

# Portrait of the Humanist as Proteus

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Is the perfection of a being a result of its perfectibility, that is to say its imperfection? Is the greatness of a human being a function of how much he is a man in the making? Can the human being elude all determination in order to construct itself freely or, at the very least, expose itself to an infinite number of potential destinies? This dream of absolute freedom was at times the humanists' dream. The following paper will try to show that behind the Renaissance philosophy of existence lay the principles of incompleteness and transformation; that these principles were the source both of the power of Renaissance philosophy and also of its irresolution, which is what places it on the threshold of modernity.

## Self-made Man

The *Oratio de hominis dignitate* by Pico della Mirandola is one of the most vigorous and influential texts of humanist thought.<sup>1</sup> The first part of his argument – and the only one that will concern us here – is full of optimism and is cast in the form of an encomium. Man, according to Pico, and as many others before him had already said, is an unequalled marvel in this world. What is the cause of human superiority? Instead of the usual – and, by then, worn out – theological and moral arguments marshaled over the centuries, Pico sets out to give his own answer. Reinterpreting fundamentally the creation of mankind, he is able, in a few short pages, to sketch brilliantly the foundations of a radical anthropology based on metamorphosis. Instead of reiterating the usual line of thinking, in which it is asserted that created life is lacking in stability, Pico asserts that this capacity for change is itself the principle on which human dignity rests.

In the book of *Genesis* it is said that man was created last. Pico turns to this biblical lesson and makes a completely original story out of it. According to him, the Master-Builder, his labors nearly completed, had used up his store of archetypes: there was nothing left with which to differentiate human beings from the other creatures. Adam and his descendants would thus have to make do with those attributes that had already been assigned to the other beings. God “decided that the one who could receive nothing as his own (*nihil proprium*) would have a share of all those attributes which had been given separately to each being individually.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, according to Pico, man was to be indeterminate. Without a predefined role, appearance, or function, he would have the role, appearance, and function that he chose. He would be a being without fixed identity, but he would in return be completely free. Having at his disposal all possible qualities, he would be the architect of his own existence:

As for the others, God said, their limited nature is held in check by laws that we have decreed: for you there is no such restriction. I have entrusted you with your own judgment, which will allow you to define your own nature ... You have been made neither heavenly nor earthly, neither mortal nor immortal; endowed, so to speak, with the arbiter’s honored power of making and fashioning yourself, you can take the form that you desire.<sup>3</sup>

To choose one’s destiny, to construct the self, to be what one wants to be (*id esse quod velit*): rarely has such a hymn to freedom been sung. The key phrases in these pages are *to want*, *to be able*, *to desire*; the dominant idea is that of a free will that acknowledges no limits. Aristotle and the Scholastics had postulated the stability of the human species, and they had attributed to man distinct and immutable attributes; although God, by his grace, could change man, human beings themselves did not have the power to escape their nature. With Pico, a voice is raised – Humanist, if there ever was one –, that disputed all forms of determinism – whether divine, natural, or social – by the power of the will.

Having not been completely created, man will therefore create himself. He “will fashion and transform himself by adapting the look of whatever animal, the qualities of whatever creature, he pleases.”<sup>4</sup> He will choose, as he sees fit, the level of being on which he wishes to place himself: vegetal, he will be like a plant;

sensual, he will share the fate of the beasts; rational, he is suddenly a celestial being; intellectual, and he becomes angelic, the true child of God. Endowed with a nature capable of these kinds of transformations, Man is a chameleon, a Proteus. And, Pico adds, it is therefore in the mythical Proteus, as in all the other stories of metamorphoses, that we must seek the essential emblems of the human being.

The fable of the human chameleon is of course consistent with a moral finality: responsible for his or her destiny, the individual must make use of this freedom for purposes of the good. But this lesson also has an ontological implication that is more important for our purposes: the greatness of a created being resides in its indeterminacy and ability to take on all possible identities. The ideal human being is a human being in the making, a malleable substance capable of fitting any mold. Paradoxically, Pico's brand of humanism is based on the absence of a specifically defined human nature. As there is no essence, no constraining model of human being, man is pure potential; having received "seeds of every kind and the germs of all types of life,"<sup>5</sup> it is his duty to cultivate them. There is an extraordinarily powerful image that dominates the first pages of the *Oratio*: that of a being who, exempt from all forms, is a force that nothing can stop.

The Spaniard Juan Luis Vivès is the author of another allegorical encomium of man, *Fabula de Homine*.<sup>6</sup> This work, probably directly influenced by Pico and certainly complementary to it, presents a somewhat less conceptually framed argument than the *Oratio* since it is presented in the form of an entertaining story.

Juno, to celebrate her birthday, invites the inhabitants of Olympus to a sumptuous meal. But the joy of the gods would not be complete without a show. A stage appears: it is the world theater, on which Jupiter will make the actors act. Among the actors there is one in particular who charms the blessed: Man. A brilliant mime, he can play all the roles: first he appears as a plant, then as various animals, finally as himself: a social creature, fair, discerning, urbane. But wait: he has not yet finished climbing the ladder of beings (this is reminiscent of that other incarnation of the Renaissance spirit, Victor Hugo's *The Satyr*, in *La Légende des siècles*). Soon escaping human contingency altogether, he takes on the character-

istics of the gods themselves, before their very eyes. Finally, in his ultimate metamorphosis, he appears on stage as the splendid and powerful Jupiter himself. He is so expert at reproducing Jupiter's person that the spectators are momentarily befuddled: is this an illusion or could he in reality be the master of the universe? All that remains, in order for him to celebrate his victory, is for them to invite him to their table, to share the feast of the gods.

It is true that Vivès's conception of man is distinct from Pico's: the various existences incarnated by man are a function of a theatrical game; although he can play all the roles, he has inherited and retains the characteristic of man; he is therefore less indeterminate. Nevertheless, he has a breadth that allows him to embrace all conditions; he is like a microcosm that combines extremes, from life closest to nature to its most immaterial forms, and who gathers in one being all qualities: both the body's beauty and the infinite riches of the intellectual faculties. Pico's two analogies – that of the chameleon and of Proteus – are used here too, and to illustrate the same basic idea: man's greatness, that is to say his aptitude for spiritual life, is a function of his metamorphic nature. This is why, for better or worse, he can indefinitely transform himself; it is because he can become the equal of anything that he is virtually the equal of the gods.

