

# Masculinities in Twentieth- and Twenty-first Century French and Francophone Literature



Masculinities in Twentieth- and Twenty-first  
Century French and Francophone Literature

Edited by

Edith Biegler Vandervoort

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P U B L I S H I N G

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*In dedication to my husband, Kurt Vandervoort,  
for his support and inspiration.*



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# INTRODUCTION

## EDITH BIEGLER VANDERVOORT

The study of masculinity and gender identity is relatively new. This is evident by the dates of the list of books on masculinity theory, which have been published in recent years, and apply theories of gender by notable feminists like Gayle Rubin, Luce Irigaray, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Much of the scholarship on gender studies, gay and lesbian studies, and queer theory, by these and others, such as Julie Rivkin, Michael Ryan, Michel Foucault, Jeffrey Weeks, Teresa de Lauretis, Judith Butler, Lee Edelman, Michael Moon, Judith Halberstam, and Nancy Chodorow originate in the 1980s and 1990s. With the increasing visibility of bisexual, lesbian, gay and transgendered communities, the study of masculinities has gained momentum.

Theoretical studies on masculinities appear almost annually. For instance, there are the books *Men, Masculinity, and Media* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1992), edited by Steve Craig, and *The Handbook of Studies on Men & Masculinities* (London: Sage, 2005), edited by Michael Kimmel, Jeff Hearn, and R. W. Connell; Kimmel, Hearn, and Connell's book includes articles on the media, health, crime, and sports. The studies *Theorizing Masculinities* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), edited by Harry Brod and Michael Kaufman, and *Feminism and Masculinities* (NY: UP Oxford, 2004), edited by Peter F. Murphy, pertain to theory and ethnographies, the history of masculinity, the military, homophobia, post-colonialism, and gender identity.

To begin a discussion of the depiction of masculinities in the literary history of any nation, it is helpful to begin examining the definition of men and masculinity in general. One very basic, working definition of a man is as "a provider of food and shelter, a controller of family finances, as inseminator of women, and as (violent) law-enforcer" (Coleman 4). It is a definition which may sound draconian, but to many readers of industrialized, Western cultures, it is still a guideline which men and women observe in their relationships to one another.

If one were to ask the question "[w]hat is a man" to a random group of men and women across the globe, one would come up with varying

definitions, for masculinity and manhood have different meanings depending on the culture and historical period and, in fact, is set in opposition to other cultures, sexualities, and women (Kimmel 120). A universal definition of masculinity varies widely across cultures (Coleman 6). As Daniel Coleman writes, “[m]asculine ideologies . . . are refracted when they encounter the medium of a new cultural context (7). In North American cultures, however, it is the dominant culture of men which sets the standards for other men and by which men of other cultures, socioeconomic classes, and sexualities, measure themselves (Kimmel 124-25). Just as boys compare themselves to their fathers and determine their image of ideal manhood in the Freudian context, adult men strive to attain the image of dominant males. The sociologist Erving Goffman goes a step further, stating that a man is “a young, married, white, urban, northern heterosexual, Protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight and height, and a recent record in sports” (qtd. in Kimmel 125).

This declaration is quite radical, but it has certain elements which all Americans have encountered. For instance, any American man who is of white, Protestant, middle-class origin, who fails to attain a college degree, earn a certain amount of money, and marry a beautiful, or at least attractive woman will face a lack of respect and have a lower status, and will even encounter scorn within his immediate and extended family, thus giving him a self image of incompetence and unworthiness. Furthermore, a mere glimpse at North American newspaper reports of political leaders, chief executive officers of large corporations, and celebrities verifies the contention that white men still represent an advantaged group in society. Today, an African-American or Latino who becomes successful in the corporate or political world has an uphill battle, for, although racial slurs are rarely heard in public, these minority groups are as marginalized as ever. Such instances of prejudice make homosocial relations, so important in attaining a powerful position, impossible between white men and members of ethnic minorities. Thus, minorities must work harder to attain a position of power, for power is most important for men. As Kimmel correctly states, the hegemonic male is “in power, a man with power, and a man of power. . . . The very definitions of manhood we have developed in our culture maintain the power that some men have over other men and that men have over women” (125).

Included in this definition of manhood is the privilege of patriarchy, an element of masculinity which is operative in male-dominated societies of other countries. Although masculine ideologies vary in each culture and change whenever they encounter different cultural contexts, masculinities are adept at adapting various institutions of patriarchal privilege to diverse

social conditions (Coleman 6-7). Furthermore, patriarchal privilege is dependent on the establishment and maintenance of some type of hierarchy, which assumes certain privileges. As Heidi Hartman argues, it is “a set of social relations between men, which have a material base, and which . . . establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women” (14). Thus, all men have the privilege of dominance over women, regardless of their class, race, or ethnic group. Men on the upper rungs of the hierarchy can “buy off” those in the lower rungs by giving them power over at least some women, thus making men dependent on each other to maintain this dominance (Hartman 15). Most certainly, the most perfunctory look at human history will verify this argument and will even confirm that dominance is not limited to behavior towards women. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes that male privileges of ancient Greece include mentoring and engaging in sexual relationships with boys and, although these relationships are oppressive to the subject, they have the function of educating boys, who will eventually wield power not only over other young men, but over slaves of both sexes and women of all classes, including their own (Sedgwick 698). Citing Hanna Arendt, Sedgwick argues,

