achieve his work. He predicted the possible deviations of the winds, and the different movements of the water. Although he was at the mercy of any change in the weather, he became a brute force himself, forgetting his own sensitivity in

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<sup>81</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 417.

order to defy the elements. His sole advantages were his heart and his mind, and he made the most out of them. By predicting and calculating the outcome of events, he ducked the blows of the water and the tempest.

Hugo's Les Travailleurs de la mer was intended to illustrate man's struggle with Nature. After having confronted society for many years as a misunderstood stranger in its midst, Gilliatt has to finally face the elements: sea, wind and rocks. Suspended in the air, above either a roaring sea, or a treacherously calm one, exposed to the intemperate climate, Gilliatt becomes one with "l'écueil." He acquires the insensitivity of a rock as he focuses on his intent: salvaging the Durande and its steam engine in order to obtain Déruchette's love.

"Il faudrait donc que, pour sauver cette machine, un homme allât aux rochers Douvres, et qu'il y allât seul, seul dans cette mer, seul dans ce désert, seul à cinq lieues de la côte, seul dans cette épouvante, seul des semaines entières, seul devant le prévu et l'imprévu, sans ravitaillement dans les angoisses du dénûment, sans secours dans les incidents de la détresse, sans autre trace humaine que celle de l'ancien naufragé expiré de misère là, sans autre compagnon que ce mort. [...] L'homme qui tenterait cela serait plus qu'un héros. Ce serait un fou. [...] Où trouver un tel homme?"<sup>82</sup>

Assessing the hypothetical conditions, which will face the man capable of such an undertaking, in complete solitude, the impossibility of the enterprise is highlighted. The evidence of reality imposes itself: such a man does not exist. "L'homme qui ira là et qui rapportera la machine n'existe pas."<sup>83</sup> This passage highlights the vulnerability of man confronting the hostile power of

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<sup>82</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 288.

<sup>83</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 288.

the ocean. Man is described as a helpless “ciron” unable to gather the necessary strength to face an unleashed sea, which has already given proof of its ruthlessness: a boat and its captain have already disappeared, most probably engulfed by the abyss. Hugo lends this unidentified hero every fear known to man: “épouvante”, “angoisse”, “détresse”... He also accumulates the deprivation to which this hero will be exposed: a series of “sans” illustrates Gilliatt’s desperate situation as he is deprived of every basic need. Yet, despite the author’s gloomy predictions, the reality of the danger surpasses these suppositions. No matter how much is the reader prepared for the outcome, reality is still scarier. But Gilliatt rises up to the circumstances...

Unaware of any physical discomfort such as thirst, hunger, cold or heat, Gilliatt functions as if he were part of the marine setting. He eats crabs or shellfish, drinks rainwater collected in the crevices, and finally uses his own clothes for plugging the ship, “colmater” and preventing the water from filling and consequently sinking it. There is no pride in Gilliatt’s behaviour, just the accomplishment of his destiny as he measures his strength against Nature’s own. Once he overcomes the odds and brings the steam engine back to its owner, he does not even claim Déruchette, the woman he loves, as a trophy.

Gilliatt does not only become part of the sea, but similarly to the birds that haunts the seascape, he becomes part of the flock as well as part of the rock. After several weeks of strenuous efforts, he started resembling marine birds that mistook him for one of them, perched on the same rock. Unlike men who were suspicious of his behaviour, birds came to like and accept his presence. When, at the point of reaching his goal, he collapsed from exhaustion, a bird attempted to revive him by pushing him with his beak.



During the episode with the octopus, Gilliatt's body is about to become a source of nourishment for the monster that intended to suck his blood. His body would have then fed the crabs, in the same manner he was feeding on fish from the sea.

A mutual terminology of exchange, a double movement describing the personification of the sea as well as the objectification of man is at stake here. Man is taking a step towards becoming one with the element: it is a movement of "rapprochement" as well as one of symbiosis. Rather than a circular movement, it is a swaying motion of "va et vient" into each other's direction until total fusion is achieved. Yet, it could also be depicted by a circular pattern, enfolding and enclosing the oneness of man and sea, since the perimeter of the circle delineates the symbiosis accomplished through common features.

In the depth of the abyss, if the mermaid is one side of the coin, the octopus is the other side. Both of them attract men to the "bas-fonds", the mermaids by means of their songs, while the "pieuvre", silently but efficiently, by means of its "glissement". So man's destiny is the same, whether attracted by an enchanting voice, or dragged by powerful tentacles. In Gilliatt's case, being aware of all the dangers, well trained by his constant proximity to the sea, he is able to break free from the deadly bondage. In his struggle with the sea, guided by his love as well as his desire for survival, he is saved despite the marks left on his body by the monster. Later on, giving up on his love for Déruchette, choosing her well being over his own, he accomplishes his own destiny by seeking death, and waiting for the moment when he would be shrouded by the waves. In the final image, he remains alive as long as his eyes are set on the ship carrying his beloved, and stops living when the rising tide covers his eyes as the ship disappears... This is the reenactment of his whole life: he lets his solitude, his only dream of love, as well as his last

breath dissolve into the water, and becomes one with the element that nourished him since his mother's death.

Cast aside by Déruchette for being himself: a tough sailor shaped by solitude and by an unpredictable sea, he ends up rejecting himself. Gilliatt also discovers that being accepted by birds and the elements is not sufficient: society and the woman of his choice reject him. Rather than going back to an endless solitude after having hoped for a break, he opts for Déruchette's happiness and chooses to dissolve his own life in this unfathomable depth, maybe in a rendez-vous with another octopus... Gilliatt is a perfect example of symbiosis: the forces of the sea turned into human forces. His fusion with the sea reaches the point of dying and dissolving in it, thus becoming one with it. Hugo describes Gilliatt's gradual disappearance into the depth in several stages: "Gilliatt avait de l'eau jusqu'aux genoux."<sup>84</sup> After covering his knees, the rising tide is now reaching his waist. "Le flot lui arrivait à la ceinture."<sup>85</sup> Gilliatt's immobility during the next hour will bring the water almost to the level of his shoulders. "Elle atteignait presque les épaules de Gilliatt."<sup>86</sup> Now, only his head is visible above the water level: "On ne voyait plus que sa tête."<sup>87</sup> About to disappear and dissolve into the abyss, Gilliatt's eye is depicted as being as deep as the sea: "l'immense tranquillité de l'ombre montait dans l'oeil profond de Gilliatt."<sup>88</sup> By the time the ship carrying his beloved vanished into the horizon, Gilliatt's head disappeared under the water: "A l'instant où le navire s'effaça à l'horizon, la tête disparut sous l'eau. Il n'y

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<sup>84</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 528.

<sup>85</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 528.

<sup>86</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 529.

<sup>87</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 529.

<sup>88</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 529.

eût plus rien que la mer.”<sup>89</sup> Gilliatt, who all his life, drew his strength and his livelihood from the sea as a fisherman, is now returning to the sea in a wish to end his life. This submersion is a flight from the solitude of life, as well as an attempt to seek refuge in the hospitable immensity of the sea.

### 3.3.2. Shaped by the Ocean

The reader witnessed Gilliatt’s symbiosis with the sea, which culminated in his dissolving into the deep liquid element. When did this symbiosis start? What were the similarities between Gilliat and the sea? What was the imprint of the sea on Gilliatt’s life, on his looks, on his behaviour, on his talents? The climatic influence of the sea on Gilliatt’s looks is presented it as a natural phenomenon. The sea and winds had an effect on the color of his skin as well as his appearance: “Mais le hâle l’avait fait presque nègre.”<sup>90</sup> It is as if Gilliatt was wearing the mark of the sea on his face: “Il avait le sombre masque du vent et de la mer.”<sup>91</sup> There is an explicit warning in Hugo’s words: “On ne se mêle pas impunément à l’Océan, à la tempête et à la nuit”<sup>92</sup>. The verb “mêler” indicates a fusion or a symbiosis between the ocean and the character. Gilliatt’s looks are the consequence of his communion with the sea, which also activated his aging process: “à trente ans, il en paraissait quarante-cinq.”<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 530.

<sup>90</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 113.

<sup>91</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 113.

<sup>92</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 113.

<sup>93</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 113.

As far as Gilliatt's talents are concerned, Hugo does not save his praise and admiration, using expressions celebrating a great affinity with the sea: "Pilote né"<sup>94</sup>, "nageur excellent"<sup>95</sup>, "un homme de mer surprenant"<sup>96</sup>. Knowledge and courage were familiar to him: "Il savait tout et bravait tout."<sup>97</sup> The choice of the verb "braver" implies the notion of challenge, as well as it predicts the future behaviour of the protagonist. The author could very well be saying that Gilliatt speaks the language of the sea, just as his brain contains a map of the abyss: "Il semblait, à voir Gilliatt voguer sur les bas-fonds et à travers les récifs de l'archipel normand, qu'il eût sous la voûte du crâne une carte du fond de la mer."<sup>98</sup> According to Hugo, it would be difficult to have more in common with the sea, than Gilliatt does. It is not given to everyone to harbor a map of the sea beneath his skull. It is as if the author is letting the reader know that the sea is constantly present in Gilliatt's mind. Gilliatt is indeed part of the sea throughout his life and particularly at the moment of his death. He continually shares the blessings as well as the curses attached to the sea. Exposed to its ruthless dangers, he manages to conquer and survive until his voluntary death, which he carefully plans in order to exit life gradually, relinquishing all hope for love and happiness.

As the symbol of a misunderstood solitary character seeking refuge into the sea, Gilliatt is undoubtedly a romantic figure. Lonely and melancholic, yet intrepid, he is the representation of the romantic hero, as well as "l'homme de la nature" or more specifically the man of the sea. Reaching for the unattainable, feeling uncomfortable in his own skin and in the society

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<sup>94</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 114.

<sup>95</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 114.

<sup>96</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 114.

<sup>97</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 114.

<sup>98</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 114.

surrounding him, it was probably “le mal du siècle” that drove him to drown himself. Befriended by marine birds, breaking free from the deadly grasp of the octopus, he will finally seek death in “le cimetière océan”<sup>99</sup>, on his own terms.

Depicting the character of Gilliatt and that of Mess Lethierry, the owner of “La Durande” with the same word, Hugo writes: “Gilliatt était un sauvage. Mess Lethierry en était un autre.”<sup>100</sup> Thus, the reader will not be surprised to find common characteristics between the young man and the old sailor. These common features describe a special relationship with the sea as well as an unconditional love for it. Mess Lethierry also had a lot in common with the sea. Underscoring his experience at sea as well as his knowledge of it, Hugo insists that he was unmatched in his relationship with the liquid element. “Mess Lethierry [...] était un matelot terrible. [...] Il n’y avait pas un autre homme comme lui pour savoir la mer.”<sup>101</sup> Moving from Lethierry’s skills as a sailor to his depiction as a challenging force to the elements, Hugo portrays him as a creature of the depth, a mythological beast of his own creation, displaying the strength of a lion whose mane is made of sea foam. “On le voyait de loin dans la rafale, debout sur l’embarcation, ruisselant de pluie, mêlé aux éclairs, avec la face d’un lion qui aurait une crinière d’écume. Il passait quelquefois, [...] cherchant dispute à la tempête.”<sup>102</sup> The author uses again the verb “mêler”, which is an indicative of symbiosis, and which he already used in connection with Gilliatt. According to Hugo, Lethierry’s face was carved by the waves, just like rocks are. He thus appears to be part of the architecture of the sea, shaped by the elements: sea, wind, and storms, and the product of the marine weather: “[...] un froncement partout sur la

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<sup>99</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 105.

<sup>100</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 126.

<sup>101</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 124.

<sup>102</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 124.

figure, une face qui semble avoir été tripotée par la vague et sur laquelle la rose des vents a tourné pendant quarante ans, un air d'orage sur le front, une carnation de roche en pleine mer; [...]”<sup>103</sup>

Not only was Lethierry shaped by his life as a sailor, he was above all a sailor by nature. “Le fond de sa nature, c'était le matelot.”<sup>104</sup> As a seaman, Lethierry was the best: “Pas de meilleur marin que lui,”<sup>105</sup>. Reinforcing his praise of the old sailor, Hugo uses the superlative form along with the negative in order to rule out any comparison. Water was his territory writes Hugo who portrays him like a Lord of the sea or some kind of Poseidon presiding over the liquid kingdom: “L'eau lui appartenait. Il disait: ‘Les poissons sont chez moi.’ En somme, toute son existence, à deux ou trois années près, avait été donnée à l'Océan; ‘jetée à l'eau’, disait-il.”<sup>106</sup> Lethierry spent almost all his life at sea, or “wasted at sea”, as he liked to repeat. The association of Lethierry and the sea led to a similarity in their behaviour. Challenging the sea just as Gilliat did, he never gave up until he had his own way. Not only was he ruthless with the sea, but also with the friends and neighbours he dealt with. He could not bear to be contradicted, either by people or by the ocean. If the sea ever tried to defy him, it would be at its own expense.

“Pourtant jamais un gros temps ne l'avait fait reculer; cela tenait à ce qu'il était peu accessible à la contradiction. Il ne la tolérait pas plus de l'océan que d'un autre. Il entendait être obéi; tant pis pour la mer si elle résistait; il fallait qu'elle en prît son parti. Mess Lethierry ne céda point. Une vague qui se cabre, pas plus qu'un voisin qui dispute, ne réussissait à l'arrêter. { ... } Il ne se courbait ni devant

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<sup>103</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 131.

<sup>104</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 125.

<sup>105</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 183.

<sup>106</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 125.

une objection, ni devant une tempête. { ... } De là son entêtement dans la vie et son intrépidité sur l'océan.”<sup>107</sup>

Like a general who expects obedience from his soldiers, Lethierry expected the waves to obey him. He would never be the one to lower his head in front of a tempest or an argument. His lifelong dealings with the sea caused him to be stubborn as well as fearless.

Challenging the sea created a powerful bond between those two strong will powers: Lethierry and Gilliatt. But as the old sailor started aging, the sea showed its intent to mark points in the struggle, which pitted them against one another. “Durande n’étant plus, Lethierry n’avait plus de raison d’être. Il avait une âme en mer, cette âme venait de sombrer.”<sup>108</sup> Illustrating his attachment to the sea, Lethierry’s despair when the news of the shipwreck of the Durande reached him was such, that he felt that his soul had disappeared in the sea: he had almost lost his purpose in living. The bond between him and the sea was so intense that it could represent something as meaningful as either life or death. He trusted the sea with his soul: “the Durande”, but the sea had betrayed him. He spent his life challenging the sea, and now the sea was getting even.

Another representation of the romantic hero, Lethierry shared his love between his niece Déruchette and his steamboat La Durande. He could only feel peace at night when Déruchette was asleep and Durande was “amarrée”, anchored in the harbour. His romantic dreams went as far as wishing to have the same man serve as a captain for Durande and as a husband for Déruchette. This very same dream suited Gilliatt, but, apparently, Déruchette had her own dream of what her life ought to be...

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<sup>107</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 130.

<sup>108</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 282.

Although writers deal with the fusion of their protagonists with Nature in its entirety, our main concern is the symbiosis with the water. Many people do enjoy a temporary assimilation with the ocean. “Y ahora soy mar”<sup>109</sup> says Chilean poet Vicente Huidobro (1893-1948) in his poem “Altazor”. After describing a symbiosis with several elements of nature: insect, tree, flower, in which he is dissolved, Huidobro reaches finally a complete fusion with the sea. Similarly, the Italian poet Gabriele D’Annunzio describes his whole being as becoming part of Nature in his celebrated poem “Meriggio”, (1902) part of the collection Alcyone. D’Annunzio truly blends with Nature, a phenomenon explored and perfected by Victor Hugo in Les Travailleurs de la mer, studied extensively in this chapter. More audacious than Hugo whose protagonists model their behaviour on that of the ocean, sharing many common features with it, D’Annunzio, moreover, will share life itself. The novelty and boldness of his conception will lead him to desist from human traits, and fully adhere to elemental life. He switches from a human sensitivity to that of the matter.

In order to write about nature, the poet has to experience a special connection to it, closer than that of the average person. Feeling nature to the extent of becoming one with it, D’Annunzio’s poem “Meriggio” justifies the expression “it grows on you”. Usually the writer distances himself from the topic he is discussing. In this case, the distance is deleted as the poet agrees to a symbiosis, which makes him part of nature. Does he remain a sentient entity while exchanging characteristics and properties with the element of his choice? Probably yes, otherwise who would be commenting upon this exchange? In order to reinforce the poetic illusion, the reader will go along with D’Annunzio’s statement: “Perduta è ogni traccia

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<sup>109</sup> Vicente Huidobro, Altazor or a Voyage in a Parachute, (Middletown, Connecticut, Wesleyan University Press, 1988) 28.



dell'uomo",<sup>110</sup> (v. 64-65) which indicates that the poet is losing himself in nature. Before reaching a perfect symbiosis with nature, the poet will make "table rase" of his human nature. As he sheds his human identity, he starts merging with the elements surrounding him. Relinquishing any human concern, the poet becomes nameless. "Non ho più nome."<sup>111</sup> (v. 67) The following lines in "Meriggio" find an echo in Elsa Morante's description of Wilhelm Gerace, Arturo's father, whose aspect and behaviour also recalled the sea to mind in L'isola di Arturo (1957). Here D'Annunzio is gradually integrating himself into a marine image.

e che la mia bionda  
barba riluce  
come la paglia marina;  
sento che il lido rigato  
con sì delicato  
lavoro dell'onda<sup>112</sup> (v. 71-76)

The comparison with Nature mandates the use of the Italian comparative "come", which will soon become a more forceful projection of the poet's being into the natural elements as he repeatedly uses the possessive. In the following statement the comparative is upgraded to "la mia": "e il fiume è la mia vena," The poet declares that the river becomes his blood, that he is the sand, and the algae. He stops being himself, loses his human entity as well as his name, and reincarnates himself into the cosmos.

... io sono nel fuco,  
nella paglia marina,

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<sup>110</sup> Gabriele D'Annunzio, "Meriggio", Alcyone, (Milano, Mondadori, 1988) 105-106.

<sup>111</sup> D'Annunzio, "Meriggio" 107.

<sup>112</sup> D'Annunzio, "Meriggio" 106.

in ogni cosa esigua,<sup>113</sup> (v. 92-94)

The poem culminates into the paradoxal image of the dispersal of his own life and into his assimilation with every form of life surrounding him. Is it a reincarnation? A transmutation?

D'Annunzio, who knows best, concludes:

E la mia vita è divina.<sup>114</sup> (v. 109)

It is indeed a divine state of life.

### 3.3.3. The Taste of the Sea

Is drinking the salty water a way of internalizing the sea? A survey of several literary works may provide an answer, while imparting clarity to this issue. Le Clézio's Daniel plays games with the sea, competes with it, and addresses it in a peer like apostrophe. Like Gilliatt, he feeds on tiny crabs and seashells. His love for the sea pushes him to drink its salty water, over and over again, until he feels a burning crust of salt growing inside his body. Not once does he consider leaving the seaside in order to recover his health or save his life. For Daniel, there is no life away from the sea. He lies still before the sea, knowing that, sooner rather than later, the tide would rise again, and that next time he would not be so lucky as to escape. Was Daniel's end similar to that of Gilliatt's? Most probably, since they both let the tide catch up with them, realizing their dream, and letting the sea have its own way for once, submerging their solitude as well as their love for the sea into the never ending waves...

Mexican poet José Gorostiza (1901-1973) and Chilean Pablo Neruda (1904-1973) both wrote about the taste of salt. The former in a poem entitled "Quién me compra una naranja, and

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<sup>113</sup> D'Annunzio, "Meriggio" 107.

<sup>114</sup> D'Annunzio, "Meriggio" 107.

the latter in “Oda a la sal”. Similar to a lament or a "complainte", Gorostiza’s poem features rhythmic repetitions, conferring to the verse song-like characteristics:

La sal del mar en los labios

Ay de mí !

la sal del mar en las venas

y en los labios recojí. <sup>115</sup> (v. 4-7)

Pablo Neruda, who has already written an ode to the Sea “Oda al mar” describes the saga of the salt, which he addresses as “Polvo del mar” or sea dust. The importance of the salt from the sea to the table is praised as the poet highlights the gastronomical importance of the salt.

Polvo del mar, la lengua

De ti recibe un beso

De la noche marina: (v. 55-57)

[...]

Y así la mínima,

la minúscula

ola del salero

nos enseña

no solo su doméstica blancura

sino el sabor central del infinito.<sup>116</sup> (v. 62 - 65)

The Chilean poet ends his poem with the statement that the modest ingredient is also able to convey the taste of infinitude.

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<sup>115</sup> José Gorostiza, “¿Quién me compra una naranja?”, Twentieth-Century Latin American Poetry, A Bilingual Anthology, Edited by Stephen Tapscott, (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1996) 157.

<sup>116</sup> Pablo Neruda, “Oda a la sal”, Libro de las Odas, (Buenos Aires, Editorial Losada, S.A., 1972) 767

As far as Rafael Alberti (1902-1999) is concerned, he prefers being a “salinero”, or salt collector rather than a simple “marinero”. Although he focuses exclusively on the sea in his poems, he does not forget to include the salt. “Marinero en tierra”, the title of his collection of poems is an indicative of his communion with the sea: “Dejo de ser marinero, / madre, por ser salinero.”<sup>117</sup> (v. 9-10)

While adults have various ways to express dismay, children favor tears in manifesting sadness. It’s probably that which gives tears a bitter taste. In his poem “Mémoire” which is part of the selection Vers nouveaux, Rimbaud (1854-1891) writes “comme le sel des larmes d’enfance,”<sup>118</sup> (v. 1) reminding the reader of the swallowed tears of childhood woes. Le Clézio’s world catches up with Rimbaud’s reminiscence in an attempt to describe the impact of the sea on the child’s behaviour through the example of the protagonists of two of his short stories: Lullaby and Daniel, with whom we have been acquainted before, in this study.

In Celui qui n’avait jamais vu la mer, Le Clézio’s protagonist, Daniel, drinks the salty water, in spite of its harmful effect upon his health. His love for the sea goes beyond life, and beyond any concern for his wellbeing. “Daniel avait soif. Dans le creux de sa main, il prit un peu d’eau et d’écume, et il but une gorgée. Le sel brûla sa bouche et sa langue, mais Daniel continua à boire, parce qu’il aimait le goût de la mer”<sup>119</sup>. The taste of salt causes a burning sensation, which is not harmless; but Daniel insists on drinking it in order to become one with the sea.

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<sup>117</sup> Rafael Alberti, “Marinero en tierra”, Libro del mar, (Barcelona, Editorial Lumen, 1985) 19-20.

<sup>118</sup> Arthur Rimbaud, “Mémoire”, Vers nouveaux, Poésies, Une saison en enfer, Illuminations, (Paris, Gallimard, 1984) 118.

<sup>119</sup> Le Clézio, Jamais vu la mer, 19.

“Mais son corps tremblait encore, et il avait sur toute sa peau, et même à l’intérieur, le goût brûlant du sel, et au fond de ses yeux la tache éblouie des vagues.”<sup>120</sup>

Like Achilles who became invulnerable when his mother dipped him in the Styx, so Daniel hopes to enjoy the protection of the sea. Adding the myth of Achilles to that of Icarus put forth by Jennifer Waelti-Walters whose study was already mentioned in a previous chapter, the reader can witness the child-protagonist, Daniel, as he becomes a sort of sea creature covered with salt inside and out. Like a crab, Daniel is covered by a “carapace dure” or a hard shell made of salt.

[...] Le sel avait pénétré la peau de Daniel, s’était déposé sur ses lèvres, dans ses sourcils et ses cils, dans ses cheveux et ses vêtements, et maintenant cela faisait une carapace dure qui brûlait. Le sel était même rentré à l’intérieur de son corps, dans sa gorge, dans son ventre, jusqu’au centre de ses os, il rongeaient et crissait comme une poussière de verre, il allumait des étincelles sur ses rétines douloureuses. La lumière du soleil avait enflammé le sel, et maintenant chaque prisme scintillait autour de Daniel et dans son corps. Alors il y avait cette sorte d’ivresse, cette électricité qui vibrait, parce que le sel et la lumière ne voulaient pas qu’on reste en place; ils voulaient qu’on danse et qu’on coure, qu’on saute d’un rocher à l’autre, ils voulaient qu’on fuie à travers le fond de la mer.<sup>121</sup>

The ecstasy experienced by Daniel as the salt burns his eyes, his skin, his throat and the inside of his body down to the marrow of his bones, is pushing him to cry. The salty tears, similar to seawater are trickling down his cheeks, and he hides underneath his shirt to protect himself from the ambivalent sea, which can be kind as well as harmful.

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<sup>120</sup> Le Clézio, Jamais vu la mer, 23.

<sup>121</sup> Le Clézio, Jamais vu la mer, 31

Les larmes salées se mirent à couler de ses yeux fermés, lentement, traçant des sillons chauds sur ses joues. Entrouvrant ses paupières avec effort, il regarda la plaine des roches blanches, le grand désert où brillèrent les mares d'eau cruelle. [...] Daniel se pencha en avant sur le rocher plat, et il mit sa chemise sur sa tête, pour ne plus voir la lumière et le sel. [...] <sup>122</sup>

Glowing brightly in the desert-like stretch of white rocks, "les mares d'eau cruelle" refers explicitly to the cruelty of the sea. Could the narrator possibly be alluding to a mirage? Or is it an optical illusion caused by the sunny reflection? Unable to open his eyes, Daniel is overwhelmed by the impact of the seaside. He feels the need to hide, while enjoying the impact of the sea.

Le Clézio himself, in an act of solidarity with his protagonist Daniel, declares: "J'irai jusque dans le sel, au centre de l'Océan, ou bien jusqu'aux poussières d'eau dans les grands nuages gris."<sup>123</sup> Le Clézio justifies the ascending movement as well as the descending one, which go from the clouds to the center of the ocean, carrying his heroes to a communion with nature.

Daniel is not the only one to be attracted to the salt, Lullaby is also becoming gradually part of the sea. Another of Le Clézio's youthful characters, Lullaby experiences a symbiosis with the sea, which represents a release from the worldly notions: "Très vite, la vie se retirait d'elle et partait, s'en allait dans le ciel et dans la mer. C'était difficile à comprendre, mais Lullaby était certaine que c'était comme cela, la mort."<sup>124</sup>

Undergoing a reenactment of the myth of Achilles too, she feels that her body is dissolving in the water and that she is becoming one with the sea: "Lullaby sentait son corps s'ouvrir doucement comme une porte, et elle attendait de rejoindre la mer. Elle savait qu'elle

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<sup>122</sup> Le Clézio, *Jamais vu la mer*, 32.

<sup>123</sup> Quoted by Jennifer Waelti-Walters, *L'évasion impossible*, 126.

<sup>124</sup> Le Clézio, *Lullaby*, 37.

allait voir cela, bientôt, alors elle ne pensait à rien, elle ne voulait rien d'autre.”<sup>125</sup> The previous passage describes the symbiosis Lullaby is about to experience, as well as her ecstatic feelings about it. Confident that the unknown she is about to discover will lead her to become one with the sea.

In order to highlight the significance of the saline distinctiveness of the sea, Le Clézio uses the word “sel” four times in a single sentence. The author’s insistence on the salt reminds us of all the properties of salty water as a cure or a remedy. Yet its appeal to children is another facet of its importance. They seem to merge with the power and beauty represented by the sea, as they are infused with its enticing properties.

Lullaby était pareille à un nuage, à un gaz, elle se mélangeait à ce qui l’entourait. Elle était pareille à l’odeur des pins chauffés par le soleil, sur les collines, pareille à l’odeur de l’herbe qui sent le miel. Elle était l’embrun des vagues où brille l’arc-en-ciel rapide. Elle était le vent, le souffle froid qui vient de la mer, le souffle chaud comme une haleine qui vient de la terre fermentée au pied des buissons. Elle était le sel, le sel qui brille comme le givre sur les vieux rochers, ou bien le sel de la mer, le sel lourd et âcre des ravins sous-marins. Il n’y avait plus une seule Lullaby assise sur la véranda d’une vieille maison pseudo-grecque en ruine. Elles étaient aussi nombreuses que les étincelles de lumière sur les vagues.<sup>126</sup>

Lullaby’s communion with the marine landscape causes her to separate into numerous Lullabies, blending respectively with the light, the air, the sea, the wind, and the salt. Going for a swim, Lullaby conveys her impressions, and the well being she experiences as the cold water envelops

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<sup>125</sup> Le Clézio, *Lullaby*, 38.

<sup>126</sup> Le Clézio, *Lullaby*, 40.

her. Floating for a moment, she lets the waves carry her, and her communion culminates in her impression that she is covered with algae instead of clothes.

Lullaby regarda la mer qui se balançait sous elle, qui cognait la base du roc, en faisant ses remous et ses nuées de bulles filantes. Elle se laissa tomber la tête la première, et elle entra dans la vague. L'eau froide l'enveloppa en pressant sur ses tympanes et sur ses narines, et elle vit dans ses yeux une lueur éblouissante. [...]

Lullaby se laissa porter un instant dans le mouvement lent des vagues, et ses habits collèrent à sa peau comme des algues.<sup>127</sup>

Although she is overwhelmed by the impact of the water upon her, Lullaby is not drowning: she is simply enjoying a symbiosis with the sea.

The characters previously studied: Hugo's Gilliatt, and Le Clézio's Lullaby and Daniel, are all fascinated by the sea, and refuse to be separated from it even if it means death to them. Their symbiosis reaches a note of eternity as their communion with the sea is intensified, thus becoming an irresistible phenomenon beyond any human control.

## **Conclusion:**

Victor Hugo's Gilliatt and Lethierry, Balzac's Etienne, Maupassant's Pierre, were all isolated characters, whose sole relief came from the companionship of a constantly present sea, providing them with inspiration as well as a place in which to live and die. Recollections were reflected by the surface of the water as authors and poets reminisced, lending life to their memories in order to overcome oblivion. The reflection of the intellect: of thoughts, wishes, memories, created new images and sounds on the surface of the water. The sea thus became a

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<sup>127</sup> Le Clézio, *Lullaby*, 54-56.



vehicle for past and present memories, as well as a “point de départ” for other deeper “songs” or “rêveries”. In his poetic essay “La mer au plus près”, Camus describes the sea as a notebook where either the poet or the universe writes, suggesting the immortal dimension provided by the sea, similar to that of Literature. The poetic image of writing on the elusive surface of the water turns the sea into a blank page on which history is written, reflecting everything around it: people and things.

As the human being extended his powers, becoming a hero or a “surhomme”, participating in the life of the marine creatures haunting the seashore, he reached a close communion or rather a symbiosis with the sea. Representing its dichotomy, the polarity of its valence as well as its mutability, he has come to use a poetic language, which could fit man or sea interchangeably. This language shows the closeness of man and sea as it highlights their similarities: “Pendant que je deviens une chose, je sens / Les choses près de moi qui deviennent des êtres.”<sup>128</sup> Victor Hugo thus observes man while he becomes as monstrous as a tempestuous sea: “portentosum mare”<sup>129</sup>, and inversely, as he reaches the magnitude of the sea in its personified and humanized aspect.

Always aware of its attraction, poets directed their heroes to Neptune’s kingdom, with its monsters and mermaids. Pushed by solitude and by an affinity to the characteristics of the sea, getting closer to it, man turned into its replica. Becoming sea brought about a contagious reaction that involved the desire to defy an unleashed sea, or to befriend an enchanting and hospitable one. Wrongdoers feared the sea, which stood as a symbol of justice and punishment. Poets admired the sea; characters such as Le Clézio’s Lullaby, Daniel, and Morante’s Arturo loved its

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<sup>128</sup> Quoted by Gros in le visionnaire de Guernesey, 35.

<sup>129</sup> Hugo, L’Homme, 231.

companionship; Hugo's Gwynplaine was attracted by it, finding more understanding in its depth than in the highest social circles. Balzac's Etienne trusted the sea, so did Hugo's Gilliatt and Maupassant's Pierre, who appeased their jealousy next to it. The proximity of the sea answered the quest of each protagonist. Either as a passport to freedom or liberation, as an identity card, a cradle or a grave, or even as a soulmate for many literary characters the sea has always been there.

It will also be there for those exiles, bemoaning their lost country and their loved ones next to a soothing ocean that will help them to remember pleasant memories and forget others. Yes! Establishing its own temporality, linking the past to the present, anticipating the future like a crystal ball, the sea will always be there...

#### 4. CHAPTER FOUR: A SEA OF EXILE.

“L’exilé partout est seul.”  
Lamennais (1782-1854)

Before planes ever existed, the sea played a major role in the lives of people and nations for ships were the only means of traveling across continents. Ships could bring people together, but could cause their separation as well. While deploring the distance from their native land or their beloved ones, exiles felt restricted by the immensity of the sea, which represented an obstacle to their wishes. “Partir, c’est mourir un peu”, says the popular adage. As a matter of fact, in her novel Corinne ou L’Italie, Mme de Staël (1766-1817) offers an accurate and sensitive description of exile: “Il en coûte davantage pour quitter sa patrie quand il faut traverser la mer pour s’en éloigner; tout est solennel dans un voyage dont l’Océan marque les premiers pas: il semble qu’un abîme s’entr’ouvre derrière vous, et que le retour pourrait devenir à jamais impossible.”<sup>1</sup> According to Mme de Staël, the dimension of the sea, or its “abyss” as described by Hugo, represents an unconquerable obstacle, intensifying the feeling of exile. A few of the literary works studied in this chapter will illustrate Mme de Staël’s statement.

Just like the sea, exile has its ambivalence. Intended to be a punishment, since it signifies separation from loved ones, distancing from one’s country, estrangement and alienation, exile can also represent safety from danger, prosecution or oppression. Yet, its hardships are at times counterbalanced by some advantages. Victor Hugo, for instance, admits that he came out of exile

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<sup>1</sup> Madame de Staël, Corinne ou l’Italie, (Paris, Gallimard, 1985) 29.

“accru”, or enhanced. Out of his deep meditations came forth Les Contemplations, as well as several novels about the sea.

