CHAPTER 2

A Case in Transit:
Reading Diderot (Reading Montaigne)
Reading Augustine

Kate E. Tunstall

The story of 'le prêtre de Calame' [the priest of Calama] is one that the Enlightenment philosophe, Denis Diderot, was particularly fond of telling and retelling. It involves a priest who would pass out, fall to the ground, and lose all feeling, such that nothing, not even extreme physical violence, would bring him round; and yet, though not breathing, he had not passed away and would later return to his senses, reporting that he had felt no pain. If this intriguing little tale will be the focus here, it is not or, at least, not only because it stages a man who is ‘transit’ [in a state of transport]; rather, it is because this is a tale that is itself in transit. Diderot knew the version of it that appears in Montaigne’s chapter I.21, ‘De la force de l’imagination’ [Of the Power of the Imagination], itself a retelling of the version told by Augustine in The City of God, which Diderot knew too, both directly and, perhaps, also as quoted in Arnauld and Nicole’s Logique (1662). To say the story is ‘in transit’ should not, of course, be taken to mean that it turns up unchanged in different texts and contexts; far from it. This is a tale that transitions as different contexts confer different meanings, and certain details come into sharper focus, are tweaked, changed, misremembered, or misread by different writers at different historical moments and for different ends. In fact, it would be more accurate to speak of the ‘“case” of the priest of Calama’ since, unlike ‘story’ or ‘tale’, the term ‘case’ more obviously foregrounds the writer’s work of framing his material, assembling and staging the elements in a particular way with a view to proving a particular point, be it theological, medical, or legal. And so, despite the risk of conjuring up an image of lost luggage, this essay is entitled ‘a case in transit’.

In exploring the transit of this particular case, which has not to date received any scholarly attention, this essay seeks both to expand the minimal existing scholarship on Diderot and Augustine, and to contribute to the substantial body of existing work on Diderot and Montaigne. There is ample evidence that Diderot knew the Essais well; indeed he was clearly fond enough of them for his lover, Sophie Volland, to leave him her seven-volume edition in her will, and he often quotes the Essais with a degree of inaccuracy that suggests the familiarity of someone so secure in
his knowledge of the text that he has no need to check his quotations.  
Moreover, although Diderot's liking for 'la parole des autres' [speaking other people's words] is well known, Montaigne is a privileged 'other' for Diderot, whose words he speaks in particularly frequent and intense ways, notably in his literary self-portrait in the Salon de 1767, which is so saturated with Montaigne as to produce the rather paradoxical object that is the literary self-portrait that sounds like someone else.  
In the instance under consideration here, Diderot's use of Montaigne is not simple, however, but, rather, triangulated since he also quotes Augustine, whom Montaigne was likewise echoing, and he does so in ways and for purposes that require some careful teasing out.

Of Diderot's various reworkings of the case, the focus here will be on that found in the Pensées philosophiques (1746), an early work, which, though published anonymously, can be said to have made Diderot's name, for it was widely read across Europe and condemned to be burned by the Paris Parlement in 1747.  
Modern scholarship has tended to neglect it, however, for, although an incendiary Diderot is a figure that philosophers and historians of ideas and science have been keen to promote, they have invested most in Diderot the materialist, the natural philosopher, and scientist, a figure that is absent from the Pensées philosophiques, the concerns of which are primarily politico-religious.  
Moreover, in their efforts to present Diderot as a formally innovative writer, literary historians and critics have tended to focus their attention on his later dialogues, such as Le Rêve de d'Alembert [D'Alembert's Dream] and Le Neveu de Rameau [Rameau's Nephew], his highly self-reflexive novel, Jacques le fataliste [Jacques the Fatalist], and his invention of the new genre of literary art criticism in the Salons, rather than on his early use of 'pensées', despite (or perhaps because of) the interpretive challenges raised by the disjointed genre.  
The present essay seeks, then, to restore the early political Diderot to view by examining the Pensées philosophiques — the title recalling both Pascal's Pensées (1669) and Voltaire's Lettres philosophiques (1734) — and the way in which it stages the case of the priest of Calama, via both Montaigne and Augustine.

At this point, Montaigne scholars might well be wondering what is going to be in it for them: what will this essay tell them, if anything, about Montaigne or the Essais? (Montaigne’s name does, after all, only appear parenthetically in my title.) There are two answers to that question. The first is that, insofar as the Pensées philosophiques offers instances of the ventriloquization of certain passages from the Essais, this study sheds light on a moment in the history of their reception, as well as a particular mode of their reception. We know that certain chapters of the Essais have been read with particular attention at different historical moments, as well as in different social and political milieux, and this study of the Pensées philosophiques offers some further evidence of what the Enlightenment chapters were, how they were read, and how the Enlightenment's selective readings enabled a construction of Montaigne as an Enlightenment philosophe.  
The second answer is that attention to Diderot's presentation of the case of the priest of Calama reveals something of the way in which Montaigne read Augustine, and something of the essayist's role in the history of the reception of the Church Father. To date, scholarly interest in the role of Montaigne in the Enlightenment's reception of Augustine has been
focused on Rousseau’s *Confessions* (1782), which played such a significant role in the crystallization of the notion of the self. Yet Montaigne was much more familiar with *The City of God* than he was with Augustine’s *Confessions*, although his reading of it has received comparatively little attention, and the Enlightenment Augustine was as much the author of *The City of God* as the *Confessions*, if not more so. The present essay argues, then, by way of an analysis of the case of the priest of Calama, as it is presented in the *Pensées philosophiques*, that Diderot read Augustine both by way of Montaigne and in direct contrast to the way Montaigne read Augustine. It demonstrates that what was, in Augustine, a theological case of the power of the will, becomes, in Montaigne, a pathological case of the power of the imagination, and that, in Diderot, the quotation of the Augustinian case in a Montaignian frame, taken from another chapter of the *Essais*, III.11, ‘Des boiteux’ [Of Cripples], enables Diderot to put a political case. (Being in parentheses, then, may turn out to be more interesting than, at first, it might look.)