“Women and slaves belonged and lived together,” writes Hannah Arendt. The system of sharp class and gender subordination was a necessary part of what the male culture valued most in itself: “Contempt for laboring originally [arose] out of a passionate striving for freedom from necessity and a no less passionate impatience with every effort that left no trace, no monument, no great work worthy to remembrance”; so the contemptible labor was left to women and slaves (698).

Included in this labor are housework and child rearing, which receive little or no recognition. Since these activities have no monetary compensation, restricting women to house work is a way for men to keep women from accessing essential productive resources, such in a means of self sufficiency. In addition, as Heidi Hartman argues, men control women’s sexuality by insisting on monogamous heterosexual marriages, which keep them in a subordinate position. In a capitalist society, the power men yield over women’s sexual and labor power often results in women’s inability to support themselves or their children and, in return, the necessity to serve their husbands in many sexual and personal ways to sustain the family structure, no matter how difficult such a living arrangement may be. Women’s servitude towards men exists outside of the household as well, because in the work place, they are employed in jobs which earn lower salaries and involve tasks which men do not want to perform because they

receive little recognition. Sexual harassment by male employers and professors serve to remind them of their lowly position in the gender hierarchy and, often, women are used as trophies to provide the appearance of success and youth in a corporation. In this way, women are also showcased to provide successful men a potential reward when they have achieved a higher rank (15). Illustrations of this argument can be seen on a daily basis in industrialized countries: the American entrepreneur Donald Trump and the French president Nicolas Sarkozy both divorced their wives to marry former fashion models, who amplify their images as powerful men who have earned the right to marry these women and expose them to the public media whenever possible. Married women of prominent politicians and executives ensure that the beauty and fashion industries remain profitable when they undergo numerous plastic surgeries in a frantic attempt to keep a youthful appearance to save their marriages. Thus, although women have made a great deal of progress in Western society, their status in male-dominated cultures is constantly in flux and threatened by the media, religion, and other patriarchal institutions.

This collection reveals many varieties of masculinity, ranging from feminized men to traditional men, who are questioning their place in society. Because heterosexuality is obligatory in many of the cultures, from which these narratives originate, several of these articles reflect the way in which men interact, or fail to interact, with women. Many of the works deal with questions of identity, whether it is a result of living in a new country and a changing society, which enables them to experiment with various forms of sexuality, or because of a new definition or variation of patriarchy.

Two of the articles in this collection deal with modernity in France. Sylvie Young's article entitled "Smiting Masculinity: From Jarry's *Surmâle* to Cendrars's *Confessions de Dan Yack*" examines the anxiety and disillusion men face when confronted with the rising presence of machines from the turn of the century until the aftermath of World War I, especially as it concerns their sexual desire, aggression, and artistry. She studies the expression of these traits in three novels of the early twentieth century: Alfred Jarry's *Le Surmâle*, Raymond Roussel's *Locus Solus*, and Blaise Cendrars's *Les confessions de Dan Yack*. In Robert M. Fagley's article, "Gide's Bastard as Ideal Modernist Hero," the author applies the "nomadology" theories of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari to explain how the bastard hero's identity is shaped through his travels and interactions with individuals representing non-traditional social and gender models. The protagonists, Bernard of *Les faux-monnayeurs* and Lafcadio of *Les Caves du Vatican*, although exposed to criminal and homosexual



elements, find themselves deterritorialized socially and geographically. The quest for reterritorialization and whether or not the heroes are successful is the major theme of this article.

Fatherhood and paternity are dominant themes in the expression of masculinity and, therefore, also belong to this collection. Michèle Schaal's article deals with the protagonist's reevaluation of gendered behavior when he unexpectedly becomes a father. Here, Virginie Despentès's *Teen Spirit* is analyzed, in which traditional notions of gender are questioned by the female protagonist's father. Fatherhood is also the subject of Nancy Arenberg's study, "Paternal Loss and Mourning: Recovering Jewish Identity in Bensoussan's *Le Dernier Devoir*." In this autobiographical and fictional novel, Bensoussan writes about the emotions of absence and grief for his dead father and the masculine traditions present in rituals of death and mourning which inevitably exclude women. Bensoussan, who presently resides in France, expresses a mythical representation of his father, which is grounded in memories of his Algerian-Jewish community.

