

Love and love of self in early modern French writing

Principal, Vice-Principal, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is both a great pleasure to me to return to Queen Mary, an institution I love and to which I owe very much, and a great honour to be invited to give the Malcolm Bowie Lecture. To be invited to give: to have to give the lecture is more a subject of apprehension, since it is difficult to pay any kind of tribute to Malcolm without accentuating the magnitude of his loss; and one fears to produce a contribution unworthy of the occasion. However, I will proceed, only marking my regret at being unable to prolong the theme of Migration, Memory, and Identity.

“Love seeketh not Itself to please,
“Nor for itself hath any care,
“But for another gives its ease,
“And builds a Heaven in Hell’s despair.”

So sang a little Clod of Clay
Trodden with the cattle’s feet,
But a Pebble of the brook
Warbled out these metres meet:

“Love seeketh only Self to please,
“To bind another to Its delight,
“Joys in another’s loss of ease,
“And builds a Hell in Heaven’s despite.”

William Blake, ‘The Clod & the Pebble’, *Songs of Experience*, in Blake, *Complete Writings*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (Oxford: OUP, 1976), p. 211

Are the Clod and the Pebble talking, unbeknownst to themselves, about different kinds of love? Or is the Pebble delivering the truth that the Clod’s idealized view of love conceals? This ambiguity can be traced in the ways early modern, particularly seventeenth-century, French writers, write about love. Of course, their representations are tributary to a long tradition of philosophical and theological discussion. Thus Augustine defines love as:

quaedam vita duo aliqua copulans, vel copulari appetens, amantem scilicet, et quod amatur [.]. Et hoc etiam in extremis carnalibusque amoribus ita est. Sed ut aliquid purius et liquidius hauriamus, calcata carne ascendamus ad animum. Quid amat animus in amico, nisi animum? (Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VIII.x.14) (A certain life that unites or seeks to unite some two beings, that is, the lover and the beloved. And this is so even in extreme and carnal love-relationships. But in order that we may drink a purer and clearer draught, let us, spurning the flesh, ascend to the soul. What does the soul love in its friend, but his soul?)

Love, then, in all its forms, is a union; but there is a hierarchy in which spiritual love, targeted at the soul, ranks higher than carnal. Aquinas, too, defines love as involving 'a certain apprehension of the oneness of the thing loved with the lover' (IaIIae, q. 28, a. 1: translation by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province). But he also differentiates between two kinds of love: a love of concupiscence, and a love of friendship or benevolence (IaIIae, q. 26, a. 4). Some early modern writers follow him in this: thus St François de Sales, for instance, whose influence on seventeenth-century French Catholicism can hardly be overrated, distinguishes them as follows:

On partage l'amour en deux espèces, dont l'une est appelée amour de bienveillance, et l'autre, amour de convoitise. L'amour de convoitise est celui par lequel nous aimons quelque chose pour le profit que nous en prétendons; l'amour de bienveillance est celui par lequel nous aimons quelque chose pour le bien d'icelle, car qu'est-ce autre chose avoir l'amour de bienveillance envers une personne que de lui vouloir du bien? (*Traité de l'amour de Dieu*, I.13.i, 392)

Descartes rejects the distinction, however. He defines all love in terms of union:

L'amour est une émotion de l'âme, causée par le mouvement des esprits, qui l'incite à se joindre de volonté aux objets qui paraissent lui être convenables. (*Les Passions de l'âme*, § 79)

Volonté here is not synonymous with desire (which is related to the future): it is defined as:

[le] consentement par lequel on se considère dès à présent comme joint avec ce qu'on aime: en sorte qu'on imagine être un tout, duquel on pense être seulement une partie, et que la chose aimée en est une autre. (§80)

We cannot distinguish two types of love because all love involves benevolence and concupiscence (§81); yet at the same time, Descartes in effect recycles the distinction, by installing another, between the love of the object in itself and the love of its possession. Thus an ambitious man's love of glory, a miser's of money, a drunkard's of wine, the lust of a would-be rapist, an honourable man's love for a mistress or friend, and paternal affection are all forms of love. But the first four involve love not for the object itself, but only for its possession. As regards the object, what is felt in these cases is rather desire, mingled with more specific passions. Whereas, a good father's love involves desiring nothing from his children:

Les considérant comme d'autres soi-même, il recherche leur bien comme le sien propre, ou même avec plus de soin, parce que, se représentant que lui et eux font un tout dont il n'est pas la meilleure partie, il préfère souvent leurs intérêts aux siens, et ne craint pas de se perdre pour les sauver. (§82)

Friendship and sexual love can somewhat resemble this, but seldom achieve this level of perfection: even an honourable man's love for a mistress displays a little of the other kind of love as well (§82).

This notion of love as a willed union with the object of love has a powerful literary fortune in the early modern period, doubtless owing to the influence of Renaissance neo-Platonism. If we take the most important prose fiction of the first part of the seventeenth century, Honoré d'Urfé's pastoral romance *L'Astrée* (1607-27), we shall find it constantly ventilated. Love is a transformation of oneself into the beloved: it is a reorientation of one's relationship to oneself, whereby one's love of self becomes subordinated to one's love of the beloved, and the beloved's contentment means more to us than our own.

"L'esprit qui n'est que la volonté, la memoire, & le jugement, lors qu'il aime, se transforme en la chose aimée." (*L'Astrée*, I.3, 238)

"Celuy, respondit Phillis, qui ayme donne son ame mesme à la personne aimée." (I.7, 438)

[Phillis] "La personne qui ayme desire presque se transformer en la chose aymée. [...] L'Amant, respondit Silvandre, qui a plus d'esgard à son contentement particulier qu'à celui de la personne aymée, ne merite pas ce tiltre." (I.8, 451)

"Aimer c'est mourir en soy, pour revivre en autrui", c'est ne se point aimer que d'autant qu'on est agreable à la chose aimée: & bref c'est une volonté de se transformer, s'il se peut entierement en elle. (I.8, 469) (Silvandre to Hylas)

The concept of all love as a form of union cuts across the distinction between love of benevolence and love of concupiscence. But it can reinforce the distinction when it is grafted, as in *L'Astrée*, on to the idea that love, or at least true love, love lifts us above the domain of self-love, or subordinates the love of ourselves to the love of the other person.

