

**A Trinitarian Poetics:  
Deconstructing Christianity in Romain  
Rolland's *Jean-Christophe***

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## Abstract

The French novelist, playwright, musicologist, biographer, historian and essayist Romain Rolland (1866-1944) was particularly well known for his unique perspective on the religious experience. After an abandonment of Catholicism during his teenage years, Rolland went on to explore a religious world opened up by his readings of Spinoza, Tolstoy and the Pre-Socratic philosophers. Art became the tool through which he sought to explore and communicate this divine truth. Rolland's "musical novel," *Jean-Christophe* (1904-1912), is a central testament to his understanding of divine truth due to its unique combination of the artistic languages of literature and music. As well as manifesting a strong trend towards a pantheistic conception of the divine, this *œuvre de foi* contains numerous references to the Bible. Past studies have neglected to undertake an in-depth analysis of the significance of this imagery within Rolland's literary method, an oversight that the current study proposes to redress. I utilise the contemporary French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy's *La Déconstruction du christianisme* as a theoretical framework, applying it to the novel through the concept of a *personnification poétique*, a key term Rolland utilises to describe the Christian God. Deconstruction allows us to observe how this *personnification* functions through what I define as a "Trinitarian poetics," which shapes both the textual narrative of the Beethovenian hero Jean-Christophe's life, and the narrative of Christian revelation in the Bible. By focusing on the action of the primary theological mysteries within the musical genius of the central protagonist, the thesis carries out a deconstruction of the divine truth that the Trinitarian poetics crafts in the novel. Chapter 1 deconstructs the very idea of Christian revelation through Nancy's thinking on the *athéologie* of the Trinity, and analyses the way in which this revelation is inscribed into a textual form that inserts the infinite into the finite through the two secondary Christian mysteries, the incarnation and resurrection. The *personnification poétique* is then positioned within this textual process through a particular focus on the Holy Spirit, which represents the opening of a creative dimension of Trinitarian relationship defined by a movement of coming-into-language that Nancy names *sens*. Chapter 2 deconstructs the concept of harmony within the novel, positioning the Trinitarian dimension of the Spirit in relation to Jean-Christophe's musical genius through an examination of the act of listening, which provides the existential basis for an opening to the movement of *sens*. This

sensual movement is further defined as an infinite, Trinitarian *renvoi*, which is manifested in a particularly intense way by the resonance of music. Chapter 3 examines how Jean-Christophe's musical creation, examined through the conceptual framework provided by the creative action of the Spirit that Nancy identifies within the Bible (creation *ex nihilo*), is essentially poetic in nature. The chapter proposes that Jean-Christophe's creative method consists of a process of *personnification poétique*, which occurs through an opening to the action of the Spirit manifested in the form of what Rolland calls the *force éternelle de vie*. Chapter 4 deconstructs the inscription of this *personnification poétique* in textual form through the Christian concept of the incarnation, which Nancy defines as a pivotal *événement de l'esprit* shaping the Christian narrative. By exploring another of Nancy's key concepts, *excription*, the chapter proposes that the incarnation can be read as a form of writing in which the movement of *sens* is grounded within the finiteness of body. The chapter utilises several of Jean-Christophe's key relationships to observe how this bodily writing *exscribes* the Trinity in poetic form. Chapter 5 analyses the second crucial element in the *événement de l'esprit*, the resurrection, an event that facilitates an analysis of the Gospel's claim to a form of parabolic truth in the person of Jesus Christ. By examining the change that occurs in Jean-Christophe's relationships in the last book of the cycle, *La Nouvelle journée*, the chapter examines how the resurrection makes possible the presentation of a type of kerygmatic truth in which the very meaning of finitude incorporates the infinite movement of *sens*. The thesis concludes that the examination of this poetic *fin infinie*, crafted by the action of what I have defined as a Trinitarian poetics, provides a valuable alternative perspective on the method Rolland uses to communicate divine truth through literary language.

DECLARATION FOR THESES CONTAINING PUBLISHED WORK AND/OR  
WORK PREPARED FOR PUBLICATION

This thesis contains **only sole-authored** work, some of which has been published under sole authorship. The bibliographical details of the work and where it appears in the thesis are outlined below.

Collins, Ashok. "The Religious Attitude and Music in Romain Rolland's *Jean-Christophe: A Tekhnè of Body*." *Australian Journal of French Studies* 48.2 (2011): 188-200.

The article contains some of the ideas that have been developed more fully in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

Student Signature: .....

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## Special Note

The *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition) has been used for referencing of both French and English sources (with some minor modifications). Australian English spelling conventions have been followed throughout the thesis (except for quotations, where the conventions of the source text have been retained).

## Abbreviations

Citations from Romain Rolland's *Jean-Christophe* and certain works by Jean-Luc Nancy are indicated by the following abbreviations. Full bibliographical details are given under Works Cited.

Romain Rolland:

*JC- Jean-Christophe*

Jean-Luc Nancy:

*A- L'Adoration (Déconstruction du christianisme, 2)*

*AE- À l'écoute*

*C- Corpus*

*D- La Déclosion (Déconstruction du christianisme, 1)*

*DA- "De l'âme"*

*DSL- Le Discours de la syncope, I. Logodaedalus*

*ESP- Être singulier pluriel*

*IT- "Identité et tremblement"*

*IRS- L'« il y a » du rapport sexuel*

*IRSA- "Il y a du rapport sexuel-et après"*

*M- Les Muses*

*NMT- Noli me tangere*

*PD- La Pensée dérobée*

*PF- Une Pensée finie*

*RP- Résistance de la poésie*

*SM- Le Sens du monde*

*TDP- Technique du présent : essai sur On Kawara*

*V- Visitation (de la peinture chrétienne)*



## Introduction

The French novelist, playwright, biographer, essayist and musicologist Romain Rolland was born on 29 January 1866, in Clamecy, a small town in Burgundy. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1915, and is best known for his vast cyclical novel, *Jean-Christophe* (1904-1912), although it is just one work within a large corpus of fictional and non-fictional writings. Outside literature he became infamous for his pacifist stance during the First World War and his insistence on the primacy of humanistic concerns over the blindness of nationalism. These concerns led him to branch out of the European context into an interest in the non-resistance of Mahatma Gandhi in the 1920s and an intense fascination with the Vedanta philosophy of Hinduism.<sup>1</sup> Although he never became a member of the Communist Party, Rolland visited Russia in 1935 and met Maxim Gorky and Joseph Stalin, becoming a passionate advocate of the Soviet experiment despite his acknowledgement of its shortcomings. The later years of his life were spent back in France, where he had returned in 1938 after spending a lengthy period in Switzerland. These final years were consumed by various writing projects, among them the last of his volumes on Beethoven (*Beethoven: Les grandes époques créatrices*) and a biography of his old associate, Charles Péguy (*Péguy*). Romain Rolland died at the age of seventy-eight on 30 December 1944, in Vézelay, France.

What is immediately striking about Rolland's life is the vast range of his interests, and this diverse engagement is given its fundamental momentum by what past scholars have recognised as a firm and unique form of faith. As Richard Francis emphasises, Rolland possessed an admirable ability to maintain a broad engagement underscored by a "strong coherence" founded on a "firm faith and a remarkable breadth of interests and sympathies" (*Romain Rolland* 258). John Cruickshank describes the development of Rolland's thought as an evolution towards "a highly individual mixture of Marxism and oriental mysticism" ("Romain Rolland" *The Penguin Companion to Literature*). This wide engagement on an international scale retains a striking relevance in today's multi-religious, globalised world and yet

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<sup>1</sup> This fascination led to the writing of his two biographical volumes on the Hindu sages Ramakrishna (*La Vie de Ramakrishna: Essai sur la Mystique et l'action de l'Inde vivante*) and Vivekananda (*La Vie de Vivekananda et l'évangile universel*). He also wrote a biography of Mahatma Gandhi (*Mahatma Gandhi*).

Rolland's contribution to intellectual history has drifted into obscurity over the last fifty years, with only a relatively small group of researchers currently examining his life and thought in any depth.<sup>2</sup> Rolland was brought up Roman Catholic, but during his teenage years he underwent a crisis of faith that saw him break away from the religion of his youth. In his later autobiographical work, *Le Voyage intérieur*, he vividly recounts his disinterest in the foreign and surreal rituals of the Mass that his pious mother forced him to attend as a child: "De ces limbes de ma vie, j'ai la mémoire de confuses litanies, de messes en grimoire, de cérémonies bourdonnantes d'orgue, et d'obéissance qui sommeille sur une chaise de l'église Saint-Martin, en regardant les nattes des petites filles et les vieux dos dévots" (176). Despite this rupture with the Church, Doisy asserts that Rolland remained adamantly convinced of the need for a religious interpretation of the human condition and never lost his "profond mysticisme inné" (133). The path he sought to forge through a historical era increasingly dominated by an atheism most succinctly given voice in Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God was laid for him through the influence of three spiritual *éclairs* he describes in *Le Voyage intérieur* (28). These three foundational experiences, which we will examine more closely in a moment, were complemented by the important role music played in his day-to-day life from a young age.<sup>3</sup> As Duchatelet succinctly puts it: "La musique lui a ouvert la porte d'un univers nouveau" (*Romain Rolland tel qu'en lui-même* 20). Although in his later years Rolland was to draw closer to the Church he had left behind in his youth, and despite the fact he maintained correspondence with various Christian religious figures throughout his life,<sup>4</sup> the majority of his career was dedicated to the exploration of a religious stance that would assist him in "sa mission de véritable citoyen du monde" (Doisy 22). In this thesis I will propose, however, that the Catholic tradition into

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<sup>2</sup> Many of these are members of L'Association Romain Rolland based in Brèves, France, which was established in 1999 and replaced the Association des Amis de Romain Rolland set up after Rolland's death by his widow, Marie Romain Rolland.

<sup>3</sup> In *Le Voyage intérieur*, Rolland calls music his "vrai culte religieux" (95). Francis points out that, although Rolland's *éclairs* were crucial events, "of more everyday help was music" (*Romain Rolland* 7).

<sup>4</sup> An interesting example of this can be found in a letter to Monsignor Nathan Soderblom, Archbishop of Uppsala in Sweden, in which Rolland speaks in very Christian language about the unjust attacks on those who were working to restore peace during the First World War: "[N]ous maintiendrons jusqu'au dernier souffle notre foi en l'Esprit de la vie et d'amour, qui est Dieu vivant dans les hommes, aujourd'hui flagellé, crucifié, mis au tombeau- et notre espoir en sa résurrection" (14 juillet 1918, *Un Beau visage* 157-58).

which Rolland was born, and from which Paul Claudel argued he was not as far as one may presume,<sup>5</sup> can paradoxically provide us with a new way in which to view his profound existential religiosity. With the aid of the contemporary French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy's *Déconstruction du christianisme*, I will explore the Christian imagery most critics have overlooked in Rolland's literary masterpiece, *Jean-Christophe*. Such an investigation aims to clarify how Rolland seeks to express the truth of religious experience in textual form, and analyse the extent to which the various elements drawn from Christian revelation serve as guiding markers along the way. Before moving on to position Jean-Luc Nancy's deconstruction in terms of Rolland's thought, I will first seek to highlight certain trends within past scholarship that can provide us with a starting point for our analysis. A central task will be to determine how past critics have viewed Rolland's movement away from the Catholic Church, and how his approach to religious experience was built. We will soon see that the guiding thread for this review of the literature is provided by the aforementioned crucial role that art played in forging Rolland's perspective on faith, since artistic expression provides the central lens through which we can begin to consider the passage of religious experience into textual form. In critiquing this artistic aspect, with the aid of several unpublished documents held in the Fonds Romain Rolland at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, I will attempt to establish whether past scholarship has adequately acknowledged the importance of the Christian tradition in Rolland's expression of religious truth, and propose a re-examination of the role of its doctrinal heritage through the textual form of *Jean-Christophe*, his most important *œuvre de foi*.

## **A Religious Experience Beyond all Doctrine**

Previous studies on Rolland's life and work have been extremely wide-ranging in their scope, a testament to the broad sphere of intellectual interests maintained by their subject. Studies extend from Rolland's intellectual engagement (Fisher; Cheval)

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<sup>5</sup> Rolland and Claudel studied together at the Lycée Louis-le-Grand in 1884-85, and saw each other periodically until losing contact in 1889. They finally met again in 1940, Claudel having already undergone his conversion to Catholicism. A friendship then sprung up which would last until Rolland's death in 1944 (for more details, see Antoine 189-200). In a conference paper given in 1948, entitled "La pensée religieuse de Romain Rolland," Claudel states that although Rolland's religiosity lacked the dogmatic structure and discipline of orthodox Catholicism, "l'insuffisance du contour ne signifie pas une absence essentielle, et [...] l'obscurité de l'appel, pour lui comme pour Beethoven, ne fut que l'aiguillon du désir et de la recherche" (412).

and interactions with Soviet Russia (Willocq; Pérus; McClain), to his later interest in Indian culture and Hindu mysticism (Guha; Duret, “Romain Rolland et le miroir indien”; Mahadoo). Critical studies on his thought have fallen into a period of decline in recent times, and what work has been done tends to focus on the aforementioned social and political implications of his work.<sup>6</sup> Very few analyses cover his religious thought in a dedicated and comprehensive manner, and again the sheer extent of his engagement perhaps goes some way to explaining this. However, the pivotal role of religion in Rolland’s life and work is testified to by the fact that even very general studies do refer to it, since its impact upon his personal philosophy and his artistic œuvre is unavoidable. Perhaps the logical starting point for our review of this literature is provided by the three *éclair*s, since although Bresky points out that not all critics agree on the meaning they hold within his thought (“Les Aventures mystiques de J.C.” 1051), most have recognised them as a crucial demonstration of the experience Rolland aimed to explore through his art. March explains that these three “‘illuminations’ [...] concern the revelation of nature at Ferney, the discovery of spiritual substance by way of Spinoza, and the feeling of invulnerability associated with an incident in *War and Peace*” (21). Rolland gives a detailed explanation of these flashes of intuition into the nature of existence in *Le Voyage intérieur*: the revelation of nature on “la terrasse de Ferney; les mots de feu de Spinoza; Et l’éclair Tolstoyen, dans la nuit du tunnel” (28). In the first *éclair*, Rolland is overcome by the view of the natural landscape from the terrace at Ferney in which “un voile” is torn asunder and he sees “nue la Nature” for the first time (30-31). Two years later comes the Spinozan *éclair*, which revealed not so much the “vraie pensée de Spinoza” but rather his own true self (35), a revelation which Roos sees as the answer Rolland was looking for in the barren spiritual wasteland he encountered in his early years of study in Paris: “Spinoza lui rouvre le ciel fermé. Il lui rend Dieu, et avec Dieu cet appui ferme, ce refuge inviolable, dont il a besoin pour vivre” (50). Rolland represents this eruption of the divine within himself as the opening of a prison in which he had been trapped: “«*Tout ce qui est, est en Dieu. » Et moi aussi, je suis en Dieu ! [...] Je ne tomberai point. Car je suis sien. Ma chute serait la sienne [...]. Je ne puis tomber qu’en Lui. J’ai la paix. Tout est paix. Je jouis de ma plénitude et de mon harmonie” (*Le Voyage intérieur* 36-37). For Stefan*

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<sup>6</sup> For example, the Journées Internationales Romain Rolland, held in Vézelay in October 2008, were dedicated to the study of Rolland’s pacifism (see Duchatelet, ed. *Romain Rolland, une œuvre de paix*).

Zweig, Spinoza was Romain Rolland's "libérateur spirituel" (28), because his philosophy allowed Rolland to approach the religious problem from an essentially human perspective. From here on in, Rolland conceived the divine as an experience within the human being, as a revelation of the truth of existence and of the world in which such existence must necessarily unfold. The final Tolstoyan *éclair* follows the same pattern: "Et ce fut comme si le tunnel s'ouvrait. Je voyais, au-dessus, les champs dans le soleil, les luzernes ondulantes, les alouettes qui montaient. Je me dis : - « C'est à moi. Je suis là [...]. Je suis ici et là, partout, et je suis tout... »" (*Le Voyage intérieur* 44). What can thus be discerned in the *éclairs* is the realisation that reality is not what it seems, that human perception can shift and reveal the very essence of Being.

The experience of openness is perhaps the common element all of these *éclairs* share: the sweeping, open expanse of nature, the opening of the true self in God, the sense of being all-in-all. This openness gives rise to an intense form of humanism, as Levy affirms when he calls Rolland a man "ouvert à tout ce qui est vivant, à tout ce qui est humain" (286). For Bresky, Rolland's religious conviction consists purely of "the faith that all men are in a real sense brothers, created by the same cosmic power" (*Cathedral or Symphony* 15), and in 1887 this faith, built on what he calls a "spinozisme de sensation," was codified in a document he entitled "Credo quia verum." In the draft of a letter to one of his fellow Normaliens, André Suarès, Rolland defines the philosophy expressed in his "Credo" as an opening to all forms of life, including "toutes les Religions, tous les Arts" (Lundi de Pâques 1887, *Le Cloître de la rue d'Ulm* 81). What Rolland defines as "God" in this profession of faith must transcend conceptual boundaries because it is an expression of the interior freedom he sought through direct experience in expansion towards a human Other. The *éclairs*, textualised in the "Credo," depict a divinity that is directly equated with the human. As Sipriot affirms, for Rolland "[l]a vraie religion suit le rythme et les drames de la vie, de notre vie. Elle est directement chose de l'être, de notre être" (29). Starr proposes that this emphasis on the unity of the divine and the interior truth of the human being as a microcosm of the exterior reality of the world leads to a conception of a God founded on constant "becoming" (*Romain Rolland One Against All* 214). The unity between the divine and human nature has led past scholars to lean towards the application of a pantheist label to this conception of the

divinity (e.g. Francis 253; Jean Bonnerot 17), and Rolland himself in fact refers to his thinking as a type of pantheism on several occasions.<sup>7</sup> However, alongside this we can also note the recognition of a need to limit the use of such terminology to definitively label Rolland's conception of the divine. Doisy, for example, notes Rolland's desire to hold back from nominative definitions: "Et son Dieu qu'il ne définit pas, qu'il ne veut pas définir, qu'il ne veut enfermer dans aucune limite, son Dieu n'est ni le spectateur muet des uns, ni le Cebaoth irrité des autres" (142). This leads to a faith that is impossible to relegate to "une forme définitive" (145), and we can propose that, underneath any attempts to systematise his thought, Rolland's direct religious experience fundamentally hinged upon this dynamic freedom from all discursive theorising, whether religious or otherwise. Perhaps one of the clearest pieces of evidence for this preoccupation can be observed in the correspondence between Rolland and Sigmund Freud.<sup>8</sup> After reading *The Future of an Illusion*, Rolland wrote to Freud to suggest a study of precisely this open "sentiment religieux" lying underneath all dogma, Church institution and scripture: "[L]e fait simple et direct de la sensation de l'« éternel » (qui peut très bien n'être pas éternel, mais simplement sans bornes perceptibles, et comme océanique)" (5 décembre 1927, *Un beau visage* 266). From this letter it can be seen that Rolland was preoccupied with a religious experience operating underneath all concept and nomination, and this central concern has been seen as playing a determining role in Rolland's thought and work, even beyond its important implications for the study of the complex links between the psychological and the spiritual. Dadoun, for example, identifies Rolland's debate with Freud as a testament to what he calls "l'Energétique rollandienne" (944), a propulsive force that provides us with a lens through which to view the entirety of his thought and œuvre. Dadoun clarifies the nature of this "Energétique" as an energy functioning underneath all doctrinal expressions of faith, an energy which goes some way to explaining Rolland's abandonment of Catholicism: "On voit par exemple comment il est exclu d'associer à une croyance

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<sup>7</sup> In his draft letter to Suarès in 1887 he refers to his newfound faith as a "panthéisme de dilettante et d'artiste" (Lundi de Pâques 1887, *Le Cloître de la rue d'Ulm* 75), and in a letter to the love-interest of his youth, Sofia Bertolini, he describes his *éclairs* as a "crise mystique, - ou plutôt panthéiste" (12 octobre 1907, *Chère Sofia* (Vol. 1) 320). It is interesting to note that Rolland refers back to his earlier pantheism in his Journal (janvier- avril 1943, *Au seuil* 124) in the context of a shift towards a more personal conception of God, but I will return to this change in his thinking a little later.

<sup>8</sup> The relationship between Rolland and Freud has been examined in depth by scholars such as Henri and Madeleine Vermorel; Masson; Parsons; and Rooney.

religieuse *constituée* (nommément, le catholicisme), dans la mesure où son effort constant est de se tenir à la source énergétique *constituante* de toute croyance, religieuse ou autre” (944). As Duchatelet summarises, Rolland’s turning towards the Pre-Socratic philosophers, and his later interest in the Indian sages Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, were manifestations of the impulsive need to find “l’expression de ce ruissellement de l’Être,” the communication of the “moi [qui] n’est qu’une parcelle de l’Être” (*Au seuil* 12). I therefore argue that it is this concern with a human experience functioning independently of all exterior forms of expression that can provide us with a key to unlock the rupturing force that past critics have identified both in Rolland’s break with the faith of his youth, and in his underlying artistic aim.

### **Romain Rolland and Art**

Art allows free expression of the profound religious experience Rolland perceived in the *éclairs*, and provides him with an arena in which to affirm this existentiality as communicable truth. As Duchatelet observes: “Rolland se fait de l’Art une conception mystique: l’Art remplace la religion; sa mission est de faire sentir le Divin à l’homme” (*Romain Rolland tel qu’en lui-même* 48). For Rolland, the artist performs a similar role to the prophet who testifies to the divine (Bresky, *Cathedral or Symphony* 15), expressing this profound reality through the “langage éternel de l’Art” (Zweig 28). One of the defining features of Rolland’s artistic thought is, as Albertini points out, the way he seeks to use art to break through convention and express something that moves beyond the confines of language itself: “Il faut dire, de plus, que Rolland s’est voulu lui-même, dès ses débuts, au-delà de la littérature et de l’art” (11-12). For this reason, his writing has been interpreted by some as sacrificing literary finesse in the cause of projecting the life-changing religious experience he underwent as a teenager (Drake 386), an aim that brought him into conflict with some of his contemporaries, like André Gide, for example.<sup>9</sup> Rolland’s conception of an art at the service of humanity is essentially informed by Leo Tolstoy, whose novel *War and Peace* served as the inspiration for the Tolstoyan *éclair*. In a letter to an Englishwoman named Clara Collet, Rolland identifies Tolstoy as one of the “grandes

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<sup>9</sup> Harris explores the relationship between Rolland and Gide in depth, and underlines their differing interpretations of the role of art that were to prove such a divisive force between them (170). According to Harris, Rolland rejected early on the nineteenth-century ideal of “l’art pour l’Art” (56), whereas Gide never completely abandoned it (57).

âmes” in which he found refuge during his formative years (15 avril 1906). As Levy affirms, Rolland’s conception of art, although differing from Tolstoy’s in many respects, is founded on “la même idée fondamentale, sur la même pensée religieuse: l’union des hommes dans une fraternité universelle” (125).<sup>10</sup> For this reason, Rolland’s artistic style combats the “mensonge d’esthètes” with the direct expression of truth, which emanates from a “source divine” (126). So Rolland’s art, in direct correlation with his experience of the divine, becomes a means of exploring further and testifying to this “vérité vivante” which Olivier Bonnerot identifies as his dominant aesthetic concern, an aesthetic that sought to combine linguistic expression with a “Platonic” method of being combining both body and soul (“L’Esthétique de Romain Rolland” 5-6). Such an expression must be able to communicate the unspeakable divine reality Rolland perceived underneath appearances, as Jouve evokes: “Et l’Art, tel que le conçoit Romain Rolland, sait aussi enfermer la pensée infinie, enfin libre, enfin vraie, délivrée de l’homme qui l’enfanta et des hommes qui la recevront, comme animée d’un pouvoir pur dans quelque sphère éternelle” (265). Perhaps it is the “Credo quia verum” that most clearly expresses the link between this open, dynamic religious experience and art. As Duchatelet points out, the “Credo” expressed a philosophy that would remain the “moteur de sa vie et de son œuvre” for many years (*La Genèse de J.C.* 29). In this essay, Rolland lucidly enunciates that art does not simply serve as a means of expressing the divine experience, but in fact plays a much more extensive role: “L’Art, brisant les barrières des âmes, nous permet d’être d’autres rôles (ou d’autres moments) de Dieu, et de puiser, pour vivre, des forces nouvelles dans ces vies plus riches, qui complètent la nôtre” (378). Art for Rolland is, then, an existential method of living that allows him to travel between the distinct individual forms of “God,” and therefore remain in profound communion with humanity.

There is one form of art that Rolland held particularly dear, as he writes in his *Mémoires*: “La musique m’a tenu par la main, dès mes premiers pas dans la vie. Elle a été mon premier amour, et elle sera, probablement, le dernier” (148). Duchatelet

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<sup>10</sup> In a letter to a Christian pastor, Rolland explains his ambivalence towards Tolstoy: “À vrai dire, il y a beaucoup de points importants par lesquels je suis en désaccord avec Tolstoy,- notamment sur l’art, sur la science, et, d’une façon générale, sur le caractère divin de l’Ésprit humain [...]” (Lettre au pasteur Théophile Grin 16 juin 1929). The correspondence between Rolland and Tolstoy has been published in a volume entitled *Monsieur le Comte*.



explains that the reasoning behind Rolland's preference for music lies in its particularly vibrant relationship with the divine realm: "Or l'Art par excellence qui l'a mis en contact avec une autre âme et lui a fait sentir Dieu est la musique, particulièrement celle de Wagner" (*La Genèse de J.C.* 29). Although Duchatelet clarifies that Rolland later distanced himself from the music of Wagner, his preference for the German composer does allow us to discern the foremost preoccupation governing his engagement with music. Wagner gave Rolland access to a type of "émotion mystique" which he saw not as an escape from the world, but rather as the perception of "la seule vraie réalité," since "[e]xprimant l'homme entier, l'art de Wagner fait sentir Dieu" (30-31). This experience of music, through Wagner but also, as we shall see a little later, through another key German composer, further convinced Rolland that art could replace religion as a unifying force bringing human beings together in a recognition of their most profound nature (Alden 264-65). For Rolland, music is a method of directly communicating an experience that avoids the stagnation of dogmatic formulations. Sipriot emphasises the importance of music in the "perpétuelle invention" Rolland aims to achieve in his communication of the divine: "[L]e trait constant de sa nature, c'est le changement. Tout ce qui n'est pas placé sous le signe du mouvement est pour lui condamné. [Par la musique], l'élément dynamique entre dans le champ de l'inspiration" (21). According to Rolland, the linguistic structure of music somehow conveys the reality of the interior life, an expressive vehicle Rolland explores further in the "Credo," in which he describes the individual self as an "accord vivant [qui] résonne encore comme un écho lointain, perceptible au divin musicien, dans l'harmonie des sphères, dans l'abîme sonore du torrent de l'Être conscient, qui les a aspirés" (378). Through musical language, Rolland seeks to make the divine present in an existential way, a goal consistent with his overarching artistic project which Nadeau accurately sums up: "[Art] establishes between human beings a kind of religion which, without naming God, makes His presence felt" (220). We can thus observe in past scholarship an emphasis on the need for a direct experience of the divine essence of the human being, free of the dogmatic boundaries Rolland collided with in Roman Catholicism. Rolland's conception of art proposes an experience that must be participated in, an experience that precedes signification and yet somehow functions through it. However, this brings with it the problem of expression: how can divine truth be presented in aesthetic form and yet retain its dynamism? Music has been

recognised as the ideal communicative means for its expression because it can capture the ever-changing nature of life itself. This is the concern which we will see dominating Rolland's musical novel, *Jean-Christophe*, a text that seeks to inscribe the divine truth of reality in textual form with the aid of music.

### ***Jean-Christophe: A Musical Novel***

*Jean-Christophe* is a cyclical novel of ten volumes first published in instalments in Charles Péguy's *Cahiers de la Quinzaine* between 1904 and 1912.<sup>11</sup> It recounts the fictional life story of a German composer born in a small town on the banks of the Rhine. Throughout the novel, Jean-Christophe<sup>12</sup> struggles to reconcile the honesty of his art and his uncompromising nobility of ideals with the corruption and spiritual emptiness of the society around him, whilst undertaking a personal journey of transformation through musical creation. The novel spans the breadth of four European countries; Germany, France, Italy and Switzerland; and in each Christophe must negotiate the difficulties and loneliness of his chosen path. His journey ends with a religious rebirth in the form of a spiritual harmony which completely transforms both him and his relationship with those around him.

The novel provides us with an ideal primary source for our study of Rolland's expression of the religious experience because of the unique way it seeks to communicate divine truth within textual form. In his preface to the 1931 definitive edition of *Jean-Christophe*, Rolland describes the novel not as a literary work but rather as an *œuvre de foi* (JC XIV) that seeks to reignite the deepest part of the human spirit, which he envisages as a spark lying dormant in the modern, rationalistic and atheistic age (XV). One could say that the novel echoes Rolland's personal religious trajectory described in the "Credo" since, in the words of Duret, "l'histoire de Christophe s'offre comme l'odyssée de l'âme, toute emplie du bruissement nostalgique de l'Éternité ("Une odyssée de l'âme" 25). It has been

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<sup>11</sup> In this thesis I will be referring to the 1961 definitive edition of the novel, which contains all ten volumes.

<sup>12</sup> Rolland utilises the full name of his central protagonist only rarely throughout most of the novel cycle, preferring instead to call him simply "Christophe." It is only towards the end of Christophe's journey that his full name is used more often, and Duchatelet indicates such a device signifies the character's final attainment of harmony which in turn earns him the right to use his "double prénom" (R. R.: *La Pensée et l'Action* 129). Throughout my analysis I will usually refer to the shortened form of the name for ease of expression.

described by some past critics as a *Bildungsroman* (Doisy 123; Grenaud 47-47; Bakhtin 20) that essentially portrays the central protagonist's journey from a loss of faith to an authentic and profoundly existential realisation of his "own divinity" through music (Francis, *Romain Rolland* 87). Starr indicates that the novel partly came about as "the result of Rolland's attempts to resolve various dichotomies and conflicting beliefs or tendencies" (Starr, *Romain Rolland One Against All* 124), whilst at the same time serving as a testament to Rolland's desire to revise the limits of art as a mode of expression and gather together a readership made up of all those who have perceived "le plus grand problème de l'homme en Dieu" (Barrère 12). At its heart, the novel seeks to access the common human experience lying underneath all outward differences, as Rolland explains in his 1931 preface to the novel: "Toujours montrer l'Unité humaine, sous quelques formes multiples qu'elle apparaisse. Ce doit être le premier objet de l'art, comme de la science. C'est l'objet de *Jean-Christophe*" (JC XVI). The novel has been viewed as the most successful example of Rolland's artistic expression of human truth, a critical stance perhaps most effectively summed up in the words of Doisy: "*Jean-Christophe* en effet, sous ses proportions énormes, apparaît non comme un roman, mais comme une prodigieuse création de vie puissante et fécondante [...]" (98-99). The novel positions itself at the juncture of linguistic expression and the concreteness of experience, a positioning that is encapsulated by the very specific role Rolland saw music playing in the novel.

Beyond the overt references to music present in the life of its central protagonist, musical composition plays a part in the very structure and central communicative function of, as Doisy calls it, this "symphonie littéraire" (121). Although many aspects of the novel's musicality have been discussed in past criticism (e.g. Wright Roberts; Yeoland), in this thesis I would like to highlight the way in which Rolland saw the musical novel as a representation of the human being in transition towards the divine reality of existence. As Francis indicates, "the interest [of the novel] lies in the interplay and development of souls" (*Romain Rolland* 66), and in a letter to the German translator of the novel, Otto Grautoff, Rolland clarifies the way in which he sought to use musical language to express this interior drama of human life: "J'ajoute que, voulant peindre le grand flot monotone et puissant d'une vie tout entière qui passe, je devais chercher plutôt à faire sentir le rythme que des effets de

couleur [...] le rythme d'ensemble" (24 février 1912). The dynamism of interior truth is imparted through the central image of the river, which has been seen by past critics as essentially informed by Rolland's interest in Pre-Socratic philosophy (Starr, "Water Symbols" 147-49). It is perhaps Sices who most clearly enunciates the musical nature of the text as a representation of interior truth, highlighting the river as a vehicle for the expression of a central movement running through the novel (*Music and the Musician* 30-43), along with the symbol of the "route en lacets qui monte" (43-68) which serves as an allegory for the experience of faith. The "life-metaphors" of the river and the mountain road are inseparable from each other and are intimately linked to musical creativity, since "Christophe's life itself is, in a certain sense, a metaphor of the musical process and architecture" (87). In order to analyse this musical process in constant movement, Sices turns to the thought of a conductor, Ernest Ansermet, who proposes that "[m]usic, like all the arts, is sentiment or the translation of sentiment; but unlike literature it is a translation by means of sense images which directly represent sentiment, rather than by means of words or signs which represent concepts, which in turn represent or evoke sentiments" (Sices, *Music and the Musician* 25). According to Sices, Ansermet then in fact goes even further and suggests that music proposes its own unique sentiment: "The particular human sentiment which music reveals or manifests is a primal state of psychic existence preceding intellectual cognition" (25). Music is thus a direct expression of the interior nature of the human being, a phenomenon which is the source of its "transcendent element" (26). Sices suggests that in the musical novel the reader encounters certain rhythmic patterns which do not seem to be entirely logical. Instead, "[t]heir primary reality is felt to be in the primitive sense of movement through time and space, which is the core of musical sentiment" (27). Through these patterns, the musical novel exposes a profound experience operating beyond the purely intellectual realm of discursive thought. This is the central challenge Reinhardt identifies in Rolland's writing. Music is the "langue de la vie intérieure, que les mots sont impuissants à fixer," but in order to achieve an "art complet, qui exprimerait toute la condition humaine," this language must move into textual form: "Le langage intellectuel, porteur de la pensée, doit se joindre à la vibration affective" (Reinhardt 43-44). The building of the textual structure of the novel through musical input therefore serves as a paradigm for the way the inexpressible nature of the divine is communicated as truth whilst remaining faithful

to the existentiality it is founded on. If Rolland claimed that “à sa source, ma création est musique” (Lettre à Otto Grautoff 24 février 1912), how does this transition of music into text allow us to understand the process by which divine truth exists within the realm of textual signification whilst retaining, as Münch puts it, its “effet de vie”? (139). I would now like to turn to the question of how “God” is represented in the novel through this musical-textual expression of the interior life, and assess the extent to which a pantheistic model has predominated within past scholarship. In doing so, I will also seek to examine how critics have taken the Catholic tradition into account in negotiating the problem of expression, and put forward my hypothesis that perhaps it is actually the Christian elements in the novel that allow us explore the issue from a different perspective.

### **Jean-Christophe’s God and Catholicism**

Before moving onto the novel, it is necessary to briefly outline the perspective of past scholarship on Rolland’s engagement with Catholicism and the broader Christian tradition more generally.<sup>13</sup> Rolland’s abandonment of Catholicism has very often been portrayed as definitive and absolute. This has often been put down to the fact that the Church’s narrow doctrinal confines and strict dogmatic control was stifling and contrary to Rolland’s need for free expression, a perspective supported by much of Rolland’s correspondence and other writings.<sup>14</sup> As Starr states: “‘Libre religion’; this is the key to his complex personality; he was throughout his life an essentially religious- but at times anti-clerical- Frenchman, who needed above all freedom to speak the truth.” (*Romain Rolland One Against All* 207). All Rolland found in the Church of the time was pretence at true religiosity through which the *éclairs* would later penetrate (Francis, *Romain Rolland* 5). As Sipriot observes, for Rolland religious experience does not occur solely within the confines of any

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<sup>13</sup> I will be clarifying the distinction between the terms “Catholic” and “Christian” a little later on, but for the moment I will utilise both, since Rolland communicated with both Catholics and Christians of other denominations.

<sup>14</sup> The correspondence exchanged between Rolland and a woman named Louise Cruppi is particularly enlightening in this regard. Duchatelet informs us of the profound grief Rolland would feel after Cruppi’s death in January 1925 and states that, apart from his sister, Cruppi was the one with whom he shared the most “intimité d’âme” (*Romain Rolland tel qu’en lui-même* 262). In one of these letters, Rolland shares his personal difficulty in accepting the dogmatic authority of the Church: “Je crois que cette puissance [du catholicisme] a pour pilier principal le dogme de l’infaillibilité papale et le devoir de l’obéissance absolue. Mais c’est là justement ce que, pour ma part individuelle, je ne puis pas admettre ; il m’est impossible de supporter l’autorité d’un homme (ou de plusieurs) : obéir, contre mon propre sentiment, serait pour moi une torture” (9 septembre 1910).

particular Church, but “cette explosion radieuse, elle est partout, dans le vaste monde” (18), and this rejection of doctrinal limits extends into his very conception of God. Cadwallader claims that Rolland’s “worship of the life force” makes his thought “an attractive alternative” to those who have turned away from Catholicism (10). However, perhaps Bresky’s interpretation best sums up many of the perspectives on Rolland’s rejection of Judeo-Christian monotheism in favour of pantheism: “It was Spinoza who revealed the Godhead to Rolland. Unlike the Christian doctrine, Spinoza does not separate creation from Creator, and it is precisely this unity of God and Nature which aroused young Rolland’s spiritual ardor. Nature is simply God himself” (*Cathedral or Symphony* 17). As we have seen, Rolland certainly found the conceptualisation of God instilled in him during the Mass to be contrary to his experience of the divine within the human, since as Sipriot asserts, these rituals seemed to him to belong to a fantastical world created by ceding power to an “Autre [...] un Être d’une qualité supérieure” (27-28). This division between the human and the divine is a direct contradiction of his artistic endeavour to proclaim the divine truth to humanity, and it would certainly seem possible to conduct an analysis of the conception of God in *Jean-Christophe* without making any reference at all to the Christian tradition.

However, despite these accurate but sometimes extreme interpretations of Rolland’s rejection of Christianity, other critics have seen the problem as more complex and subtle than may first be apparent. Rolland’s later years are not only marked by epistolary exchanges with a number of Catholic priests (see *Au seuil de la dernière porte*), but also by an increased engagement with Christian thought, the writings of Saint Paul and various other mystics (see *Lettre au père Raymond Pichard* 7 avril 1944, *Au seuil* 190), along with the Scriptures themselves.<sup>15</sup> Despite this rekindled interest, Rolland always remained outside of the faith, consistently coming up against a barrier separating his conception of the divine from Christian revelation. Duchatelet accurately sums up Rolland’s final position towards the Church by saying: “Voici que ses conceptions « océaniques » et impersonnelles de l’Être font place à des réflexions qui impliquent bien la pensée d’un Dieu personnel. Mais cet homme qui voudrait - d’instinct- croire, par raison ne peut accepter la divinité du

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<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to note that the last thing Rolland wrote before he died was a commentary on the four Gospels, entitled “Entretiens sur les Évangiles.”

Christ et pour lui la foi reste une « belle étrangère »” (*Au seuil* 35).<sup>16</sup> We can note, however, a certain degree of ambivalence in Rolland’s relationship to Catholicism even before the re-engagement of his later years, an ambivalence that warrants further study. Wilson suggests that analyses of Rolland’s opposition to Christianity have perhaps gone too far, and that Rolland’s main quarrel was with a particular conception of Christianity as a rejection of the importance of earthly existence in favour of hope in an after-life (67). In his *Mémoires*, Rolland himself describes the offense he feels when “le scepticisme empoisonneur” of the Parisian intellectual milieu turns its sights on Catholicism: “Or, ce pays [du catholicisme] était le mien, même si j’en étais sorti. L’offense qui l’atteignait fit que j’y rentrai” (230). Robichez also recognises the sometimes ambiguous relationship Rolland maintained with the faith of his youth, highlighting one moment in particular when, in 1895, in the midst of Rolland’s unhappy marriage to Clotilde Bréal, his sympathy for the Catholic faith was reawakened: “Le Christ rentre dans ce cœur par la brèche que le malheur y a faite” (*Correspondence de Romain Rolland et Lugné-Poë* 29). Duchatelet suggests that, more often than not, Rolland’s disagreement with Catholicism was restricted to the institutional decrees of the Roman Church, and with the actions of both the Church and individual Christians during the war (*Au seuil* 14; 23). Although Rolland often found that the Catholics with whom he felt the most affinity were to be found outside of the fold of the Catholic Church (17), his engagement with the Christian tradition continued throughout his life, not just in his later years, and it was marked by a desire to understand the faith in revelation he seemed to be unable to receive himself.<sup>17</sup> Barrère, who shares Duchatelet’s perspective on Rolland’s complex relationship with Catholicism that shifted from “un extrême à l’autre” (Barrère 89), proposes that “[s]a religion, ou l’expression donnée chaque fois plus ou moins provisoirement de son sentiment religieux [...] me paraît avoir été commandée, ou au moins marquée, par un raidissement contre ce qu’un rationaliste appellerait la

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<sup>16</sup> Even Paul Claudel, who hoped fervently for Rolland’s conversion back to the faith, admits he remained unable to profess the Creed of the Church right up until his death (434).

<sup>17</sup> See in particular a letter from Romain Rolland to a Catholic Priest named Abbé Guerle: “Je suis d’une famille catholique, j’ai été soigneusement élevé dans la religion catholique par une mère très croyante, que j’aime profondément. Je n’ai jamais rien fait pour me détacher de la foi. C’est elle qui m’a laissé, il y a plus de vingt ans. [I]l me manque totalement le sens de la religion, de toute religion révélée, de tout surnaturel chrétien. [...] Il semble que je sois dénué de toute possibilité de croire à une révélation.- Et comme je vois tant d’hommes que j’estime et que j’aime, qui y croient sincèrement, je voudrais au moins comprendre comment ils sont arrivés à cet état” (22 septembre 1908).

tentation du catholicisme” (81). Duchatelet also notes that Rolland made constant reference to the Christian tradition: “R. Rolland a beau dire qu’il a rompu avec le catholicisme, il en reste tributaire. Même s’il se défend d’être chrétien, il ne peut s’empêcher de se référer continuellement au Christ” (*Au seuil* 14). Duchatelet makes reference to a passage from *Le Voyage intérieur* (366) in which one can discern echoes of the Gospels, however it is perhaps *Jean-Christophe* itself that most owes its form to the Biblical references that litter it.

Descotes notes that “toute l’œuvre est [...] pleine de symboles empruntés au christianisme” (203), and, as we shall see throughout the course of this thesis, *Jean-Christophe* presents numerous characters displaying Christian faith. In the last volume of the cycle, *La Nouvelle journée*, we find a number of explicit references to the Gospel scenes relating Christ’s post-resurrection appearances, and indeed, as we shall investigate in more detail later, the name of the second last book of the cycle, *Le Buisson ardent*, takes its name from the mysterious Bush in which Moses receives the revelation of the divine name in the Book of Exodus (3: 1-21).<sup>18</sup> Rolland’s relationship to the Bible was as complex as his relationship to Christianity itself, and the equal amounts of admiration and wariness he felt towards it were manifested from his childhood right up until his aforementioned forays into the world of Scripture.<sup>19</sup> It would therefore make sense to follow the trend shown in past scholarship and dismiss these references as simply the artistic vestiges of an ancestral tradition Rolland had long since cast off. We could conceivably argue that they have little or no relevance to the study of the divine within the novel, given

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<sup>18</sup> Other Biblical references in the novel, some of which we will examine later, include the battle between Jacob and the Angel (*JC* 1586; Genèse 32: 23-33), the encounter with Rebekah at the well (*JC* 609; Genèse 24: 15-21), and extracts from the Book of Job (*JC* 647- 48; Job 7: 1-20). I refer to a French translation of the Bible (*La Bible de Jérusalem*) throughout this thesis, although it should be noted that Rolland preferred to read the Bible in Latin (see “Entretiens sur les Évangiles”).

<sup>19</sup> This complex relationship is particularly well demonstrated in his correspondence with Clara Collet during the period in which he was writing the novel. In one of these letters we read that Collet has given Rolland a Bible as a gift and has obviously sought to convince him of the merit of the Prophet Isaiah, to which Rolland replies: “J’ai relu Isaïe, comme vous me l’aviez conseillé. Les 26 derniers chapitres sont pleins de belles choses. Mais les 39 premiers me sont odieux. J’ai ressenti une fois de plus l’antipathie native que j’ai pour un tel livre” (16 juin 1907). Instead, he goes on to speak of his preference for the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, a preference perhaps based on his inherent distaste for the image of the Old Testament God, whom he describes in the letter as “maniaque et monomane.” In a later letter, however, he displays a marked shift in opinion: “Il faut que je vous dise une chose, qui peut-être vous fera plaisir. J’ai été conquis par la Bible. Ce n’est pas que j’en aie beaucoup lu. Mais de temps en temps, par petites gorgées, cela entre en vous, et cela y reste, et cela continue de travailler et de germer dans votre être. C’est un tonique admirable” (29 mars 1908).



Rolland's insistence on his independence from all religious creeds. However, I propose that the Christian references in the novel can in fact help us understand the expression of religious truth Rolland seeks to achieve. If the principal challenge is to unpack how Rolland manages to express divine truth in textual form through the movement of music into text, by engaging with the Christian references in the novel, I argue we can find an alternative solution to this dilemma.

Approaching *Jean-Christophe* from a Biblical perspective is in fact already hinted at in some of the past scholarship. Duchatelet examines the pivotal scene in which God reveals himself in the second-last volume of the cycle, *Le Buisson ardent*, a scene we will constantly return to throughout the thesis because, as we shall see, it is a fundamentally important signpost in Christophe's journey of faith. Whilst acknowledging the distinction between this revelation and the God of the Biblical tradition, Duchatelet intimates a possible similarity between the scene and the Christian drama of "un Dieu qui s'identifie au monde créé" (*Au seuil* 20). He focuses on Rolland's usage of water imagery and draws a link to the Gospel narrative: "Fontaine, source, Esprit de vie. Qui ne reconnaît en filigrane Jésus et la Samaritaine au puits de Jacob?" (21). Such an assertion lies in sharp contrast to previous interpretations of this scene, which have largely seen it as proof of the pantheistic nature of Rolland's conception of the divine (e.g. Francis, *Romain Rolland* 80). As I have already stated, this pantheistic interpretation is extremely valid, especially given Rolland's own usage of the term to define his conception of the divine. However, I suggest there is a resource lying hidden within this Christian heritage that has been left untapped in past scholarship, a resource that can allow us to better understand Rolland's religious method as it functions in a modality preceding such nominative labels. I am certainly not arguing that Rolland was a type of "Christian in denial," nor do I suggest that Christianity had the same sort of conscious impact on Rolland as did his *éclairs*.<sup>20</sup> Instead, I propose that the Biblical imagery present in the novel offers us a different means of accessing the underlying source of this movement of expression. By utilising the link to the Christian conception of God through the Biblical text, we can identify a very particular locus at which the

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<sup>20</sup> As one of Rolland's unpublished letters, dated 1 August 1892, attests: "Le Christ n'eut jamais sur moi la moitié de l'influence du juif Spinoza" (qtd. in Roos 48)

inexpressible communicative possibilities of music meet the textual form of literature.

### ***The Christophorous***

The connection Duchatelet makes between the *Buisson* revelation and the Gospel proposes an interesting pathway for our analysis which is sketched out even more clearly through his examination of the central protagonist's name. Jean-Christophe's name is arguably among the most significant of all the Biblical references in the novel. Duchatelet refers to the multiple inspirations lying behind it, including John the Evangelist (*Romain Rolland: La pensée et l'action* 129), who was, according to Rolland, the only one of the Gospel authors who possessed "la vision directe" because he perceived the inner meaning of Christ's ministry ("Entretien sur les Évangiles" 210). Rolland himself exposes another shade of meaning when he makes yet another link to "Jean le Précurseur" (John the Baptist) in *Le Voyage intérieur* (259). In addition to the meaning behind "Jean," the end of the novel is marked by the final revelation of the significance of the second part of Jean-Christophe's name, *Christophorous*, "le géant porte-Dieu" (*JC* 1593-94; *Le Voyage intérieur* 259). If Rolland proposed a hero based on the Beethovenian model of expression, as we shall investigate in more depth later on, he was also influenced by the story of Saint Christopher crossing the river with the Christ Child on his shoulders.<sup>21</sup> In the final scene of the novel we find Christophe, having been "canonised" like his namesake, finally realising that his mission has been to carry the "jour qui va naître" on his shoulders (*JC* 1594). As Di Scanno writes: "Quest'epilogo precisa il senso simbolico dell'opera intera: al di sopra delle acque che minacciano di trascinarlo, l'artista porta in sé il suo Dio" [This epilogue highlights the meaning of the entire work: above the waters that threaten to sweep him away, the artist carries his God inside himself] (244). Perhaps the Christian element in this act of carrying God can be drawn out further, since the saintly destiny of the novel's protagonist offers us the possibility of breaking open the Biblical references we have referred to through Christophe's journey from the loss of faith he experiences as an adolescent to the rediscovery of

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<sup>21</sup> Each volume of the original edition of the novel ended with an inscription making reference to Saint Christopher: "Chaque jour que tu auras vu la face de Christophe, ce jour-là tu es sûr de ne point mourir de male mort." This inscription was found on the statues of Saint Christopher that often stood guard at the entrance to the nave in French churches during the Middle Ages (*JC* XIV).

faith in God via musical creation. Bresky defines this scene of the novel as a final realisation of the “audacieuse synthèse théologique” (“Les Aventures mystiques de J.C.” 1053) that he suggests Rolland attempts to formulate in the novel, and although he claims that the God thus revealed is far from the Judeo-Christian Creator (1053), he recognises a link to Christ in the formation of such a synthesis: “Enfin Christophe, qui s’oppose au Nouveau Testament, se rend compte que Celui qu’il porte est le Christ, et que durant toute sa vie il avait été « Christophoros » - le porteur de Jésus et de sa Lumière” (1055-56). Although a proper engagement with the figure of Christ is lacking in Bresky’s analysis, the connection he establishes here can be teased open further in our analysis through an interrogation of the very distinction between the human and the divine.

One of the central problems Rolland had with Christianity, beyond all questions of Church authoritarianism, is seen in his difficulty in accepting the divinity of Christ. The emphasis Rolland placed on the human nature of Christ shapes his engagement with Christianity from his childhood right up until the writing of his “Entretiens sur les Évangiles,” in which he repeatedly returns to Jesus’ humanity as the cornerstone of his analysis (e.g. 261-62).<sup>22</sup> It is at the threshold of an acceptance of the divinity of Christ that Rolland’s reason stumbles at the end of his life, as one of his letters to Père Raymond Pichard attests: “J’aime et je vénère la figure de Jésus et sa parole dans les Évangiles. Mais je ne crois pas qu’il soit Dieu. Dieu parle en lui. Mais [...] il n’est pas le seul en qui parle Dieu” (5 novembre 1943, *Au seuil* 174). This thesis will propose that the way in which Rolland seeks to view the life of Christ in purely human terms enlightens the method he uses to musically inscribe divine truth into textual form. Paul Claudel reinterprets Rolland’s final inability to accept the divinity of Christ and suggests that what stopped him believing was actually not his reason but rather what Claudel calls a “« crampe » de la volonté,” which is “Dieu même sans doute à la dernière seconde qui se réservait de la dénouer. « Tu ne me donneras plus un nom qui n’est pas le mien, dit Dieu à l’âme, dans le *Livre d’Osée* [...]»” (435). Claudel understands Rolland’s final inability to profess the Christian faith not

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<sup>22</sup> Rolland succinctly summarises his position in his letter to the Abbé Guerle: “Toute grande pensée est donc, à sa façon, *religieuse*, si l’on veut. – Et je le crois sincèrement, à condition de donner à ce mot : religieux, un sens purement humain. Car c’est comme je vous l’ai dit, une loi de ma nature, que tout me paraît humain, - même le divin, même le surhumain, ou plutôt le supérieurement humain” (22 septembre 1908).

as a rejection of Christ, but rather as symptomatic of the unspeakable nature of the divine. From this perspective, the narrative of Christ's birth, death and resurrection would represent the textual progression of a depiction of God transcending all nomination. In other words, it would be the textual expression of what, paradoxically, cannot be adequately expressed. I argue that we have located a valuable resource for our study here, since such a narrative would offer us the ideal means through which to trace the development of Rolland's own depiction of the divine through the musical text. Can we in fact study the journey of the human towards the divine presented in the novel through the lens provided by the figure of Christ as the breaking point for all discursive understanding? We can begin to formulate an answer to such a question by briefly turning to Rolland's ambivalent position towards this crucial protagonist in the Christian narrative.

As well as being characterised by an intense admiration,<sup>23</sup> Rolland's thinking on Christ is dominated by the same dynamic existential vision he seeks to explore through his conception of art. This is perhaps most clearly summed up in one of Rolland's letters to Clara Collet: "Moi, j'aime assez Christ, et même beaucoup, parfois, quand j'y songe [...]. Mais [...] il y a eu bien d'autres Christ. Le plus intéressant d'entre eux sera toujours pour moi le plus vivant. Tout homme est un monde à lui tout seul, et son étude [...] est le livre des livres. Qu'a-t-on besoin de l'Évangile?" (18 novembre 1905). Perhaps the figure of Christ as a locus for the meeting between the divine and the human represents a unique focal point for the question of religious experience and its expression in textual form? Spirot suggests that "le message du Christ n'est pas pour Romain Rolland une chose finie, bouclée dont on peut se passer. C'est une option, une force vivante, un mouvement en marche qu'il faut refaire et dont il se sent solidaire" (100). If the doctrine of the Church can be interpreted as limiting, perhaps it can also be seen as a textual rendering of the human being in movement towards a self-divinisation that can take various expressive forms. Duchatelet hints at this when he compares Rolland's comment on the dynamic nature of religiosity to the thought of Saint Paul. He quotes

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<sup>23</sup> Rolland explains this further in a letter to Paul Claudel: "Ce cri de l'homme, du Fils de l'homme, m'a remué le cœur, depuis l'enfance; c'était même la seule chose qui m'allait au cœur, pendant les offices obscures et ennuyeux, où mon enfance somnolait" (26 avril 1940, *Une amitié* 147). In another letter to Dilip Kumar Roy, Rolland writes: "Sur la croix, près de mourir, [le Christ] cria « Eli, Eli, lamma Sabactani ! » [...]. Ce cri tragique me transperce le cœur, chaque fois que je le réentends" (22 août 1928).

from the “Avertissement au lecteur d’Occident” that Rolland places at the beginning of *La Vie de Ramakrishna*, and says that we find in this text “ses positions à la fois hérétiques au regard du catholicisme et cependant qui rappellent saint Paul” (*Au seuil* 29). In this introduction, Rolland affirms his belief not in a personal God, but rather in a conception of the divine that revolves around “une naissance perpétuelle,” conceptualising “La Création” as something that “se renouvelle, à chaque instant” (Duchatelet, *Au seuil* 29). Duchatelet’s analysis of this key point suggests that by reinserting Rolland’s emphasis on the ever-changing nature of the religious experience, exemplified in his perspective on music, back into the Christian tradition, we can in fact discern a correspondence between their internal creative exigencies, or as Barrère puts it in his commentary on the same passage, their shared “élan religieux, avant qu’il ne se fixe en doctrine” (97).<sup>24</sup> By tapping into this creativity, we can exploit the tension between the human and the divine that resides within it, using it to draw out the same tension within the *œuvre de foi* as it narrates the journey of the human self. Descotes makes another interesting observation that can enlighten us in the formulation of such an approach. He suggests that the faith Christophe finally regains is of a different nature altogether: “Cette foi-là n’est plus la foi en un Dieu personnel: le Dieu chrétien, réduit- qu’on le veuille ou non- aux proportions humaines, n’est pas assez vaste [...]. Il n’est pas rejeté : il est englobé dans un Dieu plus grand encore que lui. [...] Christophe n’abandonne pas la foi chrétienne ; il la dépasse” (203). This simultaneous movement of non-rejection and surpassing indicates the possibility that the textualisation of Christ’s life is dynamic and creative, containing within it a central current of religious experience that can be broken open further. Such an *élan* can certainly manifest itself in other expressions of the divine,<sup>25</sup> however it also contains another element that can perhaps be exploited in a new way. The central kernel of the movement of surpassing is what Descotes describes as “force,” the same energy we can discern in Rolland’s *éclairs* and his “Credo”: “La force immense de l’Univers est créatrice; elle livre un combat dont les oreilles mortelles ne peuvent percevoir l’harmonie, mais qui fait progresser

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<sup>24</sup> Barrère also points out that Rolland seemed to find it much easier to discern this “élan” in the works of early Christian mystics and theologians like Pseudo-Denys rather than in the modern Church (97-98).

<sup>25</sup> Descotes, for example, follows the general trend seen in past criticism and views this surpassing of Christianity as a transition that has as its final destination a type of pantheism, since by rediscovering his place within the natural world Christophe is gradually divinised (203-4).

le monde” (Descotes 205). Pantheism and monotheism thus somehow both meet and diverge within this “Dieu-force” that is in part inspired by the constant flux the Pre-Socratics perceived underneath visible reality (205). Christophe’s faith is located in the surge of forces which break through conventional discursive boundaries: “Le déterminisme qui régit ce mouvement dépasse les conceptions traditionnelles, et ses exigences sont plus lâches que les lois définies dans le cadre de notre science moderne” (205). By adhering to the pre-discursive potentiality of these forces, I suggest that we can avoid the pre-emptive assignation of a pantheistic definition and analyse in greater depth the way Rolland manages to express the truth of the human person in literary form. In addition, by utilising the Christian narrative as a guide to help us trace the movement of forces through Christophe’s journey of faith, we can come to a new understanding of this expressive process. But an even more accurate model for our study is provided by Rolland himself, in a letter in which he communicates with great precision his understanding of the personal God and the method he seeks to use to represent the ineffability of the divine through an application of these forces within the self.