Maghrebi immigrants living in France are also the subject of Susan Ireland's article "Masculinity and Migration: Representations of First-Generation Maghrebi Immigrants." Ireland reveals that, because immigrants were often illiterate and spoke little or no French, male workers were a silent generation, a situation reinforced by the fact that majority French society was uninterested in these workers and their culture. Thus, these representatives of immigration were initially described and defined by others. Their physical and psychological disorders, which threaten their masculinity, are evaluated in one of the works discussed in this article, *La plus haute des solitudes* by Tahar Ben Jelloun, who views these ailments as a consequence of a form of colonial violence. The hardships experienced by immigrants—this time by a young Congolese man imprisoned in Paris—are also examined in Laurence Gouaux's article "Masculinity, Spirituality and Roots: Wilfried N'Sondé's *Le Cœur des enfants léopards*." Following the accidental murder of a policeman, the young protagonist of this novel is reborn by appealing to his African ancestral spirits, in accordance with the African myths and legends his uncle, father, and grandfather recounted to him. Within the harrowing confines of the prison, these spirits help him begin a personal quest for positive representations of his masculinity. By accentuating the poetic characteristics of this text, Gouaux explains how masculinity, *métissage*, and otherness are sublimated in order to give birth to a new spirituality.

In the context of Martinican fiction, Renée Larrier discusses the educational system, which was initially not accessible to plantation workers; it then later banned the teaching of the Creole language and culture. Her

study examines how boys' experiences in school are sites where the restrictions on physical movement impede learning and contribute to underachievement. As a result, the classroom and schoolyard are often represented as opposing spaces in a region marked by colonialism and slavery, where unique challenges render the assertion of masculinity more difficult.

Sexuality and the various expressions of masculine sexuality are depicted in several of these articles. Geir Uvsløkk writes about two of Jean Genet's early novels, *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* and *Miracle de la rose*, in which Genet generalizes particular types of sexual behavior not normally found in mainstream society; his characters are murderers, burglars, pimps, virile- or effeminate homosexuals and transvestites. Although Genet is known for depicting sexual acts between men, the tensions between them in their daily lives are most important in his works. Sexuality and eroticism are also dominant themes in Keith Cohen's article about Caribbean poetry, notably Aimé Césaire's and Edward Kamau Brathwaite's. Cohen argues that their sexually explicit poetry is a calculated fusion of language and sexuality, which the authors employ in order to deform, disrupt, and pervert the mother tongue, the language of the colonizer. As revealed in Larrier's article, the people of the Caribbean have been forbidden by colonial powers to incorporate elements of their own African language and culture. In unique expressions of revolt, the poets in Cohen's article, subvert the French language in an erotically charged way to celebrate their people's sexuality. Eroticism and homosexuality are also depicted in Bruno Perreau's analysis of Rachid O's novels *L'enfant ébloui*, *Plusieurs vies*, *Chocolat chaud*, and *Ce qui reste*. In the context of the Moroccan author's narratives, he explores how these novels represent a trend of reinventing postcolonial hybridization by gay authors in France's former colonies by rejecting a sexual identity nationalized by the ruling country. In his novels, Rachid O. depicts a subversion of nationalistic expectations of gender by portraying homosexuality as a metaphor for hospitality.

Three of the authors of this collection discuss men in the texts of female writers. Vera Klekovkina writes about three recent novels by Anna Galdava: *Je l'aimais*, *Ensemble, c'est tout*, and *La Consolante*. Galdava portrays men who can be loving and open. They do not exercise their power and dominance; rather, they have difficulty expressing themselves, are misunderstood or ignored, and struggle with increasing expectations of being strong and highly ambitious. Galdava's male figures are often in crisis and bewildered by the challenges of new roles of masculinity, which face them in the twenty-first century. This view contrasts sharply to the

men in the works of Amélie Nothomb, which are analyzed by Frédérique Chevillot. Contrasting Nothomb's fictional works, in which her male protagonists commit bizarre and unspeakable crimes, with her autobiographical works, which, depicting kind and considerate men, are devoid of expressions of sexuality, Chevillot concludes that it is the act of writing about murders of passion which appeals most to Nothomb. Thus, writing about the heinous crimes of her male characters serves to help the author delve further on the power of writing. Finally, Aleksandra Grzybowska's study is about the novels of Suzanne Jacob, which highlight women as protagonists; nevertheless, these protagonists do not stand alone: her heroines need a male presence in order to evolve and prove their vital potential. Borrowing from mythology, Jacob subjects her male characters to three categories of masculine figures: the seduced man or molester, the runaway, and the ferryman. Grzybowska, thus, examines the construction of masculine identity by revealing intertextual scenarios and the mythological characters in these works.

