

DIALOGISM AND THE CRISIS OF THE “SELF” IN *LE HORLA*: FIGURES OF THE FRAGMENTED “I” FROM RIMBAUD TO MAUPASSANT

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Abstract: This article examines how dialogism illuminates the crisis of the self in Guy de Maupassant's *Le Horla* by bringing into dialogue Arthur Rimbaud's and Maupassant's conceptions of identity and otherness. While Rimbaud's famous assertion, "I is another," frames the splitting of the self as a creative and transformative experience, Maupassant reconfigures this alterity as a source of anxiety and existential disintegration. The study aims to explore how *Le Horla* stages a fragmented subjectivity through the interplay of competing voices within the narrative. Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism and polyphony, this study adopts a close textual and discursive analysis of the narrator's diary. Particular attention is paid to the modes of enunciation, shifts in narrative voice, and the progressive intrusion of alterity into the narrator's discourse. A comparative perspective is also employed to examine the ways in which Maupassant extends and transforms Rimbaud's reflection on the divided self. The analysis reveals that the narrator's identity emerges as a dialogic construct shaped by a plurality of voices. The Horla functions not merely as an external supernatural figure but as the embodiment of an intrinsic and threatening otherness that destabilizes the boundaries of the self. The fractured enunciation that permeates the text exposes a polyphonic structure in which reason, fear, and the voice of the Other coexist and compete for authority. By combining Bakhtinian dialogism with a comparative reading of Rimbaud and Maupassant, this article offers a renewed interpretation of *Le Horla* as a literary exploration of the modern self in crisis. It demonstrates how Maupassant transforms Rimbaud's poetics of alterity into a narrative of dissolution and psychic vulnerability, thereby contributing to international scholarship on nineteenth-century subjectivity, dialogism, and the representation of otherness in literary discourse.

Keywords: Crisis of the Self; Dialogism; Identity Fragmentation; Otherness; Polyphony.

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1. Introduction

The famous expression “I is another” by Arthur Rimbaud, as a radical manifestation of internal otherness, opened up a new path for reflecting on identity and its relationship to the Other. This reflection on the construction and dissolution of identity lies at the heart of Rimbaud’s work, where the subject is in perpetual transformation, subjected to the influence of another voice, an intrinsic doubling, and another reality that transcends him. Far more than a simple poetic expression, this formula becomes a paradigm of modern ipseity, “the relation of possession [...] between the person and their ‘experiences’” (Ricoeur, 1990, p. 113), marking a decisive turning point in reflections on identity and inviting us to discover our own otherness. It constitutes a radical break with the classical conception of the subject in philosophy, from René Descartes to Immanuel Kant, which conceives it as an autonomous and self-transparent entity, urging us instead to rethink identity as a shifting construction traversed by alterity.

Let us recall that, in his letter to Paul Demeny, Rimbaud overturns this perspective by rejecting the idea of a stable, autonomous “I” and suggesting that the self is a site where forces play out that pass through and exceed it, a relay for multiple voices. He summarizes this idea in the following terms: “For I is another. If the brass awakens as a bugle, that is not its fault. This is evident to me. I attend the blossoming of my thought; I watch it, I listen to it; I draw a stroke with the bow: the symphony stirs in the depths, or leaps suddenly onto the stage” (Rimbaud, 1871)².

Far from constituting a failure, this doubling represents, through this poetic and philosophical revolution, a reassessment of the unity of the self and an essential condition of poetic creation. As Paul Ricoeur (1990, p. 383) emphasizes, “The Other is not one of my objects of thought but, like myself, a subject of thought [...] he perceives me himself as another than himself; together we conceive the world as a common nature.” Otherness thus becomes a driving force that enables the subject to gain access to visions and truths that transcend the limits of individuality.

Nearly two decades later, Guy de Maupassant, in his fantastic short story *Le Horla* (1887), gives narrative form to this intuition by exploring the fragility of human identity in the face of the unknown, whether internal or external. In this text, the presence of the Other assumes a concrete and threatening shape as the invisible entity invades both the narrator’s environment and consciousness. The narrator finds himself in a situation in which his “I” is parasitized by an Other acting in his place. Through the fantastic figure of the Horla³, Maupassant illustrates the Rimbaudian conception of the fragmented self while intensifying the anxiety-provoking dimensions of this duality that erodes identity. Whereas Rimbaud celebrates the creative richness made possible by openness to otherness, Maupassant offers a darker vision of it, depicting it as an aggressive and dominating force.

Research on identity, alterity, and the fantastic has increasingly underscored the central role of narrative structures in shaping and destabilizing literary subjectivity. Bakhtinian dialogism has been widely revisited as a foundational framework for understanding the relational and multi-voiced nature of discourse and selfhood (Holquist, 2002). More recently, studies have shown how dialogic interactions participate in the formation of identity through a continuous negotiation with otherness. Examining the writings of the Italian-Somali author Igiaba Scego, Ferri and Magne (2025) demonstrate that identity emerges through encounters with multiple voices and discursive positions rather than from a unified and self-transparent

² All English translations of citations from theoretical works and excerpts from *Le Horla* are the author's own, unless otherwise indicated.

