

TRAVELS IN THE *Monolanguage*

TRAVELERS IN ANY REGION AND HISTORICAL PERIOD are forced to engage in dialogue with unfamiliar languages. Such encounters are determined by the traveler's status and may be marked by all manner of cultural anxieties. A merchant will not have the same status abroad as a soldier or a migrant. As we saw in both *Paris and Vienne* and in the *Belle Maguelonne*, travel may estrange the masculine subject from his mother tongue or may prove the feminine subject's independence of it. Travel narratives may well be the locations of the most explicit explorations of the *monolanguage's* fragile, essentially phantasmatical basis. Derrida's statement concerning the monolanguage as anything but a personal possession reemerges in this context as part of the cultural baggage taken by travelers as they leave one location (sometimes but not always their "home") in order to visit, explore, or colonize others. The strange location may refuse to let the traveler interpret its particular idiom in terms of his or her mother tongue, the signifying grid he or she strives to impose onto it.

Guillem de Torroella's *Faula* presents a bewildering journey (a "fable," after all) in which the dreaming narrator finds King Arthur entombed beneath Etna (lines 689–705), flanked by two weeping ladies, Amours and Valors.¹ Guillem travels eastward from Mallorca on the back of a great fish, escorted by a parrot (lines 75–79), and lands on an island where he encounters a Francophone snake in a tree (lines 121–25) and eats its mysterious fruit that he cannot name ("mas li pom so de tal figura / com son toronges o noronges" [lines 132–33]). A biblical apple is mixed with a new fruit purloined from Arab culture, the orange. The apple-orange hybrid from this new tree of knowledge enables him to find out from the snake (in French) that he is in an Arthurian realm (in fact, he is not: he is in Sicily, as the precise distance he has traveled would have told his audience). Morgan la Fay welcomes this visitor from overseas ("outra la mer" [line 497]), "en son lenguaatge" (in her language) (line 491). Now Guillem's interlocutors on the island are as Francophone as the snake, although he continues to

speak in Catalan. The Catalan traveler assures the entombed Arthur that he understands his language well enough, but is nevertheless aware of a significant gap in his knowledge and has to inquire if he is indeed the once and future king (lines 919–28). Arthur is offended by this ignorant traveler's failure to identify him as a king (lines 933–36), but Guillem explains that in the version of the death of Arthur that he has read, there is no entombment beneath Etna (lines 937–84). Sicily is transformed into a literary site where two competing versions of Arthur's final moments are compared, contrasted, and reconciled.

Guillem's journey ends when he travels back to Mallorca to tell of his adventures and the new insight he has acquired into a legend that he now realizes is well known. He can now assure his fellow countrymen (who may like him have been completely oblivious to the very idea) that Arthur will return to the world of the living. Guillem's complex journey expressly moves him from the familiar location of Mallorca, an island that was invaded and Christianized in the late thirteenth century, into a relatively recent Aragonese possession. Sicily is depicted as a strange literary environment that mixes the garden of Eden with Arthurian romance and Gervase of Tilbury's account of the tomb of Arthur under Etna. Guillem's literary invention (*inventio*) of Sicily allows him to explore translation's ability to revitalize "French" books, to domesticate them to the point that he might transfer them (in an act of *translatio*) back to his cultural starting point with the profitable result of turning him from a squire into a suitably chivalric knight. His text uses literary allusion to stage the absorption by the crown of Aragon of an island that was under Anglo-Norman rule some two centuries beforehand.

Literary models proved as pervasive for autobiographical accounts of travels. The account of the pilgrimage to Jerusalem by Philippe de Voisins, *seigneur* of the Gascon seat of Montaut (near Auch) was written in French in the 1490s by his squire Jehan de Belest. It notes the linguistic marvel that is the southern Italian region of Puglia, "ou les genz parlent gascon audict lieu et aultres a l'environ; lesquelz se tienent separés de l'autre nation du pais" (where people speak Gascon in that place and surrounding areas. They keep themselves separate from the other people in the region).² Gascon-speaking Pugliese may seem as ludicrous as Francophone snakes in Sicily, but there seems to have been a slim basis of fact, in that a Franco-Provençal dialect was spoken in isolated areas of Puglia.³ If their travels to the Holy Land and back bring the lord and squire into contact with their mother tongue, it is notable that this is not the language of Belest's written account. He writes in French. The mother tongue may be pleasurably rediscovered in southern

Italy, but it is not used within the *seigneur* of Montaut's own lands. Mother tongue becomes (m)other tongue, a sign of an unfamiliar familiarity.