Three contributors write about texts written by contemporary male authors in various parts of Canada. Julia Morris examines the short stories in the collection *Le Canon des Gobelins* by Daniel Poliquin, a contemporary francophone author from Ontario. In this analysis, Morris examines the portraits of Poliquin's male characters and their respective quests for identity through their vocations. Her study reveals how the importance of work has changed in the twentieth century and how it has become romanticized as a choice of lifestyle and path to self-realization, a reality which the male characters of the narratives exploit. The depiction of men in three contemporary novels of Quebec's author Christian Mistral, *Vamp*, *Vautour*, and *Valium*, are discussed by Isabelle Boisclair. In these novels, the affective relationships between men are clearly validated and provide a stark contrast to the way in which the characters treat women. Boisclair explores what Minstral's narratives say about masculine relationships and what these conceptions of sexual and gender identity signify. The subject of identity, this time in the context of immigration and the image of the ethnic self, is continued with Keith Lawrence's analysis of three Indo-Canadian authors, Keith Garebian and Arnold Itwaru, both from the West Indies, and Neil Bissoondath who, like Garebian and Itwaru moved to Canada in the late 1960s, but from India. Lawrence compares their two visions of belonging: Garebian's and Itwaru's and how they find meaning and promise in an identity, which is associated with a fixed racial conception of self, and Bissoundath's, which is closely connected to the idea of Asian-Canadian selfhood in greater Canada. Lawrence examines

how their conflicting viewpoints of Asian-Canadian masculinity are reflected in their fictional and non-fictional works.

Concluding this collection are two articles which offer a historical perspective of Canadian male identity: Fátima Buchert provides an in-depth analysis of Michel Tremblay's plays and semi-autobiographical novels. Tremblay's biting criticism of Quebec society, as well as his personal relationships in Montreal's gay community, are highlighted in this article. In my article, I discuss two well-known novels published at the advent of the Quiet Revolution. These novels depict docile or immature males, who struggle with their relationships with women and must finally realize how their own heritage and the myths encoded in Canadian history hinder their ability to accept themselves.

It is my sincere wish that this collection of essays provides a balanced representation of research on contemporary masculinities in French, French-Canadian, African, and Caribbean literature and will serve to promote a better understanding of all men and their various expressions of patriarchy. Since there will always be a need for tolerance and acknowledgement of alternate forms of masculinity, it is my hope that the articles in this book will serve to shed light on the often complex and confusing behaviors of men and women.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### SMITING MASCULINITY: FROM JARRY'S *SURMÂLE* TO CENDRARS' *CONFESSIONS DE DAN YACK*

SYLVIE YOUNG

It would be impossible to understand the work of certain authors of the beginning of the twentieth century like Jarry, Roussel or Cendrars without situating their work within the tradition of that *fin-de-siècle* literature which we sometimes call *célibataire*, or without considering the light that this literature casts upon the relationship between desire and masculinity. The three novels which we will consider here—*Le Surmâle* by Alfred Jarry, Raymond Roussel's *Locus Solus* and *Les confessions de Dan Yack* by Blaise Cendrars—feature, like such predecessors as *L'Eve future* by Villiers de L'Isle-Adam (1886) or Rémy de Gourmont's *Sixtine* (1890) what it will be convenient to refer to as “bachelor machines.” This will be in keeping with the famous definition given of such apparatus by Michel Carrouges: an imaginary machine of desire and death in which the woman becomes the working parts (244). However, unlike the nineteenth century novels which attempted to transcend masculine sexuality by transposing love to the realm of the inorganic, we note that desire for the body and its attendant violence reappear in these “modern” texts. Women of flesh are not simply transformed artistically into their inorganic equivalent—android, painting or statue; some are coolly raped and then eliminated (or the reverse). It would appear that once we leave behind the great era of thinkers and inventors, desire is no longer creative but rather destructive. Dreaming of trysts undertaken with inorganic creatures, who are in complete submission to men's control, no longer lays claim to a masculinity based on the strength of the erotic imagination. From the beginning of the twentieth century forward, with the appearance of machines which are increasingly powerful and “intelligent,” there is a growing fear of being unable to control either the machines or oneself

(Noiray 1:509). Along with this fear comes the need to equal or exceed these machines—an obsession clearly visible in *Le Surmâle*, in particular. This preoccupation with bodily power lies within a specific socio-political context, that of a fear of physical and moral weakness born out of Prussia's defeat of France in 1870 (Nye 216-28). The assimilation of the human body to a perfectible machine and the pressure to be morally strong translates into a repressed terror, evoked in the chosen texts: that of appearing as the imperfect model of a thinking machine, subject to "accidents"—a term used here in the sense suggested by Paul Virilio. According to this theoretician of dromology (the science of speed), inherent in every machine is the danger of an accident and the accident thus serves as a diagnostic tool for the improvement of the technical object:

It is the duty of scientists and technicians to avoid the accident at all costs. . . . In fact, if no substance can exist in the absence of an accident, then no technical object can be developed without in turn generating "its" specific accident: ship=ship wreck, train=train wreck, plane=plane crash. The accident is thus the hidden face of technical progress. (Virilio 92-93)