The link between the exile, solitude and the sea is an essential topos in Romantic Literature. However, its importance starts long before. Although the sea is envisioned in various manners in different literary periods, the same awe concerning the sea will surround Romanticism since its early beginnings all the way to the 20th century, with Camus for instance. The fluidity of the sea, its relative freedom of movement coincided with the fluidity of the Romantic language as well as the freedom of literary expression and feelings. Leaving behind the Classical mold with its restrictions and constraints, with its symmetry and geometrical patterns, Romanticism flew on Icarus’ wings, ascended to higher spheres of inspiration, regardless of a potential “chute”. Man’s purpose and behaviour became different and personal. Solitude took on a personal and essential aspect. Nature came to represent a friendly environment in which one could be free from an artificial and restrictive society. Yet, in Paul et Virginie, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre mentions the peacefulness of the Earth, contrasting it with the turmoils of the Sea: “Virginie chantait le bonheur de la vie champêtre, et les malheurs des gens de mer que l’avarice porte à naviguer sur un élément furieux, plutôt que de cultiver la terre qui donne paisiblement tant de biens.”<sup>2</sup>

Not all poets and writers found their reflection in the Sea. It was still a powerful element, but not constantly similar to man. This similitude bloomed with the advent of “le mal du siècle”, which defined man’s nature in function of the elements. Just as the sea, for instance, did not allow obstacles to stand in its way, so man’s quest for an unlimited freedom rejected all boundaries. Solitude became a necessary condition for self-discovery as well as “épanchement”.

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<sup>2</sup> B. De Saint-Pierre, Paul et Virginie, 117.

#### 4.1. Exile Without, Exile Within

Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's novel Paul et Virginie portrays the simple life of his young protagonists and their family. Growing on an island with their mothers and two slaves considered to be part of the family, Paul and Virginie enjoyed a peaceful and rewarding life amidst nature. Before becoming an element of separation, the sea used to be an object of contemplation. Paul's concern for Virginie's well being is obvious as he surrounds her with tender care. Witnessing their friendship, the reader realizes the extent of suffering their separation will cause.

La rivière sur le bord de laquelle ils étaient, coule en bouillonnant sur un lit de roches. Le bruit de ses eaux effraya Virginie; elle n'osa y mettre les pieds pour la passer à gué. Paul alors prit Virginie sur son dos, et passa ainsi chargé sur les roches glissantes de la rivière malgré le tumulte de ses eaux. "N'aie pas peur, lui disait-il,"<sup>3</sup>

Alarmed by the sound of the water, Virginie apprehends crossing the river. Paul does not hesitate to carry her on his back, trying to calm her fear. With authority and kindness, he bids her not to fear the water: Paul's friendship is reassuring for Virginie. As far as Paul is concerned, he is happy to feel protective towards his timorous friend, as they both fill each other's solitude. Virginie's dread of the uproar of the water predicts her tragic end in the shipwreck of the Saint-Géran.

The danger of the water averted, they discover a more serious danger coming from the sea. Virginie is about to leave for France, where she will reside with a rich aunt whose fortune she will eventually inherit. Paul, fearing the grievance of separation, tries to convince her to change her mind by reminding her that she has always feared the sea, probably predicting its

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<sup>3</sup> B. De Saint-Pierre, Paul et Virginie, 101.

forthcoming role in their lives: “Paul lui dit: “Mademoiselle, vous partez, dit-on, dans trois jours. Vous ne craignez pas de vous exposer aux dangers de la mer... de la mer dont vous êtes si effrayée!”<sup>4</sup>

Despite Paul’s despair, Virginie leaves for France, while he remains on the island, broken hearted. The separation is unbearable for the young people who have never been apart before, sharing every moment of their lives. Virginie vows to come back in order to spend the rest of her life with Paul and her family on the island. Invoking the sky, the sea and the air as witnesses, she confirms: “Je le jure par ce ciel qui m’entend, par cette mer que je dois traverser, par l’air que je respire, et que je n’ai jamais souillé du mensonge.”<sup>5</sup>

Paul is still on his native island, but without Virginie, he feels exiled from his tender love, and from what used to be a life of mutual happiness for them. As the ship carrying Virginie disappears gradually in the horizon, Paul feels an unbearable sadness invade his soul.

Ce fut de cette élévation que Paul aperçut le vaisseau qui emmenait Virginie. Il le vit à plus de dix lieues au large comme un point noir au milieu de l’océan. Il resta une partie du jour tout occupé à le considérer: il était déjà disparu qu’il croyait le voir encore; et quand il fut perdu dans la vapeur de l’horizon, il s’assit dans ce lieu sauvage, toujours battu des vents, qui y agitent sans cesse les sommets des palmistes et des tatamaques. Leur murmure sourd et mugissant ressemble au bruit lointain des orgues, et inspirent une profonde mélancolie. Ce fut là que je trouvai Paul, la tête appuyée contre le rocher, et les yeux fixés vers la terre.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> B. De Saint-Pierre, Paul et Virginie, 137-38.

<sup>5</sup> B. De Saint-Pierre, Paul et Virginie, 140.

<sup>6</sup> B. De Saint-Pierre, Paul et Virginie, 142.

Paul's gaze remains focused on the spot where the ship carrying Virginie is but a tiny black spot in the middle of the ocean. Unable to believe that Virginie is gone and that his own exile is really beginning, Paul keeps pretending that he can still see the ship after it has already disappeared. Refusing to acknowledge her departure and her absence, Paul's melancholy is a reminder of Hugo's Gilliatt in Les Travailleurs de la mer, who watches the boat carrying his beloved Déruchette with the same immobility conveying the paralysis of he who remains behind. However Gilliatt's loss of motion is a precursor of his forthcoming death, while Paul's numbness to his plight is rather a psychological death triggered by exile and separation.

Two years go by, during which very few letters are exchanged, and a lot of sadness flows back and forth. An immense nostalgia for the good old days on the island is taking hold of their lives. They both feel the cruel impact of exile. Feeling like a stranger on French soil, Virginie decides to come back to her beloved family whom she misses greatly. On the day of her arrival, Paul waits impatiently for her on the shore. Their "retrouvailles" were to put an end to their exile, but Fate and the sea had decided otherwise. A furious tempest wrecks the "Saint-Géran", the ship on which Virginie is arriving. All passengers jump overboard except Virginie whose modesty prevents from taking off her clothes in order to swim ashore. Besides her separation from Paul, she is enduring a moral exile dictated by her virtuous behaviour that isolates her from the other passengers on board.

Paul s'avança vers le Saint-Géran, tantôt nageant, tantôt marchant sur les récifs. Quelquefois il avait l'espoir de l'aborder, car la mer, dans ses mouvements irréguliers, laissait le vaisseau presque à sec, de manière qu'on eût pu faire le tour à pied; mais bientôt après, revenant sur ses pas avec une nouvelle furie, elle le couvrait d'énormes voûtes d'eau qui soulevaient tout l'avant de sa carène, et

rejetaient bien loin sur le rivage, le malheureux Paul, les jambes en sang, la poitrine meurtrie, et à demi noyé. A peine ce jeune homme avait-il repris l'usage de ses sens qu'il se relevait et retournait avec une nouvelle ardeur vers le vaisseau que la mer cependant entrouvrait par d'horribles secousses. Tout l'équipage, désespérant alors de son salut, se précipitait en foule à la mer, sur des vergues, des planches, des cages à poules, des tables et des tonneaux. On vit alors un objet digne d'une éternelle pitié: une jeune demoiselle parut dans la galerie de la poupe du Saint-Géran, tendant les bras vers celui qui faisait tant d'efforts pour la joindre. C'était Virginie. Elle avait reconnu son amant à son intrépidité.<sup>7</sup>

Standing between Paul and his beloved, continuing their exile and prolonging their separation until eternity, the waves raise their mountains of water. Paul is thrown back ashore while Virginie remains imprisoned aboard the ship mercilessly battered by an unleashed sea. Two movements can be noticed in this passage: on the one hand, Paul's attempt to reach the ship that carries Virginie in order to save her from a certain death, and on the other hand, his struggle with the sea, which throws him back to the shore. In the meantime, stretching her arms towards Paul, Virginie laments the danger to which he is exposing himself. Their solitude is endless: in this impossible encounter, they could see each other, yet could not reach for one another. Like a furious Cerberus, the raging sea kept them apart, preventing a longed for reunion. To Paul, who has been hoping for this moment for about two years, the sea refused his sole wish: embracing Virginie! The sea is holding onto its prey, the Saint-Géran, and will not let go, turning Paul's desperate assault into a lost battle where his vulnerability draws Virginie's pity and concern. That very sea, which took Virginie away from her beloved Paul, remains an unsurmountable

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<sup>7</sup> B. De Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie*, 178-79.



obstacle between them. In this extensive book America and the Sea, A Literary History, Haskell Springer states: “The motif of the drowned woman appears in literature over the centuries and became a romantic archetype with Bernardin de Saint Pierre’s immensely popular and frequently illustrated french novel Paul et Virginie (1789).”<sup>8</sup>

In the Romantic era and beyond, Paul and Virginie do inspire the creation of many other couples whose sole happiness in life resides in their love for one another. For example: Hugo’s Dea and Gwynplaine in l’Homme qui rit; Balzac’s Etienne and Gabrielle in l’Enfant maudit; George Sand’s Ralph and Indiana in Indiana, are all echoes of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s novel. French literature does not have the monopoly of this famous love story, Guido Gozzano (1885-1916), one of the “Crepuscolari”, or twilight poets of the early XXth century in Italy, transposes into verse the story of “Paolo e Virginia”. In a sevenpage poem where the sea is still the setting of the tragic denouement, he relates Paul and Virginie’s plight. Even though Gozzano is ironic of the commonplaces of early Romantic rhetoric, his concise elegy faithfully reflects the feelings of the young people, the shipwreck, Virginie’s death and Paul’s disarray. Gozzano’s musical verse, which conveys the simplicity of natural life as well as the charm of Faith and Virtue, confirms his prominence among the “Crepuscolari”.

When the Ocean refuses to deliver Virginie to her native island or to her beloved ones, Paul, helplessly desperate, watches the tragic demolition of the ship by the frenzied waves: “E non rivedo al chiaro balenare / La nave !.....Il mio singhiozzo / Disperde il vasto singhiozzar del mare.”<sup>9</sup> (v. 134-36) Both Paul and the Ocean are lamenting Virginie’s untimely death. Paul was expecting Love, but instead he is met by Death. In Gozzano’s poem, Paul does not die

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<sup>8</sup> Haskell Springer, America and the Sea, A Literary History, (Athens, Georgia, The University of Georgia Press, 1995) 153.

<sup>9</sup> Guido Gozzano, “Paolo e Virginia”, The Man I Pretend to Be, the Colloquies and Selected Poems of Guido Gozzano, (Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1981) 60.

physically but his heart is dead; he is no longer capable of loving. The Muse of love deserted the poet, and feeling that he has lost a much-needed inspiration, he wishes that things could be otherwise.

#### 4.2. Kidnapping by Sea

Virginie's letters are the sole testimony to her distress during her exile in France. Another exile, Zilia, recounts her story in an epistolary novel by Françoise de Graffigny (1695-1758): Lettres d'une Péruvienne, first published anonymously in 1747, and written nearly forty years earlier than Paul et Virginie. Although the author modeled her work on Montesquieu's (1689-1755) Les Lettres Persanes, she still gave a chance to the *vox femina*. As she criticized the society of her time, she seized the opportunity to convey a feminist's view of life to her audience. Mme de Graffigny portrays a Peruvian princess kidnapped from her native environment during the Peruvian Golden Age, and carried on a ship to France against her will. Leaving behind Aza, her fiancé, Zilia is bewildered by her violent uprooting, as well as by her first trip by ship at sea. Zilia's description of the ship and the sea denotes a total unawareness of the nature of a maritime voyage: "Cette maison, que j'ai jugée fort grande, par la quantité de monde qu'elle contenait; cette maison, comme suspendue, et ne tenant point à la terre, était dans un balancement continuel."<sup>10</sup> Through her alien's gaze, Zilia unveils the peculiarity of sea travel by ship. The ship at sea, unstable and sickening, reflects the image of Zilia's exile. Suffering from the discomforts of seasickness, suggesting nostalgia, Zilia conveys her plight to Aza: "Toute la connaissance que j'en ai, est que cette demeure n'a pas été construite par un ami des hommes:

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<sup>10</sup> Françoise de Graffigny, Lettres portugaises, Lettres d'une péruvienne, et autres romans d'amour par lettres, (Paris, G-F Flammarion, 1983) 266.

car, quelques moments après que j’y fus entrée, son mouvement continuel, joint à une odeur malfaisante, me causa un mal si violent, que je suis étonnée de n’y avoir pas succombé [...]”<sup>11</sup>

The hostility of the sea, rocking the ship and causing the passengers to experience nausea and illness, drives Zilia to emphasize the unfriendliness of this “demeure”. The ship represents the metaphor of exile itself: a no-place, unidentifiable, alien and nauseating.

Exposed to strange and unintelligible customs, Zilia seems to have forever lost her peace of mind. She will discover, later on, the reality of her trip, which will not ease the sorrow of her exile. Describing the sea as “ce terrible élément dont la vue seule fait frémir”<sup>12</sup>, Zilia seems to share the same fears Virginie had towards the sea. Aware of the uncertainty of her fate, she finally realizes her presence aboard a ship: “Je suis dans une de ces maisons flottantes dont les Espagnols se sont servis pour atteindre jusqu’à nos malheureuses contrées, et dont on ne m’avait fait qu’une description très imparfaite.”<sup>13</sup> The movement of the ship wobbling on the waves reminds her of her dislocation: not only is she deprived from a firm ground beneath her feet, but she is also carried away from all the meaningful things in her life. The sea is also held responsible for the Spanish invasion of Peru, as well as its sad consequences for its native people. Confirming the popular French proverb: “Loin des yeux loin du coeur”, the following passage anticipates the “dénouement” of the novel, as Aza, oblivious of his loyalty to Zilia, gets involved in another sentimental adventure developing into marriage. Expressing her disarray, Zilia reacts against the torments of exile according to her own conception: geographical separation as well as emotional alienation may lead to a rupture between her and Aza: “Je suis certaine que l’on m’éloigne de toi; je ne respire plus le même air, je n’habite plus le même

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<sup>11</sup> Graffigny, *D’une péruvienne*, 266

<sup>12</sup> Graffigny, *D’une péruvienne*, 273

<sup>13</sup> Graffigny, *D’une péruvienne*, 273

élément: tu ignores toujours où je suis, si je t'aime, si j'existe; la destruction de mon être ne paraîtra pas même un évènement assez considérable pour être porté jusqu'à toi."<sup>14</sup> Exile presupposes a point of reference: the homeland is embodied into the presence of the loved one: Aza, Paul, and Virginie. Graffigny's originality is to make this point of reference disappear towards the end of the novel. Although Zilia is alone, and separated from Aza, she acquires her independence by learning the French language and, taking charge of her life, she learns to function in France. In the past, Aza was the incarnation of her homeland, whereas now, Zilia's new home is France, since her only link with Peru has vanished, as a consequence of Aza's betrayal. This distinction explains how France can represent exile for Zilia at first, until it replaces a homeland marred by deception and faithlessness.

Commenting on the ordeal of separation, Zilia's laments drive her to envision her own death as a consequence of her solitude and exile. Again, a sea of exile is responsible for this tragedy, as will be the case with Virginie. Zilia will learn to speak, then read and write the language of her captors. Replacing the Peruvian "quipos" or knots by the written word, she is constantly able to relate her distress to Aza, who represents her only hope in life, as well as her only link with her past. Her loyalty to Aza is a reminder of Penelope's weaving, intended to delay her suitor's until the return of Ulysses. As John C. O'Neal mentions in his article "Sensational Aesthetics in Lettres d'une Péruvienne": "In her correspondance, Graffigny calls the Lettres d'une Péruvienne 'her Penelope work'."<sup>15</sup>

Taking a tragic decision aimed at ending the ordeal of her life in exile, Zilia declares her intentions to Aza: "Que la mer abîme à jamais dans ses flots ma tendresse malheureuse, ma vie et

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<sup>14</sup> Graffigny, Lettres d'une péruvienne, 273

<sup>15</sup> John C. O'Neal, "Sensational Aesthetics in Lettres d'une péruvienne", The Romantic Review, Vol. 85, no 3, p.382, note 22.

mon désespoir.”<sup>16</sup> Zilia’s desperate invocation to the sea will be echoed by Bernardin de Saint-Pierre protagonist, Paul, addressing Virginie’s mother who, keen on sending her daughter away, disregards the torments of separation: “Mère barbare! femme sans pitié! puisse cet océan où vous l’exposez ne jamais vous la rendre! puissent ses flots vous rapporter mon corps, et, le roulant avec le sien parmi les cailloux de ces rivages, vous donner, par la perte de vos deux enfants, un sujet éternel de douleur!”<sup>17</sup> Paul’s curse will materialize nearly to the letter, while Zilia’s decision to die in the sea does not effectively take place.

Having dismissed her intention of committing suicide in the sea, Zilia gets gradually accustomed to communicate with her captors: “il m’a fait entendre par des signes qui commencent à me devenir familiers, que nous allons à cette terre,”<sup>18</sup>. In addition to sign language, which is the only means of communication available to the exiled captive, she has the opportunity to learn the meaning of a few basic words:

Depuis deux jours, j’entends plusieurs mots de la langue du Cacique, que je ne croyais pas savoir. Ce ne sont encore que le nom des objets: ils n’expriment point mes pensées et ne me font point entendre celles des autres; cependant ils me fournissent déjà quelques éclaircissements qui m’étaient nécessaires.

Je sais que le nom du Cacique est *Déterville*, celui de notre maison flottante *vaisseau*, et celui de la terre où nous allons *France*.<sup>19</sup>

Zilia is relieved to be able to understand what she is being told, thus making sense of the events surrounding her. Unlike Virginie, who was well versed in the French language, the language

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<sup>16</sup> Graffigny, *Lettres d’une péruvienne*, 274

<sup>17</sup> B. De Saint-Pierre, *Paul et Virginie*, 140.

<sup>18</sup> Graffigny, *Lettres d’une péruvienne*, 276

<sup>19</sup> Graffigny, *Lettres d’une péruvienne*, 277

spoken around her is totally foreign to Zilia; and the reader can detect a childish pride as she conveys to Aza the meaning of the words she has finally come to learn. Yet, she is aware that mastering the language would be her only means for reaching truth and knowledge, thus easing her constant worries. “Le seul usage de la langue du pays pourra m’apprendre la vérité et finir mes inquiétudes.”<sup>20</sup> Her relationship with Déterville is placing her into an equivocal situation, since she finds herself repeating words whose meaning she is not able to comprehend. If we examine the name Déterville, we find that it suggests an uprooting from a city to another, on the other side of the sea of exile. Déterville assumes the responsibility of helping Zilia achieve a smooth transfer from one civilisation to the other.

France represent exile for both the protagonists in Lettres d’une Péruvienne, and Paul et Virginie? Unlike Paul, who remains faithful to Virginie, Aza disappears from Zilia’s life, taking with him the point of reference of a homeland, and putting an end to the feeling of exile that she experienced at first. Zilia refuses to marry Déterville, replacing her vanished homeland with a newly recovered independant identity. The reversal of this essential point of reference, which is a permanent structure in Romanticism, will once more be found in George Sand’s Indiana, (1832).

#### **4.3. Exiled on Either Shore.**

Graffigny’s Lettres d’une Péruvienne and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s Paul et Virginie recount examples of a simple exile: separation from one’s country, one’s customs, loved ones, family and friends. In Zilia’s case, there is the additional exile from one’s language and consequently from the ability to clearly understand the meaning of the surrounding events, which

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<sup>20</sup> Graffigny, Lettres d’une péruvienne, 281

drives her to ask in her ninth letter: “L’intelligence des langues serait-elle celle de l’âme?”<sup>21</sup> In George Sand’s (1804-1876) novel, Indiana, there is a more complex form of exile. Similar to the anguish of “le mal du siècle”, it is an exile from one’s wishes and dreams, an exile whose void one carries within at all times. Like Zilia who has lost everything: home, culture, motherland and finally her beloved Aza, Indiana continues the tradition set by Graffigny before the Romantic era. As a matter of fact, Sand portrays several of her protagonists as they are experiencing this “mal du siècle”, defined by the XIXth century, and attributed to Romantics authors. In “George Sand: Writing for Her Life”, the author, Isabelle Hoog-Naginski, analyzes Sand’s intention: “By identifying her heroine from the first as a kind of female René, Sand was attempting in her first novel to feminize le mal du siècle”<sup>22</sup>. One could say that besides equating a permanent exile, “le mal du siècle” is a sort of “mal de mer” or seasickness, involving nausea, malaise, discomfort, and the sensation of being uprooted everywhere.

Although more arduous for Zilia than it was for Virginie, because of the language barrier, exile has always been intolerable. Zilia and Virginie were not the only ones to cross the sea unwillingly, but were joined by George Sand’s Indiana, a young Creole from “l’île Bourbon” who followed her husband, an aged French colonel, “le colonel Delmare”. Incidentally, the name “Delmare”, meaning “of the sea” or “from the sea” in Italian, could be an allusion to the blustering and tempestuous character of the colonel. Unable to love her domineering husband, she suffers intensely in this imposed exile. Raised by a violent father, surrounded by slaves and having witnessed the injustices of life, she has developed an enduring patience in all circumstances: “En épousant Delmare, elle ne fit que changer de maître; en venant habiter le

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<sup>21</sup> Graffigny, Lettres d’une péruvienne, 279

<sup>22</sup> Isabelle Hoog-Naginski, George Sand: Writing for Her Life, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999) 58

Lagny, que changer de prison et de solitude.”<sup>23</sup> Just as the ship was an uncomfortable prison for Zilia, Indiana’s marriage to Delmare represents a prison as well as the solitude of exile. Another similarity with Grafigny’s Zilia, who was a native Indian from Peru, is found in the name Indiana, which also means “l’indienne”. The young woman, whose health is declining, is transferred from the simple environment of an island to a sophisticated French society. The only links with her past are her servant Noun, and Sir Rodolphe Brown, a cousin who loves her secretly, and watches over her without arousing the colonel’s jealousy. Considering Ralph a father despite his young age, she grows accustomed to his concern for her wellbeing: he reminds Indiana of her youth, of her happiness in the Bourbon Island. Referring to their lifelong friendship, Ralph hopes to free her of her distress: “[...] rappelle-toi l’île Bourbon et notre délicieuse retraite de Bernica, et notre enfance si joyeuse, et notre amitié aussi vieille que toi [...]”<sup>24</sup>

In order to remain near Indiana, Ralph has befriended the colonel Delmare, and he resists interfering in their marital problems. Delmare wants to control Indiana; he expects her to obey him blindly and does not grant her any autonomy. “Il est temps que cela finisse et que vous vous mettiez à vivre comme tout le monde.”<sup>25</sup> He is simply robbing her of her right to be herself. Indiana feels exiled from her true nature and from her origin across the sea, (Indiana) by the man who represents the sea (Delmare). By marriage, Mme Delmare becomes a representative of the sea, which exiles her from her true self and origin. As Ralph notices, her sadness is far from

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<sup>23</sup> Geoge Sand, *Indiana*, (Paris, Gallimard, 1984) 88.

<sup>24</sup> Sand, *Indiana*, 58.

<sup>25</sup> Sand, *Indiana*, 142.



being concealed: “Votre tristesse, votre état maladif, et, comme il le remarque lui-même, vos yeux rouges disent à tout le monde et à toute heure que vous n’êtes pas heureuse [...]”<sup>26</sup>

Mme Delmare brings to France her beauty, her inexperience, her naïveté, as well as her virtuous character. She has always been dreaming of the ideal man who would love her and change her life into an enjoyable experience. Unable to accept the despotic behaviour of an authoritarian husband, she falls in love with a young noble, Raymon de Ramière. Unaware that he was the cause of her sister’s death, Indiana trusts Raymon who tries to seduce her, pretending to be smitten by her charm and cleverly disguising his ambitious need for a trophy.

For the second time, the water will separate Indiana from a lifetime companion: Noun, her sister and servant, drowns herself upon realizing that Raymon is deserting her for a more refined conquest: “[...] madame Delmare était évanouie sur la rive, et le cadavre de Noun flottait sur l’eau, devant elle.”<sup>27</sup> Although she remains unsuspecting of the relationship between Noun and Raymon, Indiana cannot forget the sight of her sister’s body floating on the water, and reminisces constantly about her, causing Raymon fear and remorse. The grief of separation is taking its toll on Indiana’s health.

Aussi depuis l’instant affreux où elle avait, la première, aperçu son cadavre flotter sur l’eau, le repos déjà si troublé d’Indiana, son coeur déjà si triste, avaient reçu la dernière atteinte; sa lente maladie marchait déjà avec activité, et cette femme, si jeune et peut-être si forte, refusant de guérir, et cachant ses souffrances à l’affection peu clairvoyante et peu délicate de son mari, se laissait mourir sous le poids du chagrin et du découragement.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Sand, *Indiana*, 57.

<sup>27</sup> Sand, *Indiana*, 119.

<sup>28</sup> Sand, *Indiana*, 125.

Noun's suicide by drowning is adding to the feeling of exile experienced by Indiana. It is creating a larger void in her life, thus increasing the gap between her and her past, and isolating her from everything familiar or customary. Helpless in front of her sadness and pain, Indiana will allow illness and depression to take over her life, and gradually ruin her health. Later on, rescued by Ralph as she was intending to commit suicide in the Seine, Indiana is about to lose her mind:

“— Eh bien, jurez-moi, reprit Ralph, de ne plus avoir recours au suicide sans m'en prévenir. Je vous jure sur l'honneur de ne m'y opposer en aucune manière. Je ne tiens qu'à être averti;”<sup>29</sup>

Indiana's suicide attempt in the river Seine indicates the presence of a strong link between water, suffering and death, which recurs time and again, the first instance being Noun's death. The reader witnessed Ralph's profound love for Indiana, manifested in his own suicide attempt, when he thought her killed by a boar during a hunting trip. As one admires Ralph's silent restraint, one may resent the injustice of Indiana's contempt for his discerning and compassionate nature. For Indiana, exile is above all a sense of abandonment. It is no longer rooted in a culture or a home, but rather in the absence of the loved one, or in the presence of an abhorred one. Heading for the Bourbon Island, she waits in vain for Ralph to arrive. Fearing the solitude of a life without protection, her worries materialize as the ship sails farther from the coast: “ Elle frémit de songer qu'elle était désormais seule dans l'Univers avec ce mari qu'elle haïssait, qu'il faudrait vivre et mourir avec lui, sans un ami pour la consoler, sans un parent pour la protéger contre sa domination violente....”<sup>30</sup> But Ralph is always there, shattering the threatening solitude, and chasing away the feeling of exile. Indiana hangs onto his reassuring presence, which is filling the void of “destierro” created by the domineering nature of Delmare:

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<sup>29</sup> Sand, *Indiana*, 229.

<sup>30</sup> Sand, *Indiana*, 244.

“— Tu ne m’abandonnes donc pas, toi? lui dit-elle en se jetant à son cou toute baignée de larmes. — Jamais! répondit Ralph en la pressant sur sa poitrine.”<sup>31</sup> The previous dialogue highlights the comforting feeling provided by Ralph’s loyalty and constancy. His devotion to Indiana is a guarantee against the tribulations of life.

Unable to forget Raymon de Ramière, Indiana spent her time amidst nature, enjoying the lush vegetation of the island. Avoiding the sea, because it encouraged her imagination to roam free, she evoked the magical appearance of another land, most probably Paris, since the façade of the Louvre and the towers of Notre-Dame seemed to be rising from the clouds.

Rarement elle descendait dans les gorges de la rivière Saint-Gilles, parce que la vue de la mer, tout en lui faisant mal, l’avait fascinée de son mirage magnétique. Il lui semblait qu’au-delà de ces vagues et de ces brumes lointaines la magique apparition d’une autre terre allait se révéler à ses regards. [...] L’esprit de cette femme s’endormait dans les illusions du passé, et elle se prenait à palpiter de joie à la vue de ce Paris imaginaire dont les réalités avaient signalé le temps le plus malheureux de sa vie. Un étrange vertige s’emparait alors de sa tête.<sup>32</sup>

Caught between her past and her present illusions, she falls prey to “un étrange vertige”. Unable to sort her feelings, and accepting her misfortunes with an endless patience, Indiana lives in a state of confusion. Exiled in her dreams, and also in her imagination, Indiana’s frustration causes her to be constantly ill. Like Grafigny’s Zilia on the ship of exile, Indiana felt nauseated even when on firm ground.

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<sup>31</sup> Sand, *Indiana*, 244.

<sup>32</sup> Sand, *Indiana*, 253-54.

In Sand's novel, there is a movement of "va et vient" between one shore of the sea of exile and the other: Indiana crosses the sea from the Bourbon Island, where she feels exiled, to Bordeaux in France, where she also feels exiled. Then, upon Delmare's bankruptcy, she goes back with him to the Bourbon Island, where she misses Raymon and the buildings of France, feeling more exiled than she ever was. Having read his wife's correspondence with Raymon, as well as her journal addressed to him, Delmare brutally manifests his rage: "...il la saisit par les cheveux, la renversa, et la frappa au front du talon de sa botte."<sup>33</sup> Unable to put up with Delmare's brutality, she escapes by sea, facing more blows to her sensitivity than she could ever imagine. Her solitude, as she waits alone for the boat supposed to take her back to France, is intolerable.

La mer était si mauvaise, et en tout temps est si difficile sur les côtes de l'île, qu'elle commençait à désespérer de la bonne volonté des rameurs chargés de l'emmener, lorsqu'elle aperçut sur les flots brillants l'ombre noire d'une pirogue, qui essayait d'approcher. Mais la houle était si forte, la mer se creusait tellement, que la frêle embarcation disparaissait à chaque instant, et s'ensevelissait comme dans les sombres plis d'un linceul étoilé d'argent.<sup>34</sup>

Looking at an unleashed sea, which she envisions as a possible shroud, she is both relieved and horrified. Wishing to leave Delmare at any cost, the perspective of drowning does not dissuade her from taking the boat. Brutalized by her husband, she may also be assaulted by the sea whose name Delmare carries. This scene seems to recapitulate the turmoils of Indiana's life, as the boat represents salvation as well as danger. The terminology of death used to describe the sea:

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<sup>33</sup> Sand, *Indiana*, 269.

<sup>34</sup> Sand, *Indiana*, 280.

“linceul”, “s’ensevelissait” evokes Indiana’s own life of misery, frustration and malaise. She no longer hesitates, and the boat carries her and her belongings into another adventure at sea: “Le canot emporta Indiana et sa fortune au milieu des lames furieuses, des hurlements de la tempête, et des imprécations des deux rameurs, qui ne se gênaient pas pour maudire tout haut le danger auquel ils s’exposaient pour elle.”<sup>35</sup> Surrounded by the hostility of a dangerous sea, as well as that of the embittered sailors, who consider her the cause of their perils, Indiana realizes the hardship of a situation whose only way out is to seek death by jumping into the sea: “Immobile et muette, Indiana écoutait leurs propos avec épouvante; elle comprenait l’horreur de sa situation, et ne voyait pas d’autre moyen de se soustraire aux affronts qui l’attendaient que de se jeter dans la mer. Deux ou trois fois elle faillit s’élancer hors de la pirogue;”<sup>36</sup>

Indiana’s self-imposed exile is a way of escaping her dissatisfied life with Delmare, and turning toward Raymon de Ramière who is her only hope, she attempts to rejoin him in France. Crossing once more a sea of exile, she is betrayed by Raymon, and is again rescued by Ralph, her guardian angel. Similarly to Aza’s disloyal behaviour towards Zilia, Raymon is but an illusory and deceptive anchorage for Indiana’s feelings. It is a manifold form of exile, which seems to find a solution only in suicide. Suicide by drowning is often contemplated throughout the novel: whenever the protagonists feel that they have no control over the circumstances of their life, their first outlook is towards suicide. It is probably an attempt at putting an end to the feeling of exile, which they no longer can endure. Jumping to one’s death in the water confirm the metaphorical equation of water = death, as well as that of ship = life. Both Ralph and Indiana consider suicide as a solution to their problems. Ever since Noun’s death, Indiana familiarized

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<sup>35</sup> Sand, *Indiana*, 281.

<sup>36</sup> Sand, *Indiana*, 283.

herself with the idea of suicide: “Cette eau verdâtre exerçait une force attractive sur les sens d’Indiana. On s’accoutume aux idées terribles; à force de les admettre, on s’y plaît. Il y avait si longtemps que l’exemple du suicide de Noun apaisait les heures de son désespoir, qu’elle s’était fait du suicide une sorte de volupté tentatrice.”<sup>37</sup> Indiana’s myriad of problems made suicide appear to her as an easier endeavour than living. She was tempted by it every once in a while, attracted by the thought of putting an end to her distress. Watching the greenish water of the pond, she reflected on the dilemma of living or dying. As far as Ralph was concerned, his attraction to suicide leads him to choose the particular spot in which he wishes to join his fate to that of Indiana’s: “Je vais donc vous dire le lieu où le suicide m’est apparu sous son aspect le plus noble et le plus solennel. C’est au bord d’un précipice, à l’île Bourbon; c’est au haut de cette cascade qui s’élançe diaphane et surmontée d’un prisme éclatant dans le ravin solitaire de Bernica.”<sup>38</sup> Here, suicide is described as a flight or “envol” rather than a fall or “chute”. The beauty of the chosen site enhances the elevation of suicide: a torrent, a waterfall, amidst the luscious vegetation of the island of Bernica. Although Delmare’s death will bring together Ralph and Indiana, there will still be a lot of debating around suicide; but they will finally opt for a fulfilling life together. Realizing how necessary they are to each other, they will overcome their feeling of exile by reuniting their solitudes near the water. The conclusion of the story comes from a traveler who, after spending a few days with Ralph and Indiana in Bernica, is overwhelmed by their happiness and serenity: “— Oui, lui dis-je, un coeur pur peut nous faire supporter l’exil; mais, pour nous le faire aimer, il faut une compagne comme la vôtre.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Sand, *Indiana*, 227.