The notion of love as the union of selves survives much later, into Rousseau's letter novel of 1761, *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*.

Nos ames trop bien confondues ne sauroient plus se séparer; et nous ne pouvons plus vivre éloignés l'un de l'autre, que comme deux parties d'un même tout. (Julie to Saint-Preux, II.7, 212)

Deux amans s'aiment-ils l'un l'autre? Non; vous et moi sont des mots proscrits de leur langue; ils ne sont plus deux, ils sont un. (Saint-Preux to Mme de Wolmar [i.e. Julie], VI.7, 675-6)

But Rousseau is deliberately harking back to an older tradition of writing and thinking about love. For, from about the mid-seventeenth-century, an alternative current prevails. The notion of union between the lovers fades, the possibility of wishing well to the beloved for his or her own sake is discounted, and love is considered rather as a blind appetite. There is, indeed, a long tradition of thinking of late seventeenth-century writers as depicting the irrationality of love. It is worth noting, however, that 'reason' or *raison* in the

seventeenth century still retains something of a connection with what Charles Taylor called the 'ontic logos', an order of rationality instantiated in the structure of the universe. The ancient conception (we find it in different forms in Plato, and in Aristotle, who was followed by the medieval scholastics), the ancient conception of the human being as a hierarchical structure, in which the noblest faculty (the rational intelligence) should guide the inferior appetites, has not lost all purchase. In this conception, we are identified essentially with the element in us that makes us human: to be oneself is to be one's rational self, not necessarily devoid of feelings or appetites but capable of integrating them into the pursuit of a higher perceived good. That is why we speak of one who is in control of his or her feelings as 'self-possessed', or 'self-mastering'. That is why Pylade can say to Oreste in Racine's *Andromaque*:

Modérez donc, seigneur, cette fureur extrême:
Je ne vous connais plus; vous n'êtes plus vous-même.
(*Andromaque*, III.i.709-10)

Oreste's reply is a challenge to this whole conception of human nature:

Non, tes conseils ne sont plus de saison,
Pylade; je suis las d'écouter la raison. (711-12)

In the alternative viewpoint Racine is often regarded as endorsing, the real self, what seventeenth century writers sometimes call *le cœur*, is a locus of dark desires avowed reluctantly, sometimes even escaping the subject's perception; and the ideal of self-mastery is violated by the reality of passion. Madame de Lafayette's novel *La Princesse de Clèves* is often considered as embodying this conception.

There are two chief manifestations of the theme of love's irrationality. First, love attaches us to people that reason tells us we should not be attached to. Secondly, when in love we find it impossible to govern ourselves rationally. Let us take the most familiar examples of the first point. In the first scene of Molière's *Le Misanthrope* (1666), Alceste sets out his uncompromising ideal of sincerity, and condemns the moral corruption of contemporary society: why, then, asks his friend, has he become attached to Célimène, whose flirtatiousness and malicious gossip are all too typical of that society? Surely he would be much better suited with her cousin Éliante: she respects him, she is reliable and sincere. 'Il est vrai', acknowledges Alceste, 'ma Raison me le dit chaque jour;/Mais la Raison n'est pas ce qui règle l'Amour' (I.i.247-8). In Racine's *Phèdre*, the protagonist loves her stepson: but when she confesses her feelings she refers to it as '[le] fol amour qui trouble ma raison' (II.v.675); earlier she has described her futile attempts to free herself from her love by sacrificing to Venus:

De victimes moi-même à toute heure entourée,
Je cherchais dans leurs flancs ma raison égarée. (I.iii.282)

What's irrational here is that both Alceste and Phèdre love someone they know they should not, from the point of view either of happiness or of morality. Reason in this sense denotes the capacity to apprehend moral truths, and sometimes the capacity to act on that apprehension: it is for the lack of this

second capacity that Phèdre speaks of ‘ma raison égarée’ (the word denoting a possibly temporary and recoverable loss), because, after all, her misery results from the ongoing awareness that her desires are forbidden. Racine spells this out in the preface.

Very often, however, the insistence on the divorce between love and reason bears on the inability of the lover to conduct himself or herself rationally, or to listen to rational advice about his or her conduct. We find this in comic, or tragicomic, mode in *Alceste*:

Percé du Coup mortel dont vous m’assassinez,
Mes Sens, par la Raison, ne sont plus gouvernés.
(*Le Misanthrope*, IV.iii.1310-11);

We find it in tragic mode in Racine: in *Andromaque*, when Oreste remonstrates against Hermione’s command to kill Pyrrhus, and she rebuffs him brutally:

Tant de raisonnements offensent ma colère. (Racine, *Andromaque*, IV.iii.1233)

Her response is mirrored by Phèdre’s to C  none:

Enfin tous tes conseils ne sont plus de saison:
Sers ma fureur, C  none, et non point ma raison. (*Ph  dre*, III.i.792)

Earlier in that play, Hippolyte’s determination to keep his feelings out of his conversation with Aricie collapses at the idea that she might think he hates her, and he blurts out his love for her before realizing:

[...] Je me suis engag   trop avant.
Je vois que la raison c  de    la violence. (II.ii.524-5)

In their inability to see reason, or act according to reason, the behaviour of such characters contrasts with that of characters in earlier seventeenth-century texts. In *L’Astr  e*, for instance, the nymph L  onide realizes that her feelings for the shepherd C  ladon are doomed to frustration, and decides to treat him henceforth as a friend (I, 571); in Corneille’s *Polyeucte* (1643) the noble pagan S  v  re tries to save Polyeucte, a Christian, from martyrdom, even though he is in love with Polyeucte’s wife.

