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**Bridging the Gap between Center and Periphery: *La région* as a  
Medium to Thinking the Nation in George Sand, Guy de Maupassant,  
and Marcel Pagnol**

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**by**

**Valérie Masson**

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## **Dedication**

To my family and friends who have supported me with my work throughout the years.

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I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Alexandra Wettlaufer, my supervisor, who has continuously encouraged me to pursue my academic career when I had doubts about my aptitude and the quality of my work. I thank her for taking the time to provide me with insightful comments and give me guidance throughout this dissertation. I thank as well my committee for reading my work and encouraging me in this project.

**Bridging the Gap between Center and Periphery: *La région* as a  
Medium to Thinking the Nation in George Sand, Guy de Maupassant,  
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Valérie Masson, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2017

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This project examines how the division between Paris and *la province* has evolved over the course of a century, approximately 1850-1950, to give way to the territory of *la région* and its ideological construction. I examine how French identity has been shaped in reference to *la région* as a place of essence which has led to the construction of a myth of authentic France or *France profonde*. Focusing on three authors, George Sand (1804-76), Guy de Maupassant (1850-93) and Marcel Pagnol (1895-1974), each of whom wrote popular works that focused on a different region of France, I explore the evolution of the representation of *la région* as it was constructed according to the period of national crisis and the changing definition of the French identity. Applying the correlation between *le peuple* and the nation as formulated by Jules Michelet to Sand's "romans champêtres," as well as Ernest Renan's insistence of France's cultural heritage to Maupassant and Pagnol, I argue that the small community offers these authors the opportunity to reflect in their works on the nation. I contend that these authors have been misread as regionalist artists whose representation is limited to the defense of the cultural heritage of their region.

Instead, as I demonstrate, *la région* is used by Sand, Maupassant and Pagnol as a frame to comment on the community and the nation at large, and critique or defend its social practices.

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## **Introduction: Moving *la région* to the Center of French National Identity**

### **CENTER AND PERIPHERY**

As he travelled through rural France partly on missions of exploration, partly to prepare a survey of the country's rural populations, economist Adolphe Blanqui was above all struck by the profound differences between the inhabitants of the French countryside and those of the French capital. In his preliminary notes of 1851, he thus insisted that France was a nation where “deux peuples différents vivent sur le même sol une vie si différente qu'ils semblent étrangers l'un à l'autre, même s'ils sont unis par les liens de la centralisation la plus impérieuse qu'il eût jamais existé.”<sup>1</sup> What Blanqui refers to here is the extreme diversity of the living conditions, becoming ever more pronounced with the rise of capitalism and industrialization, between the population living in rural France and in the capital, the nexus of the country's political, economic and cultural life. Moreover, France's multiple regions offered such a variety of cultures and states of development that it was difficult to imagine them as forming a single nation. Therein lay the challenge of constructing a French national identity that could recognize and value regional specificities through local patriotism while ensuring the unity of the nation by promoting national allegiance.

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<sup>1</sup> Eugen Weber, *La fin des terroirs. La modernisation de la France rurale 1870-1914* (Paris: Fayard, 1983) 25.

The centralization in place since the establishment of power in the capital had created a hierarchy of space which opposed the center – identified as its capital -- to the periphery, considered as the rest of the country. *La province* referred to that periphery. Encompassing France's multiple regions and their singular cultural identity, *la province* gathered them as one whole as the collective noun suggests. It was defined in opposition to Paris, therefore as the negation of the characteristics attributed to the capital. The dichotomy between center and periphery originated with the centralization of power in the capital or nearby Versailles, which under the absolute monarchy turned *la province* into as space of deprivation due to the subjects' distance from the monarch. Constructed as a space of obscurantism, an anxiety of contamination accompanied prolonged stays in *la province* by seventeenth-century Parisian subjects such as Mme de Sévigné who during her short exile in Brittany, feared to lose the use of French because of her contact with provincials whom she referred as “gens de l'autre monde.”<sup>2</sup> If provincials were despised or mocked in some of the writings of the ancien régime because of the stigma associated with this space, *la province* became a topos in nineteenth-century texts, turning provincials into a type. The massive project of the physiologies of *Les français peints par eux-mêmes* illustrates this tendency. Presenting itself as an inventory of the different types of individuals of the society of the July Monarchy, the physiologies, although mostly focused on the urban context, devotes nevertheless three volumes to *la*

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<sup>2</sup> Alain Corbin, « Paris-Province. » *Les lieux de mémoire*. Pierre Nora ed. (Paris : Gallimard, 1997) 2. 2852.

*province* where it draws different types of provincials according to the region inhabited, ultimately turning these physiologies into ethnotypes.

However, provincials were often defined as one type of individual which thus disregarded their region of origin. In the physiology "La femme de province" (1841) for instance, Balzac illustrates the dichotomy between Paris and *la province* when he explains in a didactic manner:

Sachons-le bien ! La France au dix-neuvième siècle est partagée en deux grandes zones : Paris et la province : la province jalouse de Paris, Paris ne pensant à la province que pour lui demander de l'argent. Autrefois Paris était la première ville de province, la Cour primait la Ville ; maintenant Paris est toute la Cour, la Province est toute la Ville. La femme de province est donc dans un état constant de flagrante infériorité.<sup>3</sup>

Although some of the century's great writers such as Balzac, Flaubert, Maupassant and Zola were of provincial origins, their literary writings reflect the contempt of the time for *la province* as well as the mistrust for the figure of the provincial who migrates to the city and becomes successful thanks to his personal ambition and manipulation of others.<sup>4</sup>

Dominating every other city in France in terms of its size and influence, Paris stood as an intellectual, social, and cultural exemplar for the nation in the nineteenth century: accordingly, representations of *la province* frequently highlighted its efforts to emulate the capital by reproducing some of its cultural practices and attempting to match

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<sup>3</sup> Honoré de Balzac, « La Femme de Province, » *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* 8 vols. (Paris: Curmer, 1840-1842) 6: 2-3.

<sup>4</sup> Among the notorious examples of this opportunist figure in nineteenth-century literature are George Duroy in Maupassant's *Bel Ami* (1885) or Eugène de Rastignac in many of Balzac's novels in *La Comédie Humaine*.

its standards of taste. Print capitalism, with the circulation of newspapers and journals, as well as advances in transportation that made it easier for people and merchandise to travel between Paris and *la province*, both contributed to publicizing the Parisian cultural trends and reinforced the stigma of *la province* as imitating Paris as a model to catch up on its backwardness.

France's geography could be divided into three spaces constructed as three stages in the development of its civilization. In its earliest stage, rural France, made of regions relying entirely on agriculture, was imagined by the capital's writers and intellectual elite through wild fantasies presenting this population as made up of savages living in a primitive and isolated fashion. Balzac for instance sketches the rural inhabitants of Brittany in *Les Chouans* through a comparison to Native Americans, "les Mohicans et les Peaux rouges de l'Amérique septentrionale." Naturally, this population was presented as the product of its environment which had been frozen in time, and as such it reflected a distant Past through its landscapes and customs:

là, les coutumes féodales sont encore respectées. Là, les antiquaires retrouvent debout les monuments des Druides. Là, le génie de la civilisation moderne s'effraie de pénétrer à travers d'immenses forêts primordiales. Une incroyable férocité, un entêtement brutal, mais aussi la foi du serment ; l'absence complète de nos lois, de nos mœurs, de notre habillement, de nos monnaies nouvelles, de notre langage, mais aussi la simplicité patriarcale et d'héroïques vertus s'accordent à rendre les habitants de ces campagnes plus pauvres de combinaisons intellectuelles que ne le sont les Mohicans et les Peaux rouges de l'Amérique septentrionale, mais aussi grands, aussi rusés, aussi durs qu'eux.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Les Chouans ou la Bretagne en 1799* (Paris : C. Vimont, 1834) 45-46.

If *la province* was necessarily composed of various rural regions, the nineteenth-century imagination differentiated rural France from *la province*. This distinction is clearly illustrated in Balzac's *Comédie Humaine* when he separates the two spaces in a series of novels entitled "scènes de la vie de province" and "scènes de la vie de campagne." The effort to establish a separation within the representation of the French territory through the construction of different spaces demonstrates an attempt to contain the country's population and marginalize rural France.

If the development of transportation and the railway industry around the mid-century affected the dynamism of France by allowing for the circulation of visitors and the permeation of ideas, the dichotomy between the center and its periphery remained salient and these different spaces became for visitors the stage of cultural experiences as both the regions and the capital were turned into objects of curiosity and fascination. Moreover, the opening up of *la province* triggered the emergence of a new space in Third Republic France. As a threshold between the urban and the rural worlds, the countryside surrounding Paris formed a *banlieue* that offered Parisians the possibility of enjoying the exoticism of the pastoral while ensuring them some comfort and accommodations through the urbanization of this space made possible by its physical proximity with Paris. As much as I examine Maupassant's treatment of the emergence of this space in his short-stories, which allows him to emphasize the notion of performance and the artificiality of the social codes assigned to place, most of my project analyses the development of the spatial concept of *la région* and its use as an ideological frame for imagining the community as mirror of the nation. I rely on that point on Benedict

Anderson's theory of the community as a cultural construction deriving from the national imagination.<sup>6</sup> Anderson understands the emergence of nationalism in many industrialized countries at the end of the nineteenth century in relation to the development of print capitalism that allowed for the circulation of texts which ultimately created a shared experience among individuals, or what Anderson calls a "simultaneity in 'homogenous empty time'" (26). More importantly, a great part of Anderson's argument, on which my project relies, is his definition of the imagination of the community as a result of the Enlightenment and the fall of the monarchy and the Church. Questioning the authority of monarchy and religion, the Enlightenment triggered a redefinition of history and ontology, and imagined a new social order centered on the community. In my project, I examine the historical and cultural elements that made the space of *la région* conducive for the imagination of the community and how this cultural construction evolved over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Therefore, following a chronological approach, I study the trajectory of a century of regional discourse, from approximately 1850 to 1950. By focusing on three different regions -- Le Berry in the novels of George Sand, Normandy in Guy de Maupassant, and Provence in Marcel Pagnol's works -- my project reflects a geographical diversity that enables us to understand the relation of France with *la région*. Similarly, my analysis of these authors' regional discourse leads me to examine a variety of media such as novels, short-stories

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<sup>6</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

and films and the contribution of the genre to the author's discourse on *la région* and the community.

Before further exploring the question of the cultural construction of *la région*, it seems essential to reflect on the dialectics between space and place that are at work in the reference to *la région*. According to Yi-Fu Tuan's definition, space and place exist conjointly.<sup>7</sup> If space allows for movement and openness, through the binary relation that links space and place, the latter is understood as shelter. As Tuan contends:

Enclosed and humanized space is place. Compared to space, place is a calm center of established values. Human beings require both space and place. Human lives are a dialectical movement between shelter and venture, attachment and freedom. In open space, one can become intensely aware of place; and in the solitude of a sheltered place the vastness of space beyond acquires a haunting presence (54).

If the space of *la région* conjures up a sense of freedom for individuals to venture through natural landscapes and offers them the opportunity for self-exploration, *la région* is also the object of cultural constructions that have made it a place of essence and a refuge from modernity. In this project, I analyze the tension between the notions of space and place regarding the cultural treatment of *la région*, and more importantly I examine the evolution of its cultural construction leading to a nationalist and patriotic representation of *la région* in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The perception on rural regions is of course indebted to Jean-Jacques Rousseau who set a pre-romantic approach to considering nature as the frame for the contemplations on the self and its

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<sup>7</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: the Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977).

relation to others. The poetic quality of nature highlighted by Rousseau in his texts has encouraged likewise lyricism in the representation of nature and has turned the attention given to rural France into a reaction against modernity considered a threat for humanity, industrialization and mechanization being thought to have reduced human interactions and ruptured the bond uniting the individual to the natural world. The skepticism toward progress is present in Rousseau's philosophy, especially in his *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755) in which he deems society's sophistication responsible for the inequalities between individuals.

The mid nineteenth-century appearance of the term "région" in the dictionaries and the evolution of its definition is informative of the growing importance and role played by *la région* in the elaboration of the French national identity. Indeed, as the *Dictionnaire Culturel en Langue Française* indicates, it has gradually been replacing the concept of *la province* which conveys a condescension toward the territory outside the capital because of its lack of recognition of the cultural and geographical specificities of its different locales.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, deriving from the Latin "provincia" which referred to the territories conquered by the Roman Empire and falling under its rule, the French term "province" suggest its status as a subjugated space, colonized by the power of the capital through a centralized organization of the country. The parallel between colonization and the centralization of France regarding the state of *la province* is particularly relevant

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<sup>8</sup> Alain Rey and Danièle Morvan eds. *Le dictionnaire culturel and langue française* (Paris: Le Robert, 2005).

since according to scholar Josephine Donovan it triggered the emergence of local-color in the representation of regional France.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Josephine Donovan attributes the emergence of local-color in Europe to the experience of colonization by a foreign country, such as it was the case for Ireland, Scotland and Germany. Nevertheless, as Donovan argues, drawing from Michel Foucault's idea of "subjected literature," the regions of France experienced a form of colonization as well through the hegemonic power of the capital.<sup>10</sup> I use the term "province" accordingly when, through the dichotomy of the center and the periphery, I wish to refer to France outside its capital. As for *la région*, its definition in the mid-nineteenth-century edition of the *Larousse dictionary* (1866-1879) recognizes it as a cultural territory when, being equated to the notions of "pays" and "contrée," it stands as a "contrée dont l'étendue est déterminée par les productions semblables du sol, par la similitude du climat ou l'analogie des accidents de terrain [...] par l'unité de gouvernement ou par quelques relations de mœurs ou d'origine chez les peuples qui l'habitent."<sup>11</sup> Of course, the theorization of *la région* through its definition in the dictionary was concomitant with the development of regionalist movements devoted to the promotion of the cultural heritage of the region concerned and in some cases its demand for a political recognition. I refer in this project

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<sup>9</sup> Josephine Donovan, *European Local-color Literature: National Tales, Dorfgeschichten, Romans Champêtres* (London: Continuum, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Likewise, Michel de Certeau, Dominique Julia and Jacques Revel refer to the motive of the "enquête de l'abbé Grégoire" as the "colonization of domestic regions" (Donovan, 162).

<sup>11</sup> Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau, « De la province à la région, les enjeux historiques d'une transfiguration académique » *Province-Paris: topographie littéraire du XIX<sup>ème</sup> siècle* (Rouen : Publications de l'université de Rouen, 2000) 35.

to *la région* as a space which even before being officially drawn, was present in French thought as defined by a singular culture, geography and people.

If *le département* had been created following the French Revolution of 1789 to enable the central authority to rule over the country by delegating power to government officials such as prefects, it mostly served an administrative function.<sup>12</sup> Conversely, France's regions were only officially drawn and granted legislative power after World War I when a series of reforms endowed the cultural territory of *la région* with distinct borders and authority, especially late in the twentieth century through Minister Gaston Defferre's 1982 decentralizing law that gave political and cultural existence to *la région* as it stands today.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, during the long nineteenth century, *la région* existed as an imagined space endowed with a cultural significance and a tie to the Past since its geographic delimitations corresponded to the provinces of the Ancien Régime.

As Eugen Weber argues in his seminal work, *Peasants into Frenchmen*, France remained mostly rural until the Third Republic. According to Weber, the institutions of the Third Republic, particularly schools, were responsible for implementing a cultural assimilation across the country through laws promoting free and compulsory school. The Guizot (1833) and Falloux (1850-1851) laws particularly contributed to raising the

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<sup>12</sup> If *le département* was mentioned in ideological discourses, such as in school books during the Third Republic, it was to underline the Republican subtext and to provide clear limits to the cultural space discussed which *la région* did not officially own yet. Anne-Marie Thiesse, *Ils apprenaient la France: l'exaltation des régions dans le discours patriotique* (Paris : édition de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1997).

<sup>13</sup> *La région* has been subject to many reforms over the years, the last one being president François Hollande's reduction of the number of regions from 27 to 18 in January 2015 to increase the power of *la région*.

literacy of the French countryside and spreading the republican ideas which served as foundations to building a national consciousness. The improvement of transportation was also paramount in the modernization of rural France according to Weber, since « there could be no national unity before there was national circulation. »<sup>14</sup> As a consequence of the Third Republic's investment in the modernization of rural France, rural exodus increased, and as waves of workers left their native villages, the whole culture of these rural regions was threatened with slowly disappearing. If regional culture had increasingly become a subject of interest throughout the nineteenth century for writers and historians who saw its folklore as tied to a heritage that needed to be protected, as rural exodus intensified, the private initiatives to preserve regional culture became political as well, especially in the late twentieth-century when regional folklore became understood as the expression of a national heritage.

#### **LA REGION AS *LIEU DE MEMOIRE***

The Franco-Prussian war and the following Paris Commune contributed to the valorization of regional culture: the loss of the regions of Alsace and Lorraine was experienced by France as a wound upon the nation's body and triggered a reflection on the fundamental principles defining French identity and the position occupied by *la*

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<sup>14</sup> Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: the Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976) 218.

*région* within it.<sup>15</sup> Ernest Renan's speech "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?" (1882), which is taken to be one of the most influential expressions of French identity, relies greatly on the idea of a national heritage to be valued, protected and passed on. The history that Renan advocates for is one that turns a blind eye to the tragic incidents of French history which triggered violence and division within the French nation, and is rather devoted to the promotion of a historical legacy able to unite *le peuple*. Renan's national consensus binds the individual to the national community and reconciles the Past with the Present through the idea of a shared heritage which makes a great part of the nation's "principe spirituel." As he explains, « Deux choses qui, à vrai dire, n'en font qu'une, constituent cette âme, ce principe spirituel. L'une est dans le passé, l'autre dans le présent. L'une est la possession en commun d'un riche legs de souvenirs ; l'autre est le consentement actuel, le désir de vivre ensemble, la volonté de continuer à faire valoir l'héritage qu'on a reçu indivis. »<sup>16</sup> As the different initiatives such as the Association des Antiquaires and the Commission des Monuments Historiques had illustrated through their historical inventory of the country,<sup>17</sup> many historical remains were still standing in *la province* and especially in rural regions: sheltered from the socio-historical events happening in the capital and in major cities, they largely avoided the destruction of emblems and artifacts from the previous political regime incurred in urban centers. This reinforced the connection of *la*

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<sup>15</sup> For a deep insight into France's reaction to its defeat in the Franco-Prussian war, refer to the second chapter of Wolfgang Schivelbush, *The Culture of Defeat: on National Trauma, Mourning and recovery* (New-York: Metropolitan books, 2003).

<sup>16</sup> Ernest Renan, "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?" (1882) *Becoming National: A Reader*. Eley, Geoff and Ronald Gregor Suny eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>17</sup> The Association des Antiquaires was founded in 1813 taking over the Académie Celtique. The Commission des Monuments Historiques was created in 1830 by minister of the interior François Guizot.

*région* with the Past and was responsible for its analogy with an archeological space. Recounting national history from the perspective of regional heritage not only guaranteed a form of authenticity but it also enabled the historical narratives of the Third Republic to omit traumatic historical events that had taken place in the capital, such as the divisive episode of the Commune of 1871, that ended in bloodshed and would remain associated with a sense of shame in the French consciousness.<sup>18</sup> The Paris Commune can indeed be perceived as one of the most determining influences in the construction of a rural ideology under the Third Republic, since it shifted the collective representation of *le peuple* from Paris to *la région*. *Le peuple*, born out of the French Revolution, had threatened the cohesion of the nation under the Paris Commune which led to the displacement of its myth to rural France. Indeed, according to scholar Nelly Wolf, under the Third Republic « le peuple français se dote d'une conscience de soi et d'une image de soi dominées par la ruralité, refoulant le prolétariat et la modernité » (100).

One of the best illustrations of this trend is found in *Le tour de la France par deux enfants* (1877), a popular children's textbook in which *la région* is used as a harmonious frame to give an overview of the cultural history of France. As the two characters travel across the many regions of France, their adventures instill in its readers a love and respect for local heritage, generating in turn a sentiment of national patriotism. Jacques and Mona Ozouf, quoting Daniel Halévy in their study of *Le tour de la France* for *Les lieux*

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<sup>18</sup> The « Petit Lavis » textbook of 1895 alludes to the Commune as “une grande honte et de grands désastres,” in *La Commune de 1871: l'événement, les hommes et la mémoire* (Saint-Etienne : Publications de l'Université de Saint-Etienne, 2004) 338.

*de mémoire* write that “la France du *Tour* est une France archaïque, toute rurale, tableau déjà nostalgique d’un monde perdu; et qu’elle est une France sans enracinement historique ni religieux.”<sup>19</sup> This statement highlights the apparent paradox between the absence of a historical framework in this text and its reference as a *lieu de mémoire* which grants it a place in Pierre Nora’s eponymous anthology.<sup>20</sup> The portrayal of rural France presented in *Le tour de la France* and in most cultural representations since the Third Republic participate in a myth which would evolve to become the myth of *la France profonde* or authentic France. It is rooted in a nostalgia for a pre-industrial way of living that brings to the fore the traditional notions of family, community, and the working of the land.

To understand the applicability of myth to rural France, we should turn to Mircea Eliade’s definition presented in *Le mythe de l’éternel retour*, where myth is opposed to history’s linear conception of time.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, myth rather views time as cyclic, made of the repetition of the same actions and experiences for individuals as the seasons renew and repeat themselves. Moreover, according to Eliade, an act is always the repetition of a previous act, « un objet ou un acte ne devient réel que dans la mesure où il imite ou répète un archétype. »<sup>22</sup> Indeed, the actions of individuals are the mere repetition of actions performed before them by heroes or gods who have created a Cosmos out of Chaos by joining the different elements present in the environment. This definition of

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<sup>19</sup> Jacques and Mona Ozouf, "Le tour de la France par deux enfants, le petit livre rouge de la République," *Les lieux de mémoire*. Pierre Nora ed. (Paris : Gallimard, 1997) 1. 284.

<sup>20</sup> Pierre Nora ed., *Les lieux de mémoire* (Paris : Gallimard, 1997).

<sup>21</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Le mythe de l’éternel retour* (Paris : Gallimard, 1969).

<sup>22</sup> Michel Roux, *Géographie et complexité : les espaces de la nostalgie* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1999) 151.

mythology is applicable to *la région* since its representations shape it as a space anchored in the Past which remains alive in the present through the recurrence of the local festivals and traditions every year. Rural France particularly offers a frame for mythology since agriculture, its main activity, follows the cyclic time of seasons rather than linear history. Its backwardness and its illustration of traditional values make it stand for the roots of French civilization, in other words for the nation's origins. Thus, the representation of the French peasantry takes part in the mythology of France as its heritage, and as such a nostalgia is projected onto rural France as the embodiment of lost stability. As Armand Frémont explains in his essay for *Les lieux de mémoire*,

la terre en France n'est pas seulement le plus étendu des lieux de notre histoire, celui qui est partout le plus présent. C'est aussi le plus profond. La terre rassemble toutes les valeurs d'une civilisation paysanne dont les racines plongent dans les millénaires et qui paraît encore vivante sous les paysages contemporains. Cette mémoire la plus ancienne est aussi la plus fraîche, car les derniers des paysans vivent encore.<sup>23</sup>

Paradoxically, this idealization of the French peasantry as a pillar of the nation's heritage represents a profession that is still alive and that has had to modernize to be able to meet the demands of the market and world competition. Frémont underlines the contradiction between the efforts of French conservatism to promote an outdated vision of traditional rural France in relation to its existence as the essence of French identity, and the major transformations that rural France has undergone in the last two centuries, altering its landscapes, professions and culture. As he maintains,

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<sup>23</sup> Armand Frémont, « La terre » *Les lieux de mémoire*. Pierre Nora ed. (Paris : Gallimard, 1997) 3. 3080.

matrice de la continuité face aux changements, la terre devait être le berceau du conservatisme français, du XIX<sup>ème</sup> à nos jours. Pourtant, tout a changé en moins d'une génération. Rénovée, bouleversée, bousculée, l'agriculture française est devenue l'une des plus performantes du monde. La terre paysanne, soudain archaïque, restitue aux français une image nostalgique d'eux-mêmes, le passé idéalisé des stabilités perdues. Alors que, dans les faits, l'entreprise l'emporte sur la tradition, le conservatisme devient conservatoire.<sup>24</sup>

The tension between the cultural construction of the idea of rural France and its economic reality has ultimately contributed to reinforcing the mythological aspect of its representation within the ideology of *la France profonde*. Likewise, the local and national investment in the promotion of this heritage, particularly through tourism, seems not only unable to stop rural exodus and what has been named the “desertification” of rural areas,<sup>25</sup> but it may even be contributing to this socio-economic phenomenon by restricting the modernization of rural France while emphasizing a static vision of rural France as the repository of French traditional culture.

#### **REGIONAL VS. REGIONALIST WRITING**

Regionalist movements emerged in the mid nineteenth century initially in response to centralization and its hegemonic control over the cultural production which stifled the expression of regional writers. A Provençal association of authors led by Frédéric Mistral founded the Félibrige in 1954 as one of the first regional organizations

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Pascal Dibie offers a helpful analysis of this social phenomenon in *Le village métamorphosé. Révolution dans la France profonde* (Paris : Plon, 2006).

devoted to the protection and promotion of Provence culture and particularly its Provençal language. If other writers such as Charles Maurras embraced the cultural aspects of the movement at its start, they left when they determined that a political agenda was vital to obtain a valorization of local culture and thus demanded the decentralization of France. Regionalism became institutionalized when Jean-Charles Brun founded the Fédération Régionaliste Française in 1911. But it is during the interwar years that regionalism gained prominence, as regional culture found itself at the heart of the government's program of reconstruction with its attempts to galvanize agriculture and promote the image of *la région* through the ideology of the *retour à la terre*. Indeed, as the country was facing the destruction and deaths caused by the war, it had to ensure the survival of the nation through strong agricultural production and a self-sufficient economy. Under the Vichy regime, the rural functioned as ideological propaganda meant to advocate conservative values which were illustrated in its famous slogan "le terre, elle, ne ment pas." The backward-looking ruralism promoted by Vichy was responsible for arousing skepticism towards regionalism after the war and for years to come.<sup>26</sup> If this stigma has slowly disappeared, regionalist discourse yet remains marred by its association with conservatism through the values traditionally conjured up by *la région*, such as immobilism, attachment to the past and narrow-mindedness, and thus only

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<sup>26</sup> Jean Giono is one of the writers who were imprisoned for several months after the Liberation. He was accused of having collaborated with Vichy since his works had been adopted by Vichy in its promotion of rural ideology. Anne-Marie Thiesse comments on the relation between regionalist writers and Vichy, stating that "il y a eu de la part de Pétain et des régionalistes des malentendus intéressés" (269). Anne-Marie Thiesse, *Ecrire la France : le mouvement littéraire régionaliste de langue française entre la Belle Epoque à la Libération*, (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1991).

satirical discourse on *la région* has really gained the respect of the Parisian intelligentsia. Contrasting the reception of the treatment of nature in French and American culture, a French journalist notes, « en France, quand tu parles de nature, c'est assez réactionnaire ; le retour aux racines, la tradition, la veste en tweed etc. Aux États-Unis, c'est un thème plutôt révolutionnaire. »<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, because of the authority of Paris over French cultural production, regional works have had to comply to a certain extent with the cultural expectations imposed on their region in order to be published and gain popularity on a national level. This is why picturesque and regional stereotypes are commonly found in the regional cultural production. Indeed, in order to reach a national readership, authors who write about their native region often feel the need to seduce their readers with a representation of *la région* conforming to the latter's fantasy through myths drawing from Virgilian pastoralism to stories illustrating *la France profonde*.

Scholars such as Arnold Van Gennep have critiqued George Sand's lack of accuracy in her use of the Berrichon patois in her "romans champêtres" and in her loose references to the local folklore in the *Légendes rustiques* (1859). According to these observations, her regional works can be interpreted as her wish to construct an idealized pastoral representation of *la région* to fulfill her project to « détourner le regard et distraire l'imagination » of her readers after the torments of the 1848 revolution and the rise to power of Napoléon III, as she declares in the preface of *La petite Fadette*.

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<sup>27</sup> Olivier Gallmeister. Interview. *Le Matricule des anges* (April 2007).

Likewise, a concern for readership affected Maupassant's representation of *la province*. Indeed, publishing his works in periodicals such as *Gil Blas* and *Le Gaulois*, Maupassant was aware that his readership was mostly made of the haute-bourgeoisie, hence encouraging him to emphasize the satirical aspect of his representation of Norman peasants and provincials. As for Pagnol, he acknowledges the element of farce or « galéjade » that fills his work and its prevalence over other aspects of the personalities of his southern protagonists,<sup>28</sup> such as their inclination for melancholia which Pagnol viewed in fact as a dominant character trait of Southerners. By privileging humor in his works Pagnol seems to be conforming his representation of southerners to the cultural expectations of the time. Writer Edmonde Charles-Roux indeed comments on this form of self-parody when she declares that : « Les Marseillais font des galéjades parce que c'est l'image que vous leur demandez de produire ».<sup>29</sup> Moreover, if we look at the evolution of the posters advertising Pagnol's films, we can trace their transformation from a realistic perspective to a comedic one in the caricatural drawings of Albert Dubout, which leads François de la Bretèque to contend that « nous pouvons risquer l'hypothèse que Pagnol, dans les années 50, a été rattrapé par la Pagnolade, ce dont témoigne l'évolution des dessins de Dubout. »<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> “Galéjade” defines a type of humor specific to the South of France and which Pagnol used abundantly to the extent that he turned it into genre according to Claudette Peyrusse, *Le cinéma méridional: le Midi dans le cinéma français, 1929-1944* (Toulouse: Eché, 1986).

<sup>29</sup> Ginette Vincendeau, « Les acteurs méridionaux dans le cinéma français des années 1930. » Vincent Amielle, Jacqueline Acache, Geneviève Sellier and Christian Viviani eds. *L'acteur de cinéma : approches plurielles* (Rennes : Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2007) 217-232.

<sup>30</sup> Pierre Pasquini, « Pagnol et le pagnolisme : la provence entre naturalisme et nostalgie. » *Le roman et la région*, Joël Chevé and Francis Lacoste eds. (Périgueux, La Lauze, 2010).

However, as I argue in the chapters to follow, these aspects, i.e. rural idealism for Sand and the use of regional stereotypes in Maupassant and Pagnol, have prejudiced the reception of these authors by restricting their works to a conventional representation of *la région* and ultimately has set them at the margins of the literary canon.<sup>31</sup> Not only do these authors not fit into the category of regionalists because of the extension of the setting of their texts to other locations, especially for Sand and Maupassant, but their representation of regional culture serves as a backdrop to explore larger issues. *Le dictionnaire culturel en langue française* reminds us indeed about differentiating between regional authors who write about *la région* and regionalists who actively defend a given regional culture: “‘régionalisme, régionaliste’ est sinon péjoratif, du moins restrictif. Un grand écrivain dont l’œuvre est majoritairement consacrée à une région n’est pas appelé normalement ‘régionaliste.’ ”<sup>32</sup> If they devote a large part of their work to *la région*, specifically their region of origin – Le Berry for Sand, Normandy for Maupassant, and Provence for Pagnol—their representation of regional culture is not the focus of their work. Displacing the myth of *le peuple* from Paris to *la région* due to the historical events

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Indeed, the original posters for Pagnol’s 1930s films advertised the movies through a realist presentation. For instance, the 1931 poster for *Marius* features the eponymous character looking at Fanny, while César watches him, hence emphasizing the relationship dynamic, as well as Marius’ inner conflict as the sea and the boats remind us in the background, with Notre-Dame de La Garde, the monument symbol of Marseille as the vanishing point of the viewer’s gaze. In contrast, one of Dubout’s 1950 posters for the same movie features the most comedic and notorious scene in the film, “la partie de cartes” with caricatured characters.

<sup>31</sup> Scholar Naomi Schor explains for instance in the beginning of her introduction to *George Sand and Idealism* (1993) the initial disparaging reaction she received from scholars after demonstrating interest for George Sand, and how that experience led her to take on the project of writing her book in an attempt to “re-canonicalize” the author. Maupassant’s reception follows a similar trend as high academia has renewed interest in this author in the past few years, as we can observe through the abundance of publications, colloquiums, and Maupassant’s presence in the program of the 2011-2012 French aggregation.

<sup>32</sup> Alain Rey and Danièle Morvan eds. *Le dictionnaire culturel and langue française* (Paris: Le Robert, 2005).

that were taking place in the capital and were threatening the collective representation of the nation, these authors instead use *la région* as a space to re-imagine the community and ultimately reflect on the nation. Indeed, local culture appears as a frame to examine the responsibility of individuals and the community as a whole in ensuring the nation's integrity and unity in the face of national and foreign threats.

### **IMAGINING THE COMMUNITY: FROM THE LOCAL TO THE NATIONAL**

In this project, I examine how the local community has been the object of a reflection on the nation in the works of Sand, Maupassant and Pagnol. The tumultuous history that took place in the capital throughout the nineteenth century in the forms of revolutions and the Commune challenged the elaboration of the idea of nation as centered on its capital by bringing to the fore the fragmentation of the nation's social bond. Moreover, from Georg Simmel's sociological perspective we can also consider the effect of the mid-nineteenth-century Industrial Revolution and the modernity that it triggered on individuals' urban lifestyles and interactions as responsible for the development of individualism which hindered the construction of community in this space.<sup>33</sup> Conversely, outside history and its social divisions, *la région* stood as microcosm allowing for a reflection on the collective. Historian Gaston Roupnel draws indeed a relation between

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<sup>33</sup> Georg Simmel analyses the development of individualism in the nineteenth-century modern metropolis as related to an over stimulation which causes the individual to act detached and grow weary of his environment, and ultimately affects interpersonal relations. Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and mental life." Richard Sennett ed. *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1969).

the rural environment and the definition of community when he states that « ici dans le village, s'est déterminé le sens social rural, et toute la force de la société humaine en vient ! Mais là-bas, dans les champs, l'individu s'est entretenu de silence, nourri de rêves et de solitude. C'est de ces deux forces conjuguées, dont l'une régit le groupe, et dont l'autre construit l'individu qu'est faite toute cette puissante humanité. »<sup>34</sup>

If Third Republic ideology seized *la région* as a space to promote local patriotism or the myth of the “petite patrie,” other myths thrived during the twentieth century based on the vision of a harmonious regional community that could stand as a model for the nation. Studying three authors who write during specific moments of French national crisis -- the 1830 and 1848 revolutions for George Sand, the Franco-Prussian War for Guy de Maupassant, and the First and Second World Wars in the case of Pagnol -- this project studies the ways in which these authors responded to the fragmentation of the national community by using space and place to redefine the collective, adapting and reshaping for that sake some of these dominant myths.

Jules Michelet situates the advent of *le peuple* as nation in the French Revolution. Liberating *le peuple* from the oppression caused by a rigid hierarchical society, the French Revolution also gave a new orientation to romanticism by ending the isolation of individuals and uniting them in the struggle for the same rights. As scholar Ceri Crossley argues, « le ‘peuple’ fonctionnait comme une représentation du lien social retrouvé. Par

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<sup>34</sup> Michel Roux, *Géographie et complexité : les espaces de la nostalgie* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999) 176.

la communion avec les masses, le moi d'évadait de son isolement.»<sup>35</sup> Indeed, relating the event of the Fête de la Fédération of 1790, Michelet compares the union of *le peuple* to one soul, ultimately sacralizing them : « il y a dans ces immenses réunions où le peuple de toute classe et de toute communion ne fait plus qu'un même cœur, une chose plus sacré qu'un autel ».<sup>36</sup> Writing under the July Monarchy and involved politically as much as her gender permitted her, George Sand advocated for the return of the Republic, hence sharing with Michelet his perspective on the French Revolution as marking the origins of *le peuple* as nation. However, after having witnessed successive failed attempts to install a republican regime, I argue that George Sand reshaped the myth of *le peuple* by locating it no longer in the French Revolution, but in a national story of origins staged in the pastoral setting of her native region of Le Berry. Moreover, the 1848 law implementing universal male suffrage contributed to the realization that a whole population, the French peasantry, would determine the election results. As much as this population had been traditionally left out of national politics and ideological discourses, this historical moment marked a turning point in the recognition of rural France and its role in the nation. In fact, Maurice Agulhon dates the modernization of rural France to the Second Republic which through universal male suffrage integrated the rural population into national politics.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ceri Crossley « Du sujet libéral au peuple romantique : condition de possibilité pour l'écllosion d'un mythe, » in *Peuple, mythe et histoire*, Simone Bernard-Griffiths and Alain Pessin eds. (Toulouse : Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 1997) 117.

<sup>36</sup> Simone Bernard-Griffiths, « Prologue : écrire le peuple au XIX<sup>ème</sup> siècle, invitation à une mythalanalyse, » in *Peuple, mythe et histoire*, Simone Bernard-Griffiths and Alain Pessin eds. (Toulouse : Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 1997) 24.

<sup>37</sup> Maurice Agulhon, *La république au village : les populations du Var de la révolution à la II<sup>ème</sup> république* (Paris : Seuil, 1979).

Recognizing the division existing within *le peuple*, between the Parisian workers and the peasants, George Sand tried to reconcile Paris and *la province*. As I argue, her “romans champêtres” represent an attempt on her part to bridge the gap between these two spaces and their populations by uniting them through a common myth of origins. Reading her “romans champêtres” in parallel to her political writings, I examine how George Sand uses regional culture as an instrument to promote republicanism.

Writing after the Franco-Prussian war and the French defeat in Sedan, Maupassant’s short-stories reflect an overall disenchantment with society which echoes the *Fin de siècle* Decadent movement and the period’s indifference to politics. Therefore, Maupassant expresses a strong weariness of any forms of patriotism which also affects his view on the community as a gathering of people around common values. Indeed, as Maupassant demonstrates, the allegiance of individuals to a group in the protection of the common interest is but an illusion. Indeed, according to Maupassant, actions are always triggered by the desire of individuals to satisfy their personal interest before considering others. However, Maupassant’s writing does not express judgments for this form of individualist behavior since he views it as an expression of humankind’s animal origin in correlation with Darwin’s theories that were circulating at the time. Therefore, *la région* offers Maupassant the opportunity to isolate individuals and emphasize their primitive behaviors in the rural context and its proximity with nature. It also allows him to study the inner workings of the social community and the conformity it imposes on its members, as well as the exclusion of others in order to strengthen the cohesion of the group. I explore in Maupassant’s regional short-stories the discrepancy underlined

between nature and culture and how society's oppression of individuals' natural instincts arouses deception and violence. Referring as well to his newspaper columns I underline Maupassant's perspective on culture as an artificial construction which prompts individuals to engage in social performance in order to comply with the social codes and the identity that their class and place has assigned them.