1. Reading (Montaigne reading) Augustine

Montaigne’s ‘De la force de l’imagination’ opens with the essayist confessing to the power of his own imagination — he has only to hear someone else cough and he starts to get a tickle in his throat (V, p. 97; F, p. 82). This admission of suggestibility is the cue for a series of interrelated anecdotes, some more striking than others, in which the imagination is said to be what made the bodies behave in the uncontrollable ways they did. The best known is, no doubt, the case, originally reported by Paré as a medical case, of a man called Germain, who had been known by the name of Marie until the age of 22, when she jumped over a ditch and sprouted male genitalia; but the series also includes cases of men condemned to death who are so afraid of the moment of execution that they are already dead by the time they arrive on the scaffold, of a mute so impassioned that he acquired the power of speech, King Dagobert’s mysterious flesh wounds, St Francis’s stigmata, levitating bodies (V, pp. 98–99; F, pp. 82–83) — and a priest mentioned by Celsius who would remain for long periods of time ‘sans respiration et sans sentiment’ [with no breathing and no sensation]. It is following this reference to Celsius’s priest that Montaigne observes, ‘Saint Augustin en nomme un autre’ [St Augustine names another one], and goes on to present his case.

Before we explore what Montaigne says, it must be observed that anyone familiar with Augustine’s version may be rather surprised to find it included by Montaigne in a chapter about unruly bodies, for Augustine had presented the case in *The City of God* as being that of a man who was, on the contrary, able to make his body submit to the rule of his will. And so in order to grasp the significance of Montaigne’s reframing and re-relating of the case (and, in due course, the significance of Diderot’s re-reframing and re-re-relating of it), we must begin by examining the case as presented by Augustine.
2. The case of the ‘presbyter of Calama’

Augustine relates it in Book 14, Chapter 24, in which he makes the theological claim that man, before his fall into a state of sin, had perfect control over his body. The chapter is, no doubt, best known for its claim that Adam’s willpower was so perfect that he could even control the movements of his penis, which had since become post-lapsarian man’s most unruly member (a point seemingly confirmed by Marie/Germain’s surprise growth), but the chapter also contains a series of anecdotes or cases of modern men who, fallen though they are, are able nonetheless to exert some quite remarkable control over their bodies.

Augustine’s series begins with men who can wiggle their ears, swallow and then regurgitate an amazing number and variety of items, and fart both musically and without making any smell. It culminates in a case that would, he says, be thought quite ‘incredible’, had the events not recently been witnessed by members of the local church:

Presbyter fuit quidam Restitutus nomine in paroecia Calamensis ecclesiae: qui quando ei placebat (rogabatur autem ut hoc faceret ab eis qui rem mirabilem coram scire cupiebant,) ad imitatas quasi lamentantis cuiuslibet hominis uoces, ita se auferebat à sensibus, et iacebat simillimus mortuo, ut non solùm uellicantes atque pungentes minimè sentiret, sed aliquando etiam igne ureretur admo, sine ullo doloris sensu, nisi postmodum ex uulnere: non autem obnittingo, sed non sentiendo non mouere corpus, eo probabatur, quod tanquam in defuncto nullus inueniebatur anhelitus: hominum tamen uoces, si clarius loquerentur, tanquam de longinquo se audisse postea referebat.

[There was a presbyter, named Restitutus, in the parish of the church of Calama. Whenever he pleased (and he was often asked to do it by people wanting to witness so remarkable a phenomenon), at/to the sound of voices pretending to wail in grief, he could make himself so insensible and lie in a state so resembling death that he could be pinched and pricked and even exposed to fire and burned without his feeling a single thing, until afterwards when his injuries would hurt. That his body was not motionless owing to an effort of resistance on his part but owing, instead, to a loss of sensitivity is proved by the fact that he would no more breathe than a dead man. And yet he would report that if people spoke particularly clearly, he could hear their voices though they sounded as if they were a long way off.]