### **The Modernist God as *Personnification poétique***

Romain Rolland’s interactions with Catholics in the years during which he was writing *Jean-Christophe* largely consisted of exchanges with a number of priests who subscribed to the heterodox school of thought within the Catholic Church that Pope Pius X, in his 1907 encyclical *Pascendi dominici gregis*, labelled “modernisme.” It is Rolland’s relationship with this Catholic intellectual movement that I would like to highlight as particularly useful for our study. In a letter to Clara Collet, Rolland speaks of these “prêtres catholiques français persécutés” in admiring terms, calling them “grandes âmes religieuses et libres” who succeed in keeping “après bien des crises, leur paix intérieure et l’équilibre de leur pensée, sans rien sacrifier ni de leur obéissance, ni de leur raison” (27 décembre 1908). In Rolland’s eyes, these priests achieved the reconciliation between the dogmatic structure of revelation and the existential problems of humanity in the modern age that he himself was unable to attain during his youth.<sup>26</sup> Although their problematic

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<sup>26</sup> See Émile Poulat’s *Histoire, dogme et critique dans la crise moderniste* for more details on the modernist position towards the dogmatic development of Catholicism in a secular world.

interactions with the Church hierarchy of the time are fundamental to a proper understanding of the modernist phenomenon, just as Rolland's objection to papal authority is an essential factor in his engagement with Catholicism, I wish to set aside such concerns for the moment since they far exceed the scope of this thesis. However, there is one particular element that can be discerned within such dogmatic conflicts, an element which can perhaps allow us to position Rolland within this current of thought and the essential doctrinal movement flowing through it. Thiel attempts to locate the heart of the modernist problem, and uses the excommunicated priest and scholar Alfred Loisy's theological confrontation with Adolf von Harnack as his principal example. In his work *L'Évangile et l'église*, Loisy tries to counter Harnack's claim that the early Church corrupted the purity of Christ's message by proposing that such a continual reinterpretation of Christianity is essential, "puisque l'adaptation de l'Évangile à la condition changeante de l'humanité s'impose aujourd'hui comme toujours et plus que jamais" (275). Thiel explains how the mixed reaction of the Church to Cardinal Newman's similarly interpreted views on doctrinal development in the nineteenth-century came to a head in the excommunication of Loisy, and indeed it can be suggested that Pope Pius X had Loisy's thesis in mind when he issued *Pascendi dominici gregis* (258-59). However, as Thiel affirms, the stance of the Church changed radically with the *aggiornamento* of Vatican II (260) and perhaps, as we shall see when we turn to Jean-Luc Nancy's thought, such a tendency towards adaptation and free thought is deeply ingrained in the nature of Christianity itself. Thus the modernist crisis within Catholicism provides us with an appropriate historical context in which to examine the central concern of this thesis, namely, the expression of divine truth as a phenomenon anchored in the ever-shifting ground of existential experience.

The correspondence Rolland maintained with Louise Cruppi during the *Jean-Christophe* period is particularly crucial here, because in it he positions his own thinking on the divine in relation to the modernist conception of doctrinal development. In these letters he directly refers to the modernist crisis and its suppression by Pope Pius X (9 septembre 1910) and, just like in his letter to Clara Collet, Rolland displays his strong admiration for the modernist priests, describing

them as “de grands croyants, très libres d’esprit” (10 août 1909).<sup>27</sup> This admiration is extremely useful for the present study because it reveals another crucial facet of Rolland’s position in regards to an ever-adapting Christianity and the personal conception of God it puts forward as its core proposal. In the letter dated 10 August 1909, Rolland speaks about the real-life inspiration for the Abbé Corneille, a Catholic priest Christophe encounters in *Dans la maison* (JC 1032-1036).<sup>28</sup> He specifies that the creed of faith the Abbé Corneille espouses in the novel is not actually of his own invention, but rather a summary of the modernist doctrine. In addition, Rolland identifies the precise point at which he sees his perspective on the divine converging with this modernist creed:

Ai-je besoin de vous dire que je ne suis moderniste en rien, puisque je n’ai nul besoin de l’Évangile et de Jésus, pas plus que d’aucun Dieu. Mais je m’entends avec eux, parce que leur Dieu n’est, en somme, qu’une personnification poétique de la force éternelle de vie, que je sens couler dans l’univers. Peu m’importe son nom. Et s’ils y mêlent (certains d’entre eux) une idée de providence, ou de bonté divine, que je n’ai point, je ne les aime pas moins ; je les aime peut-être mieux : car cela prouve leur bonté de cœur et leur touchant optimisme.

With this concise statement, Rolland firmly indicates his desire to distance himself from any belief in a monotheistic God, thereby demonstrating very clearly that any study of the novel through the Christian tradition must be carried out with such a fact in mind. However, the letter also highlights that Rolland saw the same creative *force éternelle de vie* he himself seeks to exploit in the modernists’ poetic representation of a personal God. As Rolland states earlier in the letter, he admires these priests because they manage to maintain “l’équilibre entre la libre raison et la foi catholique, en quoi consiste justement le modernisme.” According to this definition, the modernists’ vision of faith incorporates a free and dynamic perspective on religious experience whilst also conceptualising God in a personal form that can be expressed

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<sup>27</sup> It is also interesting to note that later in the letter to Cruppi dated 9 September 1910, Rolland speaks of his intransigence by quoting Saint Paul: “Seulement, la conclusion, c’est qu’un homme comme moi ne peut être ni d’une armée, ni d’une Église.- ‘Et pour nous, nous sommes citoyens des cieux,’ comme disait l’apôtre à l’épée.”

<sup>28</sup> He clarifies in the letter that this priest is the “directeur d’un grand séminaire,” and in a Journal entry from 1908 he identifies him as the same Abbé Guerle that I referred to earlier, who was the “directeur de l’École Saint-Martin, à Amiens.”



within doctrinal formulations. One could certainly take this comment on modernism as an interesting addition to the study of Rolland's pantheism and leave it at that. However, in this thesis I will propose that such a poetic movement towards divine truth can in fact be examined further and applied to the novel.

Although in the above-cited letter Rolland unambiguously rejects any personalised conception of the divine, he in fact must undertake a very similar process of personification in his literature, a textual phenomenon which gives rise to a very particular paradox this thesis will seek to investigate. Rolland writes of such a need to personify the divine in a passage from his *Mémoires*:

On a pu remarquer l'appel à Dieu, qui concluait le drame *Le Siège de Mantoue* (été 1894). C'était là, pour moi, un recours assez nouveau. Car si j'étais, dès ma jeunesse, tout imprégné du « divin », ce « divin » gardait un caractère impersonnel : le dieu de Spinoza n'est point de ceux qu'on invoque. Il est. On est en lui. Mais depuis mon retour de Rome, où j'avais dû, bon gré mal gré, entrer dans le combat contre un monde ennemi, mon Dieu s'était trouvé, comme moi, entraîné dans l'action. Et puisqu'il agissait, voici qu'il prenait forme, il fallait bien qu'il me fût un compagnon de bataille... « Père, défends-toi à droite !...Père, défends-toi à gauche !... » - Et moi, je le défendais... (229)

In his writing, Rolland must obviously inscribe the divine into language, but here we can see him take one step further and assert that a process of personification must form an integral part of this linguistic communication. Such a personification must respect the unspeakable experience it wishes to project since, as Sénéchal emphasises, Rolland's usage of imagery in his writing is always aimed at the projection of "la vision intérieure de l'univers" (20). So how is such a paradox negotiated? If, as Rolland himself phrases it, we envisage the life of Christ as a *personnification poétique* that manages to implement such a paradoxical expression of divine truth within a literary narrative, we find an ideal lens through which to study the novel. As Barrère points out, and as we shall see in more detail as our analysis progresses, the novel involves various scenes in which God is personified in a similar fashion to the God of Rolland's early, unpublished play, "Le Siège de Mantoue." Foremost among these scenes is the aforementioned revelation in *Le Buisson ardent*, where Christophe speaks directly to the hidden deity he has intuitively perceived since his birth. Thus, by capitalising on the process through

which the Christian narrative presents the life of Christ as the revelation of divine truth, the thesis will propose an analysis of this *personnification poétique* as it unfolds in the novel. It is in this convergence between the narrative of revelation and the novel that, I argue, we will find the point at which the musicality of the *œuvre de foi* meets the discursive nature of text, the same point at which the existential narrative of Christ's life passes into a textual form retaining its experiential dynamism and creative momentum. As we shall observe, the *personnification poétique* provides an ideal framework for such a study because it serves as a locus at which the poetic function of music meets the narrative expression of Christian revelation. The thesis will thus build on the analyses of Rolland's method of expressing the most intimate nature of the human being that past critics have undertaken by utilising the Christian narrative as its principal resource.<sup>29</sup> I will propose that the text of the novel is in fact Christian in essence, not because, as I have already stated, Rolland himself was Christian, nor due to the fact that Biblical imagery permeates the novel, but rather because *Jean-Christophe* achieves a textual rendering of the unspeakable experience of the divine in the same way that the Christian narrative does. By carrying out such an analysis I hope to shed new light on the capacity Rolland's thought had to transcend doctrinal boundaries and conceptual limits, and how he sought to speak about the unspeakable experience of the divine that lies underneath all descriptive labels. However, another problem quickly presents itself here: what kind of theoretical method is capable of analysing such a paradoxical expression of what Louis Gillet, in a letter to Rolland dated 4 May 1902, named "l'instinct du divin," which is "antérieur aux dogmes" (155)? It is here that Jean-Luc Nancy's *Déconstruction du christianisme* reveals its importance for our study, since it will allow us to disassemble the very image of the human person as a space in which the divine is expressed within the novel.

## **Deconstruction and Christianity**

Jean-Luc Nancy is a contemporary French philosopher whose writings include commentaries on the nature of community, art, the human body, and politics, amongst other wide-ranging topics. Nancy's thought has been used to critique

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Olivier Bonnerot who speaks about a similar object of study. He aims to capture the "intuition fondamentale" governing Rolland's work, an intuition that can only be accessed by observing the "image en train de naître" ("Le parcours des Muses" 126).

literature in the past, with particular attention being paid to the application of his earlier thinking on community in such works as *Être singulier pluriel* and *La Communauté désœuvrée* to post-colonial literature (Britton). What has not yet been applied to a comprehensive study of literature, at least not to my knowledge, is the project that has dominated Nancy's thinking in recent years, namely *La Déconstruction du christianisme* which he has carried out in diverse texts, from his essay on the body, *Corpus* (1993), to the two volumes that form the bulk of this project, *La Déclosion* (2005) and *L'Adoration* (2010). This project, as its title indicates, is built upon the foundation laid out by Jacques Derrida's philosophy of deconstruction, since Nancy has been heavily influenced by the latter's thought whilst also challenging it in many respects.<sup>30</sup> It is this deconstructive foundation that offers us a theoretical guide with which to analyse the unspeakable experience of the divine in *Jean-Christophe* because, despite wide-spread interpretations of deconstruction as a sort of nihilism rooted in relativity and subjectivism (Stocker 4), it in fact proposes a valuable alternative perspective on the way in which the religious question is negotiated in textual form. Perhaps the critic who has most succinctly indicated the new possibilities that Derrida's thought has opened up for the study of religion is the American continental philosopher John D. Caputo. As Olthuis writes: "Venturing into the uncharted borderlands between deconstruction and religion, Caputo presents a compelling and original portrayal of Derrida as a religious thinker [...]. Deconstruction as 'the passion for the impossible "is"...the passion for God, the passion of God'" (1). Through his analysis of the deconstructive possibilities that Derrida brings to the study of the religious experience, Caputo begins to trace out a redefinition of the very meaning of otherness and, indeed, the very nature of a personal God:

Deconstruction is a passion and a prayer for the impossible, a defense of the impossible against its critics, a plea for/to the experience of the impossible, which is the only real experience, stirring with religious passion. By religion I mean a pact with the impossible, a covenant with the unrepresentable, a

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<sup>30</sup> Ian James states: "Nancy's early philosophical writing can be explicitly situated within the shared sense of an epochal shift or rupture within the Western philosophical tradition, as it is invoked by Derrida in 'Structure, Sign.'" (*The Fragmentary Demand* 13). Hutchens points out, however, that we must be careful not to apply the label "Derridean" to Nancy too uncritically, since "Derridean motifs and interests are vital to Nancy's own thought, but certainly less imperative for its comprehension than Nancy's own critical perspectives" (32).

promise made by the *tout autre* with its people, where we are all the people of the *tout autre*, the people of the promise, promised over to the promise. (Caputo XX)

I propose that we must focus on precisely such a relationship with the “unrepresentable” in this study, because a very similar problem of alterity through language is the kernel of the challenge presented by the *personnification poétique*. The breaking open of this new form of text and the representation it seeks to portray thus finds its ideal theoretical approach in the deconstructive project, since deconstruction at its core facilitates a re-evaluation of the nature of religious experience through a re-conceptualisation of the very function of language. As Rubenstein comments on the much debated relationship between deconstruction and negative theology: “Leaving aside for the moment the question of what they *are*, both negative theology and deconstruction witness- and, in fact, catalyze- the failure of language to circumscribe an alterity that enables and exceeds linguistic determinations” (388).<sup>31</sup> The link between deconstruction and negative theology centres on the task of expressing the inexpressible, and the dilemma of how to respect the nature of the divine as an indefinable concept whilst speaking about it as a truth affirmable in discourse. Thus deconstruction is ideally suited to an analysis of the expression of divine truth that Rolland seeks to negotiate in his musical text. Rayment-Pickard points out that Derrida is often criticised because he apparently tries to “overturn the idea of truth in favour of complete relativism” (4), an attitude countered by another possible interpretation:

We could say that Derrida, finding the metaphysical concept of truth inadequate, is in fact engaged in rescuing the true concept of truth, truth *as* truth, faithful in the fullest and widest sense to the unstable, plural, historically determined, many-layered experience of human reality. This would mean that the undecidability of truth, the *impossibility* of truth, is *more true* than the metaphysical idea of truth as determinate and stable. The problem for Derrida [...] is how to say such things when the language used to express them disintegrates into paradox. (5)

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<sup>31</sup> As Caputo points out, Derrida was careful to prohibit a simplistic comparison of deconstruction and negative theology (2).

The similarities to Rolland's conception of dynamic truth eternally in movement are striking, as is the phrasing of the problem of expression he attempts to resolve through the novel. It is at the breaking point of truth's impossible affirmation that the relevance of deconstruction to the analysis of Christianity becomes most clear, as Rayment-Pickard goes on to explain:

At the heart of Christian theology there is a paradox [...] which is not a problem for Christians but a source of wonder and marvel: the paradox of the Incarnation, the God-man, one person with two natures. The human/divine contradiction of the Incarnation is not supposed to be "explained away" by Christian theology, but celebrated. The very *tension* between the divinity and humanity of Christ is the essence of its glory [...]. In short the apparent impossibility of the Incarnation is built into orthodox Christian theology. (151)

The "paradox" that Rayment-Pickard elaborates here could be said to resemble the "crampe" that Claudel sees in Rolland's stance towards the Christian faith. Deconstruction allows us to draw closer to the impossibility of the religious experience through an engagement with the theological fact of the incarnation that nevertheless respects its intrinsic paradox: "Rather than throwing up his hands and saying 'It's a mystery!,' Derrida makes repeated attempts to explain 'impossibility' [...]. It is this discussion of the impossible which is perhaps of use to Christian theology" (Rayment-Pickard 152). Deconstruction serves as a bridge joining the Christian tradition, centred on the mystery of the incarnation as the locus of meeting between the human and the divine, to the project of expression that dominates the novel. It is here that we can locate Nancy's *Déconstruction du christianisme* and begin to work towards a more detailed theoretical framework for our study.

Jean-Luc Nancy's thinking on Christianity appears as both a continuation of, and a critical response to, Derrida's take on the religious question.<sup>32</sup> Ian James explains that Nancy engages with Christianity in a slightly different, more explicitly ontological fashion: "Unlike Derrida, one could argue, he is happy to be a philosopher of existence, of the material and the concrete" (*The Fragmentary*

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<sup>32</sup> Evidence of the dialogue that took place between the two philosophers is provided by Derrida's work *Le Toucher, Jean-Luc Nancy*, in which he critiqued Nancy's thinking on the body in a Christian context. Nancy in turn responds to Derrida's observations at various points during his deconstructive project (for example, see A 78 and *NMT* 25-26). See Secomb; Lambert; and Landes for studies examining the convergence of their thought.

*Demand* 148). Nancy seeks to explicitly engage with Christianity as an entity still operating at the heart of Western metaphysics, and in doing so he helps forge a path towards a study of the *personnification poétique* in an experiential dimension. Far from asserting a simplistic and uncritical form of atheism in which the relevance of Christianity as a theistic system is discounted from the outset, this deconstructive gesture actually allows us to break open the Christian edifice and uncover the central movement that lies beneath.<sup>33</sup> As Nancy states in *La Déclosion*: “Déconstruire signifie démonter, désassembler, donner du jeu à l’assemblage pour laisser jouer entre les pièces de cet assemblage une possibilité d’où il procède mais que, en tant qu’assemblage, il recouvre” (215). Here Nancy echoes Rolland’s own sentiments on the Christian tradition and, we could say, shares the same desire to return to the existential core that lies at its centre:

[I]l ne s’agit pas de rejeter une tradition, de laisser tomber une vieille peau, mais, précisément, d’affronter ce qui vient à l’Occident et au christianisme de plus loin que d’eux-mêmes, ce qui, du fond de notre tradition, nous vient comme plus archaïque (au sens d’une *arkhè* et non d’un commencement historique, bien entendu) que le christianisme lui-même. Autrement dit, la question est de savoir si nous pouvons, en nous retournant sur notre provenance chrétienne, désigner du sein du christianisme une provenance du christianisme plus profonde que le christianisme lui-même, une provenance qui pourrait faire surgir une autre ressource [...]. (208)

Through this “ressource,” the *Déconstruction du christianisme* can give us access to the essential movement of becoming that dominates Rolland’s thought and serves as the principal narrative force behind the central protagonist of the novel. By using Nancy’s thought to apply what Laus refers to as an “interrogation « déconstructive »” (475) to the *personnification poétique* in the novel, I propose that we will be able to uncover the “force initiale et mystérieuse qui anime la vie sous toutes ses formes” that Albertini identifies at the origin of Rolland’s conception of the divine, the underlying propulsive force beneath the “« état d’être » [...] qui pousse constamment l’homme au-delà de lui-même, et qui le fait participer, de la

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<sup>33</sup> Nancy’s thinking moves from what Franke calls an “anti-theological” stance in earlier works such as *Des lieux divins*, to the position he takes up in *La Déclosion*, which displays an interpretation of Christianity in a distinctly apophatic register (70). Although Franke’s reading perhaps risks covering over some of the subtlety of Nancy’s thought, it does highlight an important change in tone between these texts. It is for this reason that I will not be considering *Des lieux divins* in this thesis.

sorte, de façon spécifique, au devenir de l'univers" (75-77). Nancy positions his project in the same contextual framework as the one in which we have located Rolland, identifying Catholic modernism as a moment in the Church's history where the *arkhè* he wants to capture is exposed in a particularly vivid way. For Nancy, the modernist crisis clearly demonstrates "[l]e conflit d'une intégrité religieuse et de sa dissolution par adaptation à un monde qui, à la fois, sort d'elle et s'en détache, la rejette ou la dénie" (D 210). Far from being simply an isolated example of differing views on doctrine coming into conflict within the Roman Church, modernism, according to Nancy, is in fact a key sign of the very structure that defines Christianity as a whole. He sees in the conflict between "intégrisme" and "modernisme" (210) the very creative thrust of Christianity as a doctrinal system:

À l'intérieur du christianisme se produit en effet un type de conflit spécifique, qui est probablement le conflit entre une *intégrité* et sa désintégration. C'est dans ce conflit spécifique qu'il faut chercher la première amorce d'une propriété nucléaire du christianisme [...] : le christianisme ne serait-il pas, en lui-même et par lui-même, une intégrité divisée ? (210)

Christianity's interior conflict, or essential doctrinal tension moving towards self-expression, is what I propose to focus on in this thesis, using Nancy's deconstruction to explore the way the same potentiality functions in the novel. The utilisation of the deconstruction of "Christianity" could justifiably be criticised if we are speaking of a specifically "Catholic" set of doctrinal assumptions, as Rolland's engagement with modernism would imply. However, Nancy's thinking on modernism allows us to move past such external questions of doctrinal difference and penetrate to the nucleus of the expressive movement of truth we are seeking to examine, since the "christianisme" that he sees as deconstructing itself "se met en rupture" with all of the Christian Churches and their diverse theological and liturgical traditions (A 51). The context of Catholic modernism simply serves as a historical marker in the much broader analysis of a rupture that, for Nancy, has occurred throughout Christianity's history and is a manifestation of the resource that lies underneath all of its various expressions. Thus when I use the term "Catholic" and "Christianity" throughout this thesis, I am referring back to this specific place of rupture and indicating both the importance of the historical circumstances in which Rolland was engaging with

Catholicism, whilst at the same time highlighting the transcendence of such a context that is taking place.

So where can we position the *personnification poétique* within this rupture and locate a starting point for our analysis? The fundamental resource that modernism proposes revolves around a re-conception of the very idea of theism, a questioning of the distinction between belief in God and secularity that allows us to begin our deconstruction of the *personnification poétique*. As Nancy says in *L'Adoration*, evoking Marcel Gauchet's interpretation of Christianity:

Pourquoi parler du christianisme? Je voudrais en réalité en parler le moins possible. Je désire aller vers un effacement de ce nom et de tout le corps de références qui le suit [...]. Mais je tiens à suivre le mouvement le plus propre que ce nom aura recouvert : le mouvement d'une sortie de la religion et de l'expansion d'un monde athée. (35)

Hutchens suggests that Nancy's thinking, built upon such a movement of *sortie*, can best be described as "critical atheistic" in that it is as critical of atheism's interplay with theism as it is of theistic schematics themselves" (87). Nancy's thinking in this area forms part of what Watkin labels a "post-theological" trend within contemporary philosophy, a current of thought that is attempting to reengage with the Nietzschean death of God in the modern context (see Watkin, *Difficult Atheism*). If we look at the continuation of Rolland's letter to Louise Cruppi, we can note a similar trend of thought as he goes on to explain that the novel is equally aimed at those who do not share any belief in God: "Enfin, il existe aussi de libres croyants entièrement libérés même de cette croyance à Dieu vivant [...]. Je sais très bien qu'une partie du succès de *Jean-Christophe* tient à une certaine parenté morale, voire religieuse, que beaucoup de gens sentent avec lui et avec ses idées" (10 août 1909). The religious truth Rolland is seeking must be capable of engaging with the experience of those who do not share any explicitly formulated theistic faith, and so we can say that the resource we are attempting to locate must lie somewhere within such a tension between the *personnification poétique* of God and a human experience that simply adheres to the reality in which it finds itself. In short, we can identify within Rolland's thinking on the *personnification poétique* the same need to engage with the paradox Rayment-Pickard elaborates in his study of Derrida, and



this is replicated in the work of Nancy as well: “[L]a construction théorique ou dogmatique chrétienne est celle d’une pensée dont le centre est « le verbe de Dieu fait chair ». Ainsi, le dogme de l’incarnation [établit] que la personne de Jésus est identiquement celle d’un homme et celle de Dieu dans une unique manifestation” (*D* 58). Building on a foundation laid by the incarnation, the *Déconstruction du christianisme* will offer us a means of re-examining the life of Christ as the expression of what Nancy describes as the “alternative primaire du théisme et de l’athéisme” (*NMT* 10). This alternative, when examined through the Christian schema, is neither what one would conventionally describe as “God,” nor what some would label atheism. Rather, Nancy uses the term *athéologie* to describe this phenomenon, and such a term will provide us with an entry point into our study of the *personnification poétique*. Borrowing this term from Georges Bataille (*D* 127), Nancy suggests that the “athéologisation de la pensée” governing his project centres on an image of the manifestation of Christ in a Trinitarian dimension (*PD* 155), which also permeates the other two fundamental Christian theological mysteries, the incarnation and the resurrection (*A* 74). I will thus be arguing in this thesis that the novel is built around a *personnification poétique* of its central protagonist that unfolds according to what I will define as a “Trinitarian poetics,” a creative dynamic that captures the modality of expression observable in the Christian narrative. By deconstructing this creative resource, we can come to a better understanding of how Rolland negotiated the problem of expressing divine truth through the text of his *œuvre de foi*.

We will now move on to Chapter 1 of the thesis, in which we will attempt to position the concept of an atheological Trinitarian poetics within the deconstructive understanding of language, and then work towards an application of such an image of God in the text of the novel. Once we have laid out a theoretical framework, and introduced how we will explore the narrative structure of the novel, we will be in a better position to propose a chapter structure for the remaining parts of our analysis.

## Chapter 1

### **An Atheological Paradox: the *Personnification Poétique* and the Trinity**

So far we have established that the intersection at which Nancy's project of deconstruction meets the novel is fundamentally shaped by a need to tap into the expressive movement, or *ressource*, lying underneath doctrine. In this chapter, we will see that the concept of a Trinitarian *athéologie* speaks precisely to such a setting aside of nominative labels, positing a return to the very linguistic origin of the word "God" through an exploration of the instance in which this term first springs into being. With such an atheological schema, this chapter will seek to deconstruct the apparently contradictory connection between the experience of the divine outlined in the novel, and the profoundly atheistic crisis that its central protagonist undergoes. By utilising the mystery of the Trinity and the two mysteries linked to it as our guiding framework, we will seek to investigate how Rolland's vision of a *personnification poétique* encapsulates this personal journey from historical experience into the realm in which language can affirm truth, and how Jean-Christophe's musicality serves as the paradigm for such a linguistic process. We will first examine the way deconstruction views language as an entry point into the interrogation of metaphysics in its entirety, before moving on to an analysis of Nancy's response to this metaphysical context via his concept of *sens*. Once this foundational notion is defined, we will then be able to explore the very idea of Christian revelation through Nancy's thinking on the Trinity, and how this revelation is inscribed into a textual form that inserts the infinite into the finite through the two secondary Christian mysteries, the incarnation and resurrection. After locating the *personnification poétique* within this schema, we will then critique further the role of poetics in this textual process and how it is related both to the novel and to the narrative of Christian revelation. Using this fundamental linguistic concept, we will seek to deconstruct Rolland's Beethovenian model around which the central protagonist of the novel is structured, establishing a starting point for the first stage of our analysis through the key concept of harmony that lies at the heart of the musical *œuvre de foi*. The three Christian theological mysteries and their textual impact within revelation will thus allow us to deconstruct the very constitutive

elements that make up the textual expression of divine truth in the novel, and will lay the theoretical framework I will seek to define as an atheological Trinitarian poetics. After having established such a theoretical framework, we will set our textual focus through the key scene of dialogue in *Le Buisson ardent*, locating this climactic moment in the broader sweep of the narrative, and then moving on to propose a chapter breakdown for the deconstruction we will undertake in the remaining part of our analysis.

### **The Metaphysics of Presence and Jean-Luc Nancy's *Sens***

Our first step must be an assessment of the way deconstruction views the linguistic sign as a means of understanding the world, and the place that the human being and the divine hold within it. In order to outline the way in which deconstruction seeks to question these concepts, I would like to briefly turn to one of Jacques Derrida's earliest works, *De la grammatologie*, as in it we find the foundation upon which, I will argue, the atheological and Trinitarian understanding of the *personnification poétique* is built. I do not intend this to be a detailed analysis of Derrida's thought, but merely a brief overview of a philosophical context that can help us to better understand Nancy's perspective on Christianity. Derrida bases his analysis on what he names "la métaphysique de la présence" (71), a term which encapsulates the way in which Western thought has consistently sought to identify a ground of present, empirically verifiable meaning. However, this world-view based upon presence is inherently flawed, because at the heart of every apparently present meaning Derrida sees a process of mediation, difference or relationship constantly at play. One of the principal ways this emphasis on presence has been expressed is what Derrida names *logocentrisme*, that is, the privileging of speech over writing as the direct access point to presence: "Le logocentrisme serait donc solidaire de la détermination de l'être de l'étant comme présence" (23). Derrida attempts to turn this tendency on its head by instead seeing the world as "une espèce de l'écriture" (75). Writing is, for Derrida, not secondary at all, but rather the most "originary" mode in which language, and therefore the world, functions: "[L]'écriture comprendrait le langage" (16). He calls this concept of writing "archi-écriture" (83), because it most clearly exposes the world as a linguistic network governed by a ceaseless process of referral.

This process is governed by what Derrida calls “la trace” (69), which Bradley concisely summarises:

What the originary trace shows us is that every sign first refers to other signs, as opposed to some ‘present’ concept that is not itself a sign. We can see, then, that the originary trace throws the whole logocentric concept of the sign into crisis by proposing that we *never* arrive at a simple or unmediated meaning: nothing is unmediated. For Derrida, every signifier relates to other signifiers that surround it in space and time and so we can never reach a pure thought or concept – a signified – that exists in and of itself independently of all signifiers: what is supposedly *beyond* language is plunged back *into* language. (Bradley 71)

When we break down the trace further, we come to Derrida’s famous concept of *différance*: “*La trace (pure) est la différence*” (Derrida, *De la grammatologie* 92). *Différance* captures a dual process at play within the network of signifiers which impacts upon the inability to ever reach the meaning of the signified. Signs only exist within a fabric of differences, that is to say, the meaning of each sign is fundamentally reliant upon the signs around it for meaning (thus its “difference” from other signs), and on the signs that come before and after it within the linguistic sequence (therefore its meaning is also “deferred” in time). Derrida emphasises that because of this interwoven system of signs, it is impossible to think the trace within the logic of metaphysics. The trace precedes all metaphysical concepts because it is the process of *différance* that allows them to become concepts in the first place: “*La trace est en effet l’origine absolue du sens en général*” (95). Derrida clarifies that this origin cannot be thought of as just another ultimate cause or foundation that can be used to explain and organise reality. The trace is not a metaphysical point of origin in the sense implied by a simple, unified and present ground upon which a metaphysical theory of knowledge can be built: “*La trace n’est rien, elle n’est pas un étant, elle excède la question qu’est-ce que et la rend éventuellement possible*” (110). Instead of an ultimate origin as such, Derrida’s thinking proposes a complete lack of pure and simple origin in the first place, as Bradley explains:

For Derrida [...] any origin is always multiple: what claims to be a singular point of origin must always define itself against something that it is not, dividing itself in at least two, multiplying itself like a cell through a process of infinite differing/deferring. The moment of pure or simple ‘presence’ upon which every metaphysical value system is founded [...] is thus always shot

through with differences, relations, traces of other elements. This is why the metaphysics of presence – what Derrida calls the definition of Being as ‘being-present’ - can be said to reside on a grounding or foundational instability. (75)

Every time we seek the signified, the meaning behind the sign, we simply stumble across other signifiers, and so a fully present meaning is perpetually just out of reach. Thus metaphysics’ search for presence is essentially defined as impossible, and such an impossibility means that the entirety of the Western philosophical edifice has been deconstructing itself since its very inception, constantly undermining its claim to a reasonable discovery of meaning within a world where presence is never what it appears to be. Because of this, as Bradley underlines, “‘deconstruction’ is less the name of a *tool* or instrument that we apply to a text than of a basic- if hidden or repressed- condition of every text” (43). Whenever I use the word “deconstruction” in this thesis, it is the act of exposing this hidden condition that I wish to indicate.<sup>34</sup> How can this condition be uncovered and exploited in order to think a new conception of the divine, or in other words, an *athéologie*? If we are to negotiate Rolland’s relationship to religion and its doctrine, I propose that we must first find a way to uncover this condition at the heart of the novel. For Derrida, the concept of “God” is firmly grounded in this linguistic structure of the world and the problem of presence it brings with it: “L’époque du signe est essentiellement théologique” (Derrida, *De la grammatologie* 25). The Christian West has sought to delineate a framework of present meaning shaped around a first cause it has named “God,” yet this too is a position centred on the perpetually unachievable desire for presence (104). It is therefore through the door opened by this deconstructive interrogation of reality that I propose we must enter, because such a viewpoint towards the world holds important implications for our analysis of Rolland’s conception of the religious experience.

The correspondence Rolland maintained with Louise Cruppi is again particularly enlightening for us in this regard, since in these letters Rolland not only comments on the modernist movement, but also, on a broader level, attempts to explain his religious convictions to an unbelieving and overly rationalistic Cruppi. This, in turn,

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<sup>34</sup> Given this understanding of deconstruction, as Esposito emphasises, Nancy’s “project” of *Déconstruction du christianisme* cannot really be envisaged as a project at all, but rather “un fait, un événement déjà en œuvre depuis deux mille ans” (157).

can then be applied to the novel. Rolland encourages Cruppi to seek a direct experience of reality in the manner of the Pre-Socratic philosophers he admires so much: “Il faut (autant que notre éducation et nos préjugés ultra-intellectuels nous le permettent) apprendre à ne pas penser toujours par raisonnement, à nous dégager des mots, des livres, des écritures, et à voir, entendre, observer, sentir *directement* les choses et soi-même” (26 mars 1910). He doesn’t discount the importance of reason, but tries to convince Cruppi that, by using all of the senses, the profound reality of the universe can be perceived in a new way: “On n’est plus en face de mots et de raisonnements abstraits. On a le choc direct de cette Force vivante qui gonfle l’univers” (26 mars 1910). The perception of “Force” is reliant upon a process of interrogation that I suggest we can compare to a Derridaean reading of presence. The letters we are analysing are written after Rolland learns of the death of Cruppi’s son, which has sent her into a period of profound grief (11 mars 1909). He attempts to console her by undermining her “matérialisme de pensée journalier” (23 mars 1909) and her faith in appearances: “[C]eux que nous aimons, même absents, sont toujours avec nous, toujours vivants, plus vivants que les vivants” (11 mars 1909). The Cruppi correspondence therefore allows us to see how Rolland seeks a solution to the very same metaphysical problem that Derrida raises in *De la grammatologie*.<sup>35</sup> Like Derrida’s analysis of the theological age of the sign, the novel questions the *logocentrisme* of onto-theology. This is clearly demonstrated in a scene in which Christophe encounters a young man destined for the seminary, Leonhard Vogel (*JC* 242-50), who tries to convince Christophe of the joys of eternal life with God, proposing a sort of guaranteeing ground of being under reality that frees him from all doubt and distress: “Leonhard, tout heureux, exposait maintenant la beauté et l’harmonie du monde, vu du haut de son perchoir divin: en bas, tout était sombre, injuste, douloureux; d’en haut, tout devenait clair, lumineux, ordonné, le monde était semblable à une boîte d’horlogerie, parfaitement réglée...” (248). Leonhard’s futile

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<sup>35</sup> In another letter to Cruppi, Rolland speaks about a façade of presence that must be penetrated if the divine is to be perceived within everyday experience: “Je connais cette atroce douleur du cœur qui se crispe, dans la détresse de ce qu’il a perdu. Mais, au fond du gouffre, j’entends le murmure de la vie éternelle, et une voix qui me dit : « Ta douleur est un rêve. Tu te réveilleras bientôt ; et tous ceux que tu aimes ne seront qu’un avec toi. » [...]. Quand je dis : « J’aime la vie », c’est de celle-là que je parle ; l’autre n’a pour moi de prix que parce qu’elle est un reflet de l’éternelle ; et dans tout être que j’aime, je sens, au fond des yeux, dans la musique de la voix et de l’âme, la lumière et le son du Dieu qui ne passe point” (16 mai 1909).

discourse consists of “preuves métaphysiques de l’existence” (246) which clearly show Derrida’s process of referral at work, arguments that shift from signifier to signifier, never offering Christophe valid proof of God’s existence. We also see an onto-theological portrayal of God in the religiosity of Christophe’s mother, who instils in her son an intense horror of a divine being who inspires fear and subjectivity: “Il se figurait Dieu comme un soleil énorme, qui parlait avec une voix de tonnerre” (56). Thus the novel places the problem of presence squarely in the onto-theological trap outlined by Derrida. How can Rolland’s “direct” vision of reality be applied if we are constantly doomed to wander from signifier to signifier? How does the *personnification poétique* inscribe itself into the system of signs in such a way as to disrupt the onto-theological division between the human being and a guaranteeing ground of presence? Or rather, more precisely, how does it recognise the operation of *logocentrisme* and turn it to its own advantage? It is within this metaphysical impossibility that Jean-Luc Nancy’s work becomes useful for us in our attempt to locate a poetic approach to presence.

### ***La Déconstruction du christianisme***

The central problem we have elaborated so far, that of the *métaphysique de la présence* and the conception of God that it entails, meets a specific response in the thinking elaborated in Jean-Luc Nancy’s *Déconstruction du christianisme*.<sup>36</sup> In his deconstruction, Nancy seeks to challenge the very meaning of theistic belief as an onto-theological phenomenon by proposing an alternate vision of Christianity as a religious structure, a vision summed up in his thinking on the Trinity which will serve as our guide throughout this thesis. As we briefly touched on in our Introduction, Nancy links the Trinity to the other two fundamental Christian mysteries, the incarnation and the resurrection which, when examined together, will provide us with a framework for our analysis of the journey of divine truth into text. The concept of an *athéologie* binds these mysteries together: “Les mystères essentiels, c’est-à-dire ceux qui concernent proprement « Dieu », sont trois: la trinité, l’incarnation, la résurrection. Ils sont liés entre eux par un lien qui ne définit rien

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<sup>36</sup> Throughout this chapter I shall be largely referring to Nancy’s two principal volumes on the *Déconstruction du christianisme*, *La Déclousion* and *L’Adoration*, although, as I will explain, some of his other works affiliated with this project will be utilised in later chapters.

d'autre que le déplacement considérable- athéologique- dont s'y affecte la pensée même de « Dieu »" (A 74). The term *athéologie* is defined by Nancy as an "athéisme clairement dégagé du schème d'un théisme inverse" (D 41), and is linked to his wider project of re-evaluating the nature of presence. Here, Nancy builds on Derrida's notion of the age of the sign and posits that even what we know as atheism is in fact defined by exactly the same search for present meaning as that undertaken by theism, except in an inverse fashion: "[L]'athéisme a essentiellement consisté à substituer une Raison à un Dieu. En fait, à substituer une raison- cause, principe, finalité- du monde à un dieu qui était lui-même conçu comme une raison, simplement raison supérieure, pourvue de propriétés insignes de toute-puissance et de tout-savoir" (A 48). Both theism and atheism are trapped in the same metaphysical bind, both of them attempting to fix a finite principal or first cause by privileging either "Dieu" or "Raison" but never finding a way to authentically affirm present meaning or ultimate truth. Nancy's analysis of the claims of theology are thus explicitly grounded in Derrida's interpretation of metaphysics as "l'être en tant qu'étant et que étant présent," a space defined by a whole set of distinctions that revolve around the positing of "une présence fondatrice et garante" (D 16). For Nancy, however, this interpretation of Christianity is not sufficient. As Watkin neatly summarises: "Unlike Derrida, Nancy does not dismiss presence as metaphysics, but seeks to think it differently, otherwise than as self-presence" (*Phenomenology or Deconstruction?* 144). Instead of relegating Christianity to the entrapment of a closed onto-theological circle, Nancy seeks to conceptualise a Christianity that "contemple la possibilité présente de sa négation" (D 204), that is to say, a religion that recognises itself as possessing one of the most potent means of negotiating the problem of presence, along with the problem of divine truth and its expression. This is centred on the very meaning of the word "God," which Nancy revises in a radically different, atheological way:

Pour le dire d'un mot: le « dieu » chrétien est athée. En effet, « athée » signifie non-position de « Dieu », déposition de tout dieu qui peut être posé comme tel- c'est-à-dire comme « être » ou « sujet » doué de telle et telle propriété [...] : il n'y a ni monde ni outre-monde, mais une ouverture de sens qui fait l'espacement du monde et son rapport à soi. (A 46-47)



If “l’athéisme déclare le principe d’une négation du principe divin,” a principle conceived of as an “existant distinct du monde” (*D* 29), Nancy forges an entirely different path. Instead of positioning God as an “Être suprême archi-présent et efficient” (16), Nancy utilises the very conception of Christian divinity as a deconstructive space through which to question the foundation of worldly existence. The concept of an “ouverture de sens,” which we observe in the above quotation, is the means through which he intends to do this, because it opens another access point into a deconstruction of the problem of *différance* via the concept of a Trinitarian God as relationship within the world. In order to continue with our analysis, we must first locate this opening of *sens* within Nancy’s project, and then find a way to apply it to the study of the novel and the specific problem of divine truth it attempts to resolve.

Before moving on to an examination of the concept of *sens*, I would like to briefly touch on Nancy’s idea of opening which is primordial within his thought. As we will observe throughout this thesis, the movement of opening assists us in analysing various important textual aspects within the novel, and as we shall see, the entire conception of the Trinitarian God revolves around the opening represented by the Holy Spirit, an opening that defines the atheological understanding of God. If Nancy seeks to undertake a deconstruction of Christianity, it is with the aim of exploiting the resource of this opening that he sees lying within it. The very title of the project’s first volume, *La Déclosion*, indicates its central thrust: to open up the “clôture de la métaphysique” within which religion and philosophy have been ensnared (*D* 16). As we have already discussed, instead of envisaging Christianity as a closure through the assignation of meaning to a foundational guarantor of being, Nancy suggests that by focusing on the way metaphysics deconstructs itself, Christianity can be re-interpreted as a powerful example of the ability of thought to carry out an opening.<sup>37</sup> But how is this opening to be carried out? In the second volume of his

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<sup>37</sup> Nancy puts forward Saint Anselm’s *Proslogion* as evidence of Christianity’s own attempt to think that which is impossible to think (*quo majus cogitari nequit*), thereby carrying out what he names an “épreuve existentielle de la pensée” (22), which is an opening that must necessarily precede the assignation of any religious nomination or application of the term “God.” It is interesting to note that Rolland also quotes from Saint Anselm in his preparatory notes to the novel, although on a different topic (Enveloppe IV 116), so he was clearly familiar with the latter’s work.

*Déconstruction du christianisme*, entitled *L'Adoration*, Nancy attempts to think metaphysical opening *through* the realm of linguistic nomination:

[D]ès lors que nous parlons, que le langage s'adresse et nous adresse à ce dehors de la communication et de la signification homogènes. Que le langage en première et dernière instance s'adresse et nous adresse à cet hétérogène, à ce dehors [...] : il adresse, il appelle, il interpelle l'innommable, le strict revers de toute la nomination possible. Ce revers n'est pas une face cachée du monde, ni une « chose en soi » ni un être ou un étant. (10)

If language summarises the bind in which the human being finds itself, trapped within a network of *différance*, it is also for Nancy the means through which the unspeakable, including the unnameable divine truth, can be accessed. This divinity exists not in the category of a straightforward, ontologically verifiable *être* or *étant* but rather shapes the very space in which existence comes into being. Language then addresses us towards this “originary” realm that exists both on the outer edge of signification and serves as the very condition of its possibility. By signification, Nancy refers to the network of signs through which any form of presence must be understood, as Watkin clarifies: “*Signification* consists in establishing or assigning presence. From Plato to Saussure, *signification* is the conjunction of the sensible and the intelligible” (*Phenomenology or Deconstruction?* 138). Nancy’s aim is therefore to open up the metaphysics of presence through an engagement with signification, thereby revising the discursive limits of the conventional theological discourse Leonhard propounds so unconvincingly. Having now located the idea of opening within language, we can move on to examine Nancy’s method of approach, that is to say, the movement of *sens* that defines his vision of the Trinitarian revelation of God.

In order to understand what Nancy means by *sens*, it is perhaps useful to position it within another idea that seems to dominate his work, an idea which will also help us to more accurately understand the concept of *athéologie*. Nancy’s philosophy in its entirety seeks to think the point at which signification reaches a point of “exhaustion,” as Ian James writes: “If, in the wake of Nietzsche and Heidegger, philosophy has come to question the sense of philosophy itself and to think the exhaustion of metaphysical possibilities of signification, then, for Nancy at least, the

task of philosophy is to maintain itself in a thinking of the sense of this exhaustion” (*The Fragmentary Demand* 8). That is, Nancy seeks to work within the network of signs in order to explore the point at which meaning fragments itself in the movement of its own coming-into-being. As we shall see, Rolland’s conception of the *personnification poétique* indicates a similar need to think the sense of this exhaustion of signification, and such an idea is intimately related to the experience Christophe undergoes. It is this experience of limit that Nancy names *sens*: instead of focusing on meaning purely as a presence fixed within time and space, *sens* allows us to examine the very coming-into-language that defines signification.<sup>38</sup> Ian James concisely summarises this process:

‘Sense’ in Nancy is untied from an exclusive belonging to a symbolic order or relation of signifier to signified; it exists both as an outer limit and as an excess of signification per se, becoming “*the element in which signification, interpretations and representations can occur.*” In this way Nancy’s thinking of the limit, end, or closure of philosophy unfolds as a necessary reinscription of the category of ‘sense,’ where sense is not meaning or signification, but rather that which, at the outer limit or in excess of signification, makes meaning and signification possible. (*The Fragmentary Demand* 9)

The concept of *sens* provides a means of negotiating the space of the unspeakable religious experience towards which the novel is oriented, since it operates not on the basis of discursive analysis, nor of theological speculation, but rather attempts to think the arena in which such discourse arises in the first place through the very movement of fragmentation that defines it. We have here perhaps reached a clearer understanding of what Nancy means by the concept of an *athéologie*, as what is necessary is in fact an engagement with the realm of *sens* that precedes the very conceptual division between theism and atheism. Schrijvers places sensual movement at the heart of the religious problem, positing that for Nancy *sens* does not equate to metaphysical signification, nor to the meaning bestowed by a divine ground of being, but is rather “the awareness that, even though full presence cannot

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<sup>38</sup> Nancy is of course by no means the only intellectual who has attempted to think such an idea. Julia Kristeva is a notable example, especially given her Freudian and Lacanian inspired focus on what she calls the *procès de la signifiante*, and the “*chora sémiotique*” as the “[l]ieu d’engendrement du sujet” that can be found within it (*La Révolution du langage poétique* 27). However, a comparative study lies far beyond the scope of this thesis, and because we are using a specifically atheological framework for our analysis, I argue that Nancy’s thinking on *sens* is the most relevant for our purposes.

be achieved, this does not mean that all sense has abandoned us” (272). Thus, by capitalising on this sensual resource within language, I propose to move on to an analysis of the three primary Christian mysteries as they weave together an atheological conception of God, creating a textual narrative of the divine at the limit of signification. It is within this narrative based on *sens* that, I argue, we will be able to ground the *personnification poétique*.

### **A Christian Dialogue: the Trinitarian *Dieu-vivant* and *Le Buisson ardent***

In this section of our analysis, we will examine how our definition of the concept of *sens* facilitates an examination of the very concept of Christian revelation itself, which Nancy defines through the first mystery: the Trinity. From the very first moments of the Book of Genesis, the Christian narrative is defined by the experience of a revelation that is, for Nancy, essentially atheological. The three Christian theological mysteries that speak directly of this revelation are characterised by what he names a *déplacement*, which “s’opère depuis une expérience, une attente et une disposition qui puisent très loin en arrière de la « religion ». [C]’est pourquoi il conduit ensuite vers une « sortie de la religion »” (A 74). When Nancy speaks about mystery, he does not refer to a mythic realm divorced from the tangibility of human reality. Rather, he proposes that mystery in fact “s’adresse à l’esprit de l’homme, il lui demande de considérer ce qui, sans qu’il puisse le comprendre, l’éclaire en lui-même et sur lui-même” (D 58). For Nancy, the revelation of Christian mystery operates within the depths of the human person and thus provides an ideal means through which to analyse the paradox of the convergence of the human and divine within the person of Christ.<sup>39</sup> Nancy elaborates on this link between human experience and mystery by referring back to the movement of *sens*: “Énigme, question, mise en jeu, comme on voudra dire; destination à et par une dimension autre, hétérogène, exorbitante : celle du « sens » en tant que renvoi à un autre, en tant que descellement, ébranlement et lancée, ou jetée, de toute consistance d’« être »” (A 74). The heart of Christian mystery lies in a sensual relationship with otherness, and at the centre of this relationship one finds the human being. The very nature of the

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<sup>39</sup> Rolland himself shows a similar desire to reposition divine revelation in terms of the human, as one of his letters to Cruppi attests: “Révélation n’est qu’une étiquette grossière, appliquée sur la Vie intuitive, sur la Vie profonde, par des castes naïves ou intéressées” (6 juin 1909).

divine can be broken open by looking towards the human experience of relationship: “Le rapport aux dieux fait rapport à cette différence ou il fait, plus exactement, rapport de l’homme à lui-même (par lui, du monde à lui-même) selon sa différence” (74). The human experience is an experience of *sens* defined by a self-reflexive relationship, a space of relational reality that is a locus for the convergence of “God” and the human being. The first foundational mystery, the Trinity, sets the scene for our entire study because it positions the human self within a displacement of the discursive boundaries dividing the human from the divine. Nancy claims that the mystery of the Trinity “articule « Dieu » lui-même en tant que rapport. C’est-à-dire qu’il lui ôte la propriété d’ « être » au sens d’un être ou d’un étant consistant en soi, d’un sujet représentable comme une personne et même d’une « entité » quelconque” (75). Nancy’s Trinitarian understanding therefore directs us away from an onto-theological being towards a dimension of *sens* defined by relationship because, as Schrijvers emphasises, “[sense] is the name of that which happens ‘between’ all beings” (272). Nancy reads the engendering of the “fils” by the “père” not as one god dividing himself into three, nor as a simplistic “réunion de trois,” but rather as the opening of a dimension of relationship fundamental to existence (A 75-76). Here Nancy continues the thinking developed in his earlier works, such as *Être singulier pluriel* which, as Watkin points out, proposes an idea of the self that “is less a self-in-relation, more a self-as-relation, and as such it can never be closed on itself” (“A Different Alterity” 54). In the context of his *Déconstruction du christianisme*, such a self as open relationship is essentially defined by the movement of the Holy Spirit:

[Le fils] n’est pas extérieur au père mais il ouvre en quelque sorte en lui la dimension du rapport. Cette dimension se nomme à son tour l’esprit. L’esprit est le rapport, ou le sens, selon lequel peuvent se présenter des sujets qui, pour autant, ne subsistent pas indépendamment du rapport. Ou bien le rapport est le non-être selon lequel peuvent faire sens des êtres qui, par conséquent, ne subsistent pas hors de lui. (A 76)

This Trinitarian model serves as a foundational framework for our analysis, because through it Nancy deconstructs the human experience of revelation by capitalising on the continually recurring process of coming-into-language that is *sens*. In this sensual dimension, a simultaneous redefinition of both the very meaning of the human and of the divine becomes possible. By breaking open the Trinitarian understanding of

*sens* as relationship, we can begin to approach the *personnification poétique* in terms of the expressive genius of the Beethovenian hero which, as we shall see, represents a unique linguistic phenomenon operating within signification.

How can we ground the analysis of such a vast narrative of revelation within the text of the novel? We have already noted the significance of Jean-Christophe's name, and we shall return to this important textual marker later in the thesis. But how can we approach the central problem of language through the relational reality of the Trinity? If such a conception of God understood through the movement of *sens* deliberately seeks to undermine signification, a means of negotiating it within literary language is indispensable. Engaging with the problem of language will thus be an essential step towards grounding the Trinity within the novel and locating the *personnification poétique*. If we turn for a moment to another of Nancy's conceptualisations of the Christian God, we can analyse the trajectory that revelation takes in its journey through language, or more precisely, through writing. In addition to the Trinity, Nancy utilises the "Dieu-vivant" (*D* 225) as a central signpost in his project, since it describes the process of *sens* in a particularly succinct fashion. The idea of a *Dieu-vivant* also presents itself within Rolland's thought. In his "Credo quia verum," he utilises it as a reference point in his discussion of the interior truth of the divine-human nature (363), but most importantly of all, as we have already seen, Rolland uses the term "Dieu vivant" to encapsulate the modernists' *personnification poétique* of the divine in his letter to Cruppi (10 août 1909). It therefore serves as an essential link between the project of deconstruction and the novel. From the first moments of his crisis of faith, the central protagonist of the novel, in contrast to the God presented by his mother and Leonhard, experiences a form of divinity connected to the very substance of his life: "Au fond, il était trop religieux pour penser beaucoup à Dieu. Il vivait en Dieu, il n'avait pas besoin d'y croire" (*JC* 242). This type of access to the divine defies the onto-theological God that repulses Christophe so much: "Si encore il ne s'agissait que de croire à Dieu ! Mais il faut croire à *un* Dieu, de telles dimensions, de telle forme, de telle couleur et de telle race !" (242). However, there is another crucial scene in which Rolland speaks of the *Dieu-vivant* in the novel, and this passage gives us an ideal starting point for our deconstructive project. In a journal entry in April 1943 (*Au seuil* 132), after a visit from Paul Claudel at his home in Vézelay, Rolland notes that the latter's

conception of God seems to differ little from that represented in the climactic moment of revelation in the second-last volume of the novel cycle, *Le Buisson ardent*. In the Introduction to this thesis we examined some examples of past scholarship that have identified this scene as a crucial meeting between the divine and the human, and it now becomes possible to expand upon this link through Nancy's recasting of Christianity as a Trinitarian *athéologie*. Later in this chapter we will explore in more detail the way this volume fits into the narrative development of the novel, but for now I would like to begin examining the significance of the crucial dialogue that takes place here between Christophe and an interlocutor explicitly referred to as "le Dieu vivant" (JC 1419). This dialogue will be revealed as the place in which the convergence between the divine and the human can be seen most clearly, and henceforth I will refer to it as the *Buisson* dialogue, or simply the *Buisson*. The term conjures up an explicit connection to the Biblical revelation, which in turn enlightens the title of this volume since, as we noted earlier, the "buisson ardent" is the place in which Moses speaks to God (Exode 3: 1-21). As we shall see when we examine the scene's relationship to the broader narrative progression, this encounter acts as the explicit revelation of an experience that unfolds throughout the rest of the novel, representing a key turning-point in Christophe's life at which he finally begins to fully acknowledge the presence of the divine underneath material reality and begins to consciously live his life "in" God: "Il avait quitté Christophe. Il avait émigré en Dieu" (JC 1425). Given Nancy's emphasis on the idea of a *Dieu-vivant*, I propose that this concept can provide us with both a textual focus for our thesis, and a means through which to locate the Trinity in the novel.

The *Dieu-vivant* is a concept that recurs throughout the Bible, and serves as a particularly important reference marking the progression of Christian revelation, since in the Gospels, Christ is explicitly referred to as "le Fils du Dieu vivant" (Matthieu 16: 16). We can thus utilise it as a means of understanding the movement of the Christian Trinity from a sensual rapport that somehow precedes, or makes possible, signification, into a textual form that itself consists of a fragmentation of presence. The notion of a *Dieu-vivant* assists us in analysing the *Buisson* dialogue, because what Nancy focuses on in his deconstruction is the human person as the locus of a dialogue taking place not between two interlocutors, but in the domain of

the self's own nature as *sens*. His analysis therefore closely corresponds to the dialogue that Christophe, despite his explicit lack of belief in an onto-theological God “en qui sa raison ne croyait pas” (JC 1408), maintains with the mysterious “entity” within the *Buisson*. This space of dialogue questions the very nature of the human self as a fixed ground of meaning, instead provoking a revision of presence through the opening of *sens*. Nancy directly links this dialogic process to the relational schema of the Christian Trinity:

Dieu qui n'est ni représenté ni représentable, mais vivant, le Fils, « image invisible du Dieu invisible », dit Origène, est sa présence même. Le Fils est la visibilité elle-même non visible comme telle de l'Invisible, non au sens d'un dieu qui apparaîtrait, mais au sens d'une annonce de la présence. C'est *dans cette annonce*, dans cette adresse à l'homme, dans cet appel, que la vision se fait. Or, ce qui est ainsi interpellé est la *personne* même: la vie du Dieu-vivant est proprement auto-affection, elle présente la personne à elle-même dans la dimension infinie d'elle-même à elle-même. (D 225-26)

For Nancy, divine presence is locatable in an experience of dialogue in which *sens* is inscribed back into signification. Dialogue is therefore the method of the atheological God's manifestation or, to refer back to the central Trinitarian framework we are discussing, the process by which the Holy Spirit opens the Father and engenders the Son. We will explore some of the key concepts Nancy lays out in the above quotation later in the thesis, but for now it is enough to highlight that dialogue represents the opening of self-presence and the advent of “la vie du Dieu-vivant” in human experience. By examining this process of self-reflexive dialogue as it occurs within the *Buisson*, we will be able to locate the sensual processes that shape the human self and thus define how they act as a *personnification poétique* leading to the manifestation of divine truth. Turning now to Nancy's idea of history, we can further unpack this notion of manifestation within the world.

We can in fact envisage the entire Christian doctrinal entity as a creative movement of *sens* acting within history, an experiential locus in which Rolland's *personnification poétique* can be positioned. The movement of opening that defines the *Dieu-vivant* entails a redefinition of presence that is essential to Nancy's entire deconstructive project, and this must necessarily operate within experience: “Tout nous ramène ainsi, à nouveau, à l'ouverture en tant que structure même du sens.