The proximity in the texts studied here of men and machines justifies the conceptual shift that I propose to use in order to analyze the interesting reversal which happens over the course of the narration: the accident, or the sexual and murderous drive of the masculine "machine," is a symptom of its imperfection, and it is thanks to science and machines that one can undertake its "improvement." In reality, the machine, which is feminized, presents itself as an instrument of punishment and of redemption: it obliges the man to confess his crimes in order to be himself transformed into a perfect machine in the image of the superman envisioned by the futurists or, as in *L'Eve future* by Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, in order to "guérir l'homme de l'amour" (409).<sup>1</sup> Saving man from the ravages of his desire implies that, on the one hand, sexual impulses must be punished and, on the other hand, that a notion of personal and familial honor must be reinjected into male subjectivity. The consequences of this undertaking are serious, however: these novels are permeated with the fear of ending up with a shattered masculinity. The three texts we are considering present this fear in different ways, while at the same time, they have a corpus of themes and narrative techniques in common. In *Le Surmâle* (1902), we encounter machines or inventions that are clearly pataphysic, such as the *Perpetual Motion Food*, the apparatus of the cycling *quintuplette* and *La Machine-à-inspirer-l'amour*, which we will examine closely. Paradoxically, the machine, that has fallen in love with the hero, Marcueil, whose crime

is the rape and murder of at least one young girl, ends up electrocuting him—an event which certainly justifies the terror of redemptive love. In *Locus Solus* (1914), each fantastical machine of the inventor Canterel exceeds the previous: a flying *hie*, a diamond aquarium containing a dancer with musical hair, but above all a window display where cadavers conserved in “résurrectine” replay the most pivotal scenes of their lives (129). This last episode, the scene of the confession of a necrophiliac rape and subsequent suicide, will be of particular interest to us as it reveals, through dramatization and repetition, the anguish associated with the impossibility of distancing oneself from the sexual crime and its genealogical consequences. Finally, *Les Confessions de Dan Yack* (1929) evokes the repression of sexual desire and its transfer onto technical objects such as automobiles, airplanes, weapons of war and various gadgets favored by Dan Yack. The ultimate is a dictaphone linked to a secretary who remains imaginary, but to whom Dan Yack sees himself as being obliged to confess a shocking truth; this in turn leads to his condemnation to chastity and disillusionment regarding the new status of “modern” man. This novel, written and published after the First World War, bears the marks of the trauma generated by the repression of a desire as brutal as mechanical slaughter, and illustrates the disintegration of traditional notions of masculinity faced with the war machine.

The principal argument of Jarry’s novel *Le Surmâle* stems from the belief of the central protagonist, André Marcueil, in man’s limitless powers: “Les forces humaines n’ont pas de limites” (11). Marcueil is an independently wealthy man whose social circle includes great figures in science, technology and medicine, including the doctor Bathybius, the chemist William Elson and his strikingly beautiful daughter Ellen, and the engineer Gough. Marcueil himself hides a superhuman strength beneath an unassuming appearance. He has also suffered from priapism since childhood. Marcueil’s curiosity about his body’s “difference” is met with silence on the part of the adults in his life. Phillip Hadlock has aptly remarked on the effect of the resulting repression: “The thematic of the arduous process to repair tears in the fabric of male subjectivity . . . [and] accentuates the notion of the monstrous, perverted quest that originates in André’s need for authentic knowledge of the male self” (138).

This repressed curiosity effectively has two consequences: first of all, the shame arising from this difference, which Marcueil attempts unsuccessfully to master in adolescence. Realizing that his condition is permanent, he comes to see himself as a monster and attempts to lose himself in the crowd: to “se confondre avec la foule” (28) becomes his most fervent wish. Marcueil develops a prodigious physical strength,

however, which he keeps secret and from which he derives a pride that expresses itself in a devouring need to prove himself superior to both machines and other men. His masked participation in the novel's two great competitions—a *quintuplette* race between cyclists and a train over a distance of ten thousand miles, at a speed of 300 kilometers an hour, and the breaking of a sexual record—testify to an ambivalence between shame and the desire to be recognized. The text itself articulates this dialectic explicitly: “Mais pourquoi Marcueil éprouvait-il le besoin de se cacher et de se trahir à la fois? De nier sa force et de la prouver?” (28).

As Helen B. Lewis has famously indicated, shame is primarily linked to the individual's subjectivity, often manifested through dissimulation and aggression towards others, while guilt is derived from a moral conscience judging the individual's actions (30). Marcueil effectively expresses in his secret identity an aggression symptomatic of his shameful feelings. This aggression is principally directed against the feminine, as we see in his attack on and in his destruction of a machine—a dynamometer presenting physical similarities with the female anatomy, which is: “La fente du dynamomètre, verticale, luisait” (44). Upon encountering the machine he announces, “Je vais tuer la bête,” clarifying shortly thereafter, “C'est une femelle, mais c'est très fort” (43, 44). However, Marcueil never ceases to leave allusions and signs everywhere which might cause his “crime” (his rapes and murders, his identity as Supermale, his difference) to be discovered. His superhuman strength being intimately linked to what his conscience sees as a defect, recognition of his crimes for Marcueil signifies punishment—which he both hopes for and fears.