Whereas some people are special because they can fart an odourless tune, the special gift possessed by the presbyter of Calama is that he could make his body completely lifeless, and he did so, according to Augustine, not by holding his breath, which the reader might have thought would be the ultimate act of willpower, but, rather, by departing his body, leaving it behind, as is made clear in the reference to his reporting that the voices he could hear seemed to be a long way off. These seem, then, to be cases of post-lapsarian men demonstrating quite remarkable degrees of control over their bodies. What are we to make of them? Is Augustine suggesting that such cases offer some evidence of what man’s pre-lapsarian willpower might have been like or, even, that they are cases of men possessing some vestige of that power?
Certainly that would be one way of reading Augustine’s assertion, ‘Sic ergo et ipse homo potuit oboedientiam etiam inferiorum habere membrorum, quam sua inoboedientia perdidit. […] Nam et hominum quorundam naturas nouimus multum ceteris dispare et ipsa raritate mirabiles’ [Then man himself may also have once received from his lower members an obedience which he lost by his own disobedience. […] We do in fact find among human beings some individuals with natural abilities very different from the rest of mankind and remarkable by their rarity]. 29 However, in the cases of the ear-wiggler and the melodious, odour-free farter, there is something of the fairground about their powers, which not even the addition of a penis-puppeteer to the series could make appear Adamic, with the result that their cases are easier to read as comic or ironic rather than as serious signs of man’s amazing potential. 30 But is the same true of the case of the presbyter, a man who wills his own fall and his return? Is his case comic and ironic too? Some sense in which he might be somewhat different to the other cases is suggested by the fact that he alone has a name, and that the name he has is significant. ‘Restitutus’ is likely to be a name taken by a convert to signal his status as such, and, moreover, in this instance, his name evokes the events that make up his case, which is to say that ‘Restitutus’ is the name of a man restored to feeling and consciousness, as well as to the Christian Church. Of course, such referential duality may, precisely, allow for comedy and irony: perhaps the name is a joke (although quite whom the joke is on, is not quite clear), and while it would, no doubt, be too much to suggest that the name implies that the case is a hoax, ‘Restitutus’ might, despite (or perhaps because of) the assurance of its authenticity supplied by Augustine’s reference to the credible witnesses, be read as the name of a character in a comic tale. And yet a further twist is also possible for, although it is unlikely that this is the same Restitutus, also known as Possidius, Bishop of Calama, who was kidnapped and assaulted for having converted, 31 it is nonetheless possible that the pinching, pricking, and burning, to which Augustine’s Restitutus was exposed, might, although he exposed himself to them perfectly willingly, be read as recalling the acts of violence to which converts were exposed in Augustine’s time. The ironic possibilities of the case seem to be counterbalanced or held in check by the symbolic politico-religious associations of his name. What exactly Restitutus is a case of thus seems to be rather less easy to determine than that of the ear-wiggler, although even his case can be read either as an amazing sign of man’s potential or as an ironic indication of quite how far he has fallen.

That it is, at least, in part, Restitutus’s name that makes the significance of his case harder to stabilize than the others in the series may also be indicated by the fact that Montaigne draws attention to Augustine’s act of naming. He states, we recall, ‘Saint Augustin en nomme un autre’, and yet he omits the name himself. Perhaps Montaigne decided that ‘Augustine’ was the more important name of the two; perhaps he wished, on this occasion in the Essais, to avoid any allusion to religious conversion or to violence done to converts, or to avoid the possibility of any such allusion having anything comic about it, especially given recent events in France. All three are possible, at once. Yet the name is not the only unstable element in the case related by Augustine. A more detailed examination raises the question:
just how much control does Restitutus really have over his body, over his fall, his transit, and his return?

When read as one of the series, the case of Restitutus, regardless of the symbolic significance of his name, would appear to be that of a man able, entirely at will, to perform a pretty extreme kind of trick, one that requires quite extraordinary levels of self-control. Indeed the trick is so remarkable that people would come and request him to perform it for them; Augustine parenthetically tells us, we recall: ‘(rogabatur autem ut hoc faceret ab eis qui rem mirabilem coram scire cupiebant)’ [(and he was often asked to do it by people wanting to witness so remarkable a phenomenon)]. Doubtless we can assume that Restitutus would indeed perform it at their request if he so pleased (and that he wouldn’t if he didn’t), but it is not obvious that he would actually ever do it if nobody wanted him to — after all, although it might not hurt at the time, the wounds he receives clearly do afterwards: ‘nisi postmodum ex uulnere’ [afterwards when his injuries would hurt]. True, Restitutus’s self-command is not called into question by the implication that he would only ever actually perform it at other people’s request, but it might be by the fact that the performance itself relies on audience participation.

There are two different kinds of audience participation in the story, and they have different implications and serve different ends. What we might think of as extreme audience participation (the pinching, pricking, and burning) functions to guarantee the extraordinary nature of Restitutus’s ability, but, insofar as the presbyter subsequently reports hearing other people’s voices as though they were a long way off, it also suggests that he may be dependent on others in order to prove, perhaps even to himself, that he has gone into transit, once he has. (He does not say, for instance, that he observed his own body as if from afar.) Another kind of audience participation is found slightly earlier in the story, in the second of the two phrases that stand either side of the parentheses, and, though less extreme, its consequences for the case are far-reaching since it suggests that the presbyter may be dependent on others to go into transit in the first place. Whereas in the first phrase, we are told that Restitutus would do his trick ‘quando ei placet’ [whenever he pleased], in the second, we read that he would do it ‘ad imitatas quasi lamentantis hominis voces’, a phrase in which much hinges on how we read the preposition ‘ad’, which introduces ‘the sound of voices pretending to wail in grief’. If we take it to imply a merely temporal relationship, then the presbyter’s ability to perform his trick ‘whenever he pleased’ is not compromised, and we understand that the feigned lamentations were performed either in anticipation of the trick, setting it up in the manner of a drum roll (albeit a strangely mournful one), or coinciding with it, playing along. However, if we take the preposition to imply logical precedence, that is to say, if we take the feigned lamentations to be a pre-condition for the presbyter to be able to perform his trick, then the earlier claim that he could do it entirely at will is called into question. Indeed Restitutus even starts to seem a little vulnerable — when the impersonators did their trick of sounding grief-stricken, was he able not to do his trick, if he didn’t want to?