C'est *l'Ouvert comme tel*, l'Ouvert de l'annonce, du projet, de l'histoire et de la foi, qui, par le Dieu-vivant, se révèle au cœur du christianisme" (D 226). He conceptualises Christian revelation as a process of constant self-overcoming, an opening within history leading to "la fin de la promesse du sens comme visée, fin et accomplissement" (207). Roussel points out that this means "[l]e sens n'est ni présent métaphysiquement, ni promis comme fin de l'histoire" (31), but such a process can also be read as the most vital impacting force within the very formation of Christian doctrine. For Nancy, revelation does not consist of an inflexible set of dogmatic assertions, but rather an act of becoming through which historical experience is ceaselessly evolving and overcoming itself in a movement of *autodépassement*: "La Loi ancienne" gives way to "la Loi nouvelle," just as the "logos" becomes "le Verbe" (D 212). The notion of an ever-developing doctrine is of course, as we have seen, given its primary expression in the modernist crisis, and in fact the encounter between the Abbé Corneille and Christophe epitomises this vision of historical experience as revelation: "Le christianisme, c'était Christ vivant. L'histoire du monde n'était que l'histoire de l'agrandissement perpétuel de l'idée de Dieu. [...] L'abbé Corneille [...] croyait: « Où est la vie, est Dieu. »" (JC 1033).<sup>40</sup> So the historical revelation of "un dieu en trois personnes dont la divinité consiste dans le rapport à soi" serves as a model for the whole Christian edifice: "[L]e christianisme est moins un corps de doctrine qu'il n'est lui-même un *sujet* en rapport avec lui-même dans une recherche de soi" (D 59). By examining the Trinitarian God as a dialogic opening of *sens* within the human person, we are deconstructing a faith anchored in the movement of humanity throughout history. Through the experience it proposes, this essentially creative doctrinal system also begins to question its own assignation of an absolute, present meaning in the realm of nomination:

Donc, tendu entre l'antécédence virtuellement infinie où il ne cesse de déchiffrer les signes de sa propre antériorité, et un avenir infini où il projette l'avènement final de son événement en marche, le christianisme est constitutivement tendu entre le passage et la présence. Du passage de Dieu dans l'homme à la présence/parousie de Dieu à l'homme, la [...] conséquence du passage à la présence est précisément ce qui s'appelle le *sens*. [...] Le

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<sup>40</sup> It could be argued that Rolland intended for the novel in its entirety to be rooted in a very specific interpretation of communal historical experience, as he explains in the following letter: "Ceci est *l'histoire* d'une longue vie qui se déroule lentement. [...] Toute grande vie qui se développe d'une façon libre et puissante est pareille à un peuple en marche à travers les siècles" (Lettre à Henry Odenbach 18 août 1918).

christianisme [...] est le sens comme tension ou direction vers l'avènement du sens comme contenu. (213)

The movement of *sens* at the heart of the Trinity results in an atheological tension, since the *parousie*, or divine presence, is never fully graspable within signification but must be continually accessed within a historical experience of opening in which “la présence reconduit toujours le passage [et] le passage mène toujours à plus d'ouvert au cœur du sens” (214). The sensual dimension of what Nancy names “l'ouverture du sens et le sens comme ouverture” (214), provides us with a framework in which we can analyse Christophe's experience, because it facilitates a deconstruction of his experience as a passage towards meaning which, although creating a *personnification* of the divine, is also constantly calling the content of this presence into question. The Christian dimension of *sens* is therefore effectively trapped in a space of non-signification, and it is here, according to Nancy, that the most intense form of revelation is found, the point at which “l'absolu de la parousie, l'absolu de la présence finit par se confondre avec l'infinité du passage : le sens lui-même est alors bouclé ou bien, c'est la même chose, épuisé, il est sens complet où il n'y a plus de sens. C'est ce qui finit par s'appeler « la mort de Dieu »” (214). Nancy attempts to re-envisage Nietzsche's philosophy in terms of a radical understanding of Christianity as the pure revelation of God as the *Ouvert*.<sup>41</sup> If we relate such nihilism back to the movement of *sens* at the limit, then we can understand the significance of this pinnacle of revelation since, according to Nancy, “le nihilisme n'est pas autre chose que l'incandescence finale du sens, qu'il est le sens à son excès” (214). A deconstructed revelation simply consists of the complete Trinitarian opening of the human person to their nature as *sens*. The fullness of revelation is reached when, paradoxically, “rien n'est révélée, rien sinon la fin de la révélation elle-même, sinon ceci que la révélation veut dire que le sens se dévoile purement comme sens, en personne, mais en une personne telle que tout le sens de cette personne consiste à se

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<sup>41</sup> It should be noted here that although Rolland explicitly denied he was directly influenced by Nietzsche, he acknowledged that they inhabited the same “courant d'esprit” (Letter to Ronald Wilson 29 June 1936, Wilson 217). One can also find dotted throughout his preparatory notes to the novel numerous quotations taken from Nietzsche's œuvre (e.g. Enveloppe I (b), Livre 2, 156; Enveloppe V 175; Enveloppe VI 93). See *Le Rider* for more details on his intellectual relationship to Nietzsche's thought.

révéler” (214). It is precisely at this point that meaning is found at its highest intensity, because the constant fragmentation of signification is fully recognised in the movement of its own coming-to-presence as *sens*. When this opening to the “infinite” dimension of the self occurs we are left with nothing except the opening itself, which continually recurs according to the very movement intrinsic to *sens*: “Le sens se révèle et ne révèle rien, ou bien révèle sa propre infinité” (214). Revelation is a continual unfolding of *sens* right at the limit of signification, a constant creation and negation of presence which, according to the paradox of the Trinity, serves as a complete rendering of atheological meaning. Thus, in our deconstruction of the *personnification poétique*, what must occupy us is the way in which the *Buisson* dialogue results in a Trinitarian opening, an inscription of divine truth suspended at the limit. Yet how can we examine such a paradoxical projection of meaning in nothingness? *Sens* is revealed at the heart of the self, and the *Dieu-vivant* assists us in locating this within the novel, but how can this communicate truth? In order to answer these questions, we must now move on to analyse the significance of the other two theological mysteries that Nancy speaks of, the incarnation and the resurrection, and how they help us understand the infinite movement of *sens* through the finite realm of textual signification.

### **The Infinite within the Finite: the Truth of the Incarnation and Resurrection**

We have so far observed how Nancy’s deconstruction involves a conception of revelation which, framed by the Trinitarian God, is essentially built on an opening to the infinite movement of *sens* at the limit of signification. Now our attention must turn to the interaction between this infinite flow of sensual potentiality and the finiteness of being-in-the-world since, as Watkin emphasises, Nancy “is a philosopher of the infinite in the finite” (*Difficult Atheism* 77). Such an interaction between finitude and infinitude will frame our entire analysis of the textual communication of divine truth. Nancy specifies that being able to engage with the infinity of *sens* is crucial to his deconstruction: “Tout se tient donc en ce point: penser l’infinité du sens, penser la vérité comme infini du sens” (*D* 215). Here we find the central thrust of our analysis, since it is clear that what we must do is revise

the very nature of truth through a discernment of this infinite movement at the limit. If the revelation of Christian truth is fundamentally constructed upon pure opening, then we must seek to investigate how such an opening can move through textual signification. Following this line of thought, Nancy poses a very similar question to the one we have already asked:

[Q]u'est-ce qu'une ouverture qui ne s'abîmerait pas dans sa propre béance? Qu'est-ce qu'un sens infini qui pourtant fait du sens, une vérité vide qui a pourtant le poids de la vérité? Comment tracer à nouveaux frais une ouverture *délimitée*, une figure, donc, qui pourtant ne soit pas une captation figurative du sens (qui ne soit pas Dieu) ? (226)

How can the integrity of truth be retained within finitude whilst still defeating the metaphysical closure of the onto-theological God? Nancy goes on to suggest that the answer lies in tracing the limit of *sens*, investigating it through the singularity of a human existence: “Il s’agirait de penser la limite [...] le tracé singulier qui « boucle » exactement une existence, mais qui la boucle selon le graphe compliqué d’une ouverture...” (226). Nancy then goes on to interrogate the Greek equivalent of the word limit, *horizô*, in order to frame human existence as a horizon of *sens* in a state of constant fragmentation and reconstitution made up of a dynamic interaction between the finite and the infinite: “[D]ans cette (dé)construction se perd, mais *aussi* surgit, l’horizon comme question, *l’horizon* comme nom propre de la finitude qui se tourne vers son propre infini” (226). When we speak about the infinite movement of *sens*, it must be framed in reference to the finiteness of worldly existence, as Nancy clearly states “L’infini dans le fini. La finitude en tant qu’ouverture à l’infini : rien d’autre est en jeu” (A 11). This is where Nancy’s thinking on the limit and the infinity of *sens* is grounded, since both finitude and the limit of signification must be thought together: “Any attempt to think finitude must be a finite thinking that, without renouncing truth, universality or sense, thinks only insofar as it touches on its own limit and singularity” (Watkin, *Phenomenology or Deconstruction?* 174). Nancy in fact proposes a direct engagement between the finite and the infinite which gives new shape to both, and Watkin states that this thinking is essentially linked to the redefinition of presence Nancy is undertaking (174). We can thus link our discussion back to the atheological Trinity, since finitude must be seen as the end of a firmly established and self-sufficient form of presence. In *Le Sens du monde*,

Nancy clearly lays out his thinking on *sens* and truth upon a foundation of redefined finite presence by contrasting what he names “l’être-*tel*,” which equates to truth, with “l’être-*à*,” that is, the “*venue en présence*” of *sens* (25). We can suggest that what Nancy calls the limit is found precisely at this point of conjunction between these two concepts, because they simultaneously “s’entr’appartiennent” and “s’écarternt” (29). Their impossible union is the challenge that lies before us in deconstructing the atheological limit in the novel, since what we must do is revise the very nature of finite truth by incorporating our conception of revelation as an infinite opening of *sens*. I argue that this will then lead to the discovery of what Nancy terms “bonne finitude,” or “*finitude absolue*,” which is “l’existence dont la *vérité* consiste à laisser son sens toujours plus au-delà ou en deçà de tout accomplissement” (PD 21). By speaking of the limit as the finite horizon of human existence turning towards its own infinite nature, we begin to discern the process through which opening communicates a truth that retains its integrity within signification. There is a very specific way in which Nancy traces such an opening in his *Déconstruction du christianisme*, and once again the fundamental factor of the Trinity comes into play along with the two other theological mysteries that are tied to it.

The mysteries of the incarnation and resurrection can be identified as fundamental stages in the Trinitarian redefinition of presence, because they allow revelation to occur within the realm of signification in which our communication of divine truth must be grounded. If the self, according to the Trinitarian understanding, is composed of an infinite realm of self-relationship, it in turn must be grappled with in the realm of finite thought. This is signified by the event of the incarnation, which captures the tension between the infinite and the finite that we’ve been discussing: “Incarnation: que l’infinité divine ait son effectivité dans le rapport des étants finis” (A 108). In the incarnation, the infinite relationship of *sens* is thought within the finite space of the body. Ian James comments on the importance of the bodily aspect of existence within Nancy’s thought in the following terms: “[S]ense, for Nancy, [...] is extralinguistic yet finite and embodied [...] sense, as bodily existence, is that in the context of which signification and language can occur, but that, as a singular bodily event, is outside or on the other side of the outer limit of language or signification” (*The Fragmentary Demand* 149). The body is a privileged domain in

which the infinite movement of *sens* can be thought as a redefinition of presence at the limit. The Trinitarian God is inherently in transition towards such a bodily limit, and this marks the fundamental premise of Christianity: “Ce « dieu » qui a déjà en lui-même renoncé à son être renonce à sa divinité séparée de l’homme pour la « faire chair » ; épousant de cette chair le caractère mortel, il ouvre dans la mort une autre vie, une vie éternelle” (A 77). Because the atheological nature of the Trinity now reveals itself in the body, flesh itself is in movement towards the climactic point of revelation, the *mort de Dieu*, in which there is nothing but infinite *sens* in excess of itself through opening. This death of signification is the moment in which an alternate vision of truth begins to appear within the world, because the death of Christ “s’ouvre au milieu du monde, ouvrant la vérité de ce monde comme un dehors qui se présente ici même, « divin » si on le veut, « vrai » en tout cas, c’est-à-dire mettant en échec la poursuite indéfinie d’un « sens » final qui se tiendrait en quelque paradis ou autre demeure d’au-delà” (44). At the apogee of revelation, truth presents itself within the finite, putting an end to the “mauvaise finitude” that Nancy sees as characteristic of the Hegelian dialectic (PD 21). The presentation of truth essentially occurs as an opening within the world, and it is the resurrection that makes this possible. However, when Nancy speaks about the third theological mystery he does not posit it as a return to life, but rather links his discourse back to the fundamental *athéologie* of the Trinity:

Résurrection : ce n’est pas une seconde vie, c’est ce redressement par lequel le cours horizontal d’une vie pivote en signal vertical. Et c’est encore la chair, car c’est bien cette vie propre, irremplaçable, qui se redresse ainsi. C’est encore manifestation de ce qui ne se manifeste pas- du sens et de la vérité. Incarnation et résurrection déclinent ensemble une seule et même pensée : le corps est l’événement de l’esprit. (A 78)

The process by which God is inscribed into the world as an *athéologie* that still somehow manifests truth in the finite realm of signification is summarised by the concept of an *événement de l’esprit*, which ties the incarnation and resurrection to the Trinity. The fulfilment of this *événement* is given form by Nancy’s description of the resurrection as the horizontal axis of a finite human life pivoting into a “signal vertical,” because the opening of *sens* “défait l’horizontalité du sens pour la faire pivoter en une verticalité : l’instant présent comme une trouée infinie” (D 226). We

come here to the core of our analysis, since if revelation is defined as an atheological rendering of God within textual form, it can only unfold as what we could call a *personnification* revolving around such a pivoting motion. The Spirit moving through the finite, embodied space of the world turns existence itself into a presentation of atheological truth. I thus argue that Trinitarian revelation is a continual rupturing of presence and renewed self-formation, or *personnification poétique*, through an opening to the Holy Spirit. This process is perfectly suited to our purposes, because if Rolland sought to inscribe the divine truth of human life into literature, then his reading of the Christian God, understood through Nancy's Trinitarian framework, offers the ideal theoretical foundation for our study. We must therefore identify a means through which to study the opening represented by the movement of the Spirit, the place in which the presence of the human and the divine fragments, leaving in its wake a paradoxical and "impossible" form of truth.

### **The Poetics of Trinitarian *Personnification***

The theoretical framework we have outlined so far is already essentially coloured by a confrontation with the dilemma presented by signification, because Nancy's reading of revelation as sensual opening within the finite is given its impetus by this problem. We have seen that the atheological Trinity can be used to read the process of *personnification poétique*, but it is the second crucial, poetic component of Rolland's image of the divine that must be properly critiqued in order to understand the way in which revelation can most effectively be grounded in the musical novel. Before moving on to analyse this concept further, I would first like to locate it in relation to Christian revelation through Nancy's idea of the *kérygma*. In his analysis, Nancy seeks to discern the "mouvement essentiel du christianisme kérygmatic ou évangélique" (D 218), which represents the central thrust of the *déclousion* occurring in his deconstruction. Nancy argues that the Christian narrative can be analysed as a form of writing whose interior nature is revealed most clearly by this kerygmatic structure residing under the surface of the Gospel texts:

*La structure d'origine du christianisme, c'est l'annonce de la fin. [L]e christianisme est essentiellement dans la fin comme annonce, comme fin annoncée, comme Évangile, comme euaggelion, « bonne annonce ». Le*

message, c'est le cœur du christianisme. [C]'est la fin elle-même qui vaut dans l'annonce et comme annonce, parce que la fin qui est annoncée est toujours une *fin infinie*. [L]'écriture proprement chrétienne [...] est une écriture qui consiste à tracer extrêmement vite le mot d'annonce, à dire que « ça annonce », et que quelqu'un a vécu de telle manière qu'il a annoncé. (217-18)

The death and resurrection of Christ as an *événement de l'esprit* is epitomised in the Gospels, which in Nancy's eyes manage to communicate an experience of the truth of existence.<sup>42</sup> The *kérygma* is an empty text because it represents nothing except the *mort de Dieu* itself, that is to say, it presents an opening to the infinite reach of the bodily self, forming a textual projection of historical experience that maintains itself at the limit of signification. Through the announcement of the *kérygma*, we can read the Gospels as the entire truth of the atheological God manifested in the finitude of the life of the Son, a text that manages to simultaneously project the very infinite processes of *sens* that make truth come into being in the first place (that is to say, it is a textual *fin infinie*). This kerygmatic *fin infinie* in turn offers the key to understanding the relationship that poetics holds to the Christian narrative, an understanding that will allow us to move forward in our analysis of the musical novel and the *Buisson* dialogue at its centre.

The kerygmatic presentation of truth is closely aligned with the stance towards language put forward by a deconstructive reading of poetics, which can be used to accurately identify the operation of the *personnification poétique* at play within *Jean-Christophe*. Lumsden points out the affinity that exists between poetics and the idea of a presentation of “impossible” meaning: “The common ground of deconstruction as literary criticism, and of a number of modern poets of significance, is a recognition of the impossibility of ‘finishing’ meaning through any verbal presentation of it” (271). Poetics also plays an extremely important role in Nancy's thought because of the way it provides a path to the opening of *sens*. Van Den

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<sup>42</sup> In fact, the notion of scripture as an authentic writing of the human self bears close resemblance to the sentiments expressed by Rolland in one of his letters to Clara Collet: “Tout homme est un monde à lui tout seul, et son étude, si elle est faite avec intelligence et avec amour, est le livre des livres. Qu'a-t-on besoin de l'Évangile ?” (18 novembre 1905). A similar opinion is attributed to the Abbé Corneille in the novel: “Pour lui, toutes les Écritures, anciennes et modernes, religieuses et laïques, de Moïse à Berthelot, étaient certaines, étaient divines, étaient l'expression de Dieu” (*JC* 1033). It is thus not the privileged status of the Gospels as sacred texts that concerns us here, but rather the way in which they manage to resist becoming entrapped in a “vérité immobile” (*JC* 1033) through the insertion of the infinite into the finite.



Abbeele speaks about Nancy's philosophy as a "*poein* of thought exposed upon its limit," a *poein* which "is a making that is simultaneously an unmaking, a comparing of community that is also its withdrawal, an advent of sense in which sense is eclipsed, a speaking of what cannot be heard [...]" (17). In order to explore this seemingly paradoxical (and very Trinitarian) impossibility of poetry, I will be utilising one of Nancy's shorter works entitled *Résistance de la poésie*. Instead of focusing on poetry as a genre, in this work Nancy seeks to penetrate deeper into the significance of poetry as a function of language that is identifiable in all genres (14). Such an investigation centres on the same tracing of *sens* we find in the Trinitarian atheology: "Si nous comprenons, si nous accédons d'une manière ou d'une autre à une orée de sens, c'est poétiquement" (RP 9). Poetics, understood in the way Nancy sees it, is thus well-placed to provide a conceptual link between the text of the novel and the kerygmatic announcement, since it forges a literary bridge built on *sens*. We can see a trend towards the recognition of this poetic aspect of Rolland's work in past scholarship (e.g. Starr, "Water Symbols" 146; Bresky, *Cathedral or Symphony* 80), and indeed Rolland himself describes the novel as a "vaste poème en prose" (JC XIV) in his preface of 1931. We have already noted the link between the narrative of the novel and the *Bildungsroman* form, but another important contextualisation of the novel is its location within the Romantic tradition into which it has sometimes been placed.<sup>43</sup> Nancy allows us to isolate one particularly crucial aspect of this literary contextualisation, since he positions his analysis of poetry within a re-examination of the Romantic tradition.<sup>44</sup> For the Romantics, poetry represents a very particular method of being within the world: poetry is the "organe de l'infini" that

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<sup>43</sup> The blurb of the latest re-edition of *Jean-Christophe* (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 2007) is a good example of this. It labels the novel a "roman d'apprentissage" in the style of Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, and at the same time its central protagonist is described as a "héros romantique." Rolland's hero can certainly be seen to position himself "above and beyond the common range of human experience" in the manner of the Romantic hero (Reed 1), which in itself serves as a questioning of the boundary between the human and the divine. Apart from an underlying tendency towards the use of Biblical imagery in Romantic art and literature (see Prickett) which it could be argued the novel exploits, a connection could also be drawn between Rolland's *œuvre de foi* and the pantheism explored by the German Romantics, which was primarily founded on a revision of the interaction between the finite and the infinite, and a challenging of both conventional theology and Enlightenment rationalism (Lamm 165). Another important reference point in this discourse is Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's *L'Absolu littéraire: théorie de la littérature du romantisme allemand*, which I unfortunately do not have the space to examine here.

<sup>44</sup> I do not in any way intend to imply that Nancy adopts an uncritically "Romantic" perspective in his thought, as it is important to recognise that his rethinking of the "Romantic God of the poets" takes place in a post-theological context (see Watkin, *Difficult Atheism* 72-87).

facilitates a “transcendance absolue de toute détermination” (RP 20). The Romantic perspective on poetry is reappropriated by Nancy and inserted into the same movement of *autodépassement* that he locates in the Christian tradition, becoming a poetic process of self-overcoming that functions through *sens* and whose substance is in fact nothing but *sens* directed towards the infinite (20). This deconstructive reading of Romanticism allows us to suggest that when Rolland speaks of a “poème en prose,” it is a resource of *autodépassement* he seeks to locate within the novel form. In one of his later journal entries, Rolland quotes from a letter he sent to a professor named Fernando Marquez Miranda at the Universidad Nacional de la Plata in Buenos Aires on 22 June 1927. In this letter he describes the novel as a “poème épique en prose,” a mixing of genres that Nancy helps us unpack:

Pour les romantiques, [...] la « prose » était d’une part la « sobriété » [...], mais c’était d’autre part cette dissolution ou fluidification des genres dont le roman était pour eux le paradigme. [...] Par une extrémité, cela tenait encore à l’idée d’un devenir moderne de l’épopée (et d’un devenir épique de la modernité), tandis que par l’autre ce n’était qu’un nom pour baptiser le problème : l’« autodépassement » infini de la poésie. (RP 23-24)

As a result of this Romantic fluidity of genres, one can propose that the novel becomes the ideal space in which to study the *personnification poétique* in terms of the *kérygma* of Christian revelation. The novel aims at poetically reaching the point of limit at which signification ruptures, and language opens up the finite embodied self to the infinite. Poetics allows us to examine the way the singularity of a life lived according to the movement of the Spirit can form an expression of truth through a tracing of opening within language, and within the very self that seeks to express itself using such language: “Le poème ou le vers désigne l’unité d’élocution d’une exactitude. Cette élocution [...] ne renvoie pas à du sens comme à un contenu, elle n’en communique pas, mais elle le fait, étant exactement et littéralement la vérité” (RP 12). This *élocution* of truth proposes an alternate vision of signification, because it occurs through a type of language that remains faithful to the movement of its own coming-into-being as *sens*: “[L]a poésie articule *le sens*, exactement, absolument (non pas une approximation, une image ou une évocation)” (12). The revelation of the self as pure *sens* in the finite realm of the world is thus made possible by the poetic function of language, because direct experience remains at the forefront of the

poetic gesture. It is in the poetic space that the common experience shared by the atheological absence of God and the modernist *personnification* is observable in its most embryonic form. Nancy focuses on the etymological root of the word *poésie* and, as we have already seen Van Den Abbeele point out, locates its origin in the verb *poiein*, which he translates as “faire” (RP 13). This poetic act, grounded in existentiality, is the “accès au sens,” which is “l’exacte existence actuelle de l’infini, son retour éternel” (13). Here we find the same rupturing of finite space that we located in the Nietzschean *mort de Dieu*, since by inserting the infinite into the finite, poetry introduces a form of text that is a “fin comme sa négation, car le faire se défait dans sa perfection” (14). What results is a rendering of the finite which incorporates the infinite movement of *sens* into its very structure: “Sa fin est sa finition : en cela il se pose infini, chaque fois infiniment au-delà de son œuvre. [...] C’est la finition mécanique qui donne accès à l’infinité du sens” (14). Thus, like the *kérygma* in the Christian narrative, the “accès au sens” (14) of poetics produces truth in the form of a *fin infinie*, because it exposes the opening of *sens* operating through the self as a creative *personnification*. Poetics will therefore serve as the textual framework in which we will seek to place the unfolding process of Trinitarian *personnification* within the novel. In order to complete such a positioning, however, we will now analyse the way in which the central protagonist of the musical novel is crafted according to what Rolland describes in his letter to Louise Cruppi as the *force éternelle de vie* that flows through the universe. In doing so, we will be able to further refine our method of approach to what I will define as a Trinitarian poetics.

### ***Jean-Christophe: The Beethovenian Poète-musicien***

Given Rolland’s insistence on the primacy of musical language we noted in the Introduction to this thesis, if what we are seeking to deconstruct is a presentation of divine truth in the novel, such an expression must necessarily occur through the musical structure of the text itself. We will discuss this musical aspect through Nancy’s deconstruction in more detail in Chapter 2, but first we must briefly look at the figure of Christophe as a composer who utilises the *force éternelle de vie* in a very particular way that enlightens our analysis of the act of *personnification poétique*. Di Scanno explains that the character of Jean-Christophe is formulated

through the convergence of many musical influences, like Mozart and Wagner, for example (234- 235), but the overarching model was provided by the figure of Beethoven. Jean Bonnerot states that Rolland seeks to offer “la vie des héros” as a new source of faith, and “[e]n tête de cette légion héroïque, R. Rolland donne la place ‘au fort et pur Beethoven’” (43-44). Although there are in fact many points of coincidence between the life and thought of Beethoven and Rolland,<sup>45</sup> for the purposes of this study I would like to focus on what Rolland saw as Beethoven’s unique form of heroism. In his preface of 1931, Rolland clearly states that instead of retelling the life-story of Beethoven through his character, Jean-Christophe is “un *Beethoven nouveau, un héros du type beethovenien, mais autonome et jeté dans un monde différent, dans le monde qui est le nôtre*” (JC XV-XVI). Rolland’s exploitation of what Newman calls the “Beethoven mystique” centres on a figure characterised by a very specific existential structure that governs both his method of living and his method of creating:

*J’ai donné ma définition du « héros », dans l’introduction à ma Vie de Beethoven, contemporaine des débuts de Jean-Christophe. Je refuse ce titre « à ceux qui ont triomphé par la pensée ou par la force. J’appelle héros, seuls, ceux qui furent grands par le cœur ». Elargissons ce mot ! « Le cœur » n’est pas seulement la région de la sensibilité ; j’entends par là le vaste royaume de la vie intérieure. Le héros qui en dispose et s’appuie sur ces forces élémentaires, est de taille à tenir tête à un monde d’ennemis. (JC XV)*

The experience Christophe undergoes revolves around a redefinition of the human heart as a crucial interior dimension of the human person. This in turn influences his trajectory through the world, since the forces that traverse the *royaume intérieur* condition the opening which then takes place.<sup>46</sup> In the *Buisson* dialogue, these forces are manifested in a particularly intense way,<sup>47</sup> and so we can already discern a certain connection to the Trinitarian *athéologie* we have been examining. Critics

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<sup>45</sup> Mellers explains that Beethoven had “little use for institutionalized religion” and was, despite the fact he always remained officially a Roman Catholic, “suspicious of the feudal hierarchy of the Church” (3). He claims that Beethoven’s music was “beyond doctrinal associations” (262), and points out that his “religious sense” largely consisted of a “process of Becoming” (316), which we can link back to Rolland’s own preoccupation with the Pre-Socratic philosophers.

<sup>46</sup> It is from this interplay of forces that Christophe gets his surname Krafft, as Rolland writes in a preparatory note to the novel: “[L]’unité de la force intérieure- Krafft” (Enveloppe I (a) 22).

<sup>47</sup> In the final book of the cycle, *La Nouvelle journée*, Christophe speaks about Switzerland as the place in which he perceives clearly “les forces élémentaires” which brought him to the *Buisson* revelation where “Dieu lui était apparu” (JC 1435).

such as Krampf have highlighted the similarity between the idea of elemental forces and the Nietzschean *Übermensch* (53), but I would instead like to consider this through the lens provided by another thinker who can help us ground the *personnification poétique* in the kerygmatic announcement in a particularly useful way.

The relationship between Rolland's thought and the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud has already been acknowledged in the Introduction to this thesis, but it is their common perspective on the importance of the forces running through the self that is perhaps most revealing. In *L'Adoration*, Nancy comments on Freud's thought in relation to his *Déconstruction du christianisme*, and suggests that he too was concerned with forging a new vision of the human being: "C'est l'homme entier que Freud remet en jeu. C'est un nouveau récit de l'homme" (143). Both Rolland's and Freud's projects were in accord by virtue of their common desire to rewrite the narrative of humanity through a reinterpretation of interiority. Nancy argues that for Freud, "ce que désigne le mot « inconscient » n'est pas un repli de l'âme, c'est l'âme même, ou si l'on préfère, c'est l'homme" (143). Central to this vision of interiority is a movement that Nancy relates back to the processes of *sens* which shape the very identity of the human person:

Ce récit raconte que- et comment- les hommes se racontent leur provenance et leur destination en rapport à un infini dépassement d'eux-mêmes, à une poussée excessive qui les précède et qui les suit, qui les met au monde et les en retire tout en exigeant d'eux qu'ils donnent forme en ce monde à cette force d'outre-monde. (146)

Freud's conception of the human being is founded on a "jeu de forces" (142) that, for Nancy, operates in the same existential modality as the *dépassement infini* characterising the deconstructed Trinitarian God. Although a comparison between them may be extremely theologically problematic from an orthodox perspective, the similarity between these forces and the opening of the Spirit within the world is striking. We can say, then, that through the Beethovenian genius' existential structure, the novel is essentially pointed towards a poetic inscription of God within the finite. The image of a Beethovenian hero who, through an engagement with force, utilises the movement of *sens* as a creative resource through which to reshape

his self-identity thus offers us the possibility of locating the *personnification poétique* in the novel in a very effective way. We can move forward with this line of enquiry by looking at the way the interior life is coupled with a desire to express the inexpressible.

The Beethovenian hero is a protagonist who straddles the limit of signification, one who seeks to exploit the movement of *sens* to express truth whilst poetically negotiating a fragmentation of signification. In a letter Rolland wrote in 1934 to the director of Radio Moscow, Nina Niemtchenko, he utilises another descriptive label to clarify the nature of his Beethovenian model:

Beethoven : le type le plus haut et le plus complet d'un musicien, chez qui tout est expression directe et précise de la vie intérieure, de ce subconscient de l'esprit et des passions, qui trouve si difficilement sa traduction exacte dans la langue littéraire. C'est là ce fond de l'âme, que moi, poète-musicien,- musicien m'exprimant par des mots,- j'ai opiniâtement tenté d'atteindre et de faire ressurgir, du fond de la musique, dans la langue des mots. Ce sont filles d'une même mère : la Musique, - mais fécondée, chez moi, par l'expérience et la raison de l'écrivain. Je vous livre la clef de tout mon art.- Il est bien peu de critiques qui s'en soient servis, pour l'ouvrir. (14 octobre 1934)

For Rolland, the genius of Beethoven is the pinnacle of achievement in expressing the most profound nature of the human being. The central challenge Rolland takes up in the novel is the insertion of this interior truth into literary language, a challenge epitomised in the crucial figure of the *poète-musicien* who, we could say, takes up the task of accessing the “rythme” or “cadence” that allows access to the full breadth of linguistic expression (*RP* 26). I argue that the idea of a *poète-musicien* can be used to read the process of *personnification poétique* functioning in the musical novel, because as well as Rolland's own writing technique, the very character of Jean-Christophe as a hero according to the Beethovenian model is governed by this confluence of the poetic and the musical. Rolland further explains this unique musical form in an early letter to Malwida von Meysenbug, his German friend and confidant during his time studying in Rome. Following the pattern of a “Symphonie,” the essence of the text is determined by “la trame poétique du sentiment” unfolding within it (10 août 1890, *Choix de lettres à M. v. M* 28-29). Rolland clarifies that the entire novel is constructed around a revelation of the

interior sentiment of the central protagonist, in whom is incarnated an “âme poétique” which we will see in later chapters of this thesis is crucial to the inscription of divine truth, along with a poetic perception of “Ce qui *est*, d’ailleurs, plus réellement que la « réalité »” (29). I thus propose that the life of Jean-Christophe can be examined as an execution of the deepest part of the human self through a form of poetic writing that takes shape within historical experience. My argument in this thesis will be that the poetic revelation of divine truth through music defines the development of Christophe throughout the novel, and that the movement of *sens* that is thereby expressed shapes Rolland’s negotiation of the limit, his *personnification poétique* built on the same revelation of the atheological Trinitarian God that Nancy explores in his deconstruction. But there is one particular element that most clearly exposes the relationship between this poetic-musical construction and Nancy’s concept of *sens* which I would briefly like to turn to before laying out a chapter structure.

As we have seen, Rolland proposes to carry out the poetic expression of the interior dimension through the very musical structure of the novel, a process he succinctly captures with a key musical concept that can also be found in Nancy’s thought. This concept is clearly explained in Rolland’s letter to Marquez Miranda: “[M]a *musique* est marquée à la fois dans mon intuition propre des âmes que je dépeins, des sujets que j’embrasse, et dans la langue symphonique, harmonique et rythmique que j’emploie pour les traiter” (22 juin 1927). Harmony is an essential component in the poetic expression of limit within the text, and we see this most clearly in the conclusion to the novel which Rolland explicitly connects to the idea of a *fin infinie*. In his 1931 preface, he speaks of the “Harmonie, couple auguste de l’amour et de la haine” (JC 1593) that marks the end of the novel as a “*puissant équilibre, au sein de l’action en marche. Car la fin du Jean-Christophe n’est pas une fin: c’est une étape. Jean-Christophe ne finit point. Sa mort même n’est qu’un moment du Rythme, une expiration du grand souffle éternel...*” (JC XIX). Christophe’s entire experience of life and death unfolds in terms of this Empedoclean harmony that also makes itself present within the heart of the *Buisson* dialogue (1422).<sup>48</sup> Harmony thus corresponds

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<sup>48</sup> As Rolland writes in 1906: “Je crois au mouvement éternel des choses, et à la lutte incessante de l’Amour et de la Haine, comme le croyait déjà le vieil Empédocle [...]. C’est de cette lutte éternelle que se dégage l’harmonie éternelle, et la divine sérénité” (Lettre à Cosette Padoux 5 octobre 1906).

to the revelation of divine truth through the *mort de Dieu*, that is to say, the repeated fragmentation of presence that defines the atheological Trinity. At the end of the novel, the *Buisson* dialogue reaches its final, culminating point of intensity when Christophe is told “Tu renaîtras. Repose! Tout n’est plus qu’un seul cœur,” to which he responds “Je chanterai le Dieu aux deux puissantes ailes. Hosanna à la vie ! Hosanna à la mort!” (1593). Harmony is the ultimate bridge between the Beethovenian hero’s *personnification poétique* and the Trinitarian narrative of revelation, since Nancy links harmony back to the expressive possibilities of *sens* itself:

Plutôt qu’elle ne dit « l’impossible au-delà de la signification », ou bien, en guise de ce « dire » même, la musique [...] serait le savoir en acte du sens « au-delà » comme jeu de la prononciation sans mot et sans nom à prononcer, la prononciation, *non pas* d’un « imprononçable », *mais* de ce qui n’est pas du tout à prononcer. Ce qui, pour finir, n’est peut-être rien d’autre que la prononciation elle-même, l’articulation - l’« harmonia »-, et ainsi la modulation et l’exécution du sens comme le sens même. (*SM* 137)

Christophe’s experience as he journeys through life and develops his creative genius through an adherence to the movement of *sens* (that is to say, the *force éternelle*), has as its highest ideal the expression of musical harmony, which is simply a poetic expression of that which cannot be inscribed into text: the revelation of a self in opening, the *Ouvert*, or in other words, the Trinitarian God. We can sum up our discussion by affirming that Christophe’s life is a *personnification poétique* that becomes a form of writing through the action of a musical harmony expressed within the Beethovenian model of genius. Having now established this schema, I will now move on to a more precise phrasing of my central hypothesis through which our deconstruction will unfold in the remaining chapters of the thesis.

## **A Trinitarian Poetics**

Throughout this chapter we have observed that, according to Nancy, the Holy Spirit is a dimension of relationship which presents God as a *non-être*, a pure dimension of opening inscribed in text. This inscription operates in a poetic modality, which in turn has been defined as a creative action consisting of an engagement with the *force éternelle de vie* which defeats the onto-theological conception of the divine and



achieves a new expression of truth rooted in atheological experience. The resultant musical text is harmonic because it succeeds in rendering the unpronounceable divine nature in signification whilst respecting its paradoxical impossibility. I argue that this harmonic writing unfolds according to the same expressive movement inherent to the Christian narrative, and is given shape by the fundamental *événement de l'esprit* which defines the life of Christ (the incarnation and resurrection). It will be the proposition of this thesis that such writing can be defined as a “Trinitarian poetics,” because it manages to inscribe the relational reality of divine truth in textual form. As I have already intimated, the second-last volume of the novel cycle, *Le Buisson ardent*, will serve as the most important textual focus for our deconstruction of this Trinitarian poetics. We have already examined the links it holds to the atheological *Dieu-vivant*, that is to say, the dialogic point at which the poetic text comes into being, where the unknowable and unnameable “Father” is manifested in the finite (or rather, the finite is opened to the infinite). However, the scene is also extremely significant when it comes to the narrative of Christophe’s life because, as we shall see, the poetic and harmonic text is grounded in a historical experience, just like the Christian narrative. This grounding is signalled by the presence of the essential theological mysteries of Christian revelation which will allow us to formulate a chapter breakdown for our deconstruction, but first we need to locate the *Buisson* dialogue within the broader narrative of Christophe’s life.

Jacques Robichez explores the journey of our protagonist towards his destiny as the *Christophorous* through the theme of solitude, which has the *Buisson* revelation as its focal point. Robichez’s analysis can be useful for us in locating this crucial scene in the narrative because it connects the idea of presence to the discourse on the divine:

[L]e roman est un roman religieux. Son thème essentiel est celui de la solitude. Christophe est seul dans son enfance malheureuse, dans son adolescence, dans ses premiers succès, dans sa gloire. Seul même dans l’amitié et dans l’amour. [...] La constatation répétée de cette solitude représente la trame du livre. Mais simultanément apparaissent, d’abord incertaines, éphémères, puis plus assurées, triomphantes après l’épreuve du *Buisson ardent* (qui est celle de l’abandon temporaire de Dieu), souverainement apaisantes enfin dans l’agonie du héros, les consolations d’une certitude opposée : « Qu’il est bon de se dire, à la fin de sa vie, qu’on n’a jamais été seul, même quand on l’était le plus ! ». Telle est la « religion » de Christophe ; et celle de Rolland [...] Christophore,

porte-Dieu. Quel est ce Dieu dont il charge ses épaules ? A mesure qu'il vieillit, il accueille en lui de plus en plus d'êtres : vivants, morts qui vivent dans son cœur, et les différents Christophes qu'il a été, qui sont morts pour renaître et ne cesseront de renaître, car le roman ne s'achève pas. (*Romain Rolland* 158-59)

The “abandon temporaire de Dieu” we encounter in the *Buisson* is grounded in a very real experience of human solitude, which serves as that point of limit where signification fragments to reveal the Trinitarian movement of *sens* functioning at its core. The *Buisson* scene is thus the clearest revelation of what we can see functioning throughout the narrative of Christophe’s life, especially in his experiences of solitude. The starting point for our examination is linguistic dialogue because, as we have seen, in the *Buisson* Christophe dialogues with an unknown “interlocutor,” just as Moses speaks to God in the Book of Exodus. Yet through the narrative of Christophe’s life, this dialogue must be inscribed in the world as a redefinition of presence in the realm of signification, a redefinition that unfolds according to the movement of Christian revelation. Although the theme of solitude should not in any way be taken as a summary of the complexities of the narrative, it gives us a focus that can help us trace this redefinition of presence through Christophe’s experiences of human rejection, which we can observe unfolding from the first passages of the ten-volume novel. Early on, Christophe struggles to earn the affection of an alcoholic and emotionally abusive father whose neglect leads to severe hardship for Christophe and the rest of the family (*L’Aube*). The first of his many love interests, Minna, eventually rejects him because of his low social status, and his brothers’ cruelty causes the rupture of his first real friendship with a boy named Otto (*Le Matin*). After the death of both his father and grandfather, Christophe begins a short-lived and unconsummated relationship with a young widow, Sabine, who dies before he is able to profess his love for her. When the brief affair with Ada, the girl he meets directly after Sabine’s death, finishes with Christophe’s disgust at the lack of sincerity and emptiness that has characterised it, he descends into a period of drunkenness before being rescued by his pious uncle, Gottfried, who teaches him to pray (*L’Adolescent*). Meanwhile, Christophe has become a trenchant critic of the mediocrity of contemporary German music, which causes him to become alienated and eventually leads to his dismissal from his position at the ducal court. The one appreciator of his music, a retired university

professor named Peter Schulz, dies, as does his uncle Gottfried, and once more Christophe is left alone and misunderstood. Eventually he is forced to flee his homeland after he kills a soldier in a tavern brawl (*La Révolte*). In Paris, Christophe's solitude only increases, as does his outrage at the moral ambiguity and dishonesty that predominates in his new artistic milieu. His relationships also replicate the same pattern: he competes with an "esthète israélite" for the affections of a rich and frivolous young lady, Colette Stevens, an episode which again ends with Christophe being left ridiculed, sick and alone (*La Foire sur la place*).<sup>49</sup> The following book of the cycle (*Antoinette*) is dedicated to recounting the tragic tale of Olivier Jeannin, the young Frenchman Christophe meets at the end of the previous volume, and his sister, Antoinette. The friendship with Olivier develops further in the next volume (*Dans la maison*), as Christophe's wider relationships begin to exhibit a shift thanks in part to this newfound friendship: in the apartment block where the two friends are living, Christophe exerts an invisible and yet tangibly beneficial presence on the various inhabitants who live divided because of ideological, ethnic and class boundaries. After the death of his mother, Christophe suffers another loss when Olivier marries and leaves him alone again to negotiate a series of relationships with women, until the reappearance of the young girl who once unsuccessfully competed for Christophe's attention, Colette's Italian cousin Grazia. Although Christophe is now romantically interested in Grazia, the woman who has anonymously assisted him throughout the artistic scandal that has surrounded him is now married to an Austrian diplomat and thus unavailable (*Les Amies*). This is the narrative context that brings us to *Le Buisson ardent*, a volume which not only serves as the scene for the aforementioned dialogue between Christophe and God, but also, as Robichez highlights, becomes the climactic point in the narrative of solitude. After Olivier is killed in a revolutionary riot, Christophe kills a police officer and is again forced to flee, this time to Switzerland. Here he is taken in by an old acquaintance, Erich Braun, whose wife Anna serves as the unwitting agent of revelation. The shame elicited by the adulterous affair that the two begin under the nose of Erich brings them to the point of suicide, leaving them in a

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<sup>49</sup> Interestingly, in his preparatory notes to the novel, Rolland notes down another title he was contemplating for this volume, one that evokes a Gospel episode in which Christ chases the merchants and money changers from the Temple: "Sur les marchés du Temple" (Enveloppe VII 17; John 2: 13-22).

profound despair that sees Christophe flee into the mountains. It is there that God, whose periodic self-revelation has dimmed into complete obscurity in the midst of Christophe's existential solitude, reappears in the form of a dialogue that changes Christophe completely. We see the effects of this change in the last book of the cycle, *La Nouvelle journée*, where Christophe reencounters Grazia, who is now a widow. The two become romantically interested in each other again, but are unable to marry because of the jealousy of Grazia's son Lionello. The eventual death of Grazia is met with equanimity by Christophe, who is now convinced of the real presence of all those he has loved within the depths of his being. Thus we see that, as Robichez states, the reappearance of God in the *Buisson* is connected to a shift in the meaning of solitude itself: no longer is Christophe alone, but rather his very being becomes the place in which all of those with whom he has been unsuccessful in uniting himself are incarnated. This marks the end of the novel, with the revelation of the *Christophorous* finally displaying completely the image of the divinity, a Trinitarian God whose truth is revealed within history through a reshaping of self-presence. We can say, then, that the *Buisson* dialogue unfolds throughout the entire narrative of the musical novel, a dialogue that occurs in the absence of presence but in an atheological dimension: God is made present *through* absence. In the midst of Christophe's existential solitude, the image of the *poète-musicien* must assert itself as the agent of this re-crafting of presence. According to the Beethovenian model of *personnification poétique* we have established, musical opening must reveal the self as *sens*, and reinscribe the alternate vision of signification within poetic-textual form that we see being executed in Christophe's life. By focusing on the harmonic reality inherent to the *Buisson* dialogue through the Beethovenian model, we will be able to observe how this Trinitarian reality of *sens* is inscribed into the finite reality of Christophe's human relationships as divine truth. The thesis will thus utilise the *Buisson* scene as a focal point through which to deconstruct the Trinitarian God in the novel, but it is a reading of the Beethovenian hero through the Christian narrative that will allow us to carry out such a deconstruction. If the *Buisson* dialogue is marked by the presence of an atheological limit-point, it is only in function of the Christian mysteries we have discussed: the Holy Spirit, the incarnation and the resurrection. These foundational elements will allow us to position the *Buisson* as a focal point through which to disassemble the paradoxical conjunction of presence and absence in the rest of the narrative.

In the *Buisson* dialogue, we can clearly discern a form of revelation that is intimately connected to the Spirit, which is the central marker of the opening that Christophe's creation must execute. The *Dieu inconnu* that Christophe encounters in his dialogue is recognised as the origin of all life, and the artist is the one who most clearly perceives this connection: "Nul, plus que l'artiste qui crée, ne se sent à sa merci: car, s'il est vraiment grand, il ne dit que ce que l'Esprit lui dicte" (JC 1426). Nancy's thinking on the Trinity allows us to position this action of the Spirit as the key movement of dialogic opening running through the novel, and through the new experience of presence that Christophe must affirm. Just like in the Trinitarian schema, where the opening in the "Father" represented by the Spirit is conceptualised in terms of *sens*, we can analyse the *Buisson* dialogue as the central marker in a process of *personnification poétique* that achieves an expression of truth through creative opening. The central basis for the application of my thesis argument to the novel is found here, since the Spirit sketches out an opening within the self, which in turn facilitates a poetic negotiation of the limit of signification, a dialogue in which the self "interrogates itself" by following the movement of *sens*. Through music, the Beethovenian hero is able to dialogue with the world in a different way but, as we have seen, this dialogue must take place within the finite: Christophe must participate in the movement of *sens* in a poetic manner. That is to say, the very definition of finite bodily presence must be revised, and *Le Buisson ardent* serves as the essential turning point in the novel in which Christophe is completely changed through his engagement with a dialogic and bodily reality. In the mysterious dialogue that is taking place, Christophe is also told that his experiences of suffering have in fact been grounded in the divine body all along: "Tu es une de mes voix, tu es un de mes bras. Parle et frappe pour moi" (1420). The Beethovenian hero's music must also be unfolding in the same incarnate realm as his human relationships, since the dialogue that is taking place is a tracing of textual limit within the body. The *personnification poétique* of the Trinitarian God necessarily takes place as the writing of a bodily life, the unfolding of the interior realm of *sens* inscribed into the corporeal self. If we are to continue our investigation into the link between the Spirit and musical expression we must do this in function of the body, which, as we can recall, is for Nancy an *événement de l'esprit*. This movement within the body must also be examined in terms of the shift that occurs within his relationships in the *Buisson* revelation. Christophe moves from the adulterous relationship with Anna

that directly precedes his dialogue with God, through the “purification” (Duchatelet, *Romain Rolland La Pensée et l’Action* 145) of the *Buisson*, and comes out to a renewed relationship with Grazia after they encounter each other for the third time. This pivotal relationship in Christophe’s life will carry out the permanent shift in presence we have been discussing. However, there is another factor involved in the atheological revelation of the self as *sens*. The scene of purification in the *Buisson* is marked by a direct reference to the return of the *Dieu-vivant* in the form of a “résurrection,” and references to the post-resurrection encounters with Christ in the Gospels can be found in the last volume of the cycle, *La Nouvelle journée*. By utilising this second element in the *événement de l’esprit*, we will be able to observe how a state of absence (that is to say, the *mort de Dieu*) succeeds in linguistically communicating an experientially grounded truth. Essentially what the thesis will seek to do is to analyse the way in which the dialogue held between Christophe and God in the *Buisson* unfolds poetically throughout the novel. By deconstructing the *Buisson* scene using the aforementioned Christian mysteries, and seeing how this deconstruction also functions in Christophe’s developing experience throughout the novel, we will be able to examine the unfolding Trinitarian poetics as it occurs within the finiteness of the world and determine the extent to which it manages to inscribe divine truth. Based on this schema of deconstruction, we can now propose a chapter structure for the thesis.

Chapter 2 will serve as the opening move in our deconstruction by further disassembling the notion of a Beethovenian harmony and the way in which it is built on an interior dialogue that, through Nancy’s concept of listening as an access to *sens*, we will be able to analyse as a Trinitarian opening. This will provide a structural framework in which the Beethovenian hero can then be used as a lens to envisage the entire novel as a dialogic entity founded on the relationship between *sens* and music that defines the very notion of the world and the self within it. Chapter 3 will deconstruct the poetics of this sensual dialogue through the Biblical concept of creation *ex nihilo*, which will be analysed as a creative movement built on opening. The chapter will examine how the Beethovenian genius entails a complete poetic presentation of the self through an engagement with the *force éternelle de vie*. Chapter 4 will introduce the concept of incarnation and examine how this factor is crucial both to the unfolding revelation of the infinite movement of *sens* that makes

up the Trinitarian image of the divine, and Christophe's relationships in all their bodily complexity. The chapter will allow us to further deconstruct the novel as a form of writing comparable to what Nancy names *excription*. Chapter 5 will conclude our deconstruction with an examination of the significance of resurrection for the writing of *excription*, analysing how this crucial Christian mystery allows the poetic opening of the infinite within the finite to assert itself as a truth that can be communicated in textual form whilst maintaining itself at the limit of signification. The chapter will observe how the shift in Christophe's relationships in the *Buisson* revelation gives rise to the ultimate redefinition of presence in the form of his final and greatest unconsummated love affair with Grazia.

Throughout these chapters, we shall continually refer to the *Buisson* dialogue as a focal point for the deconstruction of the harmonic text, with a particular focus on the atheological elements we have identified. However, our analysis will not be restricted to this scene, as I argue that it merely serves as the most intense example of the factors that are at play throughout the whole course of the Beethovenian hero's life. What we are speaking of is a revelation that progresses through historical experience and thus forms a narrative, that is to say, the textual development of Christophe's realisation of his nature as the *Christophorous* through the *personnification poétique*. At the same time, however, a harmonic text is present that defeats such historical conceptions, since Christophe has been, since the start of the novel, the one who "bears Christ" (and, as we have stated, the novel itself is a *fin infinie*). The *Buisson* scene is the "trouée infinie" (*D* 226) in which the divine opening of *sens* is revealed, and yet every instant of Christophe's life witnesses to this coming of the infinite into the finite since, as Nancy states, the "instant présent" is the point at which such an opening must necessarily occur. It is therefore very difficult to be chronologically accurate in our passage selection, and given the vast nature of the novel, it is impossible to examine all the details of Christophe's life in a comprehensive fashion. So we will restrict our analysis to certain passages which best exemplify the chapter topics outlined above. That being said, we will generally follow the broad movement of the narrative of his life, from his first encounters with music right up until the final scene of his death, as the chapter framework we have established calls for such a division of the key events of the novel. The study of the primary text will be complemented by the utilisation of various secondary sources,

including critical literature on Rolland and various other texts published by Rolland himself. We will also continue to draw on some of his correspondence, much of it still unpublished in the Fonds Romain Rolland at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris, as well as the preparatory notes to the novel and some extracts from his Journal (also in the Fonds Romain Rolland). Again, the usage of these sources has generally been restricted to those that comment directly on *Jean-Christophe*.

Nancy's work will continue to provide a theoretical foundation throughout the thesis, and we will be largely referring to the two volumes on the *Déconstruction du christianisme* we have been using so far (*La Déclosion* and *L'Adoration*), as they provide a textual focus that will facilitate our analysis. In addition to these two key volumes, we will at times refer to some of Nancy's other works in order to draw out certain themes or expand on important concepts. In Chapter 2, we will utilise one of his shorter works *À l'écoute*, to facilitate our analysis of the Beethovenian musical genius. In Chapter 4, we will draw on his earlier works on the body, *Corpus* and "De l'âme," as they offer a unique way of looking at the human body as an *excription of sens*. In Chapter 5, we will use as our primary source a short work that exists as a type of side-project within the *Déconstruction du christianisme*, entitled *Noli me tangere*. The work presents us with a detailed analysis of the impact of the Christian resurrection on *sens* and on the nature of revelation as it seeks to present religious truth. The intention of this thesis is neither to undertake a comprehensive study of Nancy's deconstruction, nor to evaluate the theological and philosophical import of such a project. Thus, where appropriate we will be referring to secondary sources on Nancy, as we have done so far, but these sources have been carefully chosen and will only be used when it is necessary to clarify some of the more complex areas of his thought. Many of these secondary sources are in English, since the translation of much of Nancy's œuvre has allowed the study of his work to flourish in the Anglophone world, however they are complemented by the usage of various sources in French. In addition, the study does not intend to carry out an exhaustive analysis of Nancy's thought on Christianity, but simply to draw on the deconstructive framework he establishes whilst at the same time acknowledging that such a deconstruction far exceeds the analytical boundaries of this thesis. Nancy himself refers to his selection of topics for analysis in *La Déclosion* as a "chantier à ciel ouvert" (23), and in a similar way the choice of the key elements of revelation we



have outlined above serves as an admittedly limiting, but ultimately necessary restriction on the analysis of an extremely vast and complex theological system. As we have done so far, we will periodically make reference to certain passages from the Bible, but these references are simply intended to flesh out and contextualise the deconstruction of the novel. The usage of the term “Biblical narrative” follows the Christian convention of referring to the Old and New Testaments as an integral whole, but again this reference to the narrative of revelation is made strictly in terms of Nancy’s deconstructive approach. As we shall see throughout our examination of all these sources, the limits of our analysis will be imposed by the movement of opening carried out by the Holy Spirit. Such a Trinitarian schema will allow us to deconstruct a *personnification poétique* that holds within it a resource lying both underneath, and within the very heart of religious language, constantly revising its boundaries in a movement of *sortie de la religion* that will hopefully allow us to identify the opening of new pathways through Rolland’s religious thought.

## Chapter 2

### **Beethovenian Genius as Infinite *Renvoi*: the Trinitarian Harmony of the Musical Novel**

In Chapter 1, we established a theoretical framework through which to disassemble the *personnification poétique* within the novel and work towards an analysis of the inscription of divine truth that the Trinitarian poetics produces. The concept of a Trinitarian *athéologie* summarises such a process, because it allows for a conception of God that resides in the paradoxically impossible relationship between the human and the divine, a relationship encapsulated in the Christian narrative which presents truth in a textual form. This second chapter will serve as a bridge linking our theoretical framework to a close textual analysis and deconstruction of the novel by examining how Nancy's conception of Christian revelation as *sens* is connected to music. In this stage of our deconstruction, we will see how the Trinitarian poetics is grounded in the *roman-fleuve* through the person of the Beethovenian genius. The Beethovenian model has already been defined as being essentially built on an engagement with the *force éternelle de vie* that Rolland saw as the foundation of divine truth. Force, which we have already linked to the movement of *sens* through the *royaume intérieur*, is used to craft a *personnification poétique* of the Beethovenian self that corresponds to Nancy's understanding of the Christian narrative of revelation. Thus deconstructing this primordial force is an essential stage in our study, but first we must understand how it is positioned in relation to musical creation. That is to say, how does *sens* relate to music, and more specifically, how does it function within the ideal state of harmony we have defined? By carrying out such an analysis, we will be able to further break open the Beethovenian genius as the archetype through which Rolland proposes a model of the human self that is built on what we can read as a Trinitarian network of sensual relationship. This vision of the self will allow us to examine how revelation functions within the world, and how it opens up the finite to the infinite through what Nancy names *renvoi*. The chapter will be underscored by an interrogation of the very concept of "interiority," as we observe how *sens* allows us to revise the boundaries between the self and the world as the first step in carrying out the deconstruction of presence we elaborated in Chapter 1. In the following chapters, we will then investigate the utilisation of the

*force éternelle* as a poetic inscription of *sens* within this Trinitarian dimension that defeats pre-conceived notions of selfhood and otherness. The concept of harmony will serve as the starting point for our deconstruction since, as we have already seen, both Nancy and Rolland make use of this musical phenomenon to encapsulate what can be described as a movement of *sens* poetically executed through the experience of the self. Before going on to examine the poetic aspect of Christophe's genius in the next chapter, we must further deconstruct the idea of harmony with the aid of the Trinitarian opening we have posited as the guiding theoretical movement for our study. By doing so, we will be able to define how revelation is grounded in the text, and further clarify the nature of the Beethovenian genius as the vehicle of such a revelation within the novel. The *Buisson* dialogue will again serve as a key reference point, not only for the way in which it proposes an atheological "disappearance" of God, but also for the way in which it offers a means of locating the opening of a self-expressive dialogue within the central protagonist. It is within such a dialogue that revelation can be grounded, thus facilitating the analysis of its creative application through the poetics of force in its movement outwards into the world.