This estranged mother tongue finds an echo in Belesta's account of the island of Cyprus as the site of contested literary as well as political authority. The lord of Montaut and his squire sail from Venice to the Venetian port of Baffa, only to find themselves in a location that they interpret as truly belonging to the French:

Et y est la caverne ou feurent trouvés les sept dourmans, et Remondin, sieur de Lezinam, mary de Meluzine, y est ent[er]ré, a cause qu'un son filz feust roy dudict Chippre et y fist pourter le corps. Et de ceste generation sont descendus les rois de Chippre, jusques a present qu'ilz sont ausdicts Venitiens, qui leur est chose griefve et seroient volountiers ez mains des François, car ilz en ayment naturellement la nation. (25)

[The cave is there where the seven sleepers were found, and Raymondin, the husband of Melusine, is buried there because his son was king of Cyprus and had his corpse taken there. The kings of Cyprus have descended from this lineage until the present day, when they [the Cypriots] are in the hands of the Venetians, which they do not like, and they would prefer to be in the hands of the French, because they are drawn by nature to love their people.]

If Belesta has traced signs of his mother tongue in Puglia, he ascribes a patrilinear loyalty (one he perceives as "natural") to the population of Cyprus on the basis of a literary fiction, albeit one that was enjoying very widespread success by the end of the fifteenth century. The romance of Melusine is given an immediate political purpose by its French reader and is used to perpetuate the claim that a distant island should be viewed as rightfully the property of one country rather than another. Between Cypriots who are naturally drawn to prefer French rulers over Venetians, and Gascon-speaking enclaves in Puglia, Belesta's apparently naive mapping of his travels begins to show signs of an interpretative grid that is both political and empire building. It lays claim to lands that have been under "French" (Angevin or Poitevin) rule at some point in their history and in so doing negates the equally flimsy claims of Aragonese or Venetian rulers.

Several decades earlier, the Gascon *seigneur* Nompars de Caumont wrote a description in French of his own pilgrimage to the Holy Land that he had undertaken in 1418–20, for the edification of his sons. He does not lay

dynastic claims to any islands, and seems more keen to list the various souvenirs that he keeps in a single trunk, among them precious spices, amulets, a handful of relics, rings that have touched the Sepulcher, and a little water from the River Jordan (Noble, 80–82).⁴ His preference for keeping his travels locked away is explained within the manuscript, as he prefaces his narrative with a fable in which an ageing wolf takes his cubs up to a mountaintop; shows them his lands; and warns them, now he is no longer able to travel, that they must learn from him that “on país où vous vouldres fere vostre prise, ne fettes point votre maison ne habitacion, si vous vueillez vivre sans doubte” ([you should] never build your house or dwelling place in a region you want to capture, if you want to live without fear) (Noble, 21). Nompar warns his sons that invasion has its costs, before he gives them his detailed description of the sites he has visited. Nompar’s pilgrimage is framed by paternal advice to maintain a cautious peace with neighboring lands, to cultivate the family lands without seeking to expand them, to acquire precious possessions that may be handed down, and to strive to lead an upstanding life. “Cest petit livre” is, he hopes, something that his sons will be able to read and emulate in adulthood (113v).

Nompar and the *seigneur* of Montaut both chose to have their memoirs written down in French, in keeping with their increasingly Francophone environment. Their very different travel narratives are couched in a single language that is not, presumably, that in which they expressed themselves on a daily basis. Nompar was raised at the court of the count of Foix, and it is plausible that his account was translated into French by its scribe, Johannes Ferriol. The contrast could not be greater between Nompar’s memoir, which closes with a moralizing poem in French, and a vision poem composed only a half century before it by Bernat de So.⁵

Bernat was one of the most powerful noblemen of the Roussillon, attached to the king of Mallorca, and also a vassal of the count of Foix. He dedicates his work of 1382 to another vassal of the count, the Languedocian nobleman Bernat Serviers, and intends it to be read by Gaston Phébus, but he may also have destined the poem for the court of King Pere IV at Barcelona. His poem narrates the hallucinatory encounter between a traveler and an animated description of the world. His protagonist is traveling from the royal court of Barcelona to pay homage to the count of Foix in celebration of the end of the war between the houses of Foix and Armagnac. He and his men stop for a rest on the southernmost edge of the county of Comminges, at Saint-Gaudens (Haute-Garonne). They have crossed the Pyrenees (lines 37–43). Bernat decides to take a stroll on the banks of the Garonne, the

river that flows from the Pyrenees via Toulouse to the Gironde estuary on the Atlantic Coast, one of the northernmost points of Occitania. He decides to go a little farther, perhaps to admire the river, “Que.m meses en un puy / Trop bell, don sens enuy / Pugey leumen lassus. / E, garden sus e jus” ([lacuna] that I should go to the top of a very attractive hill, which I climbed without any trouble. And, looking around high and low) (lines 55–59). There is no chance to admire the view, for at this moment a gigantic male figure rears out of the Garonne and lets forth three screams “aut e cujat” (loud and quick) in a terrifying voice (lines 60–71). Bernat says that he alone could see the giant. His horrified companions are unable to see the vision that he narrates. With each cry, the giant summons from the river’s depths a series of satirical vignettes: corrupt clerics, unjust kings, oppressed merchants, and finally a long series of wars between the rulers of Europe. All are described with an alien eye, as if Bernat were an uninformed observer. It is only toward the end of the poem that he is able to speak to the “home gran” (great man) and ask him to give the names of the many individuals and peoples that have appeared momentarily from the river. He says very affably and with a smile that he is the World (“le Mon”) in person (lines 1078–1101). Bernat unleashes his bitterness against the World’s corruption, temptations, and endless violence (lines 1082–1134): “ell nos confon, / e.ns tresex, e.ns affolla” (How it confounds us, and betrays us, and drives us mad), emulating the World’s terrible voice, as he speaks “Ab guisca vots e folla” (in a harsh and wild voice) (lines 1082–85). The World reminds Bernat that it is merely the product of Creation, with no responsibility for what humans choose to make of it. The giant disappears and a disembodied voice, that not of the World, but of another figure speaking “per l’ome gran” (on behalf of the great man), briskly names the figures and countries that Bernat has seen.