In all likelihood, the Neoplatonic theory of knowledge served as the basis for Pico's and Vivès's conception of Proteus-Man. A chapter from Marsilio Ficino's *Theologia platonica* may very well have provided the philosophical foundation for their encomium.<sup>7</sup> Ficino's subject here is the act of knowing. All things, Ficino states, initially exist in a state of abstract form: this is the ideal model of which particular objects are the realisation. As for the human mind, he continues, it is a flexible and free organism which, "like matter, aspires to form."<sup>8</sup> It is thus easy for the mind to take intellectual possession of things or at least of their intelligible idea. It is by absorbing the forms of things that knowledge advances: "Only by absorbing the forms of knowable objects can the intellect have knowledge of things themselves."<sup>9</sup> Ficino compares this operation to alimentary consumption: just as the body, through digestion, assimilates the substance of nourishment, so the soul assimilates the model of things. Mental absorption is in fact easier than mater-

ial absorption; while material substances present physical resistance to the act of union, ideal forms pass unhindered into the intellect. Consequently, knowledge is based on fusion: "From our intelligence and from the form of the intelligible object there results the individuated thing."<sup>10</sup>

It follows from this theory that the soul is capable of assuming the form of anything. More than that, its very purpose is to become anything: "The intellect more or less becomes the thing it understands. It becomes, I say, this thing in act ... ; this actualization is the very act of understanding."<sup>11</sup> Infinitely receptive, the soul can therefore experience all categories of knowledge and all modes of being. To illustrate this metamorphic nature, Ficino enumerates, and classes in ascending order, – just as Pico and Vivès will do later – the different lives the soul is capable of living; from the vegetable kingdom to the divine, from the state of an animal to that of a human, from the heroic to the demonic and angelic. Moreover, this analysis of the soul can be applied to man himself, which makes it possible to move from epistemology to anthropology: "The human genus strives to become all, because it leads every type of existence."<sup>12</sup> Although Ficino's aim is clearly metaphysical – to inspire in created beings the will to become God –, it also implies a general conception of existence that, in order to assure the greatest possible mobility for the intellect, offers man every possible kind of transformation.

### **"We Are Never in Ourselves"<sup>13</sup>**

Both Ficino with his fusional conception of knowledge, and Pico and Vivès with their fervent vision of Man ascending the steps of the ladder of beings, constructed theoretical fictions. Yet the distance separating their speculations from the lived experience of certain humanists is not all that great. In fact, there were numerous Renaissance figures who, as if sharing the philosophers' ideal of an existence capable of multiple mutations, adopted the principles of variety, mobility, and change as a basis for living. In order to demonstrate how the spirit of metamorphosis inspired the behavior of many and had a bearing on the fate of more than one

Renaissance figure, I propose to sketch (with an emphasis on my announced theme) the portraits of two pivotal figures of Humanism – one of its early figures, Petrarch, and one of its leading representatives at its acme, Erasmus.

Petrarch, during the entire Renaissance, was viewed as a founding father and a model to be imitated. What style of life did he in fact bequeath to the humanists?

A fervent scholar, he liked nothing more than to devote himself to his beloved studies: reading and writing, philological labors and meditation, all of them carried out in calm and protected surroundings. And yet he never succeeded in locking himself up in his ivory tower for long periods of time.<sup>14</sup> Instead, he ventured forth abroad, took part in public life, and engaged in a variety of activities, all the while criticizing his own versatility and always yearning for his studious retreat. The tension between *otium* and *negotium*, between the contemplative and active life, determined both his self-consciousness and the rhythm of his activity. Striving for stability, Petrarch, in spite of his will, found instability; desiring unity, he succumbed to multiplicity. Whether intentionally or not, this inspirer of European humanism already manifests the metamorphic tendencies of the chameleon.

As a scholar and writer, he was curious about everything, offering to the observer the profile of a man of letters with a remarkably diverse and changing range of interests: a philologist and editor devoted to the Ancients, but also a historian, moralist, letter writer, without even taking into account his poetic activity, which itself encompassed epic, bucolic, and lyric forms. Although he wrote primarily in Latin, his love poems were composed in Italian, and he experimented in a wide variety of genres and styles. Thus, without even rising from his writing table, he had already demonstrated a remarkable multifacetedness. But how could he cut himself off from the world when there were manuscripts to be searched for, collected, and studied the world over? And what about the necessity of arranging for the publication and distribution of one's own works, not to speak of the pursuit and, ultimately, the attainment of the official stamp of poet laureate?

What is more, Petrarch was not captive of his books: interested in contemporary events, he took public positions, which added to

his range and breadth. His immense correspondence, to be remembered as one of his greatest literary works, shows him to be surrounded by a vast network of friends and preoccupied with a thousand moral, literary, and political questions. As efficient as he was in managing his literary affairs, he also gave himself over to the public arena; charged with diplomatic missions, he was a friend of the powerful – emperors, popes, and local leaders – and on occasion played a role in the affairs of the state of the fourteenth century. And how could one forget the *Canzonere*, in which a totally different side of Petrarch becomes visible; that of the lover obsessed by his passion, his love for Laura, which becomes an expression of his love for the Supreme Good?

This kind of polymorphic activity finds its most clear expression in travel. In his mature years Petrarch never remained in one place for long. Explorer or exile, pilgrim of God, science, or politics, Petrarch was drawn on by his curiosity. He zigzagged around Italy and Provence, but also traveled to northern Europe: Paris, Cologne, Basle, Prague ... . There is an enormous contrast between this vagabond mood and the traditional tranquillity of the sage or monk, with which Petrarch nevertheless felt kinship. Indeed everything seemed to predispose him to a contemplative and sedentary life. However, something inside him apparently gave way, turning him into a multiple being, a wandering and manifold man in whom posterity perceived a restless being, a man torn from himself by the flux of events; or, to put it in less negative terms, an exemplar of that openness and flexibility of spirit that are so many signs of freedom. Petrarch's psychological and intellectual mobility is perhaps an indication of early modernity; in any case, it surely heralds the advent of a conception of life that enjoyed great popularity during the Renaissance.