<sup>38</sup> Sand, *Indiana*, 307.

<sup>39</sup> Sand, *Indiana*, 343.

Who is the author of the following speech? Is it Virginie, describing her childhood with Paul? If not, who else could it be?

Vous ne savez donc pas que sa mère était la soeur de la mienne; que nous sommes nés dans la même vallée; que son adolescence a protégé mes premiers ans; qu'il a été mon seul appui, mon seul instituteur, et mon seul compagnon à l'île Bourbon; qu'il m'a suivie partout; qu'il a quitté le pays que je quittais pour venir habiter celui que j'habite; qu'en un mot, c'est le seul être qui m'aime et qui s'intéresse à ma vie?<sup>40</sup>

Surprisingly enough, it is but Indiana describing her relationship with Ralph: his constant care, his unfaltering friendship, his love and concern. Ironically, she is describing a love she is unaware of until the very end. Apparently, the couple, Ralph and Indiana, seem to be a repetition of Paul and Virginie. According to Maryline Lukacher, who wrote an article "La Communauté à venir: La Fiction Sandienne entre 1832 et 1845", Sand, by mentioning Paul and Virginie in the last chapter, indicates a distancing from suicide and a return to childhood.

C'est la double lecture que Ralph et Indiana donnent du roman Paul et Virginie (1788) qui institue le malentendu textuel d'Indiana: "Quand je vous lisais l'histoire de Paul et Virginie, vous ne la compreniez qu'à demi. Vous pleuriez cependant; vous aviez vu l'histoire d'un frère et d'une soeur là où j'avais frissonné de sympathie en apercevant les angoisses de deux amants. Ce livre fit mon tourment alors qu'il faisait votre joie."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Sand, Indiana, 155-56.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted by Maryline Lukacher, in "La Communauté à venir: La Fiction Sandienne entre 1832 et 1845", Romanic Review, 1990, p. 416.

Maryline Lukacher highlights the misunderstanding that lasted until the last chapter, when both Ralph and Indiana became free to choose a new and meaningful life together, turning their back on a preplanned suicide in the “torrent” and facing a new dawn in Ralph’s favorite spot, the island of Bernica. Evoking Indiana’s childhood in the island of Bourbon, Sand’s protagonist, Ralph, divulges to her that “j’étais seul chargé de veiller sur vous, et je me trouvais plus heureux que Paul.”<sup>42</sup> Indiana offers an explicit projection of Paul et Virginie recurring ever so often in Ralph’s dialogue with Indiana.

Although previously neglected by most critics, Grafigny’s Les Lettres d’une Péruvienne are an enlightening sub-text and intertext to Indiana. As I have attempted to establish, the similarities between the XVIIIth century novel and the XIXth century one are frequent and overwhelming. The vox femina of both protagonists rise above the roaring of the waves, describing the frustrating conditions of their lot in life imposed by an oppressive society. Both Zilia and Indiana offered the reader the sight of a life buried into an infinite exile, either physical or moral: for women, the feeling of exile in a male-dominated society is similar to “le mal de mer.” Held accountable for exile, kidnapping and alienation, the sea witnessed all these wasted lives finding the courage to convey their suffering to future generations.

#### **4.4. Prisoners of the Sea**

Alfred de Vigny, one of the first French Romantics, combined sensitivity and Stoicism in his memorable poems, novels, plays and short stories. In his last book, Servitude et grandeur militaires, (1835) where the paradoxical aspect of military life is explored, Vigny advocates “la religion de l’honneur”. A noble himself, Vigny felt in exile in post-revolutionary France. His

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<sup>42</sup> Sand, Indiana, 320.



protagonist, captain Renaud, after almost drowning, finds himself aboard the Victory, a ship under the command of Admiral Collingwood. The latter happens to know Renaud's father who was also an officer in the naval army, and treats the son with kindness and affection.

In a chapter entitled "Un homme de mer", Vigny conveys to the reader different forms of exile: that of Collingwood who, surrounded by the sea, finds himself unable to reach his fatherland or his family; and that of captain Renaud who can neither escape, nor cope with the overwhelming feeling of geographical as well as cultural exile enfolding him. As far as captain Renaud is concerned, he is distressed to be a war prisoner rather than a hero, and leaning on the deck at night, the young Frenchman wonders about his future. In this no man's land, which is the sea of exile, the young man finds himself deprived of a country, claimed by no one, and in a place where survival is rather precarious.

La frégate filait rapidement, toutes voiles dehors, et je ne la sentais pas aller. J'avais appuyé mes deux mains à un câble et mon front sur mes deux mains, et ainsi penché, je regardais dans l'eau de la mer. Ses profondeurs vertes et sombres me donnaient une sorte de vertige, et le silence de la nuit n'était interrompu que par des cris anglais. J'espérais un moment que le navire m'emporterait bien loin de la France et que je ne verrais plus, le lendemain, ces côtes droites et blanches, coupées dans la bonne terre chérie de mon pauvre pays. — je pensais que je serais ainsi délivré du désir perpétuel que me donnait cette vue et que je n'aurais pas, du moins, ce supplice de ne pouvoir même songer à m'échapper sans déshonneur, supplice de Tantale, où une soif avide de la Patrie devait me dévorer pour

longtemps. J'étais accablé de ma solitude et je souhaitais une prochaine occasion de me faire tuer.<sup>43</sup>

Prisoner of the victorious Englishmen, whose cries are resounding everywhere, Renaud's heart is bleeding for his country. The depth of the sea is increasing his feeling of exile, and the nearby French shores are giving him the nostalgia of his fatherland. The "sorte de vertige", yet another reminder of Zilia's nausea, which occurs as the Frenchman leans over the sea, is caused by the mysterious attraction of the unknown as well as the density of his thoughts pulling him down. It is the sensation one experiences just before losing one's balance.

Unable to escape since he is a prisoner of honor, he compares himself to Tantalus who died from thirst in his useless attempt to drink from a pierced barrel. Ironically, the aforementioned example of Tantalus suggests the idea of lacking water in the middle of an ocean. Vigny likens the need for one's country to the need for water, a life-giving element, and exile is represented as an unquenchable thirst for one's land. As one could die of thirst, one could also die from being deprived of one's homeland. Death is considered here as a relief from the grievance of exile, and the young prisoner is looking for the first opportunity to seek death in order to be saved from both the solitude of exile and the temptation of flight. This wish for death is the culmination of an attitude of passive obedience to the point of self-sacrifice. Renaud's unhappiness at sea is expressed in the terms he uses to describe his love for the beloved land of France, "la bonne terre chérie de mon pauvre pays." It is as if the sight of France is calling him, inspiring him to do anything just to be able to reach the land of his country. Apparently there is an antagonism between land and sea, two different elements on which man can dwell: the latter that is holding him prisoner, and the former that is calling upon him to free himself.

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<sup>43</sup> Alfred de Vigny, *Servitude et grandeur militaires*, (Paris, Robert Laffont, 1959) 197-98.

Hugo's statement in L'Homme qui rit: "La mer paie impôt à l'Angleterre" as well as "tout appartient à l'Amiral d'Angleterre"<sup>44</sup>, could apply to Captain Renaud's situation, as he considers himself to be on hostile territory. Everything around him evokes the maritime supremacy of England: the language spoken, and even the name of the ship "the Victory" is cruelly reminding him of French defeat as well as British victory. Incapable of hating his captors, who treat him with the utmost civility, the young Renaud is torn between his love of country and his affection for Collingwood. The latter ultimately becomes a father figure to Renaud.

The sea is a place claimed by the enemy: the protagonists find themselves in captivity. Indiana, for example, was considering herself Delmare's captive; Zilia, kidnapped by the French at sea, was also Déterville's captive, and so is Renaud a prisoner on a British ship. The moral confinement in which he dwells turns the immensity of the sea into the walls of a cell, thus generating an abysmal solitude. Both the vanquished and the victor in Vigny's book encountered the hostility of the sea. Going back to "the Victory", where Renaud laments his exile as well as the defeat of his countrymen, the reader will have now the opportunity to examine the feeling of exile, as it is experienced by the commander of the victorious naval army, Admiral Collingwood.

Vous n'êtes prisonnier que depuis un mois, reprit-il, et je le suis depuis trente trois ans. Oui, mon ami, je suis prisonnier de la mer; et elle me garde de tous côtés, toujours des flots et des flots; je ne vois qu'eux, je n'entends qu'eux. Mes cheveux ont blanchi sous son écume, et mon dos s'est un peu voûté sous leur humidité. J'ai passé si peu de temps en Angleterre, que je ne la connais que par la carte. La Patrie est un être idéal que je n'ai fait qu'entrevoir, mais que je sers en esclave et qui augmente pour moi de rigueur à mesure que je lui deviens plus

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<sup>44</sup> Hugo, L'Homme, 269.

nécessaire. C'est le sort commun et c'est même ce que nous devons le plus souhaiter que d'avoir de telles chaînes; mais elles sont quelquefois bien lourdes.<sup>45</sup>

His own experience of life at sea enabled Collingwood to judge Renaud's distress. Comparing the span of the young Frenchman's exile to his own, he reaches the conclusion that he is indeed a prisoner of the sea. Surrounding him at all times and in all places, the waves fill his eyes, as their sound fills his ears. His endless sojourn at sea is causing Collingwood's hair to turn grey, as well as his back to bend. The monotony of the seascape is triggering a sort of lassitude that appears in the repetitious waves: "toujours des flots et des flots". Such external emptiness allows the reader to understand why the image of the sea is used to represent exile: nothing of what I want is here to be seen or heard. The external emptiness leads to an internal void: following the examples of Zilia and Indiana, Renaud and Collingwood are now experiencing this feeling of solitude and exile. Collingwood's forceful images convey the bitterness of exile, as he emphasizes his allegiance to a fatherland he has only known on the map. He has not experienced the warmth of hearth and home, since he is constantly stranded on foreign waters, away from his land. His country seems to take advantage of his devotion, and expects him to continue the sacrifice of his feelings for the sake of duty. Collingwood complains of the burdensome chains of servitude, binding him to his duty towards England.

The sea is seen here as a restrictive force rather than a liberating element. Despite his youth, Renaud is seized by pity as he realizes the extent of Collingwood's solitude in his "prison flottante"<sup>46</sup>. He describes the admiral's life as "cette vie sacrifiée et isolée"<sup>47</sup>, even before listening to the father's laments about being separated from his family. As a matter of fact,

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<sup>45</sup> Vigny, *Servitude*, 198-99.

<sup>46</sup> Vigny, *Servitude*, 201.

<sup>47</sup> Vigny, *Servitude*, 201.

Collingwood evokes the battle, which was engaged on the day his youngest daughter was born. He complains about his inability to be closer to his children, to effectively monitor their development, and above all he bemoans his absence from their life. He expects this absence to cause his daughters' indifference for someone who is never there. "On n'aime pas un invisible."<sup>48</sup> The prisoner of the sea, the grieving father continues his laments: "Oui, Sarah ne s'est jamais assise sur mes genoux que lorsqu'elle avait deux ans, et je n'ai tenu Mary dans mes bras que lorsque ses yeux n'étaient pas ouverts encore."<sup>49</sup>

Collingwood, the broken hearted father, hiding his distress underneath the rigor of duty, expresses his concerns about his daughters' sadness and their joy, his worries about their future as they mature into adults. He cannot help wondering about their future love, marriage, and so on... "Eh bien! Tout cela n'est rien parce qu'elles ne me voient pas."<sup>50</sup>

Claiming in vain his right to rest, Collingwood was repeatedly told: "L'Angleterre répondait: 'Vous resterez en mer, toujours en mer.'<sup>51</sup> Death, more humane than England, finally put an end to his everlasting exile, and Captain Renaud recounts this outstanding man's end: "Il mourut en pleine mer, comme il avait vécu durant quarante-neuf ans, sans se plaindre ni se glorifier, et sans avoir revu ses deux filles."<sup>52</sup> Obviously, too many sacrifices were standing between Collingwood and the sea: his whole personal life and emotions were at stake. Borrowing and editing a French proverb, he concludes that "Il n'y a pas de belle prison."<sup>53</sup> The sea, often

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<sup>48</sup> Vigny, *Servitude*, 202.

<sup>49</sup> Vigny, *Servitude*, 202.

<sup>50</sup> Vigny, *Servitude*, 202

<sup>51</sup> Vigny, *Servitude*, 207.

<sup>52</sup> Vigny, *Servitude*, 214-15.

<sup>53</sup> Vigny, *Servitude*, 214.

represented as a symbol of justice, identity, and above all liberation, is standing here for restriction, incarceration, and exile.

Writing as a philosopher rather than a historian, Vigny gave the reader a poignant overview of “la religion de l’honneur”, although a source of stoic strength and dignity, yet nevertheless isolating its proponents into a moral exile. In the poem “La maison du Berger”, Vigny condenses his ideas into a single representative verse: “J’aime la majesté des souffrances humaines;”<sup>54</sup> assessing it as follows: “Ce vers est le sens de tous mes poèmes philosophiques: l’esprit d’humanité; l’amour entier de l’humanité et de l’amélioration de ses destinées”<sup>55</sup> Twice exiled, firstly as part of the nobility in post-revolutionary France, and secondly as a proponent of “la religion de l’honneur”, Vigny thus spoke of solitude and exile with the authority of a personal experience.

#### **4.5. Bouncing from one Ship to the Next**

Throughout Vigny’s Servitude et Grandeur militaires, lurks the shadow of the man behind the French Conquests and European wars: Napoleon! Comparing or confronting him with prominent historical figures such as Pope Pius VII and Collingwood, frequently to the Emperor’s detriment, Vigny allows the reader to witness exceptional imaginary situations portraying Napoleon as a “charlatan” as well as an ambitious general whose craving for glory is never satisfied. However, rather than relating to the powerful period of his life, this study focuses on the fallen Emperor, his exile as a solitary man who struggles for survival away from his country, family and glorious past, in the middle of the ocean. Considered to be the romantic hero par

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<sup>54</sup> Vigny, “La maison du berger ”, Poèmes, 226.

<sup>55</sup> Alfred de Vigny quoted by Keith Wren in Les Destinées, (London, Grant & Cutler, 1985) 55.

excellence, immortalized by painters and sculptors everywhere, the French Emperor also gained literary fame as the author of an autobiography: Les Mémoires de Sainte-Hélène.

Numerous distinguished authors studied the image of Napoleon, and endless volumes were compiled in order to grasp the human as well as the historical reality of his character. Yet, the eye focusing on Napoleon is dilated either by immoderate love or excessive hatred. Alessandro Manzoni, Victor Hugo, and José María Heredia y Heredia, Italian, French and Cuban writers respectively, emphasized the polarity of Napoleon's destiny in poems commemorating the Emperor's death, and expressing different degrees of devotion to his image. Later on, Cuban author José Martí clearly defined his hatred of "el Bonaparte infame" in his poem "En torno al marmól rojo".

Historians have endlessly compiled documents about the fallen Emperor's last days. The Count de Las Cases, one of Napoleon's companions of exile, faithfully reported the minute details of the daily life of the Emperor as well as his conversations with him. The French Consul to St. Helena, Gilbert Martineau, wrote several books recounting the journey at sea to St. Helena as well as the confinement of the Emperor and the loathsome conditions leading him gradually to his death. Jean-Paul Kauffmann also wrote about the Emperor's life on the secluded island, adding a subtle note on the temporality of exile, which will be cited later in this chapter.

This "Prometheus enchained" as Napoleon described himself, has given more than a sleepless night to his British jailer, Hudson Lowe, who feared his evasion; for Napoleon was to become "the one who always came back". Having escaped once before from Elba, Napoleon could no longer be trusted by the British. In the aftermath of the Waterloo debacle, Napoleon surrendered to his bitterest enemy: England. What was Napoleon's request? To be allowed to lead a simple life on British soil. What were England's plans concerning him? St. Helena...

According to Las Cases who closely shared the Emperor's misfortunes from the moment he left France until he landed on St. Helena, jotting down relentlessly each detail and every word, the British ministers took the following action:

Ils arrêterent de reléguer leur hôte au milieu de l'Océan, de le retenir captif sur un rocher, à deux mille lieues de l'Europe, loin de la vue et de la communication des hommes: on eût dit qu'ils eussent voulu confier aux angoisses de l'exil, aux fatigues du voyage, aux privations de tout espèce, à l'influence mortelle d'un ciel brûlant, une destruction dont ils n'osaient pas se charger eux-mêmes.<sup>56</sup>

What were Napoleon's feelings about St. Helena? "*Quant à l'île de Sainte-Hélène, c'est l'arrêt de ma mort*"<sup>57</sup> says Napoleon to Lord Keith as he first learns of his destination in an official letter signed by Lord Melville on July 28<sup>th</sup>, 1815. Protesting time and again, Napoleon invokes the hostility of the weather, his inability to adjust to such climate, the difficulty of going horseback riding on an exiguous island. That last detail is a reminder that he was a general who, unlike the British, led his troops into combat on the ground rather than on the water: "J'ai l'habitude de faire, chaque jour, vingt lieues à cheval. Que pourrai-je faire sur ce petit rocher, à l'autre bout du monde? Le climat est trop chaud pour moi. Non, je n'irai pas à Sainte-Hélène: [...] J'aime mieux la mort que Sainte-Hélène, et à quoi vous servirait ma mort?"<sup>58</sup> For a general whose military power was mostly on the ground, for a man who needs to go horseback riding daily, this is not only an exile, but a "destierro" as well. It infers an uprooting from the earth, and the need to readjust to a new life surrounded by the sea. Napoleon stepped down from the security of a stable and firm ground to the insecurity of an ever-changing sea, degrading his

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<sup>56</sup> Emmanuel de Las Cases, *Mémoires de Sainte-Hélène*, t.1, (Paris, Garnier Frère, 1961) 62

<sup>57</sup> Gilbert Martineau, *Napoléon se rend aux Anglais*, (Paris, Hachette, 1969) 212.

<sup>58</sup> Martineau, *Napoléon se rend*, 213.



authority from that of an Emperor to that of an undesirable and troublesome prisoner. Even before reaching St Helena, Napoleon was already a prisoner of the sea. What happens afterwards is the exchange of one prison for another: from the ship to the rock. In both cases, the waves are the walls of the prison as well as the gaolers: “il y en avait déjà près de trois mois que nous occupions notre cachot de bois, et les instructions précises des ministres étaient de nous y retenir jusqu’à ce que notre prison à terre fût prête.”<sup>59</sup> According to Las Cases, the “wooden dungeon” is the ship where the Emperor was detained for seventy days from the moment he left the English Channel to the moment the Northumberland anchored in Saint James Bay. Hugo lamented Napoleon’s captivity on St. Helena in his poem “Les deux îles”: “On l’exposa vivant sur un roc solitaire; / Et le géant captif fut remis par la terre / A la garde de l’Océan.”<sup>60</sup> (v. 86-88) As Victor Hugo describes so accurately: Napoleon was entrusted to the ocean. The word “terre” here has a double meaning: it could be the Earth itself who wishes to get rid of Napoleon by dispatching him to the sea; and it could also allude to everyone on Earth, such as all the European countries, forming a coalition against him. On his way to the “roc solitaire” of St. Helena, also described as a “peñasco silencioso” by Heredia y Heredia, as well as a “breve sponda” by Manzoni, Napoleon was a prisoner on British ships. From the island of Aix where he left France to the harbour of Portsmouth where he approached England; from the Bellerophon to the Northumberland, the most famous prisoner was kept at sea despite the discomfort he experienced, and most importantly despite his frequent protests. British authorities congratulate themselves about their decision to confine Napoleon to “that interesting rock”, as appears in the letter from Count Gneiseneau to Hudson Lowe in 1817. They are convinced that they have done

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<sup>59</sup> Las Cases, Mémoires de Sainte-Hélène, t. 1, 163

<sup>60</sup> Hugo, “Les deux îles”, Odes et Ballades, (Paris, Gallimard, 1964) 159.

so for the common good of Europe: “Des milliers de fois j’ai pensé à cet intéressant rocher sur lequel vous êtes le gardien de la paix de l’Europe.”<sup>61</sup> Letters flowed back and forth, carrying strict commands to prevent the prisoner from stepping on either French or British soil, thus keeping him bouncing from one ship to the next. Such behaviour prompted Chateaubriand to exclaim in his posthumous work Les Mémoires d’Outre-Tombe: “Que de précautions pour garder un seul homme, au milieu des mers!”<sup>62</sup>

The sea becomes witness to the most unusual and painful exile: not only the rupture from the homeland, from family and friends, but from civilisation as a whole; not just from glory, but from hierarchical rank and social status: from all-powerful Emperor to defeated General. Severing the most essential human ties, it’s simply a gradual decrescendo, which is a first step towards death. This general without an army was surrounded by a handful of faithful men, who vowed to follow him to the confines of the Earth. Upon hearing that the final destination of the Emperor would be St. Helena, the Count of Las Cases (1766-1842) stated in his Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène, on July 31<sup>st</sup> 1815: “Notre situation était affreuse, nos peines au-delà de toute expression; nous allons cesser de vivre pour l’Europe, pour notre patrie, pour nos familles, pour nos amis, nos jouissances, nos habitudes:”<sup>63</sup> For Napoleon, as for Vigny’s Renaud on Collingwood’s ship, the sea is British territory. Apparently, England repeats the same words addressed to Vigny’s Collingwood, to Napoleon: “Vous resterez toujours en mer.”<sup>64</sup> They prevented him from stepping on British soil. They subjected him to a permanent exile, as a foretaste of the ultimate exile: death!

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<sup>61</sup> Gilbert Martineau, La vie quotidienne à Sainte-Hélène au temps de Napoléon, (Paris, Hachette, 1966) 30.

<sup>62</sup> Quoted by Martineau, La vie quotidienne à Sainte-Hélène, 126.

<sup>63</sup> Las Cases, Mémorial de Sainte Hélène, t.1, 45

<sup>64</sup> Vigny, Servitude, 207.

Feared by the authorities in both France and England, Napoleon still managed to fascinate the common man. Las Cases mentions in his writings: “L’arrivée de l’Empereur y avait créée une curiosité qui tenait de la fureur;”<sup>65</sup> He follows by a detailed description of the boats surrounding the Bellerophon in order to look at the Emperor. The number of boats wishing to see Napoleon was so large that it covered the surface of the water, transforming it into land. The characteristic aspect of a crowd is not usually found on the water, yet, in this particular case, it was:

On savait qu’il paraissait toujours vers les cinq heures sur le pont; quelque temps avant, tous les bateaux se groupaient à côté les uns des autres, il y en avait des milliers; leur réunion serrée ne laissait plus soupçonner la mer, on eût cru bien plutôt cette foule de spectateurs rassemblés sur une place publique [...] On s’était contenté de regarder d’abord, on avait salué ensuite, quelques-uns demeuraient découverts, et l’on fût parfois jusqu’à pousser des acclamations;<sup>66</sup>

Thus, the Emperor of the French is becoming a remarkable sight to be stared at by the crowds, such as a “saltimbanque”. Before boarding the Bellerophon, the Emperor is seen carried on a sailor’s shoulders to the boat taking him to the British ship. The reason behind such scene is probably the perilous and unleashed waves that seemed to oppose this voyage: “[...] un Empereur des Français, fuyant sa patrie sur les épaules d’un simple matelot, des flots démontés qui semblaient s’opposer au départ, la masse sombre d’un vaisseau battant l’enseigne blanche de l’ennemi et les lignes sveltes des frégates arborant encore le pavillon tricolore.”<sup>67</sup> The image of Napoleon, being carried on the sailor’s shoulder to the raft taking him to the Bellerophon, could

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<sup>65</sup> Las Cases, Mémoires de Sainte-Hélène, t. 1, 42

<sup>66</sup> Las Cases, Mémoires de Sainte-Hélène, t. 1, 42

<sup>67</sup> Martineau, Napoleon se rend, 112-113.

induce one to think that he is not boarding the ship voluntarily. However, despite the semblance, he is doing it of his own free will, without being compelled by anyone. This will not be the case when he is transferred from the Bellerophon to the Northumberland, knowing with certainty that his final destination will be St. Helena, despite his reiterated protests.

How did Napoleon spend his time on the British ship, for nearly three months? First of all, Napoleon's thirst for knowledge materializes in applying himself to study English in order to emulate Las Cases's son: "J'avais imaginé d'apprendre l'anglais à mon fils: l'Empereur à qui je parlais de ses progrès, voulut l'apprendre aussi."<sup>68</sup> After "ennui" settles in, the lessons were left aside. Secondly Napoleon's deep knowledge of the affairs of the sea appeared in his conversations with the Admiral of the ship, who jotted down the Emperor's words:

On m'a assuré que l'amiral écrivait avec soin tout ce qu'il pouvait recueillir. S'il en est ainsi, ce que l'Empereur a dit un de ces jours, à dîner, sur la marine, nos ressources dans le Midi, celles qu'il avait déjà créées, celles qu'il projetait encore sur les ports, les mouillages de la Méditerranée, et que l'amiral écoutait avec cette anxiété qui redoute l'interruption, tout cela composera pour un marin un chapitre vraiment précieux.<sup>69</sup>

Finally, the most important step taken for breaking the monotony of the sojourn on the ship was the dictation of the Emperor to Las Cases.

Nous avançons toujours avec le même vent, le même ciel et la même température. Notre navigation était des plus monotones, mais elle était fort douce; nos journées étaient longues, mais le travail les faisait passer. L'Empereur me

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<sup>68</sup> Las Cases, Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène, t. 1, 98-99

<sup>69</sup> Las Cases, Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène, t. 1, 99

dictait désormais régulièrement ses campagnes d'Italie, je tenais déjà plusieurs chapitres.<sup>70</sup>

Proud to have been able to convince the Emperor to begin such a procedure, Las Cases felt that he was documenting History, and elicited several jokes on Napoleon's part. Anticipating the unfolding of events, Napoleon used to tease Las Cases about his role as a memorialist, writing about the significant occurrences in the French Empire, as well as the details of the Emperor's life:

'on ne pourra jamais s'arrêter sur nos grands évènements, écrire sur ma personne, sans avoir recours à vous,' [...] 'On dira: Après tout il devait bien le savoir, c'était son conseiller d'Etat, son chambellan, son compagnon fidèle. On dira: Il faut bien le croire, il ne ment pas, c'était un honnête homme, etc.,'<sup>71</sup>

History was thus written on board the British ship, in an attempt to break the tedious and uniform flow of time. With the approval of Napoleon himself, and his confidence into his trustworthy companion, Las Cases, each step of the Emperor's exile would thus be recorded for generations to come.

A few colourful events, recorded by Las Cases in Le Mémorial de Sainte Hélène, stood out in the monotony of the days. Similar to a Halloween at sea, a ceremony took place on the ship:

C'était la cérémonie que nos marins appellent le baptême, et que les Anglais nomment le jour de *grande barbe*. Les matelots, dans l'appareil le plus burlesque, conduisent en cérémonie, aux pieds de l'un d'eux, transformé en Neptune, tous

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<sup>70</sup> Las Cases, Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène, t. 1, 129

<sup>71</sup> Las Cases, Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène, t.1, 130

ceux qui n'ont point encore traversé la Ligne; là un immense rasoir vous parcourt la barbe, préparée avec du goudron; des seaux d'eau dont on vous inonde aussitôt de toutes parts, les gros éclats de rire dont l'équipage accompagne votre fuite, complètent l'initiation des grands mystères;<sup>72</sup>

Ruling the Empire of the sea, Neptune reigns over the passengers on board the ship, including Napoleon, who submits to the ruling power of the sea. The reader is able to observe a reversal of power, as the French Emperor becomes a prisoner of the sea as well as a subject of Neptune. Another incident bordering on tragedy was the catch of a huge shark. The story is best recounted in Las Cases' own words:

Un de ces jours, dans l'après-midi, les matelots prirent un énorme requin; l'Empereur voulut savoir la cause du grand bruit et de la confusion arrivés subitement au-dessus de sa tête, et, sur ce qu'il apprit, il eut la fantaisie d'aller voir le monstre marin: il monta sur la dunette, et s'en étant approché de trop près, un effort de l'animal, qui renversa quatre ou cinq matelots, faillit lui casser les jambes; il descendit, le bas gauche tout couvert de sang; nous le crûmes blessé, ce n'était que le sang du requin.<sup>73</sup>

It was thus a false alert: the Emperor was safe and sound. The victim was the shark caught by the sailors.

#### **4.6. Exiled from a Glorious Past**

Worrying about a vain idleness, which promises to be his lot once he disembarks on St. Helena, Napoleon shares his concern with Las Cases. To the Emperor's question: "Que pourrai-

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<sup>72</sup> Las Cases, Mémoires de Sainte-Hélène, t. 1, 131

<sup>73</sup> Las Cases, Mémoires de Sainte-Hélène, t.1, 132

je faire sur ce petit rocher, à l'autre bout du monde?"<sup>74</sup> Las Cases answers: "Sire, nous vivrons du passé"<sup>75</sup>. Las Cases' words suggest that by recording the past, one would be writing for posterity. Since the present is put into a halt, and the future is somehow blocked into a state of vacuity, nothing remains but the past, which yielded so much glory for a single life. Defining the sojourn of the Emperor on the island, Las Cases' answer may indicate that while the waves served as an isolating element, they would, at the same time, be an element of connection to the past. Through its power of reflection, its connectivity to different ways of life, the sea could also be a reminder or an agent conducive to bitter reminiscences, described by Baudelaire as: "le souvenir amer".

Written in 1821 but published much later, Manzoni's "Il Cinque maggio", which earned Goethe's admiration, is an objective account of Napoleon's exceptional life, expressing the author's pity and admiration. Desisting from any criticism of the deceased Emperor, blaming the outrageous accusations that followed him until his very end, Manzoni's sadness at the time of Napoleon's death prompted him to write this poem two days after reading the news in the Milan Gazette. Manzoni likens exile to a shipwreck: just as there is no future for the shipwrecked, there is no hope for the exile.

Come sul capo al naufrago  
l'onda s'avvolve e pesa,  
l'onda su cui del misero,  
alta pur dianzi e tesa,  
scorrea la vista e scernere

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<sup>74</sup> Martineau, Napoleon se rend, 213.

<sup>75</sup> Las Cases, Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène, t.1, 49

prode remote invan;  
tal su quell'alma il cumulo  
delle memorie scese!<sup>76</sup> (v. 61 - 68)

The weight of the waves on the head of the wrecked is as heavy as the weight of past memories on the soul of the exiled Emperor. Although he tries to raise his head over the water, searching the horizon for any hope for salvation, it proves to be a vain attempt since he is dragged down by the weight of his desperate reminiscing into an abyss of despair. No matter how hard he tries to find an issue, there is no hope.

There is a reversal between the past and the present. In the past, Napoleon used to dominate the wave with his gaze, while in the present he is drowning under the wave of reminiscences or souvenirs. He is tamed by his past, which weighs down on him just like the wave is weighing down on the shipwrecked. The accumulation of past memories is the obstacle standing in the way of salvation, as it presses down on his soul.

In Les Travailleurs de la mer, Hugo, in an image similar to that of Manzoni, presents the plight of the shipwrecked, exiled in a strange spot, experiencing the despair of the unknown as well as the distress of solitude: "Pour le nouveau venu sorti d'un naufrage et faisant là un stage dans la destinée inconnue, quelquefois l'accablement de ces solitudes est profond;"<sup>77</sup> Without being an Emperor, the shipwrecked shares a common anguish with humanity. Although he does not have a dazzling past, he still dwells on cherished memories, which are absent from his present life. Hugo emphasizes the solitude and uneasiness of the unknown fate of the exile. The

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<sup>76</sup> Alessandro Manzoni, "Il Cinque Maggio", Liriche e tragedie, a cura di Lanfranco Caretti, (Milano, Mursia, 1985) 53-54.

<sup>77</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 74.



term “accablement” suggests a heavy weight, which is a reminder of Manzoni’s “ il cumulo delle memorie” which is dragging down the exile as if he were a shipwrecked.

In La Chambre noire de Longwood: Le voyage à Sainte-Hélène, Jean-Paul Kauffmann describes the corrosive effect of time on the well being of the famous exile. In a setting of exile, the whisper of temporality accompanied by invariability, tedium and monotony can weigh down heavily on the morale of the exile. He compares it to the ocean’s roll or the thundering of the sea, although it is more menacing and unsettling, targeting those who lead solitary lives. Kaufmann thought it necessary to compare Longwood to Hauteville–House, thus joining two destinies marked by the cruelty of exile. According to the author, the presence of Napoleon in Longwood as well as that of Hugo in Guernesey is still lingering around. The man, who had the greatest political influence on France, and he, whose influence was social and literary, both endured the torments of exile. This common experience allowed Hugo to feel and convey Napoleon’s consternation at feeling abandoned on St. Helena. As suggested by Kauffmann, it proves to be an intellectual as well as a physical prison:

Longwood est un lieu hanté. Je ne connais qu’une autre demeure qui impose avec autant de force la perception du passé: Hauteville House, à Guernesey, repaire lui aussi inquiétant de l’exil et de la solitude. Les divagations, la déraison tourmentent encore chambres et corridors. La présence de Victor Hugo est si intense qu’on a l’impression de s’être introduit par effraction dans le sombre univers des *Contemplations*.<sup>78</sup>

The link between Napoleon and Hugo suggests a study of the French poet’s assessment of exile in some of his works.

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<sup>78</sup> Jean-Paul Kauffmann, La Chambre noire à Longwood: Le voyage à Sainte-Hélène, (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1997) 18-19.