What is the point of rehearsing such familiar instances? Because the stress on the weakness of the second kind of reason, the prudential reason that ought to regulate our behaviour, can lead us to misinterpret the representation of the other process that ought to but apparently cannot be guided by reason: namely the choice of a love-object. Indeed, common sense would lead us to suppose that the word ‘choice’ is entirely inappropriate to the depiction of love in early modern French literature. In what sense can Pyrrhus in Racine’s *Andromaque* be said to have ‘chosen’ Andromaque, when she cannot return his love, and all his worldly interests would incline him to be faithful to Hermione? Did Ph  dre ‘choose’ to fall in love with her stepson? No: she experiences her love as a curse visited on her by the goddess Venus. It may seem as if we are applying an anachronistic model of human behaviour here, seeking to rationalize a state of feeling fundamentally irrational.

Yet not all seventeenth-century authors would have agreed with this separation of love and reason. A striking case is furnished by the anonymous *Discours sur les passions de l'amour*, once attributed, most improbably, to Pascal, and now conjecturally dated to the late seventeenth century. The author, who as Jean Lafond suggests is probably a man of the world, with an interest in ideas and some knowledge of Malebranche, writes as follows:

L'on a ôté mal à propos le nom de raison à l'amour et on les a opposés sans un bon fondement, car l'amour et la raison n'est qu'une même chose. C'est une précipitation de pensées qui se porte d'un côté sans bien examiner tout, mais c'est toujours une raison, et l'on ne doit, et l'on ne peut pas souhaiter que ce soit autrement, car nous serions des machines très désagréables. (§52, *Moralistes*, 629).

In other words, attachments are intelligible; they are not simply effects of an emotional process considered as blind, they have a cognitive dimension. Something like this may be included in what Pascal meant when he said that 'le cœur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point' (S 680); at least, that makes more sense than what some of his critics have taken him to mean, namely, in effect, 'I'll believe there are fairies at the bottom of my garden if I feel like it, and you can't argue me out of it'. Could we then say that in some sense they are choices? That's what Philinte says: he speaks of Alceste's attachment to Célimène as 'cet étrange Choix où votre Cœur s'engage' (I.i.214); he says that Éliante would be better for him: 'Et ce Choix plus conforme, était mieux votre affaire' (I.i.245-6). Alceste, as we know, replies that love is not governed by reason: but he does not actually say that he did not choose Célimène, or that there can be no choice in love, only that his attachment is irrational.

At the start of *Phèdre* Hippolyte avows his feelings for Aricie, yet disavows them for two reasons. First, they are humiliating (I.i.96); they violate his innate narcissism: having imbibed pride from his Amazon mother, he comes to approve of this trait as an integral part of his identity:

Dans un âge plus mûr moi-même parvenu
Je me suis applaudi quand je me suis connu. (I.i.71-2).

Secondly, she is the wrong person—could not be more the wrong person, because his father Thésée, not content with killing her brothers and riding roughshod over her claim to the throne, has forbidden her to marry. But the words in which he condemns his attachment are striking:

Aurais-je pour vainqueur dû choisir Aricie? (I.i.102)

Vainqueur in *galant* vocabulary is simply, at first sight, a cliché'd expression for the person one loves, who has conquered one's heart. But his question is a tacit admission that in some sense he has chosen Aricie, however strange it may seem to speak of choosing a conqueror, when conquest implies violent subjugation. I'll come back to Hippolyte presently.

Perhaps, then, certain instances of apparently irrational attachment could be understood as choices of a kind. Perhaps when Burrhus in Racine's *Britannicus* says to Néron: 'On n'aime point, Seigneur, si l'on ne veut aimer' (III.i.790), this is not just a proof of his naïveté and ineffectualness.

But for centuries critics and commentators on seventeenth-century literature carried on setting love against reason; and among the extraordinary achievements of Roland Barthes's critical career we should not forget his attempt to think beyond this opposition. No doubt he perceived the idea of passional determinism as an avatar of the tendency against which so much of his work was directed: to explain human behaviour by categories derived from a notion of Nature. In his reinterpretation of Racine we observe a splicing together of two theoretical idioms often perceived as antithetical. He took over the existentialist claim that feeling cannot determine action, but that the choices we make in effect construct the feelings they appeal to. He grafted this onto a perception, derived from psychoanalysis, of human agency as operating within a symbolic order, in relation to which attachments acquire their meaning. Thus we do not have to explain why Pyrrhus loves Andromaque, in Racine's play of that name, as if she were an isolated individual with physical or psychological traits he happens to find attractive. The question is rather why he wants Andromaque, *and not* his fiancée Hermione. Hermione, Barthes argues, incarnates the demands of a legal order, encompassing the Father, the Fatherland, the Past, and Religion.

La fidélité amoureuse est donc ici indissolublement liée à la fidélité légale, sociale et religieuse. (OC ii, 1038).

His 'unfaithful' attachment to Andromaque is a quest for liberation from the law of vendetta, an aspiration towards a new legality; and ironically she espouses this order after his death, accepting a new role as Queen of Epirus and widow of Pyrrhus (1041-2). It is true that J.-M. Apostolidès, twenty years later produced an alternative reading, in which Pyrrhus is a conservative figure, harking back to an order of aristocratic autonomy menaced by the hegemonic aspirations of Hermione's Sparta, an analogue of Louis XIV's absolute monarchy; perhaps it would not be impossible to synthesize the two. But both readings have in common the idea of attachments as meaningful. It will be said that Pyrrhus does not himself refer to his attachment as a choice, nor does he give reasons for it; but various seventeenth-century writers and thinkers (La Rochefoucauld, Jacques Esprit, Pierre Nicole, Fénelon) hold that our actions may be due to motives of which we are unaware or aware only partially. Besides, Hippolyte in *Phèdre* does refer to his love for Aricie as a choice. What exactly he's choosing is not clear. If his initial refusal of sexuality, as Barthes says, is a kind of remonstrance directed against the freely-indulged sexuality of his father (1065; cf. I.i.), his submission to love would be a kind of justification of his father after all (see I.i.115); but why then should it be Aricie who conquers him? Possibly, one might speculate, because the paternal interdict serves as a welcome barrier, a kind of release from the claims of his desire, so that his intended obedience will, paradoxically, enable him to preserve his ambivalence about his father, his entitlement to criticize. At this point, however, we are moving well away from the text.