Bernat’s vision poem seems to stage an encounter between the uninformed viewer of a *mappa mundi* and its strange content: coats of arms, castles, crowned figures. He requires the assistance of a disembodied intermediary to interpret his words, much as the modern reader of the poem requires Amédée Pagès’s editorial notes. The World refuses to be drawn into this decrypting process. He is concerned only with stating that unlike the bewildered human beings who inhabit it, it has no need of a code of either ethics or self-control. Nompars would preface his description of his travels in the world with a peaceful plain viewed from a hilltop, bathed in the warning words of an ageing father to his sons. Bernat’s protagonist climbs a hill to admire the foothills of the Pyrenees, just as he is reaching the less arduous part of his journey (one that celebrates a newfound peace), and is

shocked by a terrifying portrait of the world that contains his immediate, highly localized, field of vision. Here, the Occitan verse serves to cement the connections between the court of Barcelona, the count of Foix, and Bernat's home in the mountains of Roussillon, but the World displays ample evidence that this constitutes too narrow a point of view. Like the new peace that has been established between the counts of Foix and Armagnac, the Occitan poem is localized and limited. Bernat can see and hear the World, but his companions can only hear the dreadful noise that it makes. Once Bernat demands a verbal gloss on the things and peoples he has seen, the World vanishes from view. He is also left to contend with a disembodied interpreter that he cannot identify (this time by sight). Bernat is forced to contend with a global vision that is fragmented and unsatisfactorily glossed. He meets the World, only to realize that he can neither conquer it by sight or words nor overcome its fundamental disregard for human emotions.

Anxieties about the impossibility of encompassing the experience of the world by sight or words in Bernat's *Vésio* are echoed by Antoine de La Sale, the Provençal-born author who wrote initially for the Francophone Angevin court of Provence and Naples and later acquired some literary success in the ambit of the duke of Burgundy.⁶ La Sale also depicts the volcanic regions near Sicily as the site of linguistic tensions. Throughout his writings, La Sale makes occasional appearances as the protagonist of short travel tales that he dates and situates within a fragmented autobiography. He depicts himself as a youth climbing Vulcano in 1407 and fighting at the siege of Ceuta (Morocco) in 1415. He seeks out the cave of the Sibyl in Umbria in 1420 and accompanies Duke Louis III on an excursion to the Flegrean fields and Pozzuoli in 1425. The same man is presented on his home turf as ducal *viguier* at Arles in 1429 and protective adviser to the ducal family during the siege of Naples by the Aragonese in 1437.⁷ However, La Sale's travel tales are not autobiographies or continuous narratives. Rather, they are fragments inserted into these collections of extracts and exempla named after La Sale himself, and his readers are to travel figuratively through this written portrait of his own learning. His eyewitness accounts of journeys are scattered between other stories as if to point out the narrator's own shared store of experience acquired in body as well as in books.

Among the 167 exempla of *La Sale*, La Sale describes an excursion to the volcanic area of Pozzuoli with Duke Louis III of Anjou in 1425, which was an opportunity for his patron to enjoy the great marvels he has conquered with the kingdom of Naples. The Angevin courtiers are shown the thermal complex with its healing baths. The Frenchmen are shown a lake full of

inedible fish and pause to stare at a beautiful Neapolitan noblewoman who has accompanied her husband, a leper, and tends to him in the baths with no regard for herself.⁸ The narrator says that he rails at the woman's relatives for letting her ruin her beauty and health in this way. He learns from them that this woman sets a model of wifely devotion for the French conquerors' womenfolk, some of whom are prepared to leave sick husbands in search of other men. The French excursion is borrowed from the ceremonial practices of the Neapolitan royal court, which appreciated what Jesús Carrillo has termed "the classicist flavor of the elite ritual of visiting volcanoes and other natural portents,"⁹ but it hints at a quest for a thrilling mixture of travelers' marvels and spiritual horror; after all, the region had long been regarded as the mouth of Hell.¹⁰ Pozzuoli was accessible in the ducal library as well as on the ground, for Duke Louis III owned one of the many descriptions of the healing baths. Although we can assume that the historical La Sale could well have visited the Campi Flegrei, this anecdote, as with so many others, could be culled from purely written sources.