### **The Harmony of the Beethovenian Genius**

In order to begin the deconstruction of the Beethovenian genius through revelation, we must position the method of expression that defines this genius in relation to the musical novel. In the previous chapter, we observed that the Beethovenian model of force is built on a musical expression in which "tout est expression directe et précise de la vie intérieure" (Rolland, Lettre à Niemtchenko 14 octobre 1934). The entire novel is built on this expression, which is crafted through a "langue symphonique, harmonique et rythmique" (Rolland, Lettre à Marquez Miranda 22 juin 1927). I suggested that we can read this form of expression through Nancy's vision of harmony as "la prononciation, *non pas* d'un « imprononçable », *mais* de ce qui n'est pas du tout à prononcer," a factor which is intimately related to the poetic act since it is "l'exécution du sens comme le sens même" (*SM* 137). However, in order to reach an understanding of how this harmony occurs within the Beethovenian genius, it is necessary to first understand how the ideal of an expressed interior "essence" relates to the deconstructive approach to language, and where Nancy's concept of *sens* can be located. Peter Hadreas' study of musical reference is particularly relevant for our

purposes because I propose it can open the path to a more profound understanding of the relationship between Nancy and Rolland's thought on music in a sensual dimension.<sup>50</sup> Hadreas seeks to apply what he names a "deconstructionist strategy" to an investigation into various ways of approaching the problem of defining what music is essentially about (5). He chooses six theories of musical reference which all centre on the claim that music transcends human experience, from Plato, Augustine and Rousseau, to Freud (7-10). However, it is his comment on the philosophy of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche that is perhaps most relevant to our discussion, since their view that "music expresses an inner self, more real than the phenomenal world of ordinary perception" (9-10), matches Rolland's insistence on the expressive possibilities of the Beethovenian model. Schopenhauer proposes that music "gives us direct access to the Will, by bypassing ordinary perceptual consciousness and directly expressing our inner selves," and for Nietzsche "music recalls our truer Dionysian self" in opposition to the "Apollonian principles of individuation, balance and reserve" (Hadreas 9-10).<sup>51</sup> We have already noted the crossroads at which Rolland and Nietzsche meet within Nancy's interpretation of revelation, but Schopenhauer's influence on the novel can be keenly felt too. In the Introduction, we saw how critics such as Sices have examined Rolland's use of music as a direct expression of interiority through other theories of music, but it is perhaps Schopenhauer who in fact serves as one of the most direct philosophical influences on the Beethovenian genius. We find Rolland quoting from the French translation of Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* in his preparatory notes to the novel: "La musique est une objectivité, une copie aussi immédiate de [toute] la volonté que l'est le monde" (Enveloppe I (b), Livre 2, 127). For this reason, music is unique amongst the arts since "[elle] n'exprime jamais le phénomène, mais l'essence intime, le dedans du phénomène, la volonté même." The resemblance to Rolland's

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<sup>50</sup> There are of course many other aspects to the interaction between music and deconstruction that are impossible to cover here. For example, see Beard and Gloag's excellent summary of the impact of deconstruction on musicology, and Subotnik's readings of musical composition through a deconstructive framework. For the purposes of this study, I will be limiting my focus to Nancy's deconstructive perspective founded on his idea of *sens*.

<sup>51</sup> Rolland directly links Nietzsche's concept of the Apollonian and the Dionysian to the novel in his preparatory notes to *La Révolte*: "Titre, ou non,- c'est bien *le livre de Dionysos*, au sens de Nietzsche,- *la force inconsciente et ivre de la Nature*, s'éveillant en Christophe, faisant irruption en lui, et s'emparant de sa volonté. *Ce doit être le Motif musical de l'œuvre*, - comme la Journée, ou le Fleuve, dans le 1<sup>er</sup> volume" (Enveloppe VI 91). We will explore this link to nature more closely a little later.

portrayal of the Beethovenian genius as a direct copy of the interior life is striking, and so perhaps Schopenhauer's philosophy centred on the concept of Will is one of the most accurate connectors between this model of interiority and Nancy's concept of *sens*. Like Hadreas, Nancy suggests that throughout Western intellectual history music has been assigned "une vocation à l'universel ou un privilège de l'essentiel" (*SM* 133). He reads this attempt to create "un art de l'au-delà de la signification" through the lens provided by his thinking on *sens*, indicating that "on peut toujours à nouveau passer à une « sursignification » ineffable (mais sonore, audible, vocale ou évocatoire), on peut aussi se tenir sur le seuil comme sur l'ouverture in-signifiante du sens" (134). It is towards this latter option that Nancy's conception of harmony is oriented, and I argue that Hadreas' analysis of Schopenhauer can assist us in reaching such an active stance towards *sens* functioning within the novel. Hadreas goes on to explain that Schopenhauer's thought on music implies a binary division that governs the very meaning of the human: "In the musical aesthetics of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, 'human' is understood within the binarisms Will/Idea and Dionysian/Apollonian. Music does the work of bridging the contrast, since Will and the Dionysian realm are off-limits to ordinary consciousness" (16). Hadreas proposes that deconstruction makes us more aware of this binary division, which he reads through the Derridaean logic of supplementarity, whilst simultaneously allowing us to propose an alternative solution. He seeks to broaden the concept of reference by rereading it in a different manner that brings us closer to Nancy's thinking on harmony as *sens*: "Let us say that deconstruction contributes to the question of musical meaning by encouraging us to pursue an infrastructure of meaning whereby the ideal of reference is suspended. Deconstruction prompts us to look squarely at musical meaning apart from the ideal of naming." (20). Hadreas uses the idea of "proffering" as alternative to musical reference, citing as an example the philosophy of Ernst Bloch, who proposes that there is "a movement, a future, already intimated in a single tone" (Hadreas 20-21). Such an idea evokes Rolland's own thinking on the musical novel's broad, sweeping scope because, as Sices points out, when the novel is viewed on a macro scale, "all of the dissonant or confused detail becomes clarified, as part of the larger pattern, rhythmic or plastic, of the work" ("*Jean-Christophe* as a 'Musical' Novel" 873). So the reader must enter the same intuitive experience which governs the author's writing process, but must also retain an independence of consciousness exercised through "another ear, a tension

towards the future, which relates the end of the work to all the parts as they are immediately experienced” (873). Music thus becomes the enacting of a conscious stance towards reality that takes into account what lies outside direct human experience whilst holding back from nominative definitions: “[M]usic is so unlike speech it never names what is, nor will be, but rather puts forward, nonverbally, what can be. [...] Music, if you will, ‘proffers,’ ‘sets forward,’ a destiny which, when most successful, is unalterable” (Hadreas 21). The concept of proffering gives us an entry point into Nancy’s thought by allowing us to deconstruct the harmonic text through the action of the Beethovenian hero within it. I propose that we can position the concept of harmony here, at the point where music becomes “le savoir en acte du sens « au-delà »” (*SM* 137), the very articulation of the sensual movement of coming-into-language. By examining musical harmony in these experiential terms, we will be able to see how the Beethovenian hero’s very relationship to the world is composed of such an articulation, and therefore how Christian revelation, as the revelation of the self as *sens*, functions in the musical novel.

If we turn now to *Jean-Christophe*, we can in fact observe another link between its musical text and the central figure of the Beethovenian genius in the form of the river, which I highlighted in the Introduction as a major point of reference in past criticism. The river serves as a sign of narrative development unfolding according to the ideal of harmonic movement, since the entire image of the novel is built on the expression of the unknowable regions of human experience. Cheval explicitly connects Rolland’s conception of Beethovenian genius to this central, ever-flowing symbol: “Le fleuve, « fort et doux à la fois », c’est l’image même du génie musical, son cours tour à tour heurté et majestueux” (87). The image of the river corresponds to the figure of the Beethovenian genius at the centre of the novel, his musical experience becoming a bridge to the inexpressible that is inscribed within text. Rolland himself compares the life of his character to a river in his preface to *Dans la maison*, a device that encapsulates the entire thrust of the text: “C’est un homme que j’ai créé. La vie d’un homme ne s’enferme point dans le cadre d’une forme littéraire. Sa loi est en elle; et chaque vie a sa loi. Son régime est celui d’une force de la nature. [...] *Jean-Christophe* m’est apparu comme un fleuve; je l’ai dit, dès les premières pages” (*JC* 1600). The concept of the river therefore serves as the dominant paradigm through which Christophe’s musical genius can be understood as the

catalyst for the production of a harmonic text, since the expression of the interior world of the Beethovenian hero is the image of the *roman-fleuve* itself, as Rolland explains in the continuation of his letter to Nina Niemtchenko:

Ce perpétuel ‘devenir’ (‘Werden’), qui est l’essence de la musique, ce flot toujours en marche (*Vater Rhein* de Christophe [...]) ces luttes, ces dissonances, qui incessamment se résolvent et se reforment, jusqu’à l’harmonie finale, à laquelle elles n’ont cessé d’aspirer, dans tout le cours de l’œuvre. – qu’est-ce autre chose qu’une grande Symphonie Beethovenienne ?” (14 octobre 1934)

The harmonic text finds its essential ground in a continuous referral of which harmony serves as the central defining feature, producing a text towards which the Beethovenian genius as an existential method of living is inherently oriented. The river is the overarching framework within which this musical process is grounded, and we can now capitalise on its harmonic movement in order to continue our deconstruction. We will now work towards further defining the Beethovenian genius as a figure whose interior self is a space through which revelation can be expressed as a text carrying language, and therefore the self with it, into the realm of what shall be defined as an infinite *renvoi* of *sens*.

We have thus far seen that musical harmony inherently refers to a mode of experience that is not readily inscribed into discursive language and instead is in constant movement towards its own expressive possibility. But if we are to deconstruct the *personnification poétique* through Christian revelation, we must move deeper into the nexus in which the self experiences this sensual movement in order to configure an effective positioning of our Trinitarian poetics. Nancy provides a useful framework for this extended analysis of the Beethovenian genius in another of his texts, entitled “Identité et tremblement,” in which he refers to the Latin mythological figure of the *Genius* as the space in which the very birth of the subject occurs. The *Genius* is “la totalité du soi de l’esprit,” the “‘mode compact’ ou ‘la forme intensive’ de l’individualité” which Nancy relates to the same conceptualisation of the self that dominates Rolland’s figure of the Beethovenian hero: “[Genius] est la même chose que ce qu’on nomme aussi ‘le *cœur*’ ou ‘la *sensibilité-profonde*’ (*Gemüt*, un autre mot pour dire, en ce sens, ‘l’âme’ ou ‘le

cœur’). Le Genius est le cœur de l’identité, en tant que l’âme affective est réellement le noyau de toutes les déterminations et de toutes les dispositions du sujet” (43). Nancy sees this space as one inherently defined by relationship: “Le Genius n’est pas l’individu, parce qu’il le partage : il le fait trembler, et il le partage d’avec et avec l’autre” (44). We can immediately note that the idea of a Trinitarian God is suited to an analysis of Beethovenian genius in these terms, and we can certainly envisage the force running through Christophe’s *royaume intérieur* as a key sign of this “communauté du partage” that sees the birth of the subject, a birth Nancy again connects back to Freud’s idea of the “inconscient” (IT 45). In two letters to a woman named Cosette Padoux written during the *Jean-Christophe* period, Rolland speaks of the process of artistic creation at the origin of the novel and, more specifically, the mastery that must be developed within the Beethovenian hero. He elaborates on a similar conception of a dynamic, relational self, and suggests that the human being “n’est pas *un* être. Il est un composé de milliers d’êtres, un empire formé de centaines de provinces, où s’agit un monde de personnalités, très diverses, souvent opposées” (15 avril 1905). In “hommes ordinaires” this profound reality often leaves the person at the mercy of the passions, and they thus remain “empires sans empereurs, une anarchie de personnalités.” In the novel we see Christophe, in the void left by the absence of God after his encounter with Leonhard, perceiving the “face multiforme de l’Être” (*JC* 366) and losing control of himself in the midst of such a self-fragmentation: “Il ne parvenait pas à se maîtriser et à se recueillir” (367). In the letter to Padoux, Rolland goes on to speak of other people who are “pratiques et raisonnables,” but who lose sight of this profound reality of the self and become instead a “mécanisme bien réglé.” Yet in a second letter to Padoux, written about a week later, Rolland goes on to explain the task of the genius:

Le vrai artiste s’applique donc à ne rien laisser en jachère de ce qui est en lui. Il tâche de faire vivre librement et pleinement toutes les obscures petites consciences qui dorment en lui. Mais il tâche aussi de n’en jamais perdre la maîtrise. Il faut qu’il puisse les faire parler ou se taire à son gré, comme les divers instruments d’un orchestre, qu’il dirige comme il lui convient. (27 avril 1905)

Rolland conceives the task of the genius according to the notion of musical experience we have been examining. An artist is one who explores the inexpressible



reaches of the human self, and it is this that gives rise to the most perfect “orchestral” harmony, the river of becoming that is an authentic expression of identity. We could say that in this mastery lies the heart of the creative and religious experience we must continue deconstructing throughout the rest of the thesis. Yet we can go further here and link this dynamic form of self to the *athéologie* of the Trinity, for it is within the very depths of this interior dynamism that Rolland positions a conception of the divine based on dialogue.

When Rolland speaks about the Beethovenian model of genius, he directly refers to an explicitly dialogic reality that is expressed through the poetic process we have sketched out. This defines the novel as a harmonic text that we can deconstruct through the Christian concept of the Trinity. Cruickshank clarifies the distinction Rolland was careful to make between talent and genius. True genius is not “a mere intensification or superabundance of ability,” but rather “a rare phenomenon coming from without and stimulating creation by a mysterious and often brutal fusion with the individual will” (Cruickshank, “The Nature of Artistic Creation” 382). Cruickshank refers to Rolland’s essay on Mozart in which he explains his interpretation of genius as a communion with the divine exemplified in the figure of Beethoven: “[G]énie, ce grand souffle indépendant du nôtre, qui emporte une âme [...]; c’est le Dieu qui est en nous, et qui pourtant n’est pas nous. [...] C’est l’essence même de l’âme qui parle, son être impersonnel et universel,- l’Être,- le fond commun des âmes, que seul le génie peut exprimer” (Rolland, *Musiciens d’autrefois* 290-91). Genius consists of a relationship with dialogic otherness, since what the Beethovenian hero is called to harmonically express is in fact founded upon the acceptance of another’s “voice.” The concept of dialogue, which we clearly see manifested in the *Buisson*, is thus the central thrust of the Beethovenian genius, since it evinces the foundational elements of the harmonic text we are examining. In his *Beethoven: Les grandes époques créatrices*, Rolland further clarifies the Beethovenian genius as the expression of a pluralistic form of self-identity:

[C]hacun de nous porte en soi des Moi divers; mais la vie de métier et de société où nous sommes enrôlés fait prédominer l’un de ces Moi [...]. Mais l’artiste, par métier même, est tenu d’explorer et d’exprimer ces mondes, ces Moi distincts et reliés, qui forment des archipels au sein de sa mer intérieure. (490)

Here we can see a transposition of harmony, defined as an “accord des sons” (“Harmonie” *Le Robert*), into the realm of human relationship based on a network of voices, because for Rolland “l’aspect réel” of this dynamic form of being is found in “l’accord de tous ces voix” (Rolland, *Beethoven* 490). Harmony is not simply the interaction of different sounds, but a sense of otherness that occurs within the very intimacy of the self. Genius is thus built in a space of dialogic sharing that is essentially directed towards harmony, or as Nancy puts it, is “le coeur [...] comme le rythme d’un partage” (IT 43). Creativity is founded on this unique birth of the subject which can be seen to provide an essential substructure for the musical novel in its sweeping entirety. It is at this point of dialogue that the Trinity comes to light as the most appropriate model for our deconstruction since, as we shall see, revelation is founded on the same skill of listening Christophe must develop in order to express harmony.

### **Listening and Revelation**

Having now outlined the context of the musical novel and its essence as an experiential movement into the realm of the harmonically unpronounceable, we are now in a position to locate the atheological Christian Trinity. Our starting point is once again the Holy Spirit since, as we saw in the previous chapter, in the *Buisson* we can note a distinct connection between the dialogic reality we have been exploring and the presence of this relational factor within experience. The presence of the Spirit is signalled by the act of listening, which Nancy’s thinking will allow us to deconstruct further. As we have observed, the notion of a divine voice speaking through the Beethovenian hero’s self is marked by the concept of the Spirit: “Nul, plus que l’artiste qui crée, ne se sent à sa merci: car, s’il est vraiment grand, il ne dit que ce que l’Esprit lui dicte” (JC 1426). Not only is Christophe’s reception of inspired musical creation through the Spirit reliant upon his ability to listen, but the entire dialogue with his unknown interlocutor and his acceptance of this announcement of presence are too, since “God” makes him an explicit proposal: “Tais-toi et écoute” (1421). The importance of listening is highlighted by its wider application within the Christian framework, as Nancy points out: “[La révélation] révèle en ce qu’elle s’adresse et cette adresse fait tout le révélé. Dieu appelle

Abraham, Marie, Mohamed. L'appel appelle la réponse, qui est un autre appel. Il ne s'agit pas d'apprendre un corps de doctrine, mais de répondre" (A 62-63). We could say that the entire Christian narrative is launched by the act of listening, since it is initiated by Mary's affirmative response to the message of an angel (Luc 1: 38). Where is such a dialogue taking place? Within a self that is inherently changed by the process of listening and response, which in turn forms the very possibility of the philosophical subject. It is within a dialogic idea of the self that the Beethovenian genius can be envisaged as a creative expression anchored in a dimension of Trinitarian relationship. The *Buisson* dialogue, viewed through the Christian model, serves as the paradigm for Christophe's developing musical skill of listening because "[l]a parole ouvre dans le vivant [...] une altérité à laquelle il ne s'agit pas d'être « relié » mais ouvert. Cette altérité n'est pas à nommer : elle s'indique en excès sur tout nom" (A 15). The atheological opening of the Spirit corresponds to the harmonic opening of language represented by dialogue, since this alterity "forme la jointure et la jonction de nos paroles, la possibilité infinie de sens" (15). I thus argue that we have successfully located the Christian narrative of *sens* within the musical genius of the central protagonist, because the very existence of the Beethovenian genius is an openness to dialogue which begins to reveal a self that is shaped by the movement of *sens*. By listening to the voices of the self, Christophe in fact accesses the most primal movement of *sens* that defines his very self and serves as a network in which God as relationship will be found. Listening positions the Beethovenian hero to enter what we will see Nancy define as the infinite *renvoi* of the self's coming-to-presence, and here we see the entire possibility of the text of the novel unfolding before us, since Nancy links revelation to the very nature of literature: "[La littérature] n'est pas autre chose que le frayage des voix de l'« avec ». [L]a littérature capte les voix innombrables de notre partage. [M]ême les arts du langage et la fiction littéraire ne signifient pas : ils emportent les significations dans un autre régime, où les signes renvoient à l'infini [...]" (A 62-63). In Nancy's take on Derrida's *archi-écriture*, revelation forms a type of writing composed of voices traversing the realm of signification until they reach the limit where *sens* refers outwards into the infinite. This deconstructive form of listening will provide us with a way of accurately conceptualising the musical novel as a matrix in which the Trinitarian poetics is grounded, and so it is to the relationship between this concept of listening and the movement of *sens* that we must now turn.

In the previous chapter we saw that the Spirit is a passage of *sens* through the world, and so our analysis of the act of listening must take the finite space of the world as its essential starting point. It is pertinent here to briefly return to the scene of encounter between Leonhard and Christophe to illustrate how this occurs within the text. Leonhard's onto-theological God revolves around a binary division between the immanence of the world and a transcendent ground of divine being:

[Leonhard] disait, les yeux brillants de contentement, combien il était doux d'échapper à la vie, d'avoir trouvé l'asile, où l'on sera pour toujours à l'abri. [Il] disait les joies de la vie en Dieu, en dehors du monde, loin du bruit, dont il parlait avec un accent inattendu de haine [...], dans le nid chaud et sûr de la foi, d'où l'on contemple en paix les malheurs du monde étranger et lointain. (JC 245; 247-48)

The interpretation of the divine realm as a space outside of the sensory world sharply contradicts Nancy's deconstructive project, since for him Christianity is an opening within the world, an opening *as* the world (a phenomenon we will understand more fully in Chapter 3). The act of listening that Christophe undertakes within the *Buisson* cannot be defined according to an onto-theological model of mystical communion with a divine reality outside of the self and the world, a model Rolland explicitly rejects in one of his letters to Louise Cruppi (26 mars 1910). Rather, the possibility brought by listening must be thought of as a tension towards the advent of *sens* within the world, a tension towards its very coming-into-being within an immanent space. In fact, it is a deconstructed Christianity that is most defined by the need to open the world to the infinite reach of its own sensual possibility, and this occurs within the very system of signs in which it is rooted. If we turn back to Christianity as a narrative of revelation, we can note that it is fundamentally posited upon the divine Word (*logos*) coming into the world (John 1:1-5). Without going into depth on this point now (we shall analyse the incarnation in more detail later), we can observe that Nancy also conceptualises the possibility of Christianity's unveiling within the world by envisaging the *logos* in terms of what he describes as the *alogon*: "[L]e christianisme assume de la manière la plus radicale et la plus expresse l'enjeu de l'*alogon*. Tout le poids- énorme- de la représentation religieuse ne peut pas faire que l' « autre monde » ou l' « autre royaume » ne furent jamais un second monde ni un arrière-monde, mais l'autre du monde [...]" (D 20-21). For

Nancy, Christianity is negotiated through the tension produced within language itself, a coming-into-language represented by the interplay between the *alogon* and the *logos* as two poles of one dialogic continuum. It is clear that the *Buisson* dialogue, as the archetype for a dialogic reality unfolding throughout the harmonic text, can be readily disassembled through this linguistic schema. In addition, Nancy highlights the fact that Christianity can be defined by the “précepte de vivre dans ce monde comme hors de lui,” and then goes on to make a link back to his thinking on *sens*: “[É]tant entendu que ce « dehors » n’est pas, n’est pas étant. Il n’existe pas, mais il (ou bien puisqu’il) définit et mobilise l’ex-istence : l’ouverture du monde à – l’altérité inaccessible (et par conséquent l’accès paradoxal à ce dernier)” (21). What we define as religious signification functioning within the novel must refer not to an otherness outside of the temporal and material, but rather to the space of *sens* that mobilises existence as a negotiation of this linguistic limit. Nancy is attempting to continue thinking the “absolute otherness” that defines experience as a constant referral to a space lying outside of the known and yet still somehow within worldly immanence.<sup>52</sup> We have therefore exposed two contrasting perspectives on Christianity. On the one hand Leonhard proposes a complete self-isolation in an immaterial dimension, and on the other Nancy offers a deconstructive reading of the same tradition. Following the latter trajectory, Christophe’s life in fact begins to establish itself in a counterpoint to Leonhard’s egotistical faith, manifesting a self that is open to the linguistic matrix of world-hood, a self that constantly rediscovers itself on the border of *sens*. It is the conjunction of *sens* and listening that can perhaps provide us with the means to more rigorously critique this open self.

We have already noted that Nancy reads the sensual movement of musical language through the concept of harmony, but listening adds yet more nuance to this relationship. In his *Reticulations: Jean-Luc Nancy and the Networks of the Political*, Philip Armstrong comments on the existential positioning of the self that Nancy, in his *Être singulier pluriel*, refers to as “la position et disposition d’existence” which exposes the “singularité plurielle” of being (*ESP* 48). Such a self-positioning provides us with an interesting point of entry into the analysis of the act of listening

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<sup>52</sup> Here, Nancy positions himself as heir to a long intellectual tradition, with Derrida’s concept of the “tout autre” serving as the pivotal signpost (*D* 15).

as a musical stance towards reality because it speaks about linguistic communication in terms of existence within the world:

[...] Nancy's argument draws us not to an interiority or an enclosed space, in which we turn away from the world and back into ourselves, but opens us toward a disposition, in the sense of a mood, an inclination, an attunement or *Stimmung*, in which we acknowledge neither the origin of communication nor some transcendent source that legitimates all communication and governs its rules, but a 'disposition of Being.' It is precisely this disposition that defines our very existence as existence *in the world* [...]. (118)

We could say that listening represents a clear example of this "disposition of Being" as an opening to the world, an opening in which we will find an even more refined conception of the importance of music for our analysis. Listening facilitates an inquiry into Christophe's musicality as an existential opening to *sens* suspended in the coming-into-presence as signification, thereby allowing us to continue deconstructing the elemental space of Christian revelation in which the *personnification poétique* occurs. In order to do so, we shall turn to one of Nancy's shorter works, entitled *À l'écoute*, in which he discusses such a connection between listening, music and *sens*. In his analysis, Nancy suggests that if instead of remaining in the mode of hearing, we go deeper and seek to penetrate into the movement of *sens*, we come at another auditory activity which is distinctly oriented towards a pre-discursive way of understanding: "Si « entendre », c'est comprendre le sens [...], écouter, c'est être tendu vers un sens possible, et par conséquent non immédiatement accessible" (19). The act of existing "à l'écoute" (17) is thus a means of being open to *sens* and the linguistic possibility that precedes signification.<sup>53</sup> With this action, Nancy provides a tool for negotiating the problem of the metaphysics of presence and approaching the problem of God through the Beethovenian musical genius. As we shall see, the idea of listening in fact helps us to better understand the importance of music in Christophe's existence within the world, allowing us to take our analysis of the musical novel even further within the dialogic schema we have elaborated.

The act of listening fundamentally changes our understanding of the system of reference governing musical harmony, since through it we can see music as an experience that somehow precedes signification whilst remaining grounded in the

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<sup>53</sup> It is interesting to note that Paul Claudel refers to Rolland as "un homme à l'écoute," seeing in this personality trait a crucial sign of his innate existential religiosity (420).

world. Nancy states that his whole analysis hinges on a conception of *sens* phrased in terms of a “résonance fondamentale” (AE 19) lying at the heart of signification, a resonance he then connects to music:

Être à l’écoute, c’est toujours être en bordure du sens, ou dans un sens de bord et d’extrémité, et comme si le son n’était précisément rien d’autre que ce bord, cette frange ou cette marge- du moins le son musicalement écouté, c’est-à-dire recueilli et scruté pour lui-même, non pas cependant comme phénomène acoustique (ou pas seulement) mais comme sens résonant, sens dont le *sensé* est censé se trouver dans la résonance, et ne se trouver qu’en elle. (21)

It is this conception of music outside the conventional definition of an acoustic phenomenon that I would like to propose as the most suitable means of further disassembling Christophe’s nature as the musical hero, because through resonance we can approach the problem of the divine through an exploration of the very limits of the self. In other words, when read through this idea of resonance, the interior self of the Beethovenian hero actually becomes the most accurate representation of the world in its entirety. To open up to sound is to perceive and participate in the *bordure du sens*, a resonance that is clearly seen in the *Buisson*: “Ces combats, cette paix, résonnaient dans Christophe. Il était un coquillage où l’océan bruit. [...] Car tout se muait en sons dans cette âme sonore” (JC 1422). Christophe’s self in the world is defined by a relationship of resonance, since he is inherently bound to it via the sounds which echo within him. During his conversation with Leonhard, we see this resonance used to represent a teeming world of sound which is set up in direct opposition to the falsity of the latter’s onto-theology: “Christophe, retenant son souffle, pensait combien la musique des musiciens est pauvre auprès de cet océan de musique, où grondent des milliers d’êtres : c’est la faune sauvage, le libre monde des sons, auprès du monde domestiqué, catalogué, froidement étiqueté par l’intelligence humaine” (249). This “océan de musique” immediately draws a parallel with the overarching conception of the musical novel as a *roman-fleuve*, since it implies an understanding of music as an experience of sensual movement defining the world. This is replicated in another passage shortly after his encounter with Leonhard, in which Christophe begins to spend long periods of time in the countryside. In the rawness of nature, Christophe “redécouvrit le monde, comme s’il ne l’avait jamais vu” (265), finding a new capacity to listen to the “orchestre invisible” made up of

“les fanfares des moustiques, les notes d’orgue des guêpes, les essaims d’abeilles sauvages vibrant comme des cloches [...] et le divin murmure des arbres” (266). All of these sounds produce an echo that is felt deep in his being: “Tous ces bruits, tous ces cris, il les entendait en lui” (266). The resonance of this “royaume mystérieux des sons,” as Rolland describes it in his preparatory notes to the novel (*Enveloppe I* (a) 28), is contrasted with the coldness of the formalised musical expression we will examine in more detail in Chapter 3. This perception of a resonating world will prove to be an indispensable formative step in Christophe’s own musical creation, since his self-positioning within the world determines the very expression that will be fashioned by his developing Beethovenian genius.

The discourse developing here in many ways evokes Rolland’s insistence on the interpenetration of art and life, and thus serves as an insight into the sensual processes behind the projection of divine truth we are working towards identifying within the form of the musical novel. In some of the early passages recounting Christophe’s childhood, we can see that his musical perception is not only defined by his appreciation of the aesthetic quality of the music, but also by his ability to listen with his whole being, to perceive the world as fundamentally defined by the resonance of music:

Tout est musique pour un cœur musicien. Tout ce qui vibre, et s’agite, et palpète, les jours d’été ensoleillés, les nuits où le vent siffle, la lumière qui coule, le scintillement des astres, les orages, les chants d’oiseaux [...] – tout ce qui est, est musique. [...] Toute cette musique des êtres résonnait en Christophe. Tout ce qu’il voyait, tout ce qu’il sentait, se muait en musique. (*JC* 82)

Nancy’s notion of *sens* as resonance allows us to define Christophe’s very existence within the world through a “musical” perception that is extended outwards into an alternate representation of the sweeping breadth of life experience we have observed within the *roman-fleuve*. The dialogue we have been examining is subtly nuanced by the resonating weight of water that is clearly observable within the *Buisson*, and in many ways serves as the defining movement of Christophe’s life. In the *Buisson*, the music of the “eau qui ronge le roc” is the precursor to the appearance of the *Dieu-vivant* (1419), this encounter with the divinity making itself present within the “fleuve de la vie” (1420). Life is perceived as a “murmure de source,” a “torrent”



that resounds like a “rire de cloche” (1421). The entire novel is in a certain way book-ended by the sound of the river, which is made present both at Christophe’s birth and death by the resonance of its flowing waters: “Le grondement du fleuve monte derrière la maison” (3).<sup>54</sup> The resonance of the river is explicitly dialogic: “Le fleuve gronde. Dans le silence, sa voix monte toute-puissante; elle règne sur les êtres. [...] Grande voix maternelle qui ne s’endort jamais! Elle berce l’enfant [...]; elle pénètre sa pensée, elle imprègne ses rêves [...]” (12). Christophe accesses his very sense of self through the resonating voice of the maternal river, which holds his life in the “manteau de ses fluides harmonies” (12). So we have here an image of interiority that is extended into the space of the world, an interior self that is redefined through a constant referral outwards to otherness. In a scene out in the fields, where Christophe encounters the “orchestre invisible” of nature, the sounds of the natural world are described as forming a “rivière de vie” in which the Beethovenian hero also bathes through his act of listening (266; also see 15). Resonance therefore serves as a foundational element in the flowing course of the musical novel, representing the location in which Christophe’s *royaume intérieur* becomes the defining feature of the musical novel through the dissolution of the border that distinguishes his identity from the resonance of the world. This discourse on *sens* is coupled with another important factor, since if what we are examining is a coming-into-language in which the self is born, then the unavoidable tension towards linguistic expression in signification that such a process implies must be taken into account. It is here that we will begin to see the importance of Christian revelation for our discussion of the Beethovenian genius’ self more clearly, in the infinite movement of what Nancy names *renvoi*.

### ***Renvoi* and the Trinitarian Self**

As we have thus far observed, the *roman-fleuve* can be deconstructed as a harmonic phenomenon governed by a process of referral understood as the movement of *sens*. At its heart lies the Beethovenian hero whose act of listening opens up the possibility of such a sensual flow of resonance. However, the dialogic nature of resonance holds

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<sup>54</sup> We will examine later how this phrase is repeated verbatim at the end of Christophe’s life, as the hero finally traverses the river of life like his saintly namesake (*JC* 1592-93).

within it another potentiality which carries forward our analysis of the infinite nature of Christian revelation and further refines our understanding of the process of referral beyond (or before) signification. By examining what Nancy defines as an infinite *renvoi*, we can understand how the musical novel is further deconstructed as a place of meeting between the revelation of the Trinity and the Beethovenian genius' self. We perhaps see this most clearly when the young Christophe is given a piano (*JC* 57), a “boîte magique” (58), which fills him with the delight of exploring a new world of sound, after which he is taken to a neighbour's house where his grandfather Jean-Michel and his father Melchior play chamber music with some friends. Christophe is the only one in the room who truly senses the fullness of the music he hears, as he enters a sort of dream-state through the act of listening: “[I]l sentait une infinité de choses. C'est comme s'il y avait une masse de choses très importantes, qu'on ne pouvait pas dire [...]. Christophe pensait : « Oui, c'est *ainsi...ainsi* que je ferai plus tard. » Il ne savait pas de tout comment était *ainsi*, ni pourquoi il le disait ; mais il sentait qu'il fallait qu'il le dît [...]

(62). The resonance of music propels Christophe towards an enunciation that seems to remain submerged in a type of primordial, pre-linguistic state, a semi-verbalised expression whose object somehow overcomes the barriers of time and space. Even the music played by these mediocre musicians contains this propulsion towards a nascent linguistic self-expression carried forward by the very thrust of musical resonance: “[I]l y a dans les sons, même maniés par un sot, une telle puissance de vie qu'ils peuvent déchaîner des orages dans une âme naïve” (63). It is here, I propose, that the origin of all of Christophe's future musical creativity, and indeed his entire future experience, can be deconstructed. Nancy identifies such a kernel of linguistic expression in the movement of *sens* that is discerned through the resonance of music, and further builds on this thinking on *sens* through the introduction of the key concept of *renvoi*:

Cette disposition [...] est un rapport au sens, une tension vers lui: mais vers lui tout à fait en amont de la signification, sens à l'état naissant, à l'état de renvoi pour lequel n'est pas donnée la fin de ce renvoi (le concept, l'idée, l'information), et donc à l'état de renvoi sans fin, comme un écho qui se relance lui-même et qui n'est rien que cette relance allant *decrescendo*, voire *moriendo*. (*AE* 52)

Within resonance, there is a particular form of movement taking place, a type of linguistic intentionality “sans vision de signification” (53), that allows us to deconstruct the act of listening even further. The system of referral we have been examining, of experience extending out into that space in which the wordless expression of harmony takes place, is governed by an infinite cycle into which the listener is inserted. Nancy names this movement *renvoi*, which is a more precise way of conceptualising the passage of *sens*. The concept of *renvoi* is particularly relevant to our analysis because it not only allows us to engage with the “infinité de choses” that Christophe feels the desire to express, but it allows us to reconceptualise the human self that seeks to express this infinity in terms of the schema of revelation we have established.

The relationship to the infinite within the resonance of the *roman-fleuve* is essentially centred on the life of the Beethovenian hero that Rolland is seeking to represent, and this has implications for the very nature of his self-relationship. Duchatelet remarks that the novel presents “un homme aux prises avec l’existence,” in which “la vie individuelle est en relation avec la Vie infinie” (“*J.C.*, « Cathédrale de l’art »” 57). The ubiquitous image of the river is coupled with another water symbol that makes present a tension towards the infinite within Christophe’s life, a sensual potentiality that will further reveal its importance as we continue our analysis. Early on in the novel, Christophe’s act of listening reveals yet another echo resounding through his experience: “Il entendait le bruit d’une mer, dont il était tout proche, séparé seulement par une muraille de dunes. Christophe n’avait nulle idée de ce qu’était cette mer et de ce qu’elle voulait de lui [...]. Rien qu’à l’entendre, à se bercer au bruit de sa grande voix [...]” (*JC* 63). The “mer infinie” (11), which is utilised throughout the novel, is defined by its voice, in front of which Christophe must reconfigure his stance towards the world through the very act of listening by which he perceives this otherness. The infinite *renvoi* of the sea exists in a linguistic tension, again expressed through the flowing waters of the river. The river’s ultimate destination is represented by an immense ocean into which it will finally empty itself at the end of the novel (1593). The presence of the ocean can be felt as a tension

throughout the entire course of the novel,<sup>55</sup> and this again occurs through a network of voices echoing within Christophe's experience. Rolland explicitly links this usage of voice to the discourse on the divine, since in the midst of his crisis of faith, like in the revelation of the *Buisson* which finds him in the depths of despair, Christophe hears the voice of the oceanic interior self as an alternative to the assignation of meaning in an exterior, ontological presence:

Christophe sentit, dans le silence bourdonnant de son cœur, la présence de son Être éternel. Les flots de la misérable vie s'agitaient au-dessous de Lui: qu'y avait-il de commun entre elle et Lui? [...] Christophe entendait battre ses artères, comme une mer intérieure; et une voix répétait: - Eternel...Je suis...Je suis... [Il] savait qu'elle était là, qu'elle ne cessait jamais, pareille à l'Océan qui gronde dans la nuit. (668)

In his dialogic relationship to the world, we find a process of *personnification* taking place within the depths of his bodily self, as the sensual tension towards speaking represented by the correlation between the river's "rythme puissant et monotone" (668) and the ocean reveals Christophe's self-identity functioning in a deconstructive mode. The resonance of the world, and the *renvoi* that this inherently involves, allows us to envisage the *Buisson* dialogue as the most intense manifestation of a foundational process occurring throughout Christophe's life, as his nature is revealed as a self-reflexive form of relationship. This conception of the self is inherently marked by a pulsation, a desire that acts as a propulsive force pushing towards the infinite. Nancy sees in this "désir de l'infini" an essential characteristic of revelation: "[Dans les religions dites «révélées»], le signe de l'infini, lui-même infini, s'envoie de lui-même. Toute religion, à coup sûr, est traversée par une motion, un élan de cette sorte [...]. Si nous sommes «finis» en cela que nous sommes mortels, cette finitude configure notre accès à l'infini" (A 61). A fundamental *élan* runs through both Christian revelation and the Beethovenian hero, since identity must incorporate the recognition of this incessant approach to the self which is never fully complete. The young Christophe, in the midst of his everyday reality,

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<sup>55</sup> As Rolland makes clear in his preparatory notes to the novel, Christophe's entire existence takes the form of a continual bathing in the waters of an ocean, which brings to mind the dialogue between Rolland and Freud on the *sentiment océanique*: "[D]ans cet océan de vie qui le baigne délicieusement, des myriades de visions, sensations, souvenirs, pressentiments précis, qui passent comme des éclairs, comme des poissons qui filent à travers l'eau, si vite qu'il peut à peine les entrevoir, et qui viennent autant du passé que de l'avenir" (Enveloppe VII 171).

encounters such an attraction towards the infinite within the finite space of the world: “La vie ne le tient pas encore; à tout instant, il s’en échappe: il nage dans l’infini” (JC 26). This thinking on revelation as a marker of the most profound part of the self anchors Christophe in the world, whilst pushing him towards what begins to come to light as a Trinitarian approach to presence.

As we have already seen, Nancy seeks to think the revelation of the sensual self in a way that avoids the closure of absolute self-presence and instead revolves around an opening that takes the form of a process of self-interrogation. Here we find the first component in Robichez’s vision of Christophe’s redefinition of presence through his experience of solitude, as the phenomenon of *renvoi* allows us to deconstruct this thinking in terms of the skill of listening we have seen the Beethovenian hero cultivating:

[L]e sens et le son partagent l’espace d’un renvoi, dans lequel en même temps ils renvoient l’un à l’autre, et que, de manière très générale, cet espace peut être défini comme celui d’un *soi*, ou d’un sujet. Un *soi* n’est rien d’autre qu’une forme ou une fonction de renvoi : un *soi* est fait d’un rapport à soi, ou d’une présence à soi, qui n’est pas autre chose que le renvoi mutuel entre une individuation sensible et une identité intelligible [...]. (AE 24)

*Renvoi* is like an infinite echo linking the self to the world in an endless cycle of *sens*, forming a musical text of resonance that is a constant referral outwards into the spacing between signs which defines existence. The listening self is positioned in this space of *renvoi*, because it can be envisaged as an infinite relationship to its own nature as a definable presence, a relationship that conditions the very access to its own self-being (25). By listening, one enters into the processes that make possible the existence of the self (25-26). Thus, when Christophe perceives the resonance of the world, he simultaneously communes with the most profound nature of his self as a coming-to-presence grounded in a self-reflexive relationship of *sens*. A pivotal moment in our study is therefore reached, because the rest of our deconstructive analysis will revolve around the definition of the self that this concept of *renvoi* gives rise to. The resonance of sound proposes a self-identity based on a musical coming-into-language, and thus we can say that the self that is inscribed into the harmonic text of the musical novel develops through Christophe’s participation in

the act of listening, the act of opening to his own nature as *sens*. The Beethovenian hero's perception of the sounds of the musical scale, and the relationship to otherness they propose, is replicated in the discourse he maintains with his own self. Although he may try to grasp his nature as a definable entity, this infinite "être sans limites" (JC 11) constantly eludes his grasp: "Depuis un an, Christophe était obsédé par des rêves, où il sentait [...] qu'il *était* à la fois plusieurs êtres différents, souvent lointains, séparés par des mondes, par des siècles [...]" (366). The multiplicity of voices we observed in our analysis of the Beethovenian genius is made existentially present within Christophe's life as a fragmentation of his sense of self centred on a redefinition of the meaning of presence. This is represented by the figure of a personified otherness that builds on the notion of *partage* we examined in our definition of the Beethovenian genius: "[U]ne autre âme assistait en lui, attentive et sereine, à ces efforts désespérés. Il ne la voyait pas ; mais elle jetait sur lui la réverbération de sa lumière cachée [...]. Elle lui faisait sentir qu'il n'était pas seul tout à fait" (366). All Christophe perceives is the reverberating echo of this mysterious entity, that is both identified with his own self and yet at the same time completely Other. The genius is dominated by the trace of dialogic otherness that defines his very identity, and again the *Buisson* is the focal point of this revelation. After passing through it, Christophe's awareness fully encompasses such a dialogic reality: "Il porte en son âme deux âmes" (1433). There is a link, then, between the tension we see towards expression and the very conception of the human self. If identity is made up of resonance, then it is also fundamentally composed of a *renvoi* that never ceases to relate to what is outside itself and yet all the while is encountered within the very limits of its worldly existence. The musical novel, through its central figure of the Beethovenian hero, posits what Nancy names a *crise de soi* (AE 25) at the heart of human reality, of which the act of listening is the central existential marker. It is within this *crise de soi* that we can finally locate a Trinitarian eruption of the Spirit through the world, an opening in the very fabric of finitude through which we must enter in order to continue our deconstruction.

Nancy uses the idea of *renvoi* to give shape to his approach to the concept of a divine Father existing in relationship with the Son through the movement of the Spirit, and here we can posit a convergence between an atheological conception of the divine and Christophe's *crise de soi*. The Trinity, read through the *renvoi* of music, presents

us with a method of engaging with Christophe's relationship to the divine through the most intimate nature of his self in fragmentation:

La génération du fils par le père n'est pas à comprendre selon la descendance, mais selon l'identité de nature à l'intérieur de laquelle s'ouvre la possibilité du « rapport » comme tel, c'est-à-dire du renvoi de sens de l'un à l'autre. C'est ainsi que le fils est dit « engendré, non produit » : il n'est pas extérieur au père mais il ouvre en quelque sorte en lui la dimension du rapport. Cette dimension se nomme à son tour l'esprit. (A 75-76)

I propose that the Trinitarian dimension of relationship exists within the dissociated self we have been examining, a self that is constantly being regenerated by the resonant *renvoi* that passes through it. After his encounter with Leonhard in particular, we can observe a crisis of identity in Christophe's life that explicitly operates according to this modality of sensual relationship. His experience exposes him to processes beyond his comprehension which become encapsulated in an otherness found within his very self: "Il ne comprenait point ce qui se passait en lui. Son être se désagrégait. [...] La nuit, il avait des sommeils pesants et hachés, des rêves monstrueux, des poussées de désirs : une âme de bête se ruait en lui" (JC 261). He becomes estranged from himself: "Au milieu de la plaine unie des heures s'ouvraient des trous béants, où l'être s'engouffrait. Christophe assistait à ce spectacle, comme s'il lui était étranger. Tout et tous,- et lui-même,- lui devenaient étrangers" (261). Christophe begins to question the relationship that this fragmented self holds with his exterior reality, no longer being capable of rationally demarcating himself from the rest of his family, the guests at the family table or the other members of the orchestra: "Car il ne savait plus s'il existait. Il parlait, et sa voix lui semblait sortir d'un autre corps" (262). Christophe's body and soul seem to constantly enter into a *crise* and come out the other side transfigured: "Comme on change de corps au courant de la vie, on change d'âme aussi [...]. Dans ces heures d'angoisse, l'être croit tout fini. Et tout va commencer. Une vie meurt. Une autre est déjà née" (263). We shall examine the significance of this death and rising to new life in more detail in the later chapters of the thesis, but even at this stage of our deconstruction we can remark upon the fundamental importance of the *crise de soi* plaguing Christophe's being. Through the "désirs qui lui tordaient les membres et le cerveau" (262), Christophe is opened up to a relationship that surpasses him, and we

could say that this occurs in a very similar way to the movement of the Spirit opening the Father in the *non-être* that is the Trinitarian God.

We have now reached the point of atheological limit that shapes Christian revelation, because *sens* as a self-reflexive relationship exposes the fragmentation of signification. In the *mort de Dieu*, the defining factor unifying the human and the divine becomes the absence of the self as presence. Christophe's *crise* is constantly referred back to the mystery of resonance, the "fôret des sons" (JC 59) within which he perceives a vertiginous gulf that most accurately portrays his worldly existence: "Une myriade de petites âmes gravitaient obscurément en son âme vers un point fixe, inconnu et certain [...]. Cet état perpétuel de dédoublement inconscient se manifestait surtout dans les moments vertigineux, où la vie quotidienne s'endort et où surgit des abîmes de sommeil le regard du sphinx, la face multiforme de l'Être" (366). Resonance is fundamentally a relationship with absence, the "renvoi d'une présence à autre chose qu'elle-même, ou à une absence de chose, le renvoi d'un *ici* à un *ailleurs*, d'un *donné* à un *don*, et toujours, à quelque égard, de *quelque chose* à *rien* (à la res du « rien »)" (AE 50). The entire structure of self-identity is dominated by an equilibrium between the known and the unknown, such that, through the resonance of sound, the self awakens to its nature as a finite self-presence fundamentally informed by absence. This leads to a radical understanding of the nothingness Christophe experiences after his encounter with Leonhard, a nothingness that is the essential precursor to the *Buisson* in which the "disappearance of God" is the central defining factor:

Et quand le puissant murmure se fut tu, quand ses derniers frémissements se furent éteints dans l'air, Christophe se réveilla. Il regarda, effaré, autour de lui [...]. Tout était changé autour de lui, en lui. Il n'y avait plus de Dieu... De même que la foi, la perte de la foi est souvent, elle aussi, un coup de la grâce, une lumière subite. (JC 249)

In a "coup de la grâce" we thus reach the climactic moment in which revelation is *bouclé* due to a complete absence of *sens*. The loss of faith in the terrifying divine figure of Christophe's childhood gives way to an intense perception of the vastness of a world that defies the measure of reason: "Il avait la sensation soudaine du vaste monde, brûlant, sauvage, incommensurable...le monde qui déborde Dieu !..." (250).



The experience of resonance removes pre-existing onto-theological structures based in signification and replaces them with the bare experience of relationship. It is this radical proposition that Nancy underlines in our understanding of Christianity. Through the advent of a Trinitarian God, all ontological signification of the divine disappears into what Nancy names the *avec* of relationship: “« Dieu » n’est autre chose- s’il s’agit d’une chose, et c’est peut-être bien *la chose* même- que cet *avec* lui-même” (A 61). As we have previously discussed, for Nancy Christianity is atheological because the monotheistic God deconstructs his own self through his nature as relationship, and therefore the disappearance of God is the “sens du monde,” a horizon dominated by the Cross of Christ (A 46). It is this atheological model that we can see beginning to accurately trace out the contours of Christophe’s experience of the divine, and listening summarises such an experience because it serves as the paradigm for a complete revision of the boundaries of the human and the divine.

The Trinitarian God corresponds to the Beethovenian genius because in the act of listening we see a form of divinity that identifies its own self-presence with an expansion into a world of resonating sound. What we can begin to think of as a Trinitarian *Dieu-vivant* is thus, within the novel, nothing but the self open to a resonating world, and in turn, a world open to its own nature as resonance: “« Dieu »: c’était un nom pour dire le rapport de tous les étants- pour dire donc le *monde* dans la force du mot” (A 46). After his encounter with Leonhard, we observe Christophe paradoxically occupying a stance of openness to the revelation of God: “Il avait tout remis en question à la fois : religion, morale, art, toute la vie. [...] Il était dans l’attente convulsive de choses indicibles, d’un miracle, d’un Dieu...” (JC 263-64). This attentive waiting for a divine advent is no longer oriented towards a presence coming from outside the self, but rather towards a coming-to-presence that will explode all pre-existing barriers dividing Christophe from the world:

Le voile se déchira. Ce fut un éblouissement. À la lueur de l’éclair, il vit, au fond de la nuit, il vit- il fut le Dieu. Le Dieu était en lui : Il brisait le plafond de la chambre, les murs de la maison ; Il faisait craquer les limites de l’être ; Il remplissait le ciel, l’univers, le néant. Le monde se ruait en Lui, comme une cataracte. [...] Il avait perdu le souffle, il était ivre de cette chute en Dieu...Dieu-abîme ! Dieu-gouffre, Brasier de l’Etre ! Ouragan de la vie !” (264)

Christophe's experience of the *Dieu-abîme* lays him bare to the stark existence of the world, since in this revision of the limits of presence he also discovers a new intensity of life that is equated with an authentic experience of the divine. We can perhaps suggest, then, that just as a loss of faith in Catholicism was a crucial step for Rolland in his own religious itinerary, Christophe's loss of faith is a crucial first stage in his discovery of an authentic poetic experience of God occurring in a deconstructive mode. In this new form of revelation, we see the fundamental nature of the harmonic world we have been investigating unveiled as a resonance entirely composed of sensual relationship. The link between this Trinitarian understanding and the Pre-Socratic philosophy of one of Rolland's primary influences, Heraclitus,<sup>56</sup> does not go unnoticed by Nancy: "*En diapheron eautô* (l'un différent de lui-même): tel est le rapport, pour autant qu'il « est » ou que « être » peut designer autre chose que l'Un en soi in-différent- ce qu'il ne peut, au vrai, qu'en résonant comme verbe être et non comme substantive, « l'être »" (A 111). The Trinitarian self is not a definable entity, but rather only exists in a continual approach to the self as *renvoi* because "« Je », c'est un rapport au monde" (112). The *Buisson* dialogue does not, therefore, occur with an ontological Other outside the self, but is rather a fundamental expression of the self's most intimate dialogic nature within the world. Listening is a unique and concrete marker of the divine, because only within this experience is the self opened up to resonance. As Nancy states: "Être à l'écoute, c'est donc entrer dans la tension et dans le guet d'un rapport à soi : *non pas*, il faut le souligner, un rapport à « moi » (sujet supposé donné) et pas non plus au « soi » de l'autre [...], mais le *rapport en soi* [...]" (AE 30). The very meaning of self-presence is deconstructed by the movement of resonance: "C'est passer, par conséquent, sur le registre de la présence à soi, étant entendu que le « soi » n'est précisément rien de disponible (de substantiel et de subsistant) à quoi on puisse être « présent », mais justement la résonance d'un renvoi" (30). What we can discern here is precisely the same phenomenon we observed occurring in Christian revelation in Chapter 1 since, as we see in Nancy's analysis of the *Dieu-vivant*, the Son is defined by "une annonce de la présence" which functions as an "interlocution comme sens infini de la personne pure ou de la vie pure" (D 226). The reality of life is revealed in dialogue, just as the Son comes into presence as an announcement through the opening of the

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<sup>56</sup> See Rolland's letter to Louise Cruppi (14 juillet 1910) and his letter to Dilip Kumar Roy (20 mars 1922) in which he emphasises the long-lasting impact Heraclitus had on his thought.

Spirit. The *Buisson* dialogue thus provides an unobstructed insight into Christophe's whole life as Trinitarian relationship, because the notion of an "interiority" expressed by the Beethovenian genius is revised through a *renvoi* that is the referral which most accurately defines the entire *roman-fleuve*.

In guise of a conclusion to this chapter, I would like to make some closing remarks that will allow us to review the position we have reached and determine the next stage in our deconstruction. We have seen that musical harmony epitomises the nature of the Beethovenian genius as an ideal expression of the unspeakable nature of the self, a harmony which forms the very thrust of the *roman-fleuve* as a representation of its central protagonist's life. Through deconstruction we can avoid binary definitions of this expression of interiority, and instead turn to the process of referral that is occurring within the heart of such a text. Nancy's concept of musical resonance provides the ideal means through which to examine such a referral, and through it we begin to approach the sensual movement intrinsic to the Holy Spirit we observe operating in the *Buisson* dialogue. Listening is the most appropriate means through which to view this opening to *sens*, because it uncovers the resonance of sound defining Christophe's world. By opening to resonance, Christophe begins to directly participate in his own fundamental nature as *renvoi*, a relationship to the self most appropriately encapsulated in the Christian Trinity, which puts itself forward as an atheological model of divinity made present within the immanence of the world. The Trinity defeats the closure of metaphysics and creates an opening to the coming-to-presence as *sens*. The *Buisson* dialogue is the key sign of this process unfolding within the novel because it allows us to observe how Christophe's self is essentially made up of a network of relationships, a harmony of voices continually referring to the infinite. Thus, the Beethovenian hero, as he who incarnates most fully the act of listening, presents an open self as a coming-to-presence concretised in the textual form of the river, which is the very image of the novel as a harmonic expression of the sensual self within the world. Throughout this analysis we have seen that *sens* and music are linked through resonance, and that this meeting forms a nexus at which revelation can be located within the novel. It is therefore within this opening of the world as sensual resonance that the Beethovenian genius' usage of the *force éternelle* must take place. We could in fact say that the process of *renvoi* is already unfolding in a poetic dimension, since it essentially involves an active articulation of

*sens* and, as we have discussed, poetics is the “organe de l’infini” (RP 20). However, carrying this idea further, we can pose another question. How exactly does this dialogic process within the self involve a fragmentation of signification that can be defined as poetic? That is to say, how does the *Buisson* dialogue involve a “call and response” that manages to inscribe *sens* back into textual form without devolving into metaphysical closure? In the next chapter, we will attempt to formulate an answer to this question through the poetic creativity that the *force éternelle* engenders within the Beethovenian genius, as we continue to deconstruct the narrative of his life through the framework of Christian revelation.

## Chapter 3

### Creation *Ex Nihilo*: the Poetic Force of the Trinity

In the previous chapter, we observed that the model of opening represented by the Holy Spirit is present within the harmonic text of the novel in the form of a musical resonance, which involves a process of *renvoi* inserting the infinite movement of *sens* into the finite space of the world. The Beethovenian genius, with the act of listening as his existential core, is the defining factor within the entire world of the novel, a world essentially characterised by the sensual opening of the Spirit. We will now undertake a deconstruction of the poetic musicality generated by the Beethovenian genius, exploring further how such a dialogic expression occurs in a Trinitarian dimension. Our deconstructive journey through the musical novel has begun to uncover certain constitutive elements that are held in common with the Christian narrative of revelation. In this chapter we will move on to examine the role of the *force éternelle de vie* as the next important element in our deconstruction of the poetic nature of this opening. If Christophe's relationship with the divine is one and the same as his relationship with the world, and if in turn this relationship defines the musical novel as a whole, it is within Trinitarian *renvoi* that we will be able to disassemble the poetic nature of this force (since, as we have seen, Rolland defines the harmonic expression of the Beethovenian hero as a poetic act). The Christian narrative of revelation, read through Nancy's project, will again serve as the key means through which to undertake such a deconstruction. In this chapter we will see a more tangible link with the Biblical narrative develop, as we trace the poetic movement of the *force éternelle* manifesting itself within the Beethovenian genius. Taking the opening of the world as our starting point, we will observe how the Biblical idea of a God who creates *ex nihilo* allows us to analyse the poetic creativity engendered by the Spirit. By deconstructing further the Beethovenian genius through Nancy's concept of presentation, we will see how this Biblical form of creativity corresponds to another key stance connected to the act of listening, which Nancy names "adoration." I propose that this concept will allow us to locate creation *ex nihilo* operating at the core of the *force éternelle* as it appears in the Beethovenian hero's musical expression. By undertaking such an analysis, we will be able to determine the extent to which the novel can be deconstructed as a

harmonic text defined by the action of a Trinitarian poetics, before moving on to look at the second two theological mysteries, the incarnation and the resurrection, in the following two chapters.

### *Ex Nihilo*

From the very beginning of the narrative of revelation in the Book of Genesis (1: 1-2), we observe a God who, throughout the history of Biblical exegesis, has come to be interpreted as creating out of nothingness, *ex nihilo* (see also 2 Maccabées 7:28). God's creation seems to be fundamentally divorced from himself, a separation we have seen cited by many critics as proof of Rolland's essential divergence from the Judeo-Christian tradition. But what if this initial creation *ex nihilo* is instead interpreted as a paradigm for the way in which the Trinitarian *athéologie* generates a poetic experience at the limit of signification? For Nancy, the act of creation is itself a fundamental stage in the revelation of an atheological God, and is unavoidably connected to the action of the Holy Spirit as a movement "hors de soi" (*D* 127), generating the Trinitarian dynamic of relationship we have already located in the novel. The very act of creating the world follows the same atheological pattern, since the monotheistic God is essentially "un dieu qui se met hors de soi par et dans une « création » (qui n'est en rien une production, mais précisément la mise-hors-de-soi)" (127). For this reason, the act of creation *ex nihilo* is an essential feature of the atheological revelation of God, and bears little resemblance to the binary opposition between an onto-theologically phrased Creator and his creation: "Il suffit de dire ceci: rigoureusement, un « créateur » bien compris se confond avec son acte de création et cet acte bien compris se confond avec une rupture fortuite du néant" (*A* 24). The opening of the Spirit characterising this creation can be located within the prefix *ex* which, for Nancy, indicates the very movement of opening by which the world is created: "*Ex* ne signifie pas « à partir de », mais bien « hors de », « à l'écart ». [...] Cet écart ouvre le monde" (24). *Ex nihilo* thus comes to light as the ideal deconstructive tool for this chapter, because it functions in an atheological mode whilst allowing us to investigate the creative properties of opening within the novel. As Nancy explains, the Biblical term proposes a form of creation that is built on the same disappearance of God we have been tracing:

*Ex nihilo*, c'est-à-dire: rien au principe, un rien de principe, rien que cela qui est, rien que cela qui croît (*creo, cresco*) sans principe de croissance, même pas (surtout pas) le principe d'autonomie d'une « nature » [...]. « Nihilisme », en effet, veut dire : faire principe du rien. Mais *ex nihilo* veut dire : défaire tout principe, y compris celui du rien. Cela veut dire : vider *rien* (*rem*, la chose) de toute principialité : c'est la création. (D 39)

With this theological concept, we find a remarkably paradoxical position that rivals the apparent impossibility of the Trinitarian God. The world is founded on a creation that essentially occurs through an absence of all principle, if we understand *principe* in Nancy's vocabulary to be the search for presence governing metaphysics. By utilising creation *ex nihilo* in our analysis of the poetics of Christophe's creation, we begin to discover the possibility of understanding the Biblical God in terms that recall Rolland's own words: "À nous de compléter l'œuvre de la Création! – « Dieu a créé l'homme », dit-on. Mais l'homme le lui rend bien ! Il est loin d'avoir fini de créer Dieu !" (*Mémoires* 144). We will therefore utilise this concept to examine the creativity that occurs through the process of opening in the self, seeking to deconstruct the process of *personnification* the Beethovenian genius executes in the poetic sphere.