On the other hand, if we turn now to Aricie, we find that the text itself is perfectly plain about the origins of her attachment to Hippolyte. To be more precise, there is that in her feelings of which she is unaware, and that, also, of

which she is perfectly aware. Before she saw Hippolyte, her hostility to love curiously paralleled his (perhaps she knew this before she saw him, on account of his reputation, referred to by Ismène (II.i.405)).

Tu sais que de tout temps à l'Amour opposée
Je rendais souvent grâce à l'injuste Thésée
Dont l'heureuse rigueur secondait mes mépris. (II.i.433-5)

When she sees Hippolyte, she falls in love with him, but, again, her attitude to him strikingly echoes his own to himself (as she seems to be aware):

Non que par les yeux seuls lâchement enchantée
J'aime en lui sa beauté, sa grâce tant vantée,
Présents dont la Nature a voulu l'honorer,
Qu'il méprise lui-même, et qu'il semble ignorer.
J'aime, je prise en lui de plus nobles richesses,
Les vertus de son Père, et non point les faiblesses. (437-42)

she can't know is that this ambivalent attitude to Hippolyte's father is precisely Hippolyte's own; nor can she know that Phèdre loves him for exactly the same reason (he is Thésée the hero, not Thésée the philanderer) (cf. II.v.634-40). But she is aware of the nature and source of her own feelings:

J'aime, je l'avouerai, cet orgueil généreux
Qui jamais n'a fléchi sous le joug amoureux.
Phèdre en vain s'honorait des soupirs de Thésée.
Pour moi, je suis plus fière, et fuis la gloire aisée
D'arracher un hommage à mille autres offert,
Et d'entrer dans un cœur de toutes parts ouvert.
Mais de faire fléchir un courage inflexible,
De porter la douleur dans une âme insensible,
D'enchaîner un Captif de ses fers étonné,
Contre un joug qui lui plaît vainement mutiné;
C'est là ce que je veux, c'est là ce qui m'irrite.
Hercule à désarmer coûtait moins qu'Hippolyte,
Et vaincu plus souvent, et plus tôt surmonté
Préparait moins de gloire aux yeux qui l'ont dompté. (443-56)

An earlier school of critics perceived Aricie as a pallid boarding-school miss: they clearly never read this speech. Had I time I would demonstrate how her fantasy of a subjugated Hippolyte matches uncannily his own image of his situation as one humiliated (I.i.95-6), a defeated rebel (II.ii.546), a captive (556); and the fact that Racine is mobilizing a conventional *galant* vocabulary should not be used to screen the violence and intensity of the fantasy life of both these characters. They are indeed uncannily well-matched.

But for the purpose of this lecture I want simply to point out that Aricie names the primary object of her desire, the object she hopes to attain through the mediation of Hippolyte: glory (446, 456). As often in seventeenth-century French drama, this denotes less an objective recognition by other people and more one's worth in one's own eyes. In short, her love for Hippolyte can be understood as a form of what seventeenth-century writers would have called

amour-propre or self-love. To say this is not to pass any kind of moral judgement on it.

How far the nexus between love and self-love applies to Racine's characters there is no room to discuss in general here. One could say that it is more evident in the characters who, in a situation analysed by Barthes as fundamental to Racine (a problematic claim), have power over another character whom they love and who does not necessarily love them. But one should be chary of regarding Racine's theatre as the working-out of a vision of human nature logically independent of the plays. I want simply to follow up the line of thought derived from Aricie's speech, and examine how other seventeenth-century writers represent love for an individual as dependent on self-love. In this context, there is no need for a long theological excursus on self-love in Augustine or Aquinas or Jansenius or Pascal. The point is simply that writers are aware that the love we experience as focused on another person may originate from some aspect of our relationship to ourselves; and, moreover, that it may confer some benefit on ourselves, were it only in the form of enhancing our gratification in being who we are. In order to understand such representations, we do not have to suppose that the presence of this benefit cancels love as such; nor is it necessary to imagine that they convey a fundamentally theological set of values.

This awareness that the other person's attachment to one enhances one's own worth is constantly explored in the the fiction of Mme de Lafayette. She excels at depicting the physical shock of desire. At the same time, desire in her works frequently has the conceptual element pointed to by the author of the *Discours sur les passions de l'amour*, and it is frequently mixed with concern for one's own sense of self-worth. To take a familiar example, when the duc de Nemours in *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678) overhears the heroine confessing to her husband that she loves another man, he exults in the very difference between her and other women that may lead to her successfully resisting her feelings for him:

Il trouva de la gloire à s'être fait aimer d'une femme si différente de toutes celles de son sexe. (337)

In other words, though he could not know this at the outset, his falling in love with her prospectively conferred on him a benefit to his self-esteem no other woman could have bestowed. But the relationship between love and self-image is especially explored in Mme de Lafayette's earlier work, *Zaïde* (1669-70). Whereas Mme de Lafayette's most read and most admired stories, such as like *La Princesse de Clèves*, are set in the sixteenth-century French court, and populated by historical figures, this one is set in a remote historical setting, medieval Spain. It involves a complicated set of often unrequited or dysfunctional attachments, but I will focus only on one episode, involving a character called Alphonse. His sufferings from female infidelity lead him, at one stage, to steer clear of beautiful women, so he is not interested when his father reports that Bélasure, high-born and rich, a fine match for someone, has arrived at court. She has the reputation of being completely impervious to love, although one man, the comte de Lara, has already died for love of her. One day

she admits to Alphonse that she has never experienced love for any man, and his response overthrows all his previous resolutions:

L'idée d'un cœur fait comme le sien, qui n'eût jamais reçu d'impression, me parut une chose si admirable et si nouvelle que je fus frappé dans ce moment du désir de lui plaire et d'avoir la gloire de toucher un cœur que tout le monde croyait insensible. (108)

The benefit of such an attachment might seem obvious, and indeed they are borne out in Alphonse's initial experience when he realizes that Bélasire has feelings for him:

Quel charme c'était pour moi de connaître l'étonnement qu'avait Bélasire de n'être plus maîtresse d'elle-même et de se trouver des sentiments sur quoi elle n'avait point de pouvoir! Je goûtai des délices, dans ces commencements, que je n'avais pas imaginées; et, qui n'a point senti le plaisir de donner une violente passion à une personne qui n'en a jamais eu [...] peut dire qu'il ignore les véritables plaisirs de l'amour. (109-10)

Alphonse's state of mind here closely parallels that we already encountered in Aricie in *Phèdre*. But the benefits it confers are fleeting, and indeed delusional. Since Bélasire's value to Alphonse as a love-object depends entirely on his belief that she has never experienced love for anyone before, any doubt of that belief throws both his love and his self-worth into crisis. But paradoxically he has an interest in subjecting that belief to doubt, lest he be comforting himself by an unfounded sense of self-worth. He had thought her protracted rejection of the love of the comte de Lara a cast-iron proof of insensibility. But since she still speaks of Lara with respect, the thought occurs to him that perhaps she felt more than she has admitted. Although she warns him that the obsessive questioning he now embarks on will destroy her love for him as well as his for her (113), he perseveres, and her prophecy becomes true, but not before he has killed his best friend in a fit of totally unfounded jealousy (126). Something of the quality of Alphonse's jealousy is conveyed by a critic writing about a much later author:

Jealousy in this view is the quest for knowledge in a terrifying pure form: a quest for knowledge untrammelled and unsupported by things actually known. It is a continuous journey towards a receding goal, an itinerary with no stopping places and no landmarks; it is an appetite for knowledge, but knows nothing. (Bowie, *Freud, Proust and Lacan*, p. 58)

In his *Maximes* (1665-78) Mme de Lafayette's close friend the duc de La Rochefoucauld (who may have had a hand in the writing of *Zaïde*, and perhaps also in that of *La Princesse de Clèves*) explores in more abstract form the relationship between love of self and self-love. That this relationship may involve self-ignorance or self-deception is plain from the following maxim:

Si l'on croit aimer sa maîtresse pour l'amour d'elle, on est bien trompé. If you think you love your beloved for her own sake, you are very much deceived. (374)

This is plainly because love is linked with self-love:

Il n'y a point de passion où l'amour-propre règne si puissamment que dans l'amour, et on est toujours plus disposé à sacrifier le repos de ce qu'on aime qu'à perdre le sien.

There is no passion so powerfully ruled by self-love as love; and we are always more willing to sacrifice the peace of our beloved, than to lose our own. (262)

La Rochefoucauld here uses the term *amour-propre*, used by theologians, especially followers of Augustine, to designate the morbid self-centredness of fallen mankind; but this does not necessarily imply that we should read a theological agenda into his work. What the maxim does imply is that if we were, *per impossible* perhaps, to put our beloved's peace of mind above our own, this would count as genuine love, just as genuine friendship consists in putting one's friends interests before one's own, whatever motives one might have for doing so (81). On this showing, it is hardly surprising that La Rochefoucauld, an apparently fully-paid up member of the Pebble tendency, should say that, in jealousy, there is more self-love than love (324)—a point brought out by the behaviour of Alphonse in *Zaïde*.

But what is *amour-propre*, according to La Rochefoucauld? The first edition of the *Maximes* began with a large-scale description of it, itself introduced with a definition (why La Rochefoucauld afterwards discarded this portrait is a matter of interest to specialists of which I shall say nothing here):

L'amour-propre est l'amour de soi-même et de toutes choses pour soi; il rend les hommes idolâtres d'eux-mêmes, et les rendrait les tyrans des autres si la fortune leur en donnait les moyens. Il ne se repose jamais hors de soi, et ne s'arrête dans les sujets étrangers que comme les abeilles sur les fleurs, pour en tirer ce qui lui est propre.

Self-love is the love of oneself and of all things for the sake of oneself; it makes human beings into idolaters of themselves, and would make them into tyrants over other people if fortune gave them the means to be so. (MS 1)

On account of *amour-propre*, all our attachments are ultimately for our own sake. To say that it makes us self-idolaters is to say that we treat ourselves as our supreme value, but also that this self to which we are attached is in some sense a fiction, something created by us from ourselves, and separated off from ourselves; and this attachment is as delusive as the idolater's belief in his idol, which can never confer the benefits he seeks in his prayers. To say it makes us, as it were, conditional tyrants, is to say that our relation to other people always treats them as instruments, subordinating them to our own goals, and denying them a will or personality of their own. The image of a union of souls with the beloved becomes nothing other than a mask for fantasies of domination: union is really annexation. Thus La Rochefoucauld offers this tentative and multi-faceted definition of love:

Dans l'âme c'est une passion de régner, dans les esprits c'est une sympathie, et dans le corps ce n'est qu'une envie cachée et délicate de posséder ce que l'on aime après beaucoup de mystères. (68)

The middle section is the most obscure, but 'sympathie' here is almost certainly to be understood in the sense of a temperamental affinity (rather than that of a feeling-for another person); if this suggests an element of mutuality, this is played down by the other terms of the definition, 'régner' and 'posséder'. To put the matter in more general terms, synthesizing the many maxims in which La Rochefoucauld discusses *amour-propre*, and which there is no time to quote here, *amour-propre* is, at one level, an inclination towards whatever benefits or gratifies us, even at the expense of other people; moreover, typically, it disguises itself so that we believe we are pursuing our goals or our objects of desire for some other reason quite independent of benefit or gratification—as it might be, for the sake of some intrinsic merit in the relevant line of conduct or in the object of our desire. This is why we might delude ourselves into thinking that we are subordinating our pleasure or good to theirs: we believe in accordance with Blake's Clod, but the truth of our feelings has been uttered by the Pebble.