The desire to be apprehended for his crimes is evident when the police come to inform Marcueil of the discovery of the body of the girl raped on his land six days before, a crime whose unusual nature—the girl has been “*violée à mort*”—speaks in itself to the identity of the perpetrator (80):

Il y a six jours? demanda Marcueil. La justice est lente . . . six jours . . . le jour de mon départ précisément, car j'ai fait un petit voyage . . . j'ai accompagné des amis . . . en chemin de fer . . . Etrange excursion! il y a eu d'autres viols encore, par une coïncidence curieuse, exactement sur notre route, et aussi un vol à main armée, comme par hasard, et, on ne sait comment, deux assassinats. (80)

Marcueil's barely veiled confession does not elicit any reaction from the policemen, who fail to connect the dots and do not realize that he is, in fact, the criminal they are looking for. Therefore, the game of hide-and-seek that Marcueil plays with the authorities continues. Since the crime he committed on his land remains unpunished, along with the ones he



perpetrated during the Ten Thousand Miles bicycle race, in which he participated as a mysterious rider, Marcueil throws himself at another challenge, that of the sexual marathon.

This time Marcueil, supposedly called away by urgent business, proceeds disguised as an American Indian. The challenge is to beat a record evoked by Rabelais—that of “L’Indien tant célébré par Théophraste” (21)—which Marcueil recalls to his guests during a *soirée* at the beginning of the novel. He undertakes to demonstrate the truth of a stupefying adage that he pronounces at the very beginning of the novel: “L’amour est un acte sans importance, puisqu’on peut le faire indéfiniment” (7). Marcueil defines himself as a true sexual machine, capable of repetition without fatigue. He is surprised to discover Ellen arrive, through a ruse, to be his partner, rather than the seven prostitutes hired for the affair. Dr. Bathybius, who is in charge of insuring the proper monitoring of the events, observes the couple’s sexual activity, “Qu’il ait chronométré, contrôlé, analysé, inscrit, vérifié des détails techniques” (93). The official count is recorded at eighty-two episodes of intercourse in twenty-four hours.<sup>2</sup> Marcueil, the Supermale has proven that he is a love machine, functioning flawlessly so long as the desire-motor is surrounded, observed and measured in the context of a record to be established—with a partner who is, herself, a machine.

It is after the doctor’s departure that the accident occurs. Observed this time by the prostitutes who have only just gained access to one of the transoms leading onto the bedroom in question, Marcueil and Ellen decide to continue making love, but this time, as Ellen says, “pour le plaisir!” (108). In order to silence the women’s gibes, Marcueil sets an enormous phonograph to play a recording, whose song seems initially to imitate reality, then to direct it. The lovers obey “l’érotisme suggéré” of the song, so that in accordance with the repeated injunctions of the machine, Marcueil takes Ellen while she begins to lose consciousness (114). The Supermale succumbs to his drive, all the while knowing that his assault will kill Ellen: “il lui faudrait posséder encore, et son sexe ne pourrait pas ne pas la posséder, la femme en train de mourir que ses bras n’avaient pas lâchée” (115). This scene echoes others, which are not explicitly played out in the novel, and is particularly suggestive of the above-mentioned rape and murder of a little girl.

Just as one can recognize the harvesting of the forest in Maupassant’s *La petite Roque* as a metaphor of the rape of little Louise, it becomes possible to substitute the scene of Ellen’s assault with that suffered by the child at the hands of Marcueil. The process is further facilitated by the fact that there is, in truth, no metaphor or figurative speech here (excluding the

song's text), only the objectification of Marcueil's interior voice in the form of a recording. The personification of the machine, "vieux monsieur au monocle de cristal" (113), added to the red roses (associated in the novel with Marcueil) displayed in the horn of the phonograph, simplify the decryption of the phonograph's role: make visible, or rather audible, the Supermale's sexual and murderous drive. This drive flows out of his priapic member just as the song flows out of the upright horn, and while Ellen appears to die under his repeated assault, we believe we are seeing the drama of the child being raped to death replayed. The secret desire of the Supermale thus becomes reality; given that this crime has witnesses (the prostitutes observing it through the transom), Marcueil will finally be discovered to be what he believes he is: a beast disguised as an ordinary man disguised as a machine.

The Supermale, in proximity to Ellen's lifeless body, seems nevertheless to begin to love her. He falls asleep next to her and has a poetic dream which culminates with a vow pronounced in his sleep: "Je l'adore!" (125). However, in reading further, we come to understand retrospectively that Marcueil's amorous dream actually takes place when Ellen's father, having discovered what had occurred, hooks a sleeping Marcueil up to a machine which is supposed to inspire love in him. The tenor of the Supermale's vow must thus be questioned: isn't the love that he declares the result of some electric impulse? The phrase "l'aveu de cette certitude monta, arraché par *une force*" leaves no uncertainty (emphasis added, 125). The eleven thousand or so volts from the machine shock the Supermale to the point of forcing him to recognize and confess his love.