La Sale's narrator is notoriously unreliable in several of these first-person anecdotes, most notoriously in his geography of the world, which includes the short texts now titled *Le Paradis de la Reine Sibylle* and the *Excursion aux îles Lipari* (1437). *Le Paradis de la Reine Sibylle* is designed to correct Agnès de Bourbon's false knowledge, as he aims to show her how different the Monti Sibillini are from their depiction in a tapestry she owns:

Pour ce vous envoie par escript et pourtrait les mons du lac de Pilate et de la Sibille, qui autrement sont que en vostre tapisserie ne sont faiz, et aussi tout ce que je ay peu veoir et moy informer par les gens du païs. (Desonay, C text, 63).

[I send you in writing and image the mountains of the lake of Pilate and of the Sybil, which look different from the way they are depicted in your tapestry, as well as everything I was able to see and glean from the people of the region.]

This is to be a corrective gloss by a seasoned traveler of an image.¹¹ Agnès's manuscript and the printed versions of *La Salade* provide a map of the Monti Sibillini, allowing the reader to plot the travels and possibly to recreate them.

Several medievalists sought to reenact the climb in the nineteenth century and were disappointed to find that the journey plan had been subtly flawed

and that even the detailed descriptions and sketches of two local plants were inaccurate.¹² The reader is given marvels that are commonplace (two local flowers), plus a misleading itinerary. According to Michèle Perret, even these learned refutations of La Sale's tale contribute to a *trompe l'oeil* narrative, one that is literally too good to be true.¹³ The reader of La Sale's travel tales has to deal with a constantly shifting focus, moving from one vignette to another, led on by a verbal promise of authenticity that becomes increasingly tenuous. In this respect, La Sale's travel writing appears to destabilize the role of the interpreter-guide, a figure defined by Luigi Monga as "an essential facilitator who transfers notions and ideas from one culture to another." Monga goes on to note that seasoned travelers in turn become the "mediators and exegetes of a distant, inexplicable world," a task La Sale appears to stand on its head by distorting observable phenomena and explaining only that these other worlds are multiple and highly subjective.¹⁴ This is all the more intriguing because of the ostensibly pedagogical function of both the geography and the *Salade*, which would imply that the authorial voice should be reliable.¹⁵ As tutor and writer, La Sale presents himself as another interpreter-guide, the learned compiler who transfers knowledge from Latin to the vernacular, the past to the present.

The narrative of La Sale's journey to Lipari seems both more personal and less significant than the account of the Monti Sibillini, but it is the tale that raises the most questions about language.¹⁶ Further, La Sale appears to destabilize the linguistic markers of authority throughout his anecdote and, in so doing, presents a meditation on the multilingual processes of the Angevins' empire building in the kingdom of Sicily. La Sale was criticized by his early editors and scholars for the poor quality of his French, as an uneducated author of Provençal origin. While he most probably had no formal tutoring in Latin, the Provençalisms and Italianisms in his writings are probably derived from both read and spoken knowledge. Indeed, La Sale's taste for multilingual neologisms and linguistic play is well attested and may provide a key for his narratorial treatment of his travel tales.¹⁷

The preceding section to the geography in *La Salade* consists of a series of extracts concerning *fallasseries* (deceits) and that he rubricates as translations from Valerius Maximus's *Facta et dicta memorabilia* (Desonay, 23–62). La Sale highlights the insufficiency of linguistic expression in this section and explains that "because they cannot be satisfactorily named in Latin or explained in French, the authors name them in Greek pronunciation, that is to say, *estrangeemens*."¹⁸ He traces his stratagems to Julius Frontinus's "Livre des Estrangeemens" (38, line 506), a book he says is difficult to find

(49, lines 838–40). The reader is compelled to trust La Sale as a resourceful compiler and translator, tracing inaccessible volumes in libraries full of newly rediscovered Greek and Latin learning. In fact, La Sale's direct source was no more than Simon de Hesdin's translation of Frontinus, which circulated independently of a shortened version he had inserted into book 7 of his French rendering of Valerius Maximus.¹⁹ It is Simon de Hesdin, not La Sale, who advises his reader that he has translated a book that is otherwise quite elusive.

The "translateur" in this section of *La Salade* is variously the interpreter-translator of the Latin source (in reality, partial transcriptions of Simon de Hesdin's glosses) or a man who usurps the position of another through trickery (25–26). If *La Salade* is read as a book rather than a series of fragments, La Sale seems to preface his travel narratives with stratagems: tales of trickery, manipulation of religious faith, and translation. His own false claim to be the tales' translator adds a further edge of knowing deceit. In these exempla, Servius Tullius becomes king of Rome thanks to a priest of Diana who manipulates a sacrifice to ensure that Rome will benefit from a prophecy (23–24). Darius's servant Orbarès tricks a horse into neighing by making him sniff the scent of a mare's genitals, thus ensuring that the magi are given a sign of his right to become king of Persia (30). The duke of Thebes sits down fully armed on his chair before battle and it collapses. He laughs at his men's terrified faces and tells them that the gods have sent a good message, urging them to fight at once (56). These deceits and stratagems share certain features: they are short exempla of how ingenuity, linguistic dexterity, and prompt laughter can obtain political advantage. La Sale also advises Jean de Calabre on the value of tutors, noting that Alexander the Great benefited from all his tutors, including one who saved a city by advising him to destroy it, thus anticipating that his master would ignore his words (31–32):