#### 4.7. A Frenchman in Exile

If Hugo has understood exile so well, it is because he lived in exile himself and was able to describe it in several of his works. The separation, the alienation, the bitterness, he experienced it all. In Les Travailleurs de la mer, Hugo describes the ordeal of a newcomer to the island of Guernesey:

Il y a dix ou douze ans, un Français, débarqué depuis peu à Guernesey, rôdait sur une des grèves de l'Ouest, seul, triste, amer, songeant à la patrie perdue. A Paris, on flâne, à Guernesey, on rôde. Cette île lui apparaissait lugubre. La brume couvrait tout, la côte sonnait sous la vague, la mer faisait sur les rochers d'immenses décharges d'écume, le ciel était hostile et noir.<sup>79</sup>

As the reader can assume, the newcomer, who is no other than Victor Hugo himself, cannot help comparing Guernesey to Paris, to the detriment of the former. Similar to Napoleon, Hugo is also tormented by both an inner feeling of solitude and an outer sense of exile. The use of disparaging terms such as “lugubre, hostile” in describing the island, highlights its unpleasant climate; whereas the epithets “seul, triste, amer,” indicate the depth of the exile’s suffering.

Where was Napoleon exiled? Wasn’t he on an island, prisoner of the “porte-clefs anglais”, and consequently on British soil? Can a Frenchman, much less an Emperor, survive on British territory?

Ce Français avait le sentiment qu’il était en Angleterre; il ne savait pas un mot d’anglais; [...] le Français sentait poindre en lui cet épaissement du deuil intérieur qui commence la nostalgie; il regardait, il écoutait; pas un rayon; des cormorans en chasse, des nuages en fuite; partout sur l’horizon une pesanteur de

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<sup>79</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 74.

plomb; un vaste rideau livide tombant du zénith; le spectre du spleen dans le linceul des tempêtes; rien nulle part qui ressemblât à l'espérance, et rien qui ressemblât à la patrie; ce Français songeait, de plus en plus assombri; tout à coup il releva la tête;<sup>80</sup>

Hugo saw nothing but antagonistic surroundings confining his spirit and increasing his solitude. A prey to nostalgia, the poet experienced despair and alienation, appearing in his morbid vocabulary: “deuil”, “livide”, “spectre” and finally “linceul”. There is neither the slightest hope, nor the slightest customary feeling. Isn't that exiled Frenchman, dwelling in idleness like Napoleon, acting the same way as the fallen Emperor? How does he fill his days? Well, “il regardait”, “il écoutait”, and finally “ce Français songeait”. Wasn't Napoleon also recollecting his past? Wasn't he looking at the sea surrounding the island, and listening to the roaring of the waves? Although written in 1866, long after Hugo's poem “Les deux îles” which was written in 1825, and “LUI”, in 1828, Les Travailleurs de la mer contains an elaborate description of exile that could only stem from personal experience. Was Hugo comparing himself to Napoleon during his exile when he wrote this novel? Was he visualizing himself in Napoleon's place as he commemorated the Emperor in “LUI”? Answering both questions in the affirmative explains Hugo's sensitive analysis of the problem of exile, as well as his ability for sharing the Emperor's plight.

According to Hugo, Mess Lethierry, the protagonist of Les Travailleurs de la mer, an experienced sailor who spent his whole life at sea, combined all his loves and interest into one great “patrie” or homeland: the Ocean. In this case, the “destierro” is not being removed from land; and being at sea does not represent exile for him, but “repatriation”, to use Alba Amoia's

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<sup>80</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 74.

terminology in her study on Camus: “Mess Lethierry était guernesiais, c’est-à-dire normand, c’est-à-dire anglais, c’est-à-dire français. Il y avait en lui cette patrie quadruple, immergée et comme noyée dans sa grande patrie, l’Océan.”<sup>81</sup> What was this quadruple homeland? Hugo describes his hero as a citizen of the world, as a sailor who had travelled all seas: “Il avait navigué dans les grandes mers, dans l’Atlantique et dans le Pacifique, mais il préférait la Manche. [...] Il y était né et voulait y mourir.”<sup>82</sup> The ocean, acting as a link between all these different countries, represented Mess Lethierry’s homeland, despite his different origins, as well as the various languages he could speak. Perhaps Hugo, comparing himself to his hero, as far as his extensive travels are concerned, emphasizes the attachment to one’s land, and the reluctance to be exiled from it. Hugo’s lament in “Napoléon II”, a poem from Les Chants du Crépuscule: “Ah! N’exilons personne. Ah! L’exil est impie.”<sup>83</sup> (v. 124) is an indicative of the torments of exile, which he personally experienced.

#### **4.8. Personal Exiles**

##### **4.8.1. The Descent of the Eagle**

An older cousin of the Parnassian French poet José-Maria de Hérédia, José María Heredia y Heredia was considered by many to be the first Hispanic Romantic poet. As a matter of fact, he combined a neo-classical form with a romantic content. Two of his essentially romantic characteristics are: Heredia y Heredia’s “humanitarian attitude inherited from the

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<sup>81</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 126.

<sup>82</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 125-26.

<sup>83</sup> Hugo, “Napoléon II”, Les Chants du Crépuscule, Les voix intérieures, Les rayons et les ombres, (Paris, Gallimard, 1964) 48.

eighteenth century French Enlightenment,” and “his skill in expressing nature’s moods in relation to his own.”<sup>84</sup> Leading the life of an exile himself, Heredia y Heredia wrote about his own exile in “Himno del Desterrado”, about the Ocean in “Al Oceano”, and also about prominent political figures such as Washington, Bolívar and Napoleon, celebrating their deeds in poems and prose essays dedicated to them.

Celebrated as “el cantor del Niágara”, for his famous poem “Niágara”, he lamented the distress of the exile in his verse: “! Ay! Desterrado, / sin patria, sin amores, / solo miro ante mí llanto y dolores!”<sup>85</sup> (v. 109-111) Heredia y Heredia laments his uprootedness. His choice of words to describe exile evokes his disconnection from the earth altogether. He could very well be at sea, since he is not on his native land. How long did Heredia’s exile last? In “Al Oceano”, expressing his love for the ocean, he greets it after eleven long years of absence: “!salve! felice torno a saludarte / tras once años de mortal ausencia.”<sup>86</sup> (v. 11-12) In the same poem, the Cuban poet is relying on the ocean to take him back to his fatherland and to his loved ones. Entrusting his sadness and hope to the waves, he expects the ocean to carry him back to his loving family, thus ending his exile:

A las orillas de mi fértil patria  
tú me conducirás, donde me esperan  
del campo entre la paz y las delicias,  
fraternales caricias,

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<sup>84</sup> John E. Englekirk et al, An Anthology of Spanish American Literature, Volume 1, ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1968) 129.

<sup>85</sup> Heredia, “Niágara”, Antología, 33.

<sup>86</sup> Heredia, “Al oceano”, Antología, 70-2

y de una madre el suspirado seno.<sup>87</sup> (v. 16-20)

Heredia y Heredia's originality lies in his verse bursting with love for the ocean. We are a long way from Grafigny, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, or Sand where the sea was seen as a negative element rather than a positive one. For Paul and Virginie, Zilia, and Indiana, the sea was a dangerous element representing exile and death. In Heredia's verse, on the contrary, his love for the ocean nearly reaches the extent of being the object of a cult: "Amarte y admirarte fué mi destino / desde la edad primera."<sup>88</sup> (v. 91-92) In "Himno del Desterrado" the sea plays also a political role: "Que no en vano entre Cuba y España / Tiende inmenso sus olas el mar."<sup>89</sup> (v. 111-12) It is not vainly that the sea stretches its immensity between Cuba and Spain: it is for the purpose of forming a barrier between the land where a tyrant dwell, and a free one. That same idea of the political role of the sea will be explored again by Heredia y Heredia in his sonnet on Napoleon. How did Napoleon survive his solitary exile? Heredia y Heredia, succinctly, recounts the defeat: "Cómo cayó?... Vencido, abandonado, / En un peñasco silencioso expira / Dando ejemplo a los déspotas terrible."<sup>90</sup> (v. 9-11) Contrasting Napoleon's past glory with his present solitude, which amplifies the grievance of exile, the Latin poet refrains from focusing on his moral exile. If he had concerned himself with Napoleon's personal distress during his exile, he would have had to show some pity towards him, which he did not wish to do. Thus the death of the Emperor comes as a quick solution to his detention, as it relieves Heredia y Heredia, from the necessity of pitying him. The word "peñasco", meaning a rock, suggests the image of

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<sup>87</sup> Heredia, "Al oceano", Antología, 70-2

<sup>88</sup> Heredia, "Al oceano", Antología, 70-2

<sup>89</sup> Heredia, "Himno del Desterrado", Antología, 52

<sup>90</sup> Heredia, "Napoleón", Antología, 30.

Prometheus, who was tied to a rock while an eagle devoured his liver, as a divine punishment for stealing the sacred fire from the gods. The solitude of exile is also accompanied by a silence, which increases the Emperor's sense of isolation. The loneliness of defeat, the desertion, the tiny island on which he dies, as well as his exemplified demise are all mentioned in the space of one and a half verse. The transition between the glorious career and the solitary detention appears in the form of a question: "Cómo Cayó?" Comparing Napoleon to a flying eagle whose fall is inevitably fatal, Heredia y Heredia describes both the flight and the fall in an image, which could be a reminder of the myth of Icarus. It also suggests the transfer from freedom to confinement. Alluding to a "chute" from glory to defeat, from vastness to constraint, from happiness to misery, the Cuban poet reminds us of several examples of deadly falls in the water. As a matter of fact, Napoleon is not only exiled, he is a prisoner as well, locked up in an exiguous island and surrounded by the sea. Just like Vigny's British admiral, Collingwood, the sea is restricting his movements; the waves are watching over his solitary life; their wailing is replacing friendly voices; and the emperor's imagination is constantly racing from the past to the present. Consistent with his beliefs, Heredia y Heredia could not possibly waste his pity on the French Emperor, because he was more inclined to celebrate democratic heroes such as George Washington and Simon Bolivar.

#### **4.8.2. The last voyage of Simon Bolívar**

Compared to Napoleon Bonaparte, often to the detriment of the latter, Bolivar is considered by many to be "El Libertador". Heredia y Heredia, Juan Montalvo, as well as numerous authors praised the general whose mythical solitary end was reported by García Márquez, leaving the reader rather depressed by the turn of events. Dedicated to as well as

inspired by Alvaro Mutis whose predilection are novels in a sea setting, García Márquez's El general en su laberinto relates a fictional biography of Simón Bolívar, focusing on the general's last voyage up the Río Magdalena from Santa Fé de Bogotá to San Pedro Alejandrino. Bolívar's life reflects both past and present: a past glory, and a lonely present. Just like Napoleon, his glorious past accentuates his helplessness. Bolivar took pride in the fact that he refused to be crowned like Napoleon did, and did not pursue personal glory. Yet, there are many similarities in their destiny, and particularly the solitude of their exile.

How did Simon Bolivar spend his last days? According to Columbian author García Márquez, a short time before his death, the "Libertador" spent the loneliest time in his life, undermined by illness, forgotten by his followers, and surrounded by the sea on the island of San Pedro Alejandrino. His internal exile manifested itself in an alternation of past memories, forgetfulness, and coughing bouts. Trapped by illness and cornered by death, he listens to the nostalgic songs of solitary slaves, reaching him from the sugar mills. Just as Hugo and Balzac's protagonists spend a solitary life listening to songs reflecting the sound of the sea, so does Simón Bolívar, García Márquez's hero in El general en su laberinto. In an attempt to improve Bolívar's health, his nephew Fernando had a band from Mamatoco playing for a whole day under the tamarind trees. The music triggered immediate and effective results: "El general reaccionó de buen modo a la virtud sedante de la música. Se hizo repetir varias veces La Trinitaria, su contradanza favorita..."<sup>91</sup> (The General responded well to the calming effect of the music. La Trinitaria, his favorite contredanse [...])<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Gabriel García Márquez, El general en su laberinto, (Bogotá, Columbia, Editorial Oveja Negra, 1989) 263.

<sup>92</sup> Gabriel García Márquez, The General in his Labyrinth, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990) 64



The solitary moribund beating the measure with his head is indeed a morbid sight: “ Estaba envuelto en una sábana blanca, más demacrado y ceniciento que después de la muerte, y llevaba el compás con la cabeza erizada por los troncos del cabello que le empezaba a renacer. Al final de cada pieza, aplaudía con la decencia convencional que aprendió en la ópera de París.”<sup>93</sup>

(He was wrapped in a white sheet, more emaciated and ashen than after death, and he kept time to the music with his head, which was bristling with a new growth of hair. After each piece he applauded with the conventional propriety he had learned at the Paris Opera.)<sup>94</sup>

His sophisticated life in the past is accentuating his helplessness. Evoking the Paris Opera contrasts enormously with the simplicity and the rusticity of his present life. Bolívar’s life reflects both past and present: a past glory, and a lonely present. Carried by the aroma of the sugar factory of San Mateo, memories come flooding by... But the general knows that he is about to die, and his gaze observes the clock, which is racing inexorably towards the ineluctable moment: “la cita ineluctable del 17 de diciembre a la una y siete minutos de su tarde final.”<sup>95</sup>

(The ineluctable appointment at seven minutes past one on his final afternoon of December 17.)<sup>96</sup>

Adopting Napoleon’s favorite gesture, Bolívar, another romantic and solitary hero awaits death, listening to the last songs he would be able to hear:

“Entonces cruzó los brazos contra el pecho y empezó a oír las voces radiantes de los esclavos cantando la salve de las seis en los trapiches, y vio por la ventana el diamante de Venus en el cielo que se iba para siempre, las nieves eternas, la

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<sup>93</sup> García Márquez, *El general*, 263.

<sup>94</sup> García Márquez, *The General*, 264.

<sup>95</sup> García Márquez, *El general*, 266.

<sup>96</sup> García Márquez, *The General*, 267-68.

enredadera nueva cuyas campánulas amarillas no vería florecer al sábado siguiente en la casa cerrada por el duelo, los últimos fulgores de la vida que nunca más, por los siglos de los siglos, volvería a repetirse.”<sup>97</sup>

(Then he crossed his arms over his chest and began to listen to the radiant voices of the slaves singing the six o’clock *Salve* in the mills, and through the window he saw the diamond of Venus in the sky that was dying forever, the eternal snows, the new vine whose yellow bellflowers he would not see bloom on the following Saturday in the house closed in the mourning, the final brilliance of life that would never, through all eternity, be repeated again.)<sup>98</sup>

Admiring Augustin Iturbide’s voice, which enchanted him, Bolívar sometimes joined him in his singing. Feeling the power and omnipotence of the sea, the general travelled the river on a sampan, reconstituting his past as he proceeded. Wherever he landed for a few days rest, the sea was always there, surrounding him, imposing its dampness on the atmosphere, and forcing his health to pay the toll. Suffering from numerous illnesses, he also had to face a diminishing vision, which trapped him in his solitude and pushed his imagination to substitute dreams and illusions to a blurred reality. He was aware that he could not expect much hope from medicine. Fighting an overwhelming pessimism with the wisdom of his past experience, he unwittingly took refuge into his past. Nestling so well in the cocoon of the past, he ended up not knowing where he stood at the present moment. Illusions, hallucinations accompanied him as his health sank deeper and deeper into a hopeless abyss. In every port, he was chased by past recollections, and at times the fusion of the past with the present, left him into a state of bafflement.

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<sup>97</sup> García Márquez, *El general*, 267.

<sup>98</sup> García Márquez, *The General*, 268.

### 4.8.3. Far away from “Il Greco mar”

Whereas islands usually represent exile, in Foscolo’s case, the longing is for a particular island, which also happens to be his native land. It is a Greek homeland, which he celebrates in Italian as he expresses his nostalgia for his birthplace, Zacinto. Although Foscolo’s Le Ultime Lettere di Jacopo Ortis is in great part autobiographical, it nevertheless explores the solitude of an exile not always connected to the sea. Ortis goes from one place to the other conveying to the reader the worries surrounding his feeling of exile. As presented by Mario Fubini in his extensive study Ugo Foscolo, the personal exile of the early Romantic Italian poet is expressed in two famous sonnets, firstly “A Zacinto” and secondly “In morte del fratello Giovanni”. In “A Zacinto” the sonnet’s incipit is a pessimistic lamentation on the separation of exile.

Né più mai toccherò le sacre sponde,  
Ove il mio corpo fanciulletto giacque,  
Zacinto mia, che te specchi nell’onde  
Del Greco mar da cui vergine nacque  
  
Venere, e fea quelle isole fecunde  
Col suo primo sorriso, onde non tacque  
Le tue limpidi nubi, e le tue fronde<sup>99</sup> (v. 1-7)

The poetic “ne più mai” renders the eternity of separation: the poet will never be able to set foot on the shores that witnessed his birth; unlike Ulysses, celebrated for his fame and adventures,

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<sup>99</sup> Ugo Foscolo, “A Zacinto”, Le ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis, Poesie e Carmi, (Milano, Rusconi, 1987) 273-74.

who was able to kiss the ground of his native island Ithaca. There is a widening of the horizon going from the waters surrounding Zacinto, to the whole Mediterranean where Ulysses travelled from one adventure to the other. That very “Greco mar” which reflects the beauty of Zacinto, has also witnessed the birth of Venus. The image of the “fanciulletto” also expands from a helpless child to the mature poet able to sing the beauty of his island. The reader goes from a tiny spot of land in Greece to the whole mythological background of its people, represented by Ulysses.

L’inclito verso di colui che l’acque

Cantò fatali, ed il diverso esiglio

Per cui bello di fama e di sventura

Baciò la sua petrosa Itaca Ulisse.<sup>100</sup> (v. 8-11)

Fubini underscores the difference between those two exiles: “Quanto diverso quell’esiglio!”<sup>101</sup> Fubini cannot help wondering whether it was the fault of the poet or that of Fate. The sonnet opens and ends with the consideration of the poet’s unfortunate condition of exile. Vast and inexorable is the sea – a distance in both time and space – that separates the poet from the joyful days of his childhood and his homeland; and tragic is the premonition of never being able to return, die or be buried there, where family and friends would undoubtedly shed tears on his grave. Foscolo suggests that Venus, with her birth from the Aegean sea and her first smile bestowed upon Zacinto, transmitting life-giving power to his native Greek islands: “e fea quell’isola feconde / col suo primo sorriso”. Evoking the mystery of Venus’ marine birth has the effect of conferring a hopeful as well as a longing quality to the poem. The thought of Venus reminds the poet of Homer, whose verse created and celebrated the character of Ulysses.

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<sup>100</sup> Foscolo, “A Zacinto”, Le ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis, Poesie e Carmi, (Milano, Rusconi, 1987) 273-74.

<sup>101</sup> Mario Fubini, Ugo Foscolo, (Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1962) 152.

Condemned to years of perilous traveling and wandering away from his island, acquiring knowledge and experience through his tribulations, the Greek hero acquired a greater stature than that of the average man, leading Foscolo to identify with him. The Gods granted Ulysses, the blessing to kiss the ground of his beloved Ithaca, “bello di fama e di sventura / baciò la sua petrosa Itaca Ulisse”, while Foscolo predicts no return for himself. Thus the distance created by mentioning Venus’ mythical birth from a legendary sea, is confirmed in the end as one that cannot be filled or bridged, one that sanctions the absolute solitude of the poet.

Persecuted by the gods, Ulysses, despite severe dangers and exhausting adventures, is able to return to his fatherland, whereas Foscolo is marked by a fatality separating him eternally from his all too human wish to return to his native island. Unable to do as much as Ulysses, he can only cry for his beloved island “O materna mia terra”, as he visualizes a fateful and solitary end, since no one will cry over his tomb: “illacrimata sepoltura.” Already, in his “oeuvre de jeunesse”, Le Ultime Lettere di Jacopo Ortis, Foscolo has his hero worry about the exile’s death in a foreign land, and about the fate of his ashes. “O illusioni! e chi non ha patria, come può dire lascierò qua o là le mie ceneri ?”<sup>102</sup> This is an early manifestation of the Foscolian “fatalismo” or his belief in predetermination.

The nostalgia and tenderness appearing in the use of the possessive, as in “Zacinto mia” and “O materna mia terra”, will also be repeated as “O fratel mio” in the poem “In morte del fratello Giovanni”. Foscolo’s life is described here as a kind of flight, however not so much from one country to the next, as from one different group of people to the other. This particular description of exile justifies the apostrophe “Straniere genti” toward the end of the poem. The fate of the two brothers is joined by a common and hopeless absence: exile and death. In

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<sup>102</sup> Ugo Foscolo, Le ultime lettere, 64.

Foscolo's first letter of Le ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis, there is the same concern about an uncertain death and burial, which is a reminder of "In morte del fratello Giovanni". "Il mio cadavero almeno, non cadrà fra braccia straniere, [...] e le mie ossa poseranno su la terra de' miei padri."<sup>103</sup>

In his sonnet "Meritamente, però ch' io potei", the poet, in the first quatrain, compares the lover's cries and laments to the furious waves that batters the Alps, as he claims that his tears are being lost in the winds blowing over the Tyrrhenian sea. Nature overwhelms the poet's suffering to the extent that he feels his vulnerability in front of their magnificence. According to Carducci, Foscolo's sonnet contains, impressive metaphors derived from the marine landscape of the Tyrrhenian Sea, such as the waves and the winds. Foscolo's exile is mentioned in this sonnet, as it is everywhere in his works, as he longs for his "bel paese"<sup>104</sup>.

#### **4.8.4. Obsession with the Sea**

Having studied the pre-romantic dimension of exile as well as its romantic version or "mal du siècle", a patriotic exile embodied by Vigny's Collingwood, and finally Foscolo, Heredia, Napoleon, Hugo and Bolivar's personal exiles, it may be interesting to examine Camus' attachment to the sea. The presence of the sea in Camus' writing is significant throughout his literary production, particularly in La chute, L'Exil et le Royaume, La Peste, L'Etranger, Le Premier homme, as well as his Carnets, and Journaux de voyage. Whenever solitude appears, the sea cannot be too far behind. As was mentioned before, Camus's feelings for the sea, for instance, indicate that Romanticism extended its shadow into the XXth century, although tinged

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<sup>103</sup> Foscolo, Ultime lettere, 53

<sup>104</sup> Foscolo, "Meritamente pero ch'io potèi", Ultime lettere, 267

with other transitory currents such as realism and surrealism. Although Camus' obsession with the sea permeates most of his writing, as does the feeling of exile, it is particularly moving in an essay entitled "La mer au plus près" subtitled "Journal de bord", where his feelings are condensed. Strikingly formulated, his devotion to the sea has a great impact on the reader, who is confronted with a new type of imagery as well as an unusual relationship with the liquid element. Whereas the sea is causing Collingwood's hair to turn grey and his back to bend, Camus' love of the sea helps him overcome exhaustion when he is "à bout de forces". The reverse phenomenon will occur with Camus who, imagining himself locked up in jail, needs only to remember the sea in order to feel free. The hypothetical situation described here seems to confirm the amiable characteristics of the sea, rather than to stress its hostility to man.

In "La mer au plus près", Camus proclaims his love for the sea as well as the feeling of liberation it generates. According to Camus, the sea represents a soothing force that is capable of overcoming the solitude of confinement: "A chaque vague, une promesse, toujours la même. Que dit la vague? Si je devais mourir, entouré de montagnes froides, ignoré du monde, renié par les miens, à bout de forces enfin, la mer, au dernier moment, emplirait ma cellule, viendrait me soutenir au-delà de moi-même et m'aider à mourir sans haine."<sup>105</sup> Camus feels that the presence of the sea can replace fame, family, comfort and even wellbeing. Even the feeling of exile can be eradicated by the presence of the sea. The contemporary author grants the sea the power to ease problems, to obliterate captivity, and finally to appease man to the degree of transcending his own mortality. "Que dit la vague?" A sort of dialogue with the sea, a certain correspondance is evoked here, suggesting a secret whispered by the waves. Camus sets himself up as an interpreter of the sea, which promised to support him up to the final moments of his life. His joy of having

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<sup>105</sup> Albert Camus, "La mer au plus près," *Essais*, (Paris: Gallimard et Calmann-Lévy, 1965) 886

the sea by his side, filling his life, will help him put up with any hardship and also rid himself of any hatred.

However, the love of sea proponed by Camus is not everyone's privilege. In his book La Mer et les prisons, Roger Quilliot's appraisal of Camus' poem indicates the evolution of the image of the sea from romanticism to surrealism: "Seule, *La Mer au plus près* ouvre des perspectives de renouvellement en dépit de son caractère exceptionnel. Le mélange visionnaire de réel et de surréal rend au mythe toute son épaisseur et son mystère; les hantises de l'auteur s'y expriment directement, sans le support des commentaires."<sup>106</sup> In fact, as early as the first sentence of "La mer au plus près", Camus depicts the sea as a luxury, which can overcome the drabness of life. Away from the sea, life can become miserable despite the possession of any riches: "J'ai grandi dans la mer et la pauvreté m'a été fastueuse, puis j'ai perdu la mer, tous les luxes alors m'ont paru gris, la misère intolérable. Depuis, j'attends. J'attends les navires du retour, la maison des eaux, le jour limpide."<sup>107</sup> Like a magic wand, the sea can transform poverty into riches, as if it had the ability of sprinkling fairy dust on every aspect of life. Having lost this magic, Camus laments the dullness of life, which emerged in its true light, as the adornment supplied by the sea started disappearing. For Camus, life becomes a long, endless wait. What could he be waiting for? Most probably, for a ship to carry him home. Having lost the sea, has he lost his identity as well? "On me somme enfin de dire qui je suis. 'Rien encore, rien encore...'"<sup>108</sup> When asked to identify himself, Camus is not able to find any answer. The need for the proximity of the sea becomes a constant dream for the author. "Je me réveille ainsi, dans la nuit,

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<sup>106</sup> Roger Quilliot, La Mer et les Prisons, Essai sur Albert Camus, (Paris: Gallimard, 1956) 260

<sup>107</sup> Camus, "La mer au plus près," Essais, 879

<sup>108</sup> Camus, "La mer au plus près," Essais, 879



et, à demi endormi, je crois entendre un bruit de vagues, la respiration des eaux.”<sup>109</sup> Unable to find the sea during the day, Camus’ imagination evokes it in his dreams. The sound of the waves is compared to the breathing of the water, thus achieving the personification of the sea as a living being.

Investigating Camus’ own impressions of his travels mentioned in his Carnets, his Journaux de voyage, as well as his essays on the sea, Alba Amoia discusses his love for the Mediterranean cultures such as Italy or Spain, where he is able to feel at home. In her article “Sun, Sea and Geraniums: Camus en voyage”, Alba Amoia, mentioning Camus’ feeling of exile, states: “Wherever he finds himself, if the sound of the sea reaches his ears, he is “repatriated.”<sup>110</sup> As a matter of fact, more than once, Camus equated the sea to “patrie” in his works: “Point de patrie pour le désespéré et moi, je sais que la mer me précède et me suit, j’ai une folie toute prête. [...] Voilà pourquoi je souffre, les yeux secs, de l’exil. J’attends encore. Un jour vient, enfin...”<sup>111</sup> Surrounded by the image of the sea, unable to forget it, or even to visualize his life without it, Camus finds both his identity and his fatherland embodied in Neptune’s Kingdom. The choice of the verbs: “précède” and “suit” indicates that the author is both following the sea everywhere, and is followed by it. There is a continuity, which does not sanction any rupture, perhaps a temporary physical separation, but definitely not a mental one. His confidence in his fate enables him to patiently bear his distancing from the sea, until the day comes, finally....

In a letter to M. Mathieu, written in December 1958, Camus describes the essence of love of life. “To love life, after all, is not only to enjoy its face of light, but to love also its face of darkness,

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<sup>109</sup> Camus, “La mer au plus près,” Essais, 879

<sup>110</sup> Bettina Knapp, “Sun, Sea and Geraniums: Camus en voyage”, Critical Essays on Albert Camus, (Boston, Mass, C. K. Hall & Co., 1988) 59.

<sup>111</sup> Camus, “La mer au plus près,” Essais, 880

to wish that it be, to bless the enemy, to look misfortune straight in the face.”<sup>112</sup> Commenting on Camus’ assessment of life, Roger Quilliot, in The Sea and Prisons, writes: “To often salutary — but sometimes murderous — intransigence, one must in turn oppose moderation and acquiescence. Life lies in this tension and this delicate balancing act.”<sup>113</sup>

What Camus writes about life could very well be used to describe the sea, which alternately offers the face of friend and foe, darkness and light, and which offers enjoyment at times and challenge at others. As he says it himself in his Journaux de voyage: ‘Marvelous night on the Atlantic.... Yes, I have loved the sea very much — [...] My model is the sea and everything on the face of this earth that resembles it...’<sup>114</sup> “The closing paragraph of his North American diary is a declaration of love for the sea.”<sup>115</sup>, says Alba Amoia on Camus’ involvement with the sea. Going a step further, Alba Amoia declares: “The sea contains the entire world; it is his eternity;”<sup>116</sup>

Roger Quilliot describes Camus’ essay “La Mer au plus près” as a prose poem, where the tension between the modern world and the natural world is conveyed at its best. As a matter of fact, the difference between travelling by plane as opposed to travelling by ship is as great as the one between sea and prisons. Recounting the frustration of an airplane flight, Camus uses expressions belonging to the realm of detention or even death: “Le cercueil barbare d’un avion”<sup>117</sup>, “ma cellule métallique”<sup>118</sup>, which, according to him, could only trigger death or

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<sup>112</sup> Quoted by Quilliot, in The Seas and Prisons, A Commentary on the Life and Thought of Albert Camus, Translated by Emmett Parker, (Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1970) 266

<sup>113</sup> Quilliot, The Seas and Prisons, 266.

<sup>114</sup> Quoted by Alba Amoia, “Sun, Sea and Geraniums”, Critical Essays, 67

<sup>115</sup> Alba Amoia, “Sun, Sea and Geraniums”, Critical Essays, 67

<sup>116</sup> Alba Amoia, “Sun, Sea and Geraniums”, Critical Essays, 59

<sup>117</sup> Camus, “La mer au plus près,” Essais, 884

madness. Camus expresses a constant nostalgia for the sea, similar to the “mal du siècle”, which is never gratified. It could be described as a need for the sea, a need increasingly exigent and never satisfied: “j’attendais la mer sans jamais l’atteindre.”<sup>119</sup> The phonetic and orthographic likeness of “atteindre” and “attendre” accentuates the frustration of the writer as well as the feeling of exile dictated by the distancing from the sea. That distancing evolves into an agony, which unquestionably drives one to madness. “La prison pour qui ne peut respirer est mort ou folie, qu’y faire sinon tuer ou posséder?”<sup>120</sup> These expressions, describing the exile within an exile of a prison, are counterbalanced by the freedom experienced when one is at sea. “Sans espace point d’innocence ni de liberté.”<sup>121</sup> Declaring that “Nous sommes comblés, une muette folie, invinciblement nous endort.”<sup>122</sup>, Camus refer to the word “folie” thrice in his essay. Is his love for the sea an inevitable madness? Counteracting the madness, there is also the word “apaisement”, which pacifies the feeling of turbulence. These antithetical tendencies lead to the paradoxical situation of absurdity. “Accomplir quoi? Depuis toujours, je le tais à moi-même. O lit amer, couche princière, la couronne est au fond des eaux!”<sup>123</sup>

The sea, for Camus, represents more than a fatherland, it means life itself: “The sea: I didn’t become lost in it, but rather found myself in it.”<sup>124</sup> Identity, equilibrium, freedom, enthusiasm, as well as the end of exile, those are the characteristics of the sea according to

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<sup>118</sup> Camus, “La mer au plus près,” Essais, 884

<sup>119</sup> Camus, “La mer au plus près,” Essais, 884

<sup>120</sup> Camus, “La mer au plus près,” Essais, 885

<sup>121</sup> Camus, “La mer au plus près,” Essais, 884

<sup>122</sup> Camus, “La mer au plus près,” Essais, 884

<sup>123</sup> Camus, “La mer au plus près,” Essais, 884

<sup>124</sup> Quoted by Alba Amoia, “Sun, Sea and Geraniums”, Critical Essays, 59

Camus, who mentions “l’eau de mon baptême”<sup>125</sup> referring to the baptism of a recently born infant, which represents the beginning of life for a believer.

“J’appareille à toute heure,”<sup>126</sup> says Camus. In a metaphor where he is comparing himself to a ship going at sea whenever he feels like it, the author probably alludes to imaginary voyages, where he can set sail at will. He is able to evoke the sea at all times, summoning, through his imagination, its soothing properties in order to counterbalance his feeling of exile. Just as Baudelaire, Hugo, and also George Sand, who could summon the familiar Architecture of their country through a mere effort of will power on the reflecting surface of the water, so could Camus. In a saga similar to that of Rimbaud’s “Le bateau ivre”, Camus pursues his vertiginous travels, going from one country to the other, and from one island to the next: “Aujourd’hui, au contraire, je suis gorgé de souffles, toutes nos ailes claquent dans l’air bleu, je vais crier de vitesse, nous jetons à l’eau nos sextants et nos boussoles.”<sup>127</sup>

Paraphrasing Rimbaud’s “Le bateau ivre”, Quilliot recounts the experience of the successive travelling experiences of the voyager, rendering the rapid pace and sequences of the journey:

Dans une sorte d’hallucination, nous suivons la course rapide de la lune et du soleil dans le ciel, nous croisons un iceberg dans les Tropiques, puis un troupeau de cerf nageant dans l’eau mousseuse. En quittant la terre, nous renoncions à nos traditionnelles façons de voir et de sentir. Nous avons gagné un monde sauvage délivré des lois de la pesanteur, où la mer, bercée par un chant invisible et

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<sup>125</sup> Camus, “La mer au plus près,” Essais, 879

<sup>126</sup> Camus, “La mer au plus près,” Essais, 880

<sup>127</sup> Camus, “La mer au plus près”, Essais, 885

familier, se couvrait “d'étranges fleurs jaunes”. L'impossible même a cessé de nous être étranger.<sup>128</sup>

It is indeed the same kind of hallucination to which the reader is subjected when he reads Rimbaud's poem. Quilliot portrays Camus as a guide and a teacher, who introduces the reader to a new approach towards life.