Creation *ex nihilo* can in fact be identified as a crucial element within Nancy's thinking on art in general, and this in turn enlightens the way in which the concept can be useful in our study of the *force éternelle* in the novel. In highlighting the importance of art in understanding the broader sweep of Nancy's thought, Michaud and Lapidus underline the fact that Nancy wishes to question the nature of the "enigmatic experience" loosely defined as art outside of traditional conceptions of technique or aesthetics (104-05). This questioning takes a particular form which can be linked back to Nancy's comment on the Biblical shaping of the world: "In short, it's a question of grasping in this thought of art, in this 'art of art,' the creation of a world- and of the world, no less- which surges and withdraws" (Michaud and Lapidus 105-06). For Nancy, creation *ex nihilo* encapsulates the very presence of the world in all its aspects, including the musical (A 25), and indeed we can identify the presence of such a concept in Rolland's musical context as well. In his *Beethoven: The Philosophy of Music*, Adorno describes each of Beethoven's pieces as a "*creatio ex nihilo*" (12), and Darcy comments on the movement of force in Wagner's *Das*

*Rheingold* prelude in a similar way: “[*Creatio ex nihilo*] serves as a musical metaphor for the creation of the world and depicts the gradual evolution of impersonal natural forces into human consciousness” (98). It is this latter usage of the Biblical term that provides us with the most logical point of intersection between the concept of creation *ex nihilo* and the novel, a connection that is clearly discernable within the *Buisson*. It is evident that this meeting of the divine and the human involves the same movement visible within the *force éternelle* as it operates at the heart of the *personnification poétique*, and again it is the idea of dialogue that sums up this creative passage. In the *Buisson*, “God” not only asks Christophe to listen, but also to speak on his behalf: “Parle et frappe pour moi” (JC 1420). The act of speaking is tied to the harmony of voices we examined in the previous chapter, since Christophe is identified as one of God’s “voix.” Listening is thus coupled with another more active positioning of the self, which forms an integral part of the harmonic text. We can observe a unique form of writing being unleashed by this divine injunction, as Christophe enters into a frenzy of musical composition that exists in the harmonic modality of an unspeakable expression: “Écrire, pourquoi écrire ? est-ce qu’on peut écrire l’indicible?... Mais que cela fût possible ou non, il fallait qu’il écrivît” (1423). The musical phrases strike him in a random and uncontrollable fashion, defying the limits of signification: “[I]l eût été incapable souvent de dire ce que signifiaient ces phrases qui jaillissaient de lui” (1423). Soon after this scene, we reach the nucleus of this unfolding creative process, as Christophe realises the true nature of art as a force that is equated with the divine: “[L’Art] est la force, elle est le feu; elle est l’éclair jailli du ciel: par là, elle est sacrée” (1424). At the same time as this discourse on art is unfolding, another factor within the divine dialogue is revealed that adds another shade of meaning to the usage of the *force éternelle*. The act of speaking is governed by a divine “tâche” (1419), which Christophe participates in throughout the narrative, the “Combat éternel” (1420) that God fights within history. This divine battle proves to be another essential facet of the harmonic novel, as “le rythme du combat fait l’harmonie suprême” (1420). As we have already demonstrated, Nancy’s atheological Trinity implies a journey of faith unfolding through a historical self, and in the same way the God of the *Buisson* is resolutely historical in nature. By undertaking a study of the *force éternelle* operating within Christophe’s historically grounded form of art, I argue that we can further deconstruct the narrative of revelation taking place in the



novel because, as Schrijvers points out, “[t]he auto-deconstruction of Christianity is not merely to be regarded as a historical process. It also reveals something of the a-historical event of the creation of the world” (276). I will be arguing in this chapter that the concept of a creation *ex nihilo* allows us to understand the conjunction of *force éternelle* with an existential and historical form of art as the “poetic” function of the Trinitarian poetics. The next step in our deconstruction, however, must necessarily consist of an interrogation of the concept of poetics through the idea of a creative opening of the world, a step that will then be followed by an analysis of the role of force within this creation.

### **The Beethovenian Genius as Poetic Presentation**

We have already seen how the Beethovenian hero opens to a process of coming-to-presence that generates his very self through the act of listening. However, the opening of genius is not simply a passive state of being, since it in fact involves an active participation in this creative process. I would again like to use Nancy’s thought to help us examine how the Beethovenian hero utilises genius as an active self-production in which identity remains at the limit of signification. In a paper on the Japanese conceptual artist On Kawara,<sup>57</sup> Nancy explores poetry through its Greek etymological root:

*Tekné poiétiké* : technique productrice. [...] La pro-duction de la chose met la chose en avant, la présente et l’expose. [...] Le mot *poiesis* provient d’une famille verbale qui désigne la mise en ordre, l’arrangement, la disposition. La poésie dispose. L’art est disposition. Il dispose la chose selon l’ordonnance de la présence. Il est la technique productrice de la présence. (*TDP* 5)

The poetic, technical production of presence hinges on the idea of presentation, which I propose will serve as the central framework for our deconstruction of the poetic aspect of the Beethovenian genius’ creativity. Presentation allows us to consider the creative process as something actively functioning within the very movement of coming-to-presence that makes up the deepest nature of the self. As we

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<sup>57</sup> This paper was originally presented in January 1997 during an exhibition of On Kawara’s work entitled *Whole and Parts: 1964-1995* at Le Nouveau Musée/Institut d’art contemporain in Villeurbanne, France.

see in *La Déclosion*, the life of the living God is also based on such a process of presentation: “La vie du Dieu-vivant est proprement auto-affection, elle présente la personne à elle-même dans la dimension infinie d’elle-même à elle-même” (225-26). Presentation is an indispensable component of the communication of truth, as we discussed in Chapter 1, and poetics allows us to begin to think this presentation of truth (“l’être-*tel*”) in the dimension of “le mouvement de l’être-à” (*SM* 25). Genius, understood through the concept of presentation, would then simply be the ability to *present* the self to the world as *renvoi*, that is to say, the genius is the one who, building on the foundation provided by listening, enters into the processes that make being possible in a unique and creative way. An examination of Christophe’s Beethovenian mastery in this light would thus be an ideal way to approach a sensual self whose poetic-musical expression segues into a creative self-control following the pattern of resonance which defines the world.

Presentation in Nancy’s thought is not purely restricted to the *Déconstruction du christianisme*, however it is particularly well suited to an analysis of the creation *ex nihilo* which puts into motion the Biblical world-view and, as we shall see, it is also observable in the novel. Ian James underlines the fundamental importance of this concept for Nancy’s thinking on art, explaining it in terms that allow us to observe a link between the concept and the study of resonance we have been undertaking: “[W]hen Nancy says that art is the ‘presentation of presentation’, when he thinks of it as the birth or creation of a figure or a form, such a presentation is analogous to, or in a way a repetition of, the presentation or manifestation which is the coming-into-being of world, that is, the disclosure (or *surgissement*) of being-in-the-world itself” (*The Fragmentary Demand* 217-18). In the previous chapter, we established that Christophe is dominated by the echo of a world of resonance, his selfhood remaining fundamentally grounded in the *renvoi* of *sens*. Artistic creation, understood through Nancy’s conception of “la présentation de la présentation” (*M* 62), follows this pattern: it is not the mimetic representation of exterior form, but is rather a poetic act “[qui] articule *le sens*, exactement” (*RP* 12). Art as presentation allows us to envisage the creation of the Beethovenian hero as a form of writing working with the movement of resonance to inscribe the voices of the *avec*. Presentation enables us to examine how the life of the *Dieu-vivant* becomes poetically creative through an active participation in the very *surgissement* of the world itself, and thus how it

operates as a creation *ex nihilo*. From the very earliest stages of Christophe's life, we see him taking up a stance towards the world that is strongly reminiscent of Nancy's thought. He is composed of "des mondes ensevelis dans l'ombre, des nébuleuses qui s'organisent, un univers en formation" (JC 11). Christophe's creativity is grounded in the very formation of his own self, which is described as an "être [...] sans limites" (11). In another passage, after the *Buisson* (in *La Nouvelle journée*), we see this expressed in particularly vivid imagery:

Sa création musicale avait pris des formes sereines. [...] C'étaient les blancs nuages de l'été, montagnes de neige et d'or, grands oiseaux de lumière, qui planent avec lenteur et remplissent le ciel...Créer! Moissons qui mûrissent, au soleil calme d'août... [...] Un bourdonnement d'orgue; la ruche où les abeilles chantent, au fond du panier...De cette musique sombre et dorée, comme un rayon de miel d'automne, peu à peu se détache le rythme qui la mène; la ronde des planètes se dessine; elle tourne... (1565)

Rolland draws an explicit connection between the natural world and Christophe's creation to such an extent that Nancy's conception of presentation as the *surgissement* of being-in-the-world certainly seems to be what predominates. When Christophe creates, he doesn't just create aesthetic form restricted to the artistic sphere, but rather we witness the creation of an entire world: "Pour créer, comme c'est le rôle du génie, un monde de toutes pièces, organiquement constitué suivant ses lois intérieures, il faut y vivre tout entier" (791).<sup>58</sup> Thus a bridge between the act of living in the infinite realm of the *Dieu-vivant* and the act of creation is traced, such that Christophe's very existence begins to seem irrevocably tied up with this creative activity: "Car la création était chez lui un besoin irrésistible, qui ne se soumettait pas aux règles que son intelligence édictait. On ne crée pas par raison. On crée par nécessité" (396). At one point in particular this need is directly connected to the divine life: "Joie, fureur de joie, soleil qui illumine tout ce qui est et sera, joie divine de créer! Il n'y a de joie que de créer. Il n'y a d'êtres que ceux qui créent. Tous les autres sont des ombres, qui flottent sur la terre, étrangers à la vie" (382). It immediately becomes apparent that the authentic grounding within the world Christophe proposes as the alternative to Leonhard's heavenly fantasy is innately

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<sup>58</sup> Earlier in the novel, Christophe describes the pieces he plays in language evoking the natural world (JC 101-2). In his preparatory notes to the novel, Rolland writes: "J'appelle *génie* la communication, consciente ou inconsciente, volontaire ou involontaire, constante ou momentanée, de la personnalité avec les entrailles de la Nature" (Enveloppe I (a) 41).

creative, and the lack of such creativity leads to a state of non-being. By connecting this idea of existence as artistic presentation to the dialogic conception of the self that is presented in the *Buisson*, we can further deepen our investigation.

The desire for the infinite we explored in the previous chapter, encapsulated in the central image of the river flowing towards the sea, is simultaneously a desire for linguistic expression, because the *renvoi* of the self is a tension the Beethovenian hero seeks to resolve through the act of presentation. The entirety of the *Buisson* dialogue as a microcosm of the embryonic self is therefore oriented towards the act of speaking. Nancy states that the idea of the *dialogique* can perhaps be taken as representative of the history of thought in general, and the limit that it seeks to explore:

[A]vec le *dialogique*, il s'agit de la tension que le *logos* est lui-même en tant qu'il ne porte pas autre chose que l'effort de *dire* [...]. Car ce qu'il dit, ce qu'il *veut dire* revient toujours à ceci : dire *la chose même* [...]. Toutes les dialectiques sont en ce sens des dialogiques : des tensions du dire qui s'efforce et s'étire, jusqu'à s'y rompre, pour qu'advienne cela (la chose) dont il est dit d'emblée qu'elle restera non dite puisque ce qui est à dire, c'est précisément cela, qu'*il y a* (ceci, cela, l'être ou l'étant, le monde, la chose). (*D* 191-92)

The tension between the *logos* and the *alogon* is replicated in a tension towards speaking the ineffable or, in other words, “la puissance de *présenter*” (192) which Nancy connects to the very coming-into-being of the world itself. Like the God of the *Buisson*, the Biblical God executes his creation *ex nihilo* through an act of speech: “Dieu dit: « Que la lumière soit » et la lumière fut” (Genèse 1: 3). Presentation is the means by which the Beethovenian genius attempts to express a coming-to-presence that is the expression of the very fact of existence itself. It is therefore an artistic endeavour formulated according to the experience of being-in-the-world, not solely upon the nominative function of language. Presentation retains the character of a “prononciation [...] de ce qui n'est pas du tout à prononcer” (*SM* 137), since it is made up of nothing except the act of existence itself, and thus the expression of the creative genius begins to take shape according to the exigency represented by the poetic gesture in which “dire, c'est faire,” and “faire, c'est dire” (*RP* 14). Such an experience is synonymous with relationship itself, the access to *sens* (13) in which the network of *renvoi* that makes presence possible is exposed.

Where Nancy speaks of *la chose même*, we can in fact substitute another, more explicitly atheological term: “« Dieu » n’est autre chose – s’il s’agit d’une chose, et c’est peut-être bien *la chose même* – que cet *avec* lui-même” (A 61). Christophe’s poetic experience is therefore a type of creativity based on the presentation of the *avec*, a creativity whose function is to uncover the nature of being as *renvoi*. His participation in the *Buisson* dialogue is thus the culmination of a process of existential enquiry that in fact occurs throughout the entire length of the novel, and so this central scene of encounter again reaffirms its importance for our analysis. However, there is another narrative development in the novel that we must take into account here.

The cultivation of the poetic skill of “self-presentation” (because we can say that all Christophe is doing in his musical creation is exposing the very foundation of his own being), is vividly captured in Christophe’s interactions with his uncle Gottfried, who appears quite early on in the young hero’s musical explorations and plays a decisive guiding role in his coming to maturity. After his grandfather first discovers his talent, Christophe begins writing banal compositions without meaning, telling himself he is a “grand compositeur” (JC 87). One day, Christophe follows his uncle Gottfried, who is the object of ridicule for both Jean-Michel and Melchior (88-89), to the banks of the river. In the darkness, Gottfried begins to sing a song in which it seems Christophe can see reflected the very depths of his uncle’s heart (90). In contrast to Christophe’s pride and desire to prove himself, Gottfried proposes an alternate method of composition that is closely linked to the act of listening:

-Pour en faire, il faut être comme eux. Écoute...

[...] Une brume d’argent flottait au ras de terre, et sur les eaux miroitantes. Les grenouilles causaient, et l’on entendait dans les prés la flûte mélodieuse des crapauds. Le trémolo aigu des grillons semblait répondre au tremblement des étoiles. [...] Des collines au-dessus du fleuve, descendait le chant fragile d’un rossignol. (93)

Building on the act of listening, Gottfried proposes a creative stance towards the resonance of the world which unleashes a musical form that is both expressed by the listener and yet, at the same time, composed of nothing but his existential participation in reality, a fact Gottfried makes explicitly clear to Christophe: “Cela ne se fait pas” (92). Instead, this “musique du bon Dieu” (94) is presented through a

direct relationship with the world, and nature in particular: “La musique est dehors, quand tu respire le cher petit air du bon Dieu” (96).<sup>59</sup> Gottfried’s poetic presentation is generated by an active positioning of the listening self in front of creation, an access to *sens* that is neither “produit, ni opéré, ni réalisé, ni créé, ni agi, ni engendré” (RP 14), but simply a presentation of the resonance of the world. It is this poetic presentation that I propose we must now deconstruct, as its constitutive elements serve as particularly informative markers in our investigation into Christophe’s creation *ex nihilo*.

### **The Beethovenian Mastery and Adoration**

The first step in such a task is a return to the network of voices that Christophe must bring under his control, since the type of mastery Rolland advocates in the Beethovenian model holds important implications for Gottfried’s method of poetic presentation. If we turn again to the *Buisson* dialogue, we can get a clearer grasp on the way this mastery functions in a Trinitarian dimension. The Biblical creation *ex nihilo* is given its propulsive thrust by the Holy Spirit hovering over the primordial waters of the “abîme” (Genèse 1: 1-2),<sup>60</sup> and we can also discern the presence of the Spirit in the creativity of the *Buisson*, as we briefly discussed in Chapter 1. The process of speaking that the action of the Spirit implies (one that, as we have noted, is echoed in the creative Word of God in the Biblical narrative), is coupled with a usage of the same Spirit to exploit the movement of the *force éternelle* through the world. In the *Buisson*, Christophe comes to understand that he must remain in continual communion with the Spirit in order to retain control over his own self-presentation:

Il comprenait la vanité de son orgueil, la vanité de l’orgueil humain, sous le poing redoutable de la Force qui meut les mondes. Nul n’est maître de soi, avec certitude. Il faut veiller. Car si l’on s’endort, la Force se rue sur nous et nous emporte...dans quels abîmes ? [...] Nul, plus que l’artiste qui crée, ne se sent à sa merci : car, s’il est vraiment grand, il ne dit que ce que l’Esprit lui dicte. Et Christophe comprit la sagesse du vieux Haydn, se mettant à genoux,

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<sup>59</sup> It is interesting to note that the German name of this character, Gottfried, means “God’s peace,” another subtle reference to the religious import of his creative methodology.

<sup>60</sup> We could certainly draw a strong parallel between the “grands oiseaux de lumière” Rolland depicts in the scene of creation we looked at before (JC 1565) and this image of God’s Spirit over the waters.

chaque matin, avant de prendre la plume... *Vigila et ora*. Veillez et priez. Priez le Dieu, afin qu'il soit avec vous. Restez en communion amoureuse et pieuse avec l'Esprit de vie ! (JC 1425-26)

Interestingly, Rolland distinguishes between the *force éternelle* and the *Esprit de vie* in a way that can perhaps be read as a sign of the mastery that must come into effect. Although the movement of *sens* is ever-present as a potentiality residing within the self, as we will continue to explore in the remaining chapters of this thesis its force must be directed in order to become authentically creative in the realm of signification. Rolland indicates this developing mastery through the active positioning of the self he names prayer, a concept that will allow us to expand the dialogic reality we have been discussing even further. The *Dieu-vivant* is made present in creation through an act of communion with the opening of the Spirit, an act of prayer which is one and the same as the act of listening we have been exploring: “Peut-être, lorsqu'on *écoute*, lorsqu'on est *à l'écoute*, est-ce toujours d'une prière” (D 200). This Trinitarian positioning of the self is the next logical step in our analysis, since it is also intimately connected to Gottfried's method of creation, the act of prayer, according to Nancy, being tied up with the poetic category: “La « poésie » résiste, et la « prière » peut être une des formes au moins de sa résistance aussi bien que de sa déposition” (195). It is Gottfried who first insists on the adoption of a pious stance towards reality. Even after he imparts to Christophe the secret of his poetic creation, we find the latter falling into a “*crise intellectuelle*” (JC 367), manifested in a lapse into drunkenness. When Gottfried reappears, he makes Christophe another proposition which directly echoes the revelation of the *Buisson*: “*Veille et prie*” (370). Christophe responds that he no longer believes in God, and therefore that such an act is impossible for him to carry out. But Gottfried goes on to explain that, instead of the mystical state Christophe thinks he is being encouraged to enter, the act of prayer simply involves a receptive stance towards reality which goes hand-in-hand with the act of listening: “*Sois pieux devant le jour qui se lève. [...] Ne violente pas la vie. Vis aujourd'hui. Sois pieux envers chaque jour. [...] Aime-le, même quand il est gris et triste, comme aujourd'hui. [...] Sois pieux. Attends*” (370). After this encounter with Gottfried, Christophe begins to experience the first signs of self-mastery: “*Quel bonheur de vivre enfin, sans être la proie de la vie, d'être devenu son maître !*” (375). Rolland thus connects the act of

prayer as a patient and watchful expectancy to the concrete existentialism he tries to explore through the Beethovenian hero. Within this dialogic, open relationship with the world we find the locus of the creative act as presentation, and this leads us to another crucial concept in Nancy's vocabulary.

The meaning of the *Buisson* dialogue is expanded through the act of prayer because, as we have already suggested, Christophe does not receive the revelation of God as the interlocution of an onto-theological Other, but rather through the very positioning of his selfhood within a resonant world. In his discussion on the dialogic nature of philosophy, Nancy proposes an alternative vision of prayer through the utilisation of another term that perhaps more accurately communicates its essence:

L'ad-oration, c'est littéralement l'adresse de la parole. Mais, essentiellement, cette adresse est à l'autre de la parole : à la *res*. [...] De manière symétrique, le « vrai » destinataire de l'adoration est le réel dont la présence ne se confond pas avec le présent-donné, le réel dont la présence se donne ou qui se présente lui-même lorsque, précisément, il est « adressé ». (*D* 197-98)

Although Rolland does not explicitly use the term adoration in the context of the *Buisson*, I would argue that Christophe's dialogue with his unknown interlocutor can be understood as an open-ended act of adoration addressed to the very existential foundation of his reality, an invocation of *le réel* that does not seek to classify it in the realm of nomination, but rather simply recognises its coming-into-presence. As Nancy clarifies, such a process has little to do with the conventions surrounding belief in a God that dispenses favours on those who adore him: "L'adorant n'est pas un adorateur: il ne s'engage pas dans la vénération d'une idole" (*A* 95). In fact, adoration escapes the realm of belief altogether, being instead intimately connected to the defeat of the *principe* carried out by creation *ex nihilo*: "L'adoration consiste à se tenir au *rien*- ni raison, ni origine- de l'ouverture. Elle est cette tenue même" (25).<sup>61</sup> We could say that Christophe's entire journey is imbued with this act of adoration, in which the self is addressed to the *alogon* in a mutual process of self-

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<sup>61</sup> Nancy is careful to clarify that his deconstruction does not revolve around "la croyance," which he sees as a "weak, hypothetical or subjective form of knowledge" founded on a search for the *principe* (Watkin, *Difficult Atheism* 115). Rather, he proposes a return to "la foi," understood precisely in terms of such a relationship to *rien* (*D* 23-24). We do not have the space to delve further into this fundamental distinction here, but its importance will become more apparent towards the end of our analysis.



presentation. Later in the novel, during the same scene in which we observe him hearing the voice of his eternal ground of being, we see Christophe getting on his knees to pray whilst asking himself: “Qui priait-il ? Qui pouvait-il prier ? Il ne croyait pas en Dieu, il croyait qu’il n’y avait point de Dieu...Mais il fallait prier, il fallait *se* prier” (JC 668). It is after he performs this act that he is able to perceive the voice of his own self, and finds again “dans cette musique le calme et l’énergie qu’il y puisait, chaque fois qu’il s’y retrempait” (668). Thus we can say that the *Buisson* dialogue, understood as an act of adoration, is simply the most intense representation of a self-awakening occurring throughout the narrative under the guiding hand of Gottfried. As we shall see, this dialogic process holds within it the core proposal governing the creation *ex nihilo* that is unfolding in the novel.

Self-presentation exposes the poetic possibilities of language because of the way in which it serves as a negotiation of the limit of signification. Due to the fact it is not focused on classifying the reality it adores, prayer generates a particular type of language that is inherently without content: “Ce langage évidé, démuné, ce *logos* sans *muthos*- et qui serait aussi « dialogue » sans interlocuteur, dialogue suspendu sur son ouverture [...]” (D 194). Adoration is almost a cyclical form of speaking in which the call and response of revelation is unveiled: “Son adresse est déjà une réponse, et celle-ci ne répond ni à un ordre ni même à une autorité. Elle est la parole qui ne répond qu’à elle-même en quelque sorte: à sa propre ouverture, à la possibilité donnée dans le langage d’aller jusqu’à la limite des significations [...]” (A 95). The poetics of this *dialogue sans interlocuteur*, which creates an opening in the very fabric of the world, is most suitably captured by the rhythmic harmonies of music. Nancy rereads Saint Augustine’s famous claim that “chanter, c’est prier deux fois” in order to posit music as a poetic exposition of the *éternel*, which consists of the ceaseless and ever-repeating coming-to-presence of *sens* that signification can never hold onto: “Musique: éternel retour du commencement et de la fin, de l’un dans l’autre, retour de l’*éternel* comme tel, c’est-à-dire comme ce qui ouvre et suspend le temps” (A 96). Adoration is exemplified in musical expression because in it the poetic function of language is clearly displayed, and here we can perhaps locate the significance of the eternal nature of the force weaving its way through the novel (although it must be said that this concept in itself would warrant an entire thesis, and so we certainly cannot presume to carry out an exhaustive examination here).

When Christophe asks who wrote the song Gottfried sings during their first encounter, his uncle gives a cryptic response that the present reading illuminates: “Cela a toujours été” (JC 91). Through this composer-less music that never ceases to return to its origin, constantly repropounding a dialogic cycle of opening to *le réel* of the world, the self, by seeking to enter into the processes involved in its expression (the interplay of the *logos* and *alogon*), participates in its passage towards the limit of signification. Thus, through Gottfried’s pious stance towards reality, the Beethovenian genius further reveals its nature as the union of the self with the passage of language moving towards its limit, a passage in which the world poetically presents both its finite and its infinite nature: “[L]’infini est actuel” (RP 11). This passage towards the limit has as its result the reciprocal opening of the self and the world, or rather, the opening of the self *as* the world, as the *surgissement* of its very coming-into-being. Gottfried’s music pre-exists the creative endeavour of its composer, a paradoxical state of affairs made clear when he asks Christophe: “Qu’est-ce que tu as besoin de chanter ? [...] Est-ce qu’ils ne chantent pas mieux que tout ce que tu pourras faire ?” (JC 93). Such a creation *ex nihilo* has as its operative modality an open acceptance of reality, Christophe feeling the overwhelming desire to “embrasser les prés, le fleuve, le ciel, les chères étoiles” (93) while he is listening to it. Nancy continues his deconstruction of adoration through the musical model by speaking about *chant* in very similar terms:

Un chant qui serait tenu et tendu entre la forme pleine, ouvragée de l’*oratorio* et l’informe du *fredonnement* [...]. Le murmure et le balbutiement d’une célébration et d’une invocation, d’une exclamation qui vient d’avant le langage et va au-delà. [L]e monde se saluant lui-même, à travers la « nature » entière et jusqu’à l’ « homme » et sa « technique » que la nature a engendrés pour aller jusqu’au bout de son art : un savoir-faire de l’impossible, de l’incommensurable et de l’infini [...]. (A 96)

Gottfried’s poetic technique is a partaking in the coming-into-being of resonance, the opening of a space of infinite sensual possibility that can only be forged within a receptive, open self. Once again, it is the movement of *sens* underscoring the creative action of the Spirit that provides us with an appropriate template for understanding this process, since Nancy suggests that the deconstructive gesture within the Christian framework is understood as eternity irrupting into the temporal or, in other words, “l’au-delà venant ouvrir le là, lui donnant son être-là dans cette ouverture

même” (V 50). In a similar way, Rolland conceptualises the *Buisson* God as he who can “faire surgir l’éternel de la boue” through the creative action of the Spirit (JC 1426). Nancy sees in this opening the central preoccupation lying behind both Derrida’s *différance* and Heidegger’s *Dasein*, and here we return once again to the conception of the world as the “lieu du renvoi mutuel infini” to which the act of adoration responds: “L’adoration parle de cet infini qui lui parle, s’adresse à lui. Elle est en quelque sorte la louange du sens infini” (A 22). The act of adoration, and the address to *le réel* it entails, allows us to envisage the movement of the Spirit as a creative execution of *sens* within the Beethovenian hero’s self, a poetic “*praxis* de l’éternel retour du même” (RP 11). The Trinitarian and dialogic self is now understood as being composed of the very same phenomenon predominating within the mutual presentation of the world, that is to say, the opening up of the space of linguistic possibility within the dimension of the *avec*. Here we encounter the very possibility of human presence being revised at the limit of signification, and such a redefinition of presence through creation *ex nihilo* is clearly discernable in the Beethovenian mastery as it develops through the novel.

In the *Buisson*, Christophe experiences a climactic moment in which the domination of the otherness he has perceived throughout his life trajectory comes to consume his entire self, an event which has as its result a form of writing that breaks the boundaries of the artistic sphere. In this writing, we find another crucial element in the redefinition of presence that is gradually taking place: “Il était en proie à ce délire de l’esprit, que connaît tout génie, à cette volonté indépendante de la volonté, « *cette énigme indicible du monde et de la vie* », que Goethe appelait « *le démoniaque* » et contre laquelle il restait armé, mais qui le soumettait” (JC 1425). Possession by the *démoniaque* is signaled by the reign of what Rolland calls the “âme créatrice” (1425), which in turn is the sign of the action of the divine Spirit epitomised in the Beethovenian model. In his preparatory notes to the novel, Rolland cites a key phrase from Beethoven: “« Toute véritable production artistique est indépendante : *elle est plus puissante que l’artiste qui la crée*. Elle retourne à sa source, à la divinité, et n’a d’autre rapport avec l’homme que de témoigner de l’intervention divine en lui. »” (Enveloppe I (a) 256). The action of the *démoniaque*, manifested in the *force éternelle* moving through Christophe’s being, serves as a platform for the implementation of a Trinitarian poetics operating within an

existentially open self. We can thus perhaps say that Christophe's adherence to the movement of the Spirit through the act of adoration is a form of mastery that does not correspond to the usual definition of the term, as it paradoxically consists in recognising the very foundation-less, dialogic, nature of the self and submitting to the force that runs through it. It is a mastery that neither occurs through the suppression of such force, nor through its unbridled action, but rather, as Rolland again writes in his preparatory notes, the Beethovenian genius "consiste à être de plus conscient de ces forces, et à les diriger, à les canaliser, à les faire servir à l'action" (Enveloppe I (a) 41). In Christophe's creative experience, we can thus begin to observe a process of *personnification* taking place, in which the *force éternelle* (that can also in fact be understood as a plurality of forces) is consciously directed towards a form of poetic self-expression at the limit of signification. Just after his encounter with Gottfried, we find a passage which demonstrates this particularly well. In this scene, Christophe experiments with a musical creativity conceptualised as an "orage [qui] se prépare," a creation that involves the entirety of a world in formation, as "toute la nature attend l'explosion de la force qui s'amasse" (JC 381), and the "Éléments exaspérés, déchaînés de la cage où les tiennent enfermés les Lois qui assurent l'équilibre de l'esprit et l'existence des choses, règnent, informes et colossaux, dans la nuit de la conscience" (382). Christophe seems to experience creation *ex nihilo* on a truly world-scale, laying bare the action of force in a poetic creation that corresponds to the Trinitarian revelation as a defeat of the *principe*. In the continuation of this passage, we see Rolland highlight another key concept that will allow us to broaden our deconstruction of poetic presentation in the Christian dimension:

Il était transpercé par l'idée musicale. Tantôt, elle avait la forme d'une phrase isolée et complète ; plus fréquemment, d'une grande nébuleuse enveloppant toute une œuvre : la structure du morceau, ses lignes générales se laissaient deviner au travers d'un voile, que lacéraient par places des phrases éblouissantes, se détachant de l'ombre avec une netteté sculpturale. [...] Mais d'ordinaire, la force capricieuse, après s'être manifesté une fois, à l'improviste, disparaissait pour plusieurs jours dans ses retraites mystérieuses, en laissant derrière elle un sillon lumineux. (383)

The concept of manifestation accurately captures the essence of the *personnification* because, according to this creative schema, the source and destination of the *force*

*éternelle* remain completely unknown, even though Christophe soon comes to identify himself with its all-consuming power: “Cette force, c’est moi” (384). All the Beethovenian genius can do is wait for force to erupt from the “souterrains de l’Être, bien au delà des frontières où commence la conscience” (385), carrying a meaning that completely escapes the intelligence, but one that the intelligence must nevertheless seek to express in order to complete the “œuvre de l’intuition” (383). By submitting to the manifestation of force through the act of adoration, Christophe inevitably walks the limit of signification between an impossible presentation of the *sens* of the œuvre in question, and the insatiable need to execute such an expression through the poetic presentation of his entire self. Nancy allows us to formulate such an impossible presentation in a particularly useful way that will prepare the ground for the second part of this chapter.

The dialogic self-creativity that the poetic action of the Spirit engenders is constantly coming-to-presence, and is never definable as textual content in the way that non-poetic discourse is, since it only exists as a manifestation at the limit. For Nancy, this form of adoration is an “adresse, hommage, reconnaissance de ceci que son dire s’efface en allant vers ce qu’il dit (ne dira jamais)” (*D* 198). There are two fundamental movements occurring here, which Nancy conceptualises in distinctly dialogic terms:

Si nous disons que « dire » a pour office de dire la chose, son être ou plutôt même son « *qu’elle est* » [...], alors nous devons comprendre aussi que cet office consiste simultanément à poser un *dit* [...] et à effacer cette position même, à la déposer dans le propre mouvement de *dire*. [C]’est ce double mouvement qui permet à la chose de se présenter [...]. Essentiellement, le dire s’emploie à laisser le réel-*res*, la chose- se réaliser, c’est-à-dire être ce qu’il est et surtout être *qu’il est*. Ce « laisser être » est son office. (196-97)

Through the lens of creation *ex nihilo* conceptualised as an act of *laisser être*, we can envisage the verbalisation of adoration not as a content-based discourse of signification, but instead as a type of speech which simply directs and facilitates the movement of *sens* through a specific form of self-positioning within the world. The very existence of the Beethovenian hero becomes a type of writing of *sens* that is continually presenting and effacing itself with the coming-into-being of the world, just as Gottfried’s “symphonie de la nuit” (*JC* 94) seems to come from afar and

disappear again into the depths of the night (90). As Nancy says, adoration is essentially shaped around a *laisser être*: “Que fait donc la parole ? Elle s’adresse à ce « laisser être », elle l’invoque ou elle l’évoque, comme on pourra dire en sollicitant ces termes. Mais on dira plus directement, peut-être plus brutalement aussi : elle l’adore” (A 197). The mastery Christophe nurtures therefore engenders a form of poetic writing at the limit, governed by the act of *laisser être* that takes the ascendancy within a self already fragmented through the Trinitarian dissolution of presence. But there is yet another explicit link we can draw between the Trinitarian poetics and Biblical revelation here. In the *Buisson*, we read a particularly concise definition of the meaning of art we have been discussing: “[L’Art] est une comète lancée dans l’infini. [Cette force] est pareille au soleil, dont elle est issue. Le soleil [...] est Celui qui Est. Il vainc la nuit. Ainsi, l’art... (JC 1424-25) This passage serves as an ideal summary of the role of art as a poetic presentation functioning according to the very *surgissement* of the world, represented in this case by the image of the sun. We will return to the significance of the theme of light in the final chapter of the thesis, but for now I would like to interrogate further the notion of God as *Celui qui Est* that is put forward in this passage, because I argue that it further links our analysis of the musical novel to the poetics functioning at the heart of the Biblical text.

### ***Celui qui Est: Biblical Poetics and Historical Testimony***

Perhaps the most effective way of negotiating this section of our deconstruction is to briefly turn to the thought of Paul Ricœur, who was Nancy’s doctoral supervisor. Although it could be argued that Ricœur’s phenomenological and hermeneutic approach is at odds with Nancy’s deconstructive project, Watkin argues that the relationship between phenomenology and deconstruction is not as straightforward and clear-cut as it has been defined in some past scholarship (*Phenomenology or Deconstruction?* 4-5). Watkin uses Nancy’s philosophy as a sort of “mediation” between the thought of Ricœur and Derrida, and argues that in fact Nancy is heavily influenced by Ricœur’s approach (137).<sup>62</sup> He highlights Nancy’s classification of

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<sup>62</sup> However, Watkin is by no means the only critic to acknowledge a link between Nancy and Ricœur. Bird, for example, compares and contrasts the two philosophers’ thinking on community (13-17).

“ontology as opening and exposure, presence as passage and contact as interruption” (137) as a means of rethinking the phenomenological in a deconstructive space, arguing that “Nancy continues the Merleau-Pontean and Ricœurian rethinking of presence” (205). Thus we can say that Ricœur seeks to engage with the same questions that Nancy carries into the realm of what Ian James calls a “postphenomenological philosophy of existence” (*The Fragmentary Demand* 202), and so his perspective can perhaps be of use to us. The scope of this thesis does not allow for, nor require, a detailed investigation into the philosophical relationship between Nancy and Ricœur, nor for that matter does it call for a detailed study of Ricœur’s thought. However, what I do wish to focus on is a paper entitled “Herméneutique de l’idée de Révélation”<sup>63</sup> in which Ricœur seeks to re-evaluate the nature of revelation and its hermeneutical position in relation to philosophical thought. Looking at this paper we can, as a secondary and unintentional consequence of our study, add additional evidence to support Watkin’s perspective, because the parallels with Nancy’s conception of revelation are striking. Like Nancy, Ricœur sees revelation as unavoidably bound to the nature of the historical events recounted in the Biblical narrative, identifying the entire faith of Israel and the early Church with “la confession du caractère transcendant de ces événements nucléaires, instaurateurs, institutants” (20). For Ricœur, the divine, “innommable” name that God reveals to Moses in the Burning Bush serves as the central model for the subsequent transmission of this confession through tradition and, more importantly, through textual form. According to Ricœur, when Moses hears the name “Je suis celui qui suis,” it is not meant as a nominative definition of the divine but rather it simply “signifie le geste de la délivrance” (33) that God has carried out. Revelation is thus firmly anchored in historical experience, and the entire Bible, according to Ricœur, is a text that is continually referring to the “nom de l’Innommable” which functions as a type of “point de fuite” (42). We can easily see that this reference embedded within scripture functions according to a modality which holds great significance for our analysis of Christophe’s poetic self-presentation.

Ricœur uses poetics to enlighten the revelatory function within the text of the Bible, and his analysis here closely resembles Nancy’s. Like Nancy, Ricœur seeks to

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<sup>63</sup> This conference paper was originally given by Ricœur in 1976 at the Facultés universitaires Saint-Louis in Brussels.

emphasise poetics as a function of language that operates independently of linguistic description (39). Poetics gives rise to a text built on the same conception of *laisser être*, or as Ricœur describes it, “laisser être ce qui se montre” (41), that we observe within Christophe’s creative relationship to the *force éternelle*. Through this conception of God, Ricœur affirms that the true meaning of revelation within text is only understood by, and through, a consciousness that lets go of the deceptive belief in its own self-sufficiency and affirms the primacy of historical experience as the locus of the self (52). This creative narrative is projected in the form of “le témoignage historique,” which communicates the meaning of the “événements fondateurs” as the concrete, historical sign of the non self-constituting nature of the human self (51). Testimony, like Nancy’s conception of poetics, is a presentation of the self. Ricœur refers to Kant’s definition of the aesthetic productions of genius in the *Critique de la Faculté de Juger* as the imagination’s ability to “présenter” (*Darstellung*) that which continually escapes reason (Ricœur 53). The Bible can be read as a poetic form of testimony functioning according to the process of presentation, since “le poème de l’Exode et le poème de la Résurrection” (54) are principally addressed to our imaginative capacity to break into the poetic realm of experience. We can thus propose, without too much difficulty, that this conception of testimony as presentation is directly comparable to Nancy’s concept of the foundational texts of Christianity as *kérygma*, since both are linked through the poetic experience they seek to project. After having elaborated the role the *force éternelle* plays in crafting a poetic self-presentation grounded in *sens*, we can now add this perspective on the historical which Ricœur manages to elucidate so clearly.

If we are to fully understand Christophe’s adoration, his addressing of the self to *le réel*, it must be within the textual framework in which presentation segues into historical testimony, since it is in this modality that the self is “revealed” in the dimension of *sens*. An essential component of Gottfried’s method of prayer is his attitude towards the primacy of historical event, especially experiences of suffering. As we have seen Robichez assert, Christophe’s experiences of suffering, particularly the experience of solitude, serve as important factors in the redefinition of presence unfolding throughout the novel. After the death of Christophe’s grandfather, Jean-Michel, Gottfried seeks in vain to impart to Christophe the same humility he displays towards the natural world:



-Il faut se soumettre, mon enfant, répéta Gottfried. *Il l'a voulu. Il faut aimer ce qu'Il veut.*

-Je le déteste ! cria Christophe haineusement, montrant le poing au ciel.

[...]. Christophe lui-même eut peur de ce qu'il venait de dire, et il se mit à prier avec Gottfried. Mais son cœur bouillonnait ; et tandis qu'il répétait les mots d'humilité servile et de résignation, il n'y avait au fond de lui qu'un sentiment de révolte passionnée et d'horreur contre l'abominable chose, et l'Être monstrueux qui l'avait pu créer. (*JC* 129)

Gottfried's humble stance is intertwined with a conception of God's presence in the experience of suffering, a proposition that Christophe cannot accept. The echoes of his disagreement with Leonhard are discernable in this scene, as he interprets God as a menacing onto-theological Other. However, an alternative method of assigning meaning again presents itself through the act of adoration. In the scene in which Gottfried encourages Christophe to pray, we find that the kernel of his pious attitude in fact lies in a submission to the movement of history: "Si tu es bon, tout ira bien. Si tu ne l'es pas, si tu es faible, si tu ne réussis pas, eh bien, il faut encore être heureux ainsi. [...] Il faut faire ce qu'on peut...*Als ich kann*" (370). Communion with nature serves as a primary means through which to achieve such a submission, but it is only in the acceptance of the events of history that Christophe approaches the full significance of the act of humility, as he exclaims at the end of this scene: "Le vent glacial soufflait...- Souffle, souffle!...Fais ce que tu veux de moi! Emporte-moi!...Je sais bien où j'irai" (371). The Beethovenian genius is somehow fulfilled in humility, and we can observe this at the very heart of Rolland's reading of Goethe's *démoniaque*. In his preparatory notes to the novel, Rolland expresses the essentially historical character of this mysterious force: "*Le démoniaque* [...] se montre dans tous les événements que ne peuvent expliquer ni l'intelligence ni la raison" (Enveloppe I (a) 52). By submitting to the primacy of historical event, Christophe is exposed to a total self-address to *le réel*, since it is his very historical experience that testifies to the poetic potential of *sens*. We observe the *démoniaque* functioning on numerous occasions throughout the novel, especially in the scene describing the "force inconnue" that brings together Christophe's parents by prompting Melchior to ask for Louisa's hand in marriage "sans savoir pourquoi" (*JC* 9).<sup>64</sup> As we saw in

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<sup>64</sup> We also observe it in another early passage in which Christophe's future experience is presaged through the usage of force: "Et l'on n'entendit plus que le souffle égal des êtres endormis dans la chambre, compagnons de misère, attachés côte à côte sur la barque fragile, qu'une force vertigineuse emporte dans la Nuit" (*JC* 108-09).

Christophe's response to Gottfried's second attempt to instil in him a spirit of humility, his revolt against this historical force slowly turns to acceptance. Another example of this is found after he meets Franz Mannheim and begins to write musical criticism for *Dionysos*, the journal that Mannheim has started with some friends (413-16). His articles harshly criticise the falsity and mediocrity of the contemporary music scene (433-40), and spark off "une campagne acharnée" (441) against him that reaches its climactic point when the *Kapellmeister*, H. Euphrat, the conductor of the local "société orchestrale" (501), offers to play one of his works, deliberately instructing the orchestra to play badly in order to humiliate Christophe in front of the audience (504-06). Christophe leaves the concert hall in a rage, and when he eventually reaches the spot where his father drowned years before he decides, on a moment's impulse, to drown himself too (507). However, it is again the music of nature that breaks him out of this despair, pushing him into an almost irrational state of happiness in which he embraces life: "Il embrassa la terre avec ivresse. Il embrassait la vie. Je t'ai ! Tu es à moi. Ils ne peuvent pas t'enlever à moi. Qu'ils fassent ce qu'ils veulent ! Qu'ils me fassent souffrir !... Souffrir, c'est encore vivre !" (507-08). We can thus affirm that the act of adoration towards the natural world also involves a submission to history, which Christophe slowly develops throughout his life. It is this humility that, I argue, creates a firm textual bridge between the Biblical vision of creation and the novel.

When Nancy speaks about creation *ex nihilo*, he connects it to the act of adoration through the concept of humility, and this in turn can be observed as an experiential opening in the novel. In the *Buisson* dialogue, the act of humility plays an important role in Christophe's epiphany: "Il faut s'humilier devant le Dieu inconnu, qui *flat ubi vult*, qui souffle quand il veut, où il veut, l'amour, la mort, ou la vie" (JC 1426). The reception of the creative Spirit revolves around a humble stance towards reality, a usage replicated in Nancy's analysis: "« *Ex nihilo* » [...] cela veut dire aussi que Dieu fait quelque chose avec le plus humble. [...] L'humilité, qu'elle soit juive (Job) [ou] chrétienne (« *respexit humilitatem ancillae suae* ») [...] n'a rien à voir avec une humiliation. Elle mesure une distance infinie, rien d'autre" (A 25-26). The divine is present in humility because this act inherently consists of openness towards historical reality, which is at the centre of the *surgissement* of the world. Another climactic moment referring to such humility in Biblical terms occurs at the beginning

of *La Foire sur la place*, after Christophe has killed a soldier in a pub brawl and is forced to flee Germany (JC 617-33). Rolland paints a vivid portrait of the deep despair and loneliness Christophe experiences after his arrival in Paris through some key scenes from the Book of Job.<sup>65</sup> In the middle of a restless night, Christophe opens his suitcase and finds his grandfather's Bible, which has belonged to his family for generations:

Christophe n'avait jamais beaucoup lu ce livre; mais ce lui fut un bien inexprimable de le trouver, en cet instant. [...] Christophe se sentit moins seul, avec lui.

Il l'ouvrit aux plus sombres passages :

*La vie de l'homme sur la terre est une guerre continuelle, et ses jours sont comme les jours d'un mercenaire...* [Job 7 :1-3]

[...] *Quand je dis : Mon lit me consolera, le repos assoupira ma plainte, alors tu m'épouvantes par des songes, et tu me troubles par des visions...* [Job 7 :13-14]

*Jusqu'à quand ne m'épargneras-tu point ? Ne me donneras-tu point quelque relâche, pour que je puisse respirer ? Ai-je péché ? Que t'ai-je fait, ô gardien des hommes ?...* [Job 7 : 19-20]. (JC 647-48)

The story of Job, the just man who embraces the suffering given to him without losing his faith in the divine plan, serves as model for Christophe's confrontation with the "tristesse sans bornes" (648) in which he finds himself, offering a complete shift in paradigm. When he awakens, Christophe, "vit plus nettement encore l'ignominie de sa chambre ; il sentit sa misère et son isolement ; mais il les regarda en face. [...] Il redit la parole de Job : *Quand Dieu me tuerait, je ne laisserais pas d'espérer en Lui...* Il se leva, et commença le combat, avec tranquillité" (648). This scene perhaps serves as the clearest link between the usage of the Bible as a text and the presentation of Christophe's self that is unfolding within the novel. Rolland in fact makes direct reference to the problem of God and justice directly before the *Buisson* scene, where Christophe questions the nature of the divine in a Nietzschean fashion: "Si Dieu existe et le tolère [le crime contre la justice], il crie vengeance contre Dieu. S'il existe un Dieu bon, la plus humble des âmes vivantes doit être sauvée" (1413). Within the *Buisson* dialogue, Christophe finally understands that it

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<sup>65</sup> Interestingly, the Book of Job is also used as a central example in Ricoeur's analysis. He proposes that Job's final acceptance of the divine plan, and his rejection of the idea that life has no meaning, brings about a new "sens insoupçonné que ne saurait transcrire aucune parole, aucun *logos* dont l'homme puisse disposer" (27).

is into this very injustice that God has entered, in a movement reminiscent of the descent of Christ into the depths of human anguish: “Dieu souffre. Dieu combat. Avec ceux qui combattent et pour tous ceux qui souffrent” (1422). When Christophe enters back into the divine battle, he unconsciously participates in the revelation of the *Dieu-vivant* that is unfolding. An essential element of the *Buisson* dialogue consists of Christophe’s mysterious interlocutor revealing that he is in fact not “tout ce qui est” but rather the “Combat éternel [...], la Volonté libre, qui lutte éternellement” (1420). God is not a static entity, instead he is the historical movement in which Christophe has been participating through his suffering: “Et Christophe rentra dans la bataille divine [...], il planait au-dessus de lui-même, il se voyait d’en haut dans l’ensemble des choses ; et, d’un regard, lui apparut le sens de ses souffrances. Ses luttes faisaient partie du grand combat des mondes” (1422). The *sens* of these sufferings is the unpronounceable “harmonie suprême” (1420) that defines the *Dieu-vivant* as a historical phenomenon formed by the poetic human experience of self-abandonment. By abandoning himself to the primacy of historical events like Job, Christophe directs his being towards the movement of *sens* that forms its most primordial foundation. The *Buisson* dialogue is thus an explicit expression of an underlying current running through the novel, because Christophe’s suffering is a divine combat that is inaccessible to mortal ears and only executed within a historical self open to experience. It is in this opening to history that an understanding of the redefinition of presence through *ex nihilo* becomes possible.

Our deconstruction has reached a point at which we can identify a distinctly Trinitarian *athéologie* within Christophe’s poetic self-presentation. This *athéologie* in turn constitutes a revised form of presence in which the movement of *sens* is affirmed. Christophe’s perception of the “[s]ymphonie héroïque, où les dissonances mêmes qui se heurtent et se mêlent forment un concert serein” (*JC* 1422), is the precursor to the perception of resonance we discussed in the previous chapter: “Ces combats, cette paix, résonnaient dans Christophe” (1422). Here we find a crossroads at which the opening to event joins the *renvoi* characterising the Trinitarian self:

Le sens, c’est un renvoi ou un envoi vers ailleurs, vers d’autres (en moi ou hors de moi). [...] L’adoration désignerait un rapport à une présence qu’il n’est pas question de faire entrer « ici » mais au contraire de connaître et d’affirmer comme essentiellement « ailleurs », ouvrant l’ « ici » [...] C’est la présence,

non de quelque chose mais de l'ouverture, de la déhiscence, de la brèche ou de l'échappée de l' « ici » même. (A 17-18)

Through the act of adoration, the *Buisson* dialogue comes to be understood as a new presentation of presence defined by the constant movement of *sens* conjoining the Beethovenian self to a world of resonance. Christophe's self is entirely defined by the active relationship to an *ailleurs* that opens up experience and inscribes the *avec* within the text of his life. This is most vividly seen in an earlier scene recounting Christophe's interactions with a retired university professor named Peter Schulz (JC 555). One day, Schulz receives a packet of the "dernières nouveautés musicales," in which he finds Christophe's score for an adaptation of Paul Gerhardt's *Christliches Wanderlied* (*Chant du voyageur chrétien*). The words of this *lieder* replicate the opening to experience portrayed in the Book of Job (557), and through it, Schulz recognises his own self transported into a new creative modality: "C'était une âme comme la sienne, c'était son âme même, mais plus jeune et plus forte, qui souffrait, qui voulait espérer, qui voulait voir la Joie, qui la voyait" (556). This musical communication calls into question the very meaning of ontological being, since Christophe's music proposes a form of presence in absence that is more real than the physical presence of the hero. A new, poetic self develops that is nothing but the creative presentation of relationship, as Schulz and Christophe are mysteriously fused into one: "Près de la mort, il se sentait revivre dans la jeune âme d'un ami inconnu" (559). This scene serves as the window into a process that reaches its climax in the *Buisson*. Submission to the experience of solitude and abandonment outlined by Robichez has left in its wake a self forged through the creativity of opening itself: "Hontes, chagrins, amertumes, révélai à présent leur mystérieuse mission: elles avaient décomposé la terre, et elles l'avaient fertilisée; le soc de la douleur, en déchirant le cœur, avait ouvert de nouvelles sources de vie. [...] Une autre âme était née" (1423). The action of the Spirit as a poetic opening can be located within this resonant, historical self that actively addresses itself to the otherness present within the very structure of resonance. As Nancy says of creation *ex nihilo*: "La rupture ouvre l'identité par la différence et le dedans par le dehors, le jour par la nuit et rien par les choses. Mais en elle-même elle n'est rien, rien que l'écart, l'ouverture" (A 25). The revelation of the *sens* of the divine combat directly precedes Christophe's re-entry into the creative stream of force that is the propulsive

thrust behind the need to write we observed at the beginning of this chapter. Through our analysis of the Biblical poetics as historical testimony, we can now more fully define this writing as a poetic writing of the self occurring at the limit of signification. However, there is another crucial Biblical element here that will assist us in moving forward with our analysis, and will lay the groundwork for the remaining chapters of this thesis.

Taking a step back for a moment, we can observe Christophe's self-recreation playing out within the broad sweep of the narrative in a distinctly Biblical fashion, which further exposes the nature of the *Christophorous*' journey. If we are to continue moving towards an analysis of the divine, kerygmatic truth presented in the Gospels, we must first understand this journey in terms of a narrative progression that remains constant from the creation *ex nihilo* of the Book of Genesis, right up until the incarnation of Jesus Christ. In order to do this, I would briefly like to cast a glance at the vision of the Mosaic Law that Nancy and Ricœur both share. In Ricœur's analysis, the Law given on Mount Sinai is connected to the *événements fondateurs* of Israel's history, since the "Déclogue est la Loi d'un peuple délivré" (24). The presence of God within the events that saw the Israelites freed from the slavery of Egypt naturally shapes their future response to history, a response that is textually expressed in the Tablets of the Law. Ricœur echoes Christ's own statement in the Gospels (Matthieu 22: 34-40) in affirming that the Torah is summed up in one commandment, one directive towards holiness expressed in the Book of Deuteronomy: "Tu aimeras Yahvé ton Dieu de tout ton cœur, de toute ton âme, de tout ton pouvoir" (6: 5). This is the Law that becomes "gravé dans le cœur," reshaping the most intimate nature of the human being according to the opening to event (Ricœur 25). We observe this Law inscribed within the *Buisson*, when Christophe's opening to *sens* is directly referred back to the Deuteronomic injunction to love God and one's neighbour: "Il aimait, il *était* son prochain comme lui-même" (JC 1423). Rolland broadens this commandment even further, as Christophe's inability to feel the suffering of others is overcome in a new, open stance underscored by his own experience of suffering.<sup>66</sup> Ricœur argues that the Deuteronomic commandment represents a new relational quality that moves into the

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<sup>66</sup> See, for example, Christophe's previous inability to feel the suffering of Olivier (JC 1234).

New Testament when the same intention of holiness inscribed in the Mosaic Law is proclaimed in the Sermon on the Mount: “Dès lors, ce que le Sermon sur la Montagne proclame c’est la visée même de perfection et de sainteté qui traversait la Loi ancienne” (Ricœur 25; Matthieu 5-7). If we now carry this interpretation of the Law into the deconstructive register, we can expand on its implications for our project.

Nancy echoes Ricœur’s interpretation of the Mosaic Law in his conception of Sainthood, which allows us to envisage the “canonisation” of the Beethovenian hero at the end of the novel (*JC* 1593) in terms of two possible types of creative activity. We will observe Christophe negotiating these two creative options within his unfolding musical mastery in the remaining chapters of this thesis. Nancy explores the meaning of sin in terms of the history of salvation unfolding throughout scripture, explaining that it is only the concept of original sin as “une condition originelle d’historicité” (*D* 224), that makes our examination of the revelation of the Trinity in the life of the Son possible. Rather than envisaging sin as the infringement of a moral law, Nancy reinterprets the scene of encounter between Eve and the serpent in the Garden of Eden (Genèse 3) and suggests that the deception which takes place causes a shift in the orientation of *sens* from God onto the self: “Ce retournement du sens sur soi fait justement émerger le soi, le soi-même, le soi en tant que rapporté à soi, non distendu et non ouvert à l’autre” (*D* 224). Nancy’s idea of original sin revolves around the same distinction we have observed between a creation solely fixated on presence and the Beethovenian genius as a musical expression centred on the movement of *sens* as relationship with otherness. Christophe’s musical trajectory as a combat against the Parisian music scene’s “culte du moi” (*JC* 743) is thus enlightened by this Christian vision of historicity, which in turn further clarifies Robichez’s analysis of the *Christophorous*. Juxtaposed with the “homme fermé sur lui-même” (*A* 79) is the image of the saint, who allows his identity to be reshaped according to the resonance of *sens*: “La sainteté n’est pas (c’est d’ailleurs cela que le christianisme pense comme relève de la Loi ancienne dans la Loi nouvelle) l’observance de la Loi, mais l’ouverture à ce qui est adressé à la foi, l’ouverture à l’annonce, à la parole de l’autre” (*D* 224-25). Here we return once again to the *Buisson* dialogue which, by virtue of its very linguistic nature, is grounded in the tension between closure and sainthood that is finally resolved at the

end of the novel. In the *Buisson*, we glimpse a recreation of the self according to the paradigm imposed by the opening to relationship, as Christophe experiences the mysterious presence of “une âme étrangère, indifférente à ce qu’il avait aimé et souffert, à sa vie entière, une âme joyeuse, fantasque, sauvage, incompréhensible !” (JC 1425). Rolland connects this “âme étrangère” to the action of the *démoniaque*, inserting this reference into the passage in which Christophe is consumed by a musical creation that imposes itself on him and evades his conscious control. Thus both Ricœur and Nancy’s analyses allow us to see how the historical opening to the Other that occurs within the *Buisson*, expressed through the Biblical Law, is fundamental to Christophe’s burgeoning musical creation, and indeed to his very self-presentation as a creature founded on relationship.