Looking at Pagnol's films and novels through a textual analysis paired with the study of the reception of his works, I explore how his representation of the community is shaped by the events of his time, from the Reconstruction period following World War I to the post World War II trauma. By demonstrating the anchorage of Pagnol's community into the national history, I expose the limits of its association with regional mythology. Indeed, rather than a static representation of *la région*, Pagnol's communities are altered by social progress and ultimately explore some of the national issues the nation was grappling with.

## Chapter 1: Constructing a National Myth of Origin in George Sand's "romans champêtres"

The pastoral novels written between 1846 and 1849, initially meant to be gathered as a series under the name *Les veillées du chanvreur* and comprising *La mare au diable* (1846), *François le champi* (1848), *La petite Fadette* (1849), stand out from Sand's earlier rustic novels taking place in the same location, Berry, Bourbonnais and the adjacent provinces of Central France. Certainly, among the different aspects responsible for this distinction is the use of a particular language alternating between local patois and modern French which had been the focus of Sand's artistic search and the source of her dissatisfaction with her previous novels: she explains in the preface of *François le champi*, it was here that she found a form of artistic expression able to appeal to a national readership while preserving the cultural integrity of the region represented. Scholars add to the distinction of this series of novels from Sand's previous works, the new turn given to her idealism.

I understand Sand's idealism in line with scholar Naomi Schor's definition that "Sandian idealism is a politics at least as much as an aesthetics. The quest for the ideal, animated by an unshakable faith in the perfectibility of humankind and the social was throughout the nineteenth century a powerfully mobilizing force for change."<sup>38</sup> Locating idealism in the historical context of Sand's time, Schor reminds her readers of the popularity of this cultural movement which prevailed over the emerging trend of realism,

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<sup>38</sup> Naomi Schor, *George Sand and Idealism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) 14.

and was later mistakenly attributed by the academic community to a marginal female mode of expression. Indeed, in her investigation into George Sand's decanonization, Naomi Schor demonstrates the role played by the gendering of aesthetic categories such as idealism in devalorizing Sand's works, ultimately marginalizing her in the French canon. Sand's idealism looked to expose "a heightening of the real through sacrifice, selection, and recombination" as Schor maintains (14), which corroborated what she defines as Sand's "socialist idealism," a form of counterdiscourse contesting the prevailing norms and stereotypes of the dominant ideology.

George Sand's idealism evolved during the course of her career, shaped by historical changes and revolutionary turbulences of the period and ultimately being intensified after 1848 according to Schor. So while Sand's endorsement of Pierre Leroux's socialist ideas prompted her to denounce social inequalities by staging the confrontation of classes in her 1840s novels, the rising tensions of the political climate foreshadowing the 1848 revolution brought Sand to realize the pressing need to fulfill what she understood to be the moral responsibility of the artist. By encouraging fraternity in her elevated portrayal of moral and compassionate peasant characters, she hoped to foster a cohesion among the French people, regardless of class and location, for the defense of the values of the republic, the only system that could ensure the protection of their inalienable rights. In the second preface of *La petite Fadette* written in 1852, Sand reiterates the motives underlying her project: « dans le temps où le mal vient de ce que les hommes se méconnaissent et se détestent, la mission de l'artiste est de célébrer la douceur, la confiance, l'amitié, et de rappeler ainsi aux hommes endurcis ou découragés,

que les mœurs pures, les sentiments tendres et l'équité primitive, sont ou peuvent être encore de ce monde."<sup>39</sup>

The study of George Sand's "romans champêtres" calls for a special consideration of the historical context surrounding the 1848 revolution, and the author's urge to engage in the defense of the republic while complying with the obligations of her gender. While she militated for gender equality, Sand's feminism also implied the restriction of women's role to the private sphere, away from the political scene with its lies and manipulation. Indeed, if Sand expressed her political views in her journalistic activity, she tried to minimize her political commitment behind the anonymity of her newspaper articles or behind pennames.

Conflating idealism with an ideological subtext in the representation of a community where the republican principles are placed in the forefront of the plot, Sand constructs what most scholars have identified as a utopia. However, as this chapter exposes, the concept of utopia is problematic when applied to the "romans champêtres." Indeed, as the Greek etymology of utopia reminds us, as a "no place," the utopian society implies the lack of a realist setting. This definition conflicts with the nature of Sand's texts and the emphasis given to the location of her plot: the province of Berry where she grew up and that she knew intimately.<sup>40</sup> If the « romans champêtres » share with utopia the lack of a clear temporal frame, the setting of these novels is paramount as scholar

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<sup>39</sup> George Sand, *La petite Fadette* (Paris: Garnier, 1958) 16.

<sup>40</sup> Most of the "romans champêtres" here under study take place in the Berry, except *Les maîtres sonneurs* where the story's setting alternates between the provinces of Berry and Bourbonnais, both provinces being anyway adjoined.

Béatrice Didier remarks, « on n'a pas manqué de faire valoir que, si les romans paysans de George Sand sont très précisément situés dans l'espace, ils le sont très vaguement dans le temps. »<sup>41</sup> If at times the picturesque nature of the landscape of the “romans champêtres” can be aligned with the Virgilian Arcadia through an idealist portrayal of the Berrichon countryside peopled by peasants as modern Arcadian shepherds, Sand's realist details nuance the ethereal quality of the setting, and reveal her design to showcase the historical and aesthetic values of the local culture of Berry. In fact, as the opening of *La mare au diable* reminds us through the author's address to the readers, the origin of the project of the “romans champêtres” lies in the author's reaction to a painting from the Renaissance painter Holbein, which features a peasant plowing a field, bent over by the difficulty of the task, and as the painting suggests, with no other source of consolation than his imminent death. It is such a representation, disregarding the poetic quality of nature and the peasantry's work, which encouraged Sand to embark upon the writing of the “romans champêtres.” Ultimately, through a celebration of the energy and culture of the milieu of the peasantry, Sand constructs a counter-discourse to the traditional grim representation of the peasantry in the arts responsible for reproducing, hence partly legitimizing, a political system upholding the peasantry in a state of servitude.

Sand's fascination with ethnology certainly played no small role in shaping her project. Throughout her rustic novels, insofar as her fiction allows her to, Sand looks to reproduce the local culture of the region of Berry where her stories are set, by featuring

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<sup>41</sup> Béatrice Didier, *George Sand écrivain: “un grand fleuve d'Amérique”* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1998) 779.

the language, traditions, and particularly the artistic sensitivity of the local people as conveyed through art, in their traditional music and dance. Sensing that modernity was threatening to erase regional cultures, especially at risk given the oral mode of transmission of their memory through storytelling and the daily enactment of local traditions, Sand takes on the role of a transcriber of the Berrichon culture, recording it and translating some of its patois and unique cultural eccentricities for the Parisian readers.

This chapter examines the paradox between Sand's ethnological aspirations that tend to underline the exceptionality of *la région* in the references to its cultural specificities, and her challenge to *la région's* position at the periphery in the national imagination. Indeed, while Sand protested against centralization, arguing against the economic exploitation and cultural misrepresentation of *la région* by Paris as the hegemonic center over the rest of the country, in her approach to validating the uniqueness of *la région*, quite paradoxically, she risks relegating it to the margins. Therein lies the challenge of abolishing the inequalities implemented by the hierarchy of a center and its peripheries, while resisting the process of homogenization by embracing the notion of difference, in culture and beyond.

Scholar Josephine Donovan draws an interesting parallel between Sand's combat for *la région's* emancipation from the center's hegemony, and her feminist commitment. As she maintains, "because regions and colonies were deemed subordinate to the dominant metropolitan power, they easily correlated to the female, in the male-female

dyad under patriarchal rule: powerless.”<sup>42</sup> Pursuing the analogy of *la région* with the female leads Donovan to explain why the local-color of European literature was defined with what were thought of as feminine characteristics, ultimately framing regional cultures as Other, “in opposition to standard (masculine) ways of thinking and behaving, which under modernity meant the abstract universalizing modes of Enlightenment rationalism” (12), and which were concentrated, as Donovan argues, by the ruling center.<sup>43</sup>

Considering the gendered construction of *la région* with Sand’s feminism, which Naomi Schor defines as “more utopianist than feminist” (81), offers new ways to understand Sand’s representation of *la région* and its symbolic role within the nation. Indeed, Sand’s acceptance of the gendered division of the private and public spheres is explained by Schor when she maintains that “the theory of the separation of spheres reinforced utopian feminism, to the extent that it enables one to imagine a protected locus where the Ideal prevails” (81). According to Schor, Sand viewed the confinement of women to the private not only as necessary in order to uphold the moral values of the nation, but also as a chance for women to stand out within their marginal position through the development of superior qualities. Indeed, as Schor explains through her discussion of *La petite Fadette* and its eponymous character, it is by conforming to the social

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<sup>42</sup> Josephine Donovan, *European Local-color Literature: National Tales, Dorfgeschichten, Romans Champêtres* (London: Continuum, 2010) 12.

<sup>43</sup> Donovan studies nineteenth-century European local-color as a response to a form of colonization, either by a foreign country, as undergone by Ireland under the British rule, or through the domestic colonization of regions under a centralized power as in the case of France.

construction of the female, that female subjects such as Fadette can have their difference fully recognized and appreciated.

In France's gendered geography, if Paris was constructed as the locus of reason, *la région* was aligned with the realm of the body and emotions. This spatial configuration seems to be accepted by Sand who nevertheless tackles its hierarchy by demonstrating the fundamental value of *la région* as a precious reserve of the resources and vital energy for the very survival of the nation, as well as a place condensing affect in the form of the love for the country's soil and fellow people. When she declares in the opening of *La mare au diable* that "la mission de l'art est une mission de sentiments et d'amour,"<sup>44</sup> she refers to her pledge to promote these values through her art. As Sand was writing during the political turmoil of 1848 and its social uprisings in the capital, which were violently repressed, she had to retreat to Nohant, to her family estate in Berry. It provided her with a safe haven, as she feared the consequences of the rumors about her implication in the demonstration of May 15. By the same token, within her art, *la région* functions as a refuge for the expression of love and hope for a better society, ideas that, to her great dismay, were being crushed by the events taking place in the capital. This chapter examines Sand's counter-discourse to the ideological construction of *la région*, and the ways in which she reshapes *la région*'s marginality to turn it into a model for the nation. Spared from the conflicts tearing up the capital, *la région* represents the safekeeping of the national essence and identity that have remained intact through the preservation of

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<sup>44</sup> George Sand, *La mare au diable* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1964) 30.

history. Sand seizes here the longtime association of *la région* with the Past but molds it to show how the national history found in the relics of the Past that are scattered across regional France can bind the French people around common origins. This chapter explores the process through which Sand turns *la région*'s cultural landmarks into manifestations of a national history and identity. Sand remains purposefully vague in the temporality of her novels so that she can create a myth of origin based on the history which regional cultures have preserved and integrated into their daily lives through the worship of the remains of a national heritage, the reenactment of rituals, and the transmission of stories and legends to the next generations. I argue that in the "romans champêtres," the idealization of the regional communities of farmers through their culture and republican structure can be understood as Sand's attempt to convey a unified and harmonious vision of *le peuple*. Stressing the singularity of the culture represented along with the emphasis on the remains of the national Past visible in *la région*, Sand defends the union of the republican People through their common peasant origin.

#### **LA RÉGION IN THE NATIONAL HISTORIOGRAPHY**

As scholars have demonstrated, the turn of the nineteenth century in France marks the passage into an era of historical crisis,<sup>45</sup> which finds one of its expressions in the emergence of historicism as a construction of a historical trajectory that approaches the

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<sup>45</sup> Richard Terdiman provides a valuable explanation of the factors that triggered a mnemonic crisis in nineteenth-century France in *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

Past from a present perspective and asserts simultaneously its belief in a glorious and exemplary future for the nation. As Hayden White has shown in *Metahistory: the Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*,<sup>46</sup> nineteenth-century historiography's search for objective truth implied the removal of explanations which were replaced by metaphors and a form of "emplotment." Jules Michelet's *Histoire de France* (1833-1867) epitomizes the shift from romanticism and positivism, and the fusion of certain of their elements. Michelet's works reflect furthermore the historian's struggle to find his voice and a form for his text answering both to the rigorousness of historical truth and to his wish to unify the nation and promote *le peuple* through a master narrative.

Michelet's insistence on the nation's Celtic and Gallic origin can be interpreted as his wish to define a single and essentially French past.<sup>47</sup> In his cohesive view of the nation marching toward progress, local particularisms represent a threat to its integrity. Yet, Michelet seems to believe that these local forms of identity will eventually disappear. As John Stuart Mill articulates,

A strenuous asserter of the power of mind over matter, of will over spontaneous propensities, culture over nature, [Michelet] holds that local characteristics lose their importance as history advances. In a rude age the 'fatalities' of race and geographical position are absolute. In the progress of society, human forethought and purpose, acting by means of uniform institutions and modes of culture, tend more and more to efface the pristine differences. And he attributes, in no small degree, the greatness of France to the absence of any marked local peculiarities in the predominant part of her population. <sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Hayden White, *Metahistory: the Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

<sup>47</sup> Michelet's tracing of French origins back to the Gallic civilization influenced the construction of French History and particularly contributed to the myth of "nos ancêtres les Gaulois" which was instilled in generations of French through school books, such as *Le petit Lavissee*, much until the 1950s.

<sup>48</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Dissertations and Discussions: Political, Philosophical, and Historical* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1882) 228.

As a proponent of the Republican ideal which relies on a correlation between the People and the nation, Michelet believes that in order to succeed in creating a stable nation collectively embracing the core values of freedom, equality and progress, local identities need to disappear in favor of personal attachment to the nation at large. Michelet's emphasis on the common origins and unity of the French people leads him to personify France as a single being. Indeed, comparing French identity to its neighbor countries, he declares, "l'Angleterre est un empire ; l'Allemagne est un pays, une race ; la France est une personne. La personnalité, l'unité, c'est par là que l'être se place dans l'échelle des êtres".<sup>49</sup> Michelet's perspective on history, in line with nineteenth-century historiography and its effort to muffle manifestations of French cultural diversity, can be attributed to the haunting memory of the Chouannerie (1793-1804), a major conflict that had opposed certain regions such as Brittany and Vendée to the national authority controlled by the capital. Swearing allegiance to the monarchy that had been overthrown by the Republic, and to their respective regions which remained under the control of influential figures from the clergy or the nobility, the rebellious groups of the Chouans threatened the early years of the Republic with such an intensity that for most of the two centuries that followed, the expression of local particularities aroused much wariness. As a result, a strong centralized system based in the capital was implemented. The main concern of centralization was to enforce a tight control over the country's politics and economy, and over its cultural production, in order to ensure the permanence of the

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<sup>49</sup> Jules Michelet, *Histoire de France* (Paris : Chamerot, 1861) 2. 103.

republic “une et indivisible.” While regional cultures and their folklore were dismissed as the expression of human primitiveness and its reverence to superstitions, they became gradually accepted when considered as heritage.

The notion of heritage developed significantly throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century, from its original meaning referring to the material assets passed on within a family, to its extension as the cultural legacy transmitted nationwide, as *the Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française* of 1835 reflects when it defines heritage as: « ensemble des richesses culturelles accumulées (par une nation, une région, une ville...) et qui sont valorisées par la société. Ex : le patrimoine archéologique, culturel d'un pays. »<sup>50</sup> However, if the nineteenth century grew aware of the value of national heritage as history's legacy of its potential as a binding element of French identity, it only became fully understood as such and consciously integrated to patriotic expression in the late twentieth century.

The concern for the protection of historical landmarks as part of a national heritage arose after the Revolution. The destruction of the myriad monuments and artefacts associated with the Ancien Régime, as well as the selling of the possessions of the Clergy to individuals who exploited relics of France's religious past,<sup>51</sup> brought attention to the many ways through which history displayed itself, and to the idea that its remains belonged to the nation entirely. In his 1794 report to the convention, the jurist

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<sup>50</sup> Alain Rey, ed. *Dictionnaire culturel en langue française* (Paris : Le Robert, 2005) 3. 1449.

<sup>51</sup> Nowadays, many ruins of medieval abbeys such as Cluny in Paris or Jumièges in Normandy are the result of the purchase of these properties following the Revolution, by individuals who turned them into stone quarries.

and revolutionary leader abbé Grégoire was among the first to introduce the idea of a common heritage, stating that « le respect public entoure particulièrement les objets nationaux qui, n'étant à personne, sont la propriété de tous [...] Tous les monuments de sciences et d'arts sont recommandés à la surveillance de tous les bons citoyens. »<sup>52</sup> Well before Ernest Renan's articulation of heritage as a paramount element of the national consensus underlining French identity and evoked in his famous formula, « deux choses qui, à vrai dire, n'en font qu'une, constituent cette âme, ce principe spirituel. L'une est dans le passé, l'autre dans le présent. L'une est la possession en commun d'un riche legs de souvenirs ; l'autre est le consentement actuel, le désir de vivre ensemble, la volonté de continuer à faire valoir l'héritage qu'on a reçu indivis » (29), individuals such as the abbé Grégoire had tried following the Revolution to bring awareness to the necessity to preserve history and democratize it so as to include *le peuple*, as both actors and common owners of the national Past.

#### **THE TEMPORAL DISPLACEMENT OF *LA PROVINCE***

If it took over a century for the definition of heritage to be officially extended in dictionaries to a national legacy, it had already made its way into the French consciousness following the Revolution, as seen through the national initiatives for the preservation of historical remains such as the Commission des Monuments Historiques,

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<sup>52</sup> André Chastel, « La notion de patrimoine. » *Les lieux de mémoire*. Pierre Nora ed. (Paris : Gallimard, 1997) 1. 1440.

founded in 1830 under the Minister of the Interior, François Guizot. Prosper Mérimée, appointed inspector of the Commission in 1835 set across France to provide an inventory of the historical monuments present on its territory and requiring maintenance. The abundance of these historical relics in most regions of France gave rural areas a connection with the Past as it turned these areas into repositories of national antiquities. The Académie Celtique, which became the Association des Antiquaires in 1813, manifested likewise an interest for the Past, yet while the Commission des Monuments Historiques valued in its inventory architectural remains from the national past, the Académie Celtique focused rather on popular culture and particularly on traces of Celtic origin within local customs, beliefs, and language. As it took over the Académie Celtique, the Association des Antiquaires abandoned the obsession with Celtic culture which had originally driven the institution in its ethnological studies, and rather adopted an archeological approach in its search for antiquities. As Nicole Belmont argues, in the early nineteenth century the interest in and study of local folklore operated a temporal displacement in order to justify its mission and valorize the local traditions and culture that otherwise remained attached to the common prejudices of ignorance and superstitions.<sup>53</sup>

The intersection of space and time which constructs *la province* as a place belonging to the past is conceptualized by Mikhail Bakhtin in *The Dialogic Imagination*. As Bakhtin explains, “In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators

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<sup>53</sup> Nicole Belmont, « L’académie celtique et George Sand: les débuts des recherches folkloriques en France » *Romantisme* 5. 9 (1975) 31.

are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope.”<sup>54</sup> Bakhtin illustrates the chronotope when he refers to the nineteenth-century literary representation of *la province*, present in Gustave Flaubert and Honoré de Balzac, as the locus of “cyclical everyday time” (247), a space characterized by its lack of investment in the movement of history. The contrasted representation of the space of Paris and *la province*, one being defined by movement and chaos, and the other by stability, recurs throughout the literature of the period and is responsible for the analogy of Paris with modernity, and *la province* with the Past. Indeed, for the young nineteenth-century characters who move to Paris to start their studies or pursue a career path, such as Frédéric Moreau in Flaubert’s *Education sentimentale* (1869), the return to one’s family in *la province* signals the failure of the character’s social and professional ascent. As for Emma Bovary or Balzac’s Eugénie Grandet, *la province* stands as a prison, confining these characters to the monotony of an existence that has been imposed onto them. This opposition between Paris and the *la province* is however not new in the nineteenth century and describes the relation between Paris and *la province* ever since power, i.e., the monarchy and the royal court, settled in Paris and Versailles. As for its representation in literature, *la province* and its inhabitants became a subject of comedy toward the middle of the seventeenth century. Historian

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<sup>54</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Michael Holquist ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 84.

Alain Corbin explains, as a complex socio-cultural reality, “la province sémantique, liée à la centralisation des représentations et de la réalité du pouvoir, se fonde sur une exclusion; de ce fait elle a d’emblée partie liée avec la dérision.”<sup>55</sup> Because of the lack of effective means of communication, despite the July Monarchy’s initiatives to develop roads and canals, during most of the nineteenth century, news and trends from the center reached *la province* with a certain delay, hence turning the provincials’ attempt to imitate Paris into an object of ridicule, as illustrated in numerous of Molière’s plays such as *Les précieuses ridicules* (1659) or *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* (1669). However, as Corbin reminds us, we should distinguish between provincial and rural representations, the latter not having had the same exposure in literature despite the same prevailing traits in their characters; ignorance and naivety. The source of the comic there emanated mostly from the patois spoken by the peasant characters, and the obstacle it presented to an effective communication with one or several Parisian characters. Deprived of the presence of the monarch and the intellectual influence surrounding him in the capital, *la province* was perceived through the notion of absence and its derivatives such as exclusion, ultimately leading to the idea of exile.

While nineteenth-century authors such as Balzac embraced the traditional representation of *la province*, others like George Sand reacted against the ideological discourse by turning its negative discursive components into positive attributes. Thus,

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<sup>55</sup>Alain Corbin, « Paris-Province. » *Les lieux de mémoire*. Pierre Nora ed. (Paris : Gallimard, 1997) 2. 2852.

Sand sees in *la région* the opportunity to escape modernity and the social and political unrest occurring in the metropolis.

#### GEORGE SAND'S REGIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY

Preserved from the effect of time, *la région* represents for Sand a space where the origin of the nation can be found. As “le pays le plus *conservé* qu’il se puisse trouver à l’heure qu’il est,”<sup>56</sup> Sand’s native province of Berry represents this historical space. The origin is displayed through linguistic practices, stories and legends, and traditions which have survived because of their reiteration and transmission in the everyday life of these rural populations. In fact, as Pierre Nora argues, history as a field emerges as a consequence of the loss of collective memory which was maintained in traditional cultures thanks to its inclusion into the practices and the stories transmitted within the community and through genealogy. However, with modernity and the gradual disappearance of rural communities and their lifestyle, which Nora refers as “cette mutilation sans retour qu’a représenté la fin des paysans, cette collectivité-mémoire,” history was assigned with the task of re-creating a national and collective memory.<sup>57</sup> Sensing that the disappearance of rural communities was on its way, George Sand devoted the last section of *La mare au diable* to the description of some of these particular local customs that she had witnessed. More clearly than elsewhere in her

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<sup>56</sup> George Sand, *La mare au diable* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1964) 153.

<sup>57</sup> Pierre Nora ed. *Les lieux de mémoire* (Paris : Gallimard, 1997) 1. 23.

“romans champêtres” is she using fiction, here the wedding of her two characters, to serve her ethnological aspirations. Before starting her account of this particular wedding procession traditional to the province of le Berry where the story takes place, she declares with nostalgia,

Car, hélas! Tout s'en va. Depuis seulement que j'existe, il s'est fait plus de mouvement dans les idées et les coutumes de mon village, qu'il ne s'en était vu durant des siècles avant la Révolution. Déjà la moitié des cérémonies celtiques, païennes ou moyen âge, que j'ai vues encore en pleine vigueur dans mon enfance, se sont effacées. Encore un ou deux ans peut-être, et les chemins de fer passeront leur niveau sur nos vallées profondes, emportant, avec la rapidité de la foudre, nos antiques traditions et nos merveilleuses légendes. (154)

Sand's fascination with ethnology became particularly strong in the 1850s when Le Berry became the scene of archeological forays. Sand's correspondence and journal entries reflect this growing interest which led her to participate in the financing of the excavations, and made her house a collection of some of the artefacts found. Likewise, the beginning of Folklore studies influenced Sand in her writing.<sup>58</sup> Particularly interested in traditional forms of music and dance, to which she devotes some of her works (such as *Les maîtres sonneurs*), George Sand became “une véritable éthnomusicologue” according to Sylvie Douce de La Salle.<sup>59</sup> As this critic notes, “Plus qu'observer, elle écoute et comprend que le jeu des musiciens populaires est fait de répétition d'airs, d'adaptations à

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<sup>58</sup> The term “folklore” was coined by William Thoms in 1846 to describe an emerging field of studies focused on popular culture. In France, some of the most notorious initiators of folklore include Laisnel de la Salle, La Villemarqué with his *Barbaz Breiz* (1839), a collection of fifty songs followed by his translation, and Amélie Bosquet with *La Normandie romanesque et merveilleuse ; traditions, légendes et superstitions populaires de cette province* (1845). Bosquet in particular influenced Sand.

<sup>59</sup> Quoted in Daniel Bernard, « le regard ethnographique de George Sand. » *George Sand, terroir et histoire*. Noël Dauphin ed. (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2006) 99.

leur propre sensibilité, par pure transmission orale."<sup>60</sup> Sand seems to approach music as a form of expression of *le peuple*, especially valuable for cultures who do not rely on written modes of transmission. As an alternative to literature, folkloric music provides a unique space for the expression of different peoples and cultures and as such, it reflects their sensibility and the intricacies of their cultural identity. "A more sincere form of communication and source of knowledge," the folkloric music of the many regions of France offers an insight into the culture of its people and thereby allows a better understanding of these cultures, ultimately binding the French across their differences.<sup>61</sup> Yet, certain scholars such as Arnold Van Gennep have argued that Sand's account of the Berrichon folkloric culture is incomplete,<sup>62</sup> and according to Béatrice Didier, her geographical references are incorrect at times.<sup>63</sup> However, except in the appendix of *La mare au diable* mentioned above, Sand is using ethnographical information as a foundation for her fiction and on a larger scale for her project defined as "une mission de sentiment et d'amour."<sup>64</sup> Indeed, not only should George Sand's ethnological inaccuracies be blamed on the lack of resources in the field at the time, Nicole Belmont remarks that « de toute façon c'eût été lui demander plus qu'aux 'savants' de son époque,

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<sup>60</sup> Daniel Bernard, « le regard ethnographique de George Sand. » *George Sand, terroir et histoire*. Noël Dauphin ed. (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2006) 99.

<sup>61</sup> David A. Powell, *While the Music Lasts: The Representation of Music in the Works of George Sand* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP/London: AUP, 2001) 132.

<sup>62</sup> Arnold Van Gennep, "George Sand folkloriste." *Le folklore français*. Robert Laffont ed. (Paris : Bouquins, 1999) 3. 3061-3070.

<sup>63</sup> Béatrice Didier, *George Sand écrivain: 'un grand fleuve d'Amérique'* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998) 779.

<sup>64</sup> George Sand, *La mare au diable* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1964) 30.

historiens, archéologues ou philologues, »<sup>65</sup> but most importantly, let us remember that George Sand is less interested in providing a faithful documentation of rural life in Berry, which would align her art with realism, than in using idealism to valorize regional culture and encourage its integration to the nation. As she explains in the preface of *La mare au diable*,

le roman d'aujourd'hui devrait remplacer la parabole et l'apologue des temps naïfs, et que l'artiste a une tâche plus large et plus poétique que de proposer quelques mesures de prudence et de conciliation pour atténuer l'effroi qu'inspire ses peintures. Son but devrait être de faire aimer les objets de sa sollicitude, et au besoin, je ne lui ferai pas de reproches de les embellir un peu. L'art n'est pas une étude de la réalité positive ; c'est une recherche de la vérité idéale [...] (30)

The oxymoronic phrase she uses, “vérité idéale,” is quite puzzling, yet it reflects Sand’s project in its conflation of ethnology with idealism. In order to elicit a form of love and compassion for the peasantry, a milieu predominantly painted as obscure by the dominant discourse, Sand resorts to idealism in the elevation of her protagonists to moral subjects, and to the representation of folklore as a constitutive element of French history. By exploiting the association of folklore with the Past, Sand is able to preserve the cultural particularities of *la région* and integrate them into the national identity. Thus, in her rustic novels temporality is purposefully unclear. With the exception of *Les maîtres sonneurs* that takes place in the late eighteenth-century before the Revolution,<sup>66</sup> temporal indicators are very scarce in the rest of the novels, making these stories seem to belong to

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<sup>65</sup> Daniel Bernard, “Le regard ethnographique de George Sand.” *George Sand, terroir et histoire*. Noël Dauphin ed. (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2006) 82.

<sup>66</sup> In *Les maîtres sonneurs*, “les juges du roi” are mentioned, referring to the pre-Revolution judicial system and its inequalities; the judges are expected to refuse settling the characters’ dispute since they are known to work solely for money, thus precipitating the characters’ fight to resolve the conflict.

a distant time, which the language particularly suggests. Indeed, Sand resorts to a combination of words and phrases in regional patois and in old French, her linguistic practice being described by critic Eric Bordas as “un joyeux mélange d'ancien et de moyen français présenté comme une originalité locale.”<sup>67</sup> In *La mare au diable*, she justifies the archaism of the language used by conflating it with the local patois which she presents as the legacy of old French. According to Sand, while the language in major urban areas of France has had to evolve as a result of modernity, rural France on the other hand, left rather intact, has preserved France’s original language, noteworthy in the traces of old French within the local patois. As Sand argues, “ces gens-là parlent trop français pour nous, et, depuis Rabelais et Montaigne, les progrès de la langue nous ont fait perdre bien des vieilles richesses [...] Mais c’est encore un plaisir d’entendre ces idiotismes pittoresques régner sur le vieux terroir du centre de la France.”<sup>68</sup> However, as hinted above, scholars of George Sand doubt her alleged truthful rendition of local patois, and rather argue that her incorporation of old and middle French in her texts functions as a literary device to emphasize local color and the indeterminacy of Time. The archaism of the linguistic practices and the traditions performed situate the local folklore into the Past which is connected to national history through the notion of heritage.

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<sup>67</sup> Eric Bordas, "Les histoires du terroir : à propos des légendes rustiques de George Sand," *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France* 106.1 (Jan-March 2006) 74.

Sand’s particular linguistic use is also explained by Marie-France Azéma in her notes to the edition of *François le champi*. She lists cultural practices that are obsolete, such as old ways of measurement as “portée de fusil” which were ended with the Revolution and its implementation of the metric system; and old French expressions such as “champi.” Other works on the language in Sand include *La langue et le style rustique de George Sand dans "les romans champêtres"* by Marie-Louise Vincent, and *The peasant vocabulary in the works of George Sand* by Alexander Schutz.

<sup>68</sup> George Sand, *La mare au diable*, 153.

## RESISTING THE SPATIAL HIERARCHY OF CENTER AND PERIPHERY

Sand strongly believes that *la région* stands within an unjust and inefficient economic system that exploits its natural resources and workforce for the benefit of the capital. She compares the national center to a black hole that absorbs *la région*. In a letter to Lamartine of December 10, 1843, published in *La revue indépendante*, she expresses her recognition of the necessary centralized organization of France, yet she deplores the lack of an equal exchange between center and periphery. As she explains,

La centralisation se trouve faussée aujourd'hui chez nous, au point de produire le contraire de la centralisation véritable, c'est à dire la concentration, l'invasion et l'absorption. Paris ne joue plus le rôle efficace par lequel la capitale devait féconder la civilisation, en organisant et en dirigeant le mouvement des provinces. Au lieu de faire refluer sans cesse la vie du centre aux extrémités, cette vaste et terrible capitale est devenue un gouffre où le sang se fige, où la richesse s'engloutit, où la vie se perd. Là devraient bien tendre et aboutir en effet toutes les forces vives du pays ; mais ce serait à condition que ces forces se reprendraient, si je puis ainsi parler, après s'être retrempées dans le sein de la *mère de la patrie* (comme disait Jean Ziska de sa vieille Prague), et reviendraient embraser la terre natale de tous les feux épurés et combinés dans le foyer central.<sup>69</sup>

This quote illustrates the necessary contribution of *la région* to the dynamism of France: a life force conveyed through the metaphor of maternity, *la région* helps direct the movement of the center, reminds it of the core values of the nation and thereby prevents it from a self-destruction caused by the accumulation of capital and the pursuit of private interests.

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<sup>69</sup> Jean Ziska is the eponymous character of an 1843 novel by George Sand. Quoted in Michelle Perrot, *George Sand, Politique et polémiques* (Paris : Imprimerie Nationale, 1997) 122.

Sand expressed her political concerns and the demands for social reforms through the medium of the press. In 1841 she co-founded *La revue indépendante*, but after the difficulty experienced in publishing her article on the Fanchette polemic,<sup>70</sup> she grew aware of the imperative to found an opposition paper, *L'éclaireur de l'Indre*. Based in the region of Indre, this paper served the project of offering a direct representation of *la région*, its population and the specific issues affecting them. It also encouraged the regional population to get involved in politics. Sand believed that reforms should be passed to protect the rural population of France, and that for a better integration of *la région* into the nation, its population should be educated to be able to consciously participate in politics. She accused the capital and the institutions of power of purposefully maintaining *la région* in a state of political apathy to continue its domination over this space. She uses a vocabulary reminiscent of domestic colonization to refer to the relation between the center and the periphery. Indeed, in the same letter addressed to Lamartine, she alludes to "la conquête incessante de la capitale sur le pays," and to the center's desire to "enchaîner la France [...] comme une esclave abrutié et obéissante."<sup>71</sup> The subjugation of *la région* and its marginalization within the paternalist French society encouraged Sand's identification with this space and her involvement vouching for the recognition of its significant contribution to the well-being of the nation. As a proponent of maternity and a defender of the gender roles, George Sand implements

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<sup>70</sup> Fanchette was a simple-minded young orphan of fifteen years old who was abandoned by the nuns of the hospice of la Châtre. Left with no resources, she wandered aimlessly and was physically abused before the incident reached the authorities of the region. George Sand militated for the cause of Fanchette.

<sup>71</sup> Michelle Perrot, *George Sand, Politique et polémiques* (Paris : Imprimerie Nationale, 1997) 122.

in her novels the analogy of the land and by extension *la région* with the feminine because of the notions of fertility associated with the earth. In *Promenades autour d'un village* (1857), Sand declares, “la terre est femelle, puisqu’elle est essentiellement mère. C’est donc une déité aux traits changeants, et elle se symbolise par une beauté de femme, tour à tour souriante et désespérée, austère et pompeuse, voluptueuse et chaste.”<sup>72</sup> In *Politique et polémiques*, Michelle Perrot exposes the paradoxical position of Sand concerning women’s cause and social claims emerging early in the century. On one hand, Sand advocated for the conservation of the sexual division of spheres and women’s role as mothers and promoters of morality, and on the other, Sand critiqued the institution of marriage which through its laws reduced wives to a situation of servitude. The Saint-Simonian doctrine attracted Sand at its beginning because of its utopian socialist project of implementing a meritocracy supporting values of equality and fraternity, which responded to Sand’s social and political hopes. However, she turned away from Saint-Simonianism when it merged into a religion under the lead of Prosper Enfantin, and supported the executive power of women in politics. As Perrot remarks, although George Sand looked to influence political and social reforms through her writings, she believed that women should stay away from politics which necessarily entailed manipulation and lies, and should reinforce instead the moral values necessary to the well-being and harmony of society. Understanding George Sand’s feminism is therefore delicate because of the writer’s extremely nuanced and at times paradoxical stance.

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<sup>72</sup> George Sand, *Promenades autour d'un village* (Paris : Michel-Lévy Frères, 1866) 6.

The “romans champêtres” make no sexual discrimination and rather emphasize universal brotherhood. Although as we have seen, George Sand views the land as a maternal figure, a woman giving life and deserving to be respected, sentiments of love and compassion reach all of the characters. There is neither a definition of the characters based on gender nor a sexual division of labor in the world of the “romans champêtres,” and even more so the female characters tend to assert as much if not more power than their male counterparts.<sup>73</sup>

As previously discussed, since the 1<sup>st</sup> Republic, France had implemented a politics of centralization which took effect in particular through a cultural homogenization designed to assert a tight control over the regions of France and avoid any proclivity to emancipate. As the model for national cultural production, Paris defined social norms, all of which participated in shaping a uniform national identity. Thus, local attachments were deemed a threat for the unity of the nation in the making, and regional specificities were to be suppressed. Relegated to the periphery in discourses about national identity, *la région* was marginalized and remained a place of exclusion or exception throughout the nineteenth century. Indeed, even regionalist movements such as the Felibrige which emerged halfway into the century with the design to valorize regional culture and highlight its contribution to the identity of the nation, were unable to

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<sup>73</sup> In *La mare au diable*, Germain is feminized. He admires Marie’s resourcefulness and her initiatives when they are lost in the woods at night. Similarly in *François le champi* the main female character, Madeleine, is empowered. Indeed, her age and social position allows her to manage the estate, especially following her husband’s death. As for *La petite Fadette*, Landry’s masculinity is challenged by his superstitious fear which leads him to a dangerous situation from which Fadette rescues him. And finally in *Les maîtres sonneurs*, Brulette is at the center of a love triangle through which she navigates with tact and which eventually gets resolved with the death of Joseph, one of the major masculine character.

successfully thwart *la région*'s marginality, and instead often further isolated it by pointing out its unique attributes relative to the standardized national culture dictated by the center. Thus, asserting *la région*'s potential entailed a discourse of exclusivity that easily merged with a form of exclusion. The language used by the Felibrige provides a compelling insight into the movement's approach to regional art. Using exclusively langue d'Oc, the Felibrige rendered its works unintelligible to a readership beyond the narrow borders of the regions concerned.

In her texts, George Sand attempts to give national recognition to *la région* by giving it a voice and an artistic expression. Her political engagement which she voluntarily limits to writing because of her acknowledgment of the confines of her gender is displayed mostly through fiction, since even the articles she writes for the newspapers are signed for the most part under pennames. The recurrence of some of these names, such as Blaise Bonnin, contributes to bridging the gap between her literary endeavors and the reality of the social problems brought forward in these articles. Voicing the socio-economic issues affecting *la région* to the government and to a Parisian readership is a way for George Sand to react against the centralization that stifles *la région* and ultimately to request a better form of distribution of power across the territory. Sand's unique position astride different geographical spaces and social classes, because of her life spent half in Nohant and half in Paris, and her aristocratic paternal legacy and her proletariat origins through her mother's line, allows Sand to take on a position as mediator. Navigating different spaces and social classes, Sand is able to understand the demands of each side, and ultimately she defends the interests of the most vulnerable.