In Petrarch's philosophy of existence we can thus see in outline something resembling "existential phenomenology."<sup>15</sup> Those humanists prefigured by Petrarch are, either literally or figuratively, travelers, seekers and investigators; their concern is less with constructing a coherent identity or oeuvre than it is with taking their quest of adventure to its limit – a quest for the other and a quest for one's self. Their acts of introspection and self-portraiture do not depict – or only with great difficulty – a unified and

consistent entity: although the inner self is ardently desired and sought, it appears to be vulnerable to disintegration by aggressive energies, to fragmentation by centrifugal forces. The human person, as conceived by many humanists, is but a sum of heterogeneous elements (events, moods, social pressures), the terms of whose unstable equilibrium must be constantly redefined. It follows from this that the self, far from constituting a distinct and homogenous subject, occupies a zone of openness and mutability, in osmosis with the outside world. Man, adaptable and permeable, exposed to contingency, is conceived as a constantly mutating system. Whether this dispersion of the self is experienced as a form of loss or sorrow, or as the normal result of a joyously expanding force, the basic perception of a changing, disjointed, and aleatory existence remains constant.

Erasmus's itinerant destiny is well documented. Constrained by circumstance, curiosity, and need, attracted to and then repulsed by dependency, he never stopped moving; so much so that his friends, who were dispersed over all of Europe, complained of losing track of him. His friend Ambrogio Leoni wrote to him from Venice:

I heard it said that you died in France; a few years later, that you had come back to life in Germany. Later, that you were being mourned in Germany; and still later that you had been seen arriving in Italy. Finally, I learned on good authority that you were dead in England and just had struck out for France from Avernus.<sup>16</sup>

Disappearing in one place only to resurface somewhere else; dying here only to be reborn there; this series of migrations, Leoni writes, "gives me the impression of observing a new Pythagoras." He continues, quite naturally invoking Proteus:

Not only from an Italian, you were observed turning into a Frenchman; from a Frenchman you became German, as if a bird had been seen arising from a calf, and from a bird some kind of corn ... . But from a poet you changed into a theologian, and from there metamorphosed into a philosopher of the Cynical school; and the final change: you traded in the Cynical philosopher for the role of an orator. Only Proteus could be the author of such a multitude of shocking transformations. And indeed, as I look now upon the books you've had published, I can see how you have varied the known forms and appearances of your person and talent.

Erasmus's correspondent then adds that the readers of his books have taken all his "metamorphoses" to mean that "they are the work of three or four authors."



Erasmus's answer betrays a certain indecision. He begins by rejecting the notion of "natural inconstancy" as applied to him: "Amidst all the upheavals Erasmus remained the same and absolutely identical to himself."<sup>17</sup> Yet at the same time he acknowledges the unhappy fact of his nomadic life, doomed to turmoil and the unexpected: "My evil genie put me to a test that had more perils, more wanderings than Neptune imposed upon Homer's Ulysses." Although accepting the comparison with Pythagoras and Proteus, he nevertheless takes it as a reproach and blames it on the theater of social life: "As soon as I began to play one role I had to take another." Beneath the masks and accidental roles the wise man claims to remain one. However, from the public's point of view, he is Proteus.

As Leoni expresses it, the impression of mutability produced by Erasmus is as much a result of his writings as it is of his constant travels. Just when it seems that Erasmus has been pigeon-holed in one specialty, he is already somewhere else, prospecting some new strip of land. Erasmus confides to a friend: "If a man wishes to make a name for himself as a writer, the key is to choose a subject suited for his natural gifts and talents, because not all subjects are right for everyone. And that's what I could never do."<sup>18</sup>

Erasmus made this confession in 1523 as he was preparing, for the first time, an edition of his collected works. To organize such a diverse body of work he catalogued, in this same letter, everything he had written to date and divided it into nine categories. These nine categories were to comprise the nine volumes he envisaged: 1. Didactic Manuals for the Teaching of Letters, 2. *Adages*, 3. Epistles, 4. Moral Treatises, 5. Pious Works, 6. Translation of the New Testament and Notes to it, 7. Paraphrases of the New Testament, 8. Apologies and Polemical Discourses, 9. Edition of the Letters of Jerome.<sup>19</sup>

Erasmus lived an additional thirteen years after drawing up this list: plenty of time to augment the variety and versatility of his intellectual biography. Never satisfied, always carried forward by curiosity, he constantly supplemented, deepened, and explored new avenues. A tireless laborer, compulsive and hurried, he felt himself involved in a vast enterprise, comparable, as he wrote, to the labors of Hercules.<sup>20</sup> The centrifugal tendency in Erasmus is

especially perceptible because of the fact that throughout his entire career he worked in two immense and almost irreconcilable fields; simultaneously a disciple of the Ancients and a witness to the truth of the Gospels, "the Christian of the *Enchiridion*, the pagan of the *Adages* and the sage of the *Colloquia*."<sup>21</sup>

Erasmus never made a final choice between service to the Word and his love of ancient literature, even though, depending on the period of his activity, the emphases vary. Why should Greco-Roman civilization be ignored, when its models of wisdom and style did so much to improve human life and develop man's power? At the same time and even more so with its passage, how could one not devote oneself to the understanding and dissemination of the Holy Scriptures, and to the restoration, inside the Church, of the spirit of Christ, without which our actions remain vain and sterile? He wore the hat both of the theologian and the man of letters, not to mention all the other ones. Luther said of Erasmus that he was slippery as an eel.

A Proteus of the pen, he was also one in character. He detested commitments and avoided ties of all kinds, whether it meant acceding to the will of another person or giving undivided loyalty to an overly constraining cause. Herein lies one of the causes of his constant peregrinations: in order to avoid a lasting obligation to any single protector, he passed from one to another. What about the increasing number of disputes among schools of thought, nations, and faiths? And the growth of fanaticism of all kinds? Erasmus found a way around them. In the field of the humanities, for example, he manifested complete independence: while advocating the study of Antiquity, he criticized the paganism of certain scholars and aesthetes; he fought for the return to classical Latin but rejected Ciceronian purism. However, it was in the religious sphere that he showed the greatest versatility. Although mercilessly criticizing and fighting to change the Roman Church, he nevertheless remained faithful to it; opening the way to Reform and actually fellow-traveling with the Protestants in part, he nevertheless refused to become a member of any new Church. Navigating between extremes, he was an excellent conciliator and thereby earned the censure both of the Catholic hierarchy and Luther: both sides called him lukewarm, pusillanimous, a traitor.

This labile man was drunk with freedom: opposing Luther, he was a ferocious defender of free will, seeing it as the foundation of moral life.<sup>22</sup> He would probably not have repudiated Pico della Mirandola's image of man: he, too, is a Proteus, capable of all kinds of metamorphoses and open to all experience; acknowledging his intellectual mobility, he demands the right to spiritual disquiet. Flexibility, for him, is not necessarily a weakness; it allows him both to incorporate every possible means of improving life here below and of climbing the ladder that leads beyond, to God.