Yet there is something of a problem in this portrayal of love as a possessive and dominating urge. It comes up against what La Rochefoucauld asserts as a fact of experience that seems at first sight to accredit the altruistic concept of love, in which we subordinate our self-love to the love of the other person. In a maxim that, admittedly, never made it to any of the published editions, La Rochefoucauld writes:

Le pouvoir que les personnes que nous aimons ont sur nous est presque toujours plus grand que celui que nous y avons nous-mêmes. (ME 24)

How can this be if our love for another person is essentially a form of self-love? Again, how is it that a mistreated lover is less likely to be unfaithful than a successful one (331)? Or, in other words, why is the unresponsive or unreliable mistress more powerful than one who reciprocates? Moreover, I just defined *amour-propre* in terms of benefit or gratification, as both were forces pulling in the same direction. But the relation between these two notions is a troubled, and possibly conflicting one. This is especially strikingly brought out in a long passage from the first edition (I 101) which La Rochefoucauld afterwards drastically abridged (so as to produce maxim 88 of the final edition). In the original version, he analyses the power of *amour-propre* to transform objects, in such a way that it is itself deceived by the effect of its workings. Thus, when someone acts against us and displays hostility we inflate their faults and transform their virtues into something worse than faults; if they change their attitude, or if our own self-interest requires us to be reconciled with them, their bad qualities fade away, and the good ones are reinstated in all their glory; we even judge their prior behaviour indulgently, because we now have an interest in thinking well of them. Adopting a favourable view of their character helps to prevent the reconciliation being derailed by unpleasant memories of their past behaviour. But this strategy may be directly against our interest, and the gratifications it offers may be perverse rather than direct. This is clear in the

sphere of love, when a lover's outrage at his beloved's neglect or infidelity, generates violent fantasies of revenge that vanish in her presence. Then:

Son ravissement rend cette beauté innocente, il n'accuse plus que lui-même, il condamne ses condamnations, et par cette vertu miraculeuse de l'amour-propre il ôte la noirceur aux mauvaises actions de sa maîtresse et en sépare le crime pour s'en charger lui-même. (I 101)

His rapture makes the beautiful creature innocent, he now accuses only himself, he condemns his own condemnations, and by the miraculous power of self-love, he strips his beloved's bad deeds of their blackness, and detaches the wrongdoing from her in order to burden himself with it.

Amour-propre thus directs aggression against ourselves, and the guilt we experience as a result is a price we gladly pay for the sake of the continuing attachment. It is because the clod is passive and malleable, 'trodden with the cattle's feet', ignorant of its own oppressed status, that it imagines that love is altruistic. *Amour-propre* here has nothing to do with entertaining a favourable image of oneself, since the lover on the contrary wishes to think ill of himself rather than of his mistress. Again, his attitude is certainly against his interest, since she has neglected him or been unfaithful; he'd be better off without her: as La Rochefoucauld elsewhere remarks, in unusually prescriptive vein—'les infidélités devraient éteindre l'amour' (infidelities ought to extinguish love) (359). And whereas he may have enjoyed his fantasies of revenge, the sense of his guilt and responsibility must be unpleasant. So the attribution of this behaviour to *amour-propre* is paradoxical. His self-condemnation is in his interest only in so far as it permits him to retain the over-valued image of his mistress, and thus to go on loving; in other words, it allows him to do what he wants, even if it damages him.

Perhaps this is how we might make sense of La Bruyère's question:

Si j'accorde que dans la violence d'une grande passion on peut aimer quelqu'un plus que soi-même, à qui ferai-je plus de plaisir ou à ceux qui aiment, ou à ceux qui sont aimés? (*Les Caractères*, 'Du cœur', 15)

At first sight he seems to be accepting, as a fact, that to love someone more than yourself is possible; but in fact he is canvassing the possibility that in such love, there is none the less a kind of self-gratification, else why might the proposition please not only those who have the satisfaction of being loved by someone who loves them more than himself or herself, but those who themselves love another person in this way?

In the long portrait of *amour-propre* to which I referred earlier (MS 1) La Rochefoucauld depicts it as something other than a concern for, or commitment to, our own advantage or gratification (as we first defined it): at a deeper level it functions like a self within the self, its interests and attachments different from that of the primary self with which we habitually identify. Thus, in MS 1, he writes that:

Il est capricieux, et on le voit travailler avec le dernier empressement, et avec des travaux incroyables, à obtenir des choses qui ne lui sont

point avantageuses, et qui même lui sont nuisibles, mais qu'il poursuit parce qu'il les veut.

Perhaps we could make sense of the process as follows. Love, as conceived in the idealist, or cloddish, manner of d'Urfé, is understood as wanting what the beloved wants because they want it, not because you want it; wanting it for their sake. Their desire becomes your law. It would be almost impure, from the lover's point of view, to want the thing for the good it might do you, or even for the good it might do the beloved, because that would dilute the fundamental identification with the beloved's desire for its own sake. This is both an ethical ideal and a phenomenological description of the experience of love. But there is no reason to suppose that La Rochefoucauld rejects it in either of those aspects. He suggests rather that the experience is itself a secondary phenomenon, masking processes of which the lover is unaware, especially those connected with self-love.

But self-love itself, paradoxically, operates like love as conceived in the idealist model. Self-love loves what you want because you want it, because it is you that wants it; for your sake, not for the sake of any good the thing might bring you. It makes your desire its law, and thus reinforces and enforces it, makes it impossible to shed.