Her role as mediator merges with her self-assigned position as translator when she becomes concerned, as explained in the avant-propos of *François le champi*, with preserving the authenticity of the local culture represented, while rendering it accessible to the understanding and identification of Parisian readers. George Sand's dream is thus to unite *le peuple* across the various geographical and social divides. I posit that George Sand resorts to mythology and more precisely, to a myth of origin as a way to reject the existing spatial hierarchy between the center and its peripheries. As a type of allegorical narrative, mythology relies on particular elements found in regional culture or landscape to build a story whose exemplarity appeals to the universal. As such, mythology is able to reconcile the particular with the general, as scholar Yeleazar Meletinsky maintains, "mythic imagination blends the absolute with the particular and sees in the single parts all the divinity of the whole" (8).<sup>74</sup>

#### **MYTHOLOGY IN THE "ROMANS CHAMPÊTRES"**

Sand's idealism can be imparted to the great influence of Pierre Leroux's utopian socialism which is displayed in Sand's works through the principles that organize the harmonious rural communities of her novels and which Sand hopes will be applied to the nation. Nevertheless, despite the thrust into progress conveyed by Sand's application of utopian socialist ideas, her novels also recall an outdated time and express a sense of nostalgia for pastoral simplicity, which becomes more prominent after 1848, since for

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<sup>74</sup> Eleazar Meletinsky, *The Poetics of Myth* (New York: Garland Publisher, 1998) 8.

Schor, “this idealism is consoling rather than mobilizing, distracting rather than hortatory, regressive rather than progressive.”<sup>75</sup>

According to Gérard Peylet, these two paradoxical movements, one leaning toward the future and the other looking back at the Past, express themselves through the local, as he maintains that for Sand “le terroir est l’occasion de méditer sur la conciliation du progrès et de l’archaïque dans un futur lointain.”<sup>76</sup> Indeed, in a century marked by economic and political changes, Sand perceives in *la région* a permanence responsible for the strength of the nation. As she declares in a letter to her daughter Solange in 1871,

tout s’efface, se transforme ou se restaure, monarchie, clergé, spéculation. Une seule chose reste, le champ qu’on a acheté et qu’on garde. Les communaux comptent sans le paysan, et le paysan c’est la France matérielle invincible. Il fera encore la loi cette fois-ci, avec tous les inconvénients de son ignorance, mais avec tous les bénéfices de son esprit de conservation. Je l’ai dit, je le dis encore, c’est le sauveur inconscient, borné, têtue ; mais je n’en vois pas d’autre. Il faudra bien que Paris l’accepte ou s’efface.<sup>77</sup>

From the protectors of the nation’s memory and identity, Sand’s peasants are given heroic qualities after the Franco-Prussian war and the Paris Commune, as they become figures of resistance against foreign as well as domestic threat. Throughout her career Sand sided with *le peuple*, defending their cause and professing her love and support for this oppressed class, as she expresses in a letter to her cousin René de Villeneuve June, 2<sup>nd</sup> 1848, « jusqu’à mon dernier souffle, je serai pour le pauvre, n’en

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<sup>75</sup> Naomi Schor, *George Sand and Idealism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) 138.

<sup>76</sup> Gérard Peylet, “Terroir et histoire dans l’oeuvre de George Sand,” *George Sand, terroir et histoire*. Noël Dauphin ed. (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2006) 19.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

doutez pas, cher cousin et fussé-je déchirée de ses mains égarées, je crierai comme les Chouans (en mourant pour une autre cause) : Vive le peuple quand même ! »<sup>78</sup>

Nevertheless, if she idealized the urban proletariat's energy and political convictions - prompting her to petition the ministry of public instruction, Hippolyte Carnot, to send blue-collar workers in each department of France to revolutionize the techniques used as well as to enlighten politically the rural workers- Sand continued to believe in the peasants whose cause and story she defends through her novels, elaborating a form of myth that critic Simone Vierendeux aligns to "une sorte de religion à travers le peuple, qui est à la fois un être à sauver et un sauveur."<sup>79</sup> With only one of her novels, *La ville noire* (1860), focusing on proletarian workers, George Sand's interest in the representation of *le peuple* is concentrated on the peasantry and other rural workers.

Between Past and Future, and a diegetic time that is fuzzy, accentuated by the archaic language used, the "romans champêtres" bring up a temporal conundrum that deserves attention. I argue that mythology, in particular myth of origin, establishes a temporal continuum, since the elaboration of a story of origins cures the Past of the conflicts that have divided its population and instead gathers them around a story of common heritage. For instance, particularly in *Jeanne* (1844), the Celtic and Gallic past of France is strongly revived for, as Naginski argues, « Sand s'intéresse à retrouver le passé perdu parce qu'il offre justement le schéma directeur, le *blue print*, d'un futur

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<sup>78</sup> Simone Vierendeux, "Le mythe du peuple sauveur chez George Sand," *Peuple, mythe et histoire*. Simone Bernard-Griffiths and Alain Pessin eds. (Toulouse : Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 1997) 165.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid. 161.

utopique.”<sup>80</sup> Therefore, myths of origin seem endowed with the potential to establish a temporal continuity necessary for Sand to imagine and believe in a republican and socialist future. Scholar Max Milner relates indeed the longing for national origins to the whole generation of intellectuals who experienced the disillusion of 1830 when he maintains that “de nombreux romantiques ont tenté d’échapper à leur désarroi en ressuscitant, en rénovant, ou en créant des mythes qui permettaient de rêver à un retour aux origines et à la remise en marche des forces présentes dans les premiers âges de l’humanité.”<sup>81</sup> Moreover, by laying out the foundational principles of a nation, one of the functions of myth is to unite *le peuple* through the forging of a national story which thereby defines the collective group. As William G. Doty articulates, myths function as “the social cement that binds societies together [...] They provide a mechanism for enabling holistic interaction between individuals who otherwise might remain independent and disengaged.”<sup>82</sup> As for Gaston Bachelard, he underlines the mobility of myth in being reshaped to adapt to the different communities and times of its circulation. Thus, unlike a “fable fossile,” myth is a form of storytelling that despite being often grounded in the past, as it is the case of the myth of origin, is largely turned toward the future.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Isabelle Hoog Naginski, *George Sand mythographe* (Clermont-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2007) 118.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* 22-23.

<sup>82</sup> William G. Doty, *Mythography: the Study of Myths and Rituals* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press) 137.

<sup>83</sup> Gaston Bachelard, "Préface" in Paul Diel *Le symbolisme dans la mythologie grecque : étude psychoanalytique*, (Paris: Payot, 1952) 8.

History and imagination are woven into each other which sets a layer of indeterminacy over temporal consistency. However, it seems important to stress that while the historical references are what give shape and stability to the story, fantasy and the exceptional destiny of the heroic group reflects the inherent goal of myth to give again energy to a nation weakened by social divisions and economic recession. Isabelle Hoog Naginski explains George Sand's resort to Greek myths in several of her novels as her effort to undermine romanticism with the reign of the individual will, to promote in her texts a common humanity and announce a utopic future for the nation.<sup>84</sup> According to Naginski, Sand views this harmonious and idyllic future as founded on a historical movement transcending the Ancien Régime and going beyond the fraternal new order implemented by the Revolution. As Naginski declares "pour assurer la transition, il faut la fonder sur la récupération des généalogies oubliées, des histoires effacées et la recréation des origines perdues" (113).

Sand's interest in *le peuple* is apparent in *Histoire de ma vie* (1855), which she began writing in 1847. In this autobiographical text, Sand claims her proletarian origins that have been wrongfully omitted from the biographies written on her life. Honoring her popular heritage, Sand declares, "il n'en est pas moins vrai que je tiens au peuple par le sang, d'une manière tout aussi intime et directe."<sup>85</sup> As a descendant of both the aristocracy on her father's side and of the people on her mother's, George Sand views

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<sup>84</sup> Isabelle Hoog Naginski, *George Sand mythographe* (Clermont-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2007) 10.

<sup>85</sup> George Sand, *Histoire de ma vie* (Saint-Cyr-sur-Loire: C. Pirot, 1993)1. 41.

herself as the product of the coming together of two historically distinct social classes. As such she embodies the hope of the removal of social barriers and of universal brotherhood. The lack of knowledge about her mother's ancestry which she believes to be symptomatic of society's denial of the people's role at the origin of history, prompts her to encourage *le peuple* to record their stories which deserve to be included in the history of the nation:

Eh bien! que chacun de vous cherche à tirer et à sauver de l'oubli les bonnes actions et les utiles travaux de ses aïeux, et qu'il agisse de manière que ses descendants lui rendent le même honneur. L'oubli est un monstre stupide qui a dévoré trop de générations. Combien de héros à jamais ignorés parce qu'ils n'ont pas laissé de quoi se faire élever une tombe! Combien de lumières éteintes dans l'histoire parce que la noblesse a voulu être le seul flambeau et la seule histoire des siècles écoulés! Echappez à l'oubli, vous tous qui avez autre chose en l'esprit que la nation bornée du présent isolé. Ecrivez votre histoire, vous tous qui avez compris votre vie et sondé votre cœur. Ce n'est pas à autres fins que j'écris la mienne et que je vais raconter celle de mes parens [sic.]. (42)

The defense of the people's story and its role in Sand's vision of the national past is thus at play in Sand's "romans champêtres." The metaphor of the plowman's furrow used in the opening of *La mare au diable* suggests that unless told and transmitted through generations, the story of the peasant's life will fall into oblivion, the physical traces of his passage disappearing with time, just like for the furrows he leaves plowing the field. In her "romans champêtres" Sand offers to be the historian and spokesperson of the rural inhabitants, recording the peasant or small farmer's story that otherwise would be forgotten and lost. In the overture of *La mare au diable*, she justifies her literary enterprise using the analogy of the plowman's furrow previously mentioned when she expresses,

Je me demandai pourquoi son histoire ne serait pas écrite, quoique ce fût une histoire aussi simple, aussi droite et aussi peu ornée que le sillon qu'il traçait avec sa charrue. L'année prochaine, ce sillon sera comblé et couvert par un sillon nouveau. Ainsi s'imprime et disparaît la trace de la plupart des hommes dans le champ de l'humanité. Un peu de terre l'efface, et les sillons que nous avons creusés se succèdent les uns aux autres comme les tombes dans le cimetière. Le sillon du laboureur ne vaut-il pas celui de l'oisif, qui a pourtant un nom, un nom qui restera, si, par une singularité ou une absurdité quelconque, il fait un peu de bruit dans le monde ?... Eh bien ! arrachons, s'il se peut, au néant de l'oubli, le sillon de Germain, le fin laboureur. Il n'en saura rien et ne s'en inquiétera guère. (40)

## MYTH AND THE SACRED

The belief in scientific truth originating in the Enlightenment, followed by positivism and its different intellectual branches, deeply undermined the Church and posed the problem of origins which had to be re-imagined. As D. G Charlton explains, what he calls secular religions developed in the mid-nineteenth century as a way to substitute for religious faith.<sup>86</sup> Examples of secular religions include Taine's positivism and its influence on various artistic movements such as Zola's naturalism and Michelet's faith in historical evolution and progress, and more importantly for my study Pierre Leroux's utopian socialism. Michèle Hecquet points out in *Poétiques de la parabole : les romans socialistes de George Sand, 1840-1845* that it was easy for social thoughts to verge onto religious faith because of its inclusive vision.<sup>87</sup> Saint-Simonianism is a perfect example of this phenomena since it was founded as a utopian socialist group and became

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<sup>86</sup> Donald Geoffrey Charlton, "Religious and Political Thought," *The French Romantics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 37.

<sup>87</sup> Michèle Hecquet, *Poétiques de la parabole : les romans socialistes de George Sand, 1840-1845* (Paris : Klincksieck, 1992).

a religious sect after the death of the count of Saint-Simon in 1825. George Sand foregrounds in her rustic novels a kind of spiritual faith which does not answer to any dogmatic religion but is rather a philosophic conception of life based on utopian social ideas, since she advocates for love, fraternity, and especially solidarity, as she asserts in *Histoire de ma vie*, “la source la plus vivante et la plus religieuse du progrès de l'esprit humain, c'est, pour parler la langue de mon temps, la notion de *solidarité*” (her emphasis; 47). Furthermore, she believes that art has the mission to encourage and spread this ethic. In *La mare au diable* she opposes art forms that expose the darkness of the human soul as does the realist literature movement flourishing in her time because of its negative influence on the readers. She seems to believe in the contagious effect of literature and its ability to reinforce cohesion and solidarity within society—the artist’s mission—or conversely bring about egoism and fear, which would no longer be restrained by religion because of its loss of influence. Hence in the opening of *La mare au diable*, Sand refers to Holbein’s painting *Simulachres de la mort* to define by opposition her own poetics. In one of his paintings, Holbein portrays an older peasant who is working in a field, bending over from a life of hard labor, and who is followed by a skeletal figure standing for Death. Sand substitutes this painting and its dark representation of rural life with her own, inspired from a scene Sand as the narrator claims to have witnessed, “un beau spectacle, un noble sujet pour un peintre. A l’autre extrémité de la plaine labourable, un jeune homme de bonne mine conduisait un attelage magnifique: quatre paires de jeunes animaux” (36). This image exudes vitality and is reinforced by the following mention of a child walking alongside the plow and helping out his father by jabbing the animals. As

the epitome of youth and the renewal of generations, the child, who we later learn is named petit Pierre, is described in highly evangelical terms, as “un ange”, whose lamb-skin jacket “le faisait ressembler au petit saint Jean-Baptiste” (36). Petite Marie, whom Germain accompanies on her journey to Fourche, is likewise sanctified. As an allegorical figure of maternity, innocence and moral virtue, she is reminiscent of the Virgin Mary, which is highlighted not only through the obvious echo of her name but also through her close bond with the Christ-like figure of petit Pierre “qu’elle tenait toujours pressé contre son sein” (92). Therefore, not only does George Sand reverse the traditional association of *la région* with immobility and decay by celebrating life and energy through her protagonists, but she offers a rewriting of Christian myths through her biblical analogies. The episode where Germain and Marie have lost their way in the forest and have to spend the night around “the devil’s pond” stages Germain’s struggle to resist his desire for Marie which has taken hold of him, a temptation that seems to be triggered by the evil influence of the pond. However, in Sand’s rewriting of the Christian myth of the original sin, Germain’s heart is able to lead him back onto the path of moral uprightness, encouraged by the sight of Marie’s vulnerability which overwhelms him with compassion. Thereby, Sand rejects Christian orthodoxy and its foundational myth of the original sin, and rather expresses her belief in humanity’s potential for love and compassion. Moreover, as Naginski posits in her examination of mythography in *Jeanne* (1844), through her elaboration of the beautiful and pure character of Jeanne, Sand attempts to reshape the female character of Eve. From a temptress and sinner in the

Christian doxa, the female character of Sand's own myth of origin functions rather as a guide toward morality.

Introduced from an early age to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's works through her grand-mother, George Sand was deeply influenced by his philosophy throughout her life, as she confesses in 1865 in "Les Charmettes," " il m'a transmis, comme à tous les artistes de mon temps, l'amour de la nature, l'enthousiasme du vrai, le mépris de la vie factice et le dégoût des vanités du monde."<sup>88</sup> Like Rousseau, George Sand displays a distrust for economic progress and the inequalities and injustices it has generated, and rather aspires for a return to a golden age. The "romans champêtres" illustrate this mythical time, when rural populations relied only on their personal work and the offerings of the earth for subsistence, and manifested charity towards one another.

George Sand's spiritual faith can be compared to Rousseau's "natural religion" expressed through the profession of faith of the Savoyard vicar in *Emile ou de l'éducation* (1762), which outlines fundamental principles of Rousseau's philosophy, his belief in the natural kindness of humanity, individuals' liberty and responsibility. The Carmelite friar who appears in *Les maîtres sonneurs* is reminiscent of Rousseau's vicar as his action and reflection illustrate an understanding of religion that relies on one's consciousness and good heart, instead on blindly conforming Church dogmas.<sup>89</sup> However, Sand's construction of a mythical golden age as well as her understanding of

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<sup>88</sup> George Sand, "Les Charmettes," *Laura – Voyages et Impressions* (Paris : Calmann Lévy, 1881) 196.

<sup>89</sup> He does not hesitate for instance to break religious law to partake in a fight in which he defends Joseph against his bullies, hence putting himself in danger at the end of *Les maîtres sonneurs* and applying his own version of assistance and self-sacrifice.

humans' perfectibility in her rustic novels deviate from Rousseau's on several aspects. While Rousseau contends in his *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (1754) that the association of individuals along with the implementation of property are the causes of inequality, Sand's golden age integrates the concepts of property and human association within a Republican social organization. Hence, Sand's golden age suggests the success of such a political and economic model regulated by the Republican political system and core values. Likewise, she sets apart her understanding of perfectibility from Rousseau's when he defines it as a freedom to act or an openness to change. For Sand, her belief in perfectibility is entirely based on education, since as she declares as early as 1837 in *Mauprat*:

L'homme ne naît pas méchant, il ne naît pas bon non plus, comme l'entend Jean-Jacques Rousseau. L'homme naît avec plus ou moins de passions, avec plus ou moins de vigueur pour les satisfaire, avec plus ou moins d'aptitude pour en tirer un bon parti dans la société. Mais l'éducation peut et doit trouver remède à tout ; là est le grand problème à résoudre, c'est de trouver l'éducation qui convient à chaque être en particulier.<sup>90</sup>

#### **ORIGIN IN THE "ROMANS CHAMPÊTRES"**

To give to her stories a sense of origins, Sand endows them with an archaic gloss. By emphasizing the stories' act of transmission through the presence and frequent

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<sup>90</sup> Nadine Vivier, "D'une mission sociale au conte pour enfant : le devenir des romans champêtres de George Sand," *George Sand, terroir et histoire*. Noël Dauphin ed. (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2006) 279.

explanatory comments of her respective narrators,<sup>91</sup> Sand locates these stories in the past, making the narrator seem like a witness or a preserver of the community's memory. The frame of the *veillées* also adds a certain verisimilitude to the stories while projecting the readers into the tradition of storytelling and its making of stories into myths and legends as they rely on the narrator's memory and adapt to the audience.<sup>92</sup> As discussed earlier in this chapter, Sand's conscious choice of inserting Old French in the language spoken by her peasants is responsible for situating the stories in a distant past that eludes temporal identification, and ultimately suggests a mythical time, referred by Mircea Eliade as "primordial Time, the fabled time of the 'beginnings.'"<sup>93</sup>

Language represents a major concern for Sand who best voices the dilemma she faces wanting to offer through her texts an authentic account of the linguistic practices of Berry and create realist characters, while ensuring the intelligibility of her stories to her Parisian readership. In the avant-propos of *François le champi* which is set as a conversation between the author George Sand and her friend François Rollinat referred as

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<sup>91</sup> While the narrator's presence in *La mare au diable* is noticeable in the explanation of certain customs or linguistic expressions signaled by the use of italics or parenthesis, in *François le champi*, the narrator intervenes much more frequently. Halfway through the novel, Monique, the local priest's servant, even lets the hemp hackler take over the storytelling during a digression in which both of them, as well as the audience, comment on the story. If the narrator is more discreet in *La petite Fadette* and *Les maîtres sonneurs*, Sand still makes sure to introduce him and allows him to explain certain cultural facts.

<sup>92</sup> The form of orality that serves as frame to her stories is a major aspect of her "romans champêtres," which is reflected in Sand's initial choice of the name *Les veillées du chanvreur* for her "romans champêtres." As she explains in a digression in the appendix of *La mare au diable*, stories were often being passed on to the village community through the figure of the "chanvreur" or hemp hackler, a villager who would tell folk tales at night while working on the hemp. The relevance of the structure of the *veillées* has been developed by Isabelle Hoog Naginski in a chapter entitled « les veillées de Sand » in *George Sand : voix, image, texte*, and by Janet Beizer's in her article "'Ecoute le chant du labourage': chant et travail de l'écriture dans *Les Veillées du chanvreur*."

<sup>93</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975) 5.

“R”, Sand exposes the difficulties of her task. She positions herself as a mediator between Berry and Paris, translating and manipulating the language so that she can “parler clairement pour le Parisien, naïvement pour le paysan” and be understood by both groups.<sup>94</sup> However, more than a concern for comprehension, the work of translation that Sand undertakes aims to “traduire cette candeur, cette grâce, ce charme de la vie primitive, à ceux qui ne vivent que de la vie factice” (23). Indeed, through a Rousseauian social view, she significantly opposes “la vie factice” and “la vie primitive”, yet she alters the myth of the unconscious primitive man by suggesting his artistic nature, thereby romantically portraying him as a creator participating in the making of popular culture. Therefore, as Sand expresses in this avant-propos, she wishes to give a role to the peasant in the artistic production which explains why she retreats from the narration, making her presence less visible in the “romans champêtres” following *La mare au diable*, where the author manifested herself particularly through explanatory comments and footnotes. Indeed, not only does Sand give a representation to the rural people by casting them as the principle actors of her stories, but her narrative frame also empowers them by bestowing the ownership of the discourse upon them. Likewise, her artist’s mission, as she attempts to define it, aims at moving away from rational and artificial art forms to focus on creating and arousing the sentiment of nature, and thereby “entrer dans le mystère de la simplicité primitive, et communiquer à l’esprit le charme répandu dans la nature” (33). This statement parallels the reading experience of the rustic novels to a

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<sup>94</sup> George Sand, *François le champi* (Paris : Folio classiques, 1999) 33.

spiritual journey, aiming at awakening the readers' emotional side and sensitiveness to nature, as well as bringing them closer to the people living off the land as did their ancestors before them.

In the avant-propos of *François le champi*, Sand refers to the pastoral as “un Eden parfumé où les âmes tourmentées et lassées du tumulte du monde ont essayé de se réfugier” in relation to the pastoral artistic tradition initiated by Virgil and adapted by different cultural epochs (28). She situates her “romans champêtres” in the continuity of this literary tradition, yet offers to reshape the genre so as to add to nature's poetry and the idealism of rural life, a substantial element of realism to support her ethnological aspirations in her representation of *la région* and reinforce the republican ideology. In *La mare au diable*, the opening work of the “romans champêtres,” Sand addresses the issue of the representation of *le peuple* in art and politics. Within the series of “romans champêtres” here under study, it is in *François le champi* that George Sand manifests the most clearly her fight for justice, particularly towards marginalized populations such as the “champis.” This text particularly resonates with Sand's previous engagement for the cause of Fanchette, an abandoned young peasant girl whom Sand defended via newspaper articles published in *L'éclaireur de l'Indre* in 1843. In her novel, she rejects the prejudice attached to these abandoned children which push them on the path of criminality, and instead demonstrates that thanks to love, they can live a respectable life. Thereby, Sand expresses her ultimate belief in the perfectibility of human nature if treated with respect and given equal opportunities through a supportive legislature.

As scholars have established, *La mare au diable*, *François le Champi*, *La petite Fadette* constitute a series of “romans champêtres” that breaks away from Sand’s previous novels. Although her 1840s novels are set in rural France as well, the writer’s ubiquitous political concerns, have led them to be catalogued as “social novels.” In his article “Les romans champêtres de George Sand: l’échec du renouvellement d’un genre littéraire,”<sup>95</sup> Reinhold Grimm exposes the evolution of Sand’s literary career and the shift occurring from the writing of social novels to the pastoral, often compared, loosely I argue, to utopia. He considers the pastoral novels as forming a second series of “romans champêtres” which stands out from Sand’s earlier works by her different use of idealism. While Sand’s previous works focused on the confrontation of social classes and their antagonisms eventually reconciled through love, Grimm contends that the turn in Sand’s literary trajectory was triggered by her new conception of literature. Indeed, Sand gradually removed hostile or threatening characters from her rustic novels, although *La mare au diable* and *François le Champi*, considered by Grimm as novels of transition, still feature the malevolence of certain figures such as the libertine farmer who takes advantage of his position of power to attempt to sexually abuse Marie in *La mare au diable*, and la Sévère who schemes to inherit the fortune of the Blanchet in *François le champi*. However, after *François le champi* and coincidentally, in the novels written during and after the 1848 Revolution, Sand’s idealism was intensified for, a Schor maintains in

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<sup>95</sup> Reinhold Grimm, “Les romans champêtres de George Sand: l’échec du renouvellement d’un genre littéraire,” *Romantisme*, 7. 16 (1977) : 64-70.

regards to the events of 1848, “the pressure of historical events served only to heighten Sand’s persistent utopian tropism, her stated preference for representing ideal worlds.”<sup>96</sup>

Certainly, already in the years preceding the 1848 revolution, Sand expressed her skepticism in politics and embraced idealism as a means to connect individuals and appeal to positive human feelings. In a letter addressed to the founders of *L’éclaireur de l’Indre* and to be published in its first issue of September 1st, 1844, Sand evokes the qualities of the dream, which she will pursue as a literary trope and assert more clearly in the following years through her “romans champêtres.” Indeed, commenting on her disbelief of politics she writes, “je crois de moins en moins à la politique comme l’entendent aujourd’hui les partis, [...] je ne veux ni ne dois m’occuper de la politique actuelle.” She continues, defining her idea of an alternative way for her political engagement:

Vous savez que je rêve une autre société : pas davantage. Vous espérez réformer celle-ci avec ses propres éléments. Croire, c’est presque pouvoir. Essayez-donc ! Et employez vos forces selon votre inspiration. Je n’aspire pas à un effort, qui me paraît, à moi, à peu près inutile, apparemment parce que je n’y suis pas propre. Mais je puis avoir, auprès de vous, un autre emploi. Je crois que le rêve d’une société meilleure est fondé sur des principes très différents de ceux qui régissent la société actuelle, oui, je crois fermement que ce rêve n’est pas seulement dans mon âme, je crois qu’il est dans d’autres âmes, et que par conséquent, ce rêve a une sorte de réalité. N’y aurait-il de réalité absolue que dans les faits matériels, dans ce qu’on voit et dans ce qu’on touche, dans ce qui nous froisse et dans ce qui nous satisfait immédiatement ? [...] Croyez donc qu’on peut, à côté de la politique et sans vouloir agir par les moyens de la politique, consoler encore aujourd’hui quelques esprits et ranimer quelques âmes éprises d’un plus doux songe.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Naomi Schor, *George Sand and Idealism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) 138.

<sup>97</sup> Michelle Perrot, *George Sand, politique et polémiques* (Paris : Imprimerie Nationale, 1997) 119-120.

The recurrence of the motif of the dream in this statement suggests Sand's henceforth utopic idealist approach to her political commitment as she will take in the "romans champêtres." As Janet Beizer observes in her article "Ecoute le chant du labourage": chant et travail de l'écriture dans 'les veillées du chanvreur,' dream is a potent motif that recurs in the « romans champêtres, » and is set up in the avant-propos of *François le Champi*. George Sand introduces her novel with an avant-propos which under the appearance of a simple conversation between the writer and a friend, lays out Sand's aesthetics. As Beizer notes, the beginning of this section sets up an atmosphere of calm and serenity that announces hibernation and by extension, the approach of sleep. This is described by the narrator as the "lourd sommeil de l'hiver [...] avant l'engourdissement de la gelée."<sup>98</sup>

Although Sand situates her rustic novels far from the modern world of politics, the years surrounding their production concur interestingly with the climax of her political involvement in writing for the press.<sup>99</sup> From 1843 when Sand took one of her first political stances for the defense of Fanchette to 1851 when she retreated into a form of inner exile, Sand's political participation was at its height, especially during the period of the Second Republic when she was, in her own terms, "dans la politique jusqu'au cou."<sup>100</sup> Therefore, keeping in mind Sand's devotion to the cause of *le peuple* and the

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<sup>98</sup> Janet Beizer, « 'Ecoute le chant du labourage' : chant et travail de l'écriture dans 'les veillées du chanvreur.' » *Littérature* 134 (2004) 21.

<sup>99</sup> She wrote during the provisional government striking articles defending her vision of socialism and the Republic, expressing opinions regarding women, *le peuple*, property and violence, in newspapers such as the *Bulletins de la République*, the *Lettres au Peuple*, *La vraie république* and the ephemeral paper she founded, the *Cause du Peuple*.

<sup>100</sup> Michelle Perrot, *George Sand, politique et polémiques* (Paris : Imprimerie Nationale, 1997) 530.

republic makes us skeptical of Sand's declaration in her prefaces that her rustic novels are mere stories, an "historiette" as she says to refer to *La petite Fadette*, aiming only at providing a distraction for the readers away from the political agitation in the capital. This perspective leads us to wonder whether we can read her pastoral novels and her "mission de sentiment et d'amour" as politically charged. The notion of fraternity that she puts forth throughout her "romans champêtres" is certainly one of the fundamental values of the republican system as illustrated in its triptych motto "liberté, égalité, fraternité." Moreover, scholar Marie-Pierre Le Hir argues that within the republican attempt to reconcile democracy and religion, Sand attempts to emphasize the individual emotional bond to the nation. As Le Hir maintains about a series of three articles that George Sand published in 1848,<sup>101</sup> « ils soulignent aussi et surtout l'importance que revêt aux yeux de Sand la dimension affective du sentiment d'appartenance nationale : pas de foi possible en la République, selon elle, sans transfert sur la nation de la 'croyance sincère et profonde' de l'évangile, d'un évangile 'librement compris et interprété' dont la devise nouvelle est 'Liberté, égalité, fraternité.' »<sup>102</sup> Therefore, there seems to exist a certain complementarity between her political writings and her rustic novels. Indeed, by illustrating the success of the republican model that organizes the rural communities of her novels, she hopes to arouse in her readers an affection and trust for this political system and its values. Insisting on the notion of fraternity which is paramount to Sand for

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<sup>101</sup> At the culmination of her political militancy in 1848, Sand published in *La Vraie République* three articles that well illustrate her concern with the National; "la religion de la France," "le dogme de la France," and "le culte de la France."

<sup>102</sup> Marie-Pierre Le Hir, « Le sentiment d'appartenance nationale dans l'oeuvre de George Sand, » *Romantisme* 4.142 (2008) : 95.

she believes that the union of *le peuple* will guarantee the permanent implementation of the republic, she tries to bridge the gap between the uneducated country-dwellers of her novels and the urban workers of Paris making some of her readership. By elevating her characters into generally attractive and virtuous types, and most interestingly, by highlighting the common history uniting the nation through the display of origins, she is putting into practice her mission, republican and humanist.

When she declared regarding political action, “je n’aspire pas à un effort, qui me paraît, à moi, à peu près inutile, apparemment parce que *je n’y suis pas propre*” (my emphasis), she is acknowledging the confines imposed by her gender. Indeed, although George Sand virulently criticized the marriage laws as established by the Napoleonic Civil Code, which is apparent in her early novels such as *Indiana* (1832) where the eponymous female character’s married condition echoes slavery, Sand rejected the idea of woman’s participation in politics and their right to vote. Women’s role, as she envisioned it, consisted in promoting morality and education, hence assuring the stability of the generations to come. This conviction is what led Sand to favor fiction as the medium to express her social and political concerns. Therefore, just like her early novels that discussed the injustice of the female condition within marriage, Sand’s involvement in the press was often realized via fiction. Indeed, in *L’éclaireur de l’Indre* she frequently resorted to fictitious characters such as Blaise Bonnin, a literate Berrichon peasant standing as the spokesman for the local class of peasants, to plead for the state’s action in solving an issue deeply affecting the local population. This literary device allowed Sand to conceal her identity as the writer of these articles, as much as it may have been used as

a rhetorical tool, giving authenticity to the issue at hand and rendering the plight experienced by Blaise Bonnin and the peasant population he represented as more poignant. These accounts offer a good insights into Sand's method of political participation. If the newspaper frame of these articles called for a factual support, the fictitious testimonial part can be paralleled to her novelist activity. However, in her article "Reflexions sur le Berry de *La petite Fadette*," Martine Reid notes that the Revolution of 1848 is pivotal in triggering the substitution of the fictitious character in the press for *the chanvreurs* in her "romans champêtres," a transition that calls for strictly literary consolations.<sup>103</sup> Indeed, as the failure of the Revolution came crashing down with the election of Louis Napoléon Bonaparte, to Sand's great dismay, she began to lose some of the hope she had invested in *le peuple* and the nation's march towards social progress through the perfectibility of its members. The "romans champêtres" following 1848 reflect Sand's disappointment in the revolution. *La petite Fadette* and *Les maîtres sonneurs* illustrate indeed a change in Sand's literary focus, since she seems to move away from an approach that considered her peasant characters as a social class, to a focus on the individual's psychology and the family cell.

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<sup>103</sup> Martine Reid, "Réflexions sur le Berry de *La petite Fadette*," *George Sand. La dame de Nohant. Les romans champêtres*. Lidia Anoll Vendrell ed (Lleida : Universitat de Lleida, 2009) : 195-209.

## FROM THE COLLECTIVE TO THE INDIVIDUAL

In his work entitled *Romantic Vision: the Novels of George Sand*, Robert Godwin-Jones highlights the romantic aspects in *La petite Fadette* and *Les maîtres sonneurs* which leads him to comment that “the failure of the Revolution led [Sand] to concentrate her attention on improving personal relationships through better mutual understanding and tolerance, qualities lacking in and after the revolution. The elevation in *La petite Fadette* and *Les maîtres sonneurs* of the family as an ideal toward which to aspire is a reflection of that change.”<sup>104</sup> Her idealism intersects indeed with romanticism in the characters of Sylvinet in *La petite Fadette* and Joset in *Les maîtres sonneurs*. Both characters are overwhelmed with feelings of jealousy and egotism which eventually consume them because of their inability to properly express their emotions, which ultimately undermines the social harmony of their respective community. In *La mare au diable* and *François le champi*, the two “romans champêtres” amongst this series written prior to the 1848 revolution, Sand praised the ignorance of the peasant which she associated with positive values such as honesty, simplicity and most of all, the ability to enjoy the poetic quality of nature. The avant-propos of *François le champi* goes as far as to draw an analogy between the local peasant or farmer and the primitive man as described by Rousseau, which is emphasized in this text by its opposition to the civilized man. And indeed, in the story that follows, François is reminiscent of an *enfant sauvage* by his complete naivety and ignorance of social norms. As a *champi*, a term in the local

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<sup>104</sup>Robert Godwin-Jones, *Romantic Vision: the Novels of George Sand* (Birmingham: Summa Publications, 1995) 236.

patois which refers to a child who has been abandoned by his parents and taken in by a local villager in exchange for monetary compensation, François lacks education and an understanding of the social rules dictating human interaction. However, François' personality which at first appears to Madeleine Blanchet as mere stupidity, soon manifests its many positive attributes such as its sincerity and genuine kindness, making this character stand out from the other protagonists and their self-interest and greed. François is a quintessential example of Sand's valorization of the qualities of *le peuple*, in their innocence and ability to learn and grow thanks to education. Conversely, the post-revolution novels of *La petite Fadette* and *Les maîtres sonneurs* shift the aesthetic and moral components previously associated with human ignorance, and rather emphasize its threat to the community. The election of Louis Napoléon Bonaparte can be attributed to this ideological change, since it brought to the fore the underlying flaw of the republican system of elections based on direct universal male suffrage when the majority of the population remained illiterate, hence unable to make a rational political decision. Indeed, Karl Marx's 1852 essay « The Eighteenth Brumaire of Napoléon Bonaparte » imputes the election of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte to the vote of the popular class, composed mostly of rural inhabitants lacking education and a political consciousness. Moreover, according to Marx, the geographical isolation of peasants also induced their disinterestedness in politics since it encouraged them to view themselves as individuals rather than as a class with common interests. Evidently, George Sand shares with Marx his assessment of the causes of the failure of the Republic, which she exposes in *La petite Fadette* and *Les maîtres sonneurs*. It is only through the characters' learning experience in overcoming

their prejudices on Otherness, that they are able to come together in a fraternal bond and that eventually the harmony of the community is restored. Certainly, as a major element of local culture, superstitions are valued by the author, yet only for their artistic qualities. Let's not forget that the legend of the haunted pond bestowed its name to Sand's first "roman champêtre." However, although Sand remained fascinated by the legends as the essence of local superstitions to which she will devote an entire work, *Légendes rustiques* in 1858, she is also aware of their destructive nature reinforcing ignorance and bringing about social exclusion. In *La petite Fadette*, the eponymous character owes her nickname to her family name, Fadet, as much as to the supernatural creature of "le fadet" or "le farfadet" with which she is associated. Indeed, as the narrator explains didactically to his audience, "vous savez tous que le fadet ou le farfadet, qu'en d'autres endroits on appelle aussi le follet, est un lutin fort gentil mais un peu malicieux. On appelle aussi fades les fées auxquelles, du côté de chez nous, on ne croit plus guère. Mais que cela voulu dire une petite fée, ou la femelle du lutin, chacun en la voyant, s'imaginait voir le follet, tant elle était petite, maigre, ébouriffée et hardie" (31). Because of her physical appearance reminiscent of the "fadet" and the rumors of sorcery surrounding her grandmother, Françoise is ostracized. Likewise, in *Les maîtres sonneurs*, Sand exposes the limits of local superstitions by referring to the subjective perspective of the local narrator to introduce her new protagonist, Huriel. Just as *La petite Fadette* was wrongfully accused of malevolence, Huriel is at first associated with the devil in the narrator's mind before the superstitious signs are cleared out and Huriel's generous and kind heart is revealed.

*Les maîtres sonneurs* is the novel that best advocates for tolerance and unity. Sand's novel focuses on the confrontation between two regions, Berry and Bourbonnais which despite their geographical proximity, are culturally different due to their contrasted landscape, language and the physiology of their respective people. The journey of the protagonists leads them to discover a different culture which eventually forces them to renegotiate their identity and understanding of the world. Thus, more than a mere trip to Bourbonnais, the characters undertake what scholar Marie-Claire Bancquart defines as an initiatory journey,<sup>105</sup> which allows Sand to advocate for the complementarity of local particularities. Sand seems to be influenced by the theory of the climates in her portrayal of the local population's disposition and lifestyle as shaped by the region's geography. Hence, the openness of the plains of Berry accounts for the Berrichon communal lifestyle, while the thick forests of Bourbonnais have entailed a rather individualist mode of existence for its population whose isolation has contributed to their preference for the nostalgic minor mode in music. Therefore, as particularly illustrated in *Les maîtres sonneurs*, Sand seems to alter her perspective on *le peuple* after the 1848 revolution. From a mythological approach of *le peuple* as an idealized community unified through common origins, she questions the validity of this myth because of the threat of individualism and the lack of education, which she sees as responsible for the failure of the revolution.