### Educate, Form, Cultivate

Erasmus ascribes this capacity for change to all human beings: "*Homines non nascuntur, sed finguntur*:"<sup>23</sup> humans are not born completely formed, their being is not predetermined by innate characteristics, but rather they come into existence as a substance to be shaped. Once again the Dutchman's view coincides with Pico's: we are dealing here not with essence but rather with existence that must be constructed, potential to be realized. Erasmus's interest in pedagogy is a natural outgrowth of this dynamic conception of the human individual. If the human being is malleable, then it is crucial for the philosopher to orient him or her toward the good: service to society and the love of God. It is precisely this concept of human malleability – the receptive and pliant infant is viewed as born to be molded – that explains the presence of a didactic strand in Erasmus's works: manuals for learning Latin, a treatise on good manners, and a plethora of moral precepts.<sup>24</sup>

This principle governs much of sixteenth-century thinking. There was hardly a single area of human activity, it was believed, that could not be formed, transformed, and reformed by the appropriate intervention. This program is implicit in the very idea of the Renaissance: if culture is to be restored and life improved, men must be prepared to face new challenges; they must themselves be changed in order to change others; they must adapt themselves to abandoned Biblical and Ancient models so that they in turn could inculcate these values in future generations. Already at the beginning of the fifteenth century, the humanist Vergerius

was exhorting parents to begin the education of their children at the earliest age possible in order to take advantage of the natural flexibility of youth, "while their mood is malleable and their age pliant."<sup>25</sup> *Mobilis aetas*: whether speaking of the age of an individual human being or, by analogy, of an entire human society, this formula well expresses a basic tenet of the humanists: in life as in history, moments arise that are particularly propitious for shaping – like so much ductile matter – the individual or the collective. It is at such moments that intervention is required.

It is significant that the word "culture," in the sense of "the development of intellectual capacities," initially arose during this period. Up until then it had been largely restricted to the vocabulary of agriculture, and it was only applied metaphorically to matters of the mind. Du Bellay praised the Greeks and Romans for having been "diligent in the culture of their Languages,"<sup>26</sup> while Montaigne spoke of "the culture of the soul."<sup>27</sup> Later all reference to labors of the land disappeared and the modern meaning of the word took firm hold: "he is a man of great culture," "French culture," etc. During the Renaissance, this figurative dimension of "culture" ensured its dynamic import: "culture" was not a given, it was acquired, and as acquired it required work, action upon the spirit, a transformation of the given.

Because the mental faculties had to be shaped, it was only natural that the number of instructional treatises increased. Although some of these treatises took up education in general, many specialized in particular skills. Young men were trained for public life: how to become a prince or courtier, how to speak and comport oneself correctly in society.<sup>28</sup> The path to spiritual perfection and the practices of religious rigor were described.<sup>29</sup> Professions and technical skills were also taught: how to use arms, the secrets of the hunt, dance steps ... . The sheer volume of this pedagogical production, accelerated by advances in printing, is indicative of humanist optimism: it is as though there are literally no limits to the absorption of new capacities.

But are there limits to what can be learned? Is the individual truly a blank slate, an infinitely malleable ball of wax on which any form can be impressed? Or are there innate propensities and inner resistances that tend to reduce the scope of potential or even

desirable achievements? Are we thus speaking of formation from nothing or rather of transformation of something? The opposition between Rabelais and Montaigne on this point shows that when it is a question of the scale of the student's transformation, there is more than one doctrine. A comparison of their pedagogical programs reveals that there are in fact two anthropological outlooks within the same will to fashion man.

After having vegetated under the harsh rule of the old school – that of the “old coughers”<sup>30</sup> of the Age of Scholasticism –, Gargantua is finally exposed to humanist knowledge, under the enlightened tutelage of Ponocrates. From dawn until dusk, “he doesn't waste a single moment but spends all his time in studying letters and the sciences.”<sup>31</sup> There is so much to learn, such a constant stream of lessons and exercises, that he is unable to keep up with his own oversaturated schedule. Everything must be known: not only Man, the world, and God, but the arts, sports, and practical things. The aim is to be able to do everything. Ponocrates's program encompasses all spheres: body and soul, intellectual and manual labor, religious and profane life, the social and natural sciences, theory and practice, work and leisure ... Gargantua's madcap day takes on the look of a catalogue *de omni re scibili, et quibusdam aliis*. Under the pretext of offering an education Rabelais seems to be setting forth the outline of an encyclopedia: surveying everything to be taught, he assigns his student a limitless field of inquiry, as if he were giving his hyperbolic and fictive version of the ideal of openness and totality that Petrarch and Erasmus incarnated in reality.

Chapters twenty-three and twenty-four of *Gargantua* fulfill this function to the extent that we read them as Rabelais's attempt to summarize his ideal of a total pedagogical program. If, however, they are read as a practical guide and model, then they can only be judged an aberration. It is clear that Rabelais is little concerned with verisimilitude and even less with psychological coherency. There is no attempt to adjust, and no perceptible correspondence between, the active subject of the apprenticeship and the objects of instruction. Rather, the student absorbs all, immediately and without differentiation. He has no effect on the material and there is nothing to suggest that he either internalizes or is changed by it.

Quantity wins out over quality, and memory, which swallows up all the data without distinction, leaves no room for a critical attitude. Gargantua offers himself to Ponocrates as a blank slate on which any message, that is to say all possible messages, can be imprinted. The education to which he acquiesces can therefore include everything; and because he has no individual character, he can offer no resistance to this pedagogical saturation. Infinitely passive and receptive, he resembles that indeterminate being, that candidate for every imaginable metamorphosis, which Pico della Mirandola had defined as the essence of the human.

Taking charge of his student, Ponocrates immediately turns to a doctor

who canonically purged him with Elebore of Anticyre, a medicine that washed away all the alteration and perverse habits of the brain. By this means Ponocrates caused him to forget everything he had learned from his former teachers.<sup>32</sup>

Erase and begin anew. Stripped of his preconceptions, freed of his bad habits, Gargantua can be reborn, as virgin and pure as a Phoenix. No form of the past – neither previous experience nor psychological inheritance – can have any effect on the new state of affairs. The purgative causes a radical rupture in the life of the giant: Gargantua before and after are two distinct beings.