The model of love as identification with the beloved's desire is put under strain if we imagine that the beloved's desire is for what will harm him or her. To want what they want is then to will harm to them. Yet the same is true with self-love as conceived in the light of this model. Your self-love can wish what is harmful to you, simply because you wish it, irrespective of your real interests. But there is another paradox here. The notion of self-love, as we've seen, might explain attachments to another person, in terms of the benefit or gratification the attachment or the idea of the attachment, can bring. To that extent, love would appear as intelligible, not blindly irrational. But in La Rochefoucauld's use of the term *amour-propre* emerges as capricious (a word he uses of it himself, as we have seen): one can give no reason for its tastes apart from its own taste:

C'est par lui-même que ses désirs sont allumés, plutôt que par la beauté et par le mérite de ses objets: [...] son goût est le prix qui les relève et le fard qui les embellit. (MS 1)

One cannot, as we have seen, explain love by the benefits, imaginary or real, it confers, or even by the pleasure it confers.

We now seem to have come round in a circle. At the start, we noted that love, in the sense of attachment to a specific object as distinct from other objects, was often regarded as purely irrational. This irrationality was qualified by the analysis of love as a form of self-love, in which the particular object was seen as conferring some benefit or gratification that other objects could not confer. But now since self-love is ultimately capricious, and its relation to benefit or gratification contingent, love appears as purely irrational again.

At this point, two observations suggest themselves. First, a historical one. Aquinas defines love as 'coaptatio appetitus sensitivi, vel voluntatis, ad aliquod bonum, idest ipsa complacentia boni' ('the aptitude of the sensitive

appetite or of the will to some good, that is to say, its very complacency in good' (Dominican Fathers' translation) (IaIIae, q. 26, a. 1); it implies 'quandam connaturalitatem vel complacentiam amantis ad amatum; unicuique autem est bonum id quod est sibi connaturale et proportionatum' (a certain connaturalness or complacency of the lover for the thing beloved, and to everything that thing is a good, which is akin and proportionate to it) (IaIIae, q. 27, a. 1). Hence what is bad or evil is loved only insofar as it appears as good (q. 27, a. 1, *ad* 1). It is on this showing perfectly reasonable to say that, on the one hand, X loves drunkenness because that state appears to him to be good, and, on the other, that that love is misplaced because drunkenness is not a state naturally suitable to a rational animal, considered both as rational and as animal.

For La Rochefoucauld this primary relationship of desire to the good seems to be absent. He lies on the far side, or perhaps I should say the near side, of a dividing-line that cuts through Western thought in the early modern period: not a straight dividing-line traced at one precise moment across the intellectual map but a jagged line starting in one corner of the map, and taking a long time to reach the other corner; a line for instance that separates La Rochefoucauld not only from Aquinas, four centuries before him, but from Montesquieu, half a century after him; that divides the terrain of Aristotelian obedience, in which norms can be deduced from the facts of human nature, from a terrain that subdivides into normative and factual regions. Before La Rochefoucauld Hobbes had already colonized this latter terrain, when he uncoupled the concept of good from any grounding in nature, and folded it back into the language of desire:

But whatsoever is the object of any mans Appetite or Desire; that is it, which he for his part calleth *Good*: [...] For these words of Good, Evill, and Contemptible, are ever used with relation to the person that useth them. There being nothing simply and absolutely so; nor any common Rule of Good and Evill to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves. (*Leviathan*, I.6, 39)

However we explain this, it is, I think, because La Rochefoucauld is tributary to this philosophical revolution that he is able to divorce self-love so completely from any necessary orientation to the good of the self-lover. Here is a description, which is neither about self-love nor about La Rochefoucauld, that seems none the less to throw light on its paradoxical qualities:

It [Proustian desire] ventures out from the inner world of narcissistic self-absorption to track down delectable objects in the external world. [...] On the other hand, it seems to want very little of the external world, to be propelled by an active will to depletion, and to cling to its own disappointments. (*Proust among the Stars*, p. 262)

But to say that self-love, and therefore love, is capricious is not to say that it is motiveless, merely to imply that we must look for the causes of it in the lover, not in the qualities of the beloved, between which and ourselves self-love introduces an opaque screen. We have encountered several cases in which we found reasons for love in the self-love of the lover. It must be said, however,

that these were intelligible reasons, within a culture in which self-esteem is highly valued, and not altogether divorced from the esteem in which one is held by others, even if the latter is subordinate to the former. But early modern writers were of course aware that that attachments may have reasons that cannot be put into words, as Richard Scholar has shown in his fine study of the *je-ne-sais-quoi*. Even when they try to be more explicit in their attempts to trace the sources of an attachment, they are not confined to speculating about its links with *amour-propre*. One remarkable attempt to go further and to find biographical, or rather autobiographical reasons, for an apparently irrational attachment was made by, of all people, Descartes. In one of his letters, he admits to a longstanding propensity to be attracted to people with squints, which he was unable to account for, until he remembered a childhood sweetheart who had the same distinctive feature:

L'impression qui se faisait par la vue en mon cerveau, quand je regardais ses yeux égarés, se joignait tellement à celle qui s'y faisait aussi pour émouvoir en moi la passion de l'amour, que longtemps après, en voyant des personnes louches, je me sentais plus enclin à les aimer qu'à en aimer d'autres, pour cela seul qu'elles avaient ce défaut; et je ne savais pas néanmoins que ce fût pour cela. (AT V, 57: *OP* III, 741)

The impression produced in my brain by sight, when I looked at her wandering eyes, fused with the other impression being formed in that organ so as to arouse in me the passion of love, in such a way that, for a long time afterwards, when I saw women with a squint, I was more inclined to love them than others, for the single reason that they had this fault: and yet I did not know that this was the reason.

The source of this attachment, then, is the ongoing influence of a trace left by experience on the body rather than an inaccessible psychical state. Moreover, he thinks that the obscure bodily causes of passion, the traces of past experience, are in principle recoverable. The memory of the little girl does not seem to have come in a Proustian anamnesis: he implies that it has been salvaged by reflection, and he holds that reflection can rid us of what is anomalous in such passions, as it has with his squint fetish (AT V, 57: *OP* III, 741-2).