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<sup>105</sup> Marie-Claire Bancquart, « préface, » in George Sand *Les maîtres sonneurs* (Paris : Gallimard, 1979) 5-54.

The disappointment felt by George Sand after the failure of the Second Republic behind which she had tried to rally the rural population is visible in *La petite Fadette* and *Les maîtres sonneurs*. Indeed, Sand taints her portrayal of the culture of Berry with the idea that the specificity of its communal lifestyle may have contributed to a profound distrust for strangers as well as for any deviations from the cultural norm, as the marginalization of Joset and Brulette suggests. The Berrichons' blind acceptance of prejudice and superstition reflects a lack of critical thinking, hence a general apathy that can be related to Sand's own frustration with the population's political participation. Bourbonnais culture is represented as complementary since, with its land covered with forests, it is home to a population that is predominantly nomadic, solitary and honest, are very different from the Berrichons. Through the sentimental and contractual union of the Berry and Bourbonnais characters at the end of the novel, Sand reconciles the cultural divides and offers a model of integration. In the cultural exchange established between these two regions, "chacun des terroirs s'enrichit de l'apport de l'autre" as Marie-Claire Bancquart argues (19).

As a gifted bagpipe artist who is drawn to melancholia and solitude, Joset impersonates the figure of the romantic artist. His talent is such that through his music he is able to transcend time and space, evoke in his audience's mind visual images that speak to their hearts. However, Joset's egotism turns his music into a source of conflict instead of allowing it to bring harmony to the community. Through Joset, Sand represents the failure of the model of the romantic artist who gets lost in his personal vision and is

unable to promote positive values such as tolerance and brotherhood and ultimately bring cohesion to the group.

Sand's understanding of her artistic mission changed over time, partly influenced by the major historical conflicts that shook the nation. Forsaking in her fiction the representation of class antagonisms and her political involvement in the promotion of social issues, Sand second series of "romans champêtres" illustrates her drift toward a more metaphorical representation of social issues. She emphasizes the presence of idealism in her novels as a way to express her hope in the perfectibility of humankind. The myth of origin allows Sand to praise the cultural specificities found in *le terroir*, yet avoid antagonisms that may arise from local allegiances.

The myth of origin destabilizes the centralization that had arbitrarily designated Paris as the heart of the nation's identity. In her rustic novels, George Sand moves this focus to *la région* that she portrays as a place of essence, a haven preserving the nation's energy and core values. Therefore, she symbolically shifts the national center to the periphery. However, this center is not enclosed on itself and is rather set within circulation and exchange with the capital. George Sand's writing is set in motion between Paris and Berry by her position as mediator between two cultures, two spaces that are perceived as complementary instead of oppositional. Sand's socialist utopism and her vision of a universal fraternity within the republic is revealing of the message of harmony conveyed in her "romans champêtres." For instance, she writes in March 1848 in the regional press hoping to rally the rural population behind the republic, "Paris c'est

vous.”<sup>106</sup> Likewise, that same year she petitions the ministry of public instruction, Hippolyte Carnot, to send blue-collar workers in each department of France to revolutionize the techniques used and enlighten politically the rural workers.

Sand chooses to rehabilitate the periphery within national discourse. Writing from the margins, she endeavors to erase the frontiers between the different spaces and times by creating a myth of origin that establishes a national fraternity, and that is set in circulation, open to transformations. George Sand’s search for continuity leads her to look for what bonds, beyond divisions. In *La pensée indéterminée*, George Poulet describes George Sand’s writing as “embrumé”. Blurring the distinctions and the contours of her subjects is a technique that Sand practices and that enables her to make connections, and to superimpose imagination and ethnography, myth and reality, as Poulet explains,

C’est ainsi que George Sand, quand elle veut représenter les choses de la nature, ne cherche nullement à les représenter isolément. Elle aime, au contraire, à les présenter, autant qu’il se peut *confondus* dans l’ensemble qu’elles forment, ou encore dans les échanges emmêlés et incertains qui se créent entre elles et le spectateur [...] mélange confus de sensations et de sentiments, où elle-même ne trouve pas toujours le moyen de démêler ce qui appartient à l’objet réel et ce qui est un don de l’imagination pure.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Michelle Perrot, George Sand, *Politique et polémiques* (Paris : Imprimerie Nationale, 1997) 280.

<sup>107</sup>George Poulet, *La pensée indéterminée* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1987) 79.

## Chapter 2: From Nature to Artifice: Cultural Identity as an Urban Product

The artistic and literary representation of the rural through the long nineteenth century has been shaped in large part by two trends, Pastoralism and Realism. While Sand's Idealism carved the rural as a place of refuge from the tensions occurring in the city – an approach taken again after the Commune by schoolbooks where the countryside served as a harmonious space to promote the moral and civic instruction of Frenchmen<sup>108</sup> – the Realist approach taken by authors such as Balzac and Zola promulgated the image of an underdeveloped French peasantry. Regardless of the ideological stance behind the representation of *la région*, it was defined through a process of differentiation with the capital, hence reinforcing its tie to the notion of *la province* from which it emerged and which was shaped around an opposition with Paris. As such *la région* was constructed as Other, either through a form of exoticism conveyed by its attractive nature as distant in space and time, or as a primitive space and culture deprived of the possibilities for social advancements as offered by modernity. However, Maupassant rejects both approaches by undermining the binary at the core of the representation of Paris and *la province*. Rather than consistently exuding progress and mobility, Maupassant's Paris is depicted in many stories as trapping the individual within its walls and the monotony of a regulated

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<sup>108</sup> *Le Tour de la France par deux enfants* (1877) by G. Bruno (Augustine Fouillée) is a good example of the post-Commune expression of French national identity. As a schoolbook that served generations of French, it relates the journey of two French children across France and offers a panorama of rural France combined with a strong moral instruction, ignoring for that stake, the world of factories, haunted by the memory of the Commune.

existence. *La région* is likewise ambivalent, as it can arouse freedom and mobility in the opportunity given to the individual to wander aimlessly through the countryside and yield entirely to the impressions offered by nature to the senses. Yet, *la région* can also be the locus of physical stagnation for the individual who naturally or voluntarily, has planted his roots in that territory.

The ambivalence in the representation of space can be explained partly by Maupassant's rejection of positivism with its claim to objective truth and inherent definitions to things, people and places. Instead, reality is shown as constantly transiting through the subject's conscience and emotions, hence introducing a level of uncertainty and imbalance to the descriptions. What Maupassant attempts to deconstruct through his rhetoric is the ideological manipulation of the mind as it dictates vision and interpretation through constructed knowledge and myths. Following the *Fin-de-siècle* fascination with the emerging field of study of the human unconscious, Maupassant gives full expression to individualism in his stories in his exploration of the mechanisms of the human primitive nature lying beneath the surface of behaviors and polished appearance. Maupassant undermines the social codes and structures dictating human behavior and confining the individual into a social role and identity in regional France. His approach to identity thus contrasts with the literature of the earlier century, where identity was determined by space and place. Removing himself from the naturalist influence of Zola, who supported his literary debuts with *Les soirées de Médan* (1880), or from a form of realism that defines identity through space in a semiotic system, as reflected in Balzac's texts or in the popular literature of the physiologies, Maupassant represents space

phenomenologically. Indeed, he reveals the artificiality of the social construction of place by opening the borders between the different regions of the hexagon and featuring the circulation of his characters, ultimately challenging the invisible ideological barrier between *la province* and capital. Discovering a different regional culture and landscape, his characters are made to confront their knowledge to their experience, allowing Maupassant to reveal the existing myths about the pastoral and *la région* as produced and circulating in the capital.

The *Fin-de-siècle* pessimism and the loss of faith in positivism led to the reemergence of a “mal de siècle,” commonly referred as “mal de fin de siècle”, diagnosed by Bourget at the time in his *Essais* (1883) and *Nouveaux essais de psychologie contemporaine* (1885) and which led to Decadence. Despite Maupassant’s effort to distance himself from the influences of his time by maintaining independence from artistic movements and by making originality his poetic guideline, his texts reflect the conflation of several of these influences, to be found in particular in Realism and Impressionism, as well as in Decadence, a movement, argues Pierre Cogny, which Maupassant can be seen as heralding in the same way as Huysmans.<sup>109</sup> Maupassant’s aesthetic can be paralleled with Decadence through the ubiquitous Schopenhaurian pessimism he adopts in his narratives, a focus on individualism which includes the representation of reality as shaped by subjective interpretation, in other words as relying

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<sup>109</sup> Cogny, and before him, scholars Marie-Claire Bancquart and Michel Décaudin have interrogated the relation between Maupassant and Decadence. Pierre Cogny, “Maupassant, écrivain de la décadence?” *Flaubert et Maupassant, écrivains normands*. Publications de l’Université de Rouen (Paris: PUF, 1981) 197.

on the individual's own psyche and sensual perception. Indeed, concurring with the philosophy of Schopenhauer in line with Kant's phenomenology, Decadence, as Jean Pierrot articulates, was founded on the epistemological principle that "the subject has no knowledge of the world that is not filtered through man's own mental structure. In other words, he never apprehends reality, the thing in itself, but only his own ideas or representations of reality."<sup>110</sup>

Not only does Maupassant feature in his narratives a view of reality as caught in a system of representations which only direct experience can remove, but his own aesthetic reproduces the paradox of wanting to offer an objective representation of reality, yet conveyed through the author's personal vision, "à force d'avoir vu et médité [l'artiste] regarde l'univers, les choses, les faits et les hommes d'une certaine façon qui lui est propre et qui résulte de l'ensemble des observations réfléchies. C'est cette vision personnelle du monde qu'il cherche à nous communiquer en la reproduisant dans un livre."<sup>111</sup>

#### **THE URBANIZATION OF THE COUNTRYSIDE: THE ENVIRONS OF PARIS**

The nineteenth-century development of the railway and other means of transportation generated what geographer David Harvey calls a "space and time

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<sup>110</sup> Jean Pierrot, *The Decadent Imagination, 1880-1900* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981) 57.

<sup>111</sup> Guy de Maupassant, "le roman," *Pierre et Jean* (1888), (Paris : Albin Michel, 1930) 12.

compression.”<sup>112</sup> By shortening the time required to reach the remote provinces of France, these new modes of transportation suppressed geographical distances and rendered the countryside more accessible to Parisian petty-bourgeois looking to enjoy an extended walk. The 1837 inauguration of the railway line Paris-Saint Germain-en-Laye connecting Paris to the west countryside in only about half an hour contributed indeed to opening the area described in Maupassant to a broader social spectrum and turning it into a resort for the petite-bourgeoisie.

Maupassant’s stories illustrate the ways in which the countryside in proximity with the capital was altered in the nineteenth-century to become by the end of the century an extension of the capital, or to borrow T.J Clark’s expression, a “demi-Paris.”<sup>113</sup> This reference to the environs of Paris not only signals the pervasive influence of the capital over the countryside, but it also echoes the notion of “demi-monde” which defined a type of prostitution in the high spheres of French society. Similarly, as the entertainment industry implemented itself in the countryside around Paris to answer to the demands of tourism and new social trends, the environs of Paris became in Maupassant’s texts urbanized sites inviting the debauchery of the petty-bourgeois (which they viewed as acceptable because of the natural frame in which it took place.) Eugen Weber explains the attraction to the countryside for the city-dwellers as stemming from their longing for freedom away from the rigidity of city codes and the opportunity to reinvent themselves,

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<sup>112</sup> For further discussion on time-space compression, see David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: an Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (1989).

<sup>113</sup> Timothy J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) 153.

“freed of their routines, of local constraints, of a society where everybody moved under the perpetual surveillance of everybody else, the tourist and the curist were free [...] to act out a certain urban ideal where the social order was less rigid, relations were easier, mobility was greater; where standing was determined on the basis of display rather than on that of a well-defined situation.”<sup>114</sup> Moreover, looking at the nineteenth-century environs of Paris through Marc Augé’s definition of the *banlieue* as a “non-lieu” helps us understand the freedom from social conventions experienced by Maupassant’s characters. Indeed, as an in-between space characterized by the transit of individuals or the ongoing consumption allowing for the preservation of anonymity, Augé sets the *banlieue* in opposition with the *lieu* and its definition as “identitaire, relationnel et historique.”<sup>115</sup> As such, the *banlieue* represents a *non-lieu*, in other words, a space empty of significance established on individual identity or relational patterns. The representation of the Parisian *banlieue* which Guy de Maupassant uses as the stage for many of his short-stories, participates in the author’s attempt to deconstruct the social codes ordering society, or in other words, to strip his characters of the superficial normative layer accompanying their actions, to get to the roots of the essence of their being.

Although originally a space associated with agriculture and peasantry, the countryside assumed a new function in the nineteenth-century by becoming a site for the leisure and entertainment of Parisians. *Guinguettes* and restaurants developed along the

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<sup>114</sup> Eugen Weber, *France fin-de-siècle* (Cambridge, Mass. : Belknap Press, 1986) 179.

<sup>115</sup> Marc Augé, *Non-lieux: introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité* (Paris: Seuil, 1992) 100.

Seine in Bougival, Chatou-Croissy and Argenteuil, to accompany the Parisians' escapades outside the city, with all the comfort and distraction desired.

*Maisons de campagne* likewise proliferated, signaling the appropriation of the countryside by metropolitan classes through the implementation of a property system enclosing what had been previously open land. In his *chronique* "Propriétaire et lilas" (1881), Maupassant precisely distinguishes between the countryside as domesticated and tailored for the Parisian and the wild or untouched nature that no longer existed in the environs of Paris despite the Parisians' fantasy and longing for authenticity. Indeed, as Maupassant declares, "la campagne pour le Parisien c'est Meudon, Saint-Cloud, Asnières, ou Argenteuil. Là, il se dilate, s'amuse. Mais si on le transportait dans la vraie campagne [...] il serait saisi d'inquiétude et redemanderait bien vite sa petite campagne de canotiers tapageurs, à chemin de fer, à bastringues."<sup>116</sup> In « Le trou », Maupassant relates the trial of a couple accused of murder. Mr and Mrs Renard are judged for having pushed a fellow fisherman in the river, causing him to drown. The defendant explains the circumstances leading to the act by emphasizing the tacit understanding in the region that the spot where the victim settled for fishing *belonged* to him, thereby casting the victim, the late Mr. Flamèche, in the position of a trespasser. As Renard maintains, "ce trou-là, m'sieur l'président, sûr de mon endroit, j'y revenais comme un propriétaire."<sup>117</sup> This story reflects one of the myths circulating in the capital, which conceived the environs as

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<sup>116</sup> Guy de Maupassant, « Propriétaires et lilas, » *Le Gaulois*, April 29, 1881. *Maupassant par les textes*. Web.

<sup>117</sup> Guy de Maupassant, *Le Horla et autres nouvelles* (Paris : Albin Michel, 1984) 60.

a virgin land, to be explored and seized by the Parisians. When Renard asserts about his fishing spot, « je pouvais le considérer comme à moi, vu que j'en étais le Christophe Colomb » (60), he frames the countryside of the environs as an uncharted and primitive territory to be colonized by Parisian subjects.

Maupassant's text "La femme de Paul" reflects the corruption of the original environment to welcome "toute la crapulerie distinguée, toute la moisissure de la société parisienne."<sup>118</sup> Particularly in this text, Maupassant insists on the denaturation of the area of the island of la Grenouillère as its natural attributes have been domesticated and arranged to fit the demands of tourism. Maupassant's description of the café hints with irony to the natural world to further emphasize the artificiality of the place. Indeed the café, referred as an "établissement aquatique" because of its proximity with water, links up to an "îlot minuscule planté d'un arbre et surnommé le 'Pot-à-Fleurs'" (110). This quote well illustrates the process in which nature has been domesticated to serve as a prop or backdrop, thus acting as a sign pointing to the natural realm, which ironically enough corresponds to its original state before having been transformed.

But most of all, what makes the area stand as a mirror of the capital is the impression of excess conveyed through the reference to the visitors as a boisterous crowd, to the heavy smell of the prostitutes' perfumes and to consumption through all its forms.

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<sup>118</sup> Guy de Maupassant, *La maison Tellier, Une partie de campagne et autres contes* (Paris : Garnier-Flammarion, 1980) 112.

As Nicholas Green suggests, while at the end of the eighteenth century, Parisians would visit the countryside north of the capital such as Enghien, Montmorency, or Ermenonville, these excursions were motivated by the wish to follow in the footsteps of Rousseau and discover the natural sites that had inspired the respected author's *Nouvelle Héloïse* and *Emile*. This patrimonial tourism and the romantic contemplation of nature influenced by Rousseau was substituted later in the nineteenth-century by a form of natural tourism centered on outdoor activities such as hiking, rowing and swimming. With the pollution of the metropole caused by industrialization, the countryside appeared as a clean haven for city-dwellers wanting to restore their health. But the environs of Paris also became places devoted to socialization, a trend initiated under the Second Empire with the creation of public parks. As illustrated in Zola's *La curée* (1871) or Renoir's *Allée cavalière au bois de Boulogne* (1873), the public parks in Paris such as the Tuileries or the Bois de Boulogne were part of a process of reinvention of nature insofar as it became laden with a social significance. Parading on horseback or carriages, high-class Parisians showed off their wealth and status through fashionable clothes and equipage. They could also socialize with other members of their class at events hosted by the park such as horse races at the Longchamp racecourse in the Bois de Boulogne.

As the environs attracted artists such as the Barbizon school, impressionists, as well as Zola and his followers in Médan, it was not long before it became a trendy place for the urban population. However, under the pressure of tourism and the expansion of industrialization, the countryside lost its virginal quality. Just as certain impressionist artists like Manet choose in their works to be faithful to the changing aspect of the

countryside, Maupassant describes the deterioration of the landscape outside of Paris in stories such as “Une partie de campagne.” As the family Dufour reaches the outskirts of the metropole, their excitement for leaving the city is all the more artificial given the omniscient narrator’s account of a sordid landscape turned sterile for natural and human life due to the pollution generated by the industries:

Des deux côtés de la route, se développait une campagne interminablement nue, sale et puante. On eût dit qu'une lèpre l'avait ravagée, qui rongait jusqu'aux maisons, car des squelettes de bâtiments défoncés et abandonnés, ou bien des petites cabanes inachevées faute de paiement aux entrepreneurs, tendaient leurs quatre murs sans toit. De loin en loin, poussaient dans le sol stérile de longues cheminées de fabriques, seule végétation de ces champs putrides où la brise du printemps promenait un parfum de pétrole et de schiste mêlé à une autre odeur moins agréable encore.<sup>119</sup>

Although nature has lost its pristine quality that allowed for the fantasy of the pastoral to bloom, on their weekend excursion to the countryside, the Dufour family feel compelled to act out their encounter with the rural world as imagined through the cultural representations and codes circulating in society.

### **THE SENSUALISM OF NATURE**

As a liminal sphere between city and nature, the environs of Paris display a blurriness in their boundaries, hence questioning the applicability of the urban social codes for the Parisian visitors. As Clark posits,

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<sup>119</sup> Guy de Maupassant, *La maison Tellier, Une partie de campagne et autres contes* (Paris : Garnier-Flammarion, 1980) 96.

Parisians were looking for somewhere to act naturally, to relax and be spontaneous; people took pleasure in Argenteuil; they did what they wanted there, they left the city behind. That was the sense in which the environs belonged to Paris, or at least to its map of urbanity [...] they wanted the difference between town and country spelt out as part of their lives. Cities ought to have an ending, an outside, an elsewhere one could reach.<sup>120</sup>

What Clark emphasizes here is the control of the capital over the cultural construction of the environs as a space separate and distant from the metropolis. Resorting to the pastoral myth, the environs are designed to answer to the desires of the consumer class of the bourgeoisie. Maupassant illustrates with much irony the use of the pastoral as an excuse for what critic C. Scott terms an “urban degeneracy,”<sup>121</sup> in other words, the expression of inner desires and sexual drives in public yet, justified by the physical proximity of nature. Standing outside of the capital, the environs are molded as a space defined by its freedom, preserved from the urban conventions and social codes. In “Une partie de campagne,” the proper bourgeois family of the Dufour starts feeling sexual drives as soon as they approach nature. As they reach the countryside, Mr. Dufour experiences that “la campagne [l’]émoustillait déjà”,<sup>122</sup> Mrs. Dufour undresses during the picnic, before her daughter Henriette and herself, are seduced by the boatmen in the thickets. Likewise, “au bois” sets up a connection between nature and the bourgeois’ uninhibited expression of sexuality by relating the incident of an old couple found copulating in the woods. In her defense, the woman accounts for her behavior by

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<sup>120</sup> Timothy J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) 198-199.

<sup>121</sup> C. Scott, « Divergent Paths of Pastoralism : Parallels and Contrasts in Maupassant’s ‘Une partie de campagne’ and ‘la femme de Paul’ » *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 16 (1980) 270.

<sup>122</sup> Guy de Maupassant, « Une partie de Campagne, » *La maison Tellier, une partie de campagne* (Paris : Garnier-Flammarion, 1980) 97.

explaining the effect of nature as a powerful source of sensual stimulation. As she declares, “quand je suis à la campagne, je perds la tête. La verdure, les oiseaux qui chantent, les blés qui remuent au vent, les hirondelles qui vont si vite, l’odeur de l’herbe, les coquelicots, les marguerites. Tout ça me rend folle ! C’est comme le champagne quand on n’en a pas l’habitude. »<sup>123</sup>

Certainly, Maupassant’s professional experience at the Ministry of the Navy led him to denounce the exploitation of the small clerk or the shopkeepers such as the story’s couple, who waste their lives away, secluded indoors by their work, and thus are disconnected from the natural world. Mrs. Beaurain explains indeed that as the years went by, unnoticed because of the routine implemented by her work, a powerful longing for nature awoke in her. As she confesses, “je me suis mise à rêver comme une petite pensionnaire [...] l’odeur des violettes venait me chercher à mon fauteuil, derrière ma caisse, et me faisait battre le coeur!” (129-130)

The alienation of metropolitan subjects from their natural condition is a condemnation that recurs in Maupassant’s texts, from his fiction to his *chroniques*. In one of them, named “les employés,” he declares about small clerks, “de tous les misérables, de toutes les classes d’individus, de tous les ordres de travailleurs, de tous les hommes qui livrent quotidiennement le dur combat pour vivre, ceux-là sont le plus à plaindre, sont les plus déshérités de faveurs. »<sup>124</sup> The rigidity of hours and the enclosed setting imposed by bureaucratic work draws Maupassant to parallel the living condition of white-collar

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<sup>123</sup> Guy de Maupassant, *Le Horla et autres nouvelles* (Paris : Albin Michel, 1984) 128.

<sup>124</sup> Guy de Maupassant, « les employés, » *Le Gaulois*, Jan. 4, 1882. *Maupassant par les textes*. Web.

workers to a form of imprisonment. Therefore, not only does Maupassant critique the unjust working system for small clerks, but he further condemns the metropolitan social organization that disturbed the very nature of humans in their instincts and desires. This in turn contributes to a form of degeneracy in society, an idea that would gain amplitude in Maupassant's time and be theorized in 1892 in Max Nordau's work, *Degeneration*. Indeed, for the metropolitan subjects estranged from nature, the sensual reception emanated by nature can be overwhelming and cause them to lose control over their behavior. Such is the case of the Parisian narrator of "Au printemps" who describes his reaction to the first days of spring in paroxysmal sensations such as "une ivresse qui m'envahit, une poussée de sève débordante" (219), "une envie démesurée de courir à travers les bois" (220).<sup>125</sup>

In fact, as he has just sat down in the boat taking him to the countryside and has spotted a young attractive woman, he is approached by a man who warns him against approaching the lady since according to his experience, it could lead to unwanted circumstances, all due to the enchantment of spring and its sensual appeal: "le gouvernement dev[ant] faire mettre sur les murs de grandes affiches avec ces mots: 'Retour du printemps. Citoyens français, prenez garde à l'amour'" (221).

As Alice Larrivaud-De Wolf argues, Maupassant questions the very definition of civilization by challenging the notions of the primitive and the civilized. This claim can be applied to the attitude of the metropolitan petty-bourgeois in the countryside who

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<sup>125</sup> Guy de Maupassant, *La parure et autres contes parisiens*. Marie-Claire Bancquart ed. (Paris : Garnier, 1984).

manifest a spontaneity oblivious of social and moral laws and which ultimately verges on a form of bestiality or primitiveness. Purporting to be sensible beings answering only to reason, they have stifled the voice of their body which, when stimulated by the senses, starts acting out of control. As the narrator's interlocutor explains in "Au printemps," spring and nature have made him act foolishly, eventually tricking him into getting married: "On entendait partout des chants d'oiseaux. Alors ma compagne se mit à courir en gambadant, enivrée d'air et d'effluves champêtres. Et moi je courais derrière en sautant comme elle. Est-on bête, monsieur, par moments! » (223) Maupassant condemns the repression on the body and its physical needs and desires triggered by urban life and supported by the institutions of the Third Republic. As Larrivaud-De Wolf maintains, « Maupassant brosse un portrait cinglant de l'homme de son temps : sous prétexte de vouloir s'émanciper de sa primitivité, il s'est façonné un environnement artificiel que la culture et les institutions, avec leurs lois trompeuses et contre nature, ont parachevé de pervertir. »<sup>126</sup> Through the representation of the petty-bourgeois' unbridled behavior in the bucolic setting, which is contrasted in the same stories with the discretion and suggested integrity of the local farmers, Maupassant highlights the hypocrisy of the moral laws followed by the bourgeoisie in the capital. Destabilizing the notions of civilization and primitivism, Maupassant not only undermines the cultural hegemony of Paris over *la province*, but he also critiques the excess of rationalism dictating every aspect of urban life and leading to the alienation of the individual from their body. Maupassant's

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<sup>126</sup> Alice Larrivaud-De Wolf's, « Le primitif dans l'œuvre de Maupassant. » Diss. Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2011. Web. 17.

investment in a form of empiricism is explained by Eugen Weber in his study of France *Fin-de-siècle* as a historical cultural trend that reemerged in the late nineteenth century as science found its limits. As Weber argues, « the internal disagreements and rival theories of the scientists themselves aggravated doubt about the possibility of arriving at unique positive truths and persuaded many that the wisest attitude would be an eclectic one, pursuing experience for its own sake, rather than a certainty of knowledge that was unattainable. »<sup>127</sup>

The privilege given to sensual experience in Maupassant's texts as a source of pleasure and knowledge derives as well from his personal life. His upbringing in the Norman countryside left him with a strong sensitivity to Nature, which he expressed through the regular practice of outdoor hobbies, such as rowing, and through his frequent trips back to the Norman coast near Etretat where his mother lived and where he established a secondary residence named "la Guillette" after his literary career took off. In a letter written in 1881 and addressed to Gisele d'Estoc, Maupassant explains his attraction to nature and solitude as the unique experience of the senses which as he explains, brought him to a state of osmosis with the natural environment:

Vous dites que j'ai le sentiment de la nature? Cela tient je crois à ce que je suis un peu faune. Oui, je suis faune et je le suis de la tête aux pieds. Je passe des mois seul à la campagne, la nuit, sur l'eau, tout seul, toute la nuit, tout le jour, dans le bois ou dans les vignes, sous le soleil furieux et tout seul, tout le jour. La mélancolie de la terre ne m'attriste jamais : je suis une espèce d'instrument à sensations que font résonner les aurores, les midis, les crépuscules, les nuits et autre chose encore.

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<sup>127</sup> Eugen Weber, *France fin-de-siècle* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1986) 143.

In Maupassant's stories nature's sensual triggers verge on a form of seduction that suggests a strong inherent female quality. In "Miss Harriett" for instance, as the painter Chenal explores the Norman countryside in search of impressions to reproduce on his canvas, the stimulation of his senses point to a form of pleasure that is highly sexual. Nevertheless, nature in Maupassant possesses two opposite sides, its seduction frequently shifting into what scholar Micheline Besnard-Coursodon views as a trap. As a life force, Eros and Thanatos according to psychoanalytic terms, nature offers individuals the possibility to fully experience the world around them through their senses, yet its relentlessness also entails that it governs over humans and disposes of their lives as it wishes. "Miss Harriett" displays the two sides of nature, since Chenal's ecstatic union with nature can be contrasted to Miss Harriett's suicide which the narrator attributes to "l'éternelle injustice de l'implacable nature !" Chenal's comment is followed in the text by his reflection on the cycle of nature that requires the human body to ultimately decompose and be returned to the natural elements. The dialectic between these two aspects of nature reflects Maupassant's life experience and the syphilis he contracted in his youth as a consequence of the yielding of his body to pleasure through sexual activity. Similarly, the seduction of nature is responsible for luring the individuals into reproduction, which in Maupassant's Schopenhaurian view is the tragic condition of the human existence. In the story «les caresses, » Maupassant expresses his allegiance to Schopenhauer's philosophy about nature when he contends without naming the latter that « un philosophe, qui ne pratiquait point ces doctrines, nous a mis en garde contre ce piège de la nature. La nature veut des êtres, dit-il, et pour nous contraindre à les créer, il a mis

le double appât de l'amour et de la volupté auprès du piège. »<sup>128</sup> This perspective on nature and human lives influences Maupassant's narrative treatment of procreation as part of a trap leading to the reproduction and hence the sustainment of humans which he views as a flawed species, and which accounts for the fact that in his texts « il n'y a d'heureuses que les maternités imaginaires » as Pierre Danger remarks.<sup>129</sup>

Robert Willard Artinian elaborates on the idea of a seduction operated by nature when he states that, « à travers l'oeuvre de Maupassant, en effet, le lecteur est assommé par les descriptions de la nature comme piège, où tous les éléments, la lumière (surtout la chaleur du soleil), les couleurs, les sons (surtout des animaux, qui manquent ici), les odeurs, tout converge pour faire tomber, écrouler, les défenses de l'homme civilisé. »<sup>130</sup> The dominance of nature over the frailty of humans is a recurrent theme in Maupassant's texts where morale and reason fall short of humans' desires and the luring call of nature. In "M. Jocaste," even the appalling crime of incest, whose taboo in primitive societies ethnologist Levi Strauss defines as the most fundamental principle to the foundation of a civilization, is debated and forgiven as the narrator muses: «que peuvent les sentiments appris contre la violence des instincts? que peut le préjugé de la pudeur contre l'irrésistible volonté de la nature ? »<sup>131</sup> Not only is nature all-powerful, but it is vicious according to Maupassant, as it persuades the characters to yield to their instincts, ultimately burdening them in countless stories with unwanted pregnancies. Maupassant

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<sup>128</sup> Guy de Maupassant, "Les caresses," *Gil Blas*, Aug. 14, 1883. *Maupassant par les textes*. Web.

<sup>129</sup> Pierre Danger, *Pulsion et désir dans les romans et nouvelles de Maupassant* (Paris : Nizet, 1993) 192.

<sup>130</sup> Robert Willard Artinian, « Les coquelicots: un aspect de la technique descriptive de Maupassant, » *South Atlantic Bulletin* 36. 3 (May, 1971) 49.

<sup>131</sup> Guy de Maupassant, "M. Jocaste," *Gil Blas*, Jan. 23, 1883. *Maupassant par les textes*. Web.

highlights the frailty of the human condition in his texts and he mocks the hubris displayed by some of his characters. Although he defends empirical knowledge against the hegemony of rational thinking in modern France, Maupassant is forced to admit its limits as well in uncovering the mystery of existence. As the narrator in « Le Horla » declares, « comme il est profond, ce mystère de l’Invisible ! Nous ne pouvons le sonder avec nos sens misérables, avec nos yeux qui ne savent apercevoir ni le trop petit, ni le trop grand, ni le trop près, ni le trop loin [...] avec nos oreilles qui nous trompent [...] avec notre odorat, plus faible que celui du chien... avec notre goût, qui peut à peine discerner l’âge d’un vin !»<sup>132</sup> Nevertheless, for individuals who are willing to forsake their social identity comprised of learned culture and behavior, the pure sensual contact with nature offers them glimpses of the eternal truth. Indeed, according to Mariane Bury, “we see in the elaboration of this poetics of reality the quest for a beauty stripped of lyricism, exclusively subordinated to the material world and revealed in those instants of sensorial ecstasy in contact with nature: at the heart of the eternal illusion, where we can find the universal vanity of Ecclesiastes, they appear as moments of grace reserved for the artist, even, if as Maupassant, his soul is damned.”<sup>133</sup>

The poetic quality of nature found in rural France is conveyed in Maupassant through the subject’s sensual reception. Thrusting away the hegemonic power of rational thinking responsible for an ideological construction of space and place in which cultural

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<sup>132</sup> Guy de Maupassant, “Le Horla,” *Le Horla et autres nouvelles* (Paris : Albin Michel, 1984) 21.

<sup>133</sup> Mariane Bury, *La poétique de Maupassant* (Paris : Cedes, 1994) 271.

representations partake, Maupassant is interested in exposing the contact between an individual and nature in its raw materiality.

### **CONSUMING THE PASTORAL**

In their “*Voyages pittoresques et romantiques dans l’ancienne France*” (1820-1878) Taylor and Nodier had exposed the urban eye to the landscapes and culture of each region of France through the juxtaposition of texts and lithographs. These volumes, which were popular in their time, offered a romantic perspective of rural France through desolated landscapes and ruins highlighting the connection of regional France with the Past. Furthermore, the aesthetics of the sublime, displayed in the steep relief of these images of landscape, established a distance between the safe or comfortable position of the viewer and the landscape as beautiful yet threatening. By the mid-nineteenth century, the development of the lithograph and the technical innovations of visual mediums such as the panorama and diorama contributed to invigorate the visual representation of rural France by anchoring it in the present through the viewer’s interactive experience with the landscape as a spectacle and object of visual consumption.

Although the panorama often showed views of the city, its mode of representation encouraged the inclusion of the spectator as the subject of the gaze and stimulated as well the phenomenon of visual consumption. Offering a view of the city from a high angle, the panorama triggered a totalizing gaze from the spectator who thus felt in control and in

possession of the environment represented.<sup>134</sup> Moreover, the representational quality of the panorama having been erased, the viewer became subject to the illusion of his gaze that no longer distinguished between reality and artifice. The diorama, invented by Louis Daguerre in 1822, particularly contributed to cast nature as the subject of a show where the manipulation of gas or natural light as well as colored filters gave the illusion of movement to the image which could reproduce under the viewers' eyes the very transformations of a landscape due to natural forces. The popularity of images of landscape and their circulation within the urban milieu contributed to turn nature into a capitalist cultural artifact. Maupassant's irony exposes the perversion of nature as it is transformed into another commodity, an object of fetishism and consumption. As Nicholas Green posits, natural landscape became in the mid-century "a spectacle that slotted easily into the consuming rhetoric of the city."<sup>135</sup>

The commodification of nature was not only limited to the possession or visual consumption of reproductions of landscape but extends, as Maupassant demonstrates in his stories, to the experience of the pastoral itself. Consumption is certainly at the core of the petty-bourgeois' experience of nature. It is carried on through an excessive ingestion of food and drinks such as in the lavish picnic of the Dufour in "Une partie de campagne," or the bustling lunch at the restaurant Grillon in "La femme de Paul." Furthermore, as Maupassant implies, the individuals' sensual reception of nature is also

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<sup>134</sup> Christopher Prendergast, *Paris and the Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Blackwell, 1992) 47.

<sup>135</sup> Nicholas Green, *The Spectacle of Nature: Landscape and Bourgeois Culture in Nineteenth-Century France* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990) 95.

paralleled with a form of consumption. The scarcity of the sensual appeal in the urban environment and the repression exerted on the physical expression of the body by Cartesian rational authority seem to be responsible for what Maupassant compares to a physical deficiency, causing a strong longing in “ces bourgeois privés d’herbe et affamés de promenades aux champs” (“Une partie de campagne,” 100). The link between sensual stimulation and ingestion recurs in Maupassant’s rhetoric, yet while the bourgeois only consume what is for them offered by the experience of the pastoral during “parties de campagne”,<sup>136</sup> the artist, such as Maupassant or his mirror image, the painter Chenal in “Miss Harriett,” takes advantage of the sensual pleasure brought by nature by transcribing his sensations and impressions of the landscape on the canvas or on a page, ultimately turning his experience of the pastoral through a form of transubstantiation into a work of art to be shared with viewers. Just as Chenal’s relation to nature transits through what is described as carnal pleasure, Maupassant describes his relationship with nature as a form of consumption engaging all of his being through his senses. As he declares in one of his *chroniques*, « Mes yeux ouverts, à la façon d’une bouche affamée, dévorent la terre et le ciel. Oui, j’ai la sensation nette et profonde de manger le monde avec mon regard, et de digérer les couleurs comme on digère les viandes et les fruits. »<sup>137</sup>

As an artist, Maupassant has been especially gifted with acute senses, or what Mariane

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<sup>136</sup> Expression recurrent in Maupassant and other texts of the period which the *Dictionnaire du XIX<sup>ème</sup> siècle* of 1874 defines as a “divertissement que l’on se donne, similaire à une partie de chasse ou de pêche.” Thus, the expression « une partie de campagne » suggests the conception of the bucolic experience as an activity by itself, on the same level as hunting or fishing.

<sup>137</sup> Alice Larrivaud-De Wolf’s, « Le primitif dans l’œuvre de Maupassant. » Diss. Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2011. Web. 29.

Bury terms an “hyperacuité sensorielle,” which according to her “fournit le pivot, la charnière essentielle entre le sensualisme pessimiste et la sensualité créatrice du réalisme illusionniste.”<sup>138</sup>

## THE COMMODIFICATION OF NATURE THROUGH ART

Maupassant’s style has been perceived as influenced by the Impressionist aesthetic where each brush stroke, insignificant on its own, functions in relation to others in giving meaning to the representation as a whole, hence the recommendation for the viewers to step back in order to be able to fully appreciate the visual artwork.<sup>139</sup> Rather than accumulating details in an attempt to mirror reality, Maupassant follows the recommendation of his mentor Flaubert in trying instead to capture the experience of the real by referring to a particular and original detail that will create an impression on the reader. Maupassant confirms his impressionist approach when he declares in “Le roman” that it is from “le groupement adroit de petits faits constants d’où se dégagera le sens définitif de l’œuvre.”<sup>140</sup>

In his *Chroniques* for the salons, Maupassant demonstrates a special talent for art criticism. However, despite his taste for visual culture, his great admiration for Impressionism and its groundbreaking approach to art, Maupassant refused to further

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<sup>138</sup> Mariane Bury, *La poétique de Maupassant* (Paris : Sedes, 1994) 55.