Listening to Camus as he attempts to reach a conclusion, the reader suddenly realizes that freedom and happiness are the result of a combination of danger and enthusiasm. “J'ai toujours eu l'impression de vivre en haute mer, menacé, au coeur d'un bonheur royal.”<sup>129</sup> By referring to a royal happiness, and previously to a crown lying at the bottom of the sea, and also by describing himself as “Roi fainéant”<sup>130</sup>, is Camus suggesting that the happiness conferred by the sea is turning him into royalty? What is certain is, that since he persuasively states “J'épouse la mer.”<sup>131</sup>, without the sea, Camus would become a widower, a dispossessed, and could very well say with Gérard de Nerval: “Je suis le ténébreux, — le veuf, — l'inconsolé, / Le prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie; (v. 1-2) [...] / Rends-moi le Pausilippe et la mer d'Italie,” (v. 6)<sup>132</sup>

Not only has Camus brought Romanticism to the XXth century, but he also brought vestiges of symbolism, realism and surrealism with it. Like a ship brimming with the most striking jewels of French Literature that he used to embellish his writing, he unloaded them in our century.

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<sup>128</sup> Quilliot, La mer et les prisons, 257.

<sup>129</sup> Camus, “La mer au plus près”, Essais, 886

<sup>130</sup> Camus, “La mer au plus près,” Essais, 884

<sup>131</sup> Camus, “La mer au plus près,” Essais, 881

<sup>132</sup> Nerval, “El Desdichado”, Les Filles du feu, les chimères, 239

## Conclusion

“Un seul être vous manque, et tout est dépeuplé” (v. 29)<sup>133</sup>. Before Lamartine ever wrote this celebrated verse, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre had Paul utter the same words in Paul et Virginie: “Ah! il me manque Virginie! Sans elle, je n’ai rien; avec elle, j’aurais tout!”<sup>134</sup> Mme de Grafigny’s Zilia could not imagine life without Aza, George Sand’s Ralph without Indiana, and Vigny’s Collingwood without his family. From the early Romantic to the Romantic era, the sea was thus an agent of separation, creating an emotional exile or vacuum where all these characters felt somewhat abandoned or at loss.

With Napoleon’s defeat and subsequent exile, three poems, Heredia y Heredia’s “Napoleón”, Manzoni’s “Il cinque maggio”, and Hugo’s “Lui” as well as “Les deux îles”, explored the solitude of the exiled Emperor, defined by a surrounding sea whose waves had the role of a prison’s walls. Commemorating the fallen Emperor’s death, the three poets presented him as the prisoner of a temporal as well as spatial confinement. The sea is thus depicted as having a geographical as well as a political role: serving political purposes, and secluding political opponents. Garcia Marquez’s recounts the imaginary saga of Simon Bolivar, as “El Libertador” remembers his past glory during his exile and illness, almost at the threshold of death.

Camus’ obsession with the sea, which he equates with life itself, represents a reversal of the topos rather than a general current. As far as Camus is concerned, the reader is offered with a kaleidoscopic array of literary influences gathered from the different schools beginning with Romanticism, then realism, and finally surrealism. The sea represents the morbidity of carrying

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<sup>133</sup> Alphonse de Lamartine, “L’isolement”, Oeuvres poétiques, 3.

<sup>134</sup> B. de Saint-Pierre, Paul et Virginie, 161.

the dead corpses, such as it is described in La Peste; the enthusiasm of adventures, as in Journaux de voyage; the exile of being separated from a native land, as in Le Premier Homme. Ultimately, almost all of Camus' works feature the pleasure of swimming as well as the beauty of the Mediterranean.

The sea does not only inspire contemplation, and reflection, but transcendence as well.

## 5. CHAPTER FIVE: TRANSCENDENCE THROUGH THE SEA.

“La mer, qui renferme l’idée d’infini, est sous leurs yeux;”<sup>1</sup>

(Stendhal)

The human being realizes his weakness as he confronts the sea. A prisoner of his own limitations, his only hope is to expand his soul in a transcendental flight. In Alterity and Transcendence, Emmanuel Levinas describes the Cartesian concept of infinity as an expansion of the soul. Conceived as an ascending line of flight, transcendence expands the soul into infinity: “The presence, taught by Descartes, of the Idea of the infinite in a soul created too small to contain it, indicates that its alterity neither limits nor absorbs, [but] that it elates the soul that, according to formal logic, it should harm.”<sup>2</sup>

Several writers, from the Preromantic era until our days, have attempted more or less successfully to transcend their own malaise. Whether they turned towards the gouffre of oblivion of the “paradis artificiels”, or towards a regenerating infinite, which provided a favorable “elevation” while putting an end to the pessimism of despair, the Romantic poets experienced the polarity of the infinite. After Rousseau and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s unquestionable belief in God and Chateaubriand’s unfaltering faith in Christianity came Victor Hugo’s alleged pantheistic belief in the forces of Good and Evil, symbolized by Light and Darkness. The reader can also examine Vigny’s oscillation from his attitude of non-belief in “Le Mont des Oliviers” as

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Cabantous, Le ciel dans la mer, 84.

<sup>2</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, Alterity and Transcendence, (N.Y., Columbia University Press, 1999) 65



well as “La Mort du loup”, to his acceptance of a Divine Will in “La Bouteille à la mer”. In the first poems, Vigny recommends an attitude of stoic defiance towards a silent sky, unresponsive to man’s invocations. Using very persuasive wording, the poet denounces the neglect to which man is being subjected. He thus advises man to respond as such:

Muet, aveugle et sourd au cri des créatures,  
Si le Ciel nous laissa comme un monde avorté,  
Le juste opposera le dédain à l’absence  
Et ne répondra plus que par un froid silence  
Au silence éternel de la Divinité.<sup>3</sup> (v. 145-49)

As long as the protagonist is standing on firm ground, his ego pushes him to defy the sky; but when his whole being sways on the liquid ground of the sea, he realizes that his fate depends on the clemency of the Creator. As things are viewed in a different manner, the expression “la volonté de Dieu” emerges from the dark shroud in which the proud ego of the Romantic writer had consigned it in his other poems. As he surrenders to his fate and focuses on the brightness of future hope, Vigny’s captain entrusts his message to the waves governed by the Divine Power.

In Le ciel dans la mer, a compilation on the behaviour of sailors, Alain Cabantous quotes an anonymous statement written in a “*Journal de voyage sur les costes d’Afrique*”, comparing it to Fournier’s advocations on the human being’s need for God at the moment of danger.

‘Quand on est continuellement environné de périls, on a bien de la peine à ne pas se rendre à la voix de Dieu. On compte si légèrement sur la vie présente qu’il est comme impossible de ne pas songer à la future. Etrange faiblesse de l’homme. Il

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<sup>3</sup> Vigny, “Le Mont des Oliviers”, Poèmes, 270-71

lui faut des disgrâces pour le rappeler à Dieu; encore, ce n'est que par rapport à lui qu'il y pense.<sup>4</sup>

What greater misfortune or “disgrâce” could there be than a prospective shipwreck or a tempest at sea? In the event of an impending demise, Cabantous explores the need for submission to divine exhortations as well as for the substitution of worldly matters with spiritual concerns. In Hugo's Quatrevingt-Treize, the imminence of danger forces the seafarers to discuss spiritual matters:

Boisberthelot dit à La Vieuville:

— Croyez-vous en Dieu, chevalier?

La Vieuville répondit:

— Oui. Non. Quelquefois.

— Dans la tempête?

— Oui. Et dans des moments comme celui-ci.

— Il n'y a en effet que Dieu qui puisse nous tirer de là, dit Boisberthelot.<sup>5</sup>

The obstinacy, which man opposes to the elusiveness of metaphysical matters, begins to crumble before the threat of death. The distress triggered by the unknown revolves man's thoughts and feelings towards accepting the existence of a Superior Power: the more threatening the danger, the greater the need for God's Protection.

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<sup>4</sup> Cabantous, Le Ciel dans la mer, 39

<sup>5</sup> Victor Hugo, Quatrevingt-treize, (Paris, Gallimard, 1979) 65.

### 5.1. Connecting with Eternity

Transcendence is nearly always a visionary experience since it goes beyond the customary in an attempt to reach the Unknown. During the process of transcending anxiety, materiality, or merely harsh reality, the character connects with Eternity through a visionary endeavour.

If perchance on a beach someday, a lonely passerby picks up a shell and applies it to his ear, he will hear the repercussion of the sound of the waves as they roll before hitting the shore. He will become a witness to the movement of the water, to the speed of the wind and to the music resulting from it. He might also be able to connect to a past mythological world, as well as to a future promise of love. This is how Rubén Darío portrays himself. A Spanish poet born in Nicaragua, considered to be one of the leaders of Hispanic modernism, Rubén Darío still retains ties to European romanticism, which came around much earlier. Dedicated to Antonio Machado, who is best known for his poems “Soledades”, Darío’s sonnet “Caracol” highlights the link between Nature and the romantic poet, as he becomes the depository of its mysterious secrets. The sonnet evokes the gestures and interpretations of this passerby as he picks up a golden seashell on the beach:

En la playa he encontrado un caracol de oro  
macido y recamado de perlas mas finas;  
Europa le ha tocado con sus manos divinas  
Cuando cruzó las ondas sobre el celeste toro.<sup>6</sup> (v. 1- 4)

Since writers and poets have relentlessly explored the spatial as well as the temporal aspects of “l’infini”, Rubén Darío’s experience with the seashell suggests the modern use of the

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<sup>6</sup> Darío, “Caracol”, *Poesías completas*, 750.

telephone. His evoking of ancient events turns this magical seashell into a long distance device able to reach as far back in time and History as Antiquity. It is a natural and poetical way of connecting to Eternity. In his quest towards Infinity, the poet is wired through Historic Memory, as well as Creative Imagination. These are the links that can render this connection with “l’infini” possible, and durable.

He llevado a mis labios el caracol sonoro  
y he suscitado el eco de las dianas marinas;  
le acerqué a mis oídos, y las azules minas  
me han contado en voz baja su secreto tesoro.<sup>7</sup> (v. 5-8)

Although most seekers of the infinite rely on contemplation as well as their visual field in order to reach their goal, in this particular instance the poet is relying mostly on the acoustical properties of the seashell as well as his own auditory sphere. Describing the solitary poet as a recipient of the secrets of the deep universe, Darío listens to the stories told by the echo contained in the golden shell. Traveling across time and space through the sounds of the sea, the Infinity of the depths, “las azulas minas”, brings back Ancient Myths to the foreground. The poet is thus able to share the experiences of the mythological heroes, as if he reached them through a time machine.

Así la sal me llega de los vientos amargos,  
que en sus hinchadas velas sintió la nave Argos  
cuando amaron los astros el sueño de Jason;  
  
Y oigo un rumor de olas, y un incógnito acento,  
Y un profundo oleaje, y un misterioso viento...

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<sup>7</sup> Darío, “Caracol”, *Poesías completas*, 750

El caracol la forma tiene de un corazón.<sup>8</sup> (v. 9-14)

These stories recount the myth and adventures of ancient heroes, such as Jason setting sail to reach the Golden Fleece, as well as the stories of mysterious events, told by an unknown voice; perhaps a long lost love story, since the shell is in the shape of a heart. Weren't the love story of Europa and Jupiter metamorphosed into a bull, and riding the waves, and the adventurous seajourney of Jason, on his ship the "Argos" pursuing the Golden Fleece, an attempt at reaching Infinity? The sonnet suggests a communion with Nature symbolized by such images as the stars approving Jason's dream; a "correspondance" between the poet and the ancient world, to the extent of feeling the salt carried by the wind. The entire marine kingdom seems to be contained in this tiny shell, since it conveys the sounds of the waves and the breeze, as well as the mystery of the unknown; in short, all the infinity emanating from the sea. Thus the echo of solitude will be confirmed by its presence within a marine shell, be it the tiniest one or a majestic Nautilus. The sonnet ends on a hopeful and optimistic note implied by the heart shaped shell, which is, at best, a means of transcending human anxiety.

## 5.2. Transcending Anxiety

A voyage at sea is a sort of exile, where one feels uprooted without the feeling of a solid ground. In Sur l'Eau, mentioned in previous chapters, Maupassant describes the void experienced by the traveler going through a literal "destierro", which is the Spanish word for exile as well for a separation from the Earth. Establishing a similarity between a voyage at sea and our temporary life on Earth, Maupassant laments the lack of the familiar and the customary as well as the possibility of a shipwreck, which leads him to a state of hopeless pessimism about

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<sup>8</sup> Darío, "Caracol", Poesías completas, 750

human existence and concerns: “Sur ce petit bateau que ballotte la mer, qu’une vague peut emplir et retourner, je sais et je sens combien rien n’existe de ce que nous connaissons, car la terre qui flotte dans le vide est encore plus isolée, plus perdue que cette barque sur les flots.”<sup>9</sup> Maupassant observes that the boat swinging on a liquid ground is still better off than the Earth suspended in space. Confirming both Maupassant’s feelings about the solitude surrounding his presence on a boat at sea, and Cabantous’ assertion that the sea reflects a spiritual dimension, Samuel Pepys, in his Journal, acknowledges the confrontation with infinitude and Eternity: “ Je ne connais rien qui ne donne une meilleure notion de l’infini et de l’éternité que d’être sur la mer à bord d’un petit vaisseau sans rien d’autre en vue que nous-même au sein de l’hémisphère entier.”<sup>10</sup> One must not necessarily travel by ship in order to be impressed by the sea. According to Victor Hugo, its contemplation is sufficient to inspire spiritual reflection: “... pour qui l’observe longtemps, l’aspect de la mer devient purement métaphysique.”<sup>11</sup> Although he attributes every aspect of nature to its Creator, Hugo felt the need to emphasize the fact that when at sea, man is on God’s territory. To confirm this, Hugo writes in “La Pente de la rêverie”, a poem in Feuilles d’automne: “Matelots dispersés sur l’océan de Dieu”<sup>12</sup>. In that same poem, Hugo describes the adventures of a visionary mind, as it explores the depths of the unknown.

Mon esprit plongea donc sous ce flot inconnu,  
 Au profond de l’abîme il nagea seul et nu  
 Toujours de l’ineffable allant à l’invisible...  
 Soudain il s’en revint avec un cri terrible,

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<sup>9</sup> Maupassant, Sur l’eau, 42

<sup>10</sup> Quoted by Cabantous, in Le ciel dans la mer, 39

<sup>11</sup> Quoted by Godo, in Victor Hugo et Dieu, (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 2001) 195.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted by Charles Villiers, in L’Univers métaphysique de Victor Hugo, (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J Vrin, 1970) 189.

Ebloui, haletant, stupide, épouvanté,

Car il avait au fond trouvé l'éternité.<sup>13</sup> (v. 139-144)

In Victor Hugo and the Visionary Novel, Victor Brombert focuses on the vertical movement of descent suggested by the verbs “plonger”, “nager” as well as “sous ce flot” and “au profond de l'abîme”, as a metaphor for intellectual searching and exploring: “Verticality, beginning with “La Pente de la rêverie,” has ever characterized the vatic poet's exploration of his dreamworld. “Mon esprit plongea donc sous ce flot inconnu...”<sup>14</sup>

Illustrating the idea of immersion and submersion existent in the poem, Brombert writes: “Immersion and submersion — with their connotation of plunging and sinking — become the metaphor of metaphorical inversion.”<sup>15</sup> The metaphysical anxiety expressed in this poem is embodied in the phrase “avec un cri terrible,” which is a cry of agony. The frailty and vulnerability of the human mind is suggested by the metaphor “il nagea seul et nu”. “Le langage est un habillage de la pensée”<sup>16</sup> says Georges Piroué in Victor Hugo romancier ou les dessus de l'inconnu. No wonder the mind is “seul et nu”, when it is not being enrobed in language. Solitude and the helplessness of the mind consist also in being deprived of the power of perception, which renders him unable to see or to speak. He seems to be blindfolded as well as speechless, as Hugo alludes to “l'ineffable and l'invisible”. Pulled apart between the conscious and the unconscious, the visible and the invisible, the human mind attempts the discovery of the depths. Isn't such exploration of the unknown what Victor Hugo describes as “entreprendre

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<sup>13</sup> Victor Hugo, “La pente de la rêverie”, *Les Feuilles d'Automne, Poésies*, t.1, (Paris, Hachette, 1962) 100.

<sup>14</sup> Victor Brombert, Victor Hugo and the Visionary Novel, (Cambridge, Mass. & London, Harvard University Press, 1984) 200.

<sup>15</sup> Brombert, Victor Hugo and the Visionary Novel, 144.

<sup>16</sup> Georges Piroué, Victor Hugo romancier ou les dessus de l'inconnu, (Paris, Denoël, 1964) 124-125

l'infini"? The final note of the poem features the saga of the quest as well as as the terrifying disclosure: "l'éternité."

The sea was thus favored as a vehicule of Transcendence during the Romantic era and beyond. In a poem entitled "L'Occident", which is part of the collection Les Harmonies poétiques et religieuses, the Romantic poet Lamartine expresses his metaphysical malaise as he contemplates the sun setting over the sea. The opening quatrain as well as the closure of Lamartine's poem feature visual sceneries of the sea. In a transcendental momentum, wondering about fate as well as Eternity, Lamartine expresses his anxiety in a succession of images displaying a chiaroscuro as striking as Victor Hugo's trademark. The theme of Light versus Darkness is explored in a religious context, contrasting the beauty of nature lit by the sun, with its disappearance as darkness spreads in the evening. As the light gradually disappears and the beauty of nature vanishes into the Darkness, so does serenity in the poet's soul. The poetic kaleidoscope of imagery taken from nature shows a correspondence between the poet and the surroundings. As the twilight sets in, the sea, the waves, the seafoam disappear from his sight, causing his soul to be oppressed and worried about his own ending. "Et quelque chose en moi, comme dans la nature, / Pleurait, priaït, souffrait, bénissait tour à tour!"(v. 15 - 16)<sup>17</sup> Considering himself as part of nature, Lamartine wonders about infinity and the unknown. The torments of the poet's soul appear in the choice of verbs, where the religious vocabulary "priaït" and "bénissait" is entwined with expressions of sadness and grief "pleuraient" and "souffraient". Describing nature, and lamenting the receding of light, Lamartine wonders about his own destiny as well as the fate of all things. Overwhelmed by the cycle of Time, and the tidal accuracy of life,

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<sup>17</sup> Alphonse de Lamartine, "L'occident", Les Harmonies poétiques et religieuses, Oeuvres poétiques, (Paris, Gallimard, 1963) 342.



Lamartine, searching for an immediate as well as a spiritual response, interrogates his eyes and his soul as well as the elements:

Dites, si vous savez, où donc allons-nous tous?

A toi, grand Tout, dont l'astre est la pâle étincelle

En qui la nuit, le jour, l'esprit vont aboutir!

Flux et reflux divin de vie universelle,

Vaste océan de l'Être où tout va s'engloutir!<sup>18</sup> (v. 36-40)

The mysterious harmony of the universe, whose beginning and end is the Creator, bears the imprint of the divine. Like Victor Hugo, Lamartine is not an adept of pantheism, but rather a believer in the omnipresence of the Author of things. In a metaphor in which God is compared to an immense ocean where everything culminates, the poet depicts the finitude of things as they converge into the infinity of "L'Être". In his poem "L'immortalité", Lamartine, in a spiritual momentum, expresses his need to be reunited with his Creator. Addressing Death, the poet enunciates his feelings of captivity within his mortal shell as well as the desire to fly free from any human attachments: "... que je m'élançe enfin / Vers cet être inconnu, mon principe et ma fin! ..." <sup>19</sup> (v. 27 - 28)

### 5.3. Danger and Divine Protection

Le ciel dans la mer, Alain Cabantous' authoritative study on the diverse beliefs surrounding the marine space, describes transcendence as an anchor by which man secures his

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<sup>18</sup> Lamartine, "L'occident", Oeuvres poétiques, 342.

<sup>19</sup> Lamartine, "L'immortalité", Oeuvres poétiques, 15.

fears and his doubts: “L'imprévision du flot, la peur de se perdre corps et biens, l'affrontement d'un espace toujours sauvage, porteur d'une mort sans trace, édifiant et confortent l'aspect largement répulsif de ce milieu naturel. En conséquence, le recours à une protection céleste apparaît d'une impérative nécessité.”<sup>20</sup> Since the Middle Ages, most ships were given saint's names in order to guarantee their safety at sea. Pablo Emilio Pérez-Mallaína Bueno mentions a few of these ships' names in El hombre frente al mar: “*Le Saint-Pierre, Espiritu Santo, Nuestra Señora del Coro de los Milagros, Santa Maria de Guadalupe.*”<sup>21</sup> The Virgin Mary, who represented a protective image for sailors, had many ships named after her, depending on the time and place of these sea travels. Several literary works go back to Biblical sources, such as Saint-Amant's poem “Moyse sauvé des eaux”, and Balzac's short story “Jésus-Christ en Flandre”. In Saint-Amant's poem, which features Moses' mother crying over her son's fate as he is exposed to a tempest, an angel gathers her tears and presents them as an offering to God: “Quand Jocabel pleure sur le sort de son enfant durant la tempête sur le Nil, un ange vient recueillir ses larmes et les offre au Seigneur en une curieuse juxtaposition du merveilleux divin et païen.”<sup>22</sup> In her book: Etude des oeuvres poétiques de Saint-Amant, Françoise Gourier mentions the poet's talent at describing the simple feelings of everyday's life. In his own way of dealing with divine intervention, Saint-Amant introduces another instance of Jocabel's solitude: her tears will be turned into a celestial honey or liquor, and used to feed the child. Gourier's comments on this episode shed light on the despair of the lonely mother whose tears do not go to waste, but are recuperated by an angel who watches over the child's needs during the tempest.

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<sup>20</sup> Cabantous, Le ciel dans la mer, 27

<sup>21</sup> Pablo Emilio Pérez-Mallaína Bueno, El hombre frente al mar, (Valparaíso, Sevilla, Universidad de Sevilla, 1996) 102

<sup>22</sup> Françoise Gourier, Etude des oeuvres poétiques de Saint-Amant, (Genève, Librairie Droz, 1981) 208.

Balzac's "Jésus-Christ en Flandre" portrays a man able to walk on the waves. Once more, following the footsteps of Moses, performing the greatest of miracles, stepping on a liquid ground, Jesus, whose name is not revealed to the reader until the very end, is still called "l'Homme" by Balzac. A ship is caught in a tempest, when a stranger appears in order to lead them to salvation. Reconsidering the materialistic principles of society, the seafarers, facing an imminent death, are willing to follow their instinctive feelings and entrust their lives to this unknown guide who displays a steadfast assurance. Some refuse to have faith and are utterly lost at sea, while the others are drawn to the mysterious stranger who promised them salvation. The stature of Jesus is gradually becoming more visible as the author focuses on it with an increasing clarity, until the end of the story when his name is finally spelled out. Commenting upon Balzac's use of the merveilleux in the story, Henri Gautier observes the effect of the supernatural in the confrontation of man and sea:

Le merveilleux est ensuite placé dans la description dramatique de la tempête, dans les fureurs du ciel et de la mer, au milieu desquelles l'homme se tient impassible, intouchable, impérissable, puis marchant d'un pas ferme sur les flots, seul acte surnaturel dont la portée est nuancée par la signification que le conte dégage.<sup>23</sup>

In Balzac's story, the sea is viewed as an instrument of divine justice: there is a judgement as well as an execution. It is either salvation or death. The stranger, witnessing the panic of an old woman who remembers her past sins, and wishes to be absolved, tries to comfort her: "— Ayez la foi, lui dit-il, et vous serez sauvée."<sup>24</sup> A little later, at the most crucial moment

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<sup>23</sup> Henri Gautier, L'Image de l'homme intérieur chez Balzac, (Genève-Paris, Librairie Droz, 1984) 236.

<sup>24</sup> Balzac, "Jésus-Christ en Flandre", La Comédie humaine, (Paris, Gallimard, 1979) 319

of the shipwreck, as death was becoming a certitude, and salvation an absurdity, the stranger took matters into his own hands, and addressing them with authority, he said: “— Ceux qui ont la foi seront sauvés; qu’ils me suivent!”<sup>25</sup> As he indicates a way out of danger, he is also offering them a choice: those who pass the test of faith will be saved. A few of the seafarers follow him, putting their fate into his hands. A miser, unwilling to part with his gold, jumps into the sea with his treasure and is dragged down by its weight into the abyss. Social values are thus viewed in their true light, while the seafarers are watching, learning, reassessing their priority and experiencing Divine judgement as it is applied through the sea, as Maupassant remarked earlier in this chapter. The following statement by Cabantous confirms the vanity of worldly concerns: “La mer ne constitue-t-elle pas un espace idéal pour se persuader de la fourberie et de l’éphémère vanité des joies terrestres et pour apprendre le mépris du monde, le *contemptus mundi*?”<sup>26</sup>

Among the seafarers, a young mother, hugging her child and worrying above all for his safety, has the courage to walk on the water, because the stranger promised her that her decision could save him. In the following lines Balzac expresses the mother’s solitary fear, as she clutches her son in her arms, protecting him from the waves. The stranger hears the mother’s cries and attempts to comfort her. He succeeds in doing so, and as he calls on them to follow him, the young mother does not hesitate for a second: she carries her precious load guided by her hope and her trust in the stranger. “Cet homme se leva, marcha d’un pas ferme sur les flots. Aussitôt la jeune mère prit son enfant dans les bras et marcha près de lui sur la mer.”<sup>27</sup> The supernatural power of the man appears in his ability to overpower the sea: it is a miracle, which stands as a testimony of his divine powers. In an instance where the tempestuous sea represents a perilous

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<sup>25</sup> Balzac, “Jésus-Christ en Flandre”, *Comédie*, 320

<sup>26</sup> Cabantous, *Le ciel dans la mer*, 36

<sup>27</sup> Balzac, “Jésus-Christ en Flandre”, *La Comédie humaine*, (Paris, Gallimard, 1979)320

death for this group of people gathered on a small boat, the needed miracle embodies their symbolic salvation. Another miracle might not have been so convincing, but overpowering a roaring sea is definitely a sign of divine power: Moses has done it before, and now Jesus is doing it once more.

The image of Jesus as a symbol of miraculous power vividly appears in Aurora de Albornos' comments quoted by Arthur Terry in his study on Antonio Machado's (1875-1939) "Campos de Castilla". As a matter of fact, the Spanish poet writes about Jesus walking on the water, which is the same subject matter treated by Balzac in "Jésus-Christ en Flandre": "Todo el que camina anda, / como Jesús, sobre el mar."<sup>28</sup> Discussing Machado's religious beliefs, Terry refers to Aurora de Albornos's emphasis on the fact that the image of Jesus that concerns him is "No es el crucificado, el agonizante, el que va a morir, el que a Machado le interesa: es el vivo. Un Jesús vivo, capaz de dominar el mar."<sup>29</sup> Overcoming an unpredictable sea is definitely a sign of Divine Power.

#### **5.4. Aquatic and Celestial Infinity**

From Rousseau and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre to Chateaubriand and Victor Hugo, the contemplation of the universe, leading to the acknowledgement of an omnipotent Author, forms a pattern whose reoccurrence is incontestable. Victor Hugo, joining sea and sky in a transcendental image, in "Plein ciel" of La Légende des siècles, describes the sky as "l'océan

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<sup>28</sup> Quoted by Arthur Terry, in Antonio Machado: Campos de Castilla, (London, Grant & Cutler, 1973) 74.

<sup>29</sup> Terry, Antonio Machado, 74.

d'en haut"<sup>30</sup>. Another poem "Extase", in Les Orientales, portrays sea and sky as they bow and pray to their Author:

Et les étoiles d'or, légions infinies,  
A voix haute, à voix basse, avec mille harmonies  
Disaient, en inclinant leurs couronnes de feu;  
Et les flots bleus que rien ne gouverne et n'arrête,  
Disaient en recourbant l'écume de leurs crête:

— C'est le Seigneur, le Seigneur Dieu!<sup>31</sup> (v. 7-12)

An all-powerful Creator elicits the submission of the universe in its entirety. Hugo's poetic representation of the stars and waves as they glorify God is a striking image personifying the elements of nature, and lending them a soul.

Next to the emotional component of "le mal du siècle", so widely discussed, there is a metaphysical component, more elusive, which numerous writers attempted to express. Chateaubriand describes his experience as follows: "Des milliers d'étoiles rayonnant dans le sombre azur du dôme céleste, une mer sans rivage, l'infini dans le ciel et sur les flots! Jamais Dieu ne m'a plus troublé de sa grandeur que dans ces nuits où j'avais l'immensité sur ma tête et l'immensité sous mes pieds."<sup>32</sup> Described as an open space, the sea also opens up to "le gouffre d'en haut" which is the sky, and "le gouffre d'en-bas" which is the abyss. As Chateaubriand illustrates it, the omnipotence of the author of the universe is particularly inscribed in the celestial as well as the aquatic infinity. The immensity of the sky as well as that of the sea stand

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<sup>30</sup> Hugo, "Plein ciel", Poésies, t. 2, 138.

<sup>31</sup> Hugo, "Extase", Poésies, t. 1, 78.

<sup>32</sup> Chateaubriand quoted by Cabantous, in Le ciel dans la mer, 39.

in contrast with the finitude of the human being often described as an atom or a “ciron” to use the Pascalian terminology illustrating the concept lying behind “Les deux infinis”.

Both Bernardin de Saint-Pierre and George Sand observed the verticality of such elevation or ascension of the spirit. The following text condenses the feelings of the solitary hermit who is also the narrator in Paul et Virginie: “Pour moi, je me laisse entraîner en paix au fleuve du temps, vers l’océan de l’avenir qui n’a plus de rivages et par le spectacle des harmonies actuelles de la nature, je m’élève vers son auteur, et j’espère dans un autre monde de plus heureux destins.”<sup>33</sup> Bernardin de Saint-Pierre chose the sea as the main site of his renowned novel Paul et Virginie. Not only did he observe the influence of the sea on the mentality of sailors and seafarers, but he also acknowledged the extent of its predominance in his own work, accepting it as a primary source of inspiration. In this passage, transcendence is viewed as an elevation, while the harmonious coherence of the universe leads him to meditate on the hereafter, establishing a correspondance between the creation and its Author. According to Daniel Mornet, Haskell Springer, and Alain Cabantous, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, more than others, displayed a great sensitivity to the sea. Cabantous confirms the prominence of the French preRomantic author as a writer of the sea: “Peut-être plus que d’autres, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre a souligné l’influence de l’emprise océane sur la mentalité des marins.”<sup>34</sup>

George Sand’s novel Indiana offers an unusual denouement: the protagonists discover an unsuspected love for each other, and in order to conserve this love intact as well as to avoid worldly concerns, they decide to end their life together, seeking death in the violent waters of a torrent. Cabantous, in Le ciel dans la mer, examines the notion of redemption, which could

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<sup>33</sup> B. de Saint-Pierre, Paul et Virginie, 154.

<sup>34</sup> Cabantous, Le ciel dans la mer, 115.

illustrate Ralph's interpretation of the ideal way of ending their life as well as preserving their love: "Au service du rachat de l'homme, de l'art de bien mourir, du concept d'éternité ou de la révélation divine, la mer tient ici un rôle positif essentiel dans l'élévation de la nature humaine, dans sa propre découverte et dans son dépassement."<sup>35</sup>

Transcendence could be seen here as "élévation" as well as "dépassement". It is the ultimate solution that Ralph envisions in order to reach a more sublime experience of love.

— Et puis, dit Ralph, un nouveau voyage en mer, fait cette fois dans d'autres sentiments que ceux qui nous ont troublés jusqu'ici, est la meilleure préparation que nous puissions imaginer pour nous recueillir, pour nous détacher des affections terrestres, pour nous élever purs de tout alliage aux pieds de l'Être par excellence.<sup>36</sup>

Planning to end their life in the sea in an attempt to transcend the limitations of reality, Ralph and Indiana are seeking to elevate themselves towards their Creator. Such line of flight, which could be condemned by many as a suicide attempt, was nevertheless condoned by the Romantic spirit of the era. Napoleon himself advocated that suicide could be viewed in a different light. After witnessing two people who attempted to jump overboard, the Emperor said to Las Cases, in his own words: " Dieu ne saurait avoir voulu un tel contrepoids à sa bonté infinie, surtout pour des actes tels que celui-ci. Et qu'est-ce après tout? Vouloir lui revenir un peu trop vite?"<sup>37</sup> Going further than a contemplation of the sea or a profound meditation, death or suicide by drowning can be viewed as a transcendental experience or as an escape from worldly problems, following self-discovery and finally leading to redemption.

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<sup>35</sup> Cabantous, in Le Ciel dans la mer, 40

<sup>36</sup> Sand, Indiana, 308.

<sup>37</sup> Las Cases, Le Mémorial, 48-49



In “Drame au bord de la mer”, Balzac depicts Pauline and the narrator while decoding the signs offered by nature: the sky and the sea are represented as two blue layers suggesting infinity.

Le ciel était sans nuages, la mer était sans rides; d'autres n'y eussent vu que deux steppes bleus l'un sur l'autre; mais nous, nous qui nous entendions sans avoir besoin de la parole, nous qui pouvions faire jouer entre ces deux langes de l'infini, les illusions avec lesquelles on se repaît au jeune âge, nous nous serrions la main au moindre changement que présentaient, soit la nappe d'eau, soit les nappes de l'air, car nous prenions ces légers phénomènes pour des traductions matérielles de notre double pensée.<sup>38</sup>

As Henri Gautier mentions, in L'Image de l'homme intérieur chez Balzac:

L'idée romantique des correspondances qui s'établissent entre l'âme humaine et l'âme de la nature est souvent exploitée par Balzac. [...] Mais aussi l'idée inverse est proposée. L'imagination exaltée cherche des présages autour de soi et tente de lire la nature comme un champ augural, d'y découvrir les hiéroglyphes de la pensée. Le narrateur et Pauline, au bord de la mer sans rides et du ciel sans nuages se font déchiffreurs de signes: [...] <sup>39</sup>

The horizon here is a manifestation of the infinite. Sharing the same color, the smooth sea and the cloudless sky imply the possibility of a transcendental dimension. Embodying the thoughts and feelings of the two young people, “ces deux langes de l'infini” become the realm of youthful

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<sup>38</sup> Balzac, Enfant maudit, 560

<sup>39</sup> Gautier, l'homme intérieur chez Balzac, 282

illusions. Balzac's short story "Drame au bord de la mer" will be studied in detail, later in this chapter, as the protagonist Cambremer seeks redemption by contemplating the ocean.