There are two, or perhaps several, Gargantuas. One need only to look at the description of the early stages of his life and education to note the discontinuity of character and the rupture of the psychological subject – or rather its absence. Instead of a cumulative and progressive path, moments simply follow one after another, as if at each stage the narrator was describing someone different. The group of chapters devoted to the giant's youth can be divided into three phases: infancy, which is marked by the spontaneous flowering of his body and mind (chapters 7 and 11-13); a vegetative phase, under the influence of the Sophists of the Gothic period (chapters 14 and 21-22); and finally, under the tutelage of Ponocrates, a period marked by stunning progress (chapters 23-24). Is this the same young man who had been developing gradually? The impression is rather of three independent episodes or three juxtaposed systems, which does not accord well with the ideal of a single, unified, evolving individual.

In addition to this kind of discontinuity, there is another, which is observable in the first two phases. Already in infancy we can note two tendencies that are difficult to reconcile: while Gargantua abandons himself fully to his sensual appetites, busy only with eating, drinking and sleeping, he nevertheless gives evidence of ingenuity both in the game of wooden horses and in the invention of ass wipes. Yet hardly has he shown a flicker of intelligence than he falls immediately into the most abject stupidity: regressing, he begins again to stagnate, even wallowing in the mud, which somehow does not prevent him from engaging in farces that make everyone forget his foolishness (chapters 16-20). Thus, simultaneously and on two separate occasions, it is as though distinct persons coexist within the same body, producing a portrait whose psychological unity is no more convincing than the chronological one described earlier.

This fragmentation of character can be found elsewhere in Rabelais. What does the Panurge of *Pantagruel*, adventurer and wag, have in common with the one found in the *Tiers* and *Quart Livres*, sophist and poltroon? How are we to reconcile the Pantagruel of the novel's end – wise and meditative – with the young giant of the beginning? Although there are some constants, it is the dissonances, differences, and even contradictions that are most striking. These fractures in the construction of individuals – even if fictive individuals – imply a particular conception of man. Character is not conceived of in terms of a uniform and consistent subject, and life does not necessarily follow a linear evolution. Instead it is presented as a series of separate and rather loosely linked moments, a montage of poorly integrated episodes and actions that fails to constitute a coherent personality. Man is discontinuous because his life is composed of a sum of events that are themselves discontinuous.<sup>33</sup> Not having to suffer the weight of the past nor anticipating the future, he is completely encompassed by the present moment, totally identified with the role he is currently playing. During one period of his life Gargantua is completely the student of the old coughers, a pure product of Scholasticism; only a little while later he will be Ponocrates' obedient disciple, a consummate incarnation of the humanist spirit. Just like Pico's created being, he is a chameleon; merging with the surrounding landscape, he is what circumstance makes of him.

The history of narrative forms would seem to confirm this fragmentary and metamorphic vision of existence. The French sixteenth century has left us few long novels: the potential of the great Chivalric collections of the Middle Ages went largely unexplored during this period while the long heroic narratives of the seventeenth century had yet to appear.<sup>34</sup> There is a probable correlation between fictional characters of short duration and the absence of long, complex narratives. This seems especially convincing in light of the fact that the short story (French *nouvelle*) was the most fashionable genre of this period – the *Heptaméron* of Marguerite de Navarre and collections of brief narratives were widespread. Significantly, the short story rarely tells the story of an entire life. Rather it seizes a crucial moment – an adventure, a news item, a moment of passion – in the life of a character. Instead of detailing a complex chain of events or the evolution of a character's psychology, the short story captures a character in a moment of defining action, in the midst of a singular and self-contained situation. Generally speaking, Rabelais's novels have a *modular* structure, which is particularly visible in the *Tiers* and *Quart Livres*. This form, which operates by juxtaposing similar episodes without any relation of cause and effect, can be compared to the compositional structure of the short story.

Montaigne too had a lot to say about the question of formation and transformation. Although he agreed with many of the premises of his contemporaries in regard to the receptivity of the student and on the mutability of man in general, he tended to diverge from them when it came to the principle of indeterminacy and tried to limit the scope of the metamorphic principle. He approached the infinite mutability of Proteus with suspicion. The chapter devoted to "the institution of children" bears witness to this reserve.

Let us begin with the points of agreement. According to Montaigne, the young child is a malleable substance whom the teacher endeavors to shape: molding his student's powers of judgment, will and morals, the teachers imparts to him the qualities of a gentleman. By methodical and determined action the student undergoes a decisive change. Montaigne envisages applying various strategies, which can result in a double transformation: "Borrowing things from others, he [the student] will blend, alter, and transform them,



making them his own, that is, his own judgment. The sole aim of his school, work, and study will be to form this faculty."<sup>35</sup>

To sharpen his critical skills, the child will be encouraged to appropriate and make use of the classics as he sees fit: the subject himself is modified in the process of modifying the object of study. Elsewhere in the same chapter the combination of changes is described as conforming to yet another mechanism:

I often admiringly noted Alcibiades' marvelous nature, his ability to transform himself so easily and in so many different ways, without any concern for his health: first surpassing the pomp and sumptuousness of the most elegant Persian; then as austere and frugal as any Lacedaemonian; as effortlessly a reformed Spartan as a voluptuous Ionian ... . This is exactly how I would like to mold my disciple.<sup>36</sup>

Instructing the child in the chameleon's stratagem, teaching him to transform himself: it is education that gives the impetus to the first of many metamorphoses of the self.

Montaigne thus largely acknowledges that the very principle of education is based on the pliability of the human spirit. In this context, it would be naive to be surprised by his speaking of mobility. What is surprising, however, is to see him equally insisting on the necessity of stability. The teacher, he says, does not operate on a blank slate. Rather he addresses a subject who, although malleable and receptive, nonetheless possesses a unique character, distinctive qualities, and an already established personality. Montaigne speaks freely of the "nature" of his student, of his "form," his "inclinations," and his "natural proclivities." He insists on the existence of a solid and inalienable center at the very heart of the individual; and if this center can not be said to be literally resistant to change, it does furnish limits. Without such a barrier the self rushes headlong and rudderless, losing its bearings and ultimately evaporating.

Montaigne, unlike Rabelais, does not think of education as operating on virgin soil. Rather, it either reinforces or counteracts already existing tendencies, actualizes preexisting capacities, develops a potential. Are these characteristics innate or acquired? Are they immutable or subject to change? The fact that Montaigne's answer to this question is unclear is not crucial. Whether our "form" is fixed once and for all by God or Nature, or whether

it develops over the course of life, it nevertheless exists; and even if this form is but rudimentary and vulnerable to all life's contingencies, it nevertheless precludes the radical instability of Proteus. It is significant that in this chapter on education Montaigne avoids the themes of inconstancy and discontinuity that are generally so present in the *Essays*.