<sup>139</sup> For further discussion on the parallel between Maupassant and Impressionism, see Joseph-Marc Bailbé, *L’artiste chez Maupassant* (Paris : Lettres Modernes, 1993) ; Mariane Bury, *La poétique de Maupassant* (Paris : Sedes, 1994), and Matthew MacNamara, *Style and Vision in Maupassant’s Nouvelles* (Berne : Lang, 1986).

<sup>140</sup> Guy de Maupassant, « Préface », *Pierre et Jean* (Paris : Albin Michel, 1930) 13.

commit to the defense of this modern art form and to the practice of art criticism, and instead engaged with Impressionism through his texts. As Louis Forestier explains, “ce qu’il n’a pas réalisé comme ‘salonnier,’ il l’a transposé dans son œuvre de conteur et de romancier, partageant avec les Impressionnistes le goût des sujets et des motifs modernes, s’enivrant de couleurs et cherchant à retenir, par mille moyens, la fugacité des choses.”<sup>141</sup> What mostly fascinated Maupassant with Impressionist artwork is the painter’s ability to capture all the nuances in the light and colors of a landscape and offer to the public the sensory experience of an ephemeral moment, or in Maupassant’s own words, expressed in “Le roman,” “l’émotion de la simple réalité” (14).

In his column “La vie d’un paysagiste”, Maupassant recounts with admiration his observation of Monet at work in Etretat and vividly describes the painter’s talent in rendering on the canvas the indomitable natural elements:

Je l’ai vu saisir ainsi une tombée étincelante de lumière sur la falaise blanche et la fixer à une coulée de tons jaunes qui rendaient étrangement le surprenant et fugitif effet de cet insaisissable et aveuglant éblouissement.  
Une autre fois, il prit à pleines mains une averse abattue sur la mer, et la jeta sur sa toile. Et c’était bien de la pluie qu’il avait peinte ainsi, rien que de la pluie voilant les vagues, les roches et le ciel à peine distincts sous ce déluge.<sup>142</sup>

The influence of Impressionism on his aesthetic is not surprising considering Maupassant’s closeness to this milieu and its artists. Friends with Monet, he invited him on several occasions to his Norman estate “La Guillette” close to Etretat, while he also

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<sup>141</sup> Louis Forestier, Introduction to the catalogue of the exhibition *Maupassant et l’impressionnisme* (Musées municipaux de Fécamp, 1993) 31.

<sup>142</sup> Guy de Maupassant, “La vie d’un paysagiste,” *Gil Blas*, Sept. 28, 1886. *Maupassant par les textes*. Web.

met on a regular basis with the other painters of the group, such as Auguste Renoir at the salon of Mme Charpentier.<sup>143</sup>

Maupassant's affinity with Impressionism extends beyond artistic influence. Indeed, some of his texts strongly echo Impressionist paintings. As Pierre Cogny remarks, the Grillon restaurant where the opening of the story "La femme de Paul" is set, refers to the Fournaise restaurant which Pierre-Auguste Renoir chose as the setting for his famous painting *Le déjeuner des canotiers* (1881). Not only does Maupassant use the same setting as Renoir, but his description of the clients on the deck of the Fournaise restaurant echoes Renoir's painting:

Dans l'établissement flottant, c'était une cohue furieuse et hurlante. Les tables de bois, où les consommations répandues faisaient de minces ruisseaux poisseux, étaient couvertes de verres à moitié vides et entourées de gens à moitié gris. Toute cette foule criait, chantait, braillait. Les hommes, le chapeau en arrière, la face rougie, avec des yeux luisants d'ivrognes, s'agitaient en vociférant par un besoin de tapage naturel aux brutes. Les femmes, cherchant une proie pour le soir, se faisaient payer à boire en attendant ; et, dans l'espace libre entre les tables, dominait le public ordinaire du lieu, un bataillon de canotiers chahuteurs avec leur compagnes en courte de jupe de flanelle. (112)

Considering that both Renoir and Maupassant visited the Fournaise restaurant in Chatou, a trendy place at the time for artists and Parisians who were eager to engage in outdoor activities, it is not surprising that their description of the establishment is very similar. However, not only were Renoir's "Le déjeuner des canotiers" and Maupassant's "La femme de Paul" produced in the same year of 1881, but the atmosphere of pleasure in the characters' consumption of food, drinks, and flirtatious attitude which these works

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<sup>143</sup> Ambroise Vollard, *La vie et l'œuvre de Pierre-Auguste Renoir*, (Paris : Ambroise Vollard, 1919) 92.

share establishes a cross-reference for the public. Nevertheless, Maupassant's approach differs from Renoir's since the allusion to the various forms of pleasure enjoyed by the restaurant's customers is pushed to its extreme, suggesting excess and artificiality and contrasting with the equilibrium of nature in the background of the scene. What Maupassant seems to suggest is that city life has reproduced itself in the countryside, a process to which art has contributed by circulating works and images of the countryside, hence promoting tourism in these once natural areas, along with a form of performativity in the Parisian visitors' longing to reproduce the experience of the pastoral as conveyed through art and the urban rhetoric, which foreshadows to some extent Oscar Wilde's concept of anti-mimesis and his claim that "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life."

Similarly, the passage where the Dufour mother and daughter are on the swings seems to have been adapted from Renoir's painting *La banlançoire* (1876). As William J. Berg notes, even if Maupassant had not seen *La balançoire*, he would have been well aware of its composition and motifs through the reading of Zola's novel *Une page d'amour* (1878). Indeed, a passage in this novel mirrors Renoir's painting by featuring Zola's character Hélène, on a swing, wearing a white dress with "des noeuds violets" with the sun playing upon it, and her daughter Jeanne looking up at her. Although Maupassant made some alterations to his representation of Renoir's painting and Zola's account, the visual quality of the scene remains. Indeed, as William J. Berg argues, this passage, more than any others from "Une partie de campagne" possesses the attributes of the spectacle. Mme Dufour and Henriette are at the center of the gaze of multiple

spectators, the two boatmen who view them as sexual objects, and the group of village children who are observing them with curiosity. Much in the same way, the woman in Renoir's *balançoire* is at the center of the gaze as she is being looked at and addressed by a man whose back is turned to the viewer of the painting, while also being watched by the little girl on the left-hand side of the canvas. Most importantly, Maupassant's writing technique underlines its visual components. In fact, his artistic dialogue with *La balançoire* is probably what encouraged filmmaker Jean Renoir to provide as well a strong echo to *La balançoire* in his filmic adaptation of Maupassant's short-story. By shooting the scene of Henriette and Mme Dufour on the swings from the window where the two boatmen are standing, not only does he provide the viewer with a masculine perspective, present in Maupassant's text, but the window creates a frame that is reminiscent of the frame of a painting, thus emphasizing the connection with Renoir's painting present in Maupassant's text. Therefore, by establishing a dialogue between his text and Impressionist paintings, Maupassant creates a system of echoes making culture and in particular Impressionist art a mediator to his texts.

If in his works such as "Une partie de campagne" and "La femme de Paul" Maupassant exposes the ways in which nature had been transformed into an artifact to be enjoyed and disposed of, as well as the difficulty to escape the influence of cultural mediation interfering with the pastoral experience, he partakes in this process as well by referencing in his descriptions to the cultural representations circulating in his time. This approach is surprising considering Maupassant's insistence on originality as his aesthetic drive. In a *chronique* for the Salon of 1886 initially published in *Le XIXème siècle*,

Maupassant makes a sharp ironic critique of the conformity of artists whom he perceives as preoccupied with following cultural trends, or whose art is limited to recycling previous motifs and techniques. Observing for instance the representation of the peasantry as conveyed through the works exposed at the Salon of Spring 1886,

Maupassant declares,

chaque fois que je retourne au Salon, un étonnement me saisit devant les paysanneries. Et ils sont innombrables aujourd'hui, les paysans. Ils ont remplacé les Vénus et les Amours, que seul M. Bourguereau continue à préparer avec de la crème rose. Ils bêchent, ils sèment, ils labourent, ils hersent, ils fauchent, ils regardent même passer les ballons, les jolis paysans peints [...] Et voilà que, tout à coup, je les ai reconnus l'autre jour. Ah ! Mes farceurs, je vous tiens ! Vous êtes les guerriers grecs et les guerriers romains que les papas de vos peintres peignaient pour nos papas à nous. [...] Et dans quatre ans vous reviendrez sous des accoutrements d'ouvriers, mes camarades ! Car nous allons à l'ouvrier maintenant.<sup>144</sup>

Originality forms the core of Maupassant's aesthetics as he explains in his essay « Le roman » when he argues that « Le talent provient de l'originalité, qui est une manière spéciale de penser, de voir, de comprendre et de juger. »<sup>145</sup> Thus, the discrepancy between his intentions and the evidence pointing to a recycling of artistic motifs and cultural clichés in Maupassant's representation of rural France, naturally leads the readers to ask themselves if it is not precisely the notion of authenticity that Maupassant debunks in his texts. Let us remember that in Maupassant's illusionary representation of reality, verisimilitude prevails over truth as he explains, “le vrai peut quelquefois n'être pas

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<sup>144</sup> Guy de Maupassant, « Au salon. » *Le XIX<sup>ème</sup> siècle*, May 10, 1886. *Au salon. Chroniques sur la peinture* (Paris : Balland, 1993) 105.

<sup>145</sup> Guy de Maupassant, « Le roman, » *Pierre et Jean* (1888), (Paris : Albin Michel, 1930) 8.

vraisemblable. Le réaliste, s'il est un artiste, cherchera, non pas à nous montrer la photographie banale de la vie, mais à nous en donner la vision plus complète, plus saisissante, plus probante que la réalité même » (« Le roman » 14).

Therefore, Maupassant's texts challenge the notion of authenticity on several levels. As the above quote illustrates, Maupassant diverges from the claims of artists to a truthful rendition of reality, but the references to cultural trends and tropes in his texts also highlight the constant cultural mediation that stands between the individual and experience and which hinders his or her grasp of reality. He seems to align himself with the aesthetics of the Decadents in that as Jean Pierrot explains, "convinced that the material universe is nothing but an appearance, and that our consciousness can never apprehend anything but its own ideas and representations, they were to make of imagination a kind of higher power by means of which the world's reality could be transformed."<sup>146</sup>

Imagination deriving from subjective interpretation or from ideological representations circulating in Paris is central in the construction of *la région*. Furthermore, as a space that had remained largely unknown for Parisians until the mid-nineteenth century when transportation and communication developed, *la région* was an especially fertile space for the projection of national fantasies and myths. As Maupassant witnessed the opening of *la région*, he observed the emergence of a gap between the social and cultural expectations attached to this space by outsiders and their experience of

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<sup>146</sup> Jean Pierrot, *The Decadent Imagination, 1880-1900* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981) 10.

it. Bourdieu's critical reflection on what he calls "the idea of *la région*" correlates to Maupassant's treatment of regional France since Bourdieu emphasizes the implication of the various representations of regional identity in the making of this identity. He posits indeed that,

on ne peut comprendre cette forme particulière de lutte des classements qu'est la lutte pour la définition d'identité « régionale » ou « ethnique » qu'à condition de dépasser l'opposition que la science doit d'abord opérer pour rompre avec les prénotions de la sociologie spontanée, entre la représentation et la réalité, et à condition d'inclure dans le réel la représentation du réel, ou plus exactement, la lutte des représentations, au sens d'images mentales, mais aussi de manifestations sociales destinées à manipuler les images mentales.<sup>147</sup>

### **PERFORMING IDENTITY**

The fluctuation between different levels of representations as well as different genres in Maupassant has been observed by critics such as Michel Crouzet who refers to this narrative device as « l'impossibilité de se situer tout à fait dans le faux ou dans le vrai, dans la comédie ou le sérieux. »<sup>148</sup> Illusion thus seems to operate on two levels, as the expression of Maupassant's aesthetics, as well as a narrative critique of the social norms that shape the reality of contemporary France and compels individuals to constantly engage in a social performance. This notion is generally at the center of Maupassant's critique of Third Republic France where individual instincts and creative drives are stifled by the norms and conventions imposed by the Republic in the name of

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<sup>147</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, « L'identité et la représentation : éléments pour une réflexion critique sur l'idée de région, » *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 35 (1980) : 65.

<sup>148</sup> Michel Crouzet, « Pour une rhétorique de Maupassant ? » *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France* 80.2 (1980) 253.

democracy and its protection of the general interest. Indeed, Maupassant sees the implementation of egalitarianism as having led the way to what Tocqueville calls the despotism of the majority. The petite-bourgeoisie in particular forms the target of Maupassant's critique. As an emergent social class, it benefited from economic prosperity and social advancement to the extent that it had become the ruling majority, imposing norms and standards eventually leading to cultural uniformity. If Maupassant lacked a political engagement due to an overall disenchantment in the sincerity and disinterest of the national leaders and their policies, as Trevor Harris posits, he seems to be nostalgic for the previous century with its political system which "allowed individualistic talent to flourish."<sup>149</sup> In his *chronique* "Les foules," written in 1882 for the newspaper *Le Gaulois*, Maupassant critiques the notion of social group since as he argues it conceals the unique personality of individuals by conforming them to the group's standardized psyche.<sup>150</sup>

This repression of the drives and distinct personality of each individual is what propels them into performance. Torn between the necessity of abiding by the rules of moral authority and the urge to unleash their desires as well as to protect their personal

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<sup>149</sup> Trevor Harris, *Maupassant in the Hall of Mirrors: Ironies of Repetition in the work of Guy de Maupassant* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990) 31.

<sup>150</sup> Guy de Maupassant, « Les foules, » *Le Gaulois*, March 23, 1882. *Maupassant par les textes*. Web.

interests (urges which when expressed have to be covered up), the characters appear indeed as actors performing in a tragi-comedy. The resort to an omniscient narrator allows Maupassant to emphasize the performativity of his characters by contrasting their inner thoughts and original intentions, with their behavior that attempts to conceal or legitimize their actions. Furthermore, Maupassant demonstrates the relativity of social codes that change from one space to another, as reflected in “La maison Tellier” with the prostitutes’ tacky dresses being perceived by the local people as the expression of gentility. Although the prostitutes’ provincial city of Fécamp would naturally be regarded as inferior to Paris in terms of its cultural authority, it is considered with great respect by the local farmers, an admiration that is poured onto the prostitutes as “les belles dames de la ville,” in other words, as the ambassadors of modernity and taste.<sup>151</sup>

Exposing in his texts the cultural stereotypes circulating about the countryside and the capital and their limits, is a way for Maupassant to reject the correlation of identity with place. In the story “Ce cochon de Morin,” the main character’s crime of having molested a young woman on the train back from Paris to his province by kissing her, is explained to the narrator as coming from a sexual frustration caused by the over-stimulation of the senses in the capital. As the character of Labarde tries to account for Morin’s crime, he emphasizes the cultural gap between *la province* and capital, and refers to a conventional representation of Paris defined by mobility and sexual promiscuity. As

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<sup>151</sup> Guy de Maupassant, *La maison Tellier, Une partie de campagne et autres contes* (Paris : Garnier-Flammarion, 1980) 54.

he explains, “tu sais ce que sont, pour un commerçant de province, quinze jours de Paris. Cela vous met le feu dans le sang. Tous les soirs, des spectacles, des frôlements de femmes, une continuelle excitation d'esprit. On devient fou.”<sup>152</sup> Similarly, in « Une soirée », for the provincial notary, maître Saval, a fervent admirer of the arts, Paris is imagined as saturated with culture and arts. On his trip to Paris, Saval thus remarks, « ‘Décidément l'air de Paris ne ressemble à aucun air. Il a un je-ne-sais-quoi de montant, d'excitant, de grisant, qui vous donne une drôle d'envie de gambader et de faire bien autre chose encore. Dès que je débarque ici, il me semble, tout d'un coup, que je viens de boire une bouteille de champagne. Quelle vie on pourrait mener dans cette ville, au milieu des artistes !’ »<sup>153</sup> The expectation to meet famous artists on every street corner is what fools Saval, inducing him to believe the deceit of the men who pretend to be renowned artists.

Likewise, socio-cultural expectations are made about the pastoral which are forcefully superimposed on *la région* by Parisian bourgeois eager to experience the circulating clichés about that space. Trips to the countryside, as a manifestation of the possibilities offered by the wealth and leisure of the petite-bourgeoisie became a new sign of status. “Une partie de campagne” illustrates well the petty-bourgeois’ attempt to recreate an experience of the pastoral that lacks spontaneity and authenticity, and thereby verges on performance. Mme Dufour’s sentimentality about nature is rehearsed and fake since she waits for a sign from her husband to launch into what is presumably a laudation of nature: “M. Dufour avait dit : ‘Voici la campagne enfin !’ et sa femme, à ce signal,

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<sup>152</sup> Guy de Maupassant, *Les contes de la bécasse* (Paris : Albin Michel, 1984) 15-16.

<sup>153</sup> Guy de Maupassant, *La parure et autres contes parisiens* (Paris : Garnier, 1984) 376.

s'était attendrie sur la nature" (95; my emphasis). Maupassant mocks as well the performativity of the Dufours' picnic by marking most prominently the intentionality of the family's choice to have lunch on the grass particularly through the subordinating conjunction introducing the clause: "*pour que* ce fût plus champêtre, la famille s'installa sur l'herbe sans table ni sièges" (100; my emphasis). The Dufours' picnic does not exemplify an attempt to reconnect with nature but is simply the enactment of a social practice assigned by popular culture. Perverted by the city codes that dictate their behavior, the petty-bourgeois have swapped their natural ability to act spontaneously for a performance.

The petty-bourgeois' alienation from nature is not the only subject of Maupassant's critique. Romanticism and its clichés is also ridiculed through the characters of Henriette ("Une partie de campagne") and Paul ("La femme de Paul"). Both are under the illusion that the space of the pastoral is the paragon of ideal romance, which has harmful consequences once the illusion fades. Henriette yields to her desire as she hears the song of a nightingale, which for her embodies romantic love, « l'invisible témoin des rendez-vous d'amour qu'invoquait Juliette sur son balcon : cette musique du ciel accordée aux baisers des hommes ; cet éternel inspirateur de toutes les romances langoureuses qui ouvrent un idéal bleu aux pauvres petits cœurs des fillettes attendries ! » (103). Maupassant's derision of romanticism in Henriette's exaltation of love reaches its paroxysm when he uses the pace of the bird song to suggest the love making of Henriette and Henri (the couple's names already being a parody of romantic stories). As the end of "Une partie de campagne" implies, Henriette will have to bear the disillusionment of her

arranged marriage exacerbated by her romantic idyll with Henri during her trip to the countryside. In “La femme de Paul,” the failure of the realization of Paul’s romantic inclination has an even more tragic outcome. Indeed, Paul is described as an extremely sensitive being who thus stands out from the corrupt crowd, his romantic experience of nature being portrayed by Maupassant as “la grisante poésie de cette soirée d’été entrain dans Paul malgré lui, traversait son angoisse affolée, remuait son cœur avec une ironie féroce, développant jusqu’à la rage en son âme douce et contemplative ses besoins d’idéale tendresse, d’épanchements passionnés dans le sein d’une femme adorée et fidèle » (123). Paul is infatuated with Madeleine, a woman who acts as both his torturer by breaking his romantic idyll through her infidelity, yet also in a way, as a victim of Paul’s attempt to impose his romanticism on her, forcing her to enact his fantasy. As an urban subject, she does not share the proximity of Paul’s relationship with nature, and soon she brings him disillusionment when she starts singing a melody from the city’s streets, thereby reminding him of her true character. The trigger for Paul’s suicide appears to be the inadequacy between his romantic conception of the pastoral and his brutal awareness of reality, when he finds the woman he loves kissing in the thickets with another woman. Not only does Paul discover that Madeleine has been unfaithful to him and is thus breaking the ideal of the pastoral romance that he had constructed in his mind, but her lesbianism is judged by Paul as “un crime contre nature” (125), exacerbating his disillusionment in the pastoral. Paul’s awareness of Madeleine’s infidelity brings about the realization that contrary to his pastoral romantic ideal, nature does not bring individuals back to a state of innocence, but can contribute to their corruption.

## FROM REGIONAL STEREOTYPES TO UNIVERSAL HUMAN NATURE

While the interconnection between space, place and identity was well established by the mid-nineteenth century and supported by determinist scientific theories, the Second Empire physically reinforced the relation between space and identity with the Haussmannian transformations of Paris. Initially intended to improve the sanitary conditions and the safety of the Parisians, its reconfiguration of Paris entailed the division of the city into arrondissements or quartiers defined according to wealth and social class, hence containing popular classes deemed potentially dangerous by marginalizing them, and by the same means making the city legible for the flâneurs.<sup>154</sup> This urban organization of space illustrates the nineteenth-century ideological attempt to classify and contain the French population. The literature of the time, especially the physiologies which were most popular during the July Monarchy, offered a panorama of the French population based on the space they inhabited and a set of codes supposedly pointing to their social status and/or profession. Originally focused on Paris, the physiologies of *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes* were extended to *la province* in 1842 with the publication of three additional volumes. If the first five volumes dealing with the urban population of Paris list hundreds of different types of individuals, regional France seems to be restricted to one type of individual per region.

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<sup>154</sup> Richard Sieburth, « Une idéologie du lisible : le phénomène des physiologies. » *Romantisme* 15. 47 (1985).

If Maupassant's representation of regional populations resonates with the stereotypical construction found in the physiologies or ideological texts looking to contain *la région* into a fixed cultural identity, the readers' horizon of expectation changes when the stereotypical characters reveal unexpected psychological depth or personality traits. The simple depiction of the local thereby opens up to a universal representation of human nature defining Maupassant as "cet écrivain qui sut élargir le régionalisme à un témoignage sur l'humanité," according to Marie-Claire Bancquart.<sup>155</sup> Indeed, with archetypal physical and character traits, Maupassant's protagonists seem at first to match the normative construction of the provincial types, his Normans for instance being most often stingy, pragmatic, sly, superstitious, and fond of drinking and playing pranks. These characteristics can be found in *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*, in Emile de la Bedollière's 1842 physiology of the Norman where he defines this local type in these terms,

il ne répond point à la confiance qu'il semble désirer, et en vous méfiant de lui vous ne faites que lui rendre la pareille. Cachant la finesse du renard sous l'air de bonhomie du mouton, retors sous le masque de la simplicité, réservé et sur la défensive avec les étrangers, il semble leur supposer ou avoir lui-même une arrière-pensée [...] N'essayons point de le dissimuler, le Normand montre quelquefois une avidité répréhensible, une âpreté au gain qui ne l'emporte pas au-delà des bornes prescrites par la loi, mais qui lèse le prochain, et répugne aux esprits délicats. Non-seulement il est religieux, ce qui est un bien, mais encore il est superstitieux, ce qui est un mal. Il confond le sacré et le profane, et observe encore des rites dont l'origine est manifestement druidique.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Marie-Claire Bancquart, Introduction to *Boule de suif et autres contes Normands* (Paris : Garnier, 1971) XLIX.

<sup>156</sup> Emile de la Bedollière, « Le Normand, » *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*. 8 vols. (Paris: Curmer, 1842) 7 : 129-145.

Just as Maupassant's stories start by introducing the provincial characters as carved out of the common types of his time, his mention of the culture also seems to be reduced to the picturesque, verging on the cliché. However, it is worth noting that Maupassant's literary genre of choice – the short-story – compelled him to reduce the spatial configuration to “quelques éléments emblématiques [...] immédiatement interprétables par le lecteur,” and which are imbued with a strong local-color to enable the readers from the start to immerse themselves in the regional space.<sup>157</sup> However, Maupassant resists the confines of the genre through an aesthetics that relies, as mentioned previously in this chapter, on the readers' participative role. If he is able to extend the meaning of his texts through his rhetorical use of echoes and suggestions that refer to a reality that surpasses the words on the page, his sensualist approach resists the ephemerality of the moment by creating lasting impressions on the readers. Likewise, Maupassant's focus on individual consciousness leads him to describe the story's spatial and temporal setting through the characters' perspective. Rejecting a traditional objective frame with its chronology, Maupassant approaches time and place as internalized by the characters. In fact, according to René Godenne, Maupassant can be considered as one of the generators of the “nouvelle instant,” a type of short-story that focuses on revealing the extent of a singular moment over the life of an individual. As Godenne explains, “c'est moins raconter une histoire qu'un instant d'une vie. L'instant est important car il est

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<sup>157</sup> Bernard Demont, *Représentations spatiales et narration dans les contes et nouvelles de Guy de Maupassant* (Paris : Honoré Champion, 2005) 139.

fondé sur une révélation, une prise de conscience qui met en cause l'existence entière de l'individu. »

In the definition of his poetics which serves as the preface to *Pierre et Jean*, Maupassant writes,

Quel enfantillage, d'ailleurs, de croire à la réalité puisque nous portons chacun la nôtre dans notre pensée et dans nos organes. Nos yeux, nos oreilles, notre odorat, notre goût [,] différents créent autant de vérités qu'il y a d'hommes sur la terre. Et nos esprits qui reçoivent les instructions de ces organes, diversement impressionnés, comprennent, analysent et jugent comme si chacun de nous appartenait à une autre race. <sup>158</sup>

This quote advocates for a subjective interpretation of reality, suggesting that both the characters within the story and the readers, participate in the making of meaning in their reception of the story's plot as directly experienced by the former and told to the latter. As Pierre Cogny notes, Maupassant's aesthetics favors a "type de paysage qui ne *représentent pas, mais évoquent.*"<sup>159</sup> Thus, it offers freedom to the readers in their reception of the works. Maupassant applies Barthe's *effet de réel*, to create what he refers as « l'illusion complète du vrai ». The principle of verisimilitude that shapes his art calls for the imagination of the readers to believe in the realism of the story based on the few realist markers dispersed in the text.

Moreover, Maupassant's attempt to remain objective brings to light, according to Renée de Smirnoff, "les limites du réalisme par la difficile conciliation de l'effacement

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<sup>158</sup> Guy de Maupassant, « Le roman, » *Pierre et Jean* (1888), (Paris : Albin Michel, 1930) 16.

<sup>159</sup> Pierre Cogny, « La rhétorique trompeuse de la description dans les paysages normands de Maupassant » *Le paysage normand dans la littérature et dans l'art*. Joseph-Marc Bailbé ed. (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1980) 168.

du narrateur avec la nécessité d'orienter la lecture sans sacrifier les préoccupations artistiques. »<sup>160</sup> As mentioned previously, Maupassant makes up for the absence of explanatory comments which would give away his authority in the text by replacing them with a system of echoes and rhetorical images. The “projection sur l'extérieur d'un lexique de l'intériorisation” according to Smirnoff (61), is concomitant with the readers' involvement in the reception of the text, and creates by the same means a form of complicity with the characters. Indeed, Maupassant's treatment of the psychology of his characters reveals the human soul in general, with its egoist impulse and its weaknesses, prompting the readers to distance themselves from the characters yet, as the former are confronted with the recurrence of these negative traits regardless of the characters and spaces where the stories are set, they cannot but recognize a representation of a universal human nature that extends well beyond the frame of the text and the limits of a construction based on the dialectics of space and identity. It is significant that Maupassant despised a conception of literature as organized around the promotion of regional culture. Referring to Frédéric Mistral and by extension to the Félibrige in a letter to la comtesse Potocka, Maupassant wrote, « j'ai en horreur depuis longtemps ce troubadour provençal, cet Apollon à l'ail, ce Buffalo de la poésie, ce commis voyageur en patois rimé que l'on nomme Mistral. »<sup>161</sup> His aversion to Mistral's works can be related

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<sup>160</sup> Renée de Smirnoff, « Paysages extérieurs, paysages intérieurs dans *Pierre et Jean* » *Maupassant multiple*. Yves Reboul ed. (Toulouse : Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 1993) 68.

<sup>161</sup> Marlo Johnston, *Guy de Maupassant* (Paris: Fayard, 2012) 837.

to Maupassant's rejection of a literary approach supporting an ideology and/or relying on a form of idealization.

Maupassant's address to a specific readership should also be recognized as an influence in his representation of *la province*. Indeed, as Florence Goyet points out, Maupassant's publication in *Le Gaulois*, and *Le Gil Blas* which were newspapers addressed to the high bourgeoisie, influenced his stories in his choice to satirize petty-bourgeois and provincials based on the collective representation of these groups. The pleasing of his readership can account for Maupassant's use of regional stereotypes which would naturally appeal to the readers by allowing them to distance themselves from the characters featured and by triggering laughter in the same process. Similarly, it is noteworthy that blue-collar workers are absent from Maupassant's abundant production of short-stories. Certainly as I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, the trauma of the Commune remained much alive in Maupassant's time. However, we can also interpret Maupassant's omission of this class within the broad spectrum of his representation of French society of the Third Republic as deriving from his choice to focus on the individual consciousness rather than on class struggle within the historical trajectory, as entailed by the philosophical trends circulating at his time, such as Marxism and its derivatives. If Maupassant contributes to contemporary social debates, his political involvement is kept to a minimum. He shares with many people of his time a general disenchantment with politics manifested in an anti-parliamentarism originating for the most part in the French defeat in Sedan. Nevertheless, as Marie-Claire Bancquart observes, Maupassant takes a stance on several social issues such as the fate of

abandoned children, the living conditions of the small clerks, or the protection of animals, which were becoming a concern and drawing the attention of legislators.<sup>162</sup> But generally, Maupassant rejects a conception of literature that is committed to the cause of social or political issues and rather favors an approach of art for art's sake.

If Maupassant borrows certain social and cultural clichés from the physiologies in the presentation of his characters and the location of the plot, soon these literary tropes and the conventional representation of *la région* they offer are undermined when the intricacy of the human psychology underneath the provincial types is revealed, thereby resisting what Jauss defines “l’art culinaire,” a type of artistic representation that relies on an aesthetic that does not require any change in the horizon of expectation and thus stands as mere entertainment.

Nevertheless, confined by the limits of the short-story genre, as well as by Maupassant's own preference for a representation based on concision and suggestions, the character's psychology is conveyed through a system of reference present in the character's environment. Thus, the lack of a substantive and descriptive portrayal of the character is what leads Maupassant's contemporary, Henry James, to criticize Maupassant's practice of realism.<sup>163</sup> The challenge of the physiological character definition in the revelation toward the end of the story of a major and unexpected

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<sup>162</sup> Marie-Claire Bancquart, « Maupassant et Paris » *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France* 94. 5 (1994) 793-794.

<sup>163</sup> James's reference to Maupassant as “a lion in the path” reflects his admiration for him mixed with a critique of his art, which makes him according to James “embarrassing” because of the amorality of his works. Richard Fusco, *Maupassant and the American short-story: the influence of form at the turn of the century* (University Park, Pa. : Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994) 180.

character trait can also be seen as a literary device appropriate to the genre of the short-story. Indeed, according to Baudelaire who translated and defended the work of Edgar Allan Poe, the short-story as he defines it, relies on an “effect” which although it may seem a twist, it has been in fact driving the plot from the start.<sup>164</sup>

Maupassant is interested in revealing the illusion of appearances which shapes reality in Third Republic France and impose meaning according to a system of signs, ultimately blurring the distinction between the fake and the real. Playing with this notion, many of Maupassant’s story plots rely on the confusion between the artificial and the authentic as their main trigger. In one of Maupassant’s most well-known story, « La parure », Mathilde Loisel mistakes the fake diamond necklace she has just lost and which had been lent to her by her friend for an original priceless piece of jewelry. This simple error of judgment brings about her financial ruin and downfall. The critique of the artifice of the semiotic system that deceives the individual and removes his or her ability to think critically in the interpretation of reality reflects Maupassant’s approach to community as a group of people functioning as one standardized conscience, hence dictating the thoughts and behaviors of each individual, ultimately encouraging conformity and lowness in judgment.

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<sup>164</sup> Charles Baudelaire, « Edgar Poe, sa vie et ses œuvres, » preface to his translation of Edgar Allan Poe’s *Histoires Extraordinaires* (1856).

## RESHAPING TRADITIONAL CODES OF REPRESENTATION

The chronique, le “drame du Pecq,” provides an interesting insight into Maupassant’s literary style led by the search for originality, so as to ultimately strike the readers with the impression of the real. Taking the incident of a body recently found floating in the Seine River around Le Pecq, Maupassant imagines the different treatments literature would provide if it were to turn this event into a fiction story. In the first account of the victim’s death, the author would pull the strings of the melodrama, relating how the crime was committed out of passion by a cuckold husband who had just found his wife in the arms of the victim. “Quel effet sur le théâtre!” declares Maupassant, who rejects this literary approach, full of exaggerated sentiments and pompous words.<sup>165</sup> Instead, he suggests that the murder was committed together by a family, « tout tranquillement, comme on met le pot au feu le dimanche. » For Maupassant, this account is much truer, for reality is more simple and banal than literature and arts represent it to be. Therefore, in order to give what Maupassant believes is a true rendering of reality, the author needs to forsake literary tropes and clichés, as well as common formulas, to find the proper image able to trigger in the readers’ minds vivid sensations and impressions. Originality is therefore the key component of this method, and following the model of his mentor Flaubert, Maupassant’s art resolves around the painstaking search for new words and images able to call out the readers’ attention and create the impression of the real. Maupassant’s rhetoric thus entails the reconfiguration of literary conventions in an effort

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<sup>165</sup> Guy de Maupassant, « Chronique, » *Chroniques*. Paris, 1882. *Wikisource*. Web.

to free his texts from systems of definitions and morals, which Michel Crouzet explains as, “Le premier trouble est donc une dénaturation des valeurs littéraires, une déception ou un égarement qui porte sur les catégories du discours, leur cloisonnement, en genres, en tons, en catégories définies ou prévisibles : il faut donc repousser une certaine propriété du discours pour établir une permanente impropiété qui le rendra indéfinissable” (242).

Maupassant’s rhetoric oscillates between over-determination and uncertainty. Rejecting the idea of an inherent definition of people and things, Maupassant’s descriptions are directed by a sense of contingency and fluctuation. Indeed, Maupassant constantly destabilizes meaning, ultimately denying the existence of universal laws. What is left is the subject’s experience as unique and unpredictable, and art as the sublimation of the real. Michel Crouzet supports this Nietzschean interpretation when he refers to « la négativité du texte » as a hallmark of Maupassant’s discourse which he defines as a narrative process that foregrounds its own artificiality. As Crouzet explains, in Maupassant, « rien n'est vrai, tout est faux, la vérité est qu'il n'y a pas de vérité ; tout devient faux par le seul fait de le dire, de le transmuier en illusion ou en artifice” (238). Yet, as Crouzet continues, « le faux se retourne en une valeur, qui est l'Art » (239). The story « Sur l’eau » exemplifies the instability of meaning underlying Maupassant’s descriptions. Indeed, the natural elements present in the narrator’s surrounding, as he is resting in his rowing boat, are first perceived as positive, in the serenity and comfort they offer him, yet as the description goes on and the narrator reflects on these elements, nature becomes associated with terror, ultimately turning the narrator’s initial pleasant experience on the river into a nightmare which climaxes with a corpse rising to the

surface. This description of nature, underlines Maupassant's rejection of a universal system of inherent definitions, to one relying on materialism and the individual's experience and personal interpretation. Maupassant's rhetoric indeed subverts the normative understanding of reality and its representation in art by challenging binary notions such as natural and artificial, inside and outside, or banal and extraordinary. What results from Maupassant's distinctive use of rhetoric is the removal of the categories organizing the real, highlighting as I argue, their versatility based on individual experience.

Another major example of Maupassant's subversion of a construction of identity based on arbitrary criteria such as occupation and place and endorsed by the literary construction of types, can be found in his treatment of the character of the prostitute. While the nineteenth century generally represented prostitutes as figures of ill-repute, Maupassant reshapes this stock character, endowing her with positive attributes. In *Boule de Suif* for instance, the eponymous prostitute displays a generosity and self-sacrifice which stand in sharp contrast with the hypocrisy and cowardice of the rest of the characters. The selfless personality of Boule de Suif even turned into heroism in the story's context of national threat caused by the French defeat of Sedan followed by the German occupation of the north-east of France. Likewise, in *La maison Tellier*, Maupassant takes up this figure to relate the weekend spent in the Norman countryside by the women of a Fécamp brothel as they accompany Madame to attend the first communion of her niece. Maupassant's rhetoric plays with the notions of natural and artificial by suggesting the women's child-like innocence and sensitivity, illustrated in the

scene where Rosa bursts out crying during the mass as memories of her own first communion and childhood come back to her, or when the night before, the women are moved by the silence of the countryside: “elles avaient des frissons sur la peau, non de froid, mais des frissons de solitude venus du coeur inquiet et troublé.”<sup>166</sup> Conversely, through Maupassant’s technique of projecting the characters’ interiority onto their environment, nature seems to have taken on the artificial attributes of the prostitutes, ultimately becoming sexualized. Indeed, its description suggests excess through the reference to the bright colors of the grass and the flowers (echoing the colors of the women’s garters), the intensity of the sun and the smell of flowers thickening the air:

Des deux côtés de la route la campagne verte se déroulait. Les colzas en fleur mettaient de place en place une grande nappe jaune ondulante d'où s'élevait une saine et puissante odeur, une odeur pénétrante et douce, portée très loin par le vent. Dans les seigles déjà grands des bluets montraient leurs petites têtes azurées que les femmes voulaient cueillir, mais M. Rivet refusa d'arrêter. Puis parfois, un champ tout entier semblait arrosé de sang tant les coquelicots l'avaient envahi. Et au milieu de ces plaines colorées ainsi par les fleurs de la terre, la carriole, qui paraissait porter elle-même un bouquet de fleurs aux teintes plus ardentes, passait au trot du cheval blanc, disparaissait derrière les grands arbres d'une ferme, pour reparaître au bout du feuillage et promener de nouveau à travers les récoltes jaunes et vertes, piquées de rouge ou de bleu, cette éclatante charretée de femmes qui fuyait sous le soleil (53).