Assavoir est que Alixandre n'eust pas seullement Aristote a maistre, pour lui endoctriner, mais en eust pluisieurs. Car Phelipe, son pere, mist tresgrant cure a le faire endoctriner en science, avant qu'il preist les armes. Et de ses maistres, entre les aultres, fust ung appellé Damaximenès. Item, est assavoir que la cite de Lancasus fust saulvée par ung subtil dit de Danecienès. Car quant Alixandre s'en alloit, a tout son ost, moult impetueusement, pour la destruire, il vist hors des murs Maximenès, son maistre, venir vers lui, pour ce qu'il ne lui sembloit pas qu'il opposast ses prieres a la grant yre qu'il avoit; mais quant il le vist, sy jura qu'il ne feroit chose qu'il lui priast, sy hault

que Maximenès le oïst. Et tantost Maximenès lui dist: je vous prie que vous destruisiez Lancasus. Ceste hastive parolle de sagacité la noble et ancienne cité garda de destruction. (Desonay, 31–32)

[It should be known that Alexander did not only have Aristotle as his tutor, but had many others to teach him. For his father, Philip, took great care to teach him the sciences before he took up a military life. One of his masters among many was called Damaximenès. Item: it should be known that the city of Lancasus was saved by Danecienès' subtle words. For when Alexander was heading there most impetuously with his army, to destroy it, he saw Maximenès, his tutor, coming toward him outside the city walls, and he did not think he would confront [the king's] great rage with his entreaties. But when he saw him, he swore that he would do nothing that he asked for, [and he swore this] so loudly that Maximenès heard him. Then Maximenès said to him, "I beg you to destroy Lancasus." These quick, sagacious words saved the noble and ancient city from destruction.]

Aristotle would make a very useful tutor for any aspiring world conqueror, but the obscure tutor whose very name cannot be remembered accurately (is he Damacienès, Maximenès, Danecienès?) can be fruitful too, as long as both parties are mistrustful of language. The tutor's "subtil dit" consists in knowing when to lie and when to make use of his master's unwillingness to listen to his words. Later in the compilation, the reader is informed that battles are commonly won because the aggressor has used spies to discover the enemy's plans, ensured that they are hungry or anxious, and lowered their morale by dividing their opinions (242, § xxvi). The same idea is repeated twice in the *Excursion*, once as a tale told by a strange mariner, second as the youthful La Sale's own misadventure. The travel narrative echoes the warning that the young prince is to be wary of stratagems in the most unlikely locations.

La Sale prefaces his tale by noting that the islands of Stromboli and Vulcano are part of the kingdom of Sicily and the duchy of Calabria (140), which are destined to be ruled by his tutee and by Agnès de Bourbon's daughter. These then represent the mouth of Hell that is closest to home for his immediate readers, as well as for him, and his text stands as a useful survey of the future duke's least controllable possessions. He opens the text as an official report; dates his journey precisely; and lists his companions, as well as the names of the Catalan merchants who took them from Messina to the islands.

Comment soit chose vraie que, en l'an de Nostre Seigneur mil quatre cens et six et vingt jours avant Pasques, soient en la cite de Messine, en l'isle de Trinacle ditte l'isle de Sicile, messeigneurs messier Hugues de Chalun, frere chevalier de Saint Jehan, de Pruilli en Touroine, de La Tour en Enjou, de Sernasse en Enjou et pluseurs autres chevaliers et escuyers de ce royaume, dont je n'ay pas bien en memoire les noms, qui tous venoient d'outre mer, montasme en la naive de Miquel Sappin et de Jehan Boros, marchans de Quathelogue. (140–41)

[So I assert that in the year of Our Lord 1406, twenty days before Easter, there were in the city of Messina, on the island of Trinacle known as the island of Sicily, my lords Hugues de Chalun, a brother knight of St. John, of Prouilly in Touraine, of La Tour in Anjou, of Sernasse in Anjou, and several other knights and squires of this kingdom whose names I do not recall well, who all came from Outremer. We all embarked onto the ship owned by Miquel Sappin and Joan Boros, merchants from Catalonia.]