Where does the fluctuating part of man end and the constant part begin? Montaigne's hesitancy to answer this question definitively constitutes an essential element of his thought and is manifested, among other ways, in an ambivalent (one might even say muddled) attitude toward the very idea of "form." Montaigne is suspicious of the scholastic concept of form. As he writes: "Others form man; I describe him, and myself present a particularly badly formed example of him."<sup>37</sup> This formative activity, which he leaves to the philosophers, postulates the existence of an essence, a universal model – Aristotelian form – to which all individuals must conform. Yet, Montaigne argues, this concept of an invariable mold, transcending the accidents of history, is a mere abstraction, an invention of metaphysicians whose theories are removed from reality. This form, fixed and artificial, stereotyped and normative, denies the dynamism of freedom and constitutes an act of violence upon the individual which Montaigne rejects. Yet this does not prevent him from writing elsewhere: "I put all my efforts into building [French: *former*] my life. This has been my profession and my labor."<sup>38</sup> While the "others" have imposed an authoritarian model of man, a congealed and predefined standard, the I gropes around the central kernel, that is to say, empirically, within itself, which it needs to do in order to act and know itself. The apparent contradiction in the two statements above can perhaps be resolved by observing the first person conjugation of "building life" (*former la vie*), which here means to seek and construct oneself; it is thus a legitimate act, a quest for a future object, and perhaps an infinite process. Nonetheless, the ultimate aim is to find and establish a form that will enable the subject to coincide with himself. As a result, with a clear conception of his or her "nature," he can simultaneously increase his self-knowledge and his power to lay down a coherent course of conduct.

This theme, along with the two-sided concept of "form," underpins another chapter of the *Essays*, "On Repentance."

Reduced to bare bones, the argument is simple. The text opens with the above-quoted statement from the “badly formed” one, then offers a most beautiful and radical image of the concept of universal and personal flux: “The world is but an endless see-saw ...”<sup>39</sup> Will this self, exposed to the discontinuity of time, be engulfed by moral anarchy? Montaigne says no. And this is because there exists an inner consistency inside of man, a kind of model on which he can base his actions; this norm allows him to settle on a code of behavior and to avoid repentance. Having recourse to his “governing form,”<sup>40</sup> he can develop an authentically personal ethics, free of the factitious prescriptions of the moralists. The content of this inner substance remains undefined. It is designated in various ways – “the inner guide,” “natural inclinations,” “native condition,” “original characteristics,” “one’s own form,” “universal form”<sup>41</sup> – and perhaps implies nothing more than an acknowledgment of the mobility of human being: although I have no stable form, my instability itself is the form with which I coincide.

Thus begins to emerge an image of the self that obviously includes malleability and fragmentation but which is identical neither with Pico’s Proteus nor Rabelais’s blank slate. While sharing in the *perpetuum mobile* of the Renaissance, Montaigne seeks in himself and attributes to the other a kernel that is untouched by indeterminacy. Experiencing his variability as a shortcoming of being and a sign of vanity, he connects the precariousness of the human condition to an ontological insufficiency. His position constitutes a crucial stage in the history of the conception of the subject. With Montaigne, and more and more after him, the concept of human dignity becomes bound with the notion of inner consistency, of a being resolute in its resistance to change. The Renaissance had seen mobility, the capacity for an infinite variety of metamorphoses, as man’s special privilege. Henceforth the human person would be perceived as a solid and independent entity, with a unitary center and a fixed point of reference. This demand for continuity and coherence would prevail for many centuries, concealing or rejecting the metamorphic sensibility of the sixteenth century.

## The Joys and Sorrows of Metamorphosis

In celebrating change as a sign of human greatness, Pico and Vivès, unlike Montaigne, took metamorphosis to be a blessing; it symbolized the powers of human being, its freedom and openness. The moral interpretation of Proteus, evident in the mythographies of the Renaissance, gives a clear indication of this.<sup>42</sup> In his *Mythologiae sive Explicationes Fabularum* (1551), the Italian scholar Natale Conti attributes, as had other commentators, both Ancient and Renaissance, several possible meanings to the sea god. A few quotes should suffice to demonstrate the range of merits he associated with metamorphosis. To begin with, Proteus is celebrated as the very incarnation of the man of learning, well versed in matters of natural sciences, who “wrote a host of treatises on philosophy, botany, and geology; on the nature of the animals and the mutual mutation of the elements; and on how from these all creatures draw their beginning and, growing, become trees or herbs or animals.”<sup>43</sup>

To progress, like Proteus, from one existence to another is tantamount to having inner knowledge of the life of the various species and a better understanding of their natural mutations. The truly learned man is one who can mentally enter into the heart of things and participate in their mobility; his instability is proof of his veracity.

As for himself, Conti continues, he would rather see in Proteus the mark of a good leader; one who can, in civil administration, maintain harmony among men. Society is composed of men of various temperaments and of conflicting forces; it therefore requires a leader who, in order to mediate among them, knows how to listen:

It is therefore necessary that the Wiseman be one who does not so much take pleasure in any particular activity – because in society not every man takes up the same occupation – but who can, by various disguises, enter into cordial relations with all men and by a diversity of means manage the multifarious interests of the State.<sup>44</sup>

Because of his ability to adapt both to men and events, Proteus-the-Sovereign is simultaneously a mediator and a moderator. Able to be everything to everyone, he symbolizes tolerance, mutual understanding, and peace. Yet, Conti adds in conclusion, the applic-

ability of this fable is not limited to the political realm: it can serve as a general model of "human life." Proteus teaches us to balance opposites, to avoid excess and to arrange our activities in accordance with the golden mean. Having himself passed through every form of existence, he knows that there is room in us for every possible kind of experience, tempered by the *aurea mediocritas*. Vincenzo Cartari, he too a mythographer, summed up the lesson of Proteus in a single phrase: "His great wisdom consisted in his ability to adjust to all things."<sup>45</sup> By having developed man's metamorphic power to its maximum, Proteus found himself promoted to the rank of master of life, protector of society, and guarantor of civilization.