In Baudelaire devant l'innombrable, Antoine Compagnon refers to the poetic topos of an aquatic and celestial harmony that reaches beyond French Literature. "Topos poétique, cette harmonie du ciel et de la mer rappelle les vers célèbres de Leopardi (1798-1837) à la fin du poème "l'infinito": "Così tra questa / Immensità s'annega il pensier mio: / E il naufragar m'è dolce in questo mare."<sup>40</sup> (v. 13-15) Although Giacomo Leopardi's poem "L'infinito" is not about the sea, it is nevertheless existent in the final unforgettable metaphor. Both present and absent at the same time, the depths of the sea seems to absorb man's thought like an abyss engulfing a ship. The imagination of Leopardi goes from the contemplation of the horizon to a meditation upon Eternity, punctuated by the whisper of the wind among the leaves and contrasting with the infinite silence created by his own imagination. His imaginary setting of interminable spaces, unadulterated silence, and eternity leads him to compare his thoughts to a pleasurable shipwreck in the depths of immensity. Assessing his feelings and ideas, transcending the mortality surrounding him with the immortality of his vision: "e mi sovvien l'eterno", Leopardi dives into the waves of an allegorical sea, confirming the fact that it encourages and inspires deep thinking. Bruno Biral, in La posizione storica di Giacomo Leopardi, discusses the poet's views of the temporal and spatial dimensions of Infinity: "Un fulmineo ribaltamento di piani: lo spazio infinito, immaginato oltre la siepe, si converte nel tempo eterno che coincide con il nulla, perché tutte le stagioni umane sono già morte e le future sono destinate a morire."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Giacomo Leopardi's "L'infinito" quoted by Antoine Compagnon, in Baudelaire devant l'innombrable, 102

<sup>41</sup> Bruno Biral, La posizione storica di Giacomo Leopardi, (Torino, Piccola Biblioteca Einaudi, 1978) 233-34

A notion of evanescence captured by the memory is suggested as the poem navigates between the eternal and the ephemeral. As man is confronted with nothingness, and the fleeting nature of all things, he is reminded of Infinity. Examining Leopardi's religious ideas, Biral states: "... la grave infelicità dei tempi moderni è determinata dal trionfo della ragione che ha sopraffatto non solo la natura primitiva creatrice delle illusioni, ma anche il sentimento religioso: il Leopardi riconosce alla religione la virtù di arricchire la vita risollemandola dalla piatezza della nuda razionalità."<sup>42</sup> Blaming the dry rule of reason for stifling creative illusions as well as religious feelings, Leopardi feels that religion enriches life by lifting it over a bare and unembellished rationality, thus providing an impetus towards Infinity.

Discussing infinity as well as the flow of life leads to a recollection of the Spanish poet Jorge Manrique's works (1440-1479). His poetical reflections oppose eternal life to life on earth, and are summed up in his famous verse:

Nuestras vidas son los ríos  
que van a dar en la mar,  
que es el morir;<sup>43</sup> (v. 25-27)

A poet of the Middle Age, Manrique is mostly known about his "Coplas". The most famous ones were written about the loss of his father: "Coplas de Jorge Manrique por la muerte de su padre". In his verse, Manrique discusses the evanescence of life, focusing on an appraisal of eternity as being the real life. Differing from Leopardi's religious ideas, or for that matter from Baudelaire's, Manrique's inspiration is strongly influenced by Medieval Christianity. Even when the sea is used as a metaphor, its characteristics spread to infinity. Quoting Baudelaire who describes

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<sup>42</sup> Biral, La posizione storica di Giacomo Leopardi, 59

<sup>43</sup> Jorge Manrique, "Coplas de Jorge Manrique por la muerte de su padre", Antología de Autores Españoles Antiguos y Modernos, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1972) 110.

Hugo, Compagnon writes: “Dans la mer comme métaphore de l’immensité et de l’infini, il fait bon s’abîmer: ‘Ainsi est-il emporté irrésistiblement vers tout symbole de l’infini, la mer, le ciel’, dira Baudelaire de Victor Hugo, dans sa notice de l’anthologie d’Eugène Crépet (II, 136).”<sup>44</sup>

Cabantous, analyzing Chateaubriand’s experience in the realm of contemplation and meditation, predicts a deviation from the traditional teachings of Christianity, as well as an adherence to a form of “déisme” or “panthéisme” such as that attributed to Victor Hugo. However, Hugo himself denies such branding when he states in his Correspondence: “Je ne suis pas panthéiste. Le panthéisme dit: *Tout est Dieu*. Moi, je dis: *Dieu est tout*. — Différence profonde<sup>1</sup>.”<sup>45</sup>

Emmanuel Godo observes that Hugo’s works contain a particular “théologie de la mer”, which appears in most of his novels whose setting is the sea:

*“On peut parler d’une véritable théologie de la mer chez Hugo. La mer, c’est l’immensité de Dieu rendue visible à l’homme: évidente et insaisissable, abyssale et monstrueuse, elle engendre une spiritualité de l’effarement et de la fascination qui ne peut se dire que dans une prose hallucinée qui place Hugo à la confluence de Lautréamont et de Rimbaud.”*<sup>46</sup>

Considering two different excerpts from Les Travailleurs de la mer (1866), and l’Homme qui rit (1868), the reader can evaluate the power of transcendence emanating from the sea and lifting the concerns of the voyagers all the way to the sky.

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<sup>44</sup> Compagnon, Baudelaire, 102

<sup>45</sup> Quoted by Villiers, in L’Univers métaphysique, 261. The italics are in the text.

<sup>46</sup> Godo, Victor Hugo et Dieu, 265. The italics are in the text.

## 5.5. The Power of Prayer: Orthodox and Unorthodox Believers

Hugo selects l'Archipel de la Manche as a site for his novel Les Travailleurs de la mer; it is an area where it seems that "l'on dirait que Dieu est plus présent [...] qu'ailleurs<sup>1</sup>. (XII, 518)"<sup>47</sup> In times of danger, as he seeks the protection of a Superior power, man remembers his Creator. As he confronts a tempestuous sea, Man struggles with all his might, however, the physical effort needs to be complemented by the additional spiritual effort, which is prayer. In Victor Hugo et Dieu: Bibliographie d'une âme, (2001) Emmanuel Godo, a specialist in the study of the spiritual component in literature, explains the mystic power of prayer as well as its healing effect. Prayer is depicted as a motivational force, which propels man towards the achievement of his goal. Far from representing a form of surrender prayer reinforces man's willpower by intensifying his strength through the annexation of a Divine Power transcending his own: "La lutte se termine en prière—la prière, énorme force propre à l'âme et de même espèce que le mystère" (XII, 759), étant, chez Hugo, non un renoncement, mais la poursuite de la lutte quand il n'y a plus de moyen humain de lutter:"<sup>48</sup> Although Les Travailleurs de la mer offers paradigms of Good versus Evil, such as Lethierry and Gilliatt versus Clubin, the reader will navigate between the diverse metaphysical thoughts of the protagonists. Since the quest for the absolute is first and foremost a personal endeavour, he will become acquainted with characters who perform a traditional act of prayer, and others who do not, while still keeping an unwavering belief in God. According to Godo, "Ce que raconte Hugo dans les *Travailleurs de la mer*, sur le mode d'un romanesque allégorique, c'est la recherche de l'absolu dans laquelle lui-même est engagé depuis l'origine."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Hugo's Les Travailleurs, quoted by Godo in Victor Hugo et Dieu, 195.

<sup>48</sup> Godo, Victor Hugo et Dieu, 199.

<sup>49</sup> Godo, Victor Hugo et Dieu, 197.

The God seeker, says Godo, is a relentless combatant, whose objective is not easily attainable: “– le chercheur de Dieu est aussi un travailleur de *l’amer*—”<sup>50</sup> The pun is on the word “amer” meaning bitterness instead of “mer” meaning the sea. According to Godo, Hugo as well as his protagonists are seekers of the “absolu”, which is another version of infinity. Hugo, in William Shakespeare, defines religion as contemplation followed by meditation: “La religion n’est pas [...], mais de tout regarder avec une âme tranquille.”<sup>51</sup> Mess Lethierry for instance, owner of the steamboat “La Durande” and a remarkable sailor himself, was not the typical believer: “Il croyait au Bon Dieu, pas au reste. Le peu qu’il allait aux églises était politesse.”<sup>52</sup> Like a real sailor whose whole world is contained aboard his ship, Lethierry has a direct relationship with God. After all, God was the only protector and source of salvation at the time of danger. Cabantous’ analysis of life at sea can perfectly be applied to the characters in Hugo’s novel: “Loin de leur paroisse, sans prêtre à bord la plupart du temps, les marins ont appris à se passer du clergé pour s’adresser au ciel.”<sup>53</sup> Not only did Lethierry consider the rituals of prayer to be redundant, but he also harbored mistrust towards members of the clergy. Advising his niece to marry anyone she chooses but a priest, Lethierry could not predict that Déruchette would do just the opposite of his request when she married the Reverend Ebenezer Caudray.

In Les Travailleurs de la mer, the narrator emphasizes the fact that “mess Lethierry ne priait point.”<sup>54</sup> That very statement, twice repeated, indicates a lack of consolation for Lethierry. Shattered by the loss of his steamboat “La Durande”, he is overcome by depression, and the

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<sup>50</sup> Godo, Victor Hugo et Dieu, 197.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted by Michel Butor, in Repertoire III, (Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 1964) 227.

<sup>52</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 130.

<sup>53</sup> Cabantous, Le Ciel dans la mer, 171

<sup>54</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 466.

narrator feels the need to analyze the extent of Lethierry's relationship to God. Dealing with God on a basis of equality is not such a good idea after all, since one requires the protection of a Powerful Being in times of need. "Mais Lethierry ne priait pas."<sup>55</sup> However, Lethierry's misfortune did not drag him to the abyss. Fortune smiled to him, as his steamboat and his money were both recovered by Gilliatt. A God of justice had given him what was rightfully his, and had lifted his spirits from the discouraged mood in which he was drowning. Discovering that God was on his side was in itself a sign of transcendence, which exploded in Lethierry's mind as he rejoiced. His triumphant jubilation was expressed in his cry: "Il y a un Dieu, canaille!"<sup>56</sup> This cry is equivalent to the Titan's cry in Hugo's poem "Les Titans": "Et leur cria, terrible: O dieux, il est un Dieu!"<sup>57</sup> Lethierry is also a Titan in his own manner. Innovative, he was the first to run the steamboat, which was a novelty for the islanders. The *Durande* is presented as a metaphysical statement, confirming the triumph of progress over the backward religious beliefs of the community. In the religious controversy stirred by the appearance of the steamboat, Victor Hugo sides with the sacred-like aspect of scientific progress: "Le but du romancier n'est pas seulement de critiquer les préjugés de la religion mais de donner au bateau une sacralité qui confèrera au travail de Gilliatt une valeur symbolique."<sup>58</sup>

Defiant, Lethierry had his own beliefs as far as religious matters were concerned. His convictions lead him to affirm his beliefs to himself, if not to anyone else, considering it to be a private matter, and most probably fearing that he might not be understood. Lifting his eyes to the ceiling as if he could see the divinity, he reiterates his affirmation of the existence of God: "Mess

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<sup>55</sup> Hugo, *Les Travailleurs*, 466.

<sup>56</sup> Hugo, *Les Travailleurs*, 490

<sup>57</sup> Quoted by Louis Aguetant, in *Victor Hugo, poète de la nature*, (Paris, L'Harmattan, 2000) 456.

<sup>58</sup> Godo, *Victor Hugo et Dieu*, 197

Lethierry s'arrêta, leva les yeux avec ce regard qui voit le ciel à travers le plafond, et dit entre ses dents: " Il y en a un."<sup>59</sup>

According to Lethierry, God, who empowered the sea to render justice by punishing those who wished him harm, and by restituting his boat as well as his money, deserves to be acknowledged. Lethierry does so with a deep gratitude; his acknowledgement conveys both his resentment and his victory over the felony of Clubin. In Victor Hugo et Dieu, Godo examines the poet's belief in the forces of Good and Evil: Clubin's lack of faith is the basis of his villainy. "L'homme du bien est nécessairement homme de Dieu chez Hugo. De même l'homme du mal est celui qui a rompu tout lien avec Dieu: Clubin, par exemple, fait le mal parce qu'il est incroyant: 'Quant à Dieu, ce mot de quatre lettres l'occupait peu' (XII, 649)"<sup>60</sup>.

Agreeing with Lethierry, Hugo adds his own "profession de foi": the inevitable fact of God's presence within man is immovable. It is the one notion that cannot be tangibly grasped. However, what cannot be seen can still be comprehended: "où le regard s'arrête, l'esprit peut continuer."<sup>61</sup> The less tangible the notion of God is, the deeper its existence. In his verse as well as his novels, Hugo, "le chercheur de Dieu", persists in highlighting the presence of God shining through the universe. As Godo explains: "Le romancier prolonge le sacerdote du poète, qui consiste à dire, sans relâche, la présence de Dieu dans le monde et le drame religieux qu'est toute vie humaine."<sup>62</sup>

Lethierry's redemption was due to the superhuman endurance and the perseverance of another sailor, Gilliatt. He admits that he owes him his moral salvation as well as his sanity:

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<sup>59</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 490.

<sup>60</sup> Godo, Victor Hugo et Dieu, 198, footnote 1.

<sup>61</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 371.

<sup>62</sup> Godo, Victor Hugo et Dieu, 203.



“Grâce à lui, je redeviens quelqu’un.”<sup>63</sup> His gratitude towards Gilliatt is as impetuous as his faith in God. Addressing him as a saint at times and a devil at others, he is struck by Gilliatt’s inconceivable accomplishment in overcoming the sea as well as the other elements of nature. Lethierry tells Gilliatt that he has done “plus de miracles à [lui] seul que tous les saints du paradis.”<sup>64</sup> Yet, in celebrating Gilliatt’s courage, he acknowledges that only the devil could achieve what he has done: “Hurrah Gilliatt! Je ne sais pas ce qu’il a fait, mais il a certainement été un diable,”<sup>65</sup> The reader, having witnessed his ordeal, is entitled to inquire about Gilliatt’s transcendental experience. What is exactly Gilliatt’s position within his surroundings? Hugo’s narrator indicates it: “d’un côté la mer, de l’autre une âme; d’un côté l’infini, de l’autre un atome.”<sup>66</sup> When alone at sea, struggling with all his might against the unleashed forces of a “nature-hydre”<sup>67</sup>, as Louis Aguetant describes it in Victor Hugo poète de la nature, facing hunger, thirst and exhaustion, he senses his finitude and prays for salvation.

[...] ayant autour de lui et au-dessous de lui l’océan, et au-dessus de lui les constellations, sous l’insondable, il s’affaissa, il renonça, il se coucha de tout son long le dos sur la roche, la face aux étoiles, vaincu, et, joignant les mains devant la profondeur terrible, il cria dans l’infini: ‘Grâce!’

Terrassé par l’immensité, il la pria.<sup>68</sup>

Discussing the importance of prayer as well as the relief provided by it, Victor Hugo’s narrator, who laments the fact that Lethierry does not pray, seems to be confident that Gilliatt’s

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<sup>63</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 495.

<sup>64</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 492.

<sup>65</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 495.

<sup>66</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 459.

<sup>67</sup> L. Aguetant, Victor Hugo, poète de la nature, 315.

<sup>68</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 460.

prayer will result in his salvation. The mysterious power of prayer resides in the consolation it provides as well as a possible influence on fate itself, determining the balance of fortune to tilt in the supplicant's favor. In a poem of Les Contemplations, entitled "Le pont", Hugo describes a white ghost, whose joined hands generated light: " Ses mains en se joignant faisaient de la lumière."(v. 17)<sup>69</sup> Who is this mysterious being? "— 'Quel est ton nom?' lui dis-je. Il me dit: — la prière."(v. 22)<sup>70</sup> According to Godo, the dangers confronting Gilliatt are also matched by a metaphysical challenge, which the hero manages to overcome: "Le monde spirituel est comme cet océan qui semble indomptable et que l'homme affronte avec une splendide déraison."<sup>71</sup>

As Victor Hugo sees it, prayer provides hope, which is indispensable for overcoming pessimism and despair. Transcending his human capabilities, Gilliatt is indeed accessing sainthood. Nature itself is sanctifying him:

Gilliatt leva les yeux.

Un grand cercle noir tournait au-dessus de sa tête, dans le ciel profond et blanc du crépuscule.

On voit, dans les vieux tableaux, de ces cercles sur la tête des saints. Seulement ils sont d'or sur un fond sombre; celui-ci était ténébreux sur un fond clair. On eût dit l'auréole de nuit de la grande Douvre.

Ce cercle s'approchait de Gilliatt ensuite s'éloignait; s'élargissant et se rétrécissant.

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<sup>69</sup> Hugo, "Le pont", Poésies, t. 1, 260

<sup>70</sup> Hugo, "Le pont", Poésies, t. 1, 260

<sup>71</sup> Godo, Victor Hugo et Dieu, 195.

C'étaient des mouettes, des goélands, des frégates, des cormorans, des mauves, une nuée d'oiseaux de mer étonnés.<sup>72</sup>

The birds are forming a circle above his head, similar to a saint's halo. This mobile halo, formed by living creatures in the sky, is a glorification of Gilliatt's courage and abnegation. Gilliatt embarked in such an unusual enterprise that it is overcoming his human limitations and providing him with a motivation similar to transcendence. It facilitates his ability to dwell into an ideal area, which represents his ties with the infinite. Isn't that "région idéale", which Hugo mentions, an aspect of "l'infini"?

## 5.6. A Sea of Justice

### 5.6.1. Redemption through the Sea

In L'Homme qui rit, Hugo explores in depth the concept of redemption. The reader is about to witness the spectacle of the redeeming virtue of prayer, made possible by the distressing situation of the passengers at the threshold of death. When the "Mattutina", carrying a load of evildoers, is about to sink, the passengers, terrified by a prospective death, begin by assessing the crimes they've committed.

Y a-t-il encore quelque chose à jeter à la mer? cria le chef.

— Oui.

— Quoi? demanda le chef.

— Notre crime.

Il y eut un frémissement et tous crièrent:

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<sup>72</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 330.

— Amen.

Le docteur, debout et blême, leva un doigt vers le ciel et dit:

— A genoux.

Ils chancelaient ce qui est le commencement de l'agenouillement.

Le docteur reprit:

— Jetons à la mer nos crimes. Ils pèsent sur nous. C'est là ce qui enfonce le navire. Ne songeons plus au sauvetage, songeons au salut.<sup>73</sup>

Here, the sea is viewed as an instrument of Divine justice. The ship is sinking because it is loaded with sins. Unless those sins are redeemed by prayers as well as by a confession signed and sealed in a bottle or “gourde” that will be entrusted to the sea, the passengers will be utterly lost body and soul. The doctor Gernardus Geestemunde encourages his companions to forget about death and to focus on the salvation of their soul. Cabantous, however, discusses the sincerity of the feeling of redemption as the shipwrecked are facing the agony of a certain death: “Même sincères, l'appel à Dieu, le repentir au moment d'une catastrophe, ne se trouvent-ils pas supplantés par le désir compréhensible de sauver sa vie, de lutter contre le ravage du flot? [...] En réalité, devant un naufrage, pense-t-on en priorité à l'imminence du trépas et au jugement de Dieu?”<sup>74</sup>

Depicting the shipwreck of the *Mattutina* as a Dantesque image, Godo compares the sea to a terrifying purgatory. As far as Hugo is concerned, this is a saga of souls, rather than that of people: “Le naufrage, dantesque, de la *Mattutina* ressortit moins au roman des êtres qu'à l'épopée des âmes. La mer déchaînée figure un purgatoire effrayant. Telles sont l'originalité et la

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<sup>73</sup> Hugo, *L'Homme*, 235.

<sup>74</sup> Cantous, *Le Ciel dans la mer*, 113

force d'évocation du verbe hugolien: de rendre tangible le drame invisible des âmes, le mystère ineffable de la présence de Dieu."<sup>75</sup> The passenger's sins are held responsible for their punishment and their oncoming death, as the slow and terrifying descent of the "Mattutina" sinking into the abyss unfolds before the reader's eyes: "C'était tout le contraire de la submersion par la marée montante. L'eau ne venait pas vers eux, ils descendaient vers elle. Le creusement de leur tombe venait d'eux-mêmes. Leur poids était le fossoyeur."<sup>76</sup> Again, the vertical movement of descent is highlighted, as will be the reversed movement of a transcendental redemption through prayer, with the difference that the descent is for the bulkiness of the bodies whereas the ascent is for the lightness of the souls. Within the hugolian scope of vision, the sea is all-powerful and self-sufficient. It can render justice: punishing crimes and rewarding good deeds. It can also carry ecclesiastical duties: purifying the bodies from sin as well as relieving the souls by accepting written confession sealed up in a bottle or "gourde".

"Dieu a choisi pour nous. Rendons-lui grâce. Il nous accorde la tombe qui lave."<sup>77</sup> The passenger's sins are digging their grave, yet it is a redeeming grave. The purifying virtues of the water are emphasized, as the felons are driven to be grateful for an end that will save their souls.

The doctor who is leading them as a guide, or "duce" stands as a prophetic image since he is leading them to moral salvation, offering sound advice and shedding light on their lives. He is also attracting their attention to the torments of eternal damnation if they resist the only path left for them: prayer and repentance.

Otons de dessus nous notre forfait. Déchargeons de ce poids nos consciences.

Tâchons que nos âmes ne soient pas englouties devant Dieu car c'est le naufrage

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<sup>75</sup> Godo, *Victor Hugo et Dieu*, 203

<sup>76</sup> Hugo, *L'Homme*, 235

<sup>77</sup> Hugo, *L'Homme*, 235

terrible. Les corps sont aux poissons, les âmes aux démons. Ayez pitié de vous. A genoux, vous dis-je. Le repentir c'est la barque qui ne se submerge pas. Vous n'avez plus de boussole? Erreur. Vous avez la prière.<sup>78</sup>

M. Rediker's quotation of Ed. Braithwaite "The seaman goes not the way of all Flesh but the way of all fish"<sup>79</sup>, confirms the doctor's assertion that the souls of the seafarers could be saved despite the fact that they will end up as food for the fish. Prayer is thus described as the compass orienting the souls towards the right direction. It is the only way to avoid being engulfed in the most sinister of shipwrecks: that of the souls. According to Hugo, prayer is a mysterious power, capable of overcoming the darkness of the Unknown. The recourse to prayer can heal the soul, because it has an indisputable effect over fate. Guided by prayer, the shipwrecked cannot go wrong, since their invocation is keeping them on the straight path. The seafarer's life is thus viewed as a ship, which should be oriented towards the Creator in order to be safe and to avoid sinking.

Siding with Emilio Pérez Mallaína-Bueno's citation in El hombre frente al mar: "el tiempo que hemos de gastar aquí será mejor lo gastemos en ponernos bien con Dios"<sup>80</sup>, Hugo's Gernardus advises his companions to be in good terms with God.

The properties of prayer, its redeeming effect, its surrender to the Divine will, granted some integrity to these felons. The prostration as well as the contrition they were going through turned them from monsters to human beings. Touched by infinity, by the grace of forgiveness

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<sup>78</sup> Hugo, L'Homme, 236

<sup>79</sup> Marcus Rediker, Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea. Merchant Seamen, Pirates and the Anglo-American Maritime World, (Cambridge University Press, 1987) 195

<sup>80</sup> Pérez- Mallaína Bueno, L'hombre frente al mar, 50-51

they desperately sought, they dived so deeply into prayer that they forgot about the impending death awaiting them.

Derrière le docteur tous songeaient. La prière est une force majeure. Ils ne se courbaient pas, ils ployaient. Il y avait de l'involontaire dans leur contrition. Ils fléchissaient comme se flétrit une voile à qui la brise manque, et ce groupe hagard prenait peu à peu, par la jonction des mains et par l'abattement des fronts, l'attitude, diverse, mais accablée de la confiance désespérée en Dieu. On ne sait quel reflet vénérable venu de l'abîme, s'ébauchait sur ces faces scélérates.<sup>81</sup>

The felons' involvement in the act of prayer is so deep and their repentance so sincere that they are willing to forget every concern except saving their soul. Describing Gwynplaine's suicide in the Thames, at the end of the novel, Godo uses the wording "noyade ascensionnelle"<sup>82</sup> since its purpose is to be reunited with his love Dea. The drowning of the felons aboard the *Mattutina*, which can be depicted as an "immolation purificatrice"<sup>83</sup>, can also be considered as a "noyade ascensionnelle". Lifted by their repentance and atonement, they are, in fact, redeemed in an ascending movement. In a dramatic scene where they kneel in the boat already filled with water in order to repent, the reader can watch the ultimate moment where they are no longer repeating the traditional prayer after the doctor. Their silence indicates their death: they no longer are praying, thus they are no longer alive.

Le docteur seul était resté debout. [...]

Aucune voix ne lui répondit.

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<sup>81</sup> Hugo, *L'Homme*, 237

<sup>82</sup> Godo, *Victor Hugo et Dieu*, 207.

<sup>83</sup> Godo, *Victor Hugo et Dieu*, 226.

Il baissa les yeux. Toutes les têtes étaient sous l'eau. Pas un ne s'était levé. Ils s'étaient laissé noyer à genoux.<sup>84</sup>

Now it is the doctor's responsibility to make sure that their confession will reach its destination. Since he shared their crime he must also share their end. He will sink in the water while whispering the rest of the prayer. A sea of justice will carry their repentance and their prayers to God: the verticality of the body descending into the abyss is counterbalanced by another verticality, which is that of the soul ascending to Heaven.

Le docteur prit dans sa main droite la gourde qu'il avait déposée sur le capot et l'éleva au-dessus de sa tête.

L'épave coulait.

Tout en enfonçant, le docteur murmurait le reste de la prière.

Son buste fut hors de l'eau un moment puis sa tête. Puis il n'y eut plus que que son bras tenant la gourde, comme s'il la montrait à l'infini.

Ce bras disparut. La profonde mer n'eut pas plus de pli qu'une tonne d'huile. La neige continuait de tomber.<sup>85</sup>

A reminder of Gilliatt's final moments where he let his eyes be covered with water as he watched his beloved sailing away towards happiness, the felons in L'homme qui rit also have a concern for their moral salvation that matters beyond life itself. The message in the bottle is the confession of their crimes that will help redeem their souls: it also represents the truth that will overturn Gwynplaine's destiny. The sea is once more converted into an instrument of justice, carrying a message whose purpose is to admit the crimes they have committed and to reverse

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<sup>84</sup> Hugo, L'Homme, 237

<sup>85</sup> Hugo, L'Homme, 237



their wrong doing by the avowal of the truth: “La bouteille jetée à la mer représente la ténuité de la conscience. Geste infime et essentiel qui, à la manière d’un scrupule infinitésimal, purifie *in extremis* l’âme du damné.”<sup>86</sup> Godo explains the symbolism behind the “gourde” entrusted to the sea. It liberates the conscience from its weight of sins, thus purifying the soul, and leading it to salvation.

### 5.6.2. Guilt and Repentance

As an instrument of justice in Balzac’s “Drame au bord de la mer”, the sea became the grave of Jacques, Cambremer’s son, when his father drowned him as a punishment for his sins. The sea becomes also a means of repentance for the father who must atone for his crime. Described as “L’Homme-au-voeu”, Cambremer offers the sight of a combination of guilt and repentance to the onlooker.

Jamais mon imagination, quand elle me reportait vers les déserts où vécurent les premiers anachorètes de la chrétienté, ne m’avait dessiné de figure plus grandement religieuse ni plus horriblement repentante que l’était celle de cet homme. Vous qui avez pratiqué le confessionnal, mon cher oncle, vous n’avez jamais peut-être vu un si beau remords, mais ce remords était noyé dans les ondes de la prière, la prière continue d’un muet désespoir.<sup>87</sup>

Balzac portrays his protagonist as if in a state of uninterrupted repentance. Focusing his gaze on the spot where his son was drowned, Cambremer attempts to drown his remorse as well. The narrator likens the continuous prayers of the wretched father to waves engulfing his guilt. Since

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<sup>86</sup> Godo, Victor Hugo et Dieu, 203

<sup>87</sup> Balzac, Drame au bord de la mer, 568-69

he is silent and immobile, his voiceless prayers are the expression of a dumb despair. By comparing Cambremer to the first Christian hermits, the narrator highlights the impact of an overwhelming image of religious penitence. Apparently, a priest imposed this penalty on the tormented father who caused the death of his son, and consequently of his wife who was unable to bear the pain.

As he contemplates the ocean, Cambremer, transcending his grief and his guilt, fills his eyes with the light reverberated by the waves. As if this light were exposing the darkness of his deed, he absorbed it without ever blinking.

Ses yeux se remuèrent par un mouvement lent, son corps demeura fixe, comme s'il eût été pétrifié; puis, après nous avoir jeté ce regard qui nous frappa violemment, il reporta ses yeux sur l'étendue de l'Océan, et la contempla malgré la lumière qui en jaillissait, comme on dit que les aigles contemplent le soleil, sans baisser ses paupières, qu'il ne releva plus.<sup>88</sup>

Fastening his eyes on the ocean, "l'homme fatal" is not disturbed by the piercing light, which emanates from the water. He realizes that he needs to cleanse his soul by any means available to him. What could be more effective than that which Hugo described as "la tombe qui lave". Just as the sea cleansed Jacques' soul from his sins, so it will cleanse Cambremer's soul from his crime and his guilt. Instead of going through a physical death like that of his son, his is rather a moral one. Having the ocean as a witness while he vainly attempts to redeem himself, the memory of his crime tortures his conscience, and like Tantale, he most probably reenacts his deed mentally. Repressing his cries and laments Cambremer expresses his guilt by a deep silence. In a striking oxymoron about his protagonist being locked up outdoors, Balzac indicates

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<sup>88</sup> Balzac, *Drame aubord de la mer*, 568

the power of guilt as it controls his protagonist's inner self: "Il n'a pas dit un mot depuis qu'il s'est enfermé en plein air; [...]"<sup>89</sup> As a matter of fact, Cambremer is the prisoner of a guilty conscience, which is keeping him captive on the crime scene: the ocean. Just as he locked up his crime within himself, he also paralyzed his speech and his movement. Similar to a statue, he loses himself in the contemplation of the sea, seeking only absolution through repentance.

Superstitions are somehow a form of transcendence since they offer various elucidations of mysterious events. Although illogical, these interpretations are an outlet for anxiety and fear, which are thus avoided by attributing to them a meaning within human grasp. Fearing a superstitious reaction from his fellow villagers, Cambremer seeks religious protection, thus proclaiming his allegiance to God and the Virgin Mary. Thus Cambremer accesses a world where, as Cabantous mentions, the absence of temporality leads to an uncertain feeling of eternity as well as infinity: "C'est un monde nouveau, mouvant qui s'offre à lui, un monde où ne s'accroche nul souvenir, nulle référence, laissant à chaque fois la voie ouverte au sentiment confus de l'infini et de l'éternité,"<sup>90</sup>

The man is sitting in its protective shadow, helpless by his guilt and grief, and unable to lift his eyes from the spot where his son drowned. The guide indicates to the narrator the presence of a cross next to Cambremer who is still on the cliff, overlooking the sea: "Voyez-vous, dit-il en se retournant pour nous montrer une chose que nous n'avions pas remarquée, il a planté là, à gauche, une croix de bois pour annoncer qu'il s'est mis sous la protection de Dieu, de la Sainte Vierge et des saints."<sup>91</sup> As his attention dives into the ocean, Cambremer is probably aware that his unusual behavior may trigger superstitions that could prove harmful to him. Due

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<sup>89</sup> Balzac, Drame aubord de la mer, 570

<sup>90</sup> Cabantous, Le Ciel dans la mer, 30

<sup>91</sup> Balzac, Drame aubord de la mer, 569

to his peculiar conduct, the whole region fears him, and the reader learns that those who have heard his story just happened to die serendipitously. Had Cambremer been a poet, he would have said along with Rimbaud: “Sur la mer, que j’aimais comme si elle eût dû me laver d’une souillure, je voyais se lever la croix consolatrice.”<sup>92</sup>. Echoing Hugo’s description of the sea as being “la tombe qui lave”<sup>93</sup>, Rimbaud’s statement conveys the spiritual effect of the sea upon his soul.

### 5.7. Transcending Visibility

Like Balzac’s narrator in “Drame au bord de la mer”, the characters of Giovanni Verga (1840-1922), the main representative of Italian Verismo, investigate the signs they see before their eyes, and delving beyond the visible, look into the invisible illusions created by their own imagination. They attempt to extract the enigma of things from the depths of the sea. Whether these things are reasonable or irrational, they offer new perspectives; and the sea, the everpresent sea, seems to entice the mind into an endless search whose outcome is unknown.

Part of the collection Novelle Rusticane, (1883) the title of Verga’s novella “Di là del mare” expresses an unlimited widening of the horizon as the Sicilian author refers to the mystery lying beyond a sea of infinity. The expression “orizzonti sconfinati”<sup>94</sup> is an allusion to the immensity of the sea, stretching out to infinity without any boundaries. Verga guides the reader through the liquid maze of the sea, conveyed by an essential phrase in the novella “al di là il mare che si allargava nuovamente, sterminato”<sup>95</sup>, as it opens up a world of possibilities

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<sup>92</sup> Yves Bonnefoy, Rimbaud par lui-même, (Paris: Du Seuil, 1961) 82.

<sup>93</sup> Hugo, L’Homme, 235.

<sup>94</sup> Giovanni Verga, “Di là del mare”, Tutte le novelle, (Milano, Mondadori, 1997) 326

<sup>95</sup> Verga, Tutte le novelle, 327

connected to the liquid element. In Baudelaire devant l'innombrable, Antoine Compagnon states: "On se souvient aussi de la dialectique du fini et de l'infini que Baudelaire apercevait dans un tableau de Delacroix: 'C'est l'infini dans le fini.'(II, 636)"<sup>96</sup> Compagnon distinguishes also between "l'immensité cernée par le regard", and "l'immensité inquiétante"<sup>97</sup> of the sea. Whereas the former corresponds to "la bonne mer" since it is adjusted to a human dimension or perception, the latter applies to "la mer mauvaise"<sup>98</sup>, a sea expanding beyond visibility, and beyond understanding.