Moreover, if this scene echoes Monet’s *Wild poppies, near Argenteuil* (1873), a parallel that Robert Willard Artinian has drawn, Maupassant seems to subvert the sensualism offered by Impressionism to suggest a form of corruption. Indeed, although Maupassant’s description begins with light sensual impressions, even borrowing elements

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<sup>166</sup> Guy de Maupassant, *La maison Tellier, Une partie de campagne et autres contes* (Paris : Garnier-Flammarion, 1980) 55.

from idealism, the description is soon undermined by the reference to the sexual, culminating in the statement that “un champ tout entier semblait arrosé de sang tant les coquelicots l’avaient envahis.” As Artinian notes, while the description alluded at first to a form of purity and respectability, through the reference to the white horse leading the women’s carriage under the command of Rivet as the figure of a knight, and the smell described as “une *saine* et puissante odeur, une odeur pénétrante et douce” (my emphasis,) Maupassant reverses the significance of these elements through the analogy of the red of the poppies with blood, and by shifting the suggestive component of the colors of the various flowers to the women’s garters. Therefore, different interpretations concerning the origin of the corruption offer themselves to the readers. Either the prostitutes are pure at heart and it is rather nature that seduces and corrupts humans; or conversely, nature is the mirror and recipient of the perversion of the prostitutes. By rejecting both an idealized representation of nature, as well the sensual aesthetic of Impressionism, Maupassant attempts to liberate his art from influence. The process of subversion of the cultural images and tropes circulating in his time, ultimately destabilizes meaning and introduces simultaneously a great uncertainty.

#### **DEFENDING INDIVIDUALISM AGAINST COLLECTIVE LAWS**

If Maupassant scholars have interpreted his depiction of nature as reflecting a deep pessimism - Michel Crouzet maintaining for instance that in Maupassant “la nature est proche d’une contre nature” (260) and Micheline Besnard-Coursodon exploring its analogy with a trap - nature in Maupassant is highly ambivalent. While he underscores its

relentlessness, and the tragic consequences triggered by humans' instincts, he also praises the primitiveness of human nature as an authentic source of experience, and much in the line of eighteenth-century empiricism, a source of knowledge. Not only have artificial laws and institutions perverted humankind, but they are capable of arousing appalling violence and conflict through the inner repression that they trigger within the individual. Maupassant's philosophy is close to Rousseau's in his distinction between human and citizen, and the individuals' inner struggle resulting in their attempt to comply with each role. An example of Maupassant's critique of the law's dismissal of sympathy or understanding of a common humanity, can be found in "Le gueux." After having been rejected consistently by the merciless villagers, a disabled man steals a chicken to appease his hunger, and as he is caught, he is severely condemned and dies the next day in his prison cell. Maupassant stresses the innocence of his character since his crime was only carried out of the instinct to survive, "il lui vint, plutôt au ventre que dans la tête, la sensation plutôt que l'idée qu'une de ces bêtes-là seraient bonnes à manger grillée sur un feu de bois mort. Le soupçon qu'il allait commettre un vol ne l'effleura pas. »<sup>167</sup> Similarly, but with a happy resolution, in « Histoire d'une fille de ferme, » Maupassant highlights the logic behind the farmer's dismissal of social conventions to take in the illegitimate child of his servant who has now become his wife, "Eh bien, on ira le chercher, c't' éfant, puisque nous n'en avons pas ensemble."<sup>168</sup> Despite the social

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<sup>167</sup> Guy de Maupassant, « Le gueux » *Contes Normands* (Paris : le livre de Poche, 2004) 530-531.

<sup>168</sup> Guy de Maupassant, « Histoire d'une fille de ferme » *Contes Normands* (Paris : le livre de Poche, 2004) 152.

condemnation of Rose's situation, the farmer's sterility and wish for progeny, prompts his acceptance of the child. Therefore, if the law made it an obstacle for both characters' happiness, common sense and understanding of both party's needs waive it.

The institution of the Church is particularly criticized by Maupassant in his stories because of its fixed laws that alienate humans from their natural condition, and can cause such an inner repression that it generates appalling violence. A renowned example of human cruelty derived from religious fanaticism can be found in l'abbé Tolbiac's slaughter of a dog's litter in front of a group of young children.<sup>169</sup> The short-story "Clair de lune" also features a rigid clergyman, l'abbé Marignan, who is portrayed as having repressed all his body sensations and natural inclinations in his adoption of a harsh reasoning based on the scriptures. If he views the existence of each element as an expression of God's work, he wonders about the role of women since they only seem to be temptresses for men, seducing them away from their righteous paths. When he learns that his niece is meeting her lover at night, he decides to catch them in what he believes is a sin. The moonlight and the amazing beauty it casts on his walk through the forest, functions as an epiphany for l'abbé Marignan who is awakened to the pleasure of the senses. He ultimately understands the world and the divine creation in its totality by allowing for the possibility of love.

All forms of indoctrinations, religious or ideological, are frowned upon by Maupassant who believes that they stifle the individuals' natural instinctive side through

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<sup>169</sup> This episode can be found in Maupassant's novel *Une vie* (1886).

an internal repression, and cloud their judgment. Rather than doctrinal rules and universal moral law, Maupassant leans towards naturalism in his philosophy of a moral that analyzes each case and expresses a judgement based on the understanding of the individual's circumstances leading to the act. Antonia Fonyi, who understands the structure of Maupassant's stories in relation to their attempt to destabilize accepted notions, perceives a pattern in the opening of the stories with "une prémisse majeure qui énonce une notion de la morale courante de la société à laquelle Maupassant oppose un cas individuel pour démontrer qu'elle n'a qu'une valeur relative."<sup>170</sup> Many of Maupassant's stories relate the trial of one or two characters who are charged with convictions that are as serious as murder, in some of the stories. After the speech of the defendant where they lay out their family history and expose the harsh environment which predisposed them to committing the crime, in most instances the jury finds them not guilty. Maupassant seems to side with the underprivileged, characters who have suffered in their lives from social exclusion and whom public opinion would rather blindly condemn than recognize their shared humanity. Some stories of trial such as "Un parricide" (1882) are intentionally left open-ended by the author, who, through his narrator, calls out the reader to pass the judgment, "Devant cette révélation, l'affaire a été reportée à la session suivante. Elle passera bientôt. Si nous étions jurés, que ferions-nous de ce parricide?"<sup>171</sup> The most poignant story that features such a moral dilemma that the

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<sup>170</sup> Antonia Fonyi « Conte, nouvelle, roman. Les genres du récit et Maupassant » *Relire Maupassant : La maison Tellier, Contes du jour et de la nuit*. Ed. Antonia Fonyi, Pierre Glaudes and Alain Pagès (Paris : Garnier, 2011) 108.

<sup>171</sup> Guy de Maupassant, « Un parricide » *Contes du jour et de la nuit* (Paris : Gallimard, 1984) 175.

reader is purposefully left unable to make judgment, is perhaps “Aux champs.” In this story, Maupassant relates the decision of a miserable family of peasants, the Vallin, to give up their son to a bourgeois couple in exchange of a monetary compensation. The filial love of the neighbor peasant family, the Tuvache, who had refused to give their son away to the same couple, is questioned by Maupassant through a prolepsis that features the return of the Vallin son and exposes the benefits of his education and the gratefulness he expresses towards his parents, while the Tuvache son remains in the same miserable condition and blames his parents for their decision. Furthermore, the magnanimity of the human heart conveyed through the Tuvache’s choice of love over material gain, is yet later on overthrown by the author’s suggestion of the implication of a certain form of selfishness and pride in having refused to give their son away. If Maupassant is influenced by naturalism in some of his stories, he radically diverts from Zola’s experimental and moral approach to literature. As Antonia Fonyi and Alain Pagès argue, Maupassant believes in an all-powerful nature that evades human control. As a moralist in the line of la Rochefoucauld, Maupassant’s texts are the result of a long series of observations on the customs of his time which he transcribes in his fiction, especially careful to render a faithful representation of the rule of egoism and self-love in society.

Far from believing in the perfectibility of humankind, as Pierre Cogy maintains, Maupassant owes his pessimistic vision of the world to Schopenhauer,<sup>172</sup> and to a belief

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<sup>172</sup> Pierre Cogy, *Maupassant : l’homme sans Dieu* (Bruxelles : la Renaissance du livre, 1967).

in what Jean Salem has termed “le caractère impitoyable de notre condition.”<sup>173</sup>

Confronted by the relentlessness of nature, Maupassant’s characters are driven by a strong sense of self-awareness and egoism that urge them to protect their interests first before answering to moral concerns. Even the account of horrific acts are presented through a Spencerian view that partly legitimizes the individual’s effort to impose his will and dominance over others out of the instinct to survive.

Therefore, if regional stereotypes can be found in Maupassant’s texts, they are used to deride and ultimately undermine the very identity they point to, by emphasizing its existence as a cultural construction. Maupassant’s aesthetic process restores individual autonomy in his account of the psychology of characters that extends beyond the limits of their assigned identity, and as well in the reception of the readers who are invited to interpret the text personally through their senses and own moral reason.

## **CULTURAL IDENTITY AND PATRIMONIAL ROOTS**

Maupassant’s communities seem to be encouraging the worst tendencies of human nature. Not only do its individual members hide their selfish motivations behind claims to support the general good, but the narrow definition of identity combined with the prejudices attached to knowledge of the world, exclude others who differ from the community’s norms, and has the potential to destroy lives through the circulation of

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<sup>173</sup> Jean Salem, « Philosophie de Maupassant. » *Les nouveaux chemins de la connaissance*. Natl. Public Radio. France Culture, Paris. 30 Jan. 2008. Radio.

rumors and judgments through public opinion. The dialectic between the individual and the community is illustrated in the story “Un vagabond,” where a man from the neighboring village is rejected by the xenophobic community who views him as an outsider, eventually leading him to commit a crime. Yet, this issue is best treated by Maupassant in his short novel, *Pierre et Jean*. In this story revolving around the secret of Jean’s illegitimate birth, the other son, Pierre is gradually excluded from the family as he tries to uncover the lies on which the family is founded. He is thus portrayed by Maupassant as a character resisting the hypocrisy and complacency of his family. In this story, narratively structured from the start on a symmetry between the two sons, Pierre’s attempts to assert his individuality breaks the pattern and threatens the stability of the family, hence triggering his isolation from the rest of the characters and precipitating his rejection, which signals according to Trevor Harris the tragic “victory of social myth over personal truth.”<sup>174</sup>

Maupassant critiques the process of exclusion of the Other by a community in order to strengthen its cohesion by having its members reaffirm their identity in line with the group. Maupassant’s critique leads him to offer an interesting variation on this social issue. Indeed, from an exterior presence, the figure of the Other is displaced to the interior and only then does it embody a real threat for the individual’s identity. According to Philippe Bonnefis’s remark in his preface to “Le Horla,” the story “L’auberge”

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<sup>174</sup> Trevor Harris, *Maupassant in the Hall of Mirrors: Ironies and repetitions in the work of Guy de Maupassant* (New York: St Martin’s Press: 1990) 70.

exemplifies Maupassant's realization of the impossibility to keep at bay a foreign presence, which in the story is materialized by the reference to a ghost, and which could stand in the author's life for the syphilis that was propagating through his body.<sup>175</sup> According to Bonnefis, the question of the habitat as a reflection of the individual's intimacy is central to Maupassant. Maupassant stories such as "L'auberge," "Le Horla" or "La petite Roque," to name only a few, illustrate the impossibility of containing the exterior and preventing it from influencing the interior. Indeed, no barricade or attempt to destroy the ghostly presence can combat the ineluctability of influence. Ultimately, it is "l'intérieur qui se retire, absorbé en lui-même » as Bonnefis declares (196).

Critics have approached Maupassant's ghost stories through the perspective of the author's disease and the fear of the double triggered by his paranoia. I believe that Francis Marcoin offers a valuable perspective on "Le Horla" as the expression of Maupassant's anxiety of influence, and particularly Gustave Flaubert's influence over this writing. I contend that Maupassant's treatment of cultural identity and roots can be interpreted as another influence that is even more pervasive to the individual's identity since it dwells within the subject, dictating his thoughts and behavior. Indeed, as the panic-stricken narrator of "Le Horla" realizes at the end of the story after having lit his house on fire in a desperate attempt to kill "Le Horla", the ghost that has been haunting his house, it is likely to be still alive and the only solution remaining to get rid of the ghost is to kill himself. It is noteworthy that in all of Maupassant's works, including texts

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<sup>175</sup> Philippe Bonnefis, « commentaires » in *Le Horla* (Paris : Albin Michel, 1984) 196.

that are heavily grounded in the local culture of Normandy, only five references to the notion of roots in the sense of a personal attachment binding an individual to his native region can be found. “Le Horla” features one of the few expression of this attachment, when the narrator explains early in the text, “j’aime ce pays, et j’aime y vivre parce que j’y ai mes racines, ces profondes et délicates racines, qui attachent un homme à la terre où sont nés et morts ses aïeux, qui l’attachent à ce qu’on pense et à ce qu’on mange, aux usages comme aux nourritures, aux locutions locales, aux intonations des paysans, aux odeurs du sol, des villages et de l’air lui-même » (19). In a text that stages the narrator’s anxiety as he senses a presence by his side and its wish to take over him, the narrator’s inability to escape from the ghost turns the mention of the cultural roots into an element of the narrator’s captivity and his enslavement to the Horla.

If Maupassant eludes for the most part the question of roots, the dialectic between mobility and immobility drives his text, leading Louis Forestier to diagnose the author with dromomania which is expressed in his texts in the frenzy of movement that leads his character from one space to the other.<sup>176</sup> Indeed, many of Maupassant’s stories are centered on the experience of a place, with its culture and inhabitants by an outsider, which allows the author to underline the cultural eccentricities of his characters, as well as portray the development of tourism made possible by the technological advancement in modes of transportation. Eventually, as Maupassant demonstrates, all spaces in the national territory are accessible to visitors, thus corroding the borders both physical and

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<sup>176</sup> Jean Pierrot, « Espace et mouvement dans les récits de Maupassant. » *Flaubert et Maupassant, écrivains normands*. Publications de l’Université de Rouen (Paris: PUF, 1981) 167.

ideological between Paris and its regions. Indeed, even the remotest site in Auvergne, where a man has retreated to live like a hermit is reached by the narrator of “l’ermite,” and as for rural Normandy, it is likewise accessible to the Parisian high-bourgeoisie, as illustrated for instance in the couple Hubières who cross the region and decide to adopt a child from a poor family of peasants.

Forestier accounts for Maupassant’s anxiety of immobility as the condition of the modern man who feels tied down to a place by the necessities of professional and familial duties, a feeling perhaps exacerbated by the contrast with the opportunities for mobility generated by the development of transportation.<sup>177</sup> Indeed, the characters who most seem to arouse Maupassant’s pity are the small clerks who, in Maupassant’s view, are alienated by their profession. Framed within a routine, their lives recall a form of enslavement, especially suggested by the limits assigned to their movements, from office to home in an endless and regular pattern. It is a break in the monotonous routine of Mr. Leras -- the onomastics of the character’s name being suggestive of a rat -- when he spontaneously decides to take a walk in the Bois de Boulogne which opens his eyes to the emptiness of his existence and ultimately triggers his suicide.<sup>178</sup>

The tension between the two opposite notions of mobility and immobility is recurrent in the literature of the second half of the century, where authors’ texts stress continuous movement to suggest the instability of the time, as well as the unstoppable

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<sup>177</sup> Louis Forestier, « Mouvement et immobilité chez Guy de Maupassant. » *Moving forward, holding fast: the dynamics of nineteenth-century French culture*. Barbara T. Cooper and Mary Donaldson Evans eds. (Atlanta: Rodopi: 1997) 94.

<sup>178</sup> Guy de Maupassant, « Promenade » *Gil Blas*, May 27, 1884. *Maupassant par les textes*. Web.

development of industry and technology that were taking over human's lives, as in Zola, who contrasts it to the physical determinism affecting the individual and limiting his or her possibilities for advancement.

Maupassant perceived travelling as a means to resist the physical determinism of which his disease constantly reminded him. Indeed, not only was syphilis felt as a menacing presence in his body, threatening his sanity, but his family also experienced a history of depression, which in his brother's case turned out as madness. In his travel narrative, *Au soleil* (1884), Maupassant accounts for his longing for travelling as an urge to flee reality with the monotony of its routine for unknown territories where one can experience sensations and receive new impressions, « Oh ! fuir, partir ! fuir les lieux connus, les hommes, les mouvements pareils aux mêmes heures, et les mêmes pensées surtout. »<sup>179</sup>

The trajectory of Maupassant's career is similar to the successful artists of his time who moved from *la province* to Paris to realize their professional ambitions. Yet, while many of these artists look back at their native province with a form of contempt for their backward lifestyle, as it is the case for Balzac and Zola for instance, Maupassant neither distances himself from Normandy nor does he express a form of nostalgia. As Henri Mitterand has illustrated in his work, Maupassant situates himself in the metaphorical space between Normandy and Paris.<sup>180</sup> Neither claiming his Norman origin

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<sup>179</sup>Jean Pierrot, « Espace et mouvement dans les récits de Maupassant » *Flaubert et Maupassant, écrivains normands*. Publications de l'Université de Rouen (Paris: PUF, 1981) 167.

<sup>180</sup> Henri Mitterand, *Maupassant : Paris-Normandie* (Paris : Hazan, 2010).

nor adopting Paris, he eludes spatial affiliation, and his relation to space is characterized by its multiple travels which took him to the Riviera and to North Africa, as well as in the small trips back and forth between Paris and Normandy. As Francis Marcoin argues in his analysis of Maupassant's relation with his native region, « d'une manière générale, la Normandie est le pays que l'on a quitté et vers lequel on revient, dans un perpétuel mouvement d'allées et venues. »<sup>181</sup> If Maupassant refused during his life to elect a fixed place in which to settle, preferring "la vie errante", as he named his second collection of travel narratives, and rejected as well claims to regional affiliation, he displays an attachment to Normandy in its natural elements, leading Francis Marcoin to conclude that,

aucune revendication identitaire [n'est faite] non plus, face à ce que serait l'omnipotence parisienne, mais un attachement mêlé de détachement au sol, pris ici dans son sens le plus littéral, le sol et pas les gens. Et moins le terroir que la terre, et plus encore la côte, le bord de mer, le ciel, le vent, les vallonnes, presque hors la présence de l'humain pour un paysage schématique, souvent réduit à quelques lignes dans le style d'une estampe japonaise. (111)

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<sup>181</sup> Francis Marcoin, « Maupassant, l'étrangeté du pays natal. » *Le roman et la région*, actes du colloque de Périgueux (Périgueux : La Lauze, 2007) 111.

### Chapter 3: Imagining the Community in Pagnol's Films

Marcel Pagnol's career as a playwright and filmmaker took off in 1928 when the success of his play *Topaze* brought him the fame he had strived for. However, the trajectory of his career was most significantly shaped two years earlier when in 1926 he saw in Brussels the play *Le mariage de Mlle Beulemans*.<sup>182</sup> Anchored in Brussels folklore, this work illustrated to him the potential of local culture to appeal to an audience beyond its borders. Although his first literary attempts in publishing regional works in *Fortunio*, the Marseillais journal he co-founded, had not received the reception he had wished for because of what he attributed to French prejudices against Provençal culture, the success of *Mlle Beulemans* restored his hopes to make Provençal culture the subject of his artistic works, showcasing its specificities and expressing his personal attachment to a culture he believed to be unfairly denigrated.<sup>183</sup> In the small number of issues of *Fortunio*, Pagnol had published several poems referring to elements of his native region of Provence. With the huge success of the Brussels play, it dawned on Pagnol that if the expression of his attachment to Provence through poetry had not been much appreciated, playwriting, a genre in which he had already demonstrated his talent with *Les marchands*

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<sup>182</sup> A Belgian play written by Fernand Wicheler and Frantz Fonson which was very popular when it was first brought to the Belgian stage in 1926 and soon became worldwide success.

<sup>183</sup> As he had moved to Paris to take a teaching position at the Lycée Condorcet, and continued in his spare time to work as the editor of *Fortunio*, he expressed his frustration concerning the prejudices of Parisians against Marseille, “faut-il faire une revue marseillaise ou une revue française? [...] vous ne pouvez imaginer combien les gens d’ici méprisent la Province, et tout particulièrement Marseille. Nous ne méprisons pas autant les nègres », letter to Mouren, November 27, 1922. Quote found in Brett Bowles, *Marcel Pagnol* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012) 31.

*de Gloire* (1925) and *Jazz* (1926), offered different artistic possibilities that could allow for the success of a representation of his native regional culture. In 1960, in a message addressed to the people of Brussels for the fiftieth anniversary of *Le mariage de Mlle Beulemans*, Pagnol explains the impact that the play had over his career, encouraging him to write his first regional play, *Marius*:

vers 1925, parce que je me sentais exilé à Paris, je m'aperçus que j'aimais Marseille et je voulus exprimer cette amitié en écrivant une pièce marseillaise. Des amis et des aînés m'en dissuadèrent: ils me dirent qu'un ouvrage aussi local, qui mettait en scène des personnages affublés d'un accent aussi particulier, ne serait certainement pas compris hors des Bouches-du-Rhône, et qu'à Marseille même, il serait considéré comme un travail d'amateur. Ces raisons me parurent fortes et je renonçai à mon projet : mais, en 1926, je vis jouer *Le Mariage de Mlle Beulemans* ; ce chef-d'œuvre avait déjà seize ans et son succès avait fait le tour du monde. Ce soir-là, j'ai compris qu'une œuvre locale, mais profondément sincère et authentique, pouvait parfois prendre place dans le patrimoine littéraire d'un pays et plaire dans le monde entier.<sup>184</sup>

The notions of sincerity and authenticity which Pagnol lists as responsible for the success of the play, and which he recommends to a larger extent as guidelines to the creation of a regional work are rather vague and thus call for critical attention. The sincerity that he praises and that will dominate his regional works seems to echo the reference to his personal experience of Paris as a place of “exile” in contrast to his familiarity and attachment he felt to Provence, constructed as a relation of “friendship.” While the sincere aspect of his regional works can thereby be grasped, the notion of authenticity is more problematic as not only is it a ubiquitous concern for fictional works,

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<sup>184</sup> Hervé Pichard, online posting for the advertisement of the restored version of the Marseille Trilogy, *Agence pour le Développement Régional du Cinéma*, 2015. Web. 12 Nov. 2016.

but it also could be antithetic to the notion of sincerity which calls for the author's personal investment in the object of the representation. Moreover, the idea of authenticity brought forward by Pagnol seems hardly compatible with the genre of the melodrama which defines for instance the trilogy, *Marius*, *Fanny* and *César*, and whose comic relief dwells partly in the cultural particularities expressed through each of the characters. Indeed, as comedy's main trigger, humor is prone to turn ethnotypes into stereotypes which are usually considered as counter to authentic representation. Although Pagnol refers in his works to various stereotypical character traits and cultural aspects, his representation of Provence has been widely accepted and appreciated in the region as well as far beyond its borders. The popularity of this particular regional author among many other regional artists, and whose works have resisted the passage of time through their lasting appeal, forms one of the underlying inquiries of my examination of Pagnol's works. As an author who has been institutionalized through the use of his works in school programs in France and whose representation focuses on *la région* in ways that exalt traditional values, Marcel Pagnol's works have been given the label of reactionary, which this chapter will challenge. Many critics have linked Pagnol's popularity to an atemporal, or anachronistic according to some, representation of regional France as a place of refuge from modern time and the political, economic and social concerns that were rising in this period of uncertainty that was the interwar years through the aftermath of World War II. As I demonstrate, Pagnol's representation of the region of Provence and in particular his treatment of traditional values such as family, community and agricultural work reflect instead the transformation of the traditional structure of *la région* and French society as a

whole as it attempted to transition from a traditional socio-economic model to one responding to the need to adapt to rural exodus, face foreign economic competition as well as remain unified as a nation in the face of the threat to national security. Therefore, I contend that Pagnol's biographical novel, *Souvenirs d'enfance*, which is also his most popular work, has projected a nostalgic tone onto his writing of *la région* when through the modernity of cinema, Pagnol rather tackles the challenges that the nation was facing.

### **LA RÉGION'S IDEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE**

The center's hegemony in the construction of France's national identity has led Foucault to define the nineteenth-century's emerging regional voice through authors defending the cultural specificities of their native province as a form of counter-discourse to the standardized and rationalized construction of the nation's identity. While the capital's urbanity stood for an illustration of the accomplishment of reason as indebted to the Enlightenment, *la province* was dialectically constructed by the dominant discourse in opposing terms, hence as a feminine space dominated by emotion. Under the Félibrige, Frédéric Mistral attempted to gather and organize regionalist aspirations of writers from the south of France who searched for an artistic expression able to restore a sense of pride and protect the heritage of the southern regional cultures in particular through the preservation of the Occitan language. The movement split in 1896 when political claims and their attack of the centralist regime took over the cultural concerns which had originally founded the Félibrige. While Charles Maurras advocated for a return to the

monarchy as the only regime offering a federalist structure able to endow *la région* with a certain autonomy, republican writer and politician Maurice Barrès actively defended local patriotism as one of the fundamental elements of his “revenchard” propaganda. What this brief historical overview of some of the major cultural and political discourses focused on *la région* suggests is that despite *la région*’s versatile application to support opposite ideologies, it embodies the cultural roots of the nation, and as such, it has served as the foundation for essentialist claims of French identity. Moreover, *la région* has been viewed as a reservoir of the strength of the nation, insuring the country a revenue from agricultural exports as well as means of subsistence for its population. This perspective has been most prevailing in the aftermath of the two world wars. Already after the Franco-Prussian war Jules Méline, deputy of the Vosges and minister of agriculture from 1896-1898, had implemented protectionist measures, claiming in « le retour à la terre et la surproduction industrielle» (1905) that « il ne reste plus qu'un seul champ d'action et d'expansion capable d'absorber toutes les forces sans emploi, et celui-là a l'avantage d'être inépuisable, au moins pour des siècles ; c'est la terre [...] qui ne laisse jamais mourir de faim ceux qui l'aiment et se confient à elle [...] Donc, retournons à la terre et dirigeons de ce côté le plus que nous pourrons l'attention du grand public. »<sup>185</sup> This rhetoric of a return to the land was resumed in the period of reconstruction following World War I and the economic crisis that accompanied it. The interwar period which most interests us here because of the context it provides to the majority of Pagnol’s films,

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<sup>185</sup> Jules Méline, *Le retour à la terre et la surproduction industrielle* (Paris : Librairie Hachette et Cie., 1906) 97.

is defined by the ambiguity of French politics in its simultaneous desire to modernize the country so as to be able to resist foreign competition in a world economy, while safekeeping its traditions, hence the various regional cultures which make its identity.

This last aspect was met with a sense of urgency as the 1931 national census exposed the abandonment of rural life through exodus to the cities and its consequence -- a phenomenon nowadays known as the “desertification” of *la province* -- by revealing that for the first time in French history, the urban population had outnumbered the population living in rural France. As a great part of the population flocked to the capital, lured by its promises of social advancement and economic prosperity, the existing divide due to centralization and its monopolizing forces in industry and technology in the capital widened. In her study of the 1937 world fair taking place in Paris, Shanny Peer argues for the relevancy of the fair as a reflection of the political orientation taken by the Popular Front in its effort to change the image of *la région*. Incorporating rural France in the rhetoric of progress and modernity, the fair hoped to emphasize its dynamism. Indeed, the fair was set up so that the exhibition of modern themes stood alongside a “rural center” where twenty-seven pavilions presented the architecture and traditional lifestyle of each of France’s regions. As Peer argues,

the 1937 formula for modernization *à la française* presumed that the French did not have to follow a prescribed path (patterned, for example, after the American model) toward ever greater industrial concentration, mechanization, and standardization, but could instead selectively adopt new methods and adapt them to local, regional and national practices and preferences. And rather than advocating a protectionist retrenchment from competition in the growing national and international market

economy, fair organizers suggested how French farmers, regional artisans, and other producers could capitalize on traditional French strengths.<sup>186</sup>

What Peer suggests is that in the 1930s the French government realized that promoting regional cultures could provide a remedy to the internal crisis triggered by rural exodus, and at the same time ensure a French specificity in the country's exports deriving from the quality and diversity of its regional products, thus allowing the country's economy to resist the rise of foreign competition in the international market. The United-States in particular were becoming a threat since the introduction of scientific methods of production by Frederick Winslow Taylor and developed by Henry Ford in the interwar years had led to great productivity and to the flow of its manufactured products following a national business model that privileged innovation and expansion. In order to compete, France adopted an alternative economic path which made regional cultures a foundation of the country's economy and an ethical model for the future of the nation.

## **THE RETURN TO THE LAND**

Scholars have established the causal link between the two wars, agreeing that the harsh provisions of the Treaty of Versailles at the end of World War I led to Germany's dishonor and desire for vengeance, and triggered an economic depression, all of which were eventually responsible for the implementation of the Third Reich and the escalation

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<sup>186</sup> Shanny Peer, *France on Display: Peasants, Provincials, and Folklore in the 1937 Paris World's Fair* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998) 2.

to war. Romy Golan argues that a continuation is visible as well in the French cultural production of the interwar years and the Vichy regime. As he claims, “the cultural production before Vichy helped naturalize and make Pétain’s ‘révolution nationale’ seem benign.”<sup>187</sup> Indeed, although France stood among the winners of World War I, the human and material damage caused by the war shaped France’s self-image as a victimized nation, conjuring up as well notions of a rural, feudal, and feminized France. According to Golan, “this weakened self-image protracted itself in France’s craving for self-infantilization during the years of Vichy” (x). In reaction, a glorification of the natural soil and racial purity animated the artistic expression of the interwar years such as in the visual arts where landscape paintings supported regionalist ideologies in their representation of the strength and cultural vitality of France as linked to its rootedness in the soil. The intellectual milieu was split between the wish to restore France as it was before the war and the desire to break away from the norms and structures of the past so as to build a new society. To the “retour à l’ordre” under the lead of Jean Cocteau and its poetics based on a reinterpretation of the classical ideal, André Breton opposed his surrealist poetics with its advocacy of the destruction of tradition for the creation of new images, ultimately leading to the shaping of a new reality.

The political realm manifested the same longing for a return to the land as found in the cultural production of the interwar years. In 1919, Jules Méline published *Le salut par la terre* in which he further developed his ideological stance and his belief that

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<sup>187</sup> Romy Golan, *Modernity and Nostalgia. Art and Politics in France between the Wars* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995) xi.

France should invest its energy in agriculture. Méline and his followers saw in the land the unique ability to answer to the immediate needs of France by feeding its population, as well as a way to restore the power of the country both domestically and abroad. Moreover, as France was counting its losses from the war, it came to light that with over half a million of deaths, the French peasantry had suffered the most. As Romy Golan suggests, the victory of Verdun and the overall defeat of the Germans was attributed to a great part to the tenacity of the peasants both on the combat fields and on their farms, ultimately shaping them as heroic figures.

This representation of the peasantry is present in Pagnol's films, especially through his 1930s series of adaptations of Giono's novels. Pagnol's film *Regain* (1937) responds the most directly to the ideology of the time and its effort to reconstruct the country's economy through the promotion of agriculture and the encouragement of natality. The symbolic component of *Regain* is compelling to the extent that it appears as a parable for the reconstruction of France in the interwar years as it faced rural exodus and economic crisis. Indeed, the story features the rebirth of a deserted village thanks to the hard work of the land by the only remaining inhabitant, Panturle, as he is being joined by Arsule, a woman who "magically" appears in this hostile area of the high plateaus of Provence and who helps Panturle by caring for him and by joining his efforts in his agricultural endeavors. The film ends on a long shot of Arsule and Panturle sowing the earth and as it zooms in on the characters, Arsule reveals her pregnancy to Panturle, thus underlining the parallel between the fertility of the land and Arsule's, and thereby

advocating for procreation as well as agricultural work as ways to ultimately restore the economy and rebuild the country.

In contrast to the valorization of rural life, the city is here portrayed in a negative light. Indeed, if the countryside encapsulates moral values attached to work and respect for others as well as for the offerings of the soil, the city is associated with vice and suffering. *Angèle* (1934) illustrates the dichotomy between the urban and the rural world through the eponymous character's self-degradation as she is unwittingly brought to Marseille where she falls into prostitution. She is able to recover self-respect and ultimately comes to live a happy and dignified life by leaving Marseille and returning to her native countryside where her family lives. The success of her rehabilitation to rural life is foreshadowed at the end of the film by the speech of Albin, the peasant neighbor whose unwavering love makes him rescue Angèle from the solitary confinement in which her father has kept her as a punishment for her departure and the subsequent life she led in Marseille. As Albin asks Angèle's father, Clarius, for her hand, he describes the life he envisions for Angèle and himself as one founded on the working of the fertile land of his estate and on the love for the family he imagines they will have. The idealized description of rural life as conveyed through Albin's speech is echoed by the last sequence of the film which features Angèle and Albin in a long shot as they walk up the hill to their new home as a couple. As they move away from the camera, the vision of the green pasture is met with the background sound of chirping birds which ultimately aligns the film with the rural ideology of the time. Moreover, as Brett Bowles points out, Pagnol's emphasis on maternity through the pregnancy of the young female characters in his films, such as

Arsule and Angèle coincides with the natalist propaganda of the 1930s in France.<sup>188</sup> Indeed, the support of the rise of birth rate in the interwar years was perceived as a remedy to France's national decline and to its national security. Bowles's analysis of *Angèle* goes as far as to argue that Angèle's baby stands as "a symbol of France's moral decadence turned into a source of national strength and renewal" (173).

The moral redemption bestowed on the characters thanks to the qualities of rural life is strongly featured in *Regain* as well. Indeed, the film introduces Arsule as an unsuccessful artist from a Parisian theatrical troupe who has just been sexually abused by a group of men in the village in which she performed. After being rescued by an itinerant worker named Gédemus and played by Fernandel, Arsule becomes exploited again when Gédemus makes her pull his cart through the mountainous roads of the Provence hill country. Her life with Panturle on his farm is what helps her recover self-esteem and find happiness. The grim portrait of city-life in contrast to the rural is brought back to the audience when, discussing her origin with Panturle, and as they compare their solitude, Arsule declares about her experience of Paris "des fois, on peut-être entouré de beaucoup de gens et, quand même, on est plus seul que jamais."<sup>189</sup>

Just as Angèle returns to her native area and her family home when her illusions about Marseille are crushed by her direct experience of the city and its criminality, other films by Pagnol feature the ultimate return of characters whose curiosity and attraction to new horizons have initially led to reject their place of origins along with their family's

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<sup>188</sup> Brett Bowles, *Marcel Pagnol* (Manchester : Manchester University Press, 2012).

<sup>189</sup> Marcel Pagnol, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Editions de Fallois, 1995) 2: 562.

heritage. Marius, in the *Marseille Trilogy*, is the prototype of the young adventurer whose eagerness to discover new and exotic territories prompts him to forsake his father and the woman he loves, Fanny. However, as Marius finds out, there is no better place on earth than one's home. Indeed, soon disenchanted by his travels, Marius returns home hoping to reintegrate his life on *le vieux port*. If some of Pagnol's works such as *Angèle* and *Regain* illustrate a dichotomy between city and countryside, in other works such as the *Marseille Trilogy* these binaries are substituted for Paris and *la province*. The core of this opposition really lies in the contrast, highlighted in *Marius*, between the place of origins and the unfamiliar place, made attractive by its promises of opportunities, glamour or exoticism.

Although *Le Schpountz* (1937) seems at first to stage the same dialectic as the films discussed above, its ending is much more ambiguous and seems to challenge the author's unequivocal defense of the primacy of the individual's spatial and familial roots. The film features the character of Irénée Fabre, played by Fernandel, who decides to follow a Parisian theatrical troupe to the capital. Thereby, he favors his personal ambition and his dream of becoming an actor and leaves behind his family, undermining his uncle's hope to see Irénée take over the grocery shop he owns in *la province*. Irénée's career exposes him to the rampant corruption and deceit in the cinema industry in the capital, yet as the film suggests, his return to his native province at the end of the film is intended merely as a visit to reunite with his family and reassure them of his rightful decision to leave. Nevertheless, if the film validates Irénée's departure from his native province through his subsequent success in his profession and romantic life, it is in

recognition of his innate talent for acting and his personality which made him unfit as a salesman in his uncle's grocery store and required that he move to the capital to be fulfilled in his life. Therefore, Pagnol seems to make a distinction between Irénée's departure and Marius' on the basis of the motives that led to each of them. While Irénée leaves to follow his calling, Marius departs because he believes the life in store for him, a life spent with Fanny and working in the local bar that his father owns, is not enough to fulfill his aspirations. Quite interestingly, a type of figure similar to Marius is mentioned in *Le Schpountz* in the scene of Irénée's return and reunion with his family. Irénée's uncle, who at first is tricked into believing that Irénée failed to realize his ambitions in Paris, reveals to him a letter written by Irénée's father. This "lettre de noblesse de l'épicerie" as the uncle names it, expresses the regrets of Irénée's father for having despised the opportunities offered to him in his native town, and thus for having believed that he could realize greater ambitions elsewhere in some faraway exotic countries. As he states in his letter,

il m'est arrivé bien souvent de te reprocher ton métier et de me moquer de l'épicerie. Au moment où ma vie est en danger, je tiens à te dire que de nous deux, c'est toi qui avait raison. Mes courses inutiles à travers le monde, mes prétentions, ma vanité, tout cela va peut-être finir chez les nègres, sous une tente, ce qui est absurde.

'Toi, tu es dans notre village, sous ton platane et tu te guéris de n'avoir pas d'enfants en te dévouant pour les miens. Va, mon frère, il n'est pas ridicule de couper des tranches de saucisson si on les coupe pour quelqu'un.

[...] j'ai voulu te dire que tu as eu une belle, une heureuse, une noble vie, parce que toi, tu auras accomplis ta tâche, si humble soit-elle, avec confiance et bonne humeur, tu auras connu la paix verte de notre village, la gloire d'être utile et l'honneur de servir.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Marcel Pagnol, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Editions de Fallois, 1995) 2: 753.

The adventurer who left his hometown full of contempt for this French provincial life and who, in the case of Irenée's father, even abandoned his children to the care of his brother, is severely punished for a decision that is interpreted as an act of selfishness. The mention of such a trivial detail as the slices of saucisson is certainly a way for Pagnol to alleviate the dramatic undertone of the letter and preserve the comic aspect of his film, but it is also a demonstration of Pagnol's rhetoric that remains grounded in the reality of the existence of *le peuple*. By displacing the honor and virtue from the adventurer to the mere provincial shop keeper, Pagnol defends the artisanal professions and small businesses in *la province* that were being jeopardized by rural exodus and as such threatened the whole economy of *la région* and the life of its remaining inhabitants. As Pagnol argued, "la disparition possible du petit commerce et de l'artisanat constitue une menace terrible pour le paysan."<sup>191</sup> Pagnol's defense of artisanal professions in his films finds an echo in his conception of cinema and his method of production which resisted industrial film practices and the monopoly of major companies, and instead brought on the market unique artisanal films produced by his company starting in 1934 when he implemented his film studios in Marseille, hence performing his own return to *la région*.