Despite La Sale's assertion that his account is "chose vraie," he hints that his memory may well fail him, as he has omitted names and locations he does not recall precisely. The men he remembers are from distant, nonvolcanic Anjou and Touraine. The ship stops in the Lipari islands and they encounter a sight that is strange indeed: Stromboli burns both night and day and throws out "les merveilleuses et grandes flambes de fumee rouge, noire, verte, jaune et de diverses couleurs" (marvelous great plumes of red, black, green, yellow, and multicolored smoke) (141). La Sale presents a first-person description of Vulcano as a depressed summit with a visible crater, containing four deep wells that produce "tresgrans et hydeux espiraux de fumee, tous entourtignés, rouges, jaunes, vers, noirs et de diverses couleurs" (very big, hideous spirals of smoke, all curled up, red, yellow, green, black, and multicolored) (144). *Entourtignés* is an Italianism, and it would have required some glossing for a French-speaking reader, enhancing the exoticism of the description.²⁰ There is a most terrible noise, "tresespoventables bruiz," like thunder. The crater also contains innumerable little funnels of smoke (fumaroles), which can be trodden upon, as they do not burn.

Rational observation gives way little by little to the irrational, as the travelers move nearer to the crater of Vulcano. The narrator and two fellow squires, François de La Tour and Guillelme le Secte, take three servants and set off to climb the crater "par occieuseté" (because of leisure), and because "folle jeunesse nous y fist aller" (foolish youth made us go there) (145).

The youths climb to a higher level but are chased downhill by billowing smoke, to the jeers of their audience. They are disturbed to find they have lost their swords (they had used them as sticks), and they determine to climb again to get them back. To their surprise, the swords have shifted. It would seem that the volcano is repelling these apprentice conquerors and playing subtle tricks on their senses.

Facts are called into question further by the arrival on a skiff of a mariner who tells them that despite many letters from many places to that effect, the *capitaine* (governor) of Lipari, Nicholo de Lussio, is alive (146–47). As Miquel Sappin writes a letter to his long-lost friend, the men scrutinize the mariner's extraordinary physique (149), for the man's appearance is systematically distorted: his eyes are too small, his smile too wide, his feet too broad, and his fingernails large and dirty. His colors are also muddled: he wears a dark, faded blue bonnet; his hair is a mixture of white and black; and even his eyeballs are off white. His clothes are a faded shade of gray. The volcano has spouted the heraldic colors red, yellow, and black, but once they were placed in a tangle of flames or stripes, noble colors (*entourtiglés*) could be synonymous with prostitution and felony.²¹ The ugly mariner, however, is clad in mixed shades of black, gray, and blue, indicative of clouds, smoke, and illusion. Yet his presence is more vivid than that of the two craters, as La Sale adds: “Que vous diroie? Il me semble que je le voy, toutes les fois qu’il m’en souvient” (What could I tell you? It seems to me I see him every time I remember him) (150). La Sale has no trouble recalling the man's dirty fingernails, unlike the names of his traveling companions.

Such detailed descriptions, with no illustration to support them, draw the reader's attention to language and its potential to deceive. The mariner starts to gloss the place for its visitors and to undermine their certainties further. He tells them that the allegedly immemorial custom of protecting ships in the Lipari Islands by fixing crosses to masts was provoked by him. La Sale notes that he is reluctant to use the word “croix” and refers to crosses as “ce signal” (151), ignoring the local term, “le signe de la croix.” The mariner seems to be at odds with the linguistic custom of the islands, although it should be obvious to the reader that the Sicilian-speaking Liparese probably do not speak French, so “le signe de la croix” cannot be a completely accurate rendering of a local term. In this respect the mariner is also at odds with a narrator whose monolingualism appears to blind him to obvious linguistic variations.

The mariner explains that during a recent war, he was asked by de Lussio to investigate twelve galleys that had landed at Vulcano, because he knew all

the languages spoken on these seas (151). The people of the Lipari Islands were at war with the Sicilians, the Sardinians, the Corsicans, the Genoese, and the Provençaux. Clad only in a shirt and armed with a dagger, the mariner sailed in his skiff to the harbor, hid in the undergrowth, and spied on the men, but could not hear their language clearly because of the loud wind (152). He untied one galley from its moorings, but this did not make the men speak clearly enough to recognize their language. He tried again, and as they cried out, he heard them use Genoese, Provençal, and Catalan (151–52). It is only after he untied a fifth galley that the men of the first ran up to the rock behind which the mariner was hiding, and he was able to identify their true language. He does not say what language that was, just as he has not specified his own native tongue.

La Sale's companions, a trilingual assortment of Catalans, Angevins, and Provençaux, as well as men from an unspecified location in Outremer, overcome the mistrust the man's appearance inspires in them and decide to untie the three crosses on their ships. Their informant sails away with the letter for Nicholo de Lussio, but their trust turns out to have been misplaced, as in the night violent gusts of wind and smoke nearly drive the ships onto the rocks, and one man is almost killed when he leaps into the sea (154–55). The men realize that they have fallen victim to a trickster's stratagem and have been left vulnerable, hungry, and disorientated. However, the tale has a further twist when it turns out that the mariner has also told them the truth, for the next day, de Lussio turns up in person to rescue them with a hearty meal and much laughter at their expense. He informs the luckless victims that they have been gulled by one of the demons that haunt the Lipari Islands.