The sea seems to assimilate the murmur of the waves, as well as the contemplative mood of the passengers whose deep thoughts are lost in the immensity. A couple, about to be separated, enjoy the view of the sea from the deck of the ship on which they're travelling. Sight and sound are both internalized by the sea in a synaesthetic correlation: "il muggito delle onde" as well as "fissando i grandi occhi pensosi nelle ombre vaganti del mare"<sup>99</sup> come across the lines. As the reader can observe, eyes are not only a visual agent, but also a cognitive one. The expression: "spingendo lo sguardo pensoso nell' abisso nero e impenetrabile;"<sup>100</sup> which keeps recurring throughout Verga's works, can also be detected in "Le storie del castello di Trezza". This novella, a reminder of Balzac's short story "Autre étude de femme" as far as the subject matter is concerned, follows the pattern of story telling established by Boccaccio's Decameron. Man's senses are strained towards understanding the enigmatic universe hidden in the depths: the visual and auditory senses join forces with the cognitive powers in order to interpret the

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<sup>96</sup> Compagnon, Baudelaire devant l'innombrable, 102

<sup>97</sup> Compagnon, Baudelaire devant l'innombrable, 104

<sup>98</sup> Compagnon, Baudelaire devant l'innombrable, 106

<sup>99</sup> Verga, "Di là del mare", Tutte le novelle, 326

<sup>100</sup> Verga, "Le storie del castello di Trezza", Tutte le novelle, 76

mysterious world of the sea. Another dimension comes into play: the intuitive or psychic element, which seems to be more apt at decoding the signs detected by the characters or the presentiment they experience. “Ella volse attorno uno sguardo lungo e pensieroso.”<sup>101</sup> The author is suggesting that the eyes, together with the intellect, are capable of reaching the Unknown, thus transcending visibility as well as rationality.

Attempting to interpret the mystery of the universe in a transcendental venture, the passengers in “Di là del mare” focus on the inscrutable emerging from the sea. An explicit reference to Charybdis and Scylla magnifies the mysterious aspect of the sea, as the ghosts of ancient mythology begin to haunt the imagination. Intuition, leading to assume the presence of other living and sentient souls dwelling in the depths of the sea, leads to a visionary perspective, transcending the boundaries of the comprehensible world. Darkness concurs in concealing the mystery, augmenting the irrational terror, which grips the soul of the protagonists. The mystery of the unknown, hidden in the abyss, stimulates the imagination towards crossing the boundaries of reality.

The protagonist’s companion, who happens to be a writer, is sensitive to every possible mystery associated to the depth and immensity of the sea. Life is made out of such alternating joys and pains, which are the very essence of existence. Not only does the protagonist draw his stories from reality, but he also tries to deduce from the unexplored depths of the sea, models similar to those around which his works revolves. This interaction of illusion and reality allows a visionary literature to take shape, following the legacy of the Gothic genre, where the fantastic

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<sup>101</sup> Verga, “Le storie del castello di Trezza”, Tutte le novelle, 76

plays a prominent role. Verismo is thus reality interpreted through the many facets of the author's imagination.

Aveva preso il braccio di lui mollemente, coll'abbandono dell'isolamento in cui erano, e s'era appoggiata al parapetto, guardando la striscia fosforescente che segnava il battello, e in cui l'elica spalancava abissi inesplorati, quasi cercasse di indovinare il mistero di altre esistenze ignorate. Dal lato opposto, verso le terre su cui Orione inchinavasi, altre esistenze sconosciute e quasi misteriose palpitavano e sentivano, chissà? povere gioie e poveri dolori, simili a quelli da lui narrati. - La donna ci pensava vagamente colle labbra strette, gli occhi fissi nel buio dell'orizzonte.<sup>102</sup>

According to Verga, the gaze or “sguardo” grasping the various aspects of reality, is a forerunner of the mind, which can go beyond visibility. As far as the Sicilian writer is concerned, the eye of the mind is capable of transcending the visible world, as it steps into an imaginary one, which reveals itself full of mystery. The mind is doing the same action as the propeller of the ship: stirring relentlessly the water in order to unfold new layers of knowledge, and to reveal the unknown secrets of the abyss. The “abissi inesplorati” mentioned by Verga suggest the physical as well as the mental abysses of an invisible world. The onlookers, whether they are passengers on a ship or simply contemplators of the sea from ashore, are thus facing the challenge of discovering the mysterious life of the depths. Attracted to the unknown, man has always dared to plunge “al di là del mare” or beyond visibility. This quest for the mysterious life hidden in the abyss could lead to a realistic result as well as to an unfathomable one: “quasi cercasse di

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<sup>102</sup> Verga, “Di là del mare”, Tutte le novelle, 326

indovinare il mistero di altre esistenze ignorate.”<sup>103</sup> The adventurous gaze of the protagonist is a precursor of the very discovery that it may eventually disclose.

In “Le storie del Castello di Trezza” written in 1877, before “I Malavoglia”, where a series of flashbacks, in the form of past legends, could undoubtedly disorient the reader, the protagonist, Matilda, Giordano’s wife, walks alongside Luciano on an uneven road leading to a deep well: “Luciano, in piedi accanto alla signora, sembrava cercasse leggere quali pensieri si riflettessero in quegli occhi impenetrabili come l'abisso che contemplavano.”<sup>104</sup> Thanking him for holding her hand and preventing her from falling over the stones around the well, she forecasts her fate by telling him: “- Grazie! - gli disse con un sorriso in traducibile. Si direbbe che l'abisso mi chiama.”<sup>105</sup> A mysterious universe, which cannot be deciphered, is as enigmatic as the lady’s smile. Such ambivalence could either mean that she is aware of her ultimate fate, or it could be a lighthearted joke about a remote probability. Her insouciance will finally be translated into her tragic end: falling practically into the abyss.

Confined in the castle overlooking the sea, the characters are dealing with the fear of the unknown, causing them to experience an “angoscia sovrumana”<sup>106</sup>. Ghosts of murdered servants, as well as that of a baroness who committed suicide haunt the premises: “A Trezza si dice che nelle notti di temporale si odano di nuovo dei gemiti, e si vedano dei fantasmi fra le rovine del castello.”<sup>107</sup> The superstitions, which are part of life for the fishermen, seem to reach the heights of the tower where the “châtelains” reside. This ascending movement of the waves, of the abyss

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<sup>103</sup> Verga, “Di là del mare”, Tutte le novelle, 326

<sup>104</sup> Verga, “Le storie del castello di Trezza”, Tutte le novelle, 76

<sup>105</sup> Verga, “Le storie del castello di Trezza”, Tutte le novelle, 79

<sup>106</sup> Verga, “Le storie del castello di Trezza”, Tutte le novelle, 116

<sup>107</sup> Verga, “Le storie del castello di Trezza”, Tutte le novelle, 117



reclaiming the lives of the aristocratic skeptics of a world of shadows, is similar to the tidal movement, yet in a more powerful form. In an attempt to assimilate diverse classes of society by dragging people down to the depths, it confirms the widespread notion that “la mer est une démocratie”. Just as a population overtaking a city is likened to a flood in Victor Brombert’s study on Victor Hugo and the Visionary Novel, inversely, in Verga’s account, it is the waves who are assaulting the Castle. Commenting on a scene in Notre-Dame de Paris, Brombert writes: “The opening pages describe the crowd in front of the Palais de Justice in terms of sea, waves, swells, and currents that ceaselessly assault the “promontories” of the houses. This human flood tide knows no ebbing. Its flood is a constant threat of violence.”<sup>108</sup> Brombert’s description, dealing with the “convertibility of solid into liquid”<sup>109</sup> in Les Misérables, directs us to envision an army of waves attacking the base of the Castle standing as the symbol of an inaccessible nobility.

From the ship, a sad sicilian lullaby could be heard. Verga underscores the joy and pain as well as the humble hope expressed in these songs: “A prua si udiva sempre la mesta cantilena siciliana, che narrava a modo suo di gioie, di dolori, o di speranze umili, in mezzo al muggito uniforme del mare, e al va e vieni regolare e impassibile dello stantuffo.”<sup>110</sup> It is as if the roaring of the waves serves as background for the lament of the poor. Once again, the sea participates in conveying the voice of the dispossessed to the more privileged ones. However, the democratic aspect of the sea is not as equitable as it is presumed to be: just as the earth features humble shacks next to majestic palaces, so does the sea as it carries tiny boats next to majestic steamers.

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<sup>108</sup> Brombert, V. Hugo and the Visionary Novel, 70-71

<sup>109</sup> Brombert, V. Hugo and the Visionary Novel, 132

<sup>110</sup> Verga, “Di là del mare”, Tutte le novelle, 327

The contrast between “il vapore superbo” and “ delle altre barchette [...] come punti neri,” emphasizes the difference between the economic status of the social classes, as well as the difference in their scope of vision:

Sul mare turchino e lucente, delle grandi vele spiegate passavano a poppa, dondolando i vasti scafi che sembravano vuoti, con pochi uomini a bordo che si mettevano la mano sugli occhi per vedere passare il vapore superbo. In fondo, delle altre barchette più piccole ancora, come punti neri, e le coste che si coronavano di spuma; [...]<sup>111</sup>

The poor may die from hunger, and perhaps from being constantly exposed to discomfort and danger, while the rich may seem well protected by the comfort of their riches. Well, this is no longer true in Verga’s world. The human mind, unprotected by its social status, becomes the prey of an irrational fear, triggering an illogical behaviour such as suicide. The sea has a primordial role in this tragedy, overlooking the pattern of events, offering its abyss to speculations, and hiding the reality of its depth under the cover of its own senseless behaviour during a tempest. A witness to social injustice, the sea, no longer able to remain silent, will attempt to reach the eyes and ears of the highly born. Besieging the privileged class in its fortresses and palaces, the sea keeps attacking the minds just as the waves breaking on the rocks: “La notte s'era fatta tempestosa, il vento sembrava assumere voci e gemiti umani, e le onde flagellavano la rocca con un rumore come di un tonfo che soffocasse un gemito d'agonia. Il barone dormiva.”<sup>112</sup> Through its laments, which are a repercussion of the voices of the oppressed, the sea urges and compels the patricians to lend an ear to the victims of fate; it exhorts them to see the world of the others,

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<sup>111</sup> Verga, “Di là del mare”, Tutte le novelle, 327

<sup>112</sup> Verga, “Le storie del castello di Trezza”, Tutte le novelle, 115

the deprived, swaying on the perilous sea of life. And just as erosion occurs due to the waves successive assaults on the “scogli” bearing the palace or fortress, so are the minds slowly sinking in the depth of the abyss, relinquishing their rationality and embracing illogical impulses. With a stinging irony, Verga describes the baron’s insensitivity: while the sea echoes the cries of his victims, he is able to remain sound asleep. As a defender of the targets of life’s inequity, the sea prevails in its retaliatory endeavour, thus participating in Verga’s aim in compiling his social message.

Ella lo vedeva dormire, immobile, sfinita, moribonda d'angoscia, sentiva la tempesta dentro di sé, e non osava muoversi per timor di destarlo. Avea gli occhi foschi, le labbra semiaperte, il cuore le si rompeva nel petto, e sembrava che il sangue le si travolgesse nelle vene. Provava bagliori, sfinimenti, impeti inesplicabili, vertigini che la soffocavano, tentazioni furibonde, grida che le salivano alla gola, fascini che l'agghiacciavano, terrori che la spingevano alla follia.<sup>113</sup>

Whereas fishermen, who are hard working people, strive for their sustenance, the nobility enjoys an idle life, which is, nevertheless, not devoid of problems. Rather than being involved in the meaningful pursuit of their livelihood, they allow their minds to wander around the unknown mysteries lying in the depths. Being relieved of physical or manual labor can sometimes prove harmful to the mind and detrimental to mental health, since it becomes engulfed by idleness. Verga focuses on these obsessions assailing the upper crust of society in several of his novellas: as an example, the baroness becomes the prey of “tutti i terrori che sconvolgevano la sua

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<sup>113</sup> Verga, “Le storie del castello di Trezza”, Tutte le novelle, 116

ragione.”<sup>114</sup> Like an octopus casting its tentacles around its prey, the sea attracts and drags its victims towards its abyss in a descending movement. Rotating the wheel of fortune, it grabs the privileged from their meaningless and presumably safe lives, exposing them to perils and sometimes death, by a voluntary or involuntary drowning, just as their fellow humans, the underprivileged.

The immensity of the sea seems to stretch the imagination towards infinite spaces where no boundaries exist. “Si direbbe che l'abisso mi chiama.”<sup>115</sup>, this fateful statement indicates that Matilda is unaware of the extent of clairvoyance contained in her words. The helplessness of the human being appears in these words, which indicate that fighting the call of fate is impossible: when destiny calls, there is no way out. In this particular case, the call originates from the abyss. Not only does this phrase anticipate the final ending of the story where Matilda disappears into the sea, but is presented ironically as a response to a husband calling his wife’s name, in “Le Storie del castello di Trezza”.

In quel momento, a 150 metri sul precipizio, accanto a quel marito di cui s'erano svegliati i sospetti, quella stretta di mano, di furto, fra le tenebre avea qualcosa di sovrumano. L'altro li vide forse nell'ombra, lo indovinò, avea calcolato su di ciò... Si volse bruscamente e la chiamò per nome. Si udì un grido, un grido supremo, ella vacillò, afferrandosi a quella mano che l'avea perduta per aiutarla, e cadde con lui nell'abisso.<sup>116</sup>

In the previous instance, rather than the perspective of social inequity, symbolized by the abyss, the reader is faced with a different one, which is the rejection of a legal commitment as well as

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<sup>114</sup> Verga, “Le storie del castello di Trezza”, Tutte le novelle, 116

<sup>115</sup> Verga, “Le storie del castello di Trezza”, Tutte le novelle, 79

<sup>116</sup> Verga, “Le storie del castello di Trezza”, Tutte le novelle, 117

the desire for a forbidden love. As foreseen, the sea will represent an escape from the sad reality of life. It will become the recipient of those two movements: the repulsive one between Giordano and Matilda as well as that of attraction between her and Luciano. The events are shown as if they were planned and calculated by the protagonists. The oxymoron “quella mano che l'avea perduta per aiutarla,” summarizes the situation facing the three people concerned: all is not gain and all is not loss. It's a compromise, which will undoubtedly be resolved in the abyss. Although the lovers are together in the haven offered by the depths of the sea, they are no longer alive. Once again, the lament of the waves will become a means for revealing this crime of passion whose explanation is beyond visibility.

### **5.8. Devotion and Superstition**

A pattern of faith through fear constantly recurs in I Malavoglia, where the lives of the fishermen are “nelle mani di Dio”<sup>117</sup>, and their fate are shaped according to “la volontà di Dio”<sup>118</sup>. Fear arises from the behaviour of an unpredictable sea, and as life and death becomes entangled in an either or situation, while faith in divine protection becomes their only hope during such turbulence. When the sea gets rough, they pray for “la grazia di Dio!”<sup>119</sup> In this situation, the sea is the enemy, and God is a protector as well as a powerful ally. Prayer and devotion seem to be the only way leading to salvation, while blasphemy is banned: “Non dire

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<sup>117</sup> Giovanni Verga, I Malavoglia, (Milano, Garzanti, 1997) 154

<sup>118</sup> Verga, I Malavoglia, 151

<sup>119</sup> Verga, I Malavoglia, 151

sacramento! che ora siamo nelle mani di Dio!”<sup>120</sup> The grandfather advises N’toni to turn towards God: “Soltanto raccomandiamoci a Dio.”<sup>121</sup>

Bastianazzo’s wife, unaware of her husband’s death, keeps constantly repeating: “Oh! Vergine Maria! Oh! Vergine Maria!”<sup>122</sup> Describing Bastianazzo’s character, Padron N’toni declares that he “aveva un cuore grande come il mare, e buono come la misericordia di Dio.”<sup>123</sup> Again the immensity of the sea becomes a criterion for kindness while God’s compassion is the ultimate comparison for a charitable heart. The sentence, joining both “il mare” and “Dio”, establishes an uncontested link between sea and infinity. Levinas’ assertion that infinity is an expansion of the soul is illustrated here in the following phrase: “anche N’toni si sentì allargare il cuore.”<sup>124</sup>

Having no protector but God, unable to face an unleashed sea on their own, the fishermen on the *Provvidenza* are aware that only God can lead them to safety. They invoke the Virgin Mary as well as their patron Saint in order to avoid shipwrecking or death. They earn their daily bread by catching fish and filling their boat with its bounty with God’s help. “E la sera, sull’imbrunire, come la Provvidenza, colla pancia piena di grazia di Dio, tornava a casa,”<sup>125</sup> After a hard day’s work, exposed to the element, dreaming of a dry spot to rest, the fishermen are grateful to the One whose mercy allowed them to earn their keep. Neither challenge, nor defiance can be perceived, but rather a faithful submission to their Creator and protector. In Verga’s novellas, superstitions and devotion go side by side. As a matter of fact, superstitions are

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<sup>120</sup> Verga, *I Malavoglia*, 154

<sup>121</sup> Verga, *I Malavoglia*, 155

<sup>122</sup> Verga, *I Malavoglia*, 48

<sup>123</sup> Verga, *I Malavoglia*, 70

<sup>124</sup> Verga, *I Malavoglia*, 74

<sup>125</sup> Verga, *I Malavoglia*, 152

so widespread, that they are able to overcome any rational endeavour on the part of the protagonists. Each one evaluates things according to his social and economic vision. In “Le storie del castello di Trezza”, the overwhelming presence of superstition is obvious. The imagination of the underprivileged is circumscribed within its own sphere, making sense of what is familiar and unwilling to step beyond their customary experience. Chatting with Grazia, the servant, the baronessa discovers that her husband’s late wife took her own life by jumping into the sea:

— Come è morta donna Violante?

— S'è buttata in mare.<sup>126</sup>

Having committed a mortal sin, Donna Violante is believed to be the prey of demons from the hereafter. Grazia reports the superstitious rumors to the Lady of the Castle: “si credeva che la baronessa fosse morta in peccato mortale, e perciò la sua anima chiedesse aiuto dall'altro mondo, mentre i demoni l'attanagliavano;”<sup>127</sup> However, the fishermen, who had seen her soul dressed in white, confirmed her sanctity, as well as her peaceful demeanor as an unequivocal sign of her salvation: “e si ebbe la certezza che l'anima benedetta della baronessa era in luogo di salvezza,”<sup>128</sup> They also reported her courage, as she walked up and down the broken stairway on the cliff. Dwelling on the heights where a seagull would fear to tread, they are convinced she is as comfortable as if she were walking on a luxurious Turkish rug, in the best room of the castle.

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<sup>126</sup> Verga, “Le storie del castello di Trezza”, Tutte le novelle, 86

<sup>127</sup> Verga, “Le storie del castello di Trezza”, Tutte le novelle, 88

<sup>128</sup> Verga, “Le storie del castello di Trezza”, Tutte le novelle, 88

— Alcuni pescatori poi ch'erano andati sul mare assai prima degli altri, raccontano d'aver visto l'anima della baronessa, tutta vestita di bianco, come una santa che ella era, sulla porta della guardiola lassù, e passeggiare tranquillamente su e giù per la scala rovinata, ove un gabbiano avrebbe paura ad appollaiarsi, quasi stesse camminando su di un bel tappeto turco, e nella miglior sala del castello.<sup>129</sup>

The reader is able to observe the diverse interpretations of the humble as they deal with the mysteries of life, death, and the afterlife. They are led to believe some things that have such grasp on their imagination that they end up seeing them. Accentuated by religious beliefs and regulating their way of thinking, superstitions play an important role in their life. All along, the enigmatic sea is lending the mystery of its depth to such superstitious interpretations.

— E chi l'aveva fatto sparire?

— Chi! ... balbettò la ragazza facendosi pallida. — Ma chi può far sparire un' anima del Signore e portarsela a casa sua, come un lupo ruba una pecora?

— Messer demonio.<sup>130</sup>

Exploited and oppressed by powerful masters, the poor renounce any attempt at comprehending the world in a rational manner. They wouldn't even consider interpreting things in a different light than their masters. Their vision is molded by their own experience. They simply utter what they have been taught, without any additional suggestion of their own. Even in issues of salvation, they view everything as a power relationship: like that of the wolf and the sheep for instance. Their imagination dives deep into their environment, the sea, in order to extract

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<sup>129</sup> Verga, "Le storie del castello di Trezza", Tutte le novelle, 87

<sup>130</sup> Verga, "Le storie del castello di Trezza", Tutte le novelle, 89



explanations from the depths. Falling into the sea, coming back to haunt the castle, are all a matter of possibilities, as long as there are mysteries beyond reach.

Discovering that it was advantageous for him to share the beliefs of his subordinates, the Baron quickly pretends to adhere to these. It is also a means of convincing his servants to follow his orders, as long as he presents them in a different perspective. While he admits regretting his past opinions, he is simply taking advantage of their naivete. Stepping into a world of shadows foreign to him, he is able to manipulate Bruno into committing a murder that the latter would not have done otherwise. Throwing a ghost into the sea is no big deal: this is where ghosts belong in the first place, in the bottom of the abyss. The Baron's insistence upon keeping the matter concealed indicates that it would be against his interest to divulge the secret:

— Avevi ragione Bruno! disse il barone con voce sorda. Non volevo crederci ai fantasmi; le credevo sciocchezze di femminucce; ma adesso ci credo anch' io. Bisogna buttare in mare questa forma della mia povera moglie che ha preso lo spirito maligno... e senza che nessuno al castello e fuori ne sappia nulla, ché sarebbero capaci d'inventarci su non so quale storia assurda [...]<sup>131</sup>

As part of his social message, Verga introduces the reader to several layers of society as they deal with multiple transcendental experiences through the sea in “Di là del mare” and “Le storie del castello di Trezza” as well as I Malavoglia. The submissive faith of the poor, the obsessive fears and desires of the rich, innocence with its vulnerability, guilt, fears, and repentance are all mingled into an encompassing composite, constituting another “Comédie Humaine” or rather a “Tragédie Humaine” with the sea as a background.

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<sup>131</sup> Verga, “Le storie del castello di Trezza”, Tutte le novelle, 97

Just as Verga's works offered a mixture of devotion and superstition, so does Rosalía de Castro's La hija del mar. The reader is thus allowed to perceive the mentality of seashore dwellers, reflecting obvious similarities no matter which language they speak. Considered to be "la hija del mar", compared to an angel exiled on earth, Esperanza's miraculous birth is constantly remembered wherever she goes. The mystery surrounding her suggests a link to the divine: people mention her "poder sobrenatural", and along with her mother, she is described as an "objeto de veneración": "¡Bendita seas tú, niña hermosa, santa de nuestros lugares! ¡Bendito sea el día en que la Virgen Nuestra Señora te arrojó a nuestras playas!"<sup>132</sup> (Bless you, beautiful child, saint of our lands! Blessed be the day the Virgin cast you up onto our beaches!)<sup>133</sup> Sailors and fishermen consider themselves privileged and blessed by Esperanza's presence on their shores. Indeed, a divine purpose led her to these shores: the Virgin Mary is responsible for Esperanza's residence among them. Linked with eternity, Esperanza's beauty places her closer to an angelic illusion than to reality: "...se la creería más bien que mujer una visión angélica, un sueño que quisiéramos se prolongara una eternidad de siglos, una ilusión, en fin, que temiéramos verla desvanecida entre los vapores de nuestro mismo pensamiento."<sup>134</sup> (... one might think she was the vision of an angel, a dream we wish would last an eternity of centuries, an illusion, in other words, that we fear will vanish among the mists of our very thought.)<sup>135</sup> In a transcendental fusion with the unknown, her evanescence may cause her to disappear. Coming out of the sea, she could vanish unexpectedly amid the vapors of the sailors' thoughts like a mirage. Unfortunately, Esperanza will not always remain the angel she used to be, distressed by the death

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<sup>132</sup> De Castro, La hija, 42

<sup>133</sup> Rosalía de Castro, Daughter of the sea, trans. by Kathleen N. March, (N. Y., Peter Lang, 1995) 24

<sup>134</sup> De Castro, La hija, 50

<sup>135</sup> De Castro, Daughter of the sea, 30.

of her beloved Fausto, driven by despair, she will drown herself in the water, asking her mother to intercede in her favor: “¡Madre del alma! ¡Esta hora es la más triste de los afligidos, es la hora de la duda y de la desesperación! ... Si acaso me miras, y más pura que yo te sientas al lado de Dios que todo lo ve y todo lo juzga, si puedes tú medir lo inmenso de mi tristeza, ruégale que me perdone...”<sup>136</sup> (Mother dearest! This is the saddest hour of all for those who suffer; it is the moment of doubt and desperation! ... If by chance you see me and purer than I you sit beside God who sees all and judges all, if you can measure the immensity of my sadness, beg him to forgive me...) <sup>137</sup> Planning to commit the sin of taking her own life by jumping in the water, she repents, invoking God’s pity and justice. She acknowledges the immorality of her intended suicide, while pleading for her inability to put up with the relentless suffering and sadness of her solitary life.

The same superstitions surrounding Esperanza will assume a different shape as they address Fausto’s death. Pablo Emilio Pérez-Mallaína Bueno differentiates between religion and superstitions as he mentions “ las creencias mágicas no reconocidas por la Iglesia.”<sup>138</sup> Observing the customs and beliefs of seafarers and giving the example of a priest, he confirms that clerics were aware of that which they condemned and that of which they approved. “No hay duda que fray Antonio de Ciudad Real distinguía con toda claridad entre superstición y religión.”<sup>139</sup>

Prohibiting Fausto’s body from entering a church and from being buried in conformity with religious rituals, the fishermen decide to throw him into the sea, which, according to their demonic interpretation, is the best way to prevent his ghost from coming back to haunt them.

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<sup>136</sup> De Castro, *La hija*, 239

<sup>137</sup> De Castro, *Daughter of the sea*, 168

<sup>138</sup> Pérez-Mallaína Bueno, *El hombre frente al mar*, 22

<sup>139</sup> Pérez-Mallaína Bueno, *El hombre frente al mar*, 72

Los pescadores juraron por su alma que Fausto había muerto endemoniado; [...]

— No, por nuestra vida, tu hijo no entrará en la iglesia. ¿Quieres que después, en las altas horas de la noche y envuelto en su mortaja, salga de la tumba y cruce ante nuestras cabañas y eche al pasar *un mal de ojo* a nuestros hijos? Llévemose a un sitio donde nadie puede saber que está allí; después, a la noche, cuando todo esté callado, cuando repose todo en la oscuridad, nosotros iremos, le llevaremos oculto y le echaremos al mar... ¡El mar no devuelve nunca el cuerpo de los endemoniados!<sup>140</sup>

(The fishermen swore on their honor that Fausto had died with a curse on him; [...]

‘No, your son will only enter the church over our dead bodies. Do you want him to rise from the grave afterward, in the middle of the night, wrapped in his shroud, and walk by our cabins, putting an evil eye on our children? Let us take him to a place where no one will know he is there; afterward, at night, when everything is silent, when everything is still and it is dark, we conceal him and carry him to the sea to throw him in ... The sea never returns the bodies of those who are cursed!’<sup>141</sup>

Since Fausto did not have the luck of “Morir cristianamente”<sup>142</sup> he could jinx their children with the evil eye. They are intent on isolating him, as well as issuing an ignorant and superstitious judgement on Fausto’s soul. Esperanza, who witnesses his burial in the sea, never recovers afterwards, and becomes the “enferma”.

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<sup>140</sup> De Castro, *La hija*, 157-58

<sup>141</sup> De Castro, *Daughter of the sea*, 108-09

<sup>142</sup> Pérez-Mallaína Bueno, *El hombre frente al mar*, 54

The narrator depicts the desolate nature surrounding Teresa and Esperanza, the absolute solitude of their lives leading to a transcendental flight towards the infinite through the sea: “Los rugidos del mar, la cólera de las olas es la única que puede estar en consonancia con los tormentos de un alma fuerte, con los sentimientos de un corazón generoso que se desespera de los mezquindades de la tierra;”<sup>143</sup> (Only the roaring of the sea and the wrath of the waves can be in accord with the torments of a strong spirit, with the feelings of a generous soul that is made desperate by the earth’s roughness.)<sup>144</sup> The sea is depicted here as an alternative to the earth, where a strong and generous heart may feel in exile, because he is surrounded with triviality. The roaring of the sea is comparable to the anger of a tormented soul. The sea is thus the first step towards transcendence, as a flight out of one’s world, which will also become a flight out of oneself. The proximity of the sea has a cleansing and healing effect on the soul, and provides a respite from problems.

By its very nature, the world of transcendence escapes any definition. There are no clear lines: it is a blurred region where the spirit navigates between hope and anxiety, seeking an escape from one’s own troubled feelings into an ascending flight towards a more peaceful and promising region. However, Rosalía de Castro captured the essence of transcendence in her poetic rendering of the horizon: “La mirada puede alcanzar hasta una inmensidad sin límites, severa y uniforme, el cielo y el mar se confunden en un lejano horizonte formando un solo cuerpo y en una sola línea, y el pensamiento se lanza allá donde no puede alcanzar la mirada y gira en un mundo que desconoce pero que adivina.”<sup>145</sup> (The eyes reach a limitless immensity, severe and uniform, the sky and the sea mingle in the distant horizon to form a single body, in a

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<sup>143</sup> De Castro, La hija, 70

<sup>144</sup> De Castro, Daughter of the sea, 44

<sup>145</sup> De Castro, La hija, 68-69

single line, and thought hurtles through places where the eye cannot go, spinning about in a world it does not know but can imagine.)<sup>146</sup> Like the horizon joining the sea and the sky, transcendence is beyond comprehensibility or even visibility. And whenever the “pensamiento humano” comes to a halt, feelings and intuition are still able to grasp the incomprehensible, as Hugo suggested as he discussed Gilliat’s awareness of the mysterious impact of infinitude: “Le comprenait-il? Non. Le sentait-il? Oui.”<sup>147</sup>

In the “Bannières de mai”, describing the horizon, Rimbaud comes up with this striking image: “L’azur et l’onde communient.”<sup>148</sup> (v. 8). In Autour de Rimbaud, Cecil Arthur Hackett, reinforcing Rimbaud’s transcendental metaphor, declares that “La mer qui, dans le voyage, n’est que décor et image du ‘fini’ est ici le symbole de l’infini et de toutes les possibilités humaines;”<sup>149</sup> Just as Vigny’s spiritual message switches from the expression of an obvious atheism to that of a profound belief, so does the author of “Une Saison en enfer”, who proves that he is capable of describing Heaven with just as much sensitivity as his hellish descriptions.

## 5.9. Transcending Mortality

Although different in content, the imagery in Vigny’s poem “La bouteille à la mer” is a reminder of the sinking of the *Mattutina* in Hugo’s l’Homme qui rit. They both indicate how the sea enables men’s decisions, ideas and discoveries to reach their contemporaries, or even posterity. Both the doctor guiding his people on the “Mattutina” in Hugo’s novel and the young captain in Vigny’s poem could symbolize the poet as the leader of his people because he

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<sup>146</sup> De Castro, Daughter of the sea, 43

<sup>147</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 375

<sup>148</sup> Quoted by Bonnefoy, in Rimbaud par lui-même, 80

<sup>149</sup> Cecil Arthur Hackett, Autour de Rimbaud, (Paris, Librairie Klincksieck, 1967) 22

possesses knowledge as well as intuition. In an image similar to that of the doctor casting the “gourde” containing the written and signed confession of the shipwrecked into the sea as a last hopeful attempt before his death, so does Vigny’s captain flinging the bottle. Using the sea with its ambiguous possibilities for peril and salvation, the poem and the novel present the image of the bottle as an allegory for truth and knowledge that goes beyond death in an effort to reach eternity.

In Nineteenth Century French Romantic poets, Robert T. Denonmé devotes a chapter to “Vigny, Preacher in an Ivory Tower”. Discussing “La Bouteille à la mer”, Denonmé asserts that: “La Bouteille à la mer” is Vigny’s expression of hope and confidence for the future of mankind.”<sup>150</sup> According to Vigny, the captain’s only hope resides in a divine Providence that will help the bottle arrive safely and thus benefit posterity, since he will no longer be alive to see his ideas reach their destination: “Il lance la Bouteille à la mer, et salue / Les jours de l’avenir qui pour lui sont venus.”(v. 62-63)<sup>151</sup> Although the captain will not be part of this “avenir” since his ship is lost and his fate confirmed, he still rejoices about the immortality of his message.

Experiencing a surge of optimistic hope after an utter pessimism or quasi nihilism, Vigny extends his solidarity to those who sacrifice themselves for the cause of humanity. Vigny’s frequent repetition of “Dieu” as an all-powerful being stands in opposition to his previous verse “La Mort du Loup” in which he discouraged prayers, and “Le Mont des Oliviers” in which he advised strong men to disregard a divinity unable to respond to man’s plea. Here, “Dieu” becomes an ally of man against the capricious behaviour of the sea. He is also an advocate of progressive ideas and knowledge that He will protect for the benefit of humanity:

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<sup>150</sup> Robert T. Denonmé, Nineteenth Century French Romantic poets, (Carbondale & Edwardsville, Southern Illinois University Press, 1969) 81-82

<sup>151</sup> Alfred de Vigny: Poèmes, 278

Que Dieu peut bien permettre à des eaux insensées  
De perdre des vaisseaux, mais non pas des pensées,  
Et qu'avec un flacon il a vaincu la mort.