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<sup>191</sup> Marcel Pagnol, *Inédits*, (Paris: Vertiges du Nord-Carrère, 1987) 75.

## PROVENCE AS HOME FOR PAGNOL AND HIS CINEMA

The return to *la province*, which defines the trajectory of most of Pagnol's characters, can be applied as well to his professional career. After having left his native Provence for Paris to fill in a position as a school teacher, a period during which he wrote several of his plays, and following the film adaptation of his plays *Marius* in 1931 and *Fanny* in 1932, Pagnol returned to Marseille in 1934, once he had earned enough notoriety and a financial autonomy allowing him to found his own film studios. His first experience with Paramount in the production of *Marius* and *Fanny* had been rather positive thanks to his collaboration with the filmmakers of these two movies, respectively Alexander Korda and Marc Allégret, and their respect for Pagnol's original artistic intentions and his suggestions in the making of the films. Korda's particular attention to the setting, on which he worked with his brother who arranged much of the set's background, along with the filmmaker's use of the evocative power of sound, prompts scholar Dudley Andrew to remark that "Korda has instinctively understood that a single shot of the harbor was all the vista he needed, because this was the drama of a particular locale and of the characters at one with that locale."<sup>192</sup> Although the first two films of the Trilogy were originally meant for the theater and as such, they naturally suggested the lack of development of the setting, as Korda rightly understood in his direction of *Marius, le vieux port* formed the crux of the plot and thus deserved special attention in the realization of the film. Indeed, as a place mediating between the sea and the community on shore, the old harbor reflects Marius'

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<sup>192</sup> Dudley Andrew, "Sound in France: the Origins of a Native School." *Rediscovering French Films*. Ed. Mary Lea Bandy (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1983) 59.

inner conflict as he is torn between domesticity and giving in to his dream of travelling on the sea and discovering new territories. Korda visually suggests Marius' dilemma when for instance he shoots from the inside of *le bar de la marine* where Marius is standing, a view on the exterior with Fanny selling seashells at the forefront and in the background, the sea, Marius' other love. The film's soundtrack contributes as well in giving predominance and verisimilitude to the old harbor. Not only are the sound of seagulls frequently heard in the background, but the horn marking the arrival or departure of boat is a trigger that sets Marius in a reverie and pushes the drama forward.

Unfortunately, Pagnol also went through a disastrous collaboration with Louis Gasnier in the Paramount production of *Topaze* in 1932. Pagnol attributed the failure of the film to Gasnier's removal of some of the dialogues and his use of artificial sets.<sup>193</sup> When he acquired full control over his films as filmmaker and producer, Pagnol used to its maximum potential the technologies that existed at the time to shoot his films outdoors. *Angèle* was very innovative in this way since it was the first French sound picture to be filmed entirely outdoors on location. To avoid renting a studio, but also as I argue, in order to forefront Provence and develop the location's sensualism and a cultural demarcation, Pagnol's insisted on shooting outdoors despite its potential negative impact on the sound quality of some of the dialogues and other related inconveniences. Accordingly, he bought a farm as the setting for *Angèle*, built the ruins of a whole village to re-create Aubignane in *Regain*, and used the location of his childhood village, la Treille, for *Jofroi* (1934) and

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<sup>193</sup> The injustice made to his original script by Gasnier compelled Pagnol to make two other versions of *Topaze* in 1936 and in 1950.

*Manon des Sources* (1952). Naturally, this ambitious enterprise drew much publicity which Pagnol seized as an opportunity for the marketing of his films. Pagnol recognized very soon in his filmmaking career that the success of his movies, such as *Jofroi* and *Angèle*, could be attributed to the enthusiasm of the audience for the sensualist appeal of Provence landscape and culture. As one critic declared in his review of *Jofroi* when it came out, “ici pas de décor au pistolet. On nous donne de la campagne, des champs qui fument, des branches qui pendent. Avant tout, l’accent des gens chante.»<sup>194</sup> Likewise, another critic writing for the journal *Comoedia* observes about *Angèle*, “l’histoire d’*Angèle* demeure émouvante par son ton de vérité et de naturel. Parfumé d’un plaisant goût de terroir et d’optimisme, le ‘tout s’arrange’ semble surgir du sol même.»<sup>195</sup>

Emphasizing the cultural specificities of Provence enabled Pagnol to provide a strong spatial anchoring for his films, and thereby produce essentially French movies able to repel the foreign competition that was attempting to take over the French film industry. Indeed, throughout the late 1920s and 1930s, the French movie industry strove to resist the hegemony that America and Germany were implementing over cinema. The respite given to French film producers thanks to the advent of sound was short-lived since the technological innovations that followed found ways to remedy the obstacle of the language for film exportations via the techniques of multiple language versions or dubbing. However, as Martine Danan remarks, the French audience was very particular about the

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<sup>194</sup> Brett Bowles, *Marcel Pagnol* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012) 151.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

language used in the films, thus multiple language films were soon rejected because of the foreign actors' poor French accents, and dubbing had to be perfected before being adopted by the French.<sup>196</sup> Dudley Andrews adds that despite these technological advancements allowing foreign film imports in France, the national audience still longed to view their own culture represented on screen. As the major American and German film companies became aware of that, they decided to work with French filmmakers to produce French films, and for these means they established residency in France, Paramount and the German film company Tobis setting up an office in the Paris area respectively in 1930 and 1929. In this context of heightened competition worsened by the economic crisis and the state's refusal to nationalize French cinema, the cinema industry in France was relentless towards independent filmmakers who most frequently went bankrupt. Nevertheless, as Bowles suggests, the state's lack of involvement encouraged the expression of individual creativity and genius in these independent filmmakers such as Renoir, Carné, Clair and Pagnol, whose success then allowed them to build their notoriety and ensure the circulation of their next films. Not only did Pagnol emphasize French cultural identity by grounding his films in the locale, but he also displayed a very personal method of filmmaking which brought forth an "esprit de camaraderie." The relaxed and friendly atmosphere that accompanied the shooting of the films was indeed once described with irony by Fernandel as, "entre deux parties de boules, nous faisons un peu de cinema."<sup>197</sup> Moreover, his lack of technical

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<sup>196</sup> Martine Danan, "Hollywood's Hegemonic Strategies: Overcoming French Nationalism with the Advent of Sound." *Film Europe and Film America: cinema, commerce, and cultural exchange 1920-1939*. Eds. Andrew Higson and Richard Maltby (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999).

<sup>197</sup> Sylvie Nougrou, "La bande à Pagnol." *Le Figaro* (special issue) June 2015, 68. Print.

rigor made him stand out from the American cinema industry and its emphasis on efficiency and productivity. Jean Renoir even parallels Pagnol's cinema to the traditional production of an artisan when he declares, "les Films Marcel Pagnol fonctionnaient à la façon d'un atelier de Moyen Age. [...] Dans sa maison de campagne, [Pagnol] accueillait ses techniciens, acteurs et ouvriers comme l'eût fait un maître charpentier du XVème siècle. »<sup>198</sup>

Likewise, Pagnol distanced himself and his production from the genre of Poetic Realism that was thriving. Though driven by the same populist intentions, Pagnol could see the limits of this representation which focused mostly on the space of Paris and on blue-collar workers. Returning to Provence may have been as much a way to reconnect with his native origins as a search for the nation's origins in its neo-latin roots which, as Claudette Peyrusse argues, were brought to the fore by French southern cinema in the interwar years and even more so in the 1940s when France was under German occupation. Because of the partition of France and the free zone until 1942, the cinema of the South of France was regarded as the expression of a genuine and free French identity. Pagnol's populist aspiration and his personal attachment to Provence made him choose southern farmers, artisans and shop keepers as the subjects of his films. His non-elitism is also demonstrated once again in his filmmaking process since he picked as his cast some non-professional actors to play leading roles in his films, such as Henri Poupon as Fonse and Vincent Scotto

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid, 67.

as Jofroi in the eponymous film.<sup>199</sup> Pagnol valued the spontaneity and sincerity that non-professional actors were able to convey, and he even allowed for some improvisation in the dialogues.

With its grim and fatalist view of the existence of the urban working-class, Poetic Realism tackled the harsh reality of the difficult economic times of the 1930s and the failure of the promises made by the Popular Front. Conversely, moving the spotlight to Provence, Pagnol offered a message of hope by rejecting the belief in determinism and illustrating instead the potential for people to unite and bond within a community despite their personal differences and their quirks. The laudatory portrait of peasants or provincial men which reveals itself behind their often brutal or primitive looks, as well as the circulation of the traditional values preserved within the regional culture of Provence, pleased an audience of diverse political views. For instance, the bi-monthly magazine *La revue de la famille* saw in *Jofroi* a fraternal message contributing to strengthening the national union : “ces images vraies et directement humaines feront mieux connaître le visage de nos cultivateurs. Nous voulons croire qu’au sortir de la salle, tourneurs et comptables, ouvriers et employés se sentiront plus près de leurs frères de la terre. »<sup>200</sup>

Similarly, *La cinématographie française* praised Pagnol’s art for liberating cinema from the confined and gloomy environment of Poetic Realism, declaring, “le cinéma doit par moments s’évader des bureaux, des boîtes de nuit et des bouges pour nous élever, en

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<sup>199</sup> Scotto was the original music composer for *Fanny*, while Poupon was a singer-song writer whom Pagnol met through Raimu and whose career was launched by his performance in *Jofroi*.

<sup>200</sup> Brett Bowles, *Marcel Pagnol* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012) 169.

pleine nature, sous le soleil et les nuages de Dieu.”<sup>201</sup> The heritage of Provence with its culture and landscape is central to Pagnol’s works as his aesthetic choices demonstrate along with the films’ critical reception. If Pagnol’s 1930s films seem to embrace the ideology circulating in the interwar years and its promotion of a traditional agriculture and artisanal production, they also seem to question the limits of this model in guaranteeing productivity and competitiveness internationally, and most importantly its ability to stop rural exodus.

#### **PEASANTS INTO FARMERS: CHANGES IN THE RELATION TO THE LAND IN *JOFROI***

*Jofroi* (1934), a film adapted from a short-story by Jean Giono, deals in a comedic manner with the suicide blackmail of the eponymous character to pressure Fonce, the man who has just purchased a plot of land from him to preserve the old orchards trees, and thus foregrounds the troubling transition to a new agricultural model based on entrepreneurship rather than on a personal relation to the land. The modernization of agriculture and the changes it triggered on the lifestyle and culture of *la région* forms in that way the crux of the plot of *Jofroi*. Giono and Pagnol offer a reflection of major regional changes already taking place in their time but which would only been theorized in the late 1960s with Henri Mendras’ groundbreaking publication *La fin des paysans, innovations et changement dans l’agriculture française* (1967). As its title suggests, Mendras’ work describes indeed the reshuffling of the French peasantry as farming no longer entailed a specific lifestyle relying

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

on the land and on the seasons' cycles but defined instead a relation to the land mediated by the search for productivity. This shift led Mendras to implement a new taxonomy differentiating between the notions of peasantry and agriculture. As he explains in his work, if the peasants' culture of the land implied a respect and attachment for it as a resource answering to the direct needs of their family and community, the farmers' agriculture became defined in terms of economics. The constant search for better productivity through the improvement of farming methods and mechanization, turned the farmer into a form of entrepreneur. The transition between these two modes of farming and the lifestyle they imply is reflected in *Jofroi*. As the film suggests, the conflict between Jofroi and Fonce is one that lies in these two opposing viewpoints on farming which are paradigmatic of the two characters' respective generation. Jofroi clearly belongs to an older generation of peasants as his old age suggests, as does his distrust towards the meddling of the law into private affairs which is evident in the opening scene at the notary in Pagnol's film. And indeed, the legal contract Jofroi signs there is swiftly discarded by the latter in the next scene when he chases Fonce away from the orchard by threatening to shoot him if he uproots another tree from the orchard. While Fonce treats the plot of land he has purchased from Jofroi in terms of productivity, thus implying the necessity to remove the trees that no longer offer any fruits to plant some profitable crop instead, "un blé qui vient du Canada",<sup>202</sup> Jofroi displays an affective bond to the land and to its living species, which makes Fonce's project unacceptable and turns him into what Jofroi repetitively terms an

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<sup>202</sup> Marcel Pagnol, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Editions de Fallois, 1995) 2: 116.

“assassin d’arbres.” In Jofroi’s humanizing conception of farming, nature should be treated with respect and thus should not be the victim of the arrogance and cupidity of humankind as illustrated in Fonce’s attitude towards the land. Both for the environmentalist that is Giono as well as for Pagnol,<sup>203</sup> Jofroi’s plea for the protection of the old orchard trees he has nursed throughout the years arouses compassion. However, Pagnol slightly departs from the original text when he stresses the comic nature of Jofroi’s successive suicide blackmail attempts through their stage performance, such as in the scene where Jofroi threatens to jump from a rooftop and where the low-angle shots convey the perception of the villagers who have gathered in front of the house and who try to persuade him to renounce to ending his life. Thereby, Pagnol emphasizes the presence of an audience which downplays the dramatic aspect of Jofroi’s suicide attempt and the cause he is fighting for by turning him into an object of spectacle for the whole community. Similarly, Pagnol’s talent for dialogues where pathos and humor are combined is expressed in Jofroi’s rhetoric of defense of the trees which openly personifies them. Drawing a parallel between the death of humans and of trees, Jofroi declares to the vicar, “nous, quand nous mourrons, ce n’est pas fini! ... Mais les arbres! Il n’y a pas de paradis des arbres!” (121), and he continues by attributing human traits to his apricot trees, “je dis qu’ils sont très vieux, c’est vrai, il y a même un abricotier qui commence à devenir gaga, et qui pousse des branches en tire-bouchon » (122). Unsurprisingly, Pagnol’s humor was not fully accepted by Giono who

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<sup>203</sup> Giono’s literature displays a strong concern for environmental issues which is said to have made him a precursor for the modern ecological movement.

thought that “the comedy Pagnol added to the level of pathos and sobriety of his texts pervaded his aesthetics and the social responsibility of his texts.”<sup>204</sup> In the dual opposing Jofroi and Fonce’s irreconcilable conception of farming, it is significant to notice the choice made to end the story with Jofroi’s natural death and Fonce’s decision to operate a compromise between Jofroi’s last wishes to preserve the old trees and his own farming plan on growing a profitable crop.<sup>205</sup> This ending thus illustrates the position embraced by the two authors who seem to recognize the necessity to modernize agriculture by privileging productivity in order to adjust to the needs of the market and ensure stable earnings for the population depending on it, while attempting to respect as much as possible the heritage of the peasantry and the balance with nature.

#### **NATIONAL UNITY IN RESPONSE TO THE RISE OF FASCISM IN EUROPE**

Pagnol’s focus on Provence and on the dramas affecting its small communities in his narratives has earned his films the label of “ahistorical.” Indeed, commenting on the Trilogy, a critic declares that “the recent past (meaning World War I) is scarcely remembered; the near future, with its political upheavals and new war, is not yet an anxiety. As for the present, you would hardly know there’s a Depression, attended by worldwide labor unrest.”<sup>206</sup> If Pagnol does not stage in his films topical international issues or threats

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<sup>204</sup> Brett Bowles, *Marcel Pagnol* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012) 186.

<sup>205</sup> Out of respect for Jofroi, Fonce finds a compromise by uprooting many trees from the orchard but leaving the ones not hindering his farming.

<sup>206</sup> Stuart Klawans, “film/DVD; the man who taught French films to talk.” *New York Times*. Web. 13 June 2014.

France was grappling with as the Second World War was becoming imminent, his movies reflect the internal struggles that the country was undergoing in its response to the economic crisis and rural exodus as discussed above, as well as its attempt to ensure national unity in the advent of the breakout of the war. Indeed, while some socio-political struggles and propositions for reforms brought forward by Pagnol are specific to *la région*, he also seems to be using the small communities of Provence as metonymic examples of the nation at large and the need to resolve its existing divisions to foster unity.

If we compare *Toni* (1935), another film from that period which is set in the south of France and produced by Pagnol's film company and filmed by Jean Renoir, we would be tempted to believe that in his films Pagnol disregards the social issues of his time, such as the substantial immigration coming from Spain, Italy and other neighboring Mediterranean countries which are illustrated in *Toni*. However, if in the Trilogy for instance the presence of foreigners is limited to a few crew members from the international cargo ships stopping in the Marseille harbor, it does stage the interaction between the community and an outsider in the figure of one of the movies' main character, the Lyonnais Mr. Brun. His lack of a provençal accent makes him stand out right away from the rest of the characters who take advantage of his limited knowledge about the local culture to trick him, as for instance when he is convinced by Honoré Panisse to buy his dysfunctional sail boat. Certainly, in the trilogy Pagnol plays with the cultural gap between the different regions of France and their respective cities, such as Lyon and Marseille. Much of the humor of the trilogy derives indeed from the ignorance and gullibility of the native community of *le Vieux Port* and Mr. Brun in respect to one another's culture. An

illustration of this comic device can be found in the scene early on in the film when Mr. Brun is back from a professional trip in Paris and is being asked by César whether he has ran into an acquaintance of his. Mr. Brun's explanation of the unlikeliness of such an encounter due to the dimension of the capital, "forty times the size of Marseille," arouses the incredulity of César and the community. Nevertheless, if in the trilogy the regional differences are approached through comic relief, they shift in the course of Pagnol's career and mainly after World War II to become as source of distrust and conflict, to the extent of triggering a major tragedy as it is the case in *Jean de Florette* and *Manon des Sources*.<sup>207</sup> By confronting characters from different regional origins, Pagnol discusses the existing divisions within the French nation.

*La femme du boulanger* (1938), another film adaptation from a passage of Giono's novel *Jean le Bleu* (1932) perhaps offers the most intense reflection on the conflicts stirring society at the time. Indeed, as Brett Bowles argues in his study of the movie, "the village serves as a microcosm of Third-Republic France that shows the detrimental effect of party politics on rural society and the nation as a whole."<sup>208</sup> Filmed in the aftermath of the Popular Front, as the Second World War was under way, this moral tale can be understood as a cathartic attempt to resolve the political and class conflicts which were seen as

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<sup>207</sup> Pagnol filmed in 1952 *Manon des sources* followed by a second part entitled *Ugolin*. It is only ten years later, in 1963 that he decided to write the novels based on these two films, *Jean de Florette* and *Manon des sources*, hence dedicating a whole novel to Manon's remembrances of her childhood and her father's farming enterprise evoked in the film and developed in the novel *Jean de Florette*. The particular issue of the community's marginalization of the Florettes as outsiders will be discussed further in this chapter.

<sup>208</sup> Brett Bowles, "Marcel Pagnol's *The Baker's Wife*, a Cinematic Charivari in Popular Front France." *The Historical Journal* 48.2 (June 2005): 445.

weakening France and threatening its very existence in case of a war. Indeed, a relevant distinction between Pagnol's film and Giono's original text includes the absence of social divisions among the village community which are paramount in Pagnol's film and confirm the hypothesis of Pagnol's endeavor to anchor his artistic representation in its time.

Bowles connects *La femme du boulanger* to the tradition of the charivari, a popular practice originating in the Middle-Ages and practiced through the late 1930s, and which functioned as a tool of popular protest against social and political practices regarded as detrimental to the welfare of the nation. Most often built around the subject of the abrogation of male social prerogatives, such as adultery, infertility or impotence, by directing collective frustration and hostility towards one imagined figure as the target of public humiliation and laughter, the charivari purged the collective and thereby attempted to restore its unity. Indeed, once his wife has eloped with the handsome shepherd, the baker Aimable Castanier takes on the figure of the cuckold husband. As such, the baker becomes the village's laughing stock. The carnivalesque of the charivari is thus at play in this tale, all the more so that as Pagnol shows, this form of catharsis allows for the resolution of the multiple social antagonisms that divide the village.

Immobilized in time, the village of *La femme du boulanger* seems to have conserved a feudal organization where social inequalities, idiosyncrasies and old family conflicts dictate the relationships between its inhabitants. Indeed, as the film suggests, the villagers are divided because of old quarrels that they perpetuate without questioning their relevancy in their present lives. This is illustrated in the opening scene where the school teacher asks one character about the reason of his antagonism with another villager, and

the former exclaims, “Oh! ça vient de loin. Mon père était fâché avec son père. Et mon grand-père était déjà fâché avec son grand-père. Et déjà, nos grands-pères ne savaient pas pourquoi, parce que ça venait de plus loin. Alors vous pensez que ça doit être quelque chose de grave. Ça doit être une bonne raison. »<sup>209</sup>

Even the authoritative figures of reason and faith, traditionally endorsed by the school teacher and the priest, turn any subject of disagreement into a bone of contention and thereby revive their long existing hostility dating back to the separation between Church and State in 1905. At the top of the village’s social hierarchy presides the Marquis who, despite his loose morals, is in fact respected by most of the villagers, for his status and wealth. The presence and privilege of a figure of the nobility under the Third Republic underlines the regressive defining quality of the village. However, when Aurélie leaves her husband and the villagers set up a search mission for her, they are compelled to collaborate, thus putting aside their personal resentment or the social superiority of their class in the case of the Marquis. The coming together of individuals opposed by their personal beliefs and past quarrels is epitomized by the association of the vicar and schoolteacher in the comic scene where the schoolteacher carries on his shoulders the vicar through the marsh. Originally, the villagers’ involvement in the search for Aurélie may have been prompted by their hope to secure the production of bread which had been disrupted due to the baker’s emotional grief. However, as the search mission progresses, the villagers learn not only how to collaborate in combining their knowledge and skills, but they also experience and

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<sup>209</sup> Marcel Pagnol, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Editions de Fallois, 1995) 2: 776.

practice compassion towards the baker as well as towards one another, hence allowing for the reconciliation of the multiple parties.

According to scholar Jean-Marie Apostolidès, the origin of the characters' initial mistrust towards the baker who had just settled in the village, can be found in the latter's traditional association with the devil.<sup>210</sup> Indeed, in peasant superstitious cultures, bakers were perceived as transgressing God by turning bread, a divine substance according to the Christian orthodoxy, into a commodity. Moreover, Aimable disrupts the village's economy by his prosperity which has earned him the status of a bourgeois, as well as a beautiful wife as the film suggests, which consequently sets a rivalry of power with the Marquis. Now at the head of the village, the baker implements a capitalist economy, which naturally ends the village's feudal-like system under the Marquis' ascendancy and the social inequalities triggered by its class distinction, and ends the practice of a service exchange economy. Therefore, *La femme du boulanger* illustrates the transition to a capitalist economic model for a society that had remained organized under a feudal social and economic structure. Furthermore, it demonstrates the responsibility that each individual has in forsaking self-love to contribute to the well-being of the community, and thus to a larger extent, of the nation. By deciding to abandon her husband to follow her erotic desire, Aurélie jeopardizes the community's very survival by undermining the baker's production hence removing the community's staple product. Her action, similar to the conflicts that tear up the community

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<sup>210</sup> Jean-Marie Apostolidès, "Impudique Aurélie" *Communications* 46. 1 (1987): 199-220.

in the beginning of the film, is shown as selfish, in other words as the expression of a preference given to personal interests over the collective.

However, as Apostolidès argues, Pagnol nuances the blame directed at Aurélie by suggesting the baker's shared responsibility in his wife's departure. Because the couple's relationship is not discussed by Giono, Pagnol's representation of their dynamic deserves all the more attention. Aimable's neglect of his marital duties has left a void in the affective life of his wife which she tries to fill by indulging in a romance with the shepherd. The scene where the married couple goes to bed is emblematic of their platonic relationship and the privilege given by Aimable to the prosperity of their business. Indeed, as Aurélie is getting undressed, her husband goes on discussing profits and adding numbers, thus illustrating the absence of erotic desire from their relationship and displaying money as an obstacle to their intimacy. Although Pagnol seems to portray in a positive light the implementation of capitalism in the provinces and the social transitions it triggers in the small communities, he also hints at its potential drifts. By focusing on his profession and the financial prosperity of their household, in other words by placing capital over human value, Aimable has neglected his wife and his marital duties.

Although loving and kind at heart, Aimable is guilty of depriving his wife of physical intimacy, as well as having used her unintentionally as a token of his social and professional success. The young and beautiful Aurélie is indeed eroticized by Aimable as he turns her into a marketing object to attract customers. Indeed, as the baker who has just settled meets the villagers, he boasts equally about the quality of his bread and about the physical beauty of his wife when gauging the quality of his bread according to her beauty,

he asks his customers, “alors, si je vous fais du pain moitié aussi beau que ma femme, ça vous suffira?”<sup>211</sup> By encouraging the villagers to admire his wife, the baker places her into the public gaze, and thus transfers her body from the private to the public sphere, which foreshadows and probably even influences Aurélie’s adultery and the public disgrace she brings upon herself. To further emphasize the couple’s abstinence and the sexual frustration it generates in Aurélie, the film displaces eroticism onto the bakery by incorporating sexual undertones in the vocabulary used by Aimable to describe the making of his bread and exploiting the symbolic charge of certain of the profession’s elements. For instance, the fire of the hearth which is traditionally associated with love and desire, forms the object of Aimable’s attention in the production of his bread, when the sexual yearning of his wife is left uncared-for. The preference given to bread, i.e. to the couple’s economic prosperity, is represented as a threat for the stability of the couple and to their family prospects, as suggested by the absence of children in the married couple’s life.

In this sense, *La femme du boulanger* reflects Pagnol’s acceptance of the development of a modern economy in *la province*, one relying on capitalism and monetary exchange, insofar as it represents a necessary historical process allowing for more social justice. He also seems to advocate for more unity in the community by featuring a major crisis that forces the community to come together and forsake their superstitions and ancestral family grudges. However, Pagnol also points out the threat that this economic system poses to the permanence of traditional values, notably those encapsulated in the

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<sup>211</sup> Marcel Pagnol, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Editions de Fallois, 1995) 2: 785.

family. As I have argued, the neglect of Aimable and Aurélie's intimacy in their couple and their lack of interest in building a family ultimately jeopardize the whole community. The family seems to represent indeed one of Pagnol's focal points not merely because of its reflection of the ideology of the time that promoted natality to combat the depopulation of *la province*, but because it displays the junction of two opposing forces. These two binaries are made of patriarchal authority and its attachment to traditions and principles, and the younger generation of offspring who challenges this authority and shakes the family hierarchy by acting spontaneously and selfishly when trying to fulfill their personal dreams, yet also introducing new ideas that have the potential to help sustain regional economy and hence a balance on the national level. The tension between the two in Pagnol's works seems to reflect the search for a compromise between the safekeeping of traditional values and the modernization of *la région*, a question at the heart of the cultural and political debates of the 1930s.

#### **PAGNOL'S PROPOSITIONS FOR SOCIAL REFORMS**

The family is the center of many of Pagnol's plots as its harmony is undermined by one of its members' personal desire. Pagnol expresses an ambivalence between the condemnation of these individual drives that can destabilize the well-being of the family and by extension of the community, and his rejection of the fixity of the family structures that do not allow for changes and that can be experienced as a form of oppression.

With his great presence on screen and his unique personality that comes across in the multiple films in which he performs, the actor Raimu embodies the patriarch. The character he plays in most of his roles governs his family with an iron grip and his short temper makes him prone to arguments.<sup>212</sup> However, although César in the Trilogy expects Marius to take over the family business of the *bar de la Marine*, he is unable to prevent Marius from following his dream to sail across the world which leads the latter into forsaking his father and Fanny, the woman he loves and has impregnated, thereby contravening his family obligations and bringing disappointment and dishonor to Fanny and César. Through Raimu's roles as the family patriarch, in César Ollivier in the trilogy, and Pascal Amoretti in *La fille du puisatier*, Pagnol reveals the fragility of this traditional figure and thus of the patriarchal system altogether. Not only do the patriarchs in Pagnol fail to preserve their family from rupture and dishonor, but they display a noticeable emotional side and prudishness which reveal their vulnerability and question their hegemonic role within the family structure and by extension society.<sup>213</sup> It is noteworthy that as it is often the case, the father is a widower. Thus, as the unique parental figure, he has had to fill the gap left by the mother in the children's upbringing, and hence naturally presents a feminine side to his character.

The break from the traditional gender performance turns the male characters, according to scholar Ginette Vincendeau, into symbolically castrated figures. The failure

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<sup>212</sup> It is noteworthy that Pagnol chose to name his character in the trilogy after the Roman emperor, hence underlining his absolute authority.

<sup>213</sup> I consider the family in parallel to the nation according to Rousseau's views of the family as the first and natural political organization on which society models itself.

of the father's rule leading to his demotion from his position as patriarch is displayed in Clarius, Angèle's father, who wears his arm in a sling and who is said to have become "useless" since Angèle left. Most significantly, in *Manon des sources*, le Papet's Machiavellian plan leading to the death of Jean is motivated by his utmost wish to ensure the future of his family line. Securing the fertile land of Jean's property of *les Peupliers* is intended as the first step of his plan to extend the family's wealth so as to enable his nephew Ugolin to marry and have children, and thereby allow for the family heritage to go on. Yet, le Papet's project ultimately fails, and worse even, not only is he not able to ensure the family's prosperity and longevity, but he brings about its own destruction. Pagnol seems here to extend the tragic of the story plot to the failure of the patriarch, who is responsible for the death of Jean de Florette whom as he learns at the end is his own son, as well as for his nephew's suicide which brings dishonor to the family. Thus, hateful in his scheme, the character of le Papet also arouses pathos in his impersonation of the failed patriarch.

As it is the case with Pagnol, his stance on socio-ideological issues evolves over the course of his career. As we have seen, Pagnol operates a destabilization of the traditional omnipotence of the patriarchal figure, visible for instance in the characters of César and Clarius. The subversion of the patriarchal system is exemplified in a film Pagnol wrote and supervised in the aftermath of the Second World War.<sup>214</sup> In *Nais* (1945), the abusive father is murdered by his own daughter Nais with the help of Toine, a hunchback who works on the farm and who is played by Fernandel. The film justifies the parricide by

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<sup>214</sup> Pagnol wrote the script for *Nais*, originally Emile Zola's short-story entitled *Nais Micoulin* (1883), and supervised its realization with Raymond Leboursier behind the camera.

emphasizing Father Micoulin's previous misuse of authority in his treatment of Naïs as his slave, and his possessive, irascible and wicked character which makes him physically violent towards Toine as well as towards his daughter and leads him to devise a plan to kill Naïs's lover. Contrary to Zola's heroine who is described as the product of her environment through her stereotypical Mediterranean physical features and her heated character that is led by a drive for vengeance against her father,<sup>215</sup> Pagnol chooses for the role Jacqueline Bouvier who had just become his wife and who, with her blond hair, her soft voice and the big cross she wears around her neck, stands as a pure and innocent character. Therefore, instead of an act of vengeance, Naïs's plan to murder her father is presented as a legitimate attempt to free herself from her oppressor. Furthermore, Pagnol's choice to remove the parental figure of the mother and Naïs's brother present in Zola's text emphasizes the absolute authority of the patriarch and his analogy with a tyrant.

Similarly, though not as extreme, *La Fille du puisatier* dramatizes the handover of authority from one generation to the next. Indeed, in one of the film's last sequences, as Jacques's parents and Patricia's father are debating over which of the two family's authority is more legitimate according to the visibility of the family's ascendance on the physical features of the new born, Jacques and Patricia interrupt the grandparents' discussion by reclaiming their authority over their child. Indeed, as Jacques argues, "il a son père et sa mère: nous sommes assez grands pour penser à lui. Vous dites que vous avez

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<sup>215</sup> Zola's character of Naïs presents southern physical features in her dark hair and olive complexion and her thirst for vengeance, all of which draws Zola to use the analogy with a warrior woman, "une guerrière," "une amazone antique."

des droits ? C'est vrai. Vous avez le droit de l'aimer, de le soigner, de vous sacrifier pour lui si c'est nécessaire...Mais cet enfant n'est pas à vous et c'est vous qui êtes à lui. »<sup>216</sup>

Therefore, while Pagnol's interwar films reflect on the ineluctable transformations of French society as it emerged from the First World War and attempted to reconstruct the nation, the films produced during and directly following the Second World War are more radical in their call for the transformation of the nation's social structures. Furthermore, by sentencing the patriarch to death, as it is the case in *Naïs* and *Manon des Sources*, Pagnol may be expressing the nation's reaction to the trauma of occupation and the guilt of collaboration under the Vichy regime.

Pagnol's approach to the social hierarchy structuring traditional French society is also more strongly undermined over the course of his career from the interwar years to the post-World War II era. If Fanny's social elevation seems an obstacle for her union with Marius at the end of *César* (1936), the last film of the Trilogy, Pagnol resolves this class conflict by having Fanny simply remind her suitor that she originally belongs to the same social background as he does, and that she will happily return to it and embrace a modest lifestyle so that she can finally be with him and openly express the love that she has kept buried in her heart throughout the years.

The division between the lovers' social class is complicated in *La fille du puisatier* and *Naïs* where it is attached to the family line and foregrounded as a major obstacle for the love of the two main protagonists. In the former, the Amoretti's low social standing is

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<sup>216</sup> Marcel Pagnol, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Editions de Fallois, 1995) 2: 998.

what triggers the wealthy Mazel family to deny the legitimacy of Patricia's child as their grand-child. The Mazels' superior wealth and status is responsible for their denial of the implication of their son Jacques in Patricia's pregnancy, and their conviction that Amoretti's speech during his visit is an attempt to blackmail them. As his daughter and family are rejected by the Mazels, the well-digger expresses in return a mistrust toward the Mazels by referring to them as members of the bourgeoisie which, according to Amoretti's Marxist taxonomy, defines them as the owners of the means of production, thus suggesting their lack of understanding and compassion for people of lower social standing, "maintenant je comprends qu'il faut se méfier des gens qui vendent des outils, mais qui ne s'en servent jamais."<sup>217</sup> However, ultimately the child bridges the divide between these two classes by uniting the two families in their wish to care for the child and see the perpetuation of their lineage.

In *Naïs*, the class division between the Micoulins and the Rostaings family is set by the Micoulin's situation as sharecroppers. As such, the Micoulin are subservient to the Rostaing whose estate they farm, and having the obligation to share the crops with their landlord, Naïs is sent early on in the movie to the Rostaings' residence in Aix-en-Provence with a basket full of the latest harvest. The intrusion of Naïs in the Rostaings' home, with her natural glow of kindness and innocence clashes with the previous introduction of Frédéric as the Rostaing son, a spoiled and manipulative man, seen as gambling money and lying to his parents. While both characters seem at first the products of their social

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<sup>217</sup> Marcel Pagnol, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Editions de Fallois, 1995) 2: 951.

class and milieu, Pagnol defends instead the perfectibility of humankind and their potential to better themselves. *Naïs* illustrates the change in the Rostaing family as they come into contact with their sharecroppers during their stay on their estate in rural Provence, and learn to sympathize with them. While Frédéric genuinely falls in love with Naïs, Mme Rostaing loses some of her contempt towards inferior social classes such as her sharecroppers as she accepts at the end of the film to make Naïs a member of their household, even alluding to the prospect of Naïs's future as Frédéric's wife and the mother of his child. Therefore, in this 1945 film not only does Pagnol suggest the permeability of social classes as Naïs breaks its division by entering the Rostaing family, but he also rejects the dichotomy city/countryside and its determination of the characters' morals, by demonstrating an evolution in the Rostaing's mentality as they become genuine and kind characters when father Micoulin remains evil and stubborn. Zola's story on the other hand is much more deterministic since Naïs does not escape her class, she remains in the same geographical space in which she has grown up and she eventually marries the farmer Toine to avoid any changes in the estate's management and by extension in her life, "comme cela, rien ne serait changé à la Blancarde."<sup>218</sup> As for the Rostaings, Zola also depicts them as consistent to their initial introduction as haughty and manipulative characters. Just as the character of Naïs is shaped by her place in Zola, Frédéric's slyness is imparted to the ennui of *la province* which tempts idle individuals to indulge in a life of pleasure and vice:

Il faut connaître Aix, la tranquillité de ses rues où l'herbe pousse, le sommeil qui endort la ville entière, pour comprendre quelle existence vide y mènent les étudiants. Ceux qui travaillent ont la ressource de tuer les heures devant leurs livres. Mais ceux

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<sup>218</sup> Emile Zola, *Naïs Micoulin* (Paris: G. Charpentier, 1884) 61.

qui se refusent à suivre sérieusement les cours n'ont d'autres refuges, pour se désennuyer, que les cafés, où l'on joue, et certaines maisons, où l'on fait pis encore (9).

Pagnol's alterations to Zola's story undermines the determinism of space in shaping an individual's temperament and life, and as in Zola, *Naïs* tackles the oppression of the family hierarchy. Moreover, by allowing for the heroine's social mobility, Pagnol seems to attempt to go beyond the rigidity of some of the class structures existing in the nineteenth-century and still in place in the mid-twentieth century. Indeed, Pagnol's approach to social classes can be contrasted to the main contemporary cinematic current of Poetic Realism. Indeed, despite the attention given to the social issues affecting *le peuple* and for defending certain ideals such as universal brotherhood across social classes,<sup>219</sup> the tragic ending of the poetic realist films questions the applicability of this project to the immediate future. While an evolution can be observed in Pagnol's discussion of family and social class in the course of his career, his representation of rural France transforms as well, ultimately reflecting the author's distance from rural ideology after the Second World War.

#### ***MANON DES SOURCES AS A MORAL TALE OF FRATERNITY***

Pagnol's post-WWII film *Manon des sources* illustrates a departure from his earlier treatment of the rural such as in his Giono adaptations of the interwar years. While

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<sup>219</sup> Renoir's 1937 *Grand Illusion* is an illustration of the effort of Poetic Realism to overcome the boundaries of nationality and class to stress the common human nature.