Human self-realization therefore depends on self-multiplication and on the assumption of as many incarnations as possible. Ronsard too makes use of the metamorphic myth in order to express this ideal of totality. He addresses the following sonnet to his teacher, Dorat:

Aurat, after your death, the earth does not deserve  
To rot such a learned body as yours truly is.  
The Gods will change it into some voice, or else  
If Echo isn't good enough, they will change it into a swan,  
Or the horn that lives on dew divine  
Or the bee that makes Hymatian honey,  
Or the bird that sings the ancient crime  
In spring, of Tereë, retold on a thorn  
Or if you've not been completely changed into someone  
You'll be dressed in a horn shared  
With the others, participating together  
And all (because one is not enough for you)  
From a man you'll be made a beautiful new monster  
Made of voice, swan, cicada, of fly and of bird.<sup>46</sup>

As a kind of recompense, the learned man will experience the joys of alterity. The beginning of the poem, with its disjunctive enumeration of potential transformations – either this or that – gives way to an additive order – both this and that – signaling that full self-realization is reached only when the subject, instead of choosing, is himself multiplied in simultaneity, both one and many, self and other. The airy lightness of the self's avatars – voice, insect, bird – reinforces even more strongly the impression of mobility and freedom. Unlike Ovid's depiction of metamorphosis, which is usually associated with violence, suffering, and pas-

sion, Ronsard depicts the migration of the body as a triumph of life. He also confers a positive value on the "beautiful monster," a traditionally negative symbol: what was once a deformity bearing the imprint of error, or a threat to order and a troubling omen, now becomes the perfection of a polymorphic existence.

The metamorphic paradigm, commonplace in profane anthropology, is much less a part of theological discourse, probably due to its pagan roots. However, the concept of transformation was highly relevant during this period, in which debates over free will and predestination were frequent. As we have seen, the humanists considered Proteus a symbol of the freedom to forge one's own destiny, to be open to all aspects of the real; and this mutability was the more exalted as it made possible an ascending impulse that allowed man to follow a moral or spiritual path leading to self-transcendence. This was the meaning of Vivès's fable: by making judicious use of his freedom, man could share the feast of the gods. This latitude accorded to created being is not wholly alien to a certain theological approach emphasizing man's ability to earn his salvation. For example, Catholic thinkers of the Counter-Reformation, especially those under Jesuit influence, asserted that sin could be atoned for by action and the power of the will. Theologians of this stripe, sharing the optimism of the humanists, would probably not have disapproved of the philosophy of freedom incarnated by Proteus.

By contrast, the Protestant thinkers looked upon the myth of metamorphosis as questionable on several fronts. Beyond its roots in the ancient and polytheistic tradition, its affinity with the doctrine of free will made it immediately suspect; its ties with animistic, pantheistic, and even magical ways of thinking only reinforced this condemnation.

It is interesting to note that Pierre Viret, one of the mainstays of Calvinist Reform, devoted an entire treatise, *Metamorphose chrestienne*,<sup>47</sup> to this subject, thereby confirming the vogue and effectiveness of this model even among those hostile to it. It is of course true that the good pastor does not pass up an opportunity to express the repugnance he feels about the pagan connotations of his subject. Quoting Pythagoras, Ovid, and Apuleus, he refers to their fables of transformation and transmigration only in order to use them *ad maiorem gloriam Dei* and for the edification of the faithful:

I wanted to write of Metamorphoses of another kind, metamorphoses consistent with Holy Scripture in which there is neither fable nor fiction. The Word of God has its own Metamorphoses, but they are of a rather different order than those of dreamy Philosophers and prevaricating Poets.<sup>48</sup>

If the humanists sing the praises of Proteus, Viret presents a totally different and opposed view: Proteus, he says, is the very image “of the inconstancy and violence of human affections.”<sup>49</sup> Rethinking the concept of metamorphosis within a Christian perspective, he will make it the cornerstone of a Protestant anthropology.

In its Calvinist version, metamorphosis is emblematic of the Fall. Man, who was perfect when God created him, was transformed by sin: “I am speaking of a form of Metamorphosis that lies in the changing of hearts, understanding, and morals of corrupt and perverted men.”<sup>50</sup> The angel was transformed into a beast. Subjugated by nature and reason, deprived of grace, man in fact leads an animal existence: “Because man isolated himself from God, without Whom he can have no Good ... in regard to his body and its affections, he is transformed into a brute beast, and in regard to the soul and the spirit, he is transformed into a devil.”<sup>51</sup> Dog, snake, wolf, fox: man has become all of them. For example, says Viret, take a look at the warrior, armed with weapons, decked out in armor: he has the look and bearing of an animal, he seems covered with scales. Herein lies the real meaning of metamorphosis: man transformed to beast embodies the degradation of the sinner and the misery of life without God.<sup>52</sup>

The pagan poets were thus correct: although unintentionally, they provided us with an accurate picture of the human condition. On this point in agreement with the humanists, Viret is prepared to credit the pagan poets with having participated indirectly in the Revelation: “They had some obscure understanding of it.”<sup>53</sup> Interpreted allegorically, these narratives of metamorphosis tell the truth about man. But at the same time these same pagan poets are wrong; they are wrong because they took these fables literally and presented them as such. They tried to convince us that a person could really turn into a stag, ox, or wolf. Such fictions nourish the worst kind of superstitions and are in obvious contradiction with the teachings of the Bible. How could a human being, endowed with a soul and whom God created in his own image, truly

become an animal? How could the various species, whom God created separately and once and for all, change into each other? The real scandal of these metamorphoses is that they overthrow the order of Creation. Viret insists that fallen man was changed qualitatively, not substantively: the mutation was not of a physical but a moral order.

Although metamorphosis is thus an ambivalent symbol, it does have the merit of illustrating, in two distinct ways, the nature of human existence. While it indicates the depravity of the created being, it can also symbolize the process of redemption. On the one hand, the fall into sin; on the other, salvation by Grace. God allowed us to be deformed, but he can also reform us: we are in his hands just as “the earthen vessel is in the potter’s hands: he can make, unmake, and remake it; form, deform, and reform it; break, smash, and repair it.”<sup>54</sup>

The distance separating Pico della Mirandola, with whom this essay began, from Pierre Viret, with whom we close, is as great as that between Catholicism and Protestantism, freedom and predestination: man, from the point of view of the Florentine humanist, is master of his own destiny; from the point of view of the Swiss Protestant he is subject to the will of God. Renaissance anthropology is contained within these two boundaries. Although the gap between them is vast, they share a similar sensitivity to the transformations of created life and the flux of existence.

## Notes

1. The *Oratio de hominis dignitate* serves as a preliminary discourse to the disputation (that did not take place) of the nine hundred theses, published in Rome in 1486, which Pic wanted to debate with other philosophers. The *oratio* appeared for the first time in a posthumous edition of the *Oeuvres complètes*. I am using here the translation by Yves Hersant, *De la dignité de l’homme*, Paris, 1993.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 7f.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
6. *Fabula de homine* (1518), in: *Opera omnia*, 8 vols., Valencia, 1782-1790, Vol. 4, pp. 1-8. Engl. transl. in: E. Cassirer, P. Kristeller, and J.H. Randall Jr. (eds.), *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, Chicago, 1948, pp. 387-93.