Tout est dit. A présent, que Dieu lui soit en aide!<sup>152</sup> (v. 68-71)

The expression “les eaux insensées” suggests the superiority of ideas to inanimate objects like vessels or even the sea itself, which possess no inherent reason or logic. The immortal legacy of ideas can transcend death. Infinity goes beyond the finite. In a duel between finitude and infinity, the reader can witness the victory of infinity, which confers immortality upon its adepts. Unusually enough, as far as Vigny is concerned, in this poem the last word is God’s word. “Tout est dit!” means that man has accomplished his deed; there is no more he can do; from now on, he needs the help of a Being greater than he is. Man is limited by death, but God’s eternal power will take care of the message. Transcending man’s personal concern for a more universal purpose is a commendable endeavour: God and man are viewed here as having the same goal, united by a pact for the salvation of a legacy. This common goal transcends the immediate fate of a single ship and a single person in order to guarantee the safety of future seafarers thus being able to avoid the deadly “écueil”.

As Cabantous gathered when he alluded to a religious perspective revolving around the contemplation of nature, Vigny’s verse is indeed a meditation on nature and the universe, and on gravity in particular, echoing Maupassant’s views in Sur l’eau, mentioned at the beginning of the chapter.

Désormais, la fonction du paysage conduit surtout à la découverte personnelle de Dieu. On retrouve ici les grandes aspirations de la théologie naturelle dans la

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<sup>152</sup>Alfred de Vigny: Poèmes, 279.



mesure où l'Océan parle de Dieu aux hommes. Cet effacement progressif de la voie peccamineuse et rédemptrice au profit de la simple contemplation et de la (re)découverte d'une transcendance facilitait un glissement vers une autre relation à Dieu:<sup>153</sup>

Cabantous focuses on the discovery of a personal God through contemplation, which is one of the trademarks of Romanticism and could be applied to the study of transcendence in numerous literary works of that period. Applying Cabantous' analysis to Vigny's poem, and particularly: "l'Océan parle de Dieu aux hommes", it is possible to follow the process of transcendence, which the captain of the ship is experiencing. The miraculous order of nature, which presupposes an Author, convinces the captain to surrender to a Divine decree: "— Il se résigne, il prie; il se recueille, il pense / A celui qui soutient les pôles et balance / L'Equateur hérissé des longs méridiens."(v. 26-28)<sup>154</sup> The situation described in this poem is dealing with an imminent shipwreck as well as a forthcoming death at sea. It inspires the choice and sequence of verbs portraying the captain of the ship as he gradually reaches transcendence. The first verb, "il se résigne" implies the surrender to what is, that he obviously cannot change. In this case, it is the loss of his ship, his own mortality, and finally his inability to pursue his valuable scientific discoveries after his death. The second verb "il prie" affirms his belief in a Supreme Being representing hope in salvation. It also attests to the power of this Being, as well as to the captain's need for His help in order to transmit his knowledge to posterity. The third verb "il se recueille" confirms the importance of meditation before reaching a conclusive idea. The cognitive process being a highly organized one, ideas are not reached haphazardly. The

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<sup>153</sup> Cabantous, Le Ciel dans la mer, 39

<sup>154</sup> Alfred de Vigny: Poèmes, 274.

contemplation of the sea as well as the reflection upon it, culminating with “il pense”, carves the path toward transcendence, which is reinforced by the miracle of Creation. The surrounding sea as well as the threatening perils inspired the poet to select the verbs most apt to depict the depth of the captain’s thoughts. In *Tas de pierres*, written in April 1856, Hugo records the correspondence between the movement of thought inspired by the sea and a boat swaying on the waves: “C’est de cette éternelle contemplation que je m’éveille de temps en temps pour écrire [...]; ma pensée flotte et va et vient, comme dénouée par cette gigantesque oscillation de l’infini. (X, 1176)”<sup>155</sup> The contemplation of the sea thus leads to transcendence through an intellectual process. In this passage, Hugo clearly assimilates the infinite to the movement of the waves, suggesting that the infinite/sea can activate thought. Isn’t that atmosphere similar to that which surrounds Vigny’s captain? This intellectual transcendence encouraged by the sea also appears in Mme de Staël’s Romantic novel Corinne ou l’Italie. The depth and immensity of the sea fascinates the human thought, because it is somehow linked to the infinite, with which it constantly merges.

D’ailleurs le spectacle de la mer fait toujours une impression profonde; elle est l’image de cet infini qui attire sans cesse la pensée, et dans lequel sans cesse elle va se perdre. Oswald, appuyé sur le gouvernail, et les regards fixés sur les vagues, était calme en apparence, car sa fierté et sa timidité réunis ne lui permettaient jamais de montrer, même à ses amis, ce qu’il éprouvait; mais des sentiments pénibles l’agitaient intérieurement. Il se rappelait le temps où le spectacle de la mer animait sa jeunesse par le désir de fendre les flots à la nage, de mesurer sa

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<sup>155</sup> Quoted by Godo, Victor Hugo et Dieu, 194

force contre elle. — Pourquoi, se disait-il avec un regret amer, pourquoi me livrer sans relâche à la réflexion?<sup>156</sup>

Standing behind the rudder just like Vigny's captain, Mme de Staël's protagonist, Oswald, observes the sea, deploring the fact that it grasps him into a continuous state of deliberation. Gone are the days of his youth when the sea used to only inspire him to compete with its waves. Now the sea is mesmerizing his thought, leading him to an abyss of painful speculations about life and infinity.

In this poem, Vigny's captain acknowledges the infinity of Creation, and particularly the sea, as well as the role of the Being responsible for it. In a deductive approach, that does not cease to be poetic: "celui qui soutient les pôles" illustrates Levinas' assertion, which describes the indefiniteness of space as the expression of the divine infinity. Attributing to the sea a primordial and regulating role in the order of the universe, Hugo proclaims that "[...] l'océan, avec son flux et son reflux, est le balancier du globe."<sup>157</sup> Similar to a pendulum in his tidal movement, the ocean creates an equilibrium controlling chaos. From its very polarity emanates the need for infinity.

Although Vigny's concept of the religion of honor, which Denommé describes as a religion of ideas, is obviously present in this poem, there is nonetheless an actual belief in an all-powerful Creator, supervising the hazards of the sea, which is extremely original. This Eternal God, whose benevolence could help human beings realize their wishes such as sending a message in a bottle, listens to man's prayers, and sides with him against the sea for the benefit of posterity. Such an alliance gives more strength to man's endeavours and enterprises. Denommé

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<sup>156</sup> Madame de Staël, Corinne en Italie, 29-30

<sup>157</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 318

notices judiciously the process by which the poet widens his religious perceptions and avoids limiting himself to a single inherited religious interpretation.

Yet Vigny eschews employing the images that he borrows from ancient mythology and Holy Scriptures in any traditional sense. Such learned allusions are instead usually stripped of their more orthodox connotations and are used principally to endow that which is common or prosaic in the human predicament with the indelible stamp of dignity and authority.<sup>158</sup>

In Quatrevingt-treize, Hugo depicts a ship loaded with passengers, about to sink. These, concerned about their fate, ask the captain about their location:— “Où sommes-nous, pilote? demanda-t-il. — Nous sommes dans la volonté de Dieu.”<sup>159</sup>

The Divine Will comes clearly into view when man is dealing with forces greater than his. The brief exchange on the ship in Quatrevingt-treize indicates the extent of God’s control over the elements as well as over man’s fate. The sea is presented as Divine territory where man has little to say, and where the final decision is God’s word. Just like Vigny’s captain, hoping, praying and having faith in the Creator are the key to salvation. The following lines present the human wish interacting with the Divine will. What will be the outcome? Undoubtedly the Divine will is about to prevail:

Qu’il aborde, si c’est la volonté de Dieu!<sup>160</sup> (v. 42)

[...]

Qu’il aborde, si c’est la volonté des Dieux!<sup>161</sup> (v. 119)

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<sup>158</sup> R. T. Denonmé, French Romantic poets, 86

<sup>159</sup> Hugo, Quatrevingt-Treize, 74

<sup>160</sup> Alfred de Vigny: Poèmes, 275

<sup>161</sup> Alfred de Vigny: Poèmes, 283

Twice repeated, this verse implies firstly the acknowledgement of an omnipotent Divinity, whose will is not subjected to mortality, and secondly the acceptance of freedom of belief. The second repetition offers a multiple version of “Dieu”, as if the poet wished to include all forms of religious beliefs in his universal statement. “Qu’il aborde” implies that the bottle will reach a safe harbour after a hazardous odyssey. It also entails that the captain’s fate prevents him from having the same end, since he is about to be submerged with his ship. In this instance the sea represent danger, while the shore represents safety. In Vigny’s own words, only God can lead the message in the bottle to safety. The Spanish poet Antonio Machado, grief-stricken after the death of his wife, is compelled to acknowledge the power of God’s will. In Campos de Castilla, he writes: “Tu voluntad se hizo, Señor, contra la mía, / Señor, ya estamos solos mi corazón y el mar.”<sup>162</sup> (v. 33-34) Confirming the omnipotence of God as well as his own defeat by his human condition as a mortal, Machado’s repetition of “Señor” is comparable to bowing to God’s power. The sea is once more the confidante of the poet’s bitterness, as it has been for many others before him. Transcending his own mortality through a faithful submission to the Divine Will, Machado recurs to a poetic image linking his solitude to the sea.

The belief in Divine Providence is indubitably expressed in this final couplet of Vigny’s poem: “Jetons l’oeuvre à la mer, la mer des multitudes: / — Dieu la prendra du doigt pour la conduire au port.”(v. 125-126)<sup>163</sup> The future generations or “multitudes” are depicted as an ocean, which will benefit from the knowledge enclosed in the bottle. But since the human will is not sufficient to transmit this knowledge, God’s help is needed for accomplishing this noble purpose. After the captain’s death, God, the supreme guide, will lead the message in the bottle to

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<sup>162</sup> Quoted by Terry, in Antonio Machado: Campos de Castilla, 58

<sup>163</sup> Alfred de Vigny: Poèmes, 283

safety. The contrast between God's strength and man's fragility, which started in the opening lines of the poem with "Courage, ô faible enfant [...]"(v. 1)<sup>164</sup> becomes clearly evident in this last image. Whereas man would have to exert superhuman labor to reach his goal, God, without any effort, can overcome the odds, such as distance, or a tempest in the sea, or any other obstacle standing in the way of the message.

The following verse is the most controversial in the whole poem: "Le vrai Dieu, le Dieu fort, est le Dieu des idées."(v. 120)<sup>165</sup> Although Denommé as well as many others, undoubtedly, relies on the verse in which Vigny praises the God of ideas as being the real God, the overall perspective of the poem goes beyond the notion of a divine protection only for the intellect. From every line emanates a belief in a Divine Power, which stand in a stunning opposition with the secular message of the other poems, in particular "La mort du Loup" and "Le Mont des Oliviers." Despite the mention of "le sort" twice in the poem, the reader can easily perceive the subordination of "le sort" to a Supreme Will. Notwithstanding the opinion of numerous critics, Vigny's religious attitude in this poem as well as in a letter to the marquise de la Grange confirms his unfaltering faith in an all-powerful Creator: "Ne m'interrogez jamais. Il y a tant de choses auxquelles Dieu seul peut quelque chose!"<sup>166</sup> Like Machado, Vigny transcends his mortal condition by submitting to a Divine Will.

As depicted in L'homme qui rit as well as in Les Travailleurs de la mer, the level of the water accomplishes here the double purpose of sinking the ship and also of keeping the bottle afloat until it reaches its destination. The sea is portrayed as an element of transcendence par excellence, as it causes the death of mere mortals, and the salvation of everlasting things such as

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<sup>164</sup> Vigny: Poèmes, 274.

<sup>165</sup> Vigny: Poèmes, 283.

<sup>166</sup> Quoted by Maurice Paléologue, Alfred de Vigny, (Paris: Hachette, 1976) 135

the purity of the soul or the progress of ideas: “L’eau monte à ses genoux et frappe son épaule; / Il peut lever au ciel l’un de ses deux bras nus.”(v. 59-60)<sup>167</sup> Just like Gilliatt in Les Travailleurs de la mer, just like the shipwrecked on the Mattutina in l’homme qui rit, who allowed the water to cover them without protesting, the captain, in a momentum towards Heaven, casts his last legacy with his last breath of life. Due to its altruistic purpose and motive, this act of faith is undoubtedly a quest for spiritual salvation. What is the content of the bottle? In which way will this message influence the lives of sailors in the future? In Vigny’s poem the message represent a warning against the treachery of the sea as well as hope for the protection of future seafarers: “C’est la carte des flots faite dans la tempête, / La carte de l’écueil qui va briser sa tête: / Aux voyageurs futurs sublime testament.”(v. 33-35)<sup>168</sup> Confirming Vigny’s observation about the perfidy of the sea, which the captain’s message is trying to overcome, Hugo declares: “On sentait de la trahison dans l’infini.”<sup>169</sup>, as he describes a silent and deserted sea setting where no prediction of an upcoming tempest could be detected. By sending them a map of the reef that triggered the loss of his ship, Vigny’s captain, in a moment of universal solidarity with all seafarers, intends to caution them against the very cause of his death. Vigny describes this message as a “pieux monument”(v. 30)<sup>170</sup> or an act of faith, since it transcends the span of human life, helping the spirit to live on. Nothing could better describe the purpose and the saga of Vigny’s bottle as an attempt towards achieving immortality if not for the body, at least for the soul or ideas, than Victor Hugo’s philosophical description of the transcendence of mortality. In Les Travailleurs de la mer, Hugo describes the momentum towards a much-needed fusion with

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<sup>167</sup> Alfred de Vigny: Poèmes, 278

<sup>168</sup> Alfred de Vigny: Poèmes, 275

<sup>169</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 408

<sup>170</sup> Alfred de Vigny: Poèmes, 275

infinity as a flood carrying human stubborn beliefs afloat, while they attempt to reach immortality. In these lines, Levinas' description of infinity as an expansion of the soul can be detected: "Adhérer à l'infini, être amené par cette adhérence à s'attribuer à soi-même une immortalité nécessaire, qui sait? une éternité possible, sentir dans le prodigieux flot de ce déluge de vie universelle l'opiniâtreté insubmersible du moi!"<sup>171</sup>

In another poem, "Eloa ou la soeur des Anges", Vigny celebrates the person "Qui s'immole à jamais pour le salut d'autrui."<sup>172</sup> Keith Wren, in his study on Vigny's *Les Destinées*, underscores the spirit of sacrifice as well as the emergence of the "captain-poet" as a christic figure conveying his message to posterity. As an ultimate gesture of stoic dignity and self-sacrifice, Vigny's captain's awareness of his impending death adds to his stature: "Il voit les masses d'eau, les toise et les mesure, / Les méprise en sachant qu'il en est écrasé."(v. 15-16)<sup>173</sup> In a Pascalian perspective, Keith Wren analyzes these lines as such: "the victim evaluates the waves that will annihilate him, and scorns their destructive force: a secularized version of Pascal's 'roseau pensant', man can rise superior to his own fate."<sup>174</sup>

In his commentary on Stéphane Mallarmé's poem "Un Coup de Dés", Henry Weinfield also evokes Pascal, praising the superiority of man's intellect over a powerful but incognizant universe: "One is reminded, as so often in *Un Coup de Dés*, of the Pascal of the *Pensées*:"<sup>175</sup>

Another shadow rises in front of the reader, that of the "prince amer de l'écueil"<sup>176</sup>, Mallarmé's

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<sup>171</sup> Hugo, *Les Travailleurs*, 375

<sup>172</sup> Quoted by Keith Wren, in *Vigny: Les Destinées*, 13

<sup>173</sup> Vigny: *Poèmes*, 274

<sup>174</sup> Keith Wren, *Vigny: Les Destinées*, 64

<sup>175</sup> Henry Weinfield, *Stéphane Mallarmé: Collected Poems*, Translated by Henry Weinfield, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, University of California Press, 1994) 270. Italics are in Weinfield's text.

<sup>176</sup> H. Weinfield, *Stéphane Mallarmé: Collected Poems*, 137.



(1842-1898) “Maître” or captain in “Un Coup de Dés”, a poem published in 1897 in *Cosmopolis*. A reminder of Vigny’s captain who confronts a fatal reef in “La Bouteille à la mer”, Mallarmé’s Master is also defying infinity “debout”, in a posture of elevation, as he tries to transcend the presence of a rock “qui imposa une borne à l’infini”<sup>177</sup> of the Thought. In a most unusual poem without measure or verse, similar to Apollinaire’s “Calligrammes”, Mallarmé emphasizes the risk-taking aspect of thinking. Before being certified, the new Thought has to undergo a perilous and hazardous procedure from which it will either emerge triumphant or sink into “la neutralité identique du gouffre”<sup>178</sup>. Henry Weinfield, translator and commentator of Stéphane Mallarmé Collected Poems, perceives the poet’s search for the absolute as an allegory:

What is allegorized in *Un Coup de Dés* — again, insofar as the poem can be seen as an allegory — is the ebb and flow of humanity’s continual struggle to seize hold of the Absolute: the Master-Seaman’s confrontation with the oceanic abyss, the Poet’s confrontation with the white page, the Philosopher’s with the Void, and Everyman’s with the “wrecks and errors”(to borrow Ezra Pound’s phrase) of experience.<sup>179</sup>

Although there is no message in a bottle in Mallarmé’s poem, the saga of the “Pensée” or Thought assumes the metaphor of a hazardous voyage at sea, facing the peril of shipwreck at any time. As a replica to Vigny’s succession of verbs, contained in a single verse: “— Il se résigne, il prie; il se recueille, il pense”, Mallarmé offers an even more elaborate view of the many steps undertaken by the Thought. Comparable to the throw of the dice, the poet implies that the survival of a new Thought involves chance.

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<sup>177</sup> Stéphane Mallarmé, Oeuvres Complètes, 381.

<sup>178</sup> H. Weinfield, Stéphane Mallarmé: Collected Poems, 141.

<sup>179</sup> H. Weinfield, Stéphane Mallarmé: Collected Poems, 266-67

veillant

doutant

roulant

brillant et méditant

avant de s'arrêter

à quelque point dernier qui le sacre

Toute Pensée émet un Coup de Dés<sup>180</sup>

Again the verbs describe the mental or even metaphysical meanderings of “La Pensée” before coming abruptly to a halt as its final success firmly secures it: “qui le sacre”. From a delirious ascent to the peaks, a hallucinating exploration of unattainable altitudes, the Thought wavers between the agony of nonexistence and the ecstasy of coming to light. The fate of “la Pensée” thus relies upon Chance who is guiding its steps across the perilous sea of established beliefs.

The sea, being the ideal setting for highlighting the opposition between man’s limitations and God’s infinite power, is also the ideal space for inspiring transcendence. Numerous metaphors have emphasized the similarity of the maritime and the celestial spaces. Vigny, describing the movement of the ship about to sink into a whirlpool, compares it to a circular bird’s flight.

Il ouvre une bouteille et la choisit très forte,

Tandis que son vaisseau que le courant emporte

Tourne en un cercle étroit comme un vol de milan.<sup>181</sup> (v. 47-49)

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<sup>180</sup> Stéphane Mallarmé, Oeuvres Complètes, 387.

<sup>181</sup> Vigny: Poèmes, 276

The vertical movement, going from the abyss in which the ship is about to be engulfed to the sky where the birds are flying, seems to deal with the gravity of the body weighing man down, while the lightness of the soul carries him to heavenly altitudes. “Enfin, oubliez l’homme en vous-même.”<sup>182</sup>, as Vigny says, advising man to forget about his own mortality and his limitations, and to proceed to a higher level, which is that of the spirit and convictions.

The Reverend Ebenezer Caudray is about to leave since Lethierry will never allow him to marry his niece Déruchette. Bidding his beloved farewell, “il lui dit ce mot, le mot des profondeurs: ‘Adieu!’<sup>183</sup> The ambivalence of Hugo’s phrase embraces both the idea of separation as well as an appeal for Divine protection. Similar to the Spanish “vaya con Dios”, it addresses God in Heaven in an ascending movement contrasting with the descent suggested by “profondeurs”. What does “profondeurs” indicate? Is it the abyss of death? Is it the depths of the human soul? Is it simply the separation through a departure that will leave the loved one without any protection? The requested Divine intervention is probably meant to replace the absence of a protector who is no longer there. The mention of “Dieu” implies the notion of height and carries the reader in an ascending flight towards Heaven whereas “profondeurs” drags him down into the abyss, in a descending dive. Sea and Sky are joined once more in a different perspective than that of the horizon.

The content of this chapter focused on the idea of transcendence generated from the sea. The contrast between the frailty of the finite and the strength of the infinite appears in every work studied. Novels, poems, and short stories display several facets of transcendence, which propel man into a world beyond his earthly limitations: be it through repentance, prayer,

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<sup>182</sup> Vigny: Poèmes, 273

<sup>183</sup> Hugo, Les Travailleurs, 508

redemption or struggle, all represents seekers of “l’absolu”. Examples from French, Italian, and Spanish literature concur into portraying the flight towards infinity: Hugo’s L’homme qui rit and Les travailleurs de la mer; Balzac’s “Jésus-Christ en Flandre” and “Drame au bord de la mer”; Vigny’s “La bouteille à la mer”; Lamartine’s “L’Occident”; Verga’s I Malavoglia as well as “Di là del mare” and “Le storie del Castello di Trezza”, and de Castro’s La hija del mar. In most cases the metaphysical quest originates from contemplation, then through an elevation of the spirit or transcendence, it reaches the desired goal of expansion of the soul. Most Romantic authors presented their convictions and devotion in their writing, occasionally combined with their doubts and rebellion. In his struggle to survive, the human being, aware of his own feebleness and conscious of the omnipotence of the Creator, will appeal to Heaven for protection from a multitude of perils lurking around every corner. Having recourse to the superior strength of the Supreme Being is an attempt for both protecting himself as well escaping from the problems and limitations of life. God’s proximity to man’s soul bestows upon him some of his attributes, in this instance the concern is for strength. In the marine realm, the seafarers need protection as well as favorable conditions; the shipwrecked prays for salvation and offers repentance in order to obtain it. During his “destierro” from mother Earth, and subjected to the oscillations of an unreliable liquid ground, Man’s spirit reaches rock bottom. Is it surprising that he should yearn for the protection of a powerful Father, in order to avoid being an orphan?

Meditation as well as the contemplation of the universe lead to transcendence. Going from the tangible to the unknown, most protagonists observed in this chapter were involved in the process of contemplation and meditation. They all needed an escape from guilt, from danger, or from loss of some kind, and they all had recourse to a Superior Power in order to heal their wounds. Whether they were physical or moral wounds, during their lifetime or in the hereafter such as

spiritual salvation, they all reached transcendence as they turned toward “l’Auteur des choses”, “l’Etre nécessaire” or “le Créateur”. And they all emerged stronger, more powerful, and more able to assume the responsibility of their sins and their crimes, more comforted by the idea that a God of mercy and justice had empowered the Sea to act on His behalf. As an instrument of justice, or as an expansion of the soul towards infinity, more than any other natural setting, the sea will always generate transcendence.

Rimbaud, in a poem entitled “L’Eternité”, finds the ideal site and sight for man’s everlasting quest. Doesn’t such an image depict a line of flight par excellence, a line joining the sea to the sky in an effort to unite or, to use Rimbaud’s own word, “communier” with the sun up above?

Elle est retrouvée.

Quoi? — L’Eternité.

C’est la mer allée

Avec le soleil.<sup>184</sup> (v. 1- 4)

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<sup>184</sup> Arthur Rimbaud, “L’Eternité”, Poésies, Une saison en enfer, Illuminations, (Paris, Gallimard, 1984) 108-09

## CONCLUSION

In his meticulous study, Le rôle de la mer dans la poésie latine, Eugène de Saint-Denis discusses the representations of the sea in Lucretius and Catullus' works. Confirming the fact that the Romantic poets were the first to reestablish the importance of the sea after centuries of neglect, he also observes that the Romans experienced a connection with the sea as well as a correspondence in behaviour, emotions, and reactions: "On l'a découverte à la fin du XVIIIe siècle, au commencement du XIXe, avec Chateaubriand, Hugo et Michelet, [...]"<sup>1</sup> Quoting Chateaubriand's *René* and the poetic malaise, and mentioning Les Travailleurs de la mer where Hugo portrays Gilliatt, his protagonist fashioned by the sea, Saint-Denis declares that the topic of the sea was not adequately explored before Romanticism launched it to the foreground.

Since the dawn of time, the human being attributed the powers of the sea to a divinity ruling it and controlling its waves. Dubbed Neptune by the Romans and Poseidon by the Greeks, the sea was perceived as reflecting the mood of its god. Invincible as well as invulnerable, the sea was also inspiring. Contemplating the magic of its beauty, awed by its wild demeanor, discovering a parallel in their behaviour, examining its visible surface and imagining the unfathomable depth of its abyss, Romantic writers sought inspiration in the vicinity of the sea. The protagonists of numerous novels and poems, all over Europe, experienced various emotional upheavals next to the sea: confiding in it, seeking its guidance, its companionship, and sometimes modeling themselves on its behaviour. Both pleased and distraught by their reflected image appearing on its surface, writers set up a network of resemblance that became a pattern.

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<sup>1</sup> Eugène de Saint-Denis, Le Rôle de la mer dans la poésie latine, (Paris: Librairie Klincksieck, 1935) 109

Either personifying the sea or objectifying the human being, a marine terminology emerged, highlighting the common bond between Man and sea. Separated from their homeland, the exiles evoked its familiar images on the reflective surface. Carried by ships away from their native land, they felt that the sea was the link that might reconnect them with it. The effect of the sea on the mood of the passengers was also noticeable: inspiring tranquility at times and unleashing panic at others. Caught in the nets of the waves during a tempest, the human being appealed to a higher power to rescue him. Opposing a divine power to the power of the sea, man sought protection as well as salvation. For the Romantics, the sea often led to transcendence, as man started worrying about his fate...

The sea has many names: be it the “Greco mar” or the Mediterranean, it has always had a prominent role in the human destiny. Rather than study the specifics of each sea according to its geographical site, I have studied the general characteristics of the water as it responds to the writer’s vision as well as the protagonist’s particular circumstances. Many authors trace their inspiration back to classical sources. Latin Poetry featured the extensive role played by the sea in Ancient Times: Lucretius, Catullus, and Horace for example, had their personal approach to the subject of the sea. Deriving mostly from Latin, Romance Languages provide an interesting vehicle for conceptualizing the sea in literary works.

Although I have mostly dealt with Romantic and Modern literary works, I detected that the writer’s vision vary according to dominant representations of the sea in his era. The poetic gaze is able to grasp the presence of Neptune’s ire and smiles in the manifestations of a powerful sea. In addition to this visionary gaze, there’s a pendulum movement swinging from the Past to the Present and perhaps to the Future, which is encompassing the totality of human memory as

well as its potential. Victor Hugo's Pendant l'exil, among others, evokes a longing for Paris, which brings back a flood of memories inscribed in the reflection on the surface of the water.

From Homer to Baudelaire and from Baudelaire to Camus, the sea has always been a topic of choice: the liquid element has always fascinated poets and writers. Whether it is voluntary or involuntary, solitude definitely offers an ambiguous aspect. The literary character chose to share his solitude with the water. His imagination was undoubtedly drawn to the water: be it as immense as the sea or ocean, or as tiny as a dewdrop. In the *Odyssee*, Homer described the beauty and power of a sea he could not perceive. Latin poets also wrote about the sea. But it was not until the Romantic era that an affinity between the human being and the sea began to emerge. It became noticeable that man's mood and behaviour were compatible with those of the sea. Frequently admitting the supremacy of the latter, as Lautréamont did in Les Chants de Maldoror, and Victor Hugo in Les Travailleurs de la mer, writers fairly assessed the power of the sea.

Following in the Romantics' footsteps, the decadent author Baudelaire linked Man and sea in both his verse and prose. Baudelaire's presented the dilemma of this explosive relationship in his celebrated selection of verse: Les Fleurs du mal. According to Baudelaire, there is an ineradicable bond between the two, which is expressed in his resounding line: "O lutteurs éternels, ô frères implacables!"<sup>2</sup>

Man and sea have always had an ambiguous literary relationship. Represented as an agent of safety or as a dangerous abyss, the sea is either Man's friend or foe. The literary character looks out to the sea for salvation, for guidance, for liberation, for self-discovery, for filling the void of solitude, for transcending his limitations. Watching the reflection of the stars in the water, and riding the waves in order to reach the sky, he either encounters a friend or a foe. The

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<sup>2</sup> Baudelaire, "L'Homme et la mer" Les Fleurs, 41



foe may drag him into the abyss, while the friend may help him solve his problems, and discover an unsuspected strength within himself, energized by the confident power emanating from the sea. Undoubtedly, the fluidity and versatility of the sea will lend itself to the protagonist's various quests.

Attempting to select a main poetic characteristic of the sea, one would probably choose: inspiring. Indeed, the sea inspires a poet's vision of things, of life, of his own identity, of the hereafter... Leading to an ascension, which is followed sometimes by a chute similar to that of Icarus, the sea offered a dual destiny to man, as it unfolded the outcome of several possibilities. The cruelty of Mother Nature is sometimes underestimated. In the wake of the global devastation caused by the Tsunami of 26 December 2004, the sea must be viewed with caution, perhaps even as a weapon of mass destruction, considering the number of victims it made. A question comes to mind: is the sea to be considered less trustworthy than the earth? According to Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, this is indeed the case in Paul et Virginie. An ancient Greek proverb reinforces this belief: "*La terre est sûre, mais la mer est perfide, dit le proverbe grec.*"<sup>3</sup> In fact, during its intensive efforts at self-destruction, Nature wiped whole forests, and upset the undersea.

Unquestionably, as in any scholarly work, a lot more could have been said about the sea in literature. Many authors were not included, not out of neglect but rather for lack of time and space. Due to the impossibility to discuss everything, one was faced with choices to make. In our day and age, where planes are used for travel, and ships for leisure trips, this attitude remains multifaceted at best. Having spoken about the role of the sea in the physical and emotional life of the characters; about the inspiration, the communion, the comfort provided by the liquid element,

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<sup>3</sup> E. de Saint-Denis, Le Rôle de la mer, 128. The italics are in the text.

I tend to leave open the outcome of a dialogue that may address present and future issues, perhaps creating a temporality of its own.

What does the sea mean to Modern Man? How does it differ from its affinity in the past centuries? Will contemplating the sea inspire our descendants the same feelings as it did our ancestors? How could the sea retain its poetic aura since so little of it is left unexplored? Will the mystery of the unknown depths persist? Will the Neptunian myth last? Will the need for the sea, for its physical and emotional healing powers, carry on? Will poets keep searching the answers above and below the liquid surface?

Indeed, the human spirit takes its flight towards the sky, proceeding from the reflection of the stars on the liquid surface, as Alain Cabantous observed in his extensive study “Le ciel dans la mer”. Several contemporary writers were not included in this study although their work are bringing a precious contribution to the aquatic topic. Francophone writer Gisèle Pineau (1956-) for example, recounting life on an island in Un papillon dans la cité, will communicate her own enlightened experience with the sea. In her book, the presence of the sea has a connotation of affluence as opposed to the lack of it, which is depicted as deprivation. Gisèle Pineau narrates a short dialogue between a child who confesses that he has never been to the sea and an old woman who answers: “Pov pitit!”

— J’avais jamais vu la mer! a déclaré Mo comme une injustice enfin dénoncée.

— Pov pitit! ponctua Man Ya en lui caressant les cheveux.<sup>4</sup>

In Les Vigiles, Algérien author Tahar Djaout (1954-1993) portrays his protagonist while he wishes for the presence of the sea. In another instance, the city is blamed for giving its back to the sea: “tourner le dos à la mer.”

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<sup>4</sup> Gisèle Pineau, Un Papillon dans la cité, (Cher, Editions Sépia, 1994) 109

Mahfoudh s’efforce de penser à la mer qui est là, tout près, mais à laquelle la ville tourne le dos.<sup>5</sup>

La ville paresseuse et casanière tourne de nouveau le dos à la mer, rompt tous les liens avec le large et se réfugie dans ses pierres.<sup>6</sup>

In his poetry Du Mouvement et de l’immobilité de Douves in which Douves represents a river, a loved one, as well as life and death, French poet Yves Bonnefoy (1923-) depicts the multivalence of water. He seizes the momentum as well as the ephemeral in his verse, for instance: “Partout où l’eau précieuse s’évapore,”(v. 10)<sup>7</sup>. The polarities of life as well as the taste of salt are expressed in function of water in “Dans le leurre du seuil”.

In “L’Autre”, francophone author Andrée Chédid (1920-) portrays an old man, Simm, waiting for his friend to be unearthed after a tragic earthquake. To make his wait more tolerable, he seeks the cooling and comforting effect of the water. His quest is presented in a crescendo:

— Enfin debout, il pensa à la mer.<sup>8</sup>

— Simm entre dans la mer. [...]

— Couché sur le dos, les bras en croix, Simm se laisse porter par la vague. Ses muscles se détendent. La masse du corps, bercée, est plus légère qu’une paillette, qu’une plume de grive!

Le vieillard ferme les yeux, goûte au sel de la mer. L’angoisse se dénoue. Dedans-dehors, partout: C’est un univers de bruissements, de silences, de calme et d’ondes...<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Tahar Djaout, Les Vigiles, (Paris, du Seuil, 1991) 105

<sup>6</sup> Djaout, Vigiles, 136.

<sup>7</sup> Yves Bonnefoy, “Dans le leurre du seuil”, La Poésie française des origines à nos jours, Ed. Claude Bonnefoy, (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975) 566

<sup>8</sup> Andrée Chédid, L’Autre, (Paris, Castor Poche Flammarion, 1994) 201

Next to flying, swimming is the most liberating experience. Calming and granting relief from anxiety, the sea provides a lightness of being, which is beyond compare.

I am convinced that my study is only a beginning, leading to a more in-depth research about all the possible effects of the sea on the poetic vision. I sincerely hope that an increased concern for this universal topic will drive more authors and researchers to dive deep into the sea of knowledge in order to convey their own experience. If asked about the reason behind the choice of this theme, like the young protagonist in Pineau's novel who wanted to become "maître-nageur", I would proclaim: "J'voudrais apprendre à d'autres à aimer la mer."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> A. Chédid, L'Autre, 206

<sup>10</sup> G. Pineau, Un Papillon, 123

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