Drawing together the various threads of our analysis, we can now use the historical movement of opening we have explored to complete our deconstruction of the *force éternelle* in terms of the Biblical creation *ex nihilo*. In the process, we will uncover its implications for the Beethovenian mastery which will in turn lead us into our analysis in Chapter 4. As an alternative to the self-creation of sin, Christophe meets the possibility of allowing the creativity of manifestation to poetically reshape his self by being open to the force pushing him towards otherness. Within this opening, we find the core processes of creation *ex nihilo* exposed in all their complexity: “*Nihil* serait en quelque sorte l’écartement lui-même, la tension de l’écart, sa pulsation ou sa pulsion” (A 25). The “écart [qui] ouvre le monde” (24) we have been studying essentially consists of a *pulsion*, which Nancy equates to the Christian virtues that lay the path towards sainthood.<sup>67</sup> Virtue is conceptualised as a “*pulsion*” (72) acting within the self, and is intimately connected to reason’s push towards the “inconditionné” (73), or as we have previously referred to it, the *alogon*.<sup>68</sup> For Nancy, this pulsion represents “la ou les forces qui nous précèdent et nous suivent, la ou les forces qui ne relèvent pas du calcul et du projet d’un sujet, mais dont on doit plutôt dire que c’est en les accueillant, en épousant leur élan qu’un sujet a quelque chance de se former [...]” (72). The new self that *pulsion* engenders is not one understood through the normal conception of subjectivity, since it is inherently

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<sup>67</sup> Nancy emphasises the link between the theological virtues and the opening to relationship: “On comprend que les vertus théologiques soient les forces qui s’emploient au rapport” (A 81).

<sup>68</sup> Ricœur also sees the call to holiness as a “pulsion” within the Torah (24).



founded on the infinite movement of *sens* in which “un homme a quelque chance de « passer infiniment l’homme »” (72). We can thus affirm that the Beethovenian hero’s mastery operates in this modality, as his submission to the *force éternelle* must be directed through the open stance towards otherness. We see Rolland refer to a similar conception of virtue during Christophe’s discovery of the *Dieu-abîme* after his encounter with Leonhard. In this state of being, he briefly abandons his musical creativity in favour of a reckless and unbridled form of virtue: “Les principes de vie stoïques, sous lesquels il avait eu plaisir jusque-là à ployer sa volonté : la morale, le Devoir, lui apparaissaient maintenant sans vérité. Leur despotisme jaloux se brisait contre la Nature. La saine, la forte, la libre nature humaine, voilà la seule vertu : au diable tout le reste !” (JC 267). His discovery of the human self as a vital force, free and independent from all preconceived ideological or philosophical systems brings Christophe to the point at which he thinks only of destruction, of “des actes aveugles et forcenés” (267). When he abandons himself to force in this way, he begins to lose his very sense of self: “Il luttait contre lui-même, et il ne savait de quel côté était le vrai Christophe. Une force aveugle l’assailait, il la fuyait en vain: c’était se fuir soi-même” (268-69). The opening of the self to creative manifestation is the formation of a self-identity based on the force moving through the interior life of the Beethovenian hero, a self that is simply made up of dialogic resonance. As Nancy emphasises, this *pulsion* does not function according to the conventional division between subject and object, but rather operates as a poetic thrust within being itself, transforming the dynamic of Christophe’s existential conception of self: “« Être », entendu comme verbe, veut dire « pousser » (ou « impulser », « lancer » et encore « ébranler », « exciter »). Être est pulsion et pulsation de l’étant en général” (A 73-74). By adhering to the force of manifestation, Christophe’s self-presentation redefines the very nature of presence itself, incorporating the Trinitarian dimension of relationship which proposes a realm of open being at the limit of signification. We clearly observe this occurring in another scene in which Christophe seems to enter a creative space characterised by the advent of a “vie illimitée” (JC 398), that holds within it a “pouvoir divin” (399) granting access to the same acceptance of reality we analysed in the textual link with the Book of Job. In this passage, Rolland connects opening to the force of virtue, further grounding our analysis in the Biblical progression from the Old Testament to the New: “Jubilation de tous les instants. Elle n’avait pas besoin de la joie, elle pouvait s’accommoder de la tristesse : sa source

était dans sa force, mère de tout bonheur et de toute vertu. Vivre, vivre trop !...” (398-99). Rolland defines this virtue as a fundamental characteristic of the true musician, and so I would like to suggest that through this concept we can understand the *Buisson* dialogue as the textual revelation of a process of continual poetic reshaping of the self through opening. Such an opening is most appropriately captured by the progression that is inscribed within the Mosaic Law and expressed at the limit of signification through the Biblical creation *ex nihilo*.

In conclusion to this stage of our deconstruction, we can now perhaps make some final observations on our analysis so far. We have seen that the creativity of the Beethovenian hero is a continuation of the act of listening in the form of prayer (or more precisely, adoration), which presents the self to a world of resonance. The textual form that the novel and the Bible share corresponds to such a poetic form of presentation based on revelation as manifestation, exemplified in the act of adoration as a creation *ex nihilo* built on *laisser être*. The Beethovenian genius begins to express the atheological Trinitarian God in the form of a *personnification poétique* of his own self in the infinite dimension of *sens*: “Cette annonce pure est l’interlocution comme sens infini de la personne pure ou de la vie pure” (*D* 226). The self is revealed as pure *sens* in a process which replicates the inner modality of Christian revelation. This poetic creation *ex nihilo* operates according to the opening brought by the Spirit, which is an opening of pure relationship: the relationship of the self to itself and to the world, the relationship between *logos* and *alogon*, the relationship between the unpronounceable harmonic foundation of the self and the musical creation that Christophe presents through his genius. Thus Christophe’s self, at this stage of our deconstruction, is simply a poetic self-presentation (or *personnification*) enacted through adoration, which makes the Spirit present within the self (as the Spirit opens the Son within the Father, constantly generating a Trinity of persons who are essentially defined by the relationship that exists between them). The *avec* of the atheological God is crafted into a text at the limit of signification, inscribing nothing but open relationship, the *écart* of *ex nihilo*. We have observed how the concept of virtue as a *pulsion* within being defines both the narrative of Christian revelation founded on *ex nihilo* and the Beethovenian hero’s adherence to the *force éternelle*. However, as we continue to deconstruct the truth communicated in the novel in the next two chapters, we will observe how this *pulsion*, or desire for

otherness, operating within Christophe's relationships brings into question the stability of the equilibrium maintained between the *logos* and the *alogon*, and thus how it calls for further investigation into the atheological character of the Christian narrative. As Perpich states, for Nancy the fact of being human essentially entails being a bodily self that is "both exposed to the world and the one who exposes or represents it" (79). This conception of the body, and the negotiation of the limit (the *mort de Dieu*) it brings with it as the Spirit traverses the realm of the flesh through the incarnation of Christ, will be our topic of discussion in the next chapter.

## Chapter 4

### Incarnation as *Excription*: Writing the Trinity through Body

The deconstruction carried out in the previous three chapters of this thesis has exposed a fundamental movement of opening which makes the atheological Trinity present within the Beethovenian hero's life. We have observed that such a movement defines God not as an onto-theological Other, but as a dialogue that takes place within the historical self as it opens to the *force éternelle* which shapes its nature as *sens* and refers outwards (*renvoi*) towards otherness. Through this movement, presence is creatively redefined as the Beethovenian genius' mastery of force crafts an open self that is a poetic execution of the Trinitarian *Dieu-vivant* acting within experience. Christophe's life is therefore understood as a *personnification poétique* of his own self inscribed within a text constantly suspended at the limit of signification. His dialogic self-interrogation is directed outwards towards an otherness that is existentially experienced through the very real opening that is occurring, but the resultant text is composed of nothing but the relationship to an elsewhere that defines the very *surissement* of the resonant world. We have thus been observing what I have defined as a Trinitarian poetics operating at the heart of the harmonic musical novel and the Biblical narrative, through the common experience of opening that they both share. However, there is another essential element in this atheological writing of the Trinity that determines its capacity to remain suspended at the limit of signification, an element corresponding to a third major aspect present within the *Buisson* dialogue. During the course of the dialogue with the *Dieu-vivant*, it is revealed that Christophe's life has not only been unfolding as an expression of the divine voice, as we have previously noted, but also that the combat he has been embroiled in has occurred through his participation as a member of the divine body: "Tu es une de mes voix, tu es un de mes bras. Parle et frappe pour moi" (JC 1420). In this chapter I will argue that this usage of body as an expression of the combat (or as we have defined it, the interplay of *sens* erupting within the resonant world) can most effectively be studied by positioning our analysis of the Trinitarian poetics within the textual progression from the Old Testament narrative we examined in the previous chapter to the *kerygmatic* text of

the New Testament, which will also be studied in terms of its poetic link to the musical novel. The pivotal concept functioning within such a progression is found in Nancy's *L'Adoration*:

Incarnation : ce n'est pas un séjour provisoire du dieu dans la chair, c'est « le verbe fait chair » ou la chair elle-même comme sens. C'est le corps comme image visible de l'invisible, manifestation de ce qui ne se manifeste pas. [...] Incarnation et résurrection déclinent ensemble une seule et même pensée : le corps est l'événement de l'esprit. Son avènement, sa venue au monde, et sa survenue, son irruption et son passage. (78)

Incarnation serves as a crucial element in the poetic presentation that the Spirit opens up as it moves through the finite space of the world, since the very *surgissement* of this world is somehow drawn together and presented by the revelation of the body as *sens*. By positioning Christophe's poetic self-writing in relation to this *événement de l'esprit*, I propose we can progress on to another stage in our deconstruction of the *personnification poétique* as it seeks to negotiate the limit of signification. Francis astutely recognises that, in order for Christophe to continue cultivating his Beethovenian genius, "il faudra la passion" ("Les œuvres musicales" 126). Directly after Christophe's insight into his bodily nature in the *Buisson*, we observe a shift occur in his creative activity along these same lines: "À présent, plus de route, c'était au sentiment de la frayer; l'esprit n'avait qu'à suivre. Son rôle n'était même plus de décrire la passion ; il devait faire corps avec elle et tâcher d'en épouser la loi intérieure" (JC 1420). Christophe realises that all of the formal musical techniques he has fallen back on in the past are no longer adequate (1423), and that a radically different, and specifically corporeal, method must be found with which to engage with his relationships. In this shift in creativity, the body, in Ian James' words, displays the "passage of sense as bodily event" (*The Fragmentary Demand* 107), an event for which I will argue the Christian model again serves as the most suitable deconstructive resource through Nancy's interpretation of its thinking on incarnation. In this chapter, we will examine the movement of incarnation taking place in terms of the unique form of writing Nancy names *excription*, using it to deconstruct the link between musical creativity and the relationships Christophe maintains in the novel. We have of course already examined some of these relationships, but in this chapter we will use Nancy's thinking on the incarnation to highlight a very specific

evolution that occurs within them, a narrative movement that reaches a climax in the adulterous affair Christophe falls into just before the *Buisson*. We will be focusing on the significance of the body in his platonic friendships with various male and female characters, whilst also underlining the particular importance of the three sexual relationships he consummates in the novel: his early tryst with Ada, his brief fling with the theatre actress Françoise Oudon, and his adulterous encounter with Anna Braun. Throughout all of these relationships, it is possible to pinpoint the redefinition of presence highlighted by Robichez, which will in turn be given further nuance by Nancy's deconstruction of the body. By examining how these relationships unfold through a very specific usage of the bodily self as a locus of touch, we will be able to come to an understanding of how *excription* provides an extremely useful lens for examining the insertion of the infinite movement of *sens* into the finite space of the world, through the *événement de l'esprit* that is the Christian incarnation. Within this body that is both "open and infinite," and "the open of closure itself" (Watkin, *Difficult Atheism* 86), we will seek to delineate the obstacle to truth that presents itself in Christophe's experience, which will then pave the way for the final stage of our deconstruction in Chapter 5.

### **The Christian Body: *Excription* as *Logos***

Before moving on to our analysis of Christophe's relationships in this light, we must define the Christian conception of body as it relates to the textual form of the novel. We can undertake such a task by turning to Nancy's deconstructive thought on incarnation in more detail.<sup>69</sup> As Hutchens explains, Nancy avoids the "body-soul incarnational paradigm" (54) because he seeks to envisage the Christian incarnation not as the entry into the bodily space of some immaterial spiritual entity which is inherently foreign to it (*D* 125), but rather as the passage of *sens* expressing itself within the flesh of the body. Once again, the Spirit is fundamental to this form of language at the limit:

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<sup>69</sup> It must be emphasised that a comprehensive examination of this area of Nancy's thought is impossible given the limited scope of this thesis. See Esposito for a more complete survey of the place Nancy's thinking on incarnation holds within the theological and philosophical landscape.

[Le corps chrétien] n'est pas autre chose que le *logos* lui-même qui se fait corps en tant que *logos* et selon sa *logique* la plus propre. Ce corps n'est pas autre chose que l'« esprit » sorti de lui-même ou de sa pure identité pour s'identifier non pas même à l'homme mais *comme* l'homme (et la femme, et la matière). (*D* 126)

For Nancy, the Christian incarnation is simply the continuation of the undermining of presence already occurring within “la mise-hors-de-soi” (127) of the Christian Trinity and the creative opening of *ex nihilo* that is inherent to its fundamental nature as relationship. I will argue that the process of *athéologie* we have been examining within Christophe’s Trinitarian poetics is rendered in bodily form through the action of emptying that characterises the incarnation, “la kénôse paulinienne,” which is further defined by Nancy as the “devenir-vide de Dieu” (127). What I propose we must undertake in this chapter, then, is an observation of how the musical creation of the Spirit finds its fullest expression in the incarnated body of the *Dieu-vivant*, as the second person of the Trinity, “le Fils, « image invisible du Dieu invisible »,” becomes “sa présence même” (225) through a divine self-presentation unfolding at the limit of signification. It is the *Buisson* dialogue that will again serve as a textual locus providing a glimpse into the meaning of Christophe’s need to incarnate his musicality, as he vehemently testifies to Olivier in the midst of the superficiality of the Parisian artistic scene: “Vos symphonies actuelles sont des têtes sans corps. Ô beaux esprits, incarnez-vous!” (*JC* 1139). Through an analysis of this unique form of writing in the novel, we will examine Rolland’s utilisation of the body to write the Trinitarian poetics, and thereby deconstruct another key aspect of the writing of limit undertaken within the harmonic text.

The alternative form of poetic musicality over which we have so far observed Christophe develop mastery is, from the first book of the novel cycle, unquestionably grounded in the body. Just as the body is for Nancy, as Ian James calls it, the “pivot” of the world without which existence cannot be thought (*The Fragmentary Demand* 131), so it is for Christophe’s musical creation. The force he perceives flowing through the world is profoundly connected to a resonance anchored in the flesh: “Son corps et son esprit sont toujours en mouvement” (*JC* 26). His creation cannot be isolated from his bodily self, as we quickly observe in the all-consuming ferocity of the poetic flow of force:

Il avait de brusques détonations nerveuses, comme des décharges électriques qui lui secouaient le corps. [...] L'ouverture de Beethoven entendue au concert grondait à son oreille. Elle remplissait la chambre de son souffle haletant. [I]l entendait les battements de ce cœur forcené qui saute dans la poitrine, ce sang tumultueux, il sentait sur sa face ces coups de vent frénétiques, qui cinglent et qui broient, et qui s'arrêtent soudain, brisés par une volonté d'Hercule. (108)

The musicality that the *force éternelle* unleashes within his being is anthropomorphised and emerges within the physical dimension of the body in the same way as it manifests itself through the natural world. In the scene in which the manifestation of force creatively presents the poetic experience of God as a *Dieu-abîme* (264), we observe the all-consuming corporeal nature of this resonant otherness: “[C]e ne fut plus un délire dangereux de l'esprit, ce fut une saine ivresse de tout l'être : corps et âme, fous de force” (265). The opening to nature found in the act of adoration is grounded in this simultaneous opening of the body, as Christophe experiences a bodily communion with nature: “Il ne se distinguait point du reste des choses” (265). We can thus affirm that the carnal space Rolland paints in the novel is resolutely defined by the sensual movement of a creative coming-to-presence linking the resonance of Christophe's self to the *surgissement* of a material world. This in turn leads us to the discovery of yet another essential factor within the *personnification poétique* as it operates in a deconstructed Christian dimension.

At the end of Chapter 3, we began to see that Christophe's musicality is not simply directed towards otherness in an infinite register, but is necessarily communicated within finite human relationships. With the Christian thinking on incarnation we can now, I propose, unravel this further. If we return to Rolland's original conception of the Beethovenian genius, we encounter an interaction between mastery of the *force éternelle* and another essential aspect that must work together with this creative self-control: “Beethoven est un des artistes exceptionnels qui ont uni au génie créateur, maître d'un immense empire intérieur, le génie du cœur fraternel à tous les humains” (JC XV). We can observe these two aspects of the Beethovenian genius functioning in accord with each other within Christophe's human relationships, and this equilibrium is inherently oriented towards a type of bodily poetics. Such an idea becomes clear in the continuation of the exchange between Christophe and Olivier on the need to incarnate art: “Le moindre d'entre nous porte en lui l'infini. L'infini



est en chaque homme qui a la simplicité d'être un homme, dans l'amant, dans l'ami [...]; il est le flot de vie, qui coule de l'un à l'autre, de l'autre à l'un..." (1140). The humility we observed unfolding in the previous chapter is intrinsically connected to the writing of life through the body, a writing that must unfold through the poetic opening of the infinite within the finite. As Christophe advises Olivier: "Écris la simple vie d'un de ces hommes simples [...]. Écris-la simplement" (1140). In the Christian thinking on incarnation, we find an ideal place in which to ground this infinite movement within the finite space of the world whilst retaining the necessary link to the limit that our *athéologie* requires. Nancy puts forward another perspective on the incarnation in *L'Adoration*: "Incarnation: que l'infinité divine ait son effectivité dans le rapport des étants finis" (108). As we have seen, the *surgissement* of Christophe's world is envisaged in precisely this manner, as a sensual "création des rapports" (A 108) which, through the incarnation, can now be positioned even more accurately within the resonance of the world. The idea of finite bodies in contact is crucial to an effective engagement with the infinite movement of *renvoi*, because both work together as a conjoined and mutual opening. We will see that the *renvoi* observable within the body clearly manifests the tension between the need to speak the ineffable and the immediate effacement of the resultant discourse that we examined in the previous chapter in our study of revelation as a *laisser être*. When art, that is, the "comète lancée dans l'infini" (JC 1424), passes through the body, we reach a dimension of presentation in which relationship becomes ever-more poetically negotiable, as the processes of a coming-to-presence reveal their infinity within the finitude of bodily interaction. This interpretation of the incarnation serves as the lens through which we can view Christophe's insistence on the fleshly grounding of art and the *personnification poétique* of the divine as two aspects of one creative, existential process. However, there is another crucial term in Nancy's philosophical vocabulary we must exploit in order to do this.

We have so far ascertained that the Christian *logos* is a bodily writing surging up through the sensual space which makes presence possible. By accessing the body, we can also access this potentiality lying hidden within metaphysics, concealed in Christophe's very being as it expands outwards in a network of human relationships. We will now utilise Nancy's concept of *excription* to join these elements together into what can be envisaged as a bodily musicality suspended at the limit. Although

we will be restricting our analysis in this chapter to two works within Nancy's œuvre, his pivotal essay on the body, *Corpus*, and another short conference paper entitled "De l'âme,"<sup>70</sup> *excription* already serves as the central notion underscoring Nancy's entire conception of art. Ian James explains that art follows the "logic of exscription" that also characterises Nancy's "realism" (*The Fragmentary Demand* 204), and so *excription* comes to light as a "liminal space of writing" (Kamuf 205) proposing an alternate ontology that revises the boundaries of bodily presence according to the movement of opening we have been examining. In the same way that Nancy envisages creation *ex nihilo* as an opening, the prefix *ex* at the beginning of the word *excription* delineates a creative opening within the flesh of the body, as William Robert affirms: "Equating *ex* and body ensures that body remains open, for *ex* marks a sign of ex-position that engenders mediation, transivity, passage, substitution [...] in events of ex-pulsion, ex-expression, [...] ex-scription, and ex-istence" (89). With the opening of *ex*, the ontological meaning of the body shifts in a way that can be useful for us in continuing our deconstruction of Christophe's Trinitarian *personnification poétique* at the limit. When Nancy speaks about *excription*, he incorporates it into a definition of body as that domain in which *sens* reveals itself as a coming-to-presence, remaining suspended at the limit and fragmenting outwards: "*Les corps n'ont lieu, ni dans le discours, ni dans la matière. Ils n'habitent ni « l'esprit », ni « le corps ». Ils ont lieu à la limite, en tant que la limite*" (C 16). The body moves beyond, or precedes, both the flesh and the spirit, serving as the place where *sens* meets its limit and is *bouclé*, to again evoke the image Nancy utilises in his analysis of the climactic point of Christian revelation (D 214). Through this conception of body as limit, we avert its pre-emptive placement into the metaphysical trap of closure and instead utilise it as a dimension in which to continue our analysis of the dialogue with *le réel* that Christophe undertakes through adoration. Nancy further clarifies the way forward in such an analysis of bodily writing through his thinking on touch:

C'est ainsi que l'ontologie s'avère comme écriture. « Écriture » veut dire : non la mostration, ni la démonstration, d'une signification, mais un geste pour *toucher* au *sens*. Un toucher, un tact qui est comme une adresse : celui qui écrit

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<sup>70</sup> This paper was originally given at a series of conferences and public meetings at the École régionale des Beaux-Arts du Mans (6-8 April 1994).

[...] touche sur le mode de s'adresser, de s'envoyer à la touche d'un dehors, d'un déroché, d'un écarté, d'un espacé. (C 16)

In a certain way, our entire analysis hinges on the connection between touch and writing because it serves as the focal point for our examination of dialogue as a poetic addressing of the self to *le réel* of existence. Van Rooden suggests that within what he names Nancy's ontological *poésie haptique*, "l'être est premièrement compris comme l'exposition des corps matériels qui se touchent réciproquement. Cet être ne peut que s'articuler de manière poétique, ou plus précisément ne peut qu'exister *comme* poésie, parce que la poésie n'est autre que l'inscription de cette exposition" (137). The body holds open the dialogue without interlocutor, as it addresses the self to an "outside" manifested within the thrust of being itself: "« Ontologie du corps » = excription de l'être. Existence adressée au-dehors [...]. Ex-istence : les corps sont l'exister, l'acte même de l'ex-istence, *l'être*" (C 18). The poetic act of bodily existence is thus simply a dialogue with *le réel* consisting of an infinite openness, and so the very fact of existence is a touching of the limit, an exposure to *sens* with the body as its ideal site of access. Here we can locate the Christian incarnation, because as William Robert indicates, "incarnation is exposition corporealized" (89). However, before moving forward into an application of *excription* as touch within the novel, Nancy's conception of bodily existence perhaps warrants a brief detour in order to connect it back to the fundamental idea of incarnation as it appears in Rolland's thought.

The important place bodily existence holds within Rolland's thought is evidenced by the way in which he speaks about sensation in the "Credo quia verum," which in turn segues into a comment on the incarnation. In this essay, Rolland reformulates the Cartesian Cogito with the help of Spinoza's thought in order to conceive human existence as fundamentally characterised by the subject's relationship to a sensual object: "Je sens donc 'Il Est'" (357).<sup>71</sup> Rolland then clarifies what he means by this sensory object, specifying that where his focus rests is on the basic fact of existence revealed by the act of sensing: "Quand je dis: 'Je sens, donc il est quelque chose,' - je n'appuie pas sur le mot: 'quelque chose', mais sur le fait d'existence, qui est

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<sup>71</sup> It is interesting to note that Ian James locates the opening of *excription* in Nancy's own re-reading of Descartes in his *Ego sum* ("The Persistence of the Subject" 138).

simple et sans restriction” (359). Rolland then summarises this fact of existence through the key concept of sensation: “Il Est sensation, - une sensation quelconque” (359). However, he avoids the relegation of sensation to the purely material, and instead moves towards a conception which accords with Nancy’s thinking on *sens* as that which makes presence possible:

On ne doit pas prendre le mot : *Sensation*, dans son sens le plus étroit. J’y fais rentrer jusqu’aux idées de la raison, jusqu’aux volitions, désirs, tendances [...]. Idées et volontés sont sensations en moi...L’idée de triangle ou d’égalité produit sur mon esprit une impression de contact, tout comme la volonté de lever le bras ou d’accomplir une action. (359)<sup>72</sup>

The entire human self is a sensory receptacle in which existence is a type of *contact* with the infinite: “Quelque chose que soit le contenu, il passe, et la Sensation *est*. Il faut donc que les existences particulières passent à l’infini dans l’Être immuable” (360). For Rolland, this thinking on existence is a way of conceptualising the “Unité infinie” that makes up God as the totality of sensations, a seemingly pantheistic divinity who is “tout et partout” (361). However, Rolland goes on to make another interesting statement that allows us to posit the Christian formula of the incarnation as an ideal model for our deconstruction: “La Raison est une forme inférieure de la Sensation divine, la forme de l’être relative: elle est proprement Dieu fait homme...Et *Verbum Caro factum est...*” (363). Can the body, and the mode of incarnate sensing it proposes, provide the framework through which to view the fact of existence as a dialogic reality leading us deeper into a deconstruction of the *personnification poétique* of God? There is another key concept here that can perhaps help us in our attempt to answer this question. Immediately after this passage, Rolland speaks about what he describes as a “Communion des âmes en Dieu” (363). In this communion, the divine comes to light as a form of resonant being-with, which Rolland encapsulates using the language of musical harmony: “Mon Moi divin se donne d’infinis spectacles, dont je suis un petit acteur,- immenses symphonies, dont je suis un accord.- Accords, dont les harmoniques sont modifiés par les vibrations des autres accords” (370). In the normal state of finite existence, the self perceives its life as limited and cannot access the “souffle de Vie” that

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<sup>72</sup> In fact, Nancy directly relates the *spinozisme* that Rolland elaborates here to the movement of *sens* (A 132).

animates the lives of others, nor the “Force divine” that acts through them (370). But by reading this communion of souls in terms of the *kenosis* of incarnation, we can perhaps begin to examine the process of *excription* through which a communion takes place at the point of limit. Rolland suggests that the self can become “une incarnation nouvelle” if a “vide absolu” is created within the soul (364). Here we return to the conception of the Beethovenian genius we examined in Chapter 2, but on a corporeal plane: the self is a microcosm of a dialogic world of bodily interaction which the artist is called to negotiate via this path of self-emptying. As Rolland writes, art is the pinnacle of such a process: “L’Art, brisant les barrières des âmes, nous permet d’être d’autres rôles (ou d’autres moments) de Dieu” (378). It is this curious connection drawn between the soul and the bodily process Rolland is discussing that I would like to focus on in our analysis of *excription* in the novel.

Rolland replicates the thinking put forward in the “Credo” in the *Buisson* dialogue, turning it into a textual device that we can also locate in the narrative flow as a whole. In the *Buisson*, Christophe realises that his soul must be broken: “Mon âme se brise ; par les fenêtres de mes blessures, l’air afflue ; je respire, je te retrouve, ô vie !...” (JC 1421). Continuing our examination of musicality as the invasion of otherness in the form of force, we can observe an unfolding process that echoes the Christian idea of *kenosis* in which the divine communion can take shape within the bodily space of resonant relationship. By placing the poetic self-presentation within this space of *mise-hors-de-soi*, we begin to re-examine the meaning of body throughout the narrative, and interrogate its role in a creativity which extends and opens the self in an action of emptying. The usage of the image of the soul in the *Buisson* revelation is repeated in a broader development within Christophe’s life, as his art moves towards the communal. After hearing Christophe’s music, Schultz “se sentait revivre dans la jeune âme d’un ami inconnu” (559). Later, his musical creation begins to form a communion that weaves itself through the threads of a divine drama of souls in resonant relationship:

Ainsi se formait autour de lui, suivant le rythme habituel de l’univers, cette petite famille du génie, qui se nourrit de lui et qui le nourrit, qui peu à peu s’étend, et finit par former une grande âme collective dont il est le foyer, comme un monde lumineux, une planète morale qui gravite dans l’espace, mêlant son chœur fraternel à l’harmonie des sphères. (1137)

The *surgissement* of the world inscribed within Christophe's creation *ex nihilo* is an essentially communal reality, as he realises his music can no longer remain a monologue if it is to engage with the harmony that actualises the divine creativity of *sens*. I would therefore like to propose that a "writing of the soul" is what best defines this creative stage, as Christophe remarks to Olivier: "Le style, c'est l'âme" (1140). Such writing can be clearly discerned in one of the relationships we will examine further later on, Christophe's romantic tryst with Françoise Oudon, whose acting style expresses the "âme commune aux millions d'êtres dont la force s'exprime en un seul" (1175). This writing must be traced within the concreteness of human relationships, and it is such a form of thinking on the soul that defines Rolland's conception of incarnation as a modality of art. We can suggest that the soul is the key element in the *excription* of incarnation because it represents a space of resonant relationship in which the line between the finite space of flesh and the infinite dimension of the divine becomes blurred. The soul, then, far from being a space of ineffable interiority, is essentially informed by the body and in turn informs the body's existence as *excription*.<sup>73</sup> We will now turn to Nancy's thinking on the soul in order to expand on the deconstructive possibilities of this concept, as we move into an analysis of the role *excription* as touch plays in the novel.

### **Body and Soul: *Exscribing* the Trinitarian Opening of the Flesh**

The soul, according to Nancy, can be envisaged as the self-awareness of sensory unity propelling the incarnation as a poetic *logos*, the space in which *sens* is touched in the body whilst following the logic of Trinitarian opening. Ian James calls the Nancean soul the "faculty of awareness of knowledge of extension" that is "extended throughout the body that knows or is aware" (*The Fragmentary Demand* 137). Nancy relates his definition of soul to the fact of existence we have just examined, in the process suggesting yet another formula with which to understand the fact of the body: "Le tout de l'expérience est là, *in nuce*, dans l'expérience du corps [...].

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<sup>73</sup> We clearly see this connection between body and soul when the otherness that invades Christophe is conceptualised as a giant "âme" entering the bodily space: "Cette âme gigantesque entrait en lui, distendait ses membres et son âme, et leur donnait des proportions colossales" (*JC* 108). We also observe it later on, during the first encounter between Christophe and Olivier, when Christophe contemplates his newfound friend: "Ici, l'âme affleurait à la surface; il y avait une vie morale dans chaque parcelle de chair" (824).

L'âme est un nom pour l'expérience que le corps *est*. [...] Expérience de quoi ? Expérience de « se sentir », de toucher à soi” (DA 191). The Trinitarian self is composed of a self-reflexive relationship, and it now becomes apparent that this necessarily unfolds through the bodily fact of existence. The approach to the self we have been examining as part of this Trinitarian formula of being is now observable in the bodily space of limit, and the soul, as the name for the experience that the body is, provides the lens through which to view it:

Le corps est l'unité d'un être hors de soi [...] l'unité du venir à soi comme un « se sentir », un « se toucher » qui nécessairement passe par le dehors [...]. Alors, ce que l'on appelait âme [...] c'est ce qui fait précisément cet *être dehors*, non pas cet être au-dehors, mais cet *être dehors sans dedans qui fait tout le dedans-* ou tout *l'être à soi*. L'âme est l'extension ou l'étendue du corps. (DA 189-90)

The soul is the name of the realm in which the body becomes a Trinitarian unity “hors de soi,” in a thinking on the self that distinctly echoes Rolland’s reformulation of the Cogito. The human subject is now seen as a “« se sentir » [qui] est un être en extériorité par rapport à soi-même. On se sent comme un dehors. [...] « Moi », c’est sentir une existence” (DA 187). This process of exteriorisation is extremely evident in the *Buisson*, alongside Christophe’s bodily revelation. Just before his epiphany on the need to respect the sovereignty of the Spirit over creation, we find a necessary preamble to this act of opening: “Il avait quitté Christophe. Il avait émigré en Dieu” (JC 1425). We can suggest that the movement out of the self does not consist of alienation from the body, nor from the world of resonance. Rather, it corresponds to Nancy’s conception of the soul as the exteriorising sensual movement that mobilises the finite bodily space. Christophe’s opening to the divine Law of holiness we examined at the end of Chapter 3 reveals another of its aspects here: “Il aimait, il *était* son prochain comme lui-même. Et tout lui était « prochain », de l’herbe qu’il foulait à la main qu’il serrait” (1423). The resonance of the outside world comes into being in the same *surgissement* of his bodily self, as this exterior reality is compared to “un tourbillon de sang” (1423) through which he lives his ever-deepening relationship to the world. Thus we can suggest that the Trinitarian understanding of the *Buisson* dialogue is further concretised within a dialogic opening of the body encapsulated by Nancy’s thinking of the self as a “se sentir,” which represents the

impossible touching of body and soul. The soul therefore comes to light as a writing of *sens*, a “toucher poétique” (Van Rooden 132), which can be located in the narrative of the novel.

Touch, when it is interpreted according to the logic of corporeal opening, manifests itself in a particularly intense way in the poetic form of musical creation. When Christophe receives the piano he is given as a gift from his grandfather, he touches the keys as if he were poking “la carapace verte de quelque gros insecte” (*JC* 58). Rolland links the notes issuing from the piano to the natural world through anthropomorphic images for which the tangible contact of human relationships serves as the ultimate model:

[L]e plus beau de tout, c'est quand on met deux doigts sur deux touches à la fois. [...] Quelquefois, les deux esprits sont ennemis ; ils s'irritent, ils se frappent, ils se haïssent, ils bourdonnent d'un air vexé [...]. Christophe adore ce jeu : on dirait des monstres enchaînés, qui mordent leurs liens, qui heurtent les murs de leur prison [...]. (59)

Through touch, music serves as a paradigm for the extension of the body into the Trinitarian dimension of relationship, and this is made clear by its nature as a tonal phenomenon. Nancy writes of the relationship between the extension of the body and tone: “Qu'est-ce qui fait une extension? C'est une tension [...]. Un corps c'est donc une tension. Et l'origine grecque du mot est « *tonos* », le ton. Un corps est un ton” (DA 190). We find the tonality of music pushing Christophe towards the bodily relationships that will, as we shall soon see, come to define his later trajectory: “[D]'autres fois encore, il y a des notes qui s'aiment: les sons s'enlacent, comme on fait avec les bras, quand on se baise ; ils sont gracieux et doux [...]” (*JC* 59). These early scenes of sensual passage beyond the physical limits of the conventional idea of the body lay the groundwork for the formation of the *âme collective* Christophe must poetically generate. With this concept of body in extension, we come closer to defining Christophe's music as a form of *excription*, but there is another term that Nancy uses to express even more accurately the creative aspect of this process. He uses the Greek word *tekné*, which can be translated as “art” or “craft” (“Technic” *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*), to help think the sensual exposure of bodies, and relates this embodied sharing of *sens* to creation: “La « création » est la



*techné* des corps. Notre monde crée le grand nombre des corps, il se crée en tant que monde des corps” (C 88). The *tekné poiétiké* we utilised as a focal point for our analysis of Christophe’s self-presentation is now further clarified in light of the *excription* of body. Ian James asserts that “*technē* is not the iteration of signifying traces, but the touch in distance of sense and matter” (*The Fragmentary Demand* 148). This paradoxical touching of *sens* clearly manifests itself within Christophe’s poetic musicality:

[T]out vrai musicien vit dans un univers sonore, et [...] ses journées se déroulent en lui, comme un flot de musique. La musique est l’air qu’il respire, le ciel qui l’enveloppe. Même son âme est musique ; musique, tout ce qu’elle aime, hait, souffre, craint, espère. Une âme musicale, quand elle aime un beau corps, le voit comme une musique. (JC 701)

The Beethovenian hero seeks to express the soul through the very fact of his existence, and again the “accord délicieux” (701) of music provides a model for the uncovering of the network of *renvoi* in the bodily realm of *techné*. Musical creation is the *surissement* of a world in which the body and soul are extended outwards, forming a new fabric of finite relationships in which the self knows itself through an exteriorised interaction with otherness. Christophe’s newfound realisation of musical corporeality finds its corresponding theoretical template in what Nancy refers to as the “*techné du prochain*”: “[L]e « prochain » comme *techné* serait la « création » et l’« art » véritable de *notre monde*” (C 90). Through this *techné*, which Watkin calls “an invitation to the sharing of sense” (*Difficult Atheism* 85), the body and soul communicate in a radically new way. The experience of the soul as the musical outside of the body is repeated numerous times within Christophe’s experience, especially in his relationship with Olivier: “Votre petit poète ? dit-elle. Il se nomme Olivier Jeannin. L’écho de ce nom tinta aux oreilles de Christophe comme une musique connue” (JC 825). Later, after they have met and Christophe has realised the beauty of having a friend through whose incarnate self one can “renaître jeune et frais” and “goûter avec ses yeux le monde renouvelé” (927), the Beethovenian hero exclaims: “Maintenant, je connais le son de votre âme” (934). The musical sharing of souls soon comes to define their relationship: “Ils passaient des heures à voguer à

la découverte dans l'âme de l'ami" (941).<sup>74</sup> After Olivier's death, Christophe is destroyed in both dimensions of his self: "Il était brisé de corps et d'âme" (1333). Later, he imagines that he can still dialogue with his lost friend: "Mon âme, je n'ai pas reçu ta lettre aujourd'hui" (1341). The usage of the soul as a technical device of extension therefore begins to form a writing that is nothing but an opening towards otherness within the tangible dimension of the flesh, through the creative movement of *ex*. The technicity revealed here in turn orients us towards a more nuanced understanding of the positioning of this writing at the limit.

Having examined the link between touch and music, we can now propose that the writing of *excription* as an act of *techné* is suspended at the Trinitarian limit of signification through the very structure of the self-touching that is taking place. Ian James reminds us that, when we speak of touch, we must be careful to understand it only as a "rupture, dislocation, or effraction of terms which touch only in their absolute separation" (*The Fragmentary Demand* 150). Here we begin to approach the heart of our discussion on *excription* as a writing of *kenosis* suspended at the limit, since touch, in forging an irresolvable tension between *renvoi* and the flesh of the body, also produces a similar polemical relationship between *sens* and linguistic expression. Ian James clarifies that this is where the dialogue with *le réel* segues into *excription*: "The realism here can be located in this logic of the limit, where body, sense, and signification touch at their limit in the event of existence itself as a temporal-spatial sharing of a meaningful world" (150). In the touch of *excription*, the self undergoes a process of *kenosis* and begins to disappear in a Trinitarian self-reflexive relationship: "Il n'y a plus de sujet « derrière ». Il n'y a qu'un « se sentir », comme rapport à soi comme dehors" (DA 188). We clearly see this disappearance of the self in one particular scene of creative interaction between Christophe and Olivier: "Créer avec son cœur et le cœur de son ami! L'étreinte de deux amants n'est pas plus douce et plus ardente que cet accouplement de deux âmes amies. Elles avaient fini par se fondre si bien qu'il leur arrivait d'avoir les mêmes éclairs de pensée, à la fois" (JC 1073). The creative process of *techné* is a contact that maintains unity in separation, a writing in which each word "*reste essentiellement étendu entre les autres mots, tendu à les toucher, sans les rejoindre pourtant : et cela*

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<sup>74</sup> A very similar usage of the soul is observable in Christophe's other relationships as well. For example, earlier in the novel he refers to his friend Otto as "ma chère âme" (171).

est le langage en tant que *corps*” (C 70). The self as an existence outside of itself becomes a means of thinking about existence as spatial opening, and this in turn provides us with an alternative reading of the incarnation. Instead of envisaging God as a disembodied otherness coming into the world, we can think of *kenosis* as the opening of space, the “là,” which “lui-même n’est fait que d’ouverture et d’exposition” (DA 188). Christophe’s musical creation maintains itself at the limit of signification through the dialogic opening of the *Buisson*, which inscribes itself into text whilst at the same time *exscribing* itself outwards towards the space in which all signification fragments into the nothingness of *kenosis*.

In the incarnation, the opening of the Spirit forms a content-less poetic text within a body of *sens*. Such a body is *exscribed* out of the categories of determined meaning that previously defined the body and soul, as Christophe moves into a mode of presentation in which the flesh becomes the fullest expression of sensual revelation at the limit: “Le corps n’est ni « signifiant », ni « signifié ». Il est exposant/exposé: *ausgedehnt*, extension de l’effraction qu’est l’existence” (C 24). The body is “la fin du sens” (22) because it no longer refers to any ideological production of meaning. It is simply an exposition of the self as an outside. That is to say, it is a dialogue with, or an address to, the *avec*. By the simple fact of his bodily existence, Christophe’s self-presentation reaches a limit at which he begins to speak the poetic reality of *sens* in a way that enlightens the *Buisson* dialogue from another angle. This is particularly evident after Christophe witnesses the death of his mother and begins to contemplate his trajectory of suffering in light of “toutes les humbles âmes qu’il avait connues,” a collective soul forming the “cœur du monde” which suffers together in silence (JC 1085). Within this “cœur fraternel” (here we can draw a link back to the second characteristic feature of the Beethovenian genius), the fragmentation of Christophe’s soul reaches its poetic apex, as Robichez’s redefinition of presence begins to take firmer shape within his experience:

Oui, je vous reconnais, je vous retrouve enfin, vous êtes de mon sang, vous êtes miennes. Comme l’Enfant prodigue, je vous ai quittées, pour suivre les ombres qui passaient sur le chemin. Je reviens à vous, accueillez-moi. Nous sommes un seul être, vivants et morts ; où je suis, vous êtes avec moi. [...] Nous ferons route ensemble. Je serai votre voix. Par nos forces unies, nous atteindrons au but... (1085)

The *Buisson* revelation is prefigured in this usage of the parable of the “Enfant prodigue” (Luc 15: 11-32) to delineate a new phase of speaking the divine *athéologie* through a body of *sens*. In other words, Christophe simply affirms the dialogic reality of existence as it *exscribes* a text that is entirely Trinitarian in nature. Again, the image of harmony coalesces at the centre of this scene: “Ô paix, divine harmonie, musique de l’âme délivrée, où se fondent la douleur et la joie, et la mort et la vie, et les races ennemies, les races fraternelles [...]” (JC 1085-86). We can identify a continuation of the act of adoration since, as Nancy emphasises in his analysis, prayer is essentially a physical act defined by its bodily openness, by “une disposition vers le dehors, une mise à disposition, l’action de la passivité ou de la passion qui s’ouvre au dehors” (D 201). The nature of the incarnation as a reality forged by the technical creation of the Spirit thus becomes clear: Christophe’s adoration, his pious stance towards the movement of *sens*, is completed here in this sensual body that is also the formation of a body of Spirit in the life of the Son.<sup>75</sup> The desire to “s’oublier dans l’univers” (JC 267) that he experiences during his meeting with Leonhard has, at this stage of the narrative, become an essential fact of bodily existence. However, there is another important aspect of this harmonic writing, and therefore also of Christophe’s relationships, that we must take into account in order to achieve a full understanding of the incarnation as it is *exscribed* within the life of the Beethovenian hero. After uncovering this final aspect with particular reference to Christophe’s three sexual relationships, we will conclude this chapter by circumscribing a very particular problem that is thrown up within Christophe’s relational reality: the barrier of death that must be engaged with in any discussion on divine truth. We will then be in a position to move into a discussion of the Christian proposal of truth in Chapter 5.

### **Desire: the *Syncope* of Incarnation**

In order to frame the problem of death, it is necessary to again turn to the *Buisson* dialogue where, if we look closely, it is possible to discern a layer of finer detail

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<sup>75</sup> As Nancy says on the topic of this body: “Le Fils est le Corps de l’Esprit s’exhalant à la face du Père, se dissipant vers Lui dans les effluves et les flux du sacrifice qui le sanctifie” (C 76). It is interesting to note that presence of the Spirit within the *Buisson* encounter is also signalled by the breath emanating from the “Dieu inconnu qui *flat ubi vult*, qui souffle quand il veut, où il veut” (JC 1426).

punctuating its bodily *excription*. There is another very marked shift that occurs in Christophe's bodily writing here, a transformation whose implications we will continue to examine in the final chapter of this thesis but one whose grounding is firmly laid in the *excription* we have already begun to analyse. As we have already seen, after the revelation of the divine body, Christophe comes to the realisation that all of the formal musical techniques he has fallen back on in the past are no longer adequate and must be cast off like "béquilles de l'esprit" (JC 1423). It is now the body that must serve as the unique vehicle of expression for his poetic self-presentation, a change depicted through the addition of a very particular textual element: "Son rôle n'était même plus de décrire la passion ; il devait faire corps avec elle et tâcher d'en épouser la loi intérieure" (1420). The writing of the body is defined by the same manifestation and effacement governing the Beethovenian genius' usage of the *force éternelle*, but in the incarnate domain of relationship this manifestation takes place through the currents of "passion" flowing through Christophe's human interactions. After he finally overcomes the dichotomy between "l'art pour le plaisir" and "l'art pour la morale" (1424) by abandoning himself to the "comète lancé dans l'infini," he experiences the appearance of "une âme étrangère [et] créatrice" (1425) which sends him into the frenzy of writing we observed in Chapter 3. This strange new soul, accompanied by "puissances inconnues," is still firmly grounded in his body: "Elle le chevauchait, elle lui labourait les flancs à coups d'éperons. Et, dans les rares moments où il pouvait reprendre haleine, il se demandait, relisant ce qu'il venait d'écrire: - Comment cela, cela a-t-il pu sortir de mon corps?" (1425). We observed in Chapter 3 that the presentation of historical testimony according to the Biblical model offers a complete poetic recreation of the self, but now we can propose that this recreation occurs within the bodily dimension of *sens*. It is through the usage of the passions as the most distinct manifestation of the *force éternelle*, which must be mastered through the body, that I propose we can analyse this recreation in terms of the *excription* we have already exposed within the novel. In doing so, we will be able to observe to what degree this mastery over force is implemented within the domain of the *cœur fraternel* we can see coming to fruition within Christophe, a developing Beethovenian mastery that will lead us into the final stage of our deconstruction.

Although it most certainly doesn't encompass the entire meaning signified by the interplay of passion in the novel (a detailed study of which is impossible here), for the purposes of the current study I would like to focus on this form of desire as the most relevant aspect of the *excription* of passion occurring in the musical text.<sup>76</sup> We see the force of desire working throughout all of Christophe's romantic relationships. For example, the relationship with his first love-interest, Minna, is governed by a "Désir inconnu" which makes present the "forces aveugles de la Nature" (*JC* 196). Christophe is completely consumed by a desire that takes over him in the same manner as the creative force we examined in the previous chapter: "Il était pris. Un tumulte de pensées s'agitait en lui: il n'y reconnaissait rien" (195). This early romantic interaction sets the precedent for those that will come later. However, it is during one of Christophe's most intense romantic relationships, his later adulterous affair with Anna Braun which directly precedes the *Buisson* revelation, that Rolland most succinctly expresses the role of passion in the life of the Beethovenian genius:

Il était livré à la passion. Elle est, chez les génies, une nécessité de la nature. Même les plus chastes, Beethoven, Bruckner, il faut qu'ils aiment constamment ; toutes les forces humaines en eux sont exaltées ; et comme en eux les forces sont captées par l'imagination, leur cerveau est la proie de passions perpétuelles. [A]vec l'âpre désir qui laboure la chair, il y a le besoin de tendresse qui pousse l'homme meurtri et déçu par la vie vers les bras maternels de la consolatrice. (1382-83)

The uncontrollable surging of the passions is, for Rolland, governed by the movement of a desire not for the possession of a physical object, but for the very relationship itself. Robichez has already explained that the intimacy of relationship is something lacking in Christophe's life from its very beginnings. For example, the rejection at the hands of the children of a bourgeoisie woman his mother goes to work for as a maid (*JC* 36-37), or his father who forces him to learn the piano against his will (65-67), are factors within his experience which clearly mark him as a figure lacking affection. We also see this manifested in his early friendship with Otto. When Christophe and his new friend exchange letters, Christophe writes: "Pense à moi! Aime-moi! J'ai besoin qu'on m'aime [...] J'embrasse ton âme" (162). Later in the novel, this need for companionship comes to a climax at the beginning of

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<sup>76</sup> See Howells for a commentary on the "liminal position" (154) of the passions in discourses on the body, desire and death.

Christophe's friendship with Olivier. After their first encounter, Christophe returns home in a daze of happiness: "Il ne voyait, il n'entendait rien [...]. Il se répétait : - J'ai un ami" (826). Romantic relationships, viewed in light of the need for an affirmation of being-with, begin to reveal their fundamental thrust. An ideal model for the bridge between the romantic and the "amitié fraternelle" that governs many of Christophe's relationships is perhaps found in the figure of Judith Mannheim. Coming immediately after the all-consuming passion for another woman, Ada, Christophe soon realises that his attraction for Judith is purely platonic in nature: "Il éprouvait l'ardent désir de se confier à Judith, de partager sa pensée avec elle" (426). The desire to share the most intimate nature of the self, to lose oneself in the writing of limit, is to some extent the unifying force moving through all of Christophe's relationships, whether platonic or romantic.<sup>77</sup> But it is when this desire meets the sensuality of body that it reveals its most profound significance for our study.

Nancy explores the function of desire through what he names the *syncope*, which provides another perspective on the *kenosis* of incarnation. Its effects can also be discerned in the novel, and so I propose that we can use it to bring to light the full impact of Christophe's relational reality on his creative and personal development. Nancy explicitly connects the *syncope* to the Christian conception of body:

[C]ette syncope que le corps *est* [...] n'est pas simplement une perte : elle est, comme en musique, un battement ; elle ajoutée (syn-) en coupant (-cope). Elle ajoutée le corps à lui-même et les corps entre eux. Syncope d'apparition et de disparition, syncope d'énonciation et de sens, elle est aussi syncope de désir. (D 127-28)

The *syncope* is essential to our discussion because it serves as the overarching poetic bridge between Christophe's musical creation and his relationships, a bridge built through the body. The very nature of the body is syncopated according to the rhythm of music, which executes the simultaneous touch and separation both between bodies and within the very structure of the self as a self-touching. As Derrida says in *Le Toucher*, Jean-Luc Nancy: "cette interruption qui constitue le toucher du *se toucher*,

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<sup>77</sup> See, for example, his relationship with Corinne (JC 477) and his relationship with Colette: "À partir de ce jour, ils eurent régulièrement des entretiens intimes" (740). It is a similar desire for Lorchen that sets into motion his flight from Germany (611), and pushes him to irrationally attack the girl he holds down and forcibly kisses one day whilst out walking (267-68).

le toucher *comme se toucher*, voilà ce que [Nancy] appelle *syncope*” (129). The body is therefore defined by a syncopated desire for the *avec* of Trinitarian relationship, since for Nancy, despite its outward appearance, the core of desire is in fact not a yearning for presence but rather “tension vers [...] la syncope elle-même, en tant qu’elle a lieu dans l’autre, et qu’elle n’est « propre » qu’en étant dans l’autre et de l’autre” (*D* 128). Where contact with the otherness of body takes place, there is simply an *écart* of infinite openness, and so the body is the place in which God as pure relationship can be lived through the recognition of this movement of syncopation governing the thrust of desire. Nancy goes on to suggest that “[u]ne érotique (socratique) traverse ici l’incarnation (christique) comme par un pli interne au *logos*” (128), a phenomenon that can be used to approach the *Buisson* revelation, and Christophe’s need to embody passion, in terms of the *excription* we have been discussing. However, in order to fully understand the significance of the *syncope* for *excription*, it is perhaps prudent to clarify further what Nancy means by this term and how it relates back to the process of poetic presentation. In *Le Discours de la syncope, I. Logodaedalus*, Nancy’s analysis of the *syncope* revolves around two key concepts that Kant puts forward in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. *Darstellung*, translated as “‘presentation,’ [...] “‘placing-there,’ ‘placing-in-front-of,’ ‘showing,’ or ‘exposition,’” indicates “the act of bringing into presence or into view the determinations and deductions of pure reason,” and *Dichtung*, meaning “an invention or creation which would include all novels and literary forms as well as verse” (James, *The Fragmentary Demand* 40). According to the Kantian model, philosophical thought attempts to present reason in all its purity, without recourse to the discursive contingency of language, but never succeeds in doing so. Instead there is always an unresolved relationship between the presentation of reason and language, between *Darstellung* and *Dichtung*: “La *Darstellung* exige une *Dichtung*, parce que, en tant qu’*exposition*, elle s’est déjà privée de la *Darstellung* pure et directe,” and in turn, “le régime impropre nommé « *Dichtung* » est engendré dans la *syncope de la Darstellung*” (*DSL* 94). In this moment of *syncope*, “the purity of reason presents itself [...] in the absence of pure presentation, in an undecidable relation of *Darstellung* and *Dichtung* (*Dardichtung*, as Nancy calls it), and therefore vanishes in the very instant of its disclosure” (James, *The Fragmentary Demand* 46). In the *syncope*’s “nature instantanée, ponctuelle et discrète” (*DSL* 13), we can undoubtedly identify echoes of Ricœur’s discussion of Kantian presentation



operating within the poetics of historical testimony, where the divine is continually manifested and effaced within scripture. The “indécidable moment de syncope” (*DSL* 17-18) determines the very “presentation and withdrawal” (James, *The Fragmentary Demand* 47) which eternally limits philosophical thought, and therefore functions at the very heart of our discussion of divine truth at the limit of signification. We can thus say that the poetic presentation of the Beethovenian hero must entail the conscious embrace of a fragmented self-identity, because it is a self-presentation that is continually coming-into-being and effacing itself according to the logic of syncopation which shapes desire.

In addition to the examples of *excription* we have already seen, we can observe syncopation functioning in a particularly intense way in Christophe’s three sexual relationships. Although I do not presume to put forward an exhaustive definition of sexuality, Nancy undertakes a deconstructive reading in his *L’« il y a » du rapport sexuel* which can perhaps be of use to us. Nancy proposes that “la différence ontologique est sexuelle” (32), and from this foundation of being as “sexué et/ou sexuant,” he goes on to posit that the God of the “constitution onto-théo-logique de la métaphysique” is engaged in an “autodéconstruction sexuelle” (32). Sexual desire in this deconstructive mode is thus intimately related to the discourse on *sens* we have been examining, and the simultaneous expression and negation of the poetic act. Nancy explains how sexual relationship can be interpreted as a mode of living bodily *sens* that reveals the poetic nature of relationship, and in doing so helps us further expand our discussion of the *Buisson* dialogue: “[L]e sexuel s’y avère [...] comme ce qui ouvre un ordre distinct de celui des choses aussi bien que de celui des significations : un ordre du *sens*- et *des sens du sens*- où jouent des signes qui ne font pas de la signification, mais qui font du plaisir-désir” (46-47). The interplay within the *syncope* is brought into relief through sexuality in such a way that adoration is, in a certain manner, completed in a poetic dialogue between two finite bodies exchanging an “appel [qui] peut avoir lieu entre deux regards, entre deux intonations, entre deux gestes, sans aucune autre suite” (47). Thus we find “une énonciation sans énoncé” that reveals “le sens littéral du mot *adoration*” (47) in the finite realm of body. We see this clearly in Christophe’s first sexual experience, with a girl named Ada, whom he meets one day whilst out walking (*JC* 319). This is a relationship that comes to be dominated by the desire they harbour for one another: “Absorbés en

eux-mêmes, ils couvaient leur désir” (324). In the sexual encounter with Ada’s “beau corps indifférent” (329), the “minutes d’ineffable poésie” he experiences earlier in the unconsummated relationship with Minna (consisting of “un regard, un geste, un mot qui ne signifiait rien” [JC 201]) are propelled into a heightened state of intensity. Through their physical union, an *excription* takes place in a dimension preceding the signification of verbalised language: “Un sourire de Ada avait pour lui des significations profondes [...]. Il l’appelait son moi, son âme, son être [...]. Ce n’était pas seulement le plaisir qui les liait ; c’était une poésie indéfinissable de souvenir et de rêves [...].” (335-36). Here we observe a clear example of the poetry displayed in Nancy’s *plaisir-désir* dynamic, as the two drown in a “torrent d’amour et de joie silencieuse” expanding into a timeless space in which the love of those who have preceded them is made present (336). What is revealed in the poetic expression of these “deux corps juvéniles” (336) is simply relationship suspended at the limit, expressed through the sexual desire that explicitly manifests the appearance and disappearance of the *syncope*, and so I propose that this has a direct impact on our discussion of the divine.

Nancy breaks open the connection between the discourse on desire and the Christian tradition by interrogating the concept of intimacy itself. As a result of sexual intercourse being an act in which we find “l’étant différenciant de soi” (*IRS* 31), it comes to light as pure sensual relationship. In a phrasing that brings to mind his thinking on *renvoi*, Nancy calls sex an act of “se rapporter” which opens up a space of “intimité” (31). He explores this intimacy via recourse to the Christian tradition and an Augustinian vocabulary describing God as a defeat of spatiality: the relationship of sex is “l’entr’ouvrir de l’entre lui-même, de l’« entre-nous », ou de l’intimité : le sexe se différenciant est l’espacement de l’intimité. L’intimité est le superlatif de l’intériorité (*interior intimo meo* [...])” (31). This confounding of the interior and exterior dimensions holds direct implications for our analysis of the Beethovenian hero’s mastery of force through bodily *excription*:

Le christianisme représente [...] le mouvement d’un « sujet » qui ne se trouve ou ne s’identifie qu’en se perdant dans une ouverture infinie de lui-même. Telle est la portée, capitale, du « *interior intimo meo, superior summo meo* » d’Augustin. Ce « plus intérieur que mon intimité, plus élevé que mon sommet » n’est autre que Dieu. (A 85)

The *kenosis* of incarnation is located precisely at this point of bodily intimacy, which is the poetic opening of the finite to the infinity of *sens*. The sexual intimacy of relationship is the existential realisation of Trinitarian *renvoi*, and thus it opens up a space of limit in which we find an “excès tourné et tendu vers le dehors du monde ouvert au milieu du monde” (A 85). The creative impact this has on the Beethovenian hero who, as we saw in the *Buisson*, must “faire corps” with passion, is perhaps best summed up in Christophe’s sexual relationship with the theatre actress Françoise Oudon: “Et Christophe, quand il créait une œuvre, projetait ses pensées, incarnait ses passions dans cette femme, sous cette forme adorée [...]. Richesse inappréciable que l’intimité d’une telle âme [...]” (JC 1174). *Excription*, the incarnation of the “âme commune,” is concretised in what Nancy names an *infinition en acte*, which consists of “deux réalités finies se tournant l’une vers l’autre : ouvrant l’une à l’autre l’intimité de leur infinité” (IRS 44). The poetic self-presentation of the Beethovenian hero is, we could say, completed in a simple exposition of the body, an “ex-position pour elle-même et sans autre fin (donc sans fin, absolument)” (IRSA 34). As Nancy writes: “Le faire accomplit chaque fois quelque chose et lui-même. Sa fin est sa finition : en cela il se pose infini, chaque fois infiniment au-delà de son œuvre” (RP 14). The finiteness of body simply consists of movement towards that which never ceases its own coming-into-being. This *faire*, or poetic enacting of bodily desire, is nothing except the accessing of *sens* within body: “Le poème est la chose faite du faire lui-même. Cette même chose qui est abolie et posée, c’est l’accès au sens” (RP 14). The *infinition en acte* of intimacy is the summit of poetic existentiality, since it consists of a ceding to the pure movement of *sens*, and so with this thinking on the intimacy of relationship, we have entered the textual space that dominates the Christian world-view, namely the *kérygma*, the empty text which projects the *mort de Dieu*. I propose that we must now consider the very particular usage Rolland makes of death in Christophe’s relationships in this light.