La Sale transfers the role of interpreter-guide at this point from the deformed mariner to de Lussio, an authority figure placed on the threshold between life and death, deceit and reality. The mariner and de Lussio are both marked as unstable figures, and both infiltrate the men's ships to laugh at the naïveté of visitors to their realm. De Lussio reportedly has been dead for two years and the letter sent to him by Sappin has not reached him, but he arrives in time to give them food and to rejoice at their misadventure (158). Similarly, in the *Paradis*, La Sale's informer at the Sybil's lake is a certain "don Anthon Fumato, c'est a dire missire Anthoine Fumé" (82), a lunatic priest whose tales cannot be trusted much of the time. This smoky, *sfumato* Antonio/Antoine echoes the two figures encountered on Vulcano, the gray-ing, ragged mariner and the revenant captain. La Sale comments at the end that de Lussio told them many tall tales and could not be trusted either.

The mariner's anecdote is disturbing, as it depicts the island of Vulcano as a place inhabited by individuals who hide behind rocks and trees to spy on their visitors. In the Lipari Islands, every visitor is from overseas; the mariner's own speech appears to differ from that of the locals whose testimony and language are invoked, but who never intervene directly in the tale. The Catalan merchant writes a letter to the (Sicilian? Neapolitan?) governor of Lipari, but we are not told what language he uses. Similarly, we are not told what languages are used by the mariner and de Lussio when they tell tales to their multilingual guests (158). La Sale's narrator informs us that the locals use a French term for the sign of the cross and appears in so doing to be less than trustworthy himself, as he seems to assume that the monolingualism he shares with his readers is a universal fact. The text plays on the destabilizing effects of multilingual confusion and associates mastery of several languages with trickery.²²

La Sale the tutor-narrator constructs an untried La Sale who learns to mistrust the tall tales of strangers. It seems that Vulcano teaches a lesson in revealing the thresholds that the traveler has taken for granted, setting the *otium* of youth against the learning of maturity. It also provides a location where a translated Latin anecdote can be retold, and subsequently experienced, in the reader's own world. Language itself cannot be relied upon, and authority is leached out of linguistic labels and signs by the three speakers, who are the narrator-tutor, his narrated younger self, and the mariner. A Francophone Angevin court seeking to reign over a multilingual empire could learn much from the lesson.

This tale of real and apparent ghosts has been described as the first example in French literature of the "fantastic."²³ As the elderly mariner vanishes into the night bearing letters for a man long thought dead, there are signs of a characteristic association of darkness and deformity with Hell. Accounts of the Lipari Islands included encounters with the souls of the dead, which were believed to reside beneath the craters; Vulcano and Stromboli lacked Etna's reassuringly fantastical alternative role as Arthur's tomb.²⁴ However, the Lipari Islands are the site of a juxtaposition of medieval beliefs concerning Hell and classical Hades, through the tale of Pluto's rape of Proserpine.²⁵ It may be argued that La Sale sets the medieval vision of Hell against the classical natural history that was beginning to enter ducal libraries, by using the volcano as an ambiguous object of knowledge. Lucretius's *De rerum natura* (before 55 B.C.E.) describes volcanic eruptions as the outcome of the heating movement of air against rocks and earth in the caves beneath the surface of the earth.²⁶ Volcanic eruptions such as those of Etna, according

to his poem, are simply the interaction of earth, fire, and water with violent winds, resulting in vast telluric belches (bk. 1, lines 722–30). Lucretius's poem attacks those who ascribe religious and moral explanations to phenomena that are the work of neutral natural forces. Lucretius survived in medieval texts alongside Pliny the Younger's first-person account of the eruption of Vesuvius, one that may also have been read as an exemplum.²⁷ Pliny's two letters (ed. Stout, 6.16, and 20) concerning the eruption, which recounted the death of the naturalist Pliny the Elder, construct a powerful meditation on the dangers of intellectual curiosity.²⁸ His account includes three points of view: the learned scientist, the learned student (who is the first-person narrator), and the reported fears and illusions of the less learned around them. The letters offer a striking echo of the patterning of encounters with volcanoes as transitions between youth and maturity, especially the sense that the catastrophe marks the culmination of Pliny the Elder's gathering of knowledge about the world (ed. Stout, 6.16, p. 476). For all the nephew's praise of his heroic acts, he makes it clear that it is his very thirst for learning that blinds him to his own safety and endangers his companions. Pliny the Younger's narrative reports a transfer of authority from the elder Pliny, killed by his curiosity, to the younger man who survives to transcribe his own observations, with the burning mountain as both agent and mediator.

La Sale's text may, then, carry a subtle consideration of where authority lies, when it comes to observing and recording the activities of volcanoes. Vulcano grants a rite of passage for the young squire, who learns through its conquest that idle curiosity is potentially life threatening. La Sale's text also echoes Petrarch's famous narrative of his ascent of Mont Ventoux.²⁹ Petrarch in mid-ascent pauses to meditate on his reluctance to take the steepest path, which is called "Filiol" (little son, or godson). His topographical choice, between the path of the "son" and that chosen by the mature man, points to the underlying sense that an untried youth may be tutor or father to himself. Petrarch's narrator places his ascent at an exact midpoint, a decade after his studies and another decade before his anticipated death (177; Letter 4.1). By presenting a convincing temporal and geographical location in *trompe l'oeil*, the ascent of Mont Ventoux also provided a template for later descriptions of ascents.³⁰ It is plausible that Bernat de So's frustrated attempt to admire the Garonne from a hill that he climbs with remarkable ease, at a halfway point on his journey, is also modeled knowingly on Petrarch.