That the feigned lamentations introduce further ambiguity into Restitutus’s case (in addition to that introduced by his name, which had already made it more
ambiguous than the others in the series) is confirmed by Vives, Augustine’s most important commentator. In his commentary, first published in 1522, Vives reports that a copy in the Carmelite library in Bruges gives a variant (not of the preposition but of the verb form following it) that would make it possible to ascribe the impersonation of the lamentations to the presbyter himself, placing him firmly in control of every element of the trick.\textsuperscript{32} Vives does not himself adopt the Bruges variant (and nor will Montaigne, although we know he read Augustine in an edition containing Vives’s commentary)\textsuperscript{33} — but some later commentators would,\textsuperscript{34} though not uncontroversially.\textsuperscript{35} A more drastic solution to the ambiguity over the strength and independence of the presbyter’s will is offered by Arnauld and Nicole, who simply omit any reference to the feigned lamentations from their vernacular gloss on the passage in the \textit{Logique}, which reads, ‘toutes les fois qu’il vouloit, [il] s’aliénoit tellement de sens, qu’il demeuroit comme mort’ [every time he wished, [he] would withdraw from his senses as if he were dead],\textsuperscript{36} ensuring that Restitutus can be read as having acted entirely of his own will, as having been in complete control of the proceedings.\textsuperscript{37}

Yet another way of resolving the ambiguity is offered by Montaigne. In contrast to Vives and to Arnauld and Nicole, who, in different ways, bolster the case for Restitutus’s willpower — which may or may not be quasi-Adamic — over his body, over his fall, his transit, and his return, Montaigne instead further weakens it. And it is to that representation of the case that we now turn.

3. The case of the priest named by Augustine

Given the title of the chapter and the string of anecdotes with which ‘De la force de l’imagination’ opens, we are primed to understand that the ‘other’ priest, not the one in Celsius but ‘another one’, named by Augustine, did not voluntarily transit any more than Montaigne coughs and Marie/Germain grew a penis. Montaigne tells the story as follows:

Sainct Augustin en nomme un autre, à qui il ne falloit que faire ouir des cris lamentables et plaintifs, soudain il defailloit et s’emportoit si vivement hors de soy, qu’on avoit beau le tempester et hurler, et le pincer, et le griller, jusques à ce qu’il fut resuscité: lors il disoit avoir ouy des voix, mais comme venant de loing, et s’apercevoit de ses eschaudures et meurtrissures. Et ce que ce ne fust une obstination apostée contre son sentiment, cela le montroit, qu’il n’avoit cependant ny poulx ny haleine. (V, p. 103; F, pp. 82–83)

[St Augustine names another one, who had only to be made to hear mournful and wretched cries, and suddenly, he would collapse and transport himself out of himself in such a lively manner that there was no point shaking him and shouting, and pinching him, and burning him until he came round, whereupon he would say he had heard voices, but as if coming from afar, and notice his burns and bruises. And that this was no obstinate refusal to feel pain was evident from the fact that, throughout, he had no pulse, nor was he breathing.]

Here the priest — or, rather, the man, for in addition to the omission of his Augustinian name his profession is elided in Montaigne’s formulation — enters a state like that which Augustine’s presbyter had entered, and in which he appears
to be dead. As in Augustine, he was not holding his breath, and in Montaigne’s version, he didn’t have a pulse either, which we might imagine to be even more difficult to control than one’s breathing. And, again as in Augustine, the fact of his having left his body behind is conveyed by reference to his having heard distant voices. There is, however, no ambiguity here regarding either the sequence of events or their logical relationship to one another. Whereas Arnauld and Nicole will later avoid referring to other people feigning cries and will thereby downplay the possibility that Restitutus is not in complete control, Montaigne here proceeds in the opposite manner and simply cuts Augustine’s opening phrase, ‘whenever he pleased’. Moreover, the verbal construction, ‘[lui] faire ouir des cris’, has the priest clearly subjected to the sound, which the restrictive formulation ‘ne ... que’ ensures we understand him no sooner to hear than he involuntarily falls to the ground. This is not a case in which the protagonist could be read as exhibiting any vestige of Adamic willpower.

As Montaigne’s narrative progresses, however, it appears to gain in similarity to Augustine’s, and as a result, Montaigne’s presentation of the man’s agency, or lack of it, gains in complexity. Where a preposition in Augustine could unsettle the case, in Montaigne it is the pronouns that perform unsettling work. What they register are shifts in agency, in its presence, absence, and location.