### **Death and the Fragmentation of Truth**

The result of the infinite/intimate relationship is the creation of a limit at which the tangibility of the finite body disappears in the death of signification. We are speaking

of a body opened up to other finite bodies, a syncopated identity built on *kenosis* which loses itself in infinity. Nancy clarifies that relationship is not an excess of *sens* that can be measured or pinned down in a spatio-temporal location, because “[d]e rapport *en tant que* rapport, de fait, il n’y a pas” (IRS 52). The text of the novel grounds itself in such a reading of relationship as nothingness through its enacting of the sexual experience, and it is within Christophe’s encounter with Ada that this is perhaps most evident. In the throes of their passion, the mutual absorption of their bodily interaction brings them to the brink of death:

Tout s’est éteint...La nuit...Le gouffre...Ni lumière, ni conscience... L’Être. La force de l’Être, obscure et dévorante. [...] La trombe du désir qui suce la pensée. [...] Leur souffle mêlé, la tiédeur dorée des deux corps qui se fondent [...], les secondes qui sont la mort...Les rêves en commun [...]. Ada pleure, Christophe perd conscience, ils disparaissent tous deux sous les flots de la nuit...La nuit...La mort...- Pourquoi revivre ? (JC 326-27)

The “force de l’Être” that desire makes present is closely connected with an imagery of death, of self-abandonment that loses itself in the *syncope* of a body “tendue entre un cri de naissance et un soupir de mort” (D 128). Christophe and Ada disappear together into the darkness of non-representation which stretches temporal space, creating a void empty of everything except desire. This *excription* is based on the same mode of presentation we have been examining, as Nancy says: “[L]e *sexuel est l’« il y a » du rapport*” (IRS 53). The sexual act opens the self to its own existence, its own self-address to *le réel*. The river again serves as the principal motif of this opening, as its flowing waters bridge the separation between the interiority of the self and the exteriorising intimacy of *excription*: “La voix du fleuve monte, elle remplit la chambre. Le lit semble une barque. [Ada et Christophe] sont entraînés, côte à côte, par le courant vertigineux [...]” (JC 327). Sexual desire therefore allows us to posit a radical statement: the syncopated identity is a divine body, but a divine body that is inherently dead.

We have now reached the core of the kerygmatic announcement in which we must attempt to locate the simultaneous breaking point and affirmation of an authentic Trinitarian *athéologie*. The opening words of Nancy’s *Corpus*, “*Hoc est enim corpus meum*” (2), signal his emphasis on the centrality of the sacrament of the Eucharist

within Western thought. For Nancy, the words of the consecration, the Christian equivalent of the Deuteronomic *Shema Israel* of Judaism, betray an obsession with the body which is representative of the need to locate presence in signification. Philosophy's ceaseless attempt to assert "l'être-soi du signe" through the construction of a "corps absolu" summarises the way in which the *hoc est enim* functions as a definition of the human body as divine: "[L]e corps de l'Homme, temple vivant de la divinité" (C 72). The Trinitarian *athéologie* finds its central fulfilment in this formula, as the desire towards otherness ruptures signification: "[L]e sens du « sens » est « corps », et le sens du « corps » est « sens ». Dans cette résorption circulaire, la signification accomplie s'évanouit aussi bien" (72). The *Buisson* dialogue is therefore the space of revelation *par excellence*, a revelation understood as the simple opening of body to its own lack of foundation or, in other words, to its own death :

*Le corps n'est donc rien d'autre que l'auto-symbolisation de l'organe absolu. Innommable comme Dieu [...]. Dieu, la Mort, la Chair : triple nom du corps de toute l'onto-théologie. Le corps est la combinatoire exhaustive, l'assomption commune de ces trois noms impossibles, où toute signification s'épuise. (72-74)*

The body that Christ offers to his disciples is fundamentally dead, because the identity of the Son is a pure Trinitarian relationship with the Father, expressed through the Spirit as it erupts through the flesh. The "divine" body therefore does not exist, or rather, it is the pure act of existence within a bodily self, since the meaning of the divine body is simply the body *exscribing* itself into a *corps du sens* empty of all content. In the words of William Robert, the Eucharist is a "unique act of divine exposition" (91). I argue that this exposition is the limit Nancy speaks of in his discussion on the *Dieu-vivant*, the space in which signification is exhausted and a narrative of *sens* begins to predominate. Through our analysis of desire, we have seen that this limit is reached within Christophe's musicality via his entry into bodily relationship. We can therefore say that the "seul être" (JC 1085) Christophe makes present through his musical self-expression is fundamentally constructed around the utilisation of the thrust of desire towards death, within the dialogic reality revealed by the *Buisson*: Christophe is to become the "voix" (1085) of all of those people he has encountered along the path of his life through a bodily negotiation of the limit.

However, in the death of signification, the paradox of the Trinitarian *athéologie* becomes vividly apparent: how can the *mort de Dieu* be the most complete representation of truth, of life in its most intense and profound divine dimension, when it involves a death of the self and an impossible affirmation of absence?

The problem of physical death, which exists at the intersection of the infinite and the finitude of corporeality, is ubiquitous within Christophe's life and proves difficult to resolve. We see the reality of death assert itself at several points in the narrative: his early irrational fears sparked by witnessing the death of his grandfather (*JC* 124), the death of his father (220), his mother (1081), his teenage love-interest, Sabine, who dies before he is able to profess his love for her (304), his uncle Gottfried, who dies tragically alone (585-86), his friend Olivier, who meets his end in a riot on the streets of Paris (1328), right up until the death of the love of his later years, Grazia (1553). I argue that we can identify a link between desire and this ubiquitous problem. After his encounter with Ada, we find Christophe consumed by the desire for relationship (364), and an inability to creatively master the passions that flow through him asserts itself (367). The same discourse on Beethovenian mastery we examined in our investigation into the act of adoration makes itself felt in the realm of bodily relationship. In Christophe's surrendering to desire, we can pinpoint an inability to truly entrust himself to the emptying inherent to relationship, an incapacity which emerges as a significant problem within his self-mastery. A paradox arises which Nancy helps us position squarely in the middle of the dynamic of *infinition* that is taking place:

Le paradoxe est ici que c'est en faisant l'amour qu'on en expose l'infinition en tant que telle [...] Il doit se produire, jusqu'à un certain point tout au moins, une détermination (une « finition ») des positions sexuées, des identités, des jouissances. Les acteurs ou les actants deviennent alors aussi les exposants de leur propre infinition. (*IRS* 51)

Within Christophe's relationships, this interaction between the finite and the infinite is deficient, since the writing that has taken shape seems to repeatedly strike a barrier encased in the very structure of limit. His desire aims for an impossible affirmation of bodily presence in finite form. The fear of absence is ubiquitous from Christophe's earliest relationships onwards, and the connection with the problem of

death is most clearly demonstrated by the scene where Minna, his first love-interest, goes away to visit relatives at Easter. Meanwhile, the young Christophe experiences “l’affreux chagrin de l’absence” for the first time in his life: “On ne peut plus respirer : c’est une angoisse mortelle [...]. On croit voir la mort en face. Et c’est bien elle qu’on voit : l’absence n’est qu’un de ses masques” (JC 206). As Robichez has pointed out, Christophe’s relationships all end in either abandonment or physical death and this, I propose, is connected with his driving need to develop a truthful art.

We can break open the connection between truth and death by turning back to the image of the river, which manifests a tension towards relationship that now allows us to make a proposition regarding the nature of the unfolding *excription* of revelation. The river appears as “un être” (JC 67) possessing its own desire and its own course set for an unknown destination: “Où allait-il ? Que voulait-il ?” (67). On the horizon of Christophe’s experience, the destination appears: “[L]a Mer. Le fleuve court à elle. Elle semble courir à lui. Elle l’aspire. Il la veut. Il va disparaître...” (69). As we have already acknowledged, the sea represents Christophe’s final destination, a fact we will observe again when we analyse the final moments of the narrative. The ocean represents the state of harmony in its textual fullness, the completion of *excription* in a new form of communion that will be manifested between all of those who have preceded Christophe into death (1592). However, the problem of absence is compounded in this dynamic harmony, since a union is proposed in the very *kenosis* of the self as it dissolves in the waters of the ocean. Nancy relates this problem of absence back to a key term that will serve as the guiding motif in the rest of our analysis. As we have seen, the *mort de Dieu* sums up the atheological execution of the Trinitarian poetics, but *exscribing* the self towards this limit raises the question we posed in the first chapter of this thesis: “Qu’est-ce qu’un sens infini qui pourtant fait du sens, une vérité vide qui a pourtant le poids de la vérité?” (D 226). Although Christophe yearns to disappear into the void of absence, his being revolts because he is unable to affirm it as truth. The challenge of communicating truth through the poetics of music is a central preoccupation from the earliest moments of Christophe’s life. The first time this is clearly seen is in his friendship with Gottfried, who reproaches him for having written untruthful pieces of music that have nothing meaningful to say (JC 95). Instead, Gottfried’s adoration proposes a creative communion with the “Seigneur, qui nous a fait présent du beau chant pour

dire des choses vraies et honnêtes” (96). The musical skill Christophe begins to cultivate through the *laisser être* of manifestation is thus already intrinsically oriented towards the expression of truth, and this is also evident from Nancy’s very definition of the concept of presentation as “l’être-*tel*” (*SM* 25). After Christophe has begun to open to experience, he undergoes a shift in his poetic creation: “[I]l possédait maintenant une mesure réelle, à laquelle il pouvait rapporter ses pensées, pour en juger le degré de vérité ou de mensonge” (381). Christophe recognises that every race has its “mensonge” (386) which it is his duty to uncover by being a witness to truth within society (396). The need for truth is also strikingly present in Christophe’s relationships. He is repulsed by Ada’s compulsive lying (335), and his relationship with Minna is marred by the “petits mensonges” that are symptomatic of the fact that neither really knows the other (196-97). When he encounters Colette later in the novel, this lack of knowledge is again manifested in an absence of sincerity (742). We can note, then, that lack of truth is a barrier not only to a real knowledge of the Other, but also to the unfolding process of *excription*, as the river of Christophe’s life progresses towards the goal of harmony.

There is one relationship in particular that allows us to draw together the various threads of the discourse we have been analysing in this chapter, and introduce the shift in bodily presence that occurs within Christophe’s Trinitarian poetics in the *Buisson*. The adulterous affair with Anna Braun directly precedes the revelation of the *Dieu-vivant*, and in it we find Christophe paralysed by an impossible need to affirm a truth that is completely absent in the midst of his all-consuming desire. Anna and Christophe are incapable of communicating with each other honestly, a fact succinctly captured in Anna’s angry outburst in the middle of their affair: “Je ne veux pas que tu parles” (*JC* 1381). Their relationship carries the stain of *mensonge*: “Ils lisaient dans l’âme l’un de l’autre. Mais ils ne voulurent pas savoir ce qu’ils avaient lu” (1374). The fact that this adulterous affair occurs within the house of the friend who has kindly taken Christophe in after his flight from Paris, Erich Braun (1335), only renders more complete the void in which truth finds no place: “Douleur de ne pouvoir dire la vérité, quand on lit dans les yeux de celui qui vous la demande, qu’il ne veut pas, il ne veut pas savoir la vérité !...” (1387). The way in which Rolland conceptualises truth in this relationship is enlightening for our analysis. He describes the deception that has occurred, not only between Christophe and Erich



Braun, but also between Christophe and Anna, as “mensonges de la passion” (1406). The link between desire and the absence of truth is enlightened further by another passage in which we find Christophe unable to stifle a tendency towards the capturing of the object of his desire in the realm of presence:

[Q]uand la musique s'est tue, quand le dompteur n'est plus là, les passions qu'il a réveillées rugissent dans la cage ébranlée, et elles cherchent leur proie [...]. Soudain- ce fut un éclair- elle se pencha sur lui, il se leva vers elle; leurs bouches se joignirent; son souffle entra en lui [...]. Elle tomba sur lui. Ils s'étreignirent en silence, sans un mot, avec rage. (1378)

The mutual bodily possession of the two lovers is related back to the lack of self-mastery and their surrender to desire, as Christophe exerts a useless effort to reign back these “puissances aveugles” (1383). The desire to consume a physical Other is obvious: “Ils se jettent l'un sur l'autre, et s'étreignent. Haine? Amour? Fureur de destruction mutuelle? – La passion, c'est l'âme de proie” (1383-84). The Beethovenian hero's lack of control over his desire signals a complete absence of the Spirit, and therefore also the absence of a divine truth which must necessarily remain anchored in the dynamism of sensual relationship. We can thus propose that not only is Christophe in need of the Spirit within his creative life, but even the dimension of relationship we have observed opening in his bodily reality must undergo a change if his creation is to express truth.

The lack of self-mastery caused by a desire to possess can be understood particularly well through the lens provided by Nancy, who allows us to link desire back to the problem of truth. As we have already seen, Nancy connects the sexual act to the opening of *sens*. However, when pure physical possession dominates, something entirely different occurs: “Jamais un corps ne « pénètre » l'ouverture d'un autre corps *sauf en le tuant* (c'est pourquoi il y a tout un pauvre lexique sexuel qui n'est qu'un lexique de meurtre et de mort...)” (C 28).<sup>78</sup> Death becomes a problem when it occurs purely through the closed action of a desire seeking to penetrate and possess

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<sup>78</sup> It is interesting to note that this interpenetration of bodies is precisely what Rolland highlights in his analysis of the relationship between Olivier and the woman he eventually marries, Jacqueline: “De toutes les parcelles de leurs corps et de leurs âmes, ils se touchent, ils se goûtent, ils cherchent à se pénétrer” (JC 1141). We could argue that the same phenomenon occurs in the affair between Christophe and Anna, although this is never explicitly stated in the novel.

physical presence in the realm of signification. This lexicon of “problematic” death is precisely what we find in Christophe’s relationship with Anna, which differentiates itself from the dissolution the Beethovenian hero’s self we observed in his relationship with Ada by virtue of the rejection of opening it brings with it: “Il leur était aussi impossible de vivre ensemble que de ne pas vivre ensemble. [...] À partir de ce moment, ils ne se touchèrent plus : l’ombre de la mort était sur eux” (JC 1385). Death is constantly haunting them and restricting the address to *le réel* that the sexual act should inherently confer, as Nancy affirms: “Ainsi, les corps des amants : ils ne se livrent pas à la transsubstantiation, ils se touchent, ils se renouvellent infiniment leur espacement, ils s’écartent, ils s’adressent l’un (à) l’autre” (C 18). The lack of touch between Christophe and Anna is instead grounded in closure and distance defined by a false creation in which an inability to entrust oneself to the *excription* of being is present: “[Le regard de Christophe] dans la glace, rencontra sa propre image ; il vit sur ses traits la même dévastation ; il vit la mort inscrite en lui, ainsi qu’en elle, et il pensa : Mon ouvrage ? Non pas. L’ouvrage du maître cruel, qui affole et qui tue” (JC 1404). The relationship between them displays an overarching tendency towards the formation of an artificial opposition between the self and the Other, as Christophe realises towards the end of their affair: “Toujours, il l’avait créée à l’image de son désir” (1406). This closure and inauthentic creation is in turn referred back to the divine register through Anna’s misconception of an onto-theological God who becomes an “ennemi dont elle ne pouvait se délivrer” (1382). Her helplessness in the face of her desire is the imagined punishment imposed by a God who violently asserts His will over her (1385), and in the end remains as absent and oppressive as Leonhard’s conception of the divine. The vision of God as enemy is replicated in Christophe’s state of being directly before the *Buisson* dialogue, where he addresses God in a similar tone: “Tu es venu à pas sourds, par derrière, comme un traître, et tu m’as poignardé” (1407). Christophe has, as a result of his desire for Anna, entered a state of death paradoxically defined by closure and opposition of himself to an unknown Other conceptualised only within the realm of signification. The barrier of death seems to confound a real communicative relationship because *excription* has hit the barrier of presence: desire seeks to affirm a bodily Other, whether this is conceptualised as a human or a divine ontological entity. The Mosaic Law is completely repudiated in the distance that is

present between Anna and Christophe,<sup>79</sup> which is in turn intimately related to the problem of speaking the truth of revelation.

However, in conclusion, we can note another possibility that is hinted at in Christophe's relationships. Just before his tryst with Ada, we find Christophe exploring his newfound freedom after the conversation with Leonhard has completely ruptured all belief in an onto-theological God. During this time, Christophe meets a young widow, Sabine Froehlich, lodging in the same house he and his mother move into after Melchior's death (226). They begin a friendship that hovers between verbal expression and silent communication, as each sit on their doorstep without speaking, yet still poetically communing in a mysterious fashion that transcends signification: "Ils s'éveillèrent de leur songerie, et se levèrent en même temps. Et, comme s'ils allaient rentrer, chacun de son côté, tous deux se saluèrent de la tête, sans parler" (276). When Christophe helps Sabine shell peas, they come into contact in a way that establishes a dynamic tension between touch and silent communication: "Ils étaient seuls. Ils ne disaient rien. Ils ne pouvaient plus rien dire [...]: une de ses mains frôla le pied de Sabine, sorti de son soulier, et resta posée sur lui, ne put se détacher" (285). Coupled with this touch, however, is a constant distance that seems to establish a link between them in a very different way to the relationship Christophe later experiences with Anna. One scene in particular demonstrates this, when Christophe is invited to a baptism at Sabine's brother's mill (292). A storm delays their departure, and so they are invited to stay the night in adjoining rooms (296), thus setting a scene in which their friendship hovers on the border of a sexual relationship, as they silently communicate through the locked door:

Soulevé sur son lit, [Christophe] l'appelait à voix basse, à travers la muraille, il lui disait des mots tendres et passionnés. [...] Ils se tendaient les bras,- lui, écrasé par un amour si fort qu'il n'avait pas le courage d'entrer,- elle, l'appelant, l'attendant, et tremblant qu'il n'entrât...Et quand il se décida enfin à entrer, elle venait de se décider à repousser le verrou. [...] Ils retournèrent, chacun vers son lit, le corps brisé, le cœur plein de tristesse. (297-98)

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<sup>79</sup> A distance that is particularly evident in the scene in which they decide to commit suicide together to escape the moral dilemma they have become trapped in: "Hélas! Dans ce moment même où ils allaient mourir l'un pour l'autre, ils se sentaient si loin l'un de l'autre..." (JC 1400).

A dialogue is established in this scene that impacts upon the body and yet holds itself back from physical contact. Their silent, incarnated communication becomes particularly relevant for our discussion when it strikes the finality of physical death. When Sabine dies of influenza (306), Christophe is not only devastated by her death, but also by the knowledge that he was never able to explicitly speak the truth of his love for her: “Pourquoi avaient-ils tant attendu pour le faire ? [...] Il brûlait d’entendre les chères paroles sortir de la bouche aimée. Il brûlait de les lui dire” (303). The dialogue cannot bridge the gap of absence that is ultimately sealed in death, yet even in the midst of this existential crisis, the opening of the Spirit appears in a seemingly irrational denial of the absoluteness of death. This is expressed in a line taken from an epitaph composed by Michelangelo Buonarroti for his friend Cecchino Bracci Fiorentino, which spontaneously erupts within Christophe: “« ...Je ne suis pas morte, j’ai changé de demeure; vivante, je reste en toi, qui me vois et qui pleures. En l’âme de l’amant se transforme l’aimée »” (309). These words serve as a premonition of the *Buisson* dialogue, where Christophe will be told that he will meet again all those he has lost to death (1421). After Sabine dies, Christophe receives an intuition of this future reencounter: “Christophe savait d’ailleurs qu’il gardait, dans les retraites souveraines de l’âme, un asile inaccessible, inviolable, où l’ombre de Sabine était close. [...] Mais un jour vient,- on le sait,- où la fosse se rouvre” (317). Here we find a clue pointing the way forward for our deconstruction, as the relationship with Sabine offers evidence to support the argument that the nature of the *mort de Dieu* itself must be revised in terms of a further stage of Beethovenian mastery, a mastery that will change the tenor of the desire that dominates Christophe in a final completion of the Trinitarian poetics.

Throughout this chapter we have traced the development of bodily *excription* via a form of touch that brings both physical contact and fragmentation of the self in a process of *kenosis*. Christophe’s Beethovenian genius is fundamentally grounded in the body, which manifests its own intense expression of the Trinitarian relationship inherent to *sens*. By adhering to the body in a continuation of the process of adoration, Christophe’s self is revealed as a fragmented exposure of the divine suspended at the limit of signification. However, when this text of self-presentation encounters absence it strikes a problem, since harmony requires a balance between the engagement with body as a finite entity and the acknowledgment of its infinite

nature as *sens*. Within Christophe's relationships we therefore find another aspect of his submission to the presence of the Spirit in the act of adoration which, leading up to the *Buisson* revelation, is obscured. At the end of *Dans la maison*, the prophecy of Christophe's overcoming of the barrier of death is directly connected to the harmonic text: "Ô paix, divine harmonie, musique de l'âme délivrée, où se fondent la douleur et la joie et la mort et la vie, et les races ennemis, les races fraternelles, je t'aime, je te veux, je t'aurai..." (JC 1085-86). An equilibrium between life and death must take shape in order for the harmonic expression of the Trinitarian God to come to completion within Christophe's self-revelation. In *Corpus*, Nancy helps us delineate an entry point into the analysis we will carry out in the final chapter of this thesis. He writes of the revelation of the mystery of the incarnation we have been examining:

Dans l'incarnation, l'esprit *se fait* chair. C'est du reste pourquoi ce Mystère par excellence *se révèle lui-même*. Cet esprit prononce de sa chair : *hoc est enim corpus meum*, il *s'articule* lui-même de toute présence sensible. Ce que le Mystère révèle, c'est donc *le corps comme mystère révélé*, le signe absolu de soi et l'essence du sens [...], ce qui se nomme enfin, dans le plein éclat du Mystère, la « résurrection ». (86)

The final destination of the revelation of mystery is located in the last stage of our project of deconstruction, which will be centred on the second component within the body as an *événement de l'esprit*: the resurrection. If Christophe has been unable to fully acknowledge his own sensual body in his relationships so far, I propose it is this last aspect of Christian revelation that will allow us to complete our analysis of the musical harmony he must *exscribe*. The extension and completion of Christophe's *excription* must then occupy our analysis in the final chapter of this thesis, in which we will observe the fundamental role the resurrection plays within the musical self-presentation of the Beethovenian hero's mastery as he moves through the *Buisson* and enters the final book of the cycle: *La Nouvelle journée*.

## Chapter 5

### Trinity and *Anastasis*: the Truth of the Resurrection

In our analysis so far we have observed that Christophe's opening to the Holy Spirit is an act of creative relationship through a type of language which, in the *événement de l'esprit* of the Christian incarnation, is expressed through the body. The resultant *excription* of Christophe's self is the expression of pure *sens*, and therefore we can say that the fundamental quality of his Trinitarian poetics, his self-revelation, is nothing but the simple reality of death: the death of the self within relationship, and thus also the death of all signification. Through the concept of *excription*, we can observe the presence of the body as the expression of a *personnification poétique* which cannot be adequately inscribed into language. The unpronounceable nature of the divine harmony is therefore executed within a fragmented self defined by the process of *kenosis* that is intrinsic to the Christian incarnation. However, we have also observed a problem with such a foundation-less understanding of the divine, a problem that clearly manifests itself within Christophe's relationships and is inherently related to the overarching question posed by the idea of an objective divine truth: how can the dialogic reality of a relationship empty of all content propose a truth that does not lose itself in infinite opening? This is the problem we find Christophe confronting as he enters the *Buisson*, the same problem that we will attempt to resolve in this concluding chapter of our thesis. By again following the textual progression suggested by Robichez, we will examine the final component in the *Buisson* dialogue's redefinition of presence, which I argue will then allow us to deconstruct the truth proposed in Christophe's relationships in the final book of the cycle, *La Nouvelle journée*. Our focus must remain fixed on the body, but a body that corresponds to the final stage of Christian revelation: the glorious body of the resurrected Christ. As Nancy says, resurrection is not a type of "seconde vie" but rather the continuation of the "manifestation de ce qui ne se manifeste pas- du sens et de la vérité" (A 78). In other words, we are speaking of an extension of the act of adoration, a full recognition and participation in the advent of the Spirit in the body, "sa venue au monde, et sa survenue, son irruption et son passage" (78). In this chapter I will argue that Nancy's interpretation of the Christian resurrection allows us to complete our analysis of the *excription* of harmony within the novel, and

analyse the fulfilment of Christophe's life as a poetic opening to the truth of his own existence as a bodily presence within the world, along with all of those he has encountered throughout his life. We will first seek to formulate a more detailed definition of the meaning of resurrection in terms of the movement of *sens*, before applying this definition to a deconstruction of Christophe's relationships. This deconstruction will be carried out with particular reference to the kerygmatic truth proposed in the Gospels, which we will analyse through a study of the importance of visual imagery both in Nancy's thought and in the novel. This will then allow us to reassess the function of desire within Christophe's relationships, and analyse the pivotal role of love in the revelation of the *Christophorous*.

### **The *Buisson* as *Anastasis***

If we turn once more to the *Buisson* revelation, we see that the event of resurrection is in fact the final vital element in its fundamental structure. After Christophe's affair with Anna Braun, and his disastrous self-abandonment to the overpowering desire to possess a physical Other, we find him in an all-consuming state of death. It is here that we can discern the very beginnings of the *Buisson* dialogue, as Christophe accuses God of having destroyed his own creation, leaving him devoid of life: "J'avais deux seuls trésors au monde: mon ami et mon âme. [...] Nos cœurs n'en faisaient qu'un, tu les as déchirés, tu ne nous a fait connaître la douceur d'être ensemble que pour nous faire connaître l'horreur de nous être perdus" (*JC* 1407). The loss of those Christophe has loved precipitates a complete absence of meaning he cannot affirm as truth: "[M]a force est brisée, ma création desséchée. Je suis un arbre mort...Mort, que ne le suis-je ! Ô Dieu, délivre-moi, romps ce corps et cette âme [...]" (1407). A revision of the meaning of presence in the midst of the death of *excription* is thus required, one that will complete Christophe's bodily writing as an access to *sens* and an expression of divine truth. We find such a revision soon after this scene of despair in the form of resurrection: "La Résurrection! C'était comme si dans son âme vide se ruait le Dieu vivant" (1419). Here Christophe encounters a resurgence of life in the definitive return of the *Dieu-vivant*, and the initiation of the dialogue we have been analysing throughout this thesis. But at the same time, we come up against the problematic counterpoint to the problem of truth we spoke about

previously. We have so far determined that *excription*, and indeed the very poetic presentation of God, revolves around the state of death in which Christophe finds himself, the death of all signification through the process of *kenosis*. So how can such a resurrection as the institution of a tangible form of truth be conceptualised without falling back into metaphysical closure? Nancy proposes a unique solution to this problem of resurrection that can work with the movement of *excription* whilst simultaneously changing the tenor of Christophe's death. He formulates such a solution by returning to the Greek root of the word resurrection, *anastasis* (NMT 33), a term which underscores his study of the second component of the *événement de l'esprit* in the work that will serve as our primary theoretical text for this chapter, *Noli me tangere*. However, even in *La Déclosion* we see this term evoked several times in a way that allows us to connect it to the problem of the *Buisson* dialogue. Having already elaborated the centrality of the act of adoration, or "le discours en tant que prière" (D 152), we can now move on to consider the fundamental role that *anastasis* plays in this discourse, since it forms a point at which "le salut se dresse et s'adresse au point exact où il ne reste rien à dire" (152). If we look more closely at the scene of resurrection within the novel, we can see that it occurs as a dialogue that fits the description of the adoration we have been investigating. Christophe hears the announcement of resurrection from "un pensionnaire de la maison de santé" he happens to pass one day during "la semaine de Pâques" (JC 1415-16). The words this seemingly insane man utters enter him with bodily impact: "Christophe tressauta. Il partit précipitamment. La parole l'avait pénétré d'un trait de feu" (1417). The wind he encounters next is described as the "annonciateur" (1418) that brings with it the resurrection, an event combining the bodily and the verbal in a particularly striking way:

L'air entrant dans sa gorge, le flot de vie nouvelle le pénétrait jusqu'aux entrailles. Il se sentait éclater, il voulait crier, crier douleur et de joie ; et il ne sortait de sa bouche que des sons inarticulés. Il trébuchait, il frappait de ses bras les murs, au milieu des papiers que l'ouragan faisait voler. Il s'abattit, au milieu de la chambre, en criant : - Ô toi, toi ! Tu es enfin revenu ! (1419)

The divine "interlocutor" is concretised in the mobilisation of Christophe's whole body, as the resurrection reactivates Christophe's ability to speak through his carnal reality and overcomes the incapacity we have identified in his relationships. We can



therefore propose that it is the resurrection which gives shape to the very possibility of the harmonic text, and we receive further proof of this a little later in the *Buisson* dialogue as Rolland specifically links the reality of life and death to resonance: “[T]out se muait en sons dans cette âme sonore. Elle chantait la lumière. Elle chantait la nuit. Et la vie. Et la mort [...]. Elle chantait. Tout chantait. Elle n’était plus que chant” (1422). Harmony involves a balance of life and death, and this revelation is replicated at the end of the novel just before Christophe’s own physical death: “Harmonie, couple auguste de l’amour et de la haine! Je chanterai le Dieu aux deux puissantes ailes. Hosanna à la vie! Hosanna à la mort!” (1593). With the disassembling of the concept of resurrection, we can therefore engage with the final layer of the dialogue with reality, and it is this last stage of deconstruction that, I will propose, offers the capacity to affirm the revelation of a Trinitarian God as truth. Nancy links resurrection to the resonance of music, and sees in this connection the completion of the act of adoration through an active union of life and death: “[L]e moi-même, mort mais soulevé par cette musique, par la venue unique de cette musique-ci, ici et maintenant, dans un même mouvement, le moi-même mourrait en disant oui à la mort et du coup ressusciterait [...]” (*D* 153). By a shift in attitude towards death through the *Buisson* dialogue, Rolland proposes an alteration of the *excription* we have been examining, which Nancy’s perspective will provide us with the necessary tools to deconstruct.

The *anastasis* of resurrection can be seen as the final element in the process of *personnification poétique* because of the way it impacts upon the interaction between the finite and the infinite. The redefinition of the *sens* of death as the truth of life entails a change in stance that defines Christianity as a faith proposing salvation: “Le christianisme, en réinterprétant un aspect du judaïsme, a proposé la mort comme vérité de la vie et a ouvert dans la vie elle-même la différence de la mort” (*A* 36). Following the Christian pattern, when God tells Christophe in the *Buisson* that he will rediscover those loved ones that have gone before him into death in the divine “âme vivante” (*JC* 1421), we must keep the definition of death as truth in sight if we are to come to a full understanding of Christophe’s final destination in sainthood, and indeed the very nature of the text itself as a projection of truth. What is striking about this divine promise is its preface, because before he finds his loved ones again, Christophe must let them go, along with his own self: “Abandonne-les, morts, avec

ton âme morte” (1421). Nancy’s thinking on the resurrection as *anastasis* facilitates our examination of this abandonment. In *L’Adoration*, Nancy clarifies that with his thinking on *anastasis* he wants to “indiquer la résurrection comme basculement du *sens* : l’horizontale du corps mort bascule en verticale” (A 129). Central to this change in horizon is a completion of the process of presentation: “Le mort ne revit pas, mais le sens de sa vie- c’est-à-dire son sens, le sens d’être « je »- bascule : au lieu de continuer à « aller vers », il s’arrête, se redresse, devenant à la fois fin dernière et présentation accomplie de ce « sens d’être je »” (129). In this shift we reach the kernel of both the poetic formation of the Trinitarian *Dieu-vivant* and Christophe’s self-mastery, which we have observed strike the stumbling block we explored in Chapter 4. When Nancy speaks about the opening of the Spirit, it is always in the context of the limit of signification, and it is at this limit that the impact of the resurrection is felt in textual *infinition*. Opening repositions the horizon (or limit) of *sens*, because it “défait l’horizontalité du sens pour la faire pivoter en une verticalité,” creating an “instant présent comme une trouée infinie” (D 226). In the resurrection, the limit is both lost completely and at the same time becomes the “nom propre de la finitude qui se tourne vers son propre infini” (226). Therefore, with the resurrection we find a self-presentation “qui est en même temps clôture, et clôture sans possibilité d’être légitimée comme un « accomplissement »,” but at the same time it presents one thing: “[Q]ue le sens d’ « être je » n’a pas lui-même de sens” (A 129). The *anastasis* of resurrection repositions the limit, and in the process completes the finite representation of an infinite reality through a total re-evaluation of the meaning of presence and absence: “La résurrection n’est pas une réanimation: elle est le prolongement infini de la mort qui déplace et qui désinstalle toutes les valeurs de présence et d’absence, d’animé et d’inanimé, d’âme et de corps” (NMT 73-74). The resurrection is fundamental for Christophe’s relationships because it is at this point that his bodily testimony reaches its fulfilment as a presentation of truth. The overcoming of the problem of presence in the *Buisson* in fact simply consists of a different perspective on the interplay between the finite and the infinite, and therefore serves as another way of approaching the poetic *infinition* within text. As we have already seen, for Nancy “bonne finitude” consists of “existence dont la vérité consiste à laisser son sens toujours plus au-delà ou en deçà de tout accomplissement” (PD 21). By completely revising the nature of finite absence, *anastasis* is the final piece in the puzzle of a production of infinite *sens* through the

exhaustion of signification. It is therefore an *infinition* of truth that maintains itself at the limit where “truth is simple presentation [...], presence before signification” (Watkin, *Phenomenology or Deconstruction?* 139). Watkin connects this presentation back to the “patency of sense” (139) that we find Nancy speaking about in *Les Muses*, a patency which is nothing except the manifestation we have been examining, the eruption of force and the textual *excription* it unleashes at the limit: “La patence est rapportée à elle-même- comme si l’on énonçait simplement: *patet*, « il est manifeste »” (*M* 62). I therefore propose that *anastasis* is the essential missing ingredient in the harmonic expression of limit, the element that will explain how the self is presented as a bodily inscription of the divine whilst revealing its inherent emptiness. Through this element of revelation, we will be able to evaluate the change that occurs within Christophe’s relationships after the *Buisson*, and analyse the extent to which Christophe attains his ideal of communicating truth: “L’art n’était-il donc pas une illusion aussi?- Non, il ne devait pas l’être. La vérité ! La vérité ! Les yeux grands ouverts, aspirer par tous les pores le souffle tout-puissant de la vie, voir les choses comme elles sont, voir l’infortune en face,- et rire!” (*JC* 594). Rolland’s interesting melding of the visual aspect of art and the discourse on truth in this passage serves as a perfect segue into the next step of our analysis, in which we will discuss the parabolic and kerygmatic truth presented in the Gospels.

### **The *Surgissement* of Light: an Evangelical Vision of Truth**

If the textual heritage of Christianity can claim to propose any definitive revelation of divine truth at all, Nancy claims it is only through the fundamental fact of *anastasis* residing at its heart. If we observe the Christian tradition, and the journey from experience into text, the definitive end-point of revelation (the *mort de Dieu*) produces a kerygmatic textual legacy that takes the form of the Gospels. Nancy utilises the *anastasis* of resurrection to define these texts as presentations of a definitive *logos*, of a discernable, communicable truth. Within them, he identifies the parable as the central form of teaching Christ utilises, but takes the thinking on this pedagogical method one step further: “[I]l n’est pas impossible de dire que le récit évangélique tout entier se présente comme une parabole” (*NMT* 8). If these parables presume to impart a definitive truth about God, then we can also say that it is

Christ's life itself which projects the essence of this truth, since "la vie de Jésus est tout entier une représentation de la vérité qu'il dit être lui-même" (8). The faith of Christianity does not revolve around the teaching of a prophet, but rather the "présentation effective de la vérité en tant que vie ou existence singulière" (8-9). Nancy begins to explore how such a claim can remain valid by linking his thought on the parable form to the nature of the visual image, providing an illustration of the importance of the shift of *anastasis* in terms of the dynamic between the visible and the invisible:

Dans cette mesure, la vérité se fait ici elle-même parabolique : le *logos* n'est pas distinct de la figure ou de l'image, puisque son contenu essentiel est précisément ceci que le *logos* se figure, se présente et se représente, s'annonce comme une personne qui survient, qui se montre et en se montrant montre l'original de la figure [...]. [La révélation] emporte aussi avec elle, de ce fait, l'identité de l'image et de l'original, fût-ce en y impliquant, de manière parfaitement conséquente, l'identité de l'invisible et du visible. (9-10)

The parable is the pinnacle of revelation because it presents the truth exactly as it appears within the text itself, absolutely and irrevocably: it presents the revelation of the life of Christ as the human being who dies and rises again, that is to say, it is the textual manifestation of "ce qui ne se manifeste pas" the "image invisible du Dieu invisible" (*D* 225). In the novel, we see that direct vision of the divine is an essential goal for the Beethovenian hero. In the last book of the cycle, just before his death, Christophe expresses the desire that has dominated his life: "[J]e veux voir ton visage Jéhovah!" (*JC* 1588). *Anastasis* allows us to see how such a desire can reach fulfilment, because in the parable "la vérité et l'interprétation" are made identical to each other, "l'une à l'autre et l'une par l'autre" (*NMT* 10-11). In such a visual text characterised by *anastasis*, truth avoids the relativism in which it would unleash an infinite multiplicity of meanings impossible to define or pinpoint (11), and instead becomes a phenomenon perceivable within the very structure of the image. I therefore argue that the parable represents the ideal textual framework for this final stage of our deconstruction.

Nancy undertakes a study of parabolic truth in *Noli me tangere* through the deconstruction of a series of paintings depicting the post-resurrection encounter between Mary Magdalene and Christ. The usage of these Gospel scenes has direct

implications for our study, because not only does the Abbé Corneille make reference to Christ's words to Mary, "Noli me tangere," in describing Christophe's strong religious ideal (JC 1034), but Rolland in fact makes reference to the very same Gospel scenes in the novel (1554; 1557). This usage of the Gospels is coupled with an increase in the prevalence of paintings depicting Christian subjects as we progress further towards the end of the novel cycle.<sup>80</sup> What can painting tell us about the impact of *anastasis* on the formation of truth? In *Visitation: de la peinture chrétienne*, Nancy clarifies the importance of painting in his project of deconstruction: "La peinture chrétienne n'est pas une représentation à sujet chrétien. À l'inverse, c'est le christianisme, ou c'est quelque chose du christianisme en peinture ou comme peinture, faisant peinture [...]" (44). Painting tells us something fundamental about the essence of Christianity as the revelation of a hidden God in which "se joue un échange indéfini entre représentation et non-représentation, entre visible et non-visible, entre art et refus de l'art" (48). For Nancy, painting is an "imaging of absence" (Kaplan and Ricco 4) which replicates in a visual form the interplay between linguistic expression and the immediate effacement of signification implied in the execution of revelation as *sens*. In *Au fond des images*, Nancy succinctly captures this visual exposure of presentation:

L'image touche à cette ambivalence par laquelle le sens (ou la vérité) se distingue sans fin du réseau lié des significations, auquel en même temps il ne cesse pas de toucher : chaque phrase formée, chaque geste accompli, chaque visée, chaque pensée met en jeu le sens absolu (ou la vérité même) qui ne cesse aussi bien de s'écarter et de s'absenter de toute signification. (31)

Painting therefore replicates the pattern of presentation found both in the parable and in the *anastasis* which defines it. Again, we find a striking parallel between the visual arts and the discourse on body, such that, as Ian James asserts, what Nancy is doing with this thinking on the image is "none other than a repetition in different terms of the logic of exscription" (*The Fragmentary Demand* 229). Thus, by following Nancy's usage of the interplay between the visible and invisible within

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<sup>80</sup> For example, reference is made to a series of paintings by Raphael: *Madone à la chaise* (JC 1138), *La Dispute du Saint Sacrement* (1239), *L'Extase de sainte Cécile* (1433) and the *Stanze* (1463). We also find a reference to Da Vinci's *La Vierge, l'Enfant Jésus et sainte Anne* (JC 1515). Although I will not be studying these particular paintings in detail, I argue that their presence in the narrative is significant.

painting, I argue we will be able to analyse the extent to which Christophe's musical self-testimony becomes a presentation of parabolic truth through a completion of *excription*.

The relationship that dominates Christophe's life after the *Buisson* clearly evidences the shift of *anastasis* that has occurred, and we find Rolland placing a strong emphasis on visual imagery in his depiction of it. When Christophe is giving music lessons to Colette Stevens, he is also hired to teach her cousin, Grazia Buontempi, who is sent to live with the Stevens after her mother dies (*JC* 781-83). The first thing we can remark about this character is the significance of her name for the discussion at hand. In the *Buisson*, we find divine grace being used as a marker of the resurrection that is occurring: "Miracle de l'âme que la grâce a touché! Elle se réveille à la vie!" (1421). The connection to his relationship with Grazia is clear, aside from the meaning of her Italian name: she not only becomes the love of his life, but when they later write to each other, he explicitly addresses her as "Grâce tranquille" (1473).<sup>81</sup> Their friendship is marked by a communicative dynamic not found with any other character. She is the only one who really hears his compositions for what they are: "Seule, la petite Grazia était pénétrée jusqu'aux larmes par cette musique" (785). Grazia is the only character, apart from Gottfried, who shares Christophe's mysterious communion with nature: "Elle causait avec les chiens, avec les grenouilles, avec les herbes, avec les arbres, avec les paysans, avec les bêtes de la basse-cour. Elle adorait tous les petits êtres qui l'entouraient [...]" (782-83). She therefore participates in the adoration we have been examining, and somehow incarnates the dialogic reality it presents in human form. The modest character of Grazia replicates Christophe's humble stance towards reality (785), and she communes with him through their shared suffering: "Elle avait la divination de la tendresse, et percevait qu'il souffrait" (786). Yet despite this, a distance is established between them even from these very early moments. Christophe ignores their mysterious connection, focusing all his attention on Colette instead (786). When she finally leaves to go back to Italy, she continues to pray for him, yet he

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<sup>81</sup> It should also be noted that Nancy briefly refers to the importance of grace in the resurrection (*NMT* 14), but does not carry this line of enquiry any further. I too merely wish to highlight this term as a connector linking Christophe's relationship with Grazia to the resurrection without going into its theological complexity.

remains unaware of this “naïve affection” that watches over him from afar (788-89). She converses with him in an unreciprocated dialogue: “[E]lle causait avec lui, tout bas, pendant des heures” (788). Grazia reappears in *Les Amies*, and even though she has married, she never loses her regard for Christophe (1239). Christophe senses her mysterious presence, despite her physical distance: “Christophe [...] sentait planer sur lui la présence de l’invisible amie” (1241). When he reencounters her, Christophe finally begins to realise the reality of this friendship that has played itself out at a distance, but Grazia now loves another, and feels nothing for him but “une paisible amitié” (1244). Despite their brief reunification at this point in the narrative, a separation is maintained between them that remains until their second meeting after the *Buisson* where, as we shall see, a distinct change in his attitude towards relationship occurs, as well as an extension of this discourse on separation manifested through visual elements. As we will observe, Christophe’s relationship with Grazia is fundamentally important to the process of *anastasis* in the novel because it displays a re-evaluation of the meaning of presence. Not only is Grazia, at the beginning of their relationship, the “invisible amie” who remains present in his life despite her absence, but when they reencounter each other after the *Buisson*, the dynamic that springs up between them will endure even through the final barrier of death. Her death serves as the final test in Christophe’s acceptance of the absence of his loved ones, and the closing move in the discourse on solitude Robichez has pointed out. I propose that we can deconstruct this passage through death by first analysing their relationship as it unfolds after the *Buisson*, locating in particular those elements referring to the interplay between visibility and invisibility and, more specifically, the interplay between light and darkness.

The contrast set up between light and darkness is the clearest marker of the shift of *anastasis* in Christophe and Grazia’s relationship because, as we shall see, it is not only intimately related to the study of the poetic presentation of the resurrection, but also to the very nature of the atheological God. When she returns home to Italy, Grazia’s mysterious connection to Christophe is represented through light imagery: “Et la paix italienne, le génie du calme, du bonheur tranquille, de la contemplation muette, rentrèrent dans ce cœur chaste et silencieux, au fond duquel continuait de brûler, comme une flamme immobile, le souvenir de Christophe” (788-89). Grazia is

dominated by light, which Rolland connects to her Italian heritage (1240). When she reappears after the *Buisson*, she brings this light to their relationship:

[...] Grazia lui apportait en dot le trésor le plus rare, que jamais Olivier n'avait possédé: la joie. La joie de l'âme et des yeux. La lumière. Le sourire de ce ciel latin, qui baigne la laideur des plus humbles choses, qui fleurit les pierres des vieux murs, et communique à la tristesse même son calme rayonnement. (1461)

The humble acceptance of suffering we examined in Chapter 3 finds heightened expression in the “calme rayonnement” Grazia provides, and thus the act of creation *ex nihilo* reveals another of its components through the imagery of light which changes the very nature of perception. The character of Grazia is directly connected to the *Buisson* dialogue through this light imagery. Before the resurrection occurs, Christophe’s state of being is signalled by the complete absence of daylight (1410). When the *Dieu-vivant* penetrates through this state of death, Rolland capitalises on another element of the Burning Bush episode that we have left unexamined until now. God reveals himself as “le Feu qui brûle dans la Nuit” (1420), an image which recalls the light emanating from the bush Moses finds burning on Mount Horeb (Exode 3: 1-6). Christophe’s task is to carry this light into the world as a sign of the presence of God (*JC* 1428). If we look more closely at this usage of light within Nancy’s deconstructive project, we can see that it is not restricted purely to the Exodus revelation. Nancy focuses in particular on the divine creative plan in terms of the separation between light and darkness executed by the “Père des lumières” (*D* 74) in the Book of Genesis. This dynamic interaction is the sign of the creation of a world in its entirety, and therefore a poetic creativity centred on the opening of the Spirit: “[L]e « divin » ne désigne pas autre chose que cette séparation entre jour (*dies*, *divus*) et nuit” (*A* 70). Grazia’s identification with a light that opposes the darkness is therefore a sign of the divine truth Rolland seeks to transmit through her character, but this usage becomes even more intense when it passes through the resurrection.

Perhaps the most effective way of analysing the passage through the resurrection is with the aid of a painter to whom both Nancy and Rolland make reference in a remarkably similar way. In a letter to Paul Claudel in 1940, Rolland says that, along with Giotto, Rembrandt is “le seul au monde [...] qui ait vu le Christ et communiqué



sa vision” (26 avril 1940, *Paul Claudel, Romain Rolland* 148). Rolland’s perspective on Rembrandt’s art as an unusually accurate portrayal of the truth of Christ’s life is extremely significant for our analysis, especially when we begin to discuss the resurrection.<sup>82</sup> This is particularly well demonstrated in Rolland’s reference to a Rembrandt painting which, although it does not directly represent the resurrection of Christ like the painting we will see Nancy analyse, does serve as a useful subject for our deconstruction. Not long after his first encounter with Grazia, in the midst of his troubled solitude in Paris, Christophe enters the Louvre and pauses in front of Rembrandt’s *Le Bon samaritain*, which clearly displays the motif of light we have been examining. As Christophe wanders through the darkness (*JC* 803), the absence of light is explicitly connected to death, imparting a faint premonition of the despair he will experience just before the *Buisson*: “Le jour était lointain déjà, déjà mort. Le soleil invisible s’effondrait dans la nuit” (804). The desire for relationship is overpowering here, as Christophe feels the “immense besoin de s’abandonner dans les bras d’un ami...” (804). The advent of the divine that occurs as Christophe contemplates the painting draws together these various textual elements in the unifying image of light:

On implore le miracle, on sent qu’il va venir...Il vient ! Dans le crépuscule un flot d’or flamboie, rejaillit sur le mur, sur l’épaule de l’homme qui porte le mourant, et tout prend une douceur, une gloire divine. C’est Dieu même qui étreint dans ses bras terrible et tendres ces misérables, faibles, laids, pauvres [...]. On ne le voit pas lui-même; on voit son auréole et l’ombre de lumière qu’il projette sur les hommes... (804)

The presence of God in the painting is intrinsically connected to the light which floods the scene and seems to physically embrace the suffering members of humanity. However, the divine presence is only perceivable in the interplay of light and shadow, and thus a shift in the very meaning of presence is manifested, a shift that leaves a lasting mark on Christophe after he leaves the Louvre: “[I]l vivait dans une atmosphère analogue à celle du tableau de Rembrandt [...]. Il sentait, lui aussi, dans son cœur, les magiques reflets d’un soleil invisible. Et bien qu’il ne crût point, il savait qu’il n’était point seul [...]” (816). Light allows Christophe to begin to

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<sup>82</sup> It is interesting to note that Rolland also had an engraving of Rembrandt’s *La Résurrection de Lazare* hanging over his bed in his home in Vézelay (see *Au seuil* 111).

affirm a relationship structured according to an entirely different dynamic. We can identify similarities to the sensual resonance we examined in Chapter 2 here, but now resonance suffuses Christophe's entire bodily stance towards reality. In the period after the *Buisson*, the interplay of light and darkness in the Rembrandt tableau is replicated: "Depuis peu, le jour commençait à renaître ; des trouées de lumière passaient par les fissures" (1435). I thus argue that the connection between light and presence offers a particularly effective way of analysing the relationship with Grazia and the change in musical creation it entails. However, before we go on to analyse this shift, we must turn to Nancy's examination of another Rembrandt painting which will allow us to link it to music more effectively through the *athéologie* of the Trinity.

For Nancy, the key factor in the post-resurrection encounter between Mary Magdalene and Christ depicted in Rembrandt's *Le Christ et Marie-Madeleine au tombeau* is also, like Rolland's interpretation of *Le Bon samaritain*, the interaction between light and darkness that dominates the painting. The focus of Nancy's analysis is of course the act of touch that the risen Christ forbids Mary to enact, and we will move on to examine this important factor within the Gospel scene a little later. However, we must first acknowledge the important role light plays in clarifying the reassessment of presence that this sensual encounter holds within it: "[Si Jésus] a pu dire: « Qui m'a vu a vu le Père », ce dernier n'est donc pas un autre ni ailleurs, mais il est, ici et maintenant, ce qui ne se voit pas et qui cependant brille, ce qui n'est pas dans la lumière mais en arrière d'elle" (*NMT* 32). The invisible God, like Rolland's "soleil invisible," is manifested within the world as a real presence through relationship. The interplay of light clearly displays the shift of *anastasis* Nancy wishes to highlight: the divine is one and the same as the human, but this must be understood in terms of the *excription* we have been examining, which always remains suspended at the limit, defying reason's attempt to localise it in signification. What is occurring within Christophe's life is a continuation of the *Buisson* dialogue, which now exposes a different conception of otherness made present through the juxtaposition of light and darkness. This way of thinking about the resurrection as a linguistic transmission is continued through Nancy's analysis of an etching by Albrecht Dürer. Nancy focuses on the rays of light striking Christ's back as his hand is raised and moves towards Mary's forehead, which for him has

immense implications for the meaning of the whole painting: the risen body remains in the shadows, not destroying the darkness but rather shining within it. Based on this reading, Nancy concludes that “la résurrection n’est pas une apothéose, c’est au contraire la *kénose* continuée, c’est dans le vide ou dans l’évidement de la présence que brille la lumière” (*NMT* 45). The resurrection is in fact the fulfilment of the incarnation, and therefore, I argue, also the completion of the *excription* Christophe has been unable to fulfil. We can say that the radiance of light in both the novel and in Dürer’s painting appears as a *kénose continuée* made present in the darkness of the tomb of absence: Christophe does not directly see God, only the “auréole” of the divine glory shimmering in the relationship to otherness that dominates the scene. Nancy places this glory in Dürer’s etching at the very point of death: “La gloire du corps glorieux rayonne comme la béance du tombeau, et non pas contre elle” (45). We can therefore note in both the novel and in *Noli me tangere* a type of alternative presence being affirmed through the usage of light. The limit of signification is continually being traced, not in a return to life and therefore a reaffirmation of truth in the destruction of death, but rather in a displacement of the very distinction between presence and absence. The risen body shines with the “éclat de l’invisible” (*NMT* 30) which reveals that the void of the tomb, the void of the death of signification, is actually the place in which the invisible Trinitarian God is most present. I suggest that this accurately captures the shift occurring in the *Buisson* where God is made present in the fire that burns in the depths of the night. Having now established the link between light and the *excription* of resurrection, we can go on to analyse the change in Christophe and Grazia’s relationship after the *Buisson*.

The connection between light and presence is unmistakable in the passages describing Christophe and Grazia’s relationship immediately following the resurrection. After their post-*Buisson* re-encounter, Grazia and Christophe begin to exchange letters. When Christophe receives her reply, inviting him to dinner, the imagery is directly connected back to the resurrection he has experienced: “Cette lettre apportait le mot de résurrection pour son cœur affamé de tendresse” (*JC* 1440). This affirmation of resurrection is echoed and concretised in the gift of light with which we have already observed Grazia endowing Christophe. When Grazia invites him to Italy, where his reluctance is overcome by “le ciel immaculé et la lumière qui coulait sur les pentes des montes” (1442), a new type of vision is instituted: “Mais à

mesure que la journée s'avavançait, la lumière moelleuse l'entourait de ses bras ; et [...] il buvait avidement la volupté de voir" (1443). Later, Christophe writes to her: "Mes yeux se sont ouverts, à la lumière de Rome" (1472). What is most significant, however, is the change in his vision of Grazia, the very source of light:

[I]l la voyait avec des yeux tout neufs. [...] Maintenant, au soleil d'Italie, les rêves du Nord s'étaient fondus ; il voyait dans la clarté du jour l'âme et le corps réels de l'aimée. [...] Ses formes avaient pris une harmonieuse plénitude ; son corps était baigné d'une fière langueur. (1446)

The light of day that has come into being in the darkness of death now leads to a radical alteration of Christophe's *personnification poétique*, as the elements of *excription* we observed in the previous chapter, the soul and the body intertwined within the Trinitarian communion, now begin to reveal a different form of presence. It is this unique vision that defines the post-resurrection life, as Christophe testifies: "Je suis comme un homme nouveau, qui recommence à vivre" (1446). Thus we can say that Christophe's new vision, characterised by a perception of light, operates on the bodily level of *excription*, penetrating to the depths of the dialogue with reality: "De tous ses sens affamés, il mangeait la splendide lumière...Lumière, sang du monde, fleuve de vie, qui, par nos yeux, nos narines, nos lèvres, tous les pores de la peau, t'infiltrés dans la chair [...]" (1443). However, as we have already observed in the previous chapter, musical creativity is the linguistic arena in which the process of *excription* reveals its inner workings most clearly, and the same is true for the repercussions of light on relationship.

From the very beginning of Christophe's life, music is closely connected to the divine through light. When he first ventures into the world of musical creativity, his awakening is compared to the eruption of the divine light within the darkness of his family situation: "Au milieu de ces lourdes ténèbres, [...] commença de briller, comme une étoile perdue dans les sombres espaces, la lumière qui devait illuminer sa vie : la divine musique..." (JC 57). Here, I argue, we find a textual echo of the star leading the Magi to Christ in the Biblical narrative of the incarnation (Matthieu 2: 1-12). We can observe the effects of light at numerous points within the novel, and it is exhibited particularly strongly in his relationship with Olivier. In the passage where Christophe begins to challenge Olivier's artistic world of "fictions poétiques sans

corps, sans chair, sans réalité” (JC 1029), light serves as a marker of Olivier’s newfound ability to incarnate art: “L’amitié de Christophe arrachait Olivier peu à peu à ces Limbes de l’art. Le soleil s’infiltrait dans les retraites de son âme” (1029). Light also serves as a sign of the “âme commune” Christophe must incarnate. When Peter Schulz listens to the music of his distant friend, its impact on his state of being is represented through light (559), which becomes the tangible marker of an *excription* operating in the dimension of an invisible communion between their two souls, communicated through sound and yet amplified in the piercing brilliance of light shining in the darkness. Just before the scene in the Louvre, another indication of the fundamental importance of light is observable: “Ainsi, Christophe commençait à exercer par sa seule présence, par le fait seul qu’il existait, une influence apaisante. Partout où il passait, il laissait inconsciemment une trace de sa lumière intérieure” (801). A radically different form of presence, expressed through resonance and light, therefore makes itself felt within the carnal realm of existence.