*Angèle* or *Regain* draw an idyllic portrayal of a return to the land whose success is made possible thanks to the help of the local community, *Manon des sources* offers a contrastive view. In *Angèle*, the eponymous character is rescued from the grip of her pimp by Saturnin, a worker on the family farm, while Albin, a peasant from the area, puts an end to her second captivity under her father's authority. As for *Regain*, the village of Aubignane rises again thanks to the sacrifice of la Mamèche, the old widow who leaves the village to search for a woman for Panturle, the presence of a woman in the deserted village being thought to be the last hope to revive the village. Likewise, in this film the success of Panturle's agricultural endeavors are possible thanks to the help of Jasmin, a friend from the village in the valley who lends him some grains and essential tools. Conversely, Jean de Florette's project to take over the farm passed on to him by his late mother and to learn husbandry, ultimately fails due to the community's lack of support and to the Soubeyrand's vicious plan to block the spring in order to eventually buy the property from Jean. Therefore, Pagnol's representation of the rural world is much more nuanced after World War II, where I argue, he reflects on the notions of revenge, the figure of "the other," and the cowardice of humankind. Indeed, all of these notions which were at the core of France's experience of the Occupation shape the plot of *Manon des sources*. Manon and her family's origin from the rival village of Crespin located only twenty-three kilometers away earns them the label of outsiders and the immediate hostility of the population of the Bastides Blanches. Jean's physical handicap – he is a hunchback – contributes to further marginalizing him. Although, the whole community is aware of le Papet and Ugolin's scheme, their cowardice prompts them to turn a blind eye

to the Soubeyrand's hateful crime. The Florettes are not the only victims of the community's xenophobia. The old Piedmontese woman, Baptistine, is ostracized for being thought to practice witchcraft, just as is Manon, who is judged during a trial attended by the community which echoes the Salem witch trials. Furthermore, significantly enough *Manon des sources* starts with what can be interpreted as Pagnol's defense of an inclusive vision of Provence as Baptistine protests against her family's exclusion. Indeed, her marginalization along with her late husband's is manifest through the intention of the authority of the village to transfer her husband's remains from the cemetery to the mass grave in response to her inability to pay for his place in the cemetery.

However, in Jean's case, the community is not the only responsible agent in the failure of his farming project. As an educated man who lived most of his life as a tax collector in a town, Jean's understanding of agriculture is limited to the information gathered from books, hence his lack of practical knowledge. His conception of agriculture is strongly influenced by Rousseau's philosophical approach to nature as the source of authenticity which allows individuals to reach a state of happiness. Indeed, explaining his project to Ugolin, Jean declares,

Après avoir longuement médité et philosophé, je suis arrivé à la conclusion irréfutable que le seul bonheur possible c'est d'être un homme de la Nature. J'ai besoin d'air, j'ai besoin d'espace pour que ma pensée se cristallise. Je ne m'intéresse plus qu'à ce qui est vrai, sincère, pur, large, en un seul mot, l'authentique, et je suis venu ici pour cultiver l'authentique. [...] Je veux vivre en communion avec la Nature. Je veux manger les légumes de mon jardin, l'huile de

mes olives, gober les œufs frais de mes poules, m'enivrer du seul vin de ma vigne, et dès que ce sera possible, manger le pain que je ferai avec mon blé.<sup>220</sup>

Jean's determination verges on insanity as he desperately attempts to cultivate his crops despite the hostility of the terrain and the lack of cooperation from the weather, ends with his tragic death which ultimately questions his project and its idealistic foundations. Moreover, to some extent, Jean is also responsible for the marginalization of his family as they settled in the Bastides Blanches and ultimately he shares the responsibility of the failure of his project since as one of the villagers points out to Manon at the end of the novel, "les victimes ne sont jamais tout à fait innocentes" (1044). As he explains, Jean was guilty of not having tried to socialize with the villagers in order to move past the initial prejudices that they had formed against him in order to ultimately be integrated in the community. Indeed, as Jean reveals to Ugolin during their first encounter early in the novel, the former too has prejudices against the community of the Bastides Blanches, prejudices passed on to him by his mother. Moreover, the attention given to his hands, "larges et longues, mais fines et blanches, avec des ongles presque transparents" (732), separates Jean from the common peasants of the area who, unlike Jean, do not use gloves and instead resort to their bare hands in toiling the land. In fact, Jean's education gives him the impression of an advantage over the community, which Pagnol subtly conveys when for instance Jean mentions to Ugolin his ambitious and modern project of farming that leads him to hope to extend his property in the future and

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<sup>220</sup> Marcel Pagnol, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Editions de Fallois, 1995) 3: 731.

potentially acquire parts of the neighbors' plots, accompanying his speech with "un sourire supérieur" (732). Therefore, the failure of Jean's project is not attributed to its novelistic aspect since Ugolin succeeds in his modernization of the family farm when he decides to plant carnations instead of pursuing the traditional plan of his uncle, le Papet consisting of "refaire le grand verger Soubeyrand, sur tout le plateau du Solitaire, comme il était du temps de [s]on père" (671). However, his success only lasts until Manon's desire for revenge causes her to block the spring, triggering a draught in the region and thus devastating Ugolin's plantation. Therefore, more than Jean and Ugolin's modern perspective on farming, the origin of the failure of their respective project can be located in their lack of attention and care in Ugolin's case for people. While Jean's full involvement in his project has led him to neglect the community, Ugolin and le Papet's urge to succeed has made them ready to remove any obstacle on their path, including human lives.

Therefore, once again, Pagnol does not preclude progress and innovation as long as they respect humankind. *Manon des sources* then can be interpreted as a response to the nation's need for unity after the cataclysm of the Second World War. It functions as a moral tale vouching for the value of fraternity and the need to learn to understand others as a way to support solidarity and cohesion within the community and thus go beyond initial prejudices. Thus, the darkness of Pagnol's perspective on the rural community of the Bastides Blanches should not be attributed to the stigma left by Vichy on rural ideology as much as its politics of racism. In fact, as Pierre Sorlin argues, a continuity in

the rural ideology and politics can be seen between Vichy and the Fourth Republic<sup>221</sup>. If Maréchal Pétain had promoted agriculture to restrain the threat of starvation as well as out of the conviction that it could prevent France's national decline which he expressed when he declared that « la Terre, elle, ne ment pas. Elle demeure votre recours. Elle est la Patrie elle-même, »<sup>222</sup> animated by the wish to stop rural exodus, General De Gaulle pursued a politics of defense of the rural which echoes Vichy's and which is mirrored in his statement that "the agricultural laborers of France are basically France for they hold, they mould, they marry the soil."<sup>223</sup> As a result, the film production of the 1940s and 50s show a resemblance in their promotion of agricultural work and its innovations thanks to mechanization. Indeed, as Sorlin notes, in the 1940s through the ministry of agriculture the government sponsored films and documentaries that offered a modern vision of rural France through the depiction of the participation of machines in the farming production. Leading mechanical firms such as Esso or Renault were even encouraged to sponsor these films which consequently turned the depiction of traditional farming techniques and lifestyles as nostalgic. Because of the pastoral life led by Manon, Pagnol's film seems to have a nostalgic tone. However, as we have seen, Jean and Ugolin's respective farming projects are quite innovative. Their failure is only due to the lack of solidarity and

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<sup>221</sup> Pierre Sorlin, "Stop the Rural Exodus': Images of the Country in French Films of the 1950s" *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 18. 2 (1998): 183-197.

<sup>222</sup> Maréchal Pétain, speech of 25 June 1940, quoted in Anne-Marie Thiesse, *Ecrire la France : le mouvement littéraire régionaliste de langue française entre la Belle Epoque à la Libération* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1991) 241.

<sup>223</sup> Général de Gaulle, speech of 18 June 1948, quoted in Pierre Sorlin, "Stop the Rural Exodus': Images of the Country in French Films of the 1950s" *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 18. 2 (1998): 186.

cohesion in the community. Therefore, rather than a commentary on the changing methods of agriculture and its impact on the traditional culture and lives of its people, in *Manon des Sources* and the films following the Second World War, Pagnol is more interested in the relationships between individuals and the damages caused by social marginalization and exclusion. As he expressed, « J'aime beaucoup de gens, et ceux que je n'aime pas m'intéressent. Je préfère un homme ou une femme à un paysage si beau soit-il. 'Rien d'humain ne m'est étranger' a dit Terence. J'ajouterai rien d'inhumain ne m'est proche. »<sup>224</sup> Pagnol's focus on human psychology prompts him to study the confrontation of an individual or a community with alterity. His vision of the community, as a reflection of the nation, defends differences may they be racial, cultural or physical, as in the case of the two hunchbacks we find in *Naïs* and *Manon des sources*. In a short-story entitled « Les secrets de Dieu », Pagnol relates the fall of Sparta to its obsession with preserving the purity of its race, obviously drawing a parallel with Nazi ideology and the damages caused to the German nation and the countries occupied as the effect of the Nazi's plan to exterminate not only an entire race but also the expression of people's singularities:

Ce fut une ville d'héroïques et de farouches patriotes soucieux avant tout, comme Hitler de la pureté et de la beauté de leur race. [...] Finalement cette race si belle et si soigneusement épurée que nous a-t-elle laissé ? Des noms de rois, auteurs de lois aussi sévères qu'un règlement pénitentiaires, des noms de généraux [...] Pourquoi leur héritage est-il si misérable ? [...] C'est parce qu'ils ont abruti sur leurs champs de manœuvres, et sacrifié sur des champs de bataille, leurs poètes, leurs philosophes, leurs peintres, leurs architectes, leurs sculpteur ; c'est parce qu'ils ont

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<sup>224</sup> Quote by Marcel Pagnol found in Bernard de Fallois, "Postface" to Pagnol's uncompleted novel *Le temps des amours*, in Marcel Pagnol, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Editions de Fallois, 1995) 3: 657.

peut-être précipité sur les rocs aigus, au fond du Barathre, un petit bossu qui était Ésope, ou le bébé aveugle qui eût chanté à travers les siècles les dieux et la gloire de leur patrie.<sup>225</sup>

Nevertheless, Pagnol's inclusive representation of Provence is overshadowed by the privilege given by reception to his four autobiographical works gathered under the title *Souvenirs d'enfance* and whose nostalgia has been mistakenly extended onto his whole oeuvre.<sup>226</sup> Ultimately, it constructs him as a reactionary author and by emphasizing the relation between the author and his native region, it turns the culture of Provence into heritage for Pagnol and by extent for the nation as it was making regional cultures a core aspect of the concept of national heritage in its construction in the 1980s after Pagnol's death.

## PROVENCE MADE INTO HERITAGE

Certain aspects of Pagnol's aesthetics have influenced the analogy of Pagnol with a reactionary author whose nostalgic representation of *la région* fixes it in time and shelters its culture from exterior influences. The respect for the French language and for

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<sup>225</sup> Marcel Pagnol, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Editions de Fallois, 1995) 3: 1096.

<sup>226</sup> In his work and analysis of Pagnol published in 1992, David Coward exposes the success of Pagnol in France and worldwide and argues for the privilege given to Pagnol's *Souvenirs d'enfance* over his other works. As he explains, not only do the first two volumes of the *Souvenirs*, *La gloire de mon père* and *Le château de ma mère* figure on official secondary syllabus since 1977, but they remain the most read and well known works of Pagnol followed by *Topaze*, *Marius*, *Le temps des amours*, and *L'eau des collines* that since Claude Berri's 1986 film adaptation moved up the scale, yet remains behind the *Souvenirs*. David Coward, *Pagnol, la gloire de mon père et le château de ma mère* (Pennsylvania : Grant and Cutler, 1992).

the Latin and Greek roots of French culture evident in Pagnol's works and are partly responsible for the misjudgment mentioned above. Pagnol's interest for the classical culture of France has always been a major drive in his works. In fact, the respect for the French language forms the core of the author's aesthetics as he explains to his friend Jean Ballard, « ma doctrine, qui est certainement la tienne, est la suivante: fidélité absolue à la vieille langue; précision, simplicité. Langue classique et pure, autant que possible. Classicisme, c'est-à-dire procédés classiques appliqués à l'âme et à la vie moderne. »<sup>227</sup> Beginning his career as a playwright, Pagnol evidently gives a prime role to language in the dialogues he creates for his characters. Pagnol's dialogues are precisely where his art excels since he can fuse together his passion for language and for human psychology in illustrating different kinds of human interactions and developing genuine portraits for his characters. It is not surprising then that the authors he admired most and wished to emulate are the humanist writers Rabelais and Montaigne as well as the seventeenth-century moralist Molière. The privilege given to language over the image and exemplified in his successful dialogues is what earned him the scorn of other filmmakers from the silent film industry and critics who saw his cinema as "filmed theater." Pagnol himself provocatively declared in an article for *Les Cahiers du film* that "le film parlant, qui apporte au théâtre des ressources nouvelles, doit ré-inventer le théâtre."<sup>228</sup> This

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<sup>227</sup> Marcel Pagnol, letter to Jean Ballard, June 1923. Found in Brett Bowles, "Marcel Pagnol's *the Baker's Wife*, a Cinematic Charivari in Popular Front France," *The Historical Journal* 48. 2 (2005): 445.

<sup>228</sup> Brett Bowles, *Marcel Pagnol* (Manchester : Manchester University Press, 2012) 109.

assertion presents cinema as a continuation of theater offering it the possibility to perfection itself, thereby refusing to recognize cinema as an art itself.

Through his works, Pagnol traces back the French culture to its Greek and Latin roots which are especially permanent in the culture of the south of France. Indeed, his autobiographical novel *La gloire de mon père* begins by presenting the author's place of origins as charged with Roman history, hence drawing a parallel between the author's origins and the nation's history through the description of the Garlaban,

Je suis né à Aubagne, sous le Garlaban couronné de chèvres, au temps des derniers chevriers [...]

Ce n'est donc pas une montagne, mais ce n'est plus une colline : c'est Garlaban, où les guetteurs de Marius quand ils virent au fond de la nuit briller un feu sur la sainte victoire allumèrent un bûcher de broussailles : cet oiseau rouge, dans la nuit de juin, vola de colline en colline, et se posant enfin sur la roche du Capitole, apprit à Rome que ses légions des Gaules venaient d'égorger, dans la plaine d'Aix, les cent mille barbares de Teutobochus.<sup>229</sup>

The reference to Latin heritage that recurs in his texts allows him to conjure up France's history, yet defend at the same time the inclusiveness of the culture of the surrounding Mediterranean countries which were also part of the Roman Empire, thereby shaping the culture of Provence as Mediterranean rather than merely Provençal.<sup>230</sup> If Pagnol does replicate certain colonial prejudices about North Africa in a few scenes present in the original plays of the trilogy, as we have seen he defends the integration of

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<sup>229</sup> Marcel Pagnol, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Editions de Fallois, 1995) 3: 15.

<sup>230</sup> Marion Brun, « Marcel Pagnol et l'écriture d'une Provence cosmopolite. » *Proceedings of the International Symposium of the University Paris-Sorbonne : Réflexions nationales et internationales dans le roman et la poésie de 1880 à 1980 : de l'europanisme à la mondialisation*. 5 June 2013, Sorbonne Un. : International Symposium, 2013. Print.

immigrant populations from southern European countries such as Italy, as illustrated for instance in his Piedmontese character Baptistine in *Manon des sources*.

The heritage of Greek culture is also present through Pagnol's reference to its myths. Much like his Provençal counterpart Giono, before the rise of his career Pagnol was invested in writing works that offered the continuation or reinvention of myths and stories from Antiquity, such as the poems or tragedies written in verse that he published in *Fortunio* and which recounted the stay of Ulysses with Nausicaa's father, the revolt of Spartacus, or the love story of a Latin poet. If he switched genre and focus, Antiquity remained a source of inspiration. Indeed, references to myths can be found in most of his works. While the story of Marius who leaves Fanny, his promised one, to her suitor Panisse in order to sail across the world, echoes Homer's *Odyssey*, *La femme du boulanger* has been paralleled to the *Iliad* in that it features the departure of the village's most coveted woman, setting off the underlying tensions in the village. Likewise, *L'eau des collines* offers a rewriting of the myth of Oedipus Rex by having the patriarch Soubeyrand, who can be said to rule over the village like a king, kill his son Jean before the former learns about his paternity. This infanticide is what triggers the drought which is felt by the villagers as a malediction and used as such by the vicar in his sermon to instill guilt in them for having neglected their religious duties. As he declares, drawing an analogy between the plight of the Bastidiens and the plague triggered by Oedipus, «j'ai lu autrefois, dans un ouvrage profane - une tragédie grecque – l'histoire de la malheureuse ville de Thèbes qui fut frappée d'une peste dévorante parce que son roi avait commis des crimes » (1008). As for the passage in the novel where Ugolin witnesses Manon bathing

naked in the river, it echoes the scene in Ovid's *Metamorphosis* where the goddess Diana is discovered by Actaeon who gets punished by being transformed into a deer. The parallel between Manon and a spiritual being is underlined by Ugolin's impression of her, « il sentait obscurément que cette dansante fille, encore fraîche de l'eau lustrale de la pluie, était la divinité des collines, de la pinède et du printemps. »<sup>231</sup>

The spiritual connection between Manon and the hills is established by the narration that presents her lifestyle as bucolic. Spending all her time outside looking after her goats who are her only true company, Manon epitomizes a pastoral character in the tradition of Virgil. Pagnol adds to his character a mythological dimension when he compares her to Pan or Orpheus who, with their musical instruments and voice in the case of Orpheus, enchant and tame their environment,

vers onze heures, elle appelait la grosse chèvre et trayait un peu de lait dans une assiette de fer-blanc qu'elle posait à côté d'elle sur la roche plate... Puis elle portait à ses lèvres le petit harmonica, et jouait un air ancien, toujours le même, une longue phrase aiguë et fragile, qui égratignait à peine le pur silence du vallon alors, le grand « limbert » des Refresquières, le lézard vert ocellé d'or et de bleu, jaillissait d'un lointain fourré de ronces. Comme une traînée de lumières il accourait vers la musique, et plongeait son bec de corne dans le lait bleuté des garrigues (931).

Goddess or sorceress according to the villagers' superstitions, Manon is at one with the natural environment which is conveyed through Pagnol's use of the pastoral. Pagnol's interest for this literary genre is well expressed in *Manon des sources*, and even more so in his project of the translation of Virgil's *Bucolics* into French verses on which

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<sup>231</sup> Marcel Pagnol, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Editions de Fallois, 1995) 3. 914.

he worked during most of his career, over the course of thirty years, and which he published in 1958.

His autobiographical works gathered in the series entitled *Souvenirs d'enfance* are also infused with references to the pastoral world of Virgil. First, it is relevant to note the frame that Pagnol gives to his souvenirs. By limiting them to the first years of his life, until he is fourteen years old, and to the setting of the hills of Garlaban and the village of la Treille where his family spent their summers,<sup>232</sup> the novels seem to correlate the time of childhood and the subject's innocence and abundant imagination with the natural environment of the hills of Garlaban which is a fertile ground for the initiation of the narrator to the skills of surviving in the wilderness, as well as to other matters such as love, which he discovers through his encounter with Isabelle Cassagnol. Therefore, the nostalgia that naturally emerges from the narration of the author's childhood gets projected onto the natural environment, both becoming a lost paradise for the author.

Moreover, Pagnol adopts the perspective of the child he once was, which he presents as a way to give to his autobiography an objective quality. Indeed, as he declares in the preface to *La gloire de mon père*, "dans ces Souvenirs, je ne dirai de moi ni mal ni bien; ce n'est pas de moi que je parle, mais de l'enfant que je ne suis plus. C'est un petit personnage que j'ai connu, et qu'est fondu dans l'air du temps à la manière des moineaux qui disparaissent sans laisser de squelettes » (11). Surely, the author's effort to distance

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<sup>232</sup> The first two volumes *La gloire de mon père* and *Le château de ma mère* are entirely focused on the Pagnols' summer vacations in la Treille, while *Le temps des secrets* and the last and unfinished work *Le temps des amours* alternate between episodes taking place at the Lycée Thiers in Marseille where Pagnol studied and his vacations in the hills.

himself from his autobiographical project which he expresses in his preface reflects the author's attempt to restore his humility and image threatened by the nature of such writing enterprise, yet it also endows the narration with a great deal of naivety and humor deriving from it which ultimately softens the nostalgia by preventing it from turning into melancholia. For instance, when presenting his parents early in *La gloire de mon père*, Pagnol declares about the age of his parents and most significantly about his mother who died when Pagnol was just a teenager and who as we know was the object of the author's unwavering love, "l'âge de mon père, c'était vingt-cinq ans de plus que moi, et ça n'a jamais changé. L'âge d'Augustine, c'était le mien, parce que ma mère c'était moi, et je pensais, dans mon enfance, que nous étions nés le même jour » (22). Moreover, describing the Provence countryside through the eyes of the child gives it an enchanting quality, the result of the child's vivid imagination which he draws in great parts from his readings, particularly Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and James Fennimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*.

Despite the humor and the exotic perspective of the land of Provence through the parallel established by the narrator with the landscape of the American Far West, nostalgia is present throughout his *Souvenirs* and set as early as in the first line of *La gloire de mon père* when the narrator situates his birth temporally in the "temps des derniers chevaliers" (15), hence in a time witnessing the disappearance of traditional trades and pastoral lifestyles such as the one led by goat herders. Certainly, during his lifetime Pagnol was drawn towards modernity as we can see through his involvement with cinema as it was innovating with techniques with the emergence of the talkies.

Likewise, Pagnol's subsequent withdrawal from cinema when it became a common entertainment product seems to confirm this argument. Conversely, his younger brother Paul remained close to the pastoral as he chose to live in the hills of their childhood as a goat herder. In the mention of his premature death, Pagnol compares him to a Virgilian character, the last one of his kind, thereby associating the death of his brother to the end of a pastoral way of living,

Puis, le petit Paul est devenu très grand. Il me dépassait de toute la tête, et il portait une barbe en collier, une barbe de soie dorée. Dans les collines de l'Étoile, qu'il n'a jamais voulu quitter, il menait son troupeau de chèvres ; le soir, il faisait des fromages dans des tamis de joncs tressés, puis sur le gravier des garrigues, il dormait, roulé dans son grand manteau : il fut le dernier chevrier de Virgile. Mais à trente ans, dans une clinique, il mourut. Sur la table de nuit, il y avait son harmonica. (290)

Paul's harmonica stands out in the context of the hospital, and the short and abrupt sentence referring to his death underlines the contrast between his natural lifestyle described as full of poetry, and the sterility of the hospital room and thus to some extent modern society.

As for Marcel Pagnol, retrospectively reflecting on the summers spent in the Garlaban leads him to parallel his experience of its natural environment with the Virgilian pastoral as when he refers to the family's first trip to their summer house in the hills and the narrator's experience of the potent smell of thyme naturally growing in the area, « c'était le thym, qui pousse au gravier des garrigues ces quelques plantes étaient descendues à ma rencontre, pour annoncer au petit écolier le parfum futur de Virgile » (69).

The nostalgia for the pastoral world as the author experienced it during his childhood merges with his nostalgic feelings towards *le peuple* who were present and close to him during these years, such as his mother and brother whose deaths are only mentioned briefly but can be seen as weighing heavily on the author precisely because of their mention through a short and bare syntax and the lack of development of the author's feelings regarding them. The memories of Paul and Augustine are instead transferred onto the landscape and the familiar places in the hills of Provence. Similar to the Romantic poets such as Alphonse de Lamartine who in "Le lac" asks nature to preserve the memories of his loved one and the time the couple spent in that natural area, Pagnol is attaching his memories to the places of his childhood. Ultimately, Provence becomes an affective place for the author through his *Souvenirs*. The emotional bond of the author for Provence and its role in Pagnol's cinema is justified through Pagnol's life experience which he recounts at the end of *Le château de ma mère*, the second volume of his *Souvenirs*. Having bought an estate in Provence to host his cinema troupe without having had time to visit it prior to its purchase, he recognizes it on the troupe's first trip there as the residence that had marked his childhood and haunted his mother. In a Proustian way, Pagnol's discovery of the estate and his sudden realization of his familiarity with it, leads him in "une course folle à travers la prairie et le temps" (292). As the memories come filling his head, he expresses his nostalgia for his loved ones triggered by the physical features of the landscape,

Oui, c'était là. C'était bien le canal de mon enfance [...] Tout le long du sentier herbeux, l'eau coulait sans bruit, éternelle, et les sauterelles d'autrefois, comme des éclaboussures, jaillissaient en rond sous mes pas. Je refis lentement le chemin des

vacances, et de chères ombres marchaient près de moi [...] Je suivis la berge : c'était toujours « une passoire », mais le petit Paul n'était plus là pour en rire, avec ses belles dents de lait... Une voix au loin m'appela : je me cachai derrière la haie, et j'avançai sans bruit, lentement, comme autrefois... [...] Mais dans les bras d'un églantier, sous des grappes de roses blanches et de l'autre côté du temps, il y avait depuis des années une très jeune femme brune qui serrait toujours sur son cœur fragile les roses rouges du colonel. Elle entendait les cris du garde, et le souffle rauque du chien. Blême, tremblante, et pour jamais inconsolable, elle ne savait pas qu'elle était chez son fils (292).

## Conclusion: *la région*: Past or Present ?

The long-held belief that the Third Republic (1870-1940) successfully repressed regional identities through its Jacobin institutions, most notably in the national schools' efforts to eradicate the local patois, is a popular misconception : according to Anne-Marie Thiesse, “le national et le local ont été alors désignés comme parfaitement solidaires, le second étant même proposé comme fondement le plus irrefutable du premier.”<sup>233</sup> Indeed, represented as a microcosm of France, *la région*, also referred as “la petite patrie” under the Third Republic, has been the locus of the formulation of the national identity. As the subject of textbooks, regional culture offered the transmission of knowledge, as well as the diffusion of republican values. As scholar Nelly Wolf explains, the rural setting in particular established a « parenté étroite entre la thématique rurale sous ses différents aspects et les situations d'apprentissage scolaire désignées comme références fondatrices et lieux d'élaboration de l'identité nationale. »<sup>234</sup> The comprehension of regional identity was considered a medium for children's understanding of the national identity, which prompts Anne-Marie Thiesse to contend that at that time « l'histoire locale s'écrit donc comme version miniaturisée de l'histoire nationale ».<sup>235</sup> Therefore, the regional texts

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<sup>233</sup> Anne-Marie Thiesse, *Ils apprenaient la France : l'exaltation des régions dans le discours patriotique* (Paris : Editions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1997) 1.

<sup>234</sup> Nelly Wolf, *Le peuple dans le roman français de Zola à Céline* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1990) 107.

<sup>235</sup> Anne-Marie Thiesse, *Ils apprenaient la France : l'exaltation des régions dans le discours patriotique* (Paris : Editions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1997) 56.

found in school books can be viewed as a reflection of the effort of the national institutions to anchor French patriotism in *la région*.

Moreover, an analogy emerged between the hierarchical division of the territory that shaped *la région* as periphery and the condition of *le peuple*, a class historically dominated and marginalized by the centralized power,

l'ancienneté du centralisme français concentrant en un même lieu le sommet de la hiérarchie des pouvoirs (politique, économique, culturel) a engendré une homologie entre d'un côté la capitale et les positions dominantes en tous domaines, d'un autre côté l'échelon local et les positions dominées. De ce fait, le peuple, au sens social, est assimilé au local. Célébrer le local et souligner sa place comme fondement premier du national, c'est affirmer l'ancrage national de la nation dans le soubassement populaire, donner une image harmonieuse et complémentaire des diversités sociales qui sont rabattues, par une transposition elliptique, sur la représentation territoriale.<sup>236</sup>

The representation of *le peuple* through the setting of *la région* can also be explained by the attempt to displace *le peuple* from Paris and the social struggles and divisions associated with urban culture and blue-collar workers, to *la région*, perceived as a space where the nation's unity could be restored through the representation of harmonious regional communities. Texts featuring peasants and regional communities therefore demonstrated the attempt to anchor their culture in a national history applicable to the idea of the nation at large, which leads Wolf to claim that, « le roman sur le paysan s'inscrit dans l'histoire nationale alors que l'ouvrier est associé à des faits d'histoires particuliers maintenu en dehors du corpus national. »<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>237</sup> Nelly Wolf, *Le peuple dans le roman français de Zola à Céline* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1990) 109.

As a culture that is structured by traditions and the repetitions of seasons in the case of rural regions, *la région* features a cyclic time frame that allows for the construction of myth. As such, it has encouraged a timeless representation of its culture, yet associated with the Past and particularly with origins. Indeed, incorporating the Past through the daily practices transmitted from one generation to the next, as well as through the historical remains still standing, *la région* has been shaped since the Third Republic as a place of essence and a refuge from modernity. I have attempted to highlight in this project how the idea of *la région* evolved over the course of a century, roughly from 1850 to 1950. Writing during three distinct and paramount periods of French history which prompted the nation to redefine its identity and the position of *la région* within it, the regional works of George Sand, Guy de Maupassant and Marcel Pagnol provide cultural landmarks to examine the evolution of the idea of *la région* and to understand its construction over time by its reception as a space welcoming the expression of French patriotism. As I have exposed, for most of the century examined, the bucolic tradition has remained a major source of influence in the representation of rural France. If the realist regional novels of the mid-nineteenth century set aside Virgilian pastoralism in their writings, George Sand combines it with realism in a portrayal of *la région* anchored in its cultural traditions and language and where the proximity of nature elevates her characters to moral beings. With Maupassant, I show the saturation of literary tropes and stereotypes associated with *la région* at the end of the nineteenth century and which this author tackles by debunking cultural standards and questioning beliefs taken for general truths. As I contend, George Sand resorts to the representation of regional communities in her

“romans champêtres” as a model for the republic she hopes to see implemented, thereby, transferring the imagination of the nation onto the regional community. If George Sand uses the local community to illustrate some of her political and social ideas, the bond between *la région* and the nation truly developed during the Third Republic, being exploited by the national institutions to promote a certain definition of French identity that has remained prevalent. As for Pagnol, I put his works in perspective with the development of regionalism in the interwar years and the circulation of a national ideology of “return to the land” that aimed at containing rural exodus and restoring the country’s demographics. I discuss as well the government’s politics of promotion of regional cultures as an economic strategy to support local production and advertise abroad France’s production of goods based on diversity and quality, thereby differentiating it from other foreign exports. While early in his career, Pagnol embraced the ideology of “the return to the land” with its valorization of regional culture, I argue that his discourse becomes more critical closer to WWII and in the following period, as he focuses in his works on the tensions dividing the community. The plots of the films he produced in this period develop around a social issue that is not particular to the region featured but rather concerns the nation as a whole and questions the class and family structures of the French society of the time, as well as the country’s responsibility in the Second World War.

As I argue, school and the media are responsible for the cultural prejudice against Sand, Maupassant and Pagnol by shaping them as authors of a nostalgic representation of regional France answering to the popular demand to see illustrated the myth of *la France*

*profonde* or authentic France. Thereby it has obscured their critical reflection on the nation and their advocacy for social progress. The regional elements of the writings of Sand, Maupassant and Pagnol have been strongly emphasized in cultural discussions of their works and in textbooks through the selection of their texts and through the realist approach taken. For instance, despite the author's irony and his social commentary, Maupassant's characters are turned into ethnotypes when, presenting Norman villagers, an early twentieth-century schoolbook states: « tout le monde connaît ce villageois madré et cossu que Maupassant et tant d'autres ont immortalisés. »<sup>238</sup> Moreover, as writers who partake in the French literary heritage, the biographical relation of Sand, Maupassant and Pagnol to their native region is highlighted as well. It enhances the authors' affective bond to their region, yet depreciates their works, as suggested by George Sand's nickname "la bonne dame de Nohant" which was commonly used to refer to her in textbooks and in French culture until recently. Of course, we can also interpret French institutions's emphasis on the tie between the authors and their region as an effort to promote local tourism, as illustrated in the multiple cultural initiatives to open the authors' regional estate to visitors, and expose some of the settings featured in the texts to allow visitors to physically experience passages from the writers' works. Similarly, the limits between fiction and the documentary have been purposefully blurred in the first quarter of the twentieth-century through the circulation of postcards of Berry featuring

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<sup>238</sup> Quote from a textbook written by Risson and Lechevalier in 1905-1910 and found in Anne-Marie Thiesse, *Ils apprenaient la France : l'exaltation des régions dans le discours patriotique* (Paris : Editions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1997) 38.

photographs of traditional scenes of Berrichon daily life with extracts from George Sand's "roman champêtres" as captions, hence transposing Sand's fiction onto the reality of Berrichon culture.<sup>239</sup> If school contributed to casting Sand, Maupassant and Pagnol as regionalist authors whose perspective on *la région* is imbued with nostalgia, the development of the national heritage in the 1980s corroborated this interpretation. Making *la région* one of its pillars, the field of heritage has diverted the perspective on regional texts by projecting onto them the myth of *la France profonde* with its longing for lost stabilities and the nostalgia for a world defined by authenticity in the relations to the land and to others.

If the valorization of regional specificities was a concern for Ernest Renan who, in his 1882 speech perceived them as part of the nation's cultural heritage that needed to be protected, the significance of *la région* within the nation's heritage was fully understood and exploited by the national institutions with the crises triggered by the two world wars and more recently, immigration and globalization. As in other western countries, such as Great Britain, the notion of heritage thrived in France in the 1980s to become the expression of a consensus over a certain vision of France's Past. Indeed, as David Lowenthal explains, heritage deviates from history in that rather than a historical account of the Past open to scrutiny, heritage fabricates an account which ultimately represents a "declaration of faith in that Past."<sup>240</sup> According to Lowenthal, the development of

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<sup>239</sup> Martine Reid, « Romans en cartes postales. » *Littérature* 134. 2 (2004) 147-154.

<sup>240</sup> David Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past: Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (New York: Free Press, 1997) 121.

heritage is related to nation's loss of memory. If as Richard Terdiman demonstrates, a mnemonic crisis was already ongoing in the nineteenth-century due to industrialization and its disruption of an organic connection with the Past, it intensified in the next century, especially in the period of recession following the *Trente Glorieuses*.<sup>241</sup> Indeed, the increase of exterior influences such as immigration and globalization on French culture appeared to threaten the essence of the nation's identity.

As a favored medium for the expression of heritage, films offering adaptations of literary classics or representing significant moments in the nation's history, have consequently developed in the late twentieth-century. Offering a visual spectacle of period décors and ornaments, or of domesticated and venerable landscapes, the image predominates in heritage films. Space in particular is given much attention, leading Andrew Higson to contend that in this film genre the focus is "heritage space rather than narrative space."<sup>242</sup> With its domesticated and wild nature in different areas, French landscapes is considered part of the national heritage. As Françoise Cachin explains in her essay for *Les lieux de mémoire*, the conflation of nature and culture in the French landscape conjures up a sense of belonging to a community through a shared memory and history.<sup>243</sup> Therefore, in regional works adapted as visual media, the French countryside

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<sup>241</sup> Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

<sup>242</sup> Andrew Higson, "Re-presenting the National Past: Nostalgia and Pastiche in the Heritage Film." *Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism*. Lester Friedman ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) 117.

<sup>243</sup> Françoise Cachin, « Le paysage du peintre. » *Les lieux de mémoire*. Pierre Nora ed. (Paris : Gallimard, 1997) 2.

is given much attention through narrative or technical devices such as the long shots and panoramic shots.

Moreover, as Higson argues, the nostalgic lens projected onto these works dulls the social commentary and irony present in the original texts, which ultimately offers a realist and comforting representation where “the past is displayed as a visually spectacular pastiche, inviting a nostalgic gaze that resists the ironies and social critiques so often suggested narratively by these films.”<sup>244</sup> However, while British heritage films offer a vision of popular nationalism that is tied to class structures with “an organic community hierarchically and deferentially organized as if natural,”<sup>245</sup> French heritage films are anchored in a democratic popular nationalism with characters that oppose social hierarchy, or more commonly, with a representation of rural communities living in harmony with their environment.<sup>246</sup>

It is significant that the first French heritage films produced focused on the countryside. Indeed, critics trace the emergence of the genre back to Bertrand Tavernier’s *Un dimanche à la campagne* (1984) and Claude Berri’s adaptations of Pagnol’s works, *Jean de Florette* and *Manon des sources* (1986). As Dayna Oscherwitz explains, French heritage films developed under François Mitterrand’s presidency thanks to subsidies

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<sup>244</sup> Andrew Higson, “Re-presenting the National Past: Nostalgia and Pastiche in the Heritage Film.” *Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism*. Lester Friedman ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) 109.

<sup>245</sup> Andrew Higson, *Waving the Flag: Constructing a National Cinema in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) 44.

<sup>246</sup> To distinguish French heritage films from the British production, certain critics have chosen to refer to them through the French term “films de patrimoine” or “films de terroirs,” the latter term interestingly emphasizing the rural thematic of the French heritage film production.

given by the ministry of culture to films deemed quintessentially French in order to promote France's cultural and cinematic profile.<sup>247</sup> If the French heritage films of the 1990s featured historical plots through the adaptations of the canonic literature of Hugo, Dumas and Zola for instance, the following decade renewed its interest for the rural.<sup>248</sup> I relate the popular reemergence of regional works in that period to the debate over French national identity triggered by the polemical creation of a Ministry of Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Codevelopment in 2007 under Nicolas Sarkozy's presidency (2007-2012). As the nation became invested in questions surrounding the definition of its identity, a nostalgic view of *la région* was brought the fore in the cultural production of the period, one that enhanced *la France profonde* and ignored the serious issues that rural France was (and still is) grappling with due to the agricultural crisis. In such a context, adaptations of the regional works of Sand, Maupassant and Pagnol prevailed on the small and big screen especially given their popular appeal. Indeed, three seasons of adaptations of Maupassant's short-stories, most of them set in *la province*, were filmed for the French television in 2007, 2008, 2011 (the producers deciding to make season 2 and 3 only after observing the huge success of the first season). Likewise, a biographical fiction based on George Sand's life in Berry and her relationship with Fanchette, was filmed in 2010. As for Pagnol, actor and filmmaker Daniel Auteuil took

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<sup>247</sup> Dayna Oscherwitz, *Past Forward: French Cinema and the Post-Colonial Heritage* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010).

<sup>248</sup> The adaptation of Zola's novel, *Germinal* by Claude Berri in 1993, and the miniseries for the television *Le Comte de Monte Cristo* (1998), and *Les misérables* (2000) realized by Josée Dayan are examples of the interest of the French heritage films of the period in epic narratives strongly anchored in a historical time period.

on the project of adapting for the cinema multiple films by Pagnol, such as *La fille du puisatier* in 2011, and the first two films of the Trilogy in 2013.

The ideology of *la France profonde*, which has been promoted by French politics and culture over the last century in order to assert the nation's identity and face contemporary challenges, has contributed to the denigration of regional literature. Projecting onto these texts a nostalgia expressed as a longing for authenticity in a lifestyle that relies on the harmony between the individual and the environment as well as the community, the political and social commentary of regional authors such as Sand, Maupassant and Pagnol has been neglected. If we recognize that *la région* has been the locus of the elaboration of the national myth of *la France profonde*, we should understand as well its potential for exploring national and even universal questions that go well beyond the representation of the local.

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