Montaigne states, we recall, that ‘il defailloit et s'emportoit si vivement hors de soy’, a curious phrase involving a intransitive verb with a subject pronoun, followed by a reflexive verb without a subject pronoun and qualified by an adverb, and a preposition, followed by a third-person impersonal object pronoun. The man’s transition from agent to inanimate object is conveyed here in the shift from ‘il’ to ‘soy’, and though ‘soy’ is no doubt not as strange in early modern French as it would be in modern (where one would expect ‘lui’), the impersonality allows for a striking presentation of the lifelessness of the priest’s body. Peculiarly, however, the agent of that transition would seem to be the man himself, for the reflexive verb (‘s'emporter’) and the adverb (‘vivement’) ascribe agency to the man, who effects his own transit in a lively manner, leaving a lifeless body behind. This would seem to undercut Montaigne’s framing of the story as one about a man who is not in control. So, is it, in fact, as Augustine might have been saying it was, the case of someone able, at will, to transport himself out of his body? And are the sounds not causal after all?

The answer to both questions is ‘no’. Although there is no grammatical reason to repeat the subject pronoun, its disappearance halfway through ‘il defailloit et s'emportoit’ is not without significance. Of course, there can be no doubt that the reflexive verb is governed by the same subject pronoun as that governing the preceding verb, and yet not only is it difficult to imagine the man being the agent of his self-transport given that he has just been the subject of the verb ‘défaillir’, but also, in the absence of a contiguous subject pronoun, the only marker of subjecthood in ‘s'emportoit’ is the reflexive object pronoun, which appears to be a kind of halfway house between the subject pronoun, ‘il’, and the impersonal object, ‘soy’. And so the apparently banal disappearance of a subject pronoun, in fact, performs the disappearance of the agent; and the gap between subject and verb, (‘il
Another ellipsis, indicated by a colon, marks the moment when the man’s imagination relinquishes its control and his will returns. Montaigne states, we recall, ‘on avoit beau le tempester et hurler, et le pincer, et le griller, jusques à ce qu’il fut resuscité: lors il disoit avoir ouy des voix’, a curious phrase insofar as the list of verbs referring to actions that it was futile to perform because they would not have caused him to come round culminates in a statement that he would come round nonetheless, the causal explanation for which is, however, withheld. The colon, located at the moment of transition between transit and return, is a kind of pivot that transforms the phrase, ‘il fut resuscité’, from being a counterfactual into an actual. Before the colon, it is part of an assertion that the man would not come round, but the colon has the effect of retrospectively dissociating the phrase from ‘on avoit beau [...] jusques à ce qu[e]’ and transforming it into the positive condition for him to become the subject of a verb of action once again: ‘lors [qu’il fut resuscité], il disoit’. It is undoubtedly significant that at the very point at which his imagination gives way to his will again, the word ‘resuscité’ is to be found, for when his will is restored, so is an echo of his Augustinian name.

The question remains, however, as to why it was that the man’s imagination ran away with him or, rather, what it was about those ‘cris lamentables et plaintifs’ that caused his imagination to afford him a near-death experience. While Montaigne’s ticklish throat seemed to be a straightforward case of suggestibility, this man’s suggestibility is of a different order, for his imagination does not make him identify with the mourner and begin to feel grief too; rather, the mournful cries cause his imagination to make him identify with the person being mourned. He passes out as he imagines himself passing away, and his case thus gestures ironically back to the previous chapter, which stages another way of responding to mortality, one so different that, in the light of it, the man’s response appears comic. That chapter is, of course, I.19, ‘Que philosopher, c’est apprendre à mourir’ [That Doing Philosophy Teaches You How to Die] (V, pp. 81–96; F, pp. 67–82), and the Stoic contemplation of death thus gives way in ‘De la force de l’imagination’ to (what might today be referred to as) a ‘hysterical’ death.

Having re-related the case in we might call ‘non-voluntarist’ terms, Montaigne interrupts his series of cases to consider the belief that extraordinary behaviour, such as that exhibited by various people in his list, has a supernatural cause. This consideration, wholly foreign to Augustine, requires our attention here, for it is crucial to understanding the story’s subsequent transit.

4. Transit (de)mystified

Immediately following the case of ‘the other one Augustine names’, Montaigne makes the following statement:

Il est vray semblable que le principal credit des miracles, des visions, des enchantemens et de tels effects extraordinaires, vienne de la puissance de l’imagination agissant principalement contre les ames du vulgaire, plus molles. On leur a si fort saisi la creance, qu’ils pensent voir ce qu’ils ne voyent pas.
[It seems to be the case that the principal credit afforded to miracles, visions, enchantments, and other such special effects is due to the power of the imagination pressing principally against the souls of common people, which are softer. Their credulity is so forcibly seized upon that they think they see what they do not see.]

Here the implicit disagreement with Augustine over whether bodies behaving in extraordinary ways do so under the influence of human willpower or under the power of the human imagination has been replaced by an explicit disagreement with ‘common people’, who are said to believe that such extraordinary behaviours are caused by a superhuman power. Montaigne’s counter-claim is that just as a powerful imagination can wreak all kinds of havoc on the body, so a weak soul is powerless when confronted with the imagination, which can impress on it all kinds of unfounded beliefs. For Montaigne, the beliefs in question relate to demonological activity, in particular, also the subject of the later chapter ‘Des boyteux’, in which Montaigne will again enlist Augustine:

Il me semble qu’on est pardonnable de mescroire une merveille, autant au moins qu’on peut en destourner et elider la verification par voie non merveilleuse. Et suis l’advis de saint Augustin, qu’il vaut mieux pancher vers le doute que vers l’assurance ès choses de difficile preuve et dangereuse creance. (V, p. 1032; F, p. 961)

[It seems to me that we might be forgiven for not believing in a marvel, at least when we can come up with an alternative, non-marvellous way of explaining it away. And I am of the same opinion as St Augustine, which is that it is better to lean towards doubt rather than assurance when it comes to things that are difficult to prove and dangerous to believe in.]