And this brings me to my second general point, as, in another way, does the reference to Proust. In this lecture, I have discussed psychological processes and emotional relationships using more or less the language that the writers discussed would themselves have used. Except for the term 'fetish' just now, and a passing reference to Hippolyte's 'narcissism', I have not resorted to any subsequent metalanguage of analysis: and one might defend that approach by arguing that acute reflection on the depths of the mind and the complex relationship between desire and thought was not a late nineteenth-century invention.

Malcolm Bowie, of course, knew this as well as anyone. In his essay on 'Freud and Proust', he observes how much of Proust's psychological reflection, on such central Proustian topics as 'the multiplicity of the self, forgetfulness,

psychical numbness, de-personalisation, and the inconstancy or contradictoriness of desire' 'has deep roots in the French intellectual tradition: in the work of Montaigne, Descartes, Pascal, La Rochefoucauld and La Bruyère', not to mention more recent writers (79). But he insists on the incompatibility between this introspective approach and psychoanalytic theory (79-80) (the Descartes example could be adduced as confirmation of this), and, having acknowledged the pertinence of the introspective approach, he proceeds to show how other strands of Proust's writing are best teased out with reference to the alternative Freudian conception. Other critics had done justice to the first set of debts, and after all these authors are mentioned in the text of *A la recherche du temps perdu* itself; to discern the second less palpable connections was one of Malcolm's distinctive contributions. And even if one is dealing with early modern texts, I could understand that certain listeners might marvel at the spectacle of someone restricting himself or herself to early modern concepts in order to interpret them, as they would at that of a researcher whose idea of methodology is to read a lot of books in a library and make notes on index cards. I do not here wish to discuss the methodological issue of the choice of a metalanguage; such choices are always to be justified with relation to a context. But I would willingly concede that even if one abstains from developing one's reading of an older text in the terms of a later vocabulary, it may be those later categories of thought that have alerted one to features of that text in the first place. Could we really have done better than those critics who wrote off Aricie as an uninteresting piece of decoration, a concession to audiences who had to take their Greek tragedy diluted with romantic love, if we had never been alerted to the relationships between desire and fantasy, and to the perverse undercurrents of supposedly normal attachments?

In any case, when we look again at Malcolm's essay on Freud and Proust, we find that the presence of early modern texts in Proust's work is not simply as models for the Proustian narrator's psychological analyses. In tracking bisexual motifs in the writing Malcolm comes upon a whole set of echoes of Racine, as when the narrator, redescribing his passion for the individual Albertine as a generalized passion for youth, takes on the language of Phèdre, voicing her desire for Hippolyte as a desire for the young and uncorrupted Thésée. '[This] and other self-identifications with Racine's heroine are now recapitulated in a symmetrical exchange of sexual roles: the narrator becomes Phèdre to Albertine's Hippolyte' (83).

In the course of this lecture I have twice cited passages from a critic who was in fact not talking at all about the texts to which I applied them. The critic—as if those of you who know his work could not recognize his inimitable style—is Malcolm, talking on both occasions about Proust, and the two examples happen to illustrate the distinction he made, and to which I referred, between that in Proust which belongs to a tradition of French moralist writing, and that which stands outside that tradition. The obsessive jealous ratiocination of Alphonse, and indeed of Consalve, in *Zaïde* is reminiscent of the Proustian narrator's; but the moralists, philosophers, and theologians of the late seventeenth century were well aware of how passion can both stimulate and distort or cripple the reasoning faculty: as Malebranche put it, 'toutes les

passions se justifient'. The other case is somewhat different. In so far as La Rochefoucauld expounds a concept of *amour-propre*, it is certainly possible to trace its antecedents to seventeenth-century to followers of St Augustine, and, beyond them, to Augustine himself. But the portrait of *amour-propre* does more than articulate a concept: it deploys an image, it unfurls a rhetoric, the rhetoric, for instance, of personification, that says something more, and something other, than the theoretical discourse of its time, and seems to enter into relations with discourses from another time, another conceptual universe.

It is certainly possible to read literary texts, or certain literary texts, in keeping with a purely internal logic, in virtue of which they refer to nothing but themselves. Yet this goes against our inveterate tendency to read the literary text mimetically—as representing, or referring to, something beyond itself. But, to the extent that a text works as literary, this referential function can be satisfied by an endless procession of possible referents. Phèdre and Hippolyte, their genders inverted, can represent a male heterosexual narrator (himself in a sense symbolizing a male homosexual Proust) and a female lesbian object of desire. Barthes sneered at his critic Raymond Picard for describing a Racinian character as 'a proud and noble-hearted prince' ('un prince fier et généreux'): what can such words mean nowadays (*Critique et vérité*, OC, ii, 31)? Yet these words, which seem so dated, so vacuous, yet perhaps so ideologically pernicious, meant something very real to the men and women of the seventeenth century: they designated a figure whom they could love and admire, whose loss they could mourn. We gain nothing from rendering ourselves unable to respond to those feelings. Yet Picard too was wrong—wronger—to brandish his commonsense language, hallowed by tradition, against Barthes's attempt to rewrite Racine for his time—a time, indeed, already half a century remote from ours.

I have tried to show how early modern French literature offers, as it were, a series of orchestrations of the songs of both Blake's Clod and his Pebble. I do not claim that all seventeenth-century writers, or even that all late seventeenth-century writers, reduce love to self-love; that they take the side of the Pebble, against his Clod. What I would suggest, however, is that, by tracing connections between love and self-love, they make it possible to see how that even if love for a particular individual is not subject to reason, in the sense that it cannot be mastered by reason, its origins may not be altogether irrational. Perhaps also I have conveyed something of what we may experience when, in endeavouring to track down the concepts articulated in early modern discourses, as we develop our ear for the conceptual music of early modernity, we come upon strange discordances that jolt us back to our immediate present. And perhaps this is, after all, a way of saying that reading is a kind of unpredictable migration in time.