When such a usage of light is combined with our analysis of the *Buisson* harmony, we find new possibilities for our examination of *excription* opening up. The combat between light and darkness that God undertakes within the world on behalf of all those who suffer is textually concretised in the Beethovenian harmony that such a divine battle produces. God is “la Vie, la goutte de lumière qui, tombée dans la nuit, s’étend et boit la nuit,” a divine action which unleashes a “symphonie héroïque,” a “concert serein” formed by the dissonance of battle (JC 1422). Our thinking on resonance is deconstructed further here, as we see that the divine consists of a form of presence that is harmonic in nature, made up of *sens* and yet incarnated in the bodily sphere of relationship. It is the post-*Buisson* relationship with Grazia that most obviously connects the formation of the harmony of light and darkness to the Beethovenian mastery. Grazia represents the pinnacle of harmony, since she possesses a “cœur tranquille, très sain et très serein, qui trouve son bonheur dans l’accord harmonieux de ses désirs et de sa destinée,” residing in a “calme musique” of the soul “nourrie de la lumière et de la paix puissante de la terre italienne” (1240). Light is coupled with mastery over desire, that is to say, it produces a type of mastery that forms the second element of the Beethovenian genius, the “génie du cœur fraternel” (XV). This mastery presents the new form of presence we have already begun to analyse and shapes it into a musical harmony that comes into being

at the limit of signification. When Christophe meets Grazia again after the *Buisson*, her “clarté” penetrates to the depths of his genius: “Le démoniaque de la vie et de l’art lui échappait entièrement [à Grazia]; elle y versait la clarté de son cœur intelligent. Cette clarté pénétrait le génie de Christophe” (1524). Light therefore serves as the crucial catalyst for the final stage in Christophe’s mastery over art and life. When Christophe comes to an understanding of the nature of mastery as a pious stance towards reality, and recognises the Spirit of God that courses through it, he also comes to another realisation: “Veillez et priez. Priez le Dieu, afin qu’il soit avec vous. Restez en communion amoureuse et pieuse avec l’Esprit de vie !” (1426). It is this aspect of “communion amoureuse” that I propose is the crucial step in Christophe’s attainment of the same “accord harmonieux” of desire that Grazia enjoys, the component that must balance the force of desire in order to complete the process of bodily *excription* executed within an authentic Trinitarian poetics. Amorous communion is identifiable in the passages describing the “âme commune,” particularly in the scene of encounter between Christophe and the mysterious girl he “communes” with in the audience at a concert at the Théâtre du Châtelet, just before the Louvre scene. In a common self-abandonment to the “torrent de rêves” issuing from the orchestra, Christophe discerns the faces of his fellow audience members, their features distorted by the shadows: “[I]l s’attachait à elles; il écoutait en elles; il finissait par s’assimiler corps et âme avec elles” (798). Rolland expresses this network of bodily interaction through music via a comment on the link between music and love: “[L]’essence de la musique est tellement l’amour qu’on ne la goûte complètement que si on la goûte en un autre” (798). In his second encounter with Grazia, Christophe begins to discern this reality more fully: “[B]ien que les millions d’êtres semblent différents entre eux comme les mondes qui roulent dans le ciel, c’est le même éclair d’amour qui resplendit, à la fois, dans les cœurs séparés par les siècles” (JC 1238). Love begins to completely overtake his engagement with reality: “La mesure de la vie, c’est l’amour” (1247). When the *Buisson* harmony finally consumes the *Christophorous*’ musical expression, and indeed his very existence, at the end of the novel, the importance of this aspect of communion through love is evident: “Tout n’est plus qu’un seul cœur. Sourire de la nuit et du jour enlacés. Harmonie, couple auguste de l’amour et de la haine!” (1593). The formation of harmony through the creative Spirit is, then, irrevocably tied to the act of love, and so we can now move forward with an analysis of the change in Christophe’s desire

that the addition of light brings, a deconstruction of the poetic and harmonious balance between love and desire perfected by the resurrection. This balance will then provide us with an appropriate model with which to deconstruct the metamorphosis of Christophe's relationship with Grazia as it traverses physical death.

### **The Harmony of Touch: a Poetic *Infinitum* of Desire and Love**

We have so far concluded that the *excription* taking place in Christophe's life meets an insurmountable obstacle in the form of the dissolution of the self, since desire constantly seeks to assert a tangible form of metaphysical presence in the realm of signification which *kenosis* renders impossible. According to Nancy, through *anastasis* the finite nature of the self becomes "à la fois fin dernière et présentation accomplie de ce « sens d'être je »" (A 129). In *anastasis*, what Nancy proposes as a completion of self-presentation occurs, because a harmonious balance between signification and dissolution takes shape through the equilibrium between desire and love. In his *L'« il y a » du rapport sexuel*, Nancy explores this equilibrium in the context of sexual relationship:

L'amour et le désir se commandent et s'excluent peut-être mutuellement, chacun représentant à la fois la finition et l'infinitum de l'autre [...]. L'amour et le désir seraient ainsi les deux pôles du rapport, de son avoir-lieu sans lieu, étant eux-mêmes l'un à l'autre dans un rapport sans rapport. L'amour donne ce qu'il n'a pas (selon Lacan), et le désir saisit ce qui l'excède [...] (49)

With Nancy's clarification of the complementary forces of desire and love, we come to the heart of the problem of *excription* and begin to glimpse a solution. Through Nancy's thinking on love, Fischer writes, "the experience of lovers, which was for so long in the service of the fusional logic of desire, now opens us to the infinite spacing of bodies and to the sharing that we are" (37). If the absence of physical presence seems to be the end of the finite self, with the act of love this end of finitude regains its nature as the poetic beginning of infinitude. In other words, it exposes metaphysical presence as an atheological Trinitarian relationship. I thus argue that resurrection and love mutually enlighten each other, as the Beethovenian hero moves into the final phase of his relationship with Grazia and the *kenosis* of the incarnation reaches its apogee. Nancy's deconstruction in *Noli me tangere* will now

allow us to further unpack this phenomenon through an exposure of the role of touch.

When Nancy comments on the scene of encounter between Mary Magdalene and the risen Christ, a large part of his analysis consists of an interrogation of the nature of their physical interaction, which we can in turn relate back to the love unfolding in the novel. All of the paintings Nancy analyses in *Noli me tangere* depict the risen Christ complementing his own verbal injunction with a recoiling movement away from Mary's outstretched hand as it moves to touch him. He speaks about this in terms that allow us to draw a clear comparison between this movement and the act of love that is the necessary complement to the desire for possession:

Ce n'est pas que Jésus se refuse à Marie-Madeleine : c'est que le vrai mouvement de se donner n'est pas de livrer une chose à empoigner, mais de permettre le toucher d'une présence, et par conséquent l'éclipse, l'absence et le départ selon lesquels, toujours, une présence doit se donner pour se présenter. [S]i je me donne comme un bien appropriable, je reste, « moi », derrière cette chose et derrière ce don, je les surveille et je m'en distingue. [Mais si] je me donne en écartant la touche, [...] je ne maîtrise pas ce don, et celle/celui qui me touche et se retire, ou bien que je retiens avant sa touche, elle/il a réellement retiré de moi un éclat de (ma) présence. (*NMT* 82-83)

The act of self-giving, epitomised in the *écart* of touch, reveals the infinite reality of the self within the sensual finitude of body. The exposure of the “caresse” and the “battement du baiser” (83) in this deconstructive light succeeds in communicating the presence of the Trinitarian God: “Le Dieu-vivant est donc celui qui s'expose comme vie de l'appropriation-déappropriation portant au-delà d'elle-même” (*D* 226). The force that raises Christ from the dead is, as we have seen, not an annulment of the state of death itself, but rather a prolonging of the *kenosis* which defines it. This, we can now assert, is enacted by the movement of love which entails the complete giving of the self. We can discern this within Christophe's relationships, in a nascent form, before the *Buisson*. In his first romantic encounter, both Christophe and Minna experience a balancing force in the midst of their desire for one another: “Cette froide et coquette petite fille, ce garçon orgueilleux, étaient dévorés du besoin de se donner, de souffrir, de mourir l'un pour l'autre” (*JC* 199). The sexual encounter with Ada brings a heightened desire for such self-giving: “Et malgré tout, ils s'aimaient,



ils s'aimaient de tout leur cœur. [I]l aurait voulu mourir alors pour elle" (335). The need for self-sacrifice (as Christophe asserts to Ada a little later: "Quand on aime, on se sacrifie l'un à l'autre" [347]) proposes a balance of sensuality and love: "C'était un bel amour de jeunesse ; et si sensuel qu'il fût, il n'était pas vulgaire, car tout était jeune en lui ; il était naïf, presque chaste [...]" (335). The concept of chastity Rolland employs here further enlightens the harmonious accord between love and desire. Christophe's surrender to the force of desire is countered by this state of being which dissolves after his affair with Ada: "Christophe était délivré de Ada, mais il ne l'était pas de lui-même. En vain tâchait-il de se faire illusion et de revenir au calme chaste et fort du passé" (363). A little later in the novel, just before the Rembrandt encounter in the Louvre, Rolland defines chastity in terms that evoke the harmonious balance we have been examining: "Il menait une vie rigoureusement chaste [...]. Ce n'était pas qu'il fût à l'abri des passions. [...] Mais ces passions étaient chastes, même quand il y cédaît : car il n'y cherchait pas le plaisir, mais le don absolu de soi et la plénitude de l'être" (797). It is chastity that proposes itself as the antidote to the "égoïsme le plus piteux" (797) Christophe has observed within the Parisian artistic scene. However, we can say that Rolland's thinking on this harmony reflects Nancy's, because it is only after the *anastasis* of the *Buisson* resurrection that chastity begins to cement itself, and again, it is the relationship between Christophe and Grazia that displays its effects most intensely.

From Christophe's first meeting with Grazia onwards, her character embodies chastity, and their relationship quickly comes to be governed by the act of self-giving. Grazia possesses the "cœur chaste et silencieux" (JC 789) that watches over Christophe from afar, and after the resurrection her chastity finally penetrates into the depths of Christophe's being. The imagery Rolland chooses to evoke this recalls the shining light that Grazia also brings as the visible manifestation of harmony: "La présence de ce qu'on aime arrache à l'imagination son dard envenimé ; la fièvre du désir tombe ; l'âme s'absorbe dans la chaste possession de la présence aimée.- Grazia rayonnait d'ailleurs sur ceux qui l'entouraient le charme silencieux de son harmonieuse nature" (1460). An unconventional form of possession is enunciated here, a possession not constructed around physical presence, but rather on the interaction between *appropriation* and *déappropriation* which leads to an awareness of the infinite nature of the self as *sens*. Chastity thus enacts an intimacy that consists of

the equilibrium between distance and proximity. After their post-resurrection encounter, Christophe wishes to take their friendship further (1456), but Grazia instead insists on a form of platonic love which introduces a communion that defies the categories of presence and absence we have been disassembling (1460). After this, Christophe finally accepts their paradoxical proximity and an “intimité simple et recueillie” (1460) comes into being between them. Love reaches its climax when, even after Grazia realises she loves Christophe, they are both forced to sacrifice themselves for the sake of her son Lionello, who jealously tries to come between them (1520-21). Yet this sacrifice ironically brings them closer together than ever: “Le renoncement même, le commun sacrifice les tenaient par des liens plus forts que ceux de la chair” (1523). The two of them are bound together in an exchange consisting of self-giving and a mutual sharing of suffering which recalls the *athéologie* of poetic adoration: “[L]e matin, il n’ouvrait pas les yeux, il ne les fermait pas, le soir, sans une muette prière d’adoration amoureuse. Et elle, quand elle s’éveillait, ou que la nuit, elle restait, comme souvent, des heures sans dormir, elle songeait : - Mon ami pense à moi” (1524). I therefore suggest that we have exposed yet another layer of revelation in which the self as relationship becomes fully discernable through the very finiteness of body, a stage of revelation which is also coupled with a change in the Beethovenian genius’ creation *ex nihilo*.

In mutual self-sacrifice, *excription* comes to fruition via a melding of the carnal and the visual within the Beethovenian self-mastery. After Christophe returns to Paris, he exchanges a series of letters with Grazia (*JC* 1470-82), and during this epistolary communication he finally understands that the special distance between them is in fact not an absence of relationship at all: “Il partit. Il s’éloigna d’elle. Il ne la quitta point. Comme dit un vieux trouvère, « l’ami ne quitte son ami que quand son âme y consent »” (1467). In these letters we find a full *excription* of being, which Rolland utilises a discourse on visibility to encapsulate: “Il épousait son âme. Il voyait avec ses yeux” (1462). Vision draws together the process we have been analysing in a form that concretises the Beethovenian hero’s mastery over his own self-presentation, as Christophe finally gains “une maîtrise de soi” (1460). A shift in Christophe’s musical creation is also seen during these passages of the novel, a shift to which painting speaks in a profound manner. Grazia teaches Christophe a new appreciation for Italian art, as his soul is filled with a “[m]usique des lignes sereines,

des nobles architectures, des groupes harmonieux. Musique qui rayonne de la beauté parfaite du visage, des mains, des pieds charmants, des draperies et des gestes” (1463). The “musique” emanating from the paintings by Titian and Raphael is compared to a “sourire lumineux où les ombres s’effacent, où la passion s’endort,” giving Christophe control over the “forces frémissantes de la vie” which are finally subdued by the “main calme du maître...” (1463). The Spirit, which is evoked through the “souffle impérial de Rome” (1505), brings Christophe to a climactic moment in the formation of the Trinitarian poetics. We observe the instigation of a harmonious balance of the forces of passion: “C’est l’ordre dans l’harmonie des libres passions et de la volonté...Christophe s’étudiait à maintenir dans son art le juste équilibre des puissances de la vie” (1505). The resurrection declares itself as a completion of the *événement de l’esprit* in the relationship of *excription*, because it is precisely the “impossible” love Christophe and Grazia share within his creative harmony that allows our Trinitarian poetics to remain at the limit of signification. As Nancy writes: “[L]’impossibilité de l’amour chrétien pourrait être du même ordre que l’impossibilité de la « résurrection »” (NMT 86). Christophe loses himself in the *excription* between them, but this paradoxically allows him to completely possess Grazia’s soul: “À vivre sa musique au travers de l’âme de Grazia, il épousait cette âme et il la possédait. De ce mystérieux accouplement naissaient des œuvres musicales, qui étaient comme le fruit de leurs êtres mêlés” (JC 1524). A being-in-common, which crafts a tension between the love that unites and the spatial separation that balances the forces of passion, shapes their relationship into a new form of creation that extends and draws out the dialogic reality of the *Buisson* in the bodily realm of presence: “Le son d’un bel instrument est, pour le musicien, pareil à un beau corps où son rêve aussitôt s’incarne. Mystérieuse fusion de deux esprits qui s’aiment [...]” (1549). Their dialogue thus remains suspended at the limit: “Se tenir au lieu de l’impossible revient à se tenir là où l’homme se tient sur sa limite- celle de sa violence et de sa mort : sur cette limite, il s’écroule ou il s’expose, et d’une manière ou de l’autre il se perd nécessairement” (NMT 86-87). I argue that this dynamic suspension completes the Empedoclean harmony of “amour et haine” which defines the end of the novel (JC 1593). There is, however, another textual device that Nancy identifies as an encapsulation of the impossibility of this act of love through distance and the withdrawal from touch it involves. Through this concept, I propose to trace the way in which *excription* penetrates the final barrier of

Grazia's (and then in turn, Christophe's) physical death, in the process revealing the full meaning of the *anastasis* of resurrection and the truth of presence it brings with it.

In Nancy's deconstruction of the contrast between light and darkness, a particular emphasis is placed on the image of the hand, a haptic device that is also distinctly present in the novel. The interplay between light and darkness is echoed in the act of touch, which in turn is represented by the frozen position of the hands of both Mary and Christ in the paintings Nancy examines: "[C]es mains sont en effet les signes et les signaux de l'intrigue d'une arrivée (celle de Madeleine) et d'un départ (celui de Jésus), mains prêtes à se joindre mais déjà disjointes et distantes autant que l'ombre et la lumière [...]" (*NMT* 56). The pictorial representation of hands indicates the potential both for touch and for a withdrawal from physical contact, serving as the signal for Christ's sending of Mary as "la première envoyée" to the other Apostles (57). The hand thus represents in a physical way the tension between light and darkness, along with the balanced forces of desire and love. In the novel, the importance of the image of the hand soon becomes clear. Just before the *Buisson* dialogue, Christophe expresses his desperate need for a hand to guide him through the darkness of solitude: "Christophe était sans aide; et sa main ne rencontrait aucune main dans la nuit" (*JC* 1410). The lack of a helping hand prevents him from attaining "la lumière du jour" (1410) that we have seen is so fundamental for both his artistic creation and his relationships. In the Rembrandt painting, the image of the hand is connected back to the Trinity, as Christophe's continued disbelief is tempered by his perception of a presence that escapes signification: "[U]n Dieu le tenait par la main, le menait où il fallait qu'il vînt. Il se confiait à lui comme un petit enfant" (816). The invisible God, known only by his light, is thus also present through the image of the hand, the sign of touch and withdrawal suffusing the very *surgissement* of the resurrection that is pre-figured in the painting.

The phenomenon of the hand is localised in the relationship between Christophe and Grazia, and the poetic gesture of their intertwined hands makes it possible for us to trace the passage of their relationship through the barrier of death. From their first encounter onwards, Grazia is envisaged as "[l]e mystérieux ami, qui plus d'une fois

avait travaillé pour [Christophe]” (JC 1237), and it is her “main affectueuse” that is the sign of her invisible presence. After the post-resurrection encounter, their interlocked hands represent the communication taking place at the limit of signification, where the poetic act is the simple presentation of the self to an Other. This physical act marks the beginning of their new relationship: “Ils se donnèrent la main, et restèrent sans parler” (1438), and recurs throughout (e.g. 1440; 1520). The *excription* between them is also represented by the guiding hand of Grazia, which leads Christophe towards the attainment of her *clarté*: “Les yeux fermés, il l’écoutait, il la suivait, la tenant par la main, dans le dédale de sa propre pensée” (1524). Yet even before Grazia’s death, this presentation of intimacy is marked by an element of absence that balances the seemingly obvious physical presence of the hand as an instrument of touch. We see this clearly in the way Rolland uses the hand to describe their epistolary exchange: “La correspondance de Christophe et de Grazia avait pris le ton grave et contenu d’un couple qui n’en est plus à l’épreuve dangereuse de l’amour, mais qui, l’ayant passée, se sent sûr de sa route et marche, la main dans la main” (1527). It is this fragmented potentiality of the interwoven hands that allows us to examine another core aspect of Christophe’s *personnification poétique* as it traverses death. In his preparatory notes to the novel, Rolland explains the three successive stages which define Christophe’s development, or rather, the three building blocks that are all equally fundamental to the narrative. First comes the stage of love, then faith, and lastly, the “couronnement” of all, is peace, which Rolland says is summarised by musical harmony:

À travers les brumes et les nuées, Christophe est parvenu seul au faite où l’on voit Dieu,- le Seigneur des combats, Sabaoth. Mais pour s’élever plus haut, il faut la main de l’aimée, de l’aimante. Calme que donne la possession de l’âme,- non diminuée, accrue plutôt par la mort qui, supprimant les corps (le corps de la bien aimée), laisse en présence les âmes toutes nues. (Enveloppe XV, Livre 3, 355)

Through the *excription* of the hand, we see the profound reality of Trinitarian relationship fully revealed in the finite form of flesh. Harmony is the key word around which everything revolves, since within the dissolution of signification, the finite and the infinite come into balance in “la sphère sereine où le passé et l’avenir sont également présents, où l’on voit à la fois naître, fleurir et finir les peines et les

joies, où tout est Harmonie” (Enveloppe XV, Livre 3, 355). Such a harmonic movement directly impacts upon finite bodily reality, yet, as we shall see, it is an *infinition* in which the resurrection will bring into being a manifestation of *sens* and truth in the final, kerygmatic stage of revelation.

In the passages following Grazia’s death, we find Rolland making direct reference to the same Gospel scene that Nancy uses in his analysis, the encounter between the risen Christ and Mary Magdalene, who mistakes him for the gardener. The scene has profound relevance for our understanding of the glorious body of the risen Christ as a textual proposition, since it is here that Nancy elaborates another element in his interpretation of Christ’s post-resurrection words to Mary: “[N]e touchant pas ce corps, toucher à son éternité. Ne venant pas au contact de sa présence manifeste, accéder à sa présence réelle, qui consiste dans son départ” (NMT 28). For Nancy, real presence is found in the departing body of Christ, flagged by the mutual extension of hands which simultaneously proffer the self and indicate its ascension. Soon after their self-sacrifice in the face of Grazia’s son’s jealousy, Grazia dies of the flu (JC 1552-53). After Christophe reads the letter bringing news of her death (1552), Olivier’s son Georges finds an open Bible sitting on Christophe’s bed: “Georges le ramassa et lut, dans l’Évangile, la rencontre de Madeleine avec le Jardinier” (1554).<sup>83</sup> The body that Mary encounters has undergone a change which Nancy scrutinises through the tension between presence and absence: “[Le Christ] est le même sans être le même, il est altéré en lui-même : n’est-ce pas ainsi qu’apparaît un mort ? [L’]apparaître de ce(lui) qui proprement n’apparaît plus, l’apparaître d’un *apparu et disparu* [...] ?” (NMT 48). The presence of the risen body involves a simultaneous self-revelation and disappearance that pivots around a transfigured identity: no longer is the body recognised as a fixed ontological entity, but rather the very recoiling movement away from Mary, the ascent to the Father, is in(*ex*)scribed on Christ’s very flesh: “La partance inscrite sur la présence” (49). Christ is thus present and not present at the same time, forging a presentation of the self in absence in which subsists the entirety of his self as a communion with the

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<sup>83</sup> The textual link to the Bible is further affirmed by the fact that on the day of Grazia’s death, Christophe is busy rehearsing a piece whose subject “les avait passionnés tous deux, car c’était un peu le symbole de leur propre destinée : *La Terre promise*” (JC 1553). In fact, “*La Terre promise*” was one of the titles Rolland considered for *La Nouvelle journée* (Notes préparatoires, Enveloppe XV 184)

Father and the Spirit. This *partance* soon begins to take effect within Christophe's musical creation: "De cette époque datent ses œuvres les plus poignantes, et aussi les plus heureuses : une scène de l'Évangile, que Georges reconnut : « *Mulier, quid ploras ?* »- « *Quia tulerunt Dominum meum, et nescio ubi posuerunt eum.* » *Et cum haec dixisset, conversa est retrorsum, et vidit Jesum stantem : et non sciebat quia Jesus est*" (JC 1557). The Gospel scene thus serves as the most intense revelation of a textual self as harmony, which is also transcribed into the mysterious encounter that occurs next.

Soon after her death, Christophe "meets" Grazia again, and when viewed through the Gospel scene, we can see that this meeting completes the dialogic process that is so clearly manifested in the *Buisson* dialogue. Music takes a privileged place, as the reappearance of Grazia is accompanied by a "symphonie" whose meaning Christophe cannot decipher (JC 1555). When Grazia extends her hands towards him, Christophe enters into a space in which "la musique des sphères" echoes between the light of the stars (1555). When he awakens to the light of the dawn, "la lueur lointaine des paroles entendues" remains with him, while the presence of Grazia is cemented in an extension of the *Buisson* dialogue's core process of *excription*:

Entre [Grazia] et lui, le mur était franchi. Il y avait longtemps déjà que plus de la moitié de son âme était de l'autre côté. À mesure que l'on vit, à mesure que l'on crée, à mesure que l'on aime et qu'on perd ceux qu'on aime, on échappe à la mort. À chaque nouveau coup qui nous frappe, à chaque œuvre qu'on frappe, on s'évade de soi, on se sauve dans l'œuvre qu'on a créée, dans l'âme qu'on aimait et qui nous a quittés. (1555)

The richness of Christophe's very existence is now found in a relationship with absence itself, which makes present both the life of those who have gone before him and his own Trinitarian being. For Nancy, such a realm is "suspendue entre représentation, pensée, sentiment et sensation," since it is fundamentally a space in which the dead no longer "exist" as metaphysical presence, but are rather incorporated into the existence of the living in the form of a "trace vivante" (A 131). This trace is thus both a presence and absence, or rather, a complete redefinition of both of these concepts through a suspension at the limit that reminds us of Rolland's attempt to convince Louise Cruppi of the real presence of her dead son: "[C]eux que

nous aimons, même absents, sont toujours avec nous, toujours vivants, plus vivants que les vivants” (Lettre à Cruppi 11 mars 1909). The encounter with the deceased Grazia is constantly referred back to the discourse on *sens*, which we can now carry forward into a more detailed examination of the *anastasis* lying at the heart of the resurrection.

At this point in the narrative, we can note the various threads in our discussion of the Trinitarian poetics beginning to coalesce into a more unified form, with *anastasis* as its consolidating force. Nancy further clarifies the nature of *anastasis* by specifying that it is something that essentially occurs through, and in, a relationship with the dead as *sens*: “[L]’*anastasis* n’est pas ou ne provient pas de soi, du sujet propre, mais de l’autre: elle lui vient de l’autre, ou bien elle relève de l’autre en lui- ou encore, elle est en lui la levée de l’autre” (NMT 35). Through Grazia’s death and subsequent resurrection within his *exscribed* self, Christophe begins to incorporate absence itself, a process that can be understood as *kenosis* and its accompanying *anastasis* functioning in tandem with each other. Understood in terms of the *spinozisme* of sensation we analysed in Chapter 4, the process of resurrection is simply a continued participation in the series of relationships that define both the living as an apparent “foyer d’un « je »,” and the dead as a dislocation of this “je” as it exists in the finite space of world (A 132). In death, the realm of relationship as Spirit is reaffirmed as the reality of all being, since as Nancy emphasises “les *rappports* ne meurent pas” (132). In *anastasis*, presentation is redefined along with the *sens* of life and death itself, as they become deferred finite encounters within the same reality of relationship: “[N]i mort, ni vif, il n’y a simplement qu’un *présent*. Mais toujours une présentation de l’un à l’autre, vers l’autre ou en l’autre : la présentation d’une *partance*” (NMT 36). *Partance* is *exscribed* not only in the absence of the physical presence of Grazia, but also in the joint movement of Christophe and the rest of his deceased loved-ones as they strive for a goal that constantly evades the grasp of signification: “[L]a cime ne paraissait pas plus proche. Il ne l’atteindrait jamais (il le savait maintenant), dût-il marcher pendant l’éternité. Mais quand on est entré dans le cercle de lumière et qu’on ne laisse pas derrière soi les aimés, l’éternité n’est pas trop longue pour faire route avec eux” (JC 1556). Christophe is reunited with Grazia via a *partance* in which presence as a multiplicity of relationships is existentially realised. The figure of the hand again encapsulates this process, as it makes a gesture of



proximity whilst at the same time indicating a departure towards the infinite, a departure completed in death: “Alors, la bien-aimée lui était apparue; elle l’avait pris par la main; et la mort, en brisant les barrières de son corps, avait, dans l’âme de l’ami, fait couler l’âme de l’amie” (*JC* 1586). Departure forms the kernel of the harmony which consumes Christophe in this scene: “Ensemble, ils étaient sortis de l’ombre des jours, et ils avaient atteint les bienheureux sommets, où, comme les trois Grâces, en une noble ronde, le passé, le présent, l’avenir se tiennent par la main, où le cœur apaisé regarde à la fois naître et finir les chagrins et les joies, où tout est Harmonie...” (1586). Yet Christophe’s acceptance of absence must be fulfilled through an embrace of his own death, the ultimate *excription* of his self in a completion of the opening of the Spirit. With this entry into death, I propose that the *infinition* we have glimpsed in the novel will be revealed as a presentation of kerygmatic truth which can be directly compared to the parabolic form of the Gospels.

### **The Trinitarian Poetics as Sensual Truth**

The poetic harmony of life and death that we find in the *Buisson* is *exscribed* in Christophe’s attainment of musical mastery at the end of his life, which in turn builds on the phenomena we have observed in his relationship with Grazia. By analysing this last phase of Beethovenian expression through the *anastasis* of resurrection, we can determine the extent to which the truth proposed by the Gospels serves as an appropriate model for engaging with this relational reality. Towards the end of his life, a disillusioned Christophe feels the temptation to reject his musical creation as a finite, incomplete expression of the unpronounceable harmony of the soul: “Notre musique est illusion. [...] C’est un compromis de l’esprit entre les sons réels, une application du système métrique à l’infini mouvant. L’esprit avait besoin de ce mensonge, pour comprendre l’incompréhensible [...]. Mais cela n’est pas vrai. Cela n’est pas vivant” (*JC* 1587). Language can never capture truth, being but a poor reflection of the “infini mouvant” of *sens* that resides at the limit of signification. Inevitably, even the genius is incapable of affirming a creative product that is truthful, since meeting the gaze of “les yeux de Jéhovah” (1588) is impossible. The atheological God remains the unspeakable truth of life, repeatedly slipping out of the

grasp of human reason. However, as we have seen, Christophe's desire throughout his life has been to attain such clear vision, so how can we affirm truth as a musical harmony captured in the literary form of the novel given this impossibility? Nancy's reading of the risen body again comes to our assistance, as the culmination of the Christian narrative reveals at its heart a means of textualising truth in terms of the infinite movement of *sens*. After his realisation, Christophe rejects the falsity of music only to re-embrace it a moment later: "Ô ma vieille compagne, ma musique, tu es meilleure que moi. [...] Nous partirons ensemble, mon amie. Reste avec moi, jusqu'à la fin !" (1588). As Duchatelet explains, the last line of this dialogue without interlocutor is a subtle reference to the episode in the Gospel of Luke where the disciples, after the encounter with the risen Christ on the way to Emmaus, ask Jesus to stay the night with them because it is almost evening (*Au seuil* 256; Luc 24: 28-29). Nancy also makes reference to the same episode, citing it as further evidence for the change in the risen Christ's appearance he highlights in his analysis of the "jardinier" (*NMT* 48). Thus we can suggest that Nancy's commentary on the Gospel narrative of the risen Christ, and the bodily reality of touch and separation that it proposes, allows us to read Christophe's relationship to music at this point in the novel as the affirmation of a form of truth that takes into account the *anastasis* of resurrection. The encounter with a finite, embodied reality (music) which calls the self into movement (expressed by Christophe's desire to "partir ensemble"), even while this self constantly seeks to hold onto meaning (the reference to the disciples' desire to remain with Christ), poetically presents God as truth. The schema of interaction between *sens* and truth we explored in Chapter 1 is now fully exposed in the novel: "[L]e sens et la vérité s'entr'appartiennent autant qu'ils s'écartent l'un de l'autre, et cet écart lui-même donne la mesure de leur entr'appartenance" (*SM* 29). Ian James phrases this interaction in a way that allows us to understand the importance of the act of *partance* in the formation of truth, and indeed the very infinite movement that characterises *sens* as *renvoi*:

[I]f the sense of an entity, fact, or event is determined as truth- that is, as the truth of the sense which that entity, fact or event *is*- there exists a tension between the "fixing" of the determination and the necessary movement, relationality, and plurality of sense as passage or being-to [...]. (*The Fragmentary Demand* 110)

In order to speak of truth, we must retain a position of tension in which the coming-to-presence that defines the very *surgissement* of the world is continually acknowledged and affirmed. Nancy's definition of truth is strikingly similar to the one Rolland sets out in his preparatory notes to the novel: "La vérité, c'est la vie. Elle est toujours mouvante. Sa mesure, c'est l'heure et c'est l'homme" (Enveloppe X (b) 88). By applying this idea of truth to the novel, I argue that we reach Nancy's "geste d'écriture, frayage et forçage d'un *a* dont toute la signification et toute la destination (le à du *a*...) est de *s'exprimer* : d'aller toucher au concret du monde où l'existence fait sens" (SM 28-29). When *sens* is inserted back into truth, we come to a different understanding of Rolland's religious thought as an atheological stance towards reality proposing "une vérité vide" (D 226) which still paradoxically retains its weight as truth. We will now move on to look at how Christophe's musicality remains the central vehicle for this union of *sens* and truth, which is coupled with the bodily reality of the incarnation and the resurrection as an *événement de l'esprit* fulfilled through *anastasis*.

The constant tension between the act of *partance* and the desire to define a fixed truth underscores Christophe's Beethovenian mastery at the end of his life, and indeed his own self-expression as a presentation of truth. Christophe is led into physical death by a mysterious symphony: "[S]uffoquant, d'une voix qui n'obéissait plus à sa pensée [...], il entonna un cantique à la vie. Un orchestre invisible lui répondit" (JC 1589). The *Buisson* dialogue is continued in the form of this exchange between Christophe and an invisible cohort of musicians who seem to evade his efforts to control them (1590). He desperately seeks to keep up with their complex manoeuvres, but "la musique joue toujours, s'éloignant. Christophe, ruisselant de sueur, tend les bras vers elle: - Attends-moi! Attends-moi!" (1591). The orchestra inevitably escapes his grasp, extending and distending his musical creation whilst remaining present in a dimension of tonal resonance. The passage of the symphony takes place in a bodily dimension, because melded with this musical imagery is the figure of a living, corporeal being with whom Christophe struggles: "Un homme l'étreignit, à bras-le-corps. Ils roulaient ensemble. L'autre pesait sur lui. Il étouffait. [...] Avec qui est-ce que je lutte, enlacé? Quel est ce corps que je tiens, qui me brûle?..." (JC 1590-91). This "invisible ennemi" (1591) is also evoked when Rolland speaks of the unfolding revelation of God throughout Christophe's life by

referring to the Biblical scene of Jacob's battle with the Angel: "Se trouver face à face avec Dieu. Lutter ensemble, comme Jacob avec l'ange" (*JC* 1586; Genèse 32: 23-33). The resonance of music is a bodily presentation of truth built on passage: it is continually escaping the nominative definition reason seeks to give to it, yet it remains tangibly present through the "être aux prises avec le réel" (Mounic 9) represented by the Biblical figure of Jacob struggling with a divine being who refuses to reveal his identity. The effort to identify this invisible being, that is to say, the very face of God, is impossible and yet is an integral part of the encounter, because as Ian James writes, the image "opens onto, or gives access to, the real of an existence itself," which is nothing but "the sense of the world" ("The Evidence of the Image" 73). For Nancy, the fleeting vision of a continually escaping, incarnate God essentially defines the Christian experience: "Il faudrait que « dieu » ne soit nommé qu'en passant, et comme passant" (A 114). We can therefore say that the resurrection occurring within the novel proposes a truth grounded in *le réel*, which can be negotiated *through* the constant interplay of presence and absence, and this is clearly evident in Rolland's usage of another textual element we examined earlier in the thesis.

We have already observed the way in which the image of the river represents the Beethovenian genius' musical expression of the limit of signification, and serves as the paradigm through which the desire for signification meets the dissolution of *kenosis*. At this point in the narrative, the opening words of the novel are repeated, bringing together the lives of those Christophe has encountered throughout the course of the novel in a dynamic form of unity: "Le grondement du fleuve monte derrière la maison. [...] Toute sa vie coulait sous ses yeux, comme le Rhin. Toute sa vie, toutes ses vies, Louisa, Gottfried, Olivier, Sabine [...]. (1592). The river itself is nothing but a passage towards unity that carries with it all of Christophe's human ties: "- Nous sommes avec toi. [...] Le fleuve qui t'emporte, nous emporte avec toi. - Où allons-nous ?- Au lieu où nous serons réunis." (1592). The ocean is the final terminus, connected with the "paix souveraine de Dieu" (1593). Again, desire finds its equilibrium in the self-giving of love, which leads to the supreme harmony of the divine life, a continuous passage stretching into eternity:

Seigneur, n'es-tu pas trop mécontent de ton serviteur? [...] J'ai lutté, j'ai souffert, j'ai erré, j'ai créé. Laisse-moi prendre haleine dans tes bras paternels. Un jour, je renaîtrai, pour de nouveaux combats. Et le grondement du fleuve, et la mer bruissante chantèrent avec lui : - Tu renaîtras. Repose ! Tout n'est plus qu'un seul cœur. Sourire de la nuit et du jour enlacés. Harmonie, couple auguste de l'amour et de la haine! Je chanterai le Dieu aux deux puissantes ailes. Hosanna à la vie! Hosanna à la mort! (1593)

The completion of Christophe's Trinitarian poetics is marked by the presence of God's paternal embrace, and so we can affirm that the dimension of relationship referred to as the Holy Spirit is manifested in a dynamic unity concretised within finite, bodily form, which in turn is inherently pointed towards the infinite through the act of *partance*. The end of Christophe's life can thus now be understood as a ceaseless movement towards the infinite in which the finite is mobilised and deconstructed, revealing its inherent nature as *sens*: "Jean-Christophe *ne finit point. Sa mort même n'est qu'un moment du Rythme, une expiration du grand souffle éternel...*" (JC XIX). Here we find a trace of Nancy's interpretation of the pneumatic prayer of the Orthodox tradition, which represents the expression of words in silence, at the limit, a language consisting purely of breath: "Non les mots mais le souffle qui les porte. Et la trace de ce souffle en nous, en l'autre. Une parole de souffle" (A 32). The *Buisson* dialogue with a God who "souffle quand il veut, où il veut" (JC 1426) through the action of his divine Spirit, passes into the same realm of silence we observed in Nancy's definition of harmony as "la prononciation [...] de ce qui n'est pas du tout à prononcer" (SM 137), and yet retains its nature as self-presentation through the adoration of the risen body. Christophe's passage into death is nothing but an extension of the act of adoration, because his very being *exscribes* the dynamic of relationship at the limit of signification through an active acceptance of the *kenosis* and *anastasis* of resurrection which function in partnership. As Rolland writes in his "Adieu à Jean-Christophe" at the end of the novel cycle: "Moi-même, je dis adieu à mon âme passée ; je la rejette derrière moi, comme une enveloppe vide. La vie est une suite de morts et de résurrections. Mourrons, Christophe, pour renaître !" (JC 1595). The concept of a chain of deaths and resurrections allows us to come to a more refined understanding of how the kerygmatic text forms a presentation of truth that is most clearly visible in the *Buisson* revelation, but in fact also functions at all moments of the musical narrative.

Christophe's death and resurrection essentially occurs at the heart of life itself, and so it is therefore a process that is continually recurring from the very moment of his birth. The desire to capture signification and the ceaseless process of death and resurrection must occur together, at all moments of Christophe's musical expression. It is through this process that we can define the existential religious experience as functioning at the limit, whilst at the same time proposing a distinct and tangible truth through the finite bodily reality in which this experience must necessarily take place. We have in fact already observed such a process occurring within the *Buisson* dialogue: "Une autre âme était née. Elle naissait, à chaque instant. [...] Chaque seconde faisait d'elle un nouvel univers" (JC 1423). *Anastasis* now allows us to view the *surgissement* of this continually recreated universe as a poetic presentation of truth at the limit. In poetic expression, life and death function as two sides of an *infinition*, that is to say, a union of love and desire, finitude and infinitude, attraction and repulsion, "couple auguste de l'amour et de la haine" (JC 1593).<sup>84</sup> The harmonic union of life and death conditions the *infinition* of the *kérygma*, and defines the religious experience as something that functions at the limit of signification, constantly shifting in and out of discourse, constantly presenting a truth that must be understood through the infinite movement of *sens*. We will now bring our deconstruction to a close by highlighting the essentially parabolic nature of this phenomenon, as we conclude our inter-textual analysis of the Christian narrative and the life-story of the *Christophorous*.

The harmony of the novel is gathered up and projected according to the logic of the Gospel form, a type of writing that comes to light as an opening to *sens* and the affirmation of a *dépassement infini* that proposes itself as truth within experience. For Nancy, the parable is founded on the act of opening, which he connects back to the act of listening: "[L'excès de sa vérité] est toujours d'abord celui de sa provenance ou de son adresse : « Entende qui a des oreilles ! » Il n'y a pas de « message » sans qu'il y ait d'abord [...] une adresse à une capacité ou à une disposition d'écoute" (NMT 17). The parable is built on a mutual opening to *sens* in

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<sup>84</sup> We can also observe such a poetic experience functioning in Christophe's *crise de soi* that we examined in Chapter 2: "Comme on change de corps au courant de la vie, on change d'âme aussi. [...]. Une vie meurt. Une autre est déjà née" (263). Just before the scene of the escaping symphony, another resurrection occurs within the natural world under the influence of a "force renaissante" (1589).

which we see presented “[m]oins ou plus que du sens : rien du tout ou bien toute la vérité, d’un coup présente et chaque fois singulière” (18). Through the lens provided by the parabolic truth of the Gospels, the textual harmony that is unfolding throughout the novel in the eternal cycle of death and resurrection can be read as a complete opening of the self to dialogue, as we see at the end of the novel when Christophe’s self-reflexive verbal interrogation becomes a communication with the “dix [âmes qui] logeaient en lui” (*JC* 1584). What comes to light is a network of relationships in which a truth that is captured in all its singularity in each moment of opening to *renvoi* is communicated, an opening in which we can identify what Düttmann calls “the exposition of an immanence of finitude” (190). The new dawn that occurs at the very end of the novel as a sort of post-script to the concluding scene of harmony can be seen as the final move in the perfection of such an opening. In this scene, Christophe has taken on the form of his namesake crossing the river with a child on his shoulders: “Saint Christophe a traversé le fleuve” (*JC* 1593). The Mosaic Law is again evoked here, as the opening of sainthood we have observed in previous chapters is sealed, along with the revelation that has been unfolding.<sup>85</sup> In his analysis of the Trinitarian *Dieu-vivant*, Nancy states: “[D]isons [...] que dans cette (dé)construction se perd, mais aussi surgit, l’horizon comme question, l’horizon comme nom propre de la finitude qui se tourne vers son propre infini” (*D* 226). We could say that Christophe’s fictional canonisation represents this turning of the finite, embodied self towards the infinity of *sens*. The child Christophe carries finally brings together the discourse on sight and harmony as the new day arrives, signalled by the chime of the bells ringing out the Angelus: “Voici l’aurore nouvelle ! Derrière la falaise, qui dresse sa noire façade, le soleil invisible monte dans un ciel d’or. Christophe, près de tomber, touche enfin à la rive” (*JC* 1594). Christophe dialogues with the child, posing him one last question: “Nous voici arrivés ! Comme tu étais lourd ! Enfant, qui donc es-tu ?” (1594). The child then responds: “Je suis le jour qui va naître” (1594). The new dawn presents the manifestation and effacement of existence, remaining a “soleil invisible” that

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<sup>85</sup> The Mosaic Law is fulfilled in the tension between sin and forgiveness: “Le péché revient à se saisir du don, à se l’incorporer par le savoir et par l’absorption. Le pardon du péché nous dessaisit de cette saisie. Se saisir/se dessaisir de... : cette pulsation nous rythme” (*A* 79). Such a rhythm is echoed in Christophe’s desire to rejoin his lost loved-ones and his simultaneous inability to seize them: “Où êtes-vous, mes âmes ? Je sais que vous êtes là, et je ne puis vous saisir” (*JC* 1592). This in turn, I argue, fits into the broader interaction between *sens* and truth we have outlined.

nevertheless reveals itself in the carnal and dialogic exchange occurring between Christophe and the child he has been struggling to carry on his shoulders. The truth of Christophe's existence is completely disclosed here, a truth that has been unfolding from the very first moments of the novel but which must also be continually rediscovered through an eternally repeated implementation of the Trinitarian poetics. Christophe's carrying the new day is not only a continuation of the injunction made in the *Buisson* to be the one who shines forth the divine light, but is also intimately connected to the *événement de l'esprit* which passes through the bodily narrative of the incarnation and resurrection. The entirety of Christophe's self-revelation is encapsulated in this scene of encounter with the new dawn because, as Nancy suggests, light epitomises the revelation of mystery: "[C]'est la lumière qui ouvre les yeux sur le mystère, qui s'y donne à voir de lui-même et qui n'est en fait rien d'autre que la lumière elle-même" (A 69). For Nancy, the recurring moment of awakening that must be extended into infinity is the essence of the textual provocation of the Gospels, which propose a way of thinking about the truth we have encountered in literary form: "La parabole ne va de l'image au sens : elle va de l'image à une vue déjà donnée ou non" (NMT 13). I argue that the novel does not seek to propose a fixed truth at all, but rather offers access to the potentiality for such truth in the finite realm of historicity. Light encapsulates this experience of truth, because with the advent of dawn a new form of vision becomes possible. As Nancy explains, light governs the potentiality for truth to take shape in the realm of finite presence: "Entendons aussi bien que la lumière ouvre les yeux de quelqu'un (de « l'homme ») ou bien qu'elle ouvre elle-même les yeux : car la lumière est regard en même temps que clarté, et le regard est lumière. La vision [est] l'éclaircissement d'une présence" (A 69). Christophe's death is the awakening to the self's presence as *sens*, a *personnification poétique* that engages with the totality of the relationships forming the very *surgissement* of the world. Thus the novel proposes a vision that completes the creativity of the Trinitarian poetics we have been examining, since it consists of a form of parabolic opening which serves as the only real "substance" of the text, as well as making it possible in the first place. What is necessary, then, is a continual repetition of self-awakening, and therefore also a constant rejuvenation of the possibility inherent in the dawn of a new day: "Lumière soudaine, instantanée et



brève- toujours surgissant dans la nuit. [...] Ce n'est pas un flamboiement d'apocalypse mais le renouvellement d'une aube" (A 69).<sup>86</sup> The novel puts forward a truth that only exists in this gap between light and darkness, between life and death, between signification and the linguistic possibility of *sens*. Nancy defines this in-between state as a locality of "croire sans croire" (A 137), an interval between faith as an "embrace of insufficiency" (Watkin, *Difficult Atheism* 115) and belief in which one finds "la force d'un élan qui ne se prend pas pour un semblant de savoir mais qui ouvre dans l'impossible la possibilité de se rapporter à lui" (A 137). As Descotes puts it: "La foi serait envolée, mais le désir de croire serait le même; c'est tout le drame de Christophe, et de Romain Rolland" (202). In the context of the *œuvre de foi* we have been deconstructing, we can most certainly affirm the truth of Nancy's claim that such a desire defines literary language itself. The effort to affirm belief in objective truth presents an "infigurable vérité" through a fiction that continually resists signification, whilst simultaneously proposing a poetic *finition* of the infinite nature of God as Trinitarian relationship: "[D]ans la fiction, la vérité n'est pas figurée comme par une allégorie impudente : elle est figurée en ce qu'elle est infigurable. L'infini reçoit finition, il s'ouvre dans le fini" (A 138). This form of writing ceding to its own infinite potentiality, we can conclude, offers a way of accurately understanding *Jean-Christophe* as a unique presentation of divine truth through a Trinitarian poetics operating at the very limit of *sens*.

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<sup>86</sup> We could argue that we come full circle here, as an exchange between the light of the first "Aube" and that of "La Nouvelle journée" becomes clear. In fact, in his preparatory notes to the novel, Rolland explains that "L'Aube nouvelle" was one of the working titles for *La Nouvelle journée* (Enveloppe XV 183).

## Conclusion

The deconstruction of what I have defined as a Trinitarian poetics has demonstrated that, in contrast with the assumption certain critics have made in past scholarship, Christianity in fact offers us a unique insight into the way religious truth is inscribed within *Jean-Christophe*. Jean-Luc Nancy's *Déconstruction du christianisme* enlightens Romain Rolland's attempts to communicate the experience of the divine, because it provides a way of engaging with the dynamic nature of truth and offers a means through which to negotiate the central problem of its expression: if God remains in the realm of the unspeakable, how can the novel function as an *œuvre de foi* that must operate through the signification of literary language? With a focus on the *Christophorous'* musical journey of faith, we have not only deconstructed a *personnification poétique* that provides an alternative understanding of Rolland's method of confronting the problem of truth, but we have also perhaps paved the way for future investigations into the interreligious engagement he undertook later in his career.

The overarching framework for our analysis has been the Trinity, a theological mystery that Nancy reads as the central marker in Christianity's unfolding revelation of divine truth. By focusing on the movement of *sens* which makes such a revelation possible, we refer to the space in which experience functions as a poetic coming-into-language, whilst also engaging with the manifestation of Trinitarian *renvoi* within signification. The fundamental experience of solitude and eventual harmony we have seen Jean-Christophe undergo can be referred to as a Trinitarian *athéologie*, because it remains continually suspended at the limit of signification whilst producing a type of *personnification* grounded in linguistic form. Such linguistic anchoring in signification means that the very limits of human presence are revised, and that the paradox of Christ's life as a meeting of the divine and the human is exploited as an atheological presentation of God. Resting on the foundation of this central experience, the text of the novel reveals itself as an opening of the Holy Spirit that develops gradually and yet is, paradoxically, present at all moments of this textual expression of divinity. We have seen that the *Buisson* dialogue serves as the most intense representation of the profound reality of Trinitarian relationship, and

yet this dialogue must be lived existentially through various experiences whose essence is encapsulated by the processes involved in musical creation. Such a creation *ex nihilo* is founded on an engagement with the *force éternelle* Rolland perceives moving through the Beethovenian hero and extending outwards into the realm of relationship. The resultant bodily interaction is a form of writing, or *excription*, which presents a Trinitarian *personnification* occurring in the poetic dimension.

We can conclude our analysis of the Trinitarian poetics by affirming this deconstructive model as an extremely accurate means of understanding the form of divine truth Rolland sought to produce in the novel. Read through this form of poetics, the musical novel serves as the paradigm for a creative process that is capable of projecting a “vérité vide” (*D* 226) which nevertheless retains its integrity within the realm of finite thought. In order to exist, however, this form of truth must continually refer back to the poetic process that engenders it within finite bodily existence, maintaining itself in an opening through which the self *exscribes* itself outwards in the act of love. With this simultaneous recognition of the absolute nature of finite experience and its infinite referral outwards, we attain a point at which truth can be affirmed in an *infinition* that invites the reader to enter its internal movement of self-surpassing, just as Grazia invites Jean-Christophe to join her beyond the barrier of physical death. Such a divine truth is continually in formation, perpetually suspended between the pre-linguistic possibility of faith and the affirmation of belief within the realm of signification. This, I have argued, is the atheological nature of the Trinitarian poetics, and the source of its rendering in textual form through the two other theological mysteries that have provided the central theoretical framework for our study, the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The deconstruction of such an *athéologie* has broad-reaching implications, because in examining the unfolding progression of the Trinitarian poetics within the novel as it produces an *excription* of truth, we have discerned some broad trends in thought that can perhaps be applied to the wider field of Rolland studies.

The first of these trends pertains specifically to Rolland’s relationship with Catholicism, since in utilising the Christian tradition to deconstruct the novel we have also perhaps reached a vantage point from which it is possible to shed new light

on his stance towards the Church. We have observed how the Catholic modernist movement serves as a historical marker in Rolland's engagement with the faith of his youth and, through our deconstructive reading, how it is also an example of the presence of a factor within religious experience that transcends such dogmatic specificities. Although we must be careful not to overstate the implications of our analysis, especially since it has only been able to focus on a very narrow range of theological elements in an extremely vast doctrinal system, applying its conclusions to Rolland's later engagement with the pre-Vatican II Church is not outside the realms of possibility.<sup>87</sup> In the Introduction to this thesis, we noted Paul Claudel's suggestion that Rolland's ultimate inability to profess the Creed of the Church was in fact not governed by his reason at all, but was rather a "« crampe » de la volonté" (435) that is the central sign of the divine's eternal escape from the categorisation of discursive thought. After having carried out our deconstruction, we can certainly assert that Rolland's way of thinking about divine truth seems to match Claudel's understanding. If Rolland was unable to profess his faith in the divine nature of Christ, perhaps it was primarily because of his need to affirm the dynamic conception of "impossible" truth that Nancy proposes through his deconstructive project. By remaining in this experiential dynamism in which truth is understood through the passage of *sens*, Rolland can be seen to affirm the need to poetically project divine experience. Only if Christianity remains suspended at the limit where the singularity of real experience is presented as a divine truth that contemplates its atheological underpinnings can it be acknowledged as an authentic religious system. Perhaps such an application can also be extended into a consideration of the significance of the deconstructive project for Rolland's broader religious engagement.

If we work outwards from the conception of divine truth posited in the novel, we can see that *Jean-Christophe* in fact proposes a stance towards the linguistic expression of faith that could easily be expanded in future projects. The analysis we have

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<sup>87</sup> Rolland also stressed that his literary style can be divided into "deux époques nettement différentes," one extending from the *Vie de Beethoven* up until *Jean-Christophe*, and the other commencing with *Colas Breugnot* and concluding with his *L'Âme enchantée* (Lettre à Marquez-Miranda 22 juin 1927). We thus need to be careful in applying the insights gleaned through the study of the novel, although it can still be argued that the fundamental truth Rolland sought to project remained unchanged despite this shift in style.

carried out in this thesis demonstrates that the very structure of the divine is founded on finite, embodied human interaction, and that this interaction must be read through the concept of *sens*: it is both a pre-linguistic phenomenon, functioning underneath all creeds and nominative labels, and an essentially poetic one that is shaped in the realm of signification, the space of manifestation represented by the mysteries of the incarnation and the resurrection. The central textual marker of this process is the state of harmony that both defines Jean-Christophe's death and, as we have seen, serves as a profound existential foundation from the very first moments of his life. Harmony proposes itself as a state of being in which a dynamic form of human "unity" is proposed, a unity constantly residing in a Trinitarian mode of sensual suspension. This harmonic unity communicates a truth that is characterised both by the ceaseless movement towards linguistic expression, and at the same time by the finitude of the world and the bodily reality it proposes. Harmony, and the impossible truth it contains, allows us to read the religious universality Rolland proposed in a different light: not as an unproblematic jumble of creeds and practices, but rather as an experience proposing its own inherent textual expression suspended at the point at which all religious discourse comes into linguistic being and immediately vanishes again. The thesis thus elaborates a theoretical foundation through which Rolland's later engagement with non-European forms of religiosity could perhaps be read, a foundation that takes into account the importance of the Christian tradition whilst at the same time allowing for a gaze which encompasses the universal nature of human experience. Although his *Déconstruction du christianisme* is firmly grounded in a post-Enlightenment engagement with Western philosophy, Nancy repeatedly makes reference to the implications of his analysis for the three "Religions of the Book" throughout his analysis.<sup>88</sup> This engagement is broadened even further in the notion of an atheological "alternative primaire du théisme et de l'athéisme" (10), in which Nancy at times includes such non-Western thought systems as Buddhism, for example.<sup>89</sup> Given this extension of the *Déconstruction du christianisme* outside of the "Christian" West, we could argue that using it to reread Rolland's later

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<sup>88</sup> For example, see his "Déconstruction du monothéisme" (*D* 47-63), and his comment on the relationship between the sacred and the profane within Islam (*A* 55-57).

<sup>89</sup> Nancy comments on the fact that Buddhism can be seen as essentially forming part of the "vecteur d'athéisme" which involves the "suppression, sinon du « divin », au moins de « Dieu »" (*A* 44-45) that is integral to the atheological perspective on religion we have observed unfold.

engagement with Hinduism<sup>90</sup> (and even Marxism<sup>91</sup>) is certainly not out of the question. The movement Nancy refers to as a *sortie de la religion* thus provides interesting possibilities for a religious engagement that respects the integrity of the experience codified within doctrine whilst also constantly calling this codification into question.

We observed in our review of the literature that very little recent scholarship on Rolland has been undertaken, and perhaps the results of our analysis call for a reappraisal of the religious thought of this largely forgotten intellectual who has so much to offer a twenty-first-century context that is still confronting many of the same problems. Rereading Rolland's work through modern thinkers like Jean-Luc Nancy perhaps offers a way of negotiating the religious problem in all its doctrinal complexity, instead of reverting back to a vague form of secular spirituality or syncretism. If we understand the religious phenomenon through the essential building blocks we have utilised in this study (that is to say, the movement of *sens* and its grounding within finitude through the poetic experience), we can reach a critical stance towards religious truth that can perhaps be applied to the problem of interreligious dialogue. Underneath all outward appearance lies a common human existentiality that is a singular and unrepeatable form of truth, localised within history and only perceivable through a shared participation in its experiential structure. Any interreligious engagement would therefore have to respect the impossibility of speaking such truth, whilst at the same time acknowledging the essentially human foundation that lies underneath, a foundation that can only be accessed through the movement of opening in which bodily existence reveals its most profound nature as relationship. This way of looking at truth through *sens* can serve as a useful tool for understanding the contribution that Rolland's thought can make to the modern, pluralistic and multi-religious environment we live in. I would like to

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<sup>90</sup> The basis for such an analysis is demonstrated in an appendix to Rolland's *La Vie de Vivekananda et l'évangile universel*, in which he undertakes a brief comparative study of Christian mysticism and Hindu spirituality (315-346).

<sup>91</sup> Nancy refers to the need to reread Marxism through the poetic lens of the "rapport au sens infini" (A 120-121), although admittedly such a reading must also take into account the broader sweep of Nancy's thinking on politics, which this thesis has been unable to do. Rolland himself speaks about Marxism in very Christian terms in a letter dated 18 March 1932: "Le Jugement Dernier est aussi une Révolution. Comme elle tarde, les porte-croix d'ici-bas font la leur. Ce n'est pas eux, c'est leur confrère de Galilée qui a dit le mot, d'une ironie terrible à la Lenine, sur les riches qui n'entreront pas au royaume de Dieu !" (Lettre à Mademoiselle Meynard).

conclude with a phrase taken from a letter the Hindu sage Swami Shivananda wrote to Rolland in response to the publication of the latter's *La Vie de Ramakrishna*, words that encapsulate the potential for religious renewal that the atheological and Trinitarian stance towards truth perhaps holds: "J'espère que votre œuvre contribuera à faire des chrétiens de vrais chrétiens, des hindous de vrais hindous, des mahométans de vrais mahométans ! [...] Puisse-t-il nous montrer le chemin sur lequel nous devons nous engager pour reconnaître que nous sommes tous enfants du même père !" (15 septembre 1930).

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