Of course, with respect to the presbyter of Calama, Augustine had nothing to say of any belief, popular, unfounded, or otherwise, that the events had a supernatural cause. However, by juxtaposing the case of the ‘other [priest] named by Augustine’ and the belief in the supernatural, Montaigne effects a mystification of the events, which he then demystifies. This process of mystification and demystification will have lasting consequences for the ways in the case will subsequently be read and re-related.

5. The case of ‘the priest of Calama’

Over a hundred years later, in Diderot’s Pensées philosophiques, the phenomenon to be demystified by means of a comparison with the case of the priest of Calama is not demonological, but thaumaturgical. The context is the second wave of Jansenist miracles, the first being that of ‘la Sainte Épine’ [the Sacred Thorn], which cured Pascal’s niece and goddaughter of an eye infection, and established miracles as a significant part of Jansenist culture. By the late 1720s and early 1730s, particularly in the poorest areas of Paris, Jansenism had become a kind of popular movement, sparked by the papal bull, ‘Unigenitus’, of 1713, which had condemned as unconstitutional many of the Jansenist beliefs, notably those regarding grace and predestination. A key element in that movement was the high incidence of
reported miracles in the cemetery of the Paris church of Saint-Médard, where the prominent Jansenist magistrate, François de Pâris, had been buried in 1727; by early 1732, the frequency of miraculous cures, states of ecstasy, and convulsions was so high that the police took the decision to close the cemetery.\textsuperscript{49} When the \textit{Pensées philosophiques} were published in 1746, the affair had not entirely gone away: Carré de Montgeron, a notable convert, lawyer, and Parlementarian who had undergone a transformative experience on Pâris’s tomb, had just published the third volume of his \textit{La Vérité des miracles démontrée} [\textit{The Truth of Miracles Demonstrated}] (1745),\textsuperscript{50} a work containing witness statements and other documents, presented as proofs in a legal case for the miraculous nature of the events.\textsuperscript{51} It is in discussing or, rather, debunking the ‘miracles of Saint-Médard’ that Diderot relates the case of a man he calls ‘le pendant du prêtre de Calame’ [the modern-day equivalent of the priest of Calama].\textsuperscript{52} Where the case had appeared in Augustine and Montaigne as one in a series, in Diderot it appears as one of a pair:

\begin{quote}
Un homme est étendu sur la terre, sans sentiment, sans voix, sans chaleur, sans mouvement. On le tourne, on le retourne, on l’agite, le feu lui est appliqué, rien ne l’émeut: le fer chaud n’en peut arracher un symptôme de vie; on le croit mort: l’est-il? Non. C’est le pendant du prêtre de Calame. \textit{Qui, quando ei placebat, ad imitatatas quasi lamentantis hominis voces, ita se auferebat a sensibus et jacebat simillimus mortuo, ut non solum vellicantes at que pungentes minime sentiret, sed aliquando etiam igne uretur admoto, sine ullo doloris sensu, nisi post modum ex vulnere, etc.} (Saint Augustin, \textit{Cité de Dieu}, Liv. XIV, chap. xxiv.) Si certaines gens avaient rencontré, de nos jours, un pareil sujet, ils en auraient tiré bon parti. On nous aurait fait voir un cadavre se ranimer sur la cendre d’un prédestiné; le recueil du magistrat janséniste se serait enflé d’une résurrection, et le constitutionnel se tiendrait peut-être confondu.
\end{quote}

[A man is lying on the ground, he can’t feel anything, he’s not saying anything, he’s stone-cold and stock-still. We roll him over one way and roll him back, we shake him, we hold a flame to his skin, but nothing brings him round, not even a hot iron can induce a sign of life. We believe he’s dead, but is he? No. He’s the modern-day equivalent of the priest of Calama. \textit{Who whenever he pleased, to/ at the sound of voices pretending to wail in grief, could make himself so insensible and lie in a state so resembling death that he could be pinched and pricked and even exposed to fire and burned without his feeling a single thing, until afterwards when his injuries would hurt etc.} (St Augustine, \textit{City of God}, Book 14, Chapter 24.) If certain people were to have encountered such a subject today, they would have put him to good use. We’d have been made to see a corpse come back to life on the ashes of one of the elect; the magistrate’s casebook would have expanded to include a resurrection, and the constitutionalist might find himself rather perplexed.]\textsuperscript{54}

The designation, ‘le prêtre de Calame’, suggests the figure’s dual genealogy: it combines the geographical location given by Augustine with the job description suggested by Montaigne, but made much more audible. What we witness here is a demystification and a hypothetical mystification: while the quotation from Augustine (minus the parentheses containing the reference to the fact that he would do his trick on request) makes it clear that the priest’s case involves no supernatural intervention, Diderot also makes it clear that, were the priest of Calama alive today,
the magistrate, Carré de Montgeron, would mystify his case by representing it as one of a man who had died and come back to life.\textsuperscript{56} Clearly Diderot is mobilizing Montaigne’s reframing of the case in anti-marvellous terms here in order to undercut the legal and theological case being made by the Jansenist magistrate — but what are the implications of his quoting Augustine?