However, with the avowal, the energy generated by the Supermale increases a notch. This energy begins to build an electric charge up in the machine, which has become receptive and begins running amuck: "elle tournait à l'envers à une vitesse inconnue et formidable" (132). Thus the man influences the machine, provoking the following reflection from the doctor: "Il faut bien que l'homme, pour survivre, devienne plus fort que les machines, comme il a été plus fort que les fauves . . . simple adaptation au milieu . . . mais cet homme là est le premier de l'avenir . . ." (132). At this moment, the Supermale is a Superman who has vanquished all the machines—carrier of a supreme masculinity, prototype of the man of the future. In this he is, as has noted Bettina Knapp, the precursor of man as seen by the futurists (495). As Paul Virilio argues, the accident is inevitable: the machine-man Marcueil functioning in concert with the machine creates a new and extremely powerful apparatus; the machine overheats with excess energy and crushes Marcueil's temples with its metallic jaws. The Supermale manages, because of his superhuman strength,

to disengage himself from the machine, runs away and throws himself against his estate's gate before dying. The final image of him is, aptly, as a fusion of flesh and metal:

Et le corps d'André Marcueil, tout nu et doré par places d'or rouge, restait entortillé autour des barreaux, ou les barreaux autour du corps. . . . Le Surmâle était mort là, tordu avec le fer. (134)

The machine manages in the end to extract the fatal vow of love and punish the arrogant male who aspired to dominate it. As Kai Mikkonen remarks, this final scene testifies to the fear evoked by the out-of-control machine: "*Le Surmâle* projects some of the strongest anxieties associated with new technology in its own time, including the fear of being paralyzed, stranded, cut off from earth, electrocuted or shattered by explosions" (219). The final image of the shattered man translates the anxiety of "modern" masculinity, dedicated to machines and to belief in man's all-powerfulness. Marcueil, as a tortured Supermale, is finally exposed to the eyes of all, as he secretly wished, having expiated his crimes. Apparently, the agent of his redemption is, at first, a metal machine. However, it is, in fact, Ellen who remains the involuntary architect of the more complex machination which leads to the fatal *dénouement*. Associated with machines throughout the text, she is also implicated in the Supermale's secret, and bears the ultimate responsibility of his final torture, for her father, having learned of her participation in the marathon, wishes to extract a confession of love from the Supermale via the Love Machine in order to force a marriage. It is therefore she who, as both victim and executioner of the Supermale, constitutes the pivotal workings of the machine which saves Marcueil from himself.

Like *Le Surmâle*, *Locus Solus* presents a situation of confession and punishment played out around a man—the genius intellectual Martial Canterel—obsessed by the dialectic of occultation and revelation. Although published nearly ten years after *Le Surmâle*, *Locus Solus* doesn't portray any of the "real" machines represented in Jarry's novel, such as the automobile, the train or the airplane, even though these were at this point well-entrenched in French society. Instead, we encounter fantastic inventions inspired equally by science and by Martial Canterel's imagination. These inventions, which cannot be understood without Canterel's authoritative commentary, place this work resolutely within the tradition of Jarrian pataphysics.<sup>3</sup> Canterel, by the vigor of his imagination, evokes the figure of the brilliant and visionary inventor prized in the nineteenth century, such as he appears notably in Jules Verne's novels, of which Roussel was a fervent admirer. We also find in Canterel echoes of

intellectuals fictionalized by Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, such as the engineer Bathybius Bottom or Thomas Edison. If Canterel's machines seem perhaps more fanciful than those of Edison, their advantage is a literary richness rather than utility. As Jacques Noiray has remarked, "L'objet technique, ici, triomphe par sa négation même. Il refuse sa vocation utilitaire, il la détourne et la nie. Il la remplace par une destination différence, ironique et fantastique" (1:388).

There is, however, one machine in *Locus Solus* whose function is rather concrete and specific. I refer to a complex apparatus serving to resurrect certain cadavers who, once they are revitalized with the aid of the "vitalium" and "ressurectine," invented by Canterel, are protected from putrefaction by a gigantic, refrigerated glass cage and replay the most important scene of their lives (129, 130). Among these eight cadavers, one is of particular interest: while seven of the dead have been brought to Canterel by their families or by a weeping loved one hoping to see the person live once more, one of them has been brought there out of revenge instead of love. Like all episodes in *Locus Solus*, this one is played out twice. Spectators and readers first find themselves confronted with the "visual" rendition: on a stage furnished with suitable scenery, this revitalized cadaver, a young man, carries out a series of incomprehensible but dramatic gestures culminating in his shooting himself through the heart. Later, the text returns to this scene as it is narrated and explained by Canterel: following the tragic death of his beloved daughter while she played near the fire with a doll, François-Jules Cortier took an orphan, Andrée, into his home to assuage his loneliness and grief. The orphan quickly grew into a ravishing beauty and Cortier, devoured by passion for her, lost his mind upon learning that she loved his son, François-Charles. He strangled and then raped her. The crime was blamed on a young servant of the household, Thierry Foucqueteau, who found himself condemned to a penal colony, from which his mother vowed to redeem him. François-Jules then drafted a confession, but hid it, leaving various clues as to its location:

Il résolut d'enfermer son écrit, afin de pallier la honte destinée à s'en dégager, dans quelque sûre cachette qui, célébrant elle-même sa gloire, ne pût se découvrir qu'au terme d'une série de manœuvres propres à faire sans cesse toucher du doigt des particularités honorifiques pour lui. (186)

He died shortly thereafter, and his son, who came to set his affairs in order, discovered the clues and the confession. Overcome by emotion, he chose to put the confession back in its hiding place, but not without adding

a paragraph outlining his intervention. He then shot himself through the heart.