In La Sale's text, the three young men are impelled to climb Vulcano by boredom and sunshine, armed not with copies of Augustine's *Confessions*,

but with swords. They have opted for the easier path, Vulcano, as Stromboli has steeper slopes covered in loose debris. They are jeered when they tumble downhill. Their decision to finish their climb the following day is explained as a joint decision to enjoy the good weather. Their triumphant return impels their companions to emulate them. By reducing the physical encounter with the volcano to a tale of spontaneous enjoyment, La Sale emphasizes that it is simply a fiery mountain. Their psychological encounter with deceptive tales and beliefs is foreshadowed by the message that the volcano is a mass of rock and fire that can be looked into and “conquered.” This leaves the reader to suppose that the wind, not the devil or damned souls, blows smoke from the crater onto the ships by night, and that the men’s panic may be the work of their own superstition—there is no loss of life, and they are rescued the following day.

The ascent of a mountain, especially one that burns, may well provoke moments of doubt in those who think they are enacting either a sacred gesture or a conquest. It is both knowable and a marvel, something that may be gazed upon, but that ultimately may not be controlled. Ascents are not simply a reflection of the pilgrimage narrative and its emphasis on spiritual transcendence; rather, such narratives may be moments of dynamic *translatio studii*, combining, scrutinizing, and assessing the authoritative texts that allow the traveler to interpret his or her observations. Antoine de La Sale rethinks an anecdote he has ostentatiously gleaned secondhand from Valerius Maximus and prompts his reader to reconsider the value of trust and the reliability of interpretation between languages and to confront the disorienting effect of traveling out of the familiar realm into one that is stranger yet somehow wiser than that of its monolingual visitors. Disorientation may make a victim of the traveler, but it also enables him to learn some valuable lessons.

As a final twist, the printed *Salade* of 1521 (which Desonay thought was derived from a lost autograph copy) offers a key lesson: the world as we represent it is an image of our body, and the infernal depths that we fear are in fact only our horror at our own excreted foulness. The head is the noblest limb, and all good things enter the body through it (159). Digestion produces gases and filth: “et toute l’ordure qui est en toy, que tu reçois des IIII elemens, viennent [de] la profondeur de ta personne; et en icelle fait espiraux, dont yssent pueurs et abhominables ordures” (All the ordure that is inside you, that you receive from the four elements, comes from the depths of your person. And within it, it [the ordure] makes spouts, from which flow stench and abominable filth).³¹ As all parts of the world are composed

of four elements, the turbulent activity ascribed by Lucretius to the interaction of the elements can be reflected in the human body, which becomes a miniature volcano. Mariner and volcano collide, and the ugly corruption of one body is associated with the powerful natural forces seen in the other. By a trick of language (for the body is a microcosm only in linguistic convention, not observable fact), La Sale removes Hell from the picture and leaves his reader to ponder the extent to which he or she produces infernal emanations, be they words or gases. The forces spewed out by the burning mountain may be oracular, infernal, or mere flatus. His insistence on food in the *Excursion*, itself one of the leaves of a salad, hints at the risks posed by lessons that are poorly digested. The head cannot know fully what the body, in all its uncontrollable activity, is doing when it absorbs the stuff of the world, nor can it know what will become of it. Bernat de So's "gran home," a bellowing giant of a World, sneers at the little man's attempt to criticize its injustice, replying that it is merely an unfeeling, created artifact.

Antoine de La Sale as compiler and translator was in the position of go-between for an audience who expected to be given clear renditions of his sources in French, French from Latin, Latin and iconography. His stratagem in dealing with an apparently monolingual transfer of knowledge is to make it foreign, to introduce unreliable narrators and landscapes, so that even unavoidable facts, such as the existence of volcanoes, seem to be a matter of subjective experience and words. Translations and multilingual transmissions of knowledge are so unreliable that a book may not prove useful, once it is expressed in the mother tongue, unless it is systematically mistrusted. Derrida's statement "Je n'ai qu'une langue, ce n'est pas la mienne" may be reworked and applied to these complex relationships of power and desire. The mother tongue can only be effectively absorbed once it is divorced from the maternal and has become, thanks to numerous go-betweens, the (m)other tongue, producing new thoughts and texts in a process of hybridization and enrichment. The *monolanguage* unmask the fantasies that subtend the mother tongue as both an ideal and a nostalgic symbol of lost (pre-Babelian) communication. It makes its status as (m)other tongue explicit and exposes it as another example of the many myths concerning languages and multilingualism in the later Middle Ages.