The Church Father is, of course, a major Jansenist authority, and one obvious reason for citing Augustine is to be able to turn him against the popular neo-Augustinians. Yet this is not the only reason. The question of the will is fundamental to the case with which Diderot compares that of Restitutus: it is one in which not only is the man’s performance a willed act, but its reception by the onlookers is willful too — Diderot observes, we recall, that if the man had been alive today, ‘certaines gens [...] en auraient tiré bon parti’ [certain people [...] would have put him to good use]. The question raised by Diderot is thus not, as it was in Augustine, whether the man could play dead whenever he pleased or whether he needed other people to play at being grief-stricken first, but rather whether or not, were he alive today, he would willingly accept to play a role in someone else’s politically motivated trick, involving the pretence that he was the subject of a miracle. Would a modern-day priest of Calama be someone who was just having some (somewhat masochistic) fun (with some sadists) in the graveyard at Saint-Médard, but who found himself unwittingly used as Jansenist pro-miracle propaganda? Or would he, in fact, be a willing participant in the pro-miracle propaganda, either by claiming himself to be the subject of a miracle or by allowing others to claim it for him? In both readings, what is important is that charlatanism is involved, and Augustine’s version of the case is amenable, in a way that Montaigne’s is not, to what we might call a ‘voluntarist’ reworking, one in which the protagonist subjects his body to his will.\textsuperscript{57} Moreover, the Montaignian framing enables not simply the mystification and demystification of the case; it also enables Diderot not only to present the charlatan as a priest, but also to suggest that it is precisely because he is a priest that he is a charlatan.

That the Jansenists are indeed viewed as charlatans is made clear a couple of \textit{pensées} later, in which we can also hear further echoes of the case of the priest of Calama. The sounds of voices, which had been absent, now return, albeit in the form of cheering rather than wailing, and we read: ‘[u]n faubourg retentit d’acclamations: la cendre d’un prédestiné y fait, en un jour, plus de prodiges que Jésus-Christ n’en fit en toute sa vie. On y court’ [a suburb rejoices as the ashes of a chosen one perform more miracles in one day than Jesus Christ performed in his entire life. People rush along to see].\textsuperscript{58} The voices function not so much to set the priest off, as they did in Montaigne, as to pull the crowd in, as perhaps they did in Augustine. However, drawing on the Montaignian frame, while the crowd cheers ‘Miracle!’, Diderot’s \textit{penseur}, now abandoning the third-person pronoun ‘on’, and speaking in the first-person, recounts:

$$\begin{align*}
[J]’\text{arrive à peine, que j’entends crier: miracle! miracle! J’approche, je regarde,}
\text{et je vois un petit boiteux qui se promène à l’aide de trois ou quatre personnes}
\text{charitables qui le soutiennent [...]. Où donc est le miracle, peuple imbécile? Ne}
\text{vois-tu pas que ce Fourbe n’a fait que changer de béquilles?}
\end{align*}$$
No sooner do I get there than I hear cries of ‘Miracle! Miracle!’ I move closer, take a look, and see a little cripple walking with the help of three or four kind people who are holding him up [...]. Where is this miracle then, you silly people? Can’t you see that this conman has simply swapped one set of crutches for another?"  

And in a further twist, the penseur asserts that those who see miracles are not, as they were in Montaigne, victims of their over-active imaginations; rather they too are voluntarists since they willingly fall for the tricks: ‘tous ceux qui voyaient là des miracles, étaient bien résolus d’en voir’ [all those who saw miracles in such events did so because they had firmly decided to]. Just as Diderot’s priest of Calama willed himself not to feel anything, so the onlookers willed themselves not to see anything other than evidence of the workings of a power beyond their control.

This, then, is a case that undergoes a number of transformations as it transits from Augustine to Diderot via Montaigne, from theology to law and politics, via medicine and pathology. Indeed one might even compare the case in transit to its own protagonist, whom ‘on […] tourne, on […] retourne’. Moreover, like the protagonist in the cases related by Montaigne and Augustine, who, on coming round, reported hearing voices in the distance, each version of the case echoes with earlier versions. Yet the context for each version is different, and each both calls for and confers new meanings and frames. In fifth-century North Africa, Augustine related a case involving a performance that replayed the violence done to a convert and which, even as it offered a cathartic outlet for that violence, revealed it to have no effect because Restitutus, precisely because he was a convert, had a strength of will that enabled him to feel no pain. In late sixteenth-century France, in the aftermath of a bloody civil war fought between Catholics and Protestants, Montaigne presented a case in which the protagonist needed only to hear the sounds of people grieving their loss for his imagination to seize control, distance him from such unbearable sounds, and close him off from feeling any pain. And in early to mid-eighteenth-century Paris when the popular Jansenists were protesting against the Papal bull, Diderot quoted Augustine’s case in a Montaignian frame, presented its protagonist as being unambiguously in control of his body, and suggested he was performing a politically orchestrated spectacle — one that only someone who was wilfully blind would not see through. A case of a man in temporary transit, then, but also a case in both transit and transition across time.