7. M. Ficin, *Théologie platonicienne* (1482), Vol. 14, 3: "Sixième signe. L'âme tend à devenir toutes choses." I am quoting here from the translation by R. Macrel, *Théologie platonicienne. De l'immortalité des âmes*, 3 vols., Paris, 1964, Vol. 2, pp. 256-59.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 257.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*, p. 258.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 256f.
13. Montaigne *Essais*, Vol. 1, 3 (ed. by P. Villey), Paris, 1965, p. 15: "Nous ne sommes jamais chez nous, nous sommes toujours au-delà."
14. On Petrarch's movements see N. Mann, *Petrarch*, Oxford, 1984; see also T. M. Greene, "The Flexibility of the Self in Renaissance Literature," in: P. Demetz et al. (eds.), *The Disciplines of Criticism: Essays in Literary Theory. Interpretations and History*, New Haven, 1968, pp. 241-64.
15. Term by D. Letocha, "Preface," in: idem, *Aequitas, Aequalitas, Auctoritas. Raison théorique et légitimation de l'autorité dans le XVe siècle européen*, Paris, 1992, p. xii. See also the excellent article by D. Russell, "Conception of Self and the Generic Convention. An Example from the *Heptameron*," in: *Sociocriticism*, 4-5 (1986-87), pp. 159-83; T.M. Greene (note 14 above).
16. Letter 854 (19 July 1518) in: A. Gerlo and P. Foriers (eds.), *Erasmie. Correspondance*, 11 vols., Brussels, 1967, Vol. 3, p. 380, also for the following.
17. Letter 868 (Erasmus to Ambroise Leo, Louvain, 15 October 1518), in: *ibid.*, p. 434.
18. Letter to Jean Botzheim, Basle, 30 January 1523, in: *ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 2.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 36-9.
20. See the comments on *Herculei labores* in: *Adages*.
21. L. Febvre, "Preface," in: J. Huizinga, *Erasmie*, Paris, 1955, p. 8. Huizinga's biography illustrates Erasmus's versatility.
22. To Erasmus's diatribe (*De libero arbitrio*, 1524), Luther responded with his *De servo arbitrio*.
23. Quoted in T.M. Greene (note 14 above), p. 249. In this piece one finds some very good pages on the sixteenth-century popularity of treatises on education.
24. See, for example, *De copia. Ratio studiorum. De civitate morum puerilium, Colloquia*.
25. Vergerius quoted in: T.M. Greene (note 14 above), p. 249: "*Dum faciles animi iuvenum, dum mobilis aetas.*"
26. H. Chamard (ed.), *La Deffence et Illustration de la Langue françoise*, Vol. 1, 3, Paris, 1961, p. 27. See also Du Bellay, "Ample discours au Roy (...)," in: H. Chamard (ed.), *Oeuvres poétiques*, 6 vols., Paris, 1908-31, Vol. 6, p. 233.
27. *Essais* (note 13 above), Vol. 2, 17.
28. See Machiavelli's *Prince*, Castiglione's *Le Courtisan*, Della Casa's *Galateo*, and Guazzo's *La Civil Conversazion*, as well as numerous rhetoric treatises.
29. See, for example, Erasmus's *Enchiridion Militis christiani* and Calvin's *Institution de la Religion chrétienne*.
30. Rabelais, *Gargantua*, Ch. 14; M. Huchon (ed.), *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris, 1994, p. 43.
31. *Ibid.*, Ch. 23, p. 65.

32. Ibid., p. 64.
33. Important comments on this in D. Russell's article (note 15 above).
34. I have tried to explain this phenomenon in "Le récit modulaire et la crise de l'interprétation. A propos de l'*Heptaméron*," in: *Le Défi des signes. Rabelais et la crise de l'interprétation à la Renaissance*, Orléans, 1994, pp. 53-74.
35. *Essai* (note 13 above), Vol. 1, 26, p. 152.
36. Ibid., p. 167.
37. Ibid., Vol. 3, 2, p. 804.
38. Ibid., Vol. 2, 37, p. 784.
39. Ibid., Vol. 3, 2, p. 804.
40. Ibid., p. 811.
41. Ibid., pp. 807, 811, 813, respectively.
42. See A. B. Giamatti, "Proteus Unbound: Some Versions of the Sea God in the Renaissance," in: P. Demetz et al. (eds.) (note 14 above), pp. 437-75.
43. I have used here N. Comes, *Mythologie, ou Explication des Fables (...)*, Paris, 1627, p. 870.
44. Ibid.
45. V. Cartari, *Le Imagini dei Dei de gli Antichi*, Venice, 1571, p. 257.
46. Ronsard, *Continuation des Amours*, Vol. 1, 5, in: P. Laumonier (ed.), *Oeuvres complètes*, 20 vols., Paris, 1914-1975, Vol. 7, pp. 121f.
47. *Metamorphose chrestienne, faite par dialogue*, Geneva, 1561. The summary of the first part, given on the title page, points straight away to the importance accorded to the mobility of forms: "1. L'homme naturel; 2. L'homme difformé; 3. La transformation des ames; 4. Le vray Homme, ou l'Homme reformé." Another treatise by Pierre Viret (*Dialogues du desordre qui est a present au monde*, Geneva, 1545) is an early version of *Metamorphose*.
48. *Metamorphose* ("Advertissement"), f. Aiiiv.
49. *Dialogues*, p. 733.
50. *Metamorphose* ("Advertissement"), f. Aiiiv.
51. *Metamorphose*, pp. 113f.
52. Frank Lestringant in his Preface to his edition of Agrippa d'Aubigne's *Les Tragiques* (Paris, 1995, p. 10) refers to the same phenomenon: "Les Tragiques sont ainsi remplis de bien étranges métamorphoses: tyrans 'allouvis,' qui quittent la table pour se ruer sur les humains à la manière de loups-garous, juges transformés en fauves parqués dans des tanières et ayant de la chair humaine entre les dents, roi travesti en courtisane, à perruque et vertugadin, courtisans en chiens et en singes, le Louvre en ménagerie, le Palais de Justice en Enfer, les églises en lupanars ou en cabinets d'aisance."
53. *Metamorphose*, p. 114.
54. Ibid., p. 110.