Suspicious of this suicide, Thierry's mother asks Canterel to bring François-Charles back to life, thinking that the secret would perhaps be revealed. As it so happens, the great intellectual, having retraced the murderer's deductive clues, finds the double confession and exonerates Thierry—who henceforth often comes by with his mother to enjoy the spectacle of the two guilty parties (François-Jules, murderer of Andrée, and his son François-Charles, accessory to the crime by his silence) being unmasked.

The punitive machine functions here, as may be noted, because of the instigation of a woman, Thierry's mother. Moreover, two other women are at the origin of the drama: through her death, the little girl drives her father to adopt this female child, Andrée; through her beauty, Andrée drives François-Jules to his crime. Regarding the crime, however, François-Jules' displaced passion for his adoptive daughter is described as a passion which is transformed into rage when he discovers that the young woman prefers a younger version of himself, his son: "Souligné par une complète ressemblance de trait et d'allure, le contraste que formait avec son déclin propre l'écrasante jeunesse de son fils exaspérait ses tortures jalouses" (183). It is the young girl's repetition of the name "François-Charles" that drives François-Jules to silence her by strangling her the night he visits her in her room to convince her to marry him. The "accident" of masculine sexuality, namely desire, is provoked by the father's jealousy toward his son. The father suffers from the loss of his masculinity and cannot abide seeing himself supplanted by his son, especially sexually.

François-Jules represents a classical model of dominating patriarchy, appropriating everything that falls under his authority and accepting only with difficulty competition from his son, who has successfully followed in his professional footsteps. When this rivalry moves to the sexual arena, the accident takes place with rage toward the son being enacted upon the common object of their desire. In killing the young woman, François-Jules thus also symbolically kills his son in a reversed oedipal gesture. The son discovers and reveals the crime of the father and, at the same time, becomes culpable himself: his striking physical resemblance to the late father, added to the similarity of their acts when he hides the confessions once again (with the addition of his own paragraph), contributes to the fusion of the two men into one criminal. Moreover, François-Charles is not innocent: he is guilty of incestuous passion for the girl who was raised as his sister, as well as of being an accessory to his father's crime through his decision to let "l'exacte somme de hasard acceptée par son père

présider au déterrement du secret" (194). All of this comes to pass on a stage, testifying to the fact that this is an attempt to, by way of dramatization, work through profound anguish: that of seeing the honor of procreative and genealogical masculinity threatened by uncontrollable sexuality.<sup>4</sup>

François-Charles uses the machination established by his father, which he alone, being François-Jules's, double, was able to uncover, to preserve the situation as it was when he discovered it. Not wanting to be either his father's denouncer or accomplice, he allows fate to settle the matter. Michel Foucault remarks upon this singular aspect of Roussel's machines, that of maintenance in stasis, which opens a space for communication between life and death:

Protected by the glass which enables them to be seen, sheltered by this transparent and frozen parenthesis, life and death can communicate in order to remain one within the other, one in spite of the other, what they are indefinitely. (78)

Just as the refrigerated glass cube where the scenes play out maintains the cadavers in a state which allows their provisional resurrection, François-Charles' silence perpetuates the *status quo* and even his suicide completes a series of substitutive analogies which permit "maintenance" of life despite the various deaths in this episode: substitution of a human skull for a doll with melted eyes, of Andrée for little Lydie, of François-Charles for François-Jules. The series ends with Canterel's intervention, but even though he might, in this way, reveal the crime, Canterel's contribution to honor and justice is darkened by his agreement to replay the scene of François-Charles' discovery of his father's confession, as well as his suicide. In so doing, he restarts the machine, whose progress he had momentarily interrupted. This performance, which he puts on for the benefit of visitors (frequently including Thierry and his mother), casts a certain halo of doubt over the machine's innovation: the pleasure that Thierry and his mother derive from witnessing François-Charles' horror and suicide comes under the category of sadism, of vengeance taken to an extreme. In addition, each reenactment memorializes the atrocious crime, of which Andrée was the victim. Although Canterel's scientific discovery has redeemed a man, it also contributes to perpetuating the memory of the original desire and violence. In allowing the son to live again, and then to die, Canterel resurrects, with the same gesture, the phantoms of the father and of his victim, demonstrating a fascination for the horror of the crime and its punishment. The fact that his intervention is required in order to achieve a "good" reading of the scene testifies to the hold that the