Notes to Chapter 2


5. ‘Case’ might also be thought the most appropriate term given the nature of the events involved, for ‘case’ is etymologically linked to the Latin ‘cadere’ [to fall]. Diderot refers to the priest of Calama when he is in transit as a ‘cadavre’, and the implications of the Christian story of the Fall are an important part of Augustine’s framing of the case.
11. See Tunstall, ‘Portraits and Afterlives’.
13. The standard view is that the *Pensées philosophiques* is the work of a sceptic or a deist, and that Diderot’s more interesting atheist materialist writing begins with the *Lettre sur les aveugles* [Letter on the Blind] (1749); see Aram Vartanian, ‘From Deist to Atheist: Diderot’s Philosophical Orientation, 1746–1749’, *Diderot Studies*, 1 (1949), 46–63. For another reading of the *Lettre*, see Tunstall, *Blindness and Enlightenment*.
14. Such a challenge is taken up, to a degree, by the philosopher Jean-Claude Bourdin in his *Introduction to the Pensées philosophiques* (pp. 20–24; 51–56). Given the relatively scarce attention given to the text these days, it is ironic that Diderot gave the work two epigraphs: the declaration, ‘Piscis hic non est omnium’ [This fish is not for everyone], and the question, ‘Quis leget hæc?’ [Who will read this?].
24. I have borrowed the word ‘unruly’ from Richard Regosin; see Montaigne’s Unruly Brood: Textual Engendering and the Challenge to Paternal Authority (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).
25. This might itself be thought rather surprising, given Augustine’s well-known hostility to Pelagianism, which leaves open the possibility, also to be discussed in this essay, that the case may be read as ironic.
27. The Latin preposition ‘ad’ will be the subject of commentary below.
29. De civitate Dei, p. 97; City of God, p. 388.
30. Kate Cooper and Conrad Leyser argue that the series of anecdotes is aimed at undermining the moral claims of contemporary ascetics by presenting them and their ability to control their bodies as the stuff of fairground performances; 'The Gender of Grace: Impotence, Servitude, and Manliness in the Fifth-Century West’, Gender and History, 12.3 (2000), 536–51. They make no distinction between the ear-wiggler and Restitutus in this regard. I suggest in what follows, by contrast, that such a distinction might be made, and argue that Montaigne and other early modern readers did, in fact, make it.
32. See De civitate Dei, p. 99. Hervet observes: ‘si ainsi est, il signifie que luy-même avait coutume de se contrefaire, et ainsi se déparit des ses sentimens corporels’ [if that is so, it means that he
was himself in the habit of imitating himself, and that that was how he took leave of his bodily feelings; *De la cité*, trans. Hervet, p. 412.

33. Kubota persuasively demonstrates that Montaigne read the text in Latin in one of the Erasmian editions, accompanied by Vives's commentaries and printed between 1550 and 1570; see Kubota, ‘Montaigne et Saint Augustin’, pp. 136–37. Montaigne mentions Vives by name on one occasion in the *Essais* (V, p. 87; F, p. 87).


36. *Logique*, p. 73; *Logic*, p. 50. My translation. Their gloss is followed by the complete lines in Latin from Augustine.

37. There is not room here to explore what the stakes of such readings and commentaries are, although they should be read in conjunction with the debates over Pelagianism, for which, see Conrad Leyser, ‘Semi-Pelagianism’, in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan Fitzgerald and John C. Cavadini (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), pp. 761–66, and Irena Backus and Aza Goudriaan, ‘Semipelagianism’: The Origins of the Term and its Passage into the History of Heresy’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 65.1 (2014), 25–46.

38. My translation.

39. Perhaps it is not insignificant that the preposition ‘à’, though not performing quite the same function here as it does in Augustine’s, occupies such a prominent position in Montaigne’s sentence: ‘un autre, à qui il ne fallait que’.

40. Later in the same chapter, Montaigne makes it clear that he is not convinced by Augustine’s claim that if Adam had not disobeyed God in paradise, modern man’s body would do his bidding (V, p. 103; F, p. 87).

41. For a study of punctuation in Montaigne, see Warren Boucher’s essay in this volume.

42. There is no room here to explore the ways in which the case of ‘the other [priest] named by Augustine’ points to Montaigne’s story about his own fall in II.6, ‘De l’exercitation’ [Of Practice].


44. V, p. 90; F, p. 84. My translation.

45. My translation.


47. My translation.


50. Louis Basile Carré de Montgeron, *La Vérité des miracles de M. de Paris démontrée contre M. l’Archevêque de Sens* (Cologne: Lib. de la Comp., 1745). The first two volumes had appeared in 1737 and 1741.


53. Diderot omits the parenthetical statement about how people would come and ask Restitutus, whose name he also omits, to perform the trick. The same is true of Arnauld and Nicole, which may suggest that Diderot is quoting from the Logique rather than directly from the City, despite the parenthetical citation.


55. My translation.


61. Diderot will later tend to consider the question of free will from a philosophical perspective rather than from the polemical, political one adopted here, and, when he does, he presents it as an illusion; see, for instance, ‘Lettre à Landois’ (29 June 1756), in Denis Diderot, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Herbert Dieckmann, Jacques Proust, and Jean Varloot (Paris: Hermann, 1975–), vol. 9, pp. 243–60.

62. The wording of this point was inspired by the title of John O’Brien and Malcolm Quainton’s *Distant Voices Still Heard: Contemporary Readings of French Renaissance Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000).