³ In what follows, (*Le Horla*) will designate the novella, while (the Horla) will refer to the entity or character.

consciousness. As Viallon et al. (2026) note, meaning and identity emerge through processes of negotiation and reconfiguration shaped by discursive interactions. Such a perspective resonates with the present study's understanding of the self as a dynamic and unstable construct traversed by alterity. In parallel, contemporary narratological approaches have highlighted how narrative acts participate in shaping identity as a dynamic and distributed process rather than a fixed essence (Herman, 2013). Within studies of the fantastic and Gothic tradition, scholars have further explored how textual strategies of ambiguity and the uncanny articulate the fragmentation of the modern subject and its confrontation with otherness (Botting, 2014). Despite these advances, fewer studies have combined dialogism, discourse analysis, and intertextual reading to examine the crisis of the self in *Le Horla* through a comparative lens with Rimbaud's poetics of alterity. This study seeks to address this gap.

Against this backdrop, this article seeks to explore how dialogism makes it possible to account for the crisis of the self in *Le Horla* and how it opens a dialogue between Arthur Rimbaud and Guy de Maupassant regarding the issues of identity and otherness. The study brings these two perspectives on the self and the Other into conversation, showing how this short story dramatically and disturbingly illustrates the identity crisis evoked by Rimbaud. Thus, we ask how a dialogical approach can illuminate the way *Le Horla* stages the tension between the "I" and the Other, while revisiting and transforming Rimbaud's reflection on the fragmentation of the self in the face of alterity.

To this end, we posit that the enunciation in *Le Horla* is grounded in an oscillation between identity and otherness, perceptible through a fragmented discourse marked by polyphonic features that activate a form of dialogism revealing the narrator's identity crisis. From this perspective, we draw on Mikhail Bakhtin's theses on the novel and dialogism, according to which the narrative voice emerges as a polyphonic space where multiple and competing discourses intersect and confront one another. The subject's identity, like that of the narrator, is never closed upon itself but is continually shaped by a plurality of voices, here embodied in the figure of the Horla. We also rely on discourse analysis to show how these enunciative phenomena are rooted in a profound dialogism, exposing a tension between the narrator's voice and the foreign voice of the Other that overwhelms him.

2. Literature Review

Research on the crisis of the self in late nineteenth-century literature has generated a rich body of critical reflection within the humanities. The aesthetic and philosophical shifts of this period, marked by the emergence of an unstable and fragmented identity, have led numerous scholars to examine the literary forms capable of conveying this instability of the subject. In this context, Guy de Maupassant's novella *Le Horla* has often been approached as a revelatory narrative of a self-confronted with its own fragmentation.

2.1 From the Fantastic to the Psychoanalytic Crisis of the Self

Early critical studies largely emphasized the fantastic dimension of the tale. Drawing on the theoretical framework proposed by Tzvetan Todorov, critics have described the fantastic as a moment of hesitation between rational explanation and supernatural interpretation. Such hesitation lies at the heart of *Le Horla*, where the narrator struggles to determine whether the disturbing presence he perceives belongs to the realm of hallucination or to that of an invisible entity. This ambiguity destabilizes the narrator's sense of reality while progressively eroding the unity of the self.

Other readings have moved toward psychological and psychoanalytic interpretations. From this perspective, the invisible being that haunts the narrator may be understood less as

an external creature than as the manifestation of an inner division. Inspired by the reflections of Sigmund Freud on the uncanny, several critics interpret the Horla, main character of the narrative, as the return of what the subject attempts to repress. This oscillation between unstable identity and invasive otherness prefigures the Freudian uncanny (das *Unheimliche*), where the repressed familiar resurfaces as an anguishing double. Freud (1919) theorizes this "uncanny strangeness" as the return of the repressed, a crisis of identity that the narrator undergoes, losing his self to the Horla. The narrative thus becomes the stage on which an intimate conflict unfolds, revealing the fragile boundaries between consciousness and the hidden regions of the mind.

Reflections on the crisis of the subject in literary modernity cannot overlook Arthur Rimbaud's poetic contribution. His famous formula "*I is another*" stands as a cornerstone in theorizing subject depersonalization. Rimbaudian poetry envisions the self as a site of transit and metamorphosis, paving the way for a fluid, plural subjectivity. This fractured conception of the subject resonates in Maupassant's writing, where the narrator of *Le Horla* experiences an internal otherness that dismantles the boundaries between self and other.

Several comparative studies have indeed emphasized that late 19th-century literature reveals a shared sensitivity to the identity crisis. Between visionary poetry and fantastic narrative, Rimbaud's and Maupassant's texts converge in interrogating the stability of the modern subject. Though their forms diverge, the poetic experimentation of one, the fantastic narration of the other, they jointly portray the self as a fragmented, dialogic instance.

2.2 Dialogism and the Refoundation of the Self

Art and literature have always provided fertile ground for exploring the question of the "I" and the "Other". Poetry, fiction, theater, and cinema offer singular ways to probe these relationships. Artistic expression creates a dialogic space between identities, while confronting the "I" with its limits, vulnerabilities, and transformative potential.

In this context, the "I" is perceived as a perpetual motion, an endless quest for transformation and metamorphosis, since identity constitutes an uncertain construct (Kristeva, 2014). The subject, from this perspective, does not reduce to a single self-representation; it is a space in constant evolution, a territory both interior and exterior, where the boundaries between the "Self" and the "Other" are porous and shifting.

In sum, the famous phrase "*I is another*" compels us to reconsider the very notion of identity, to question, explore, and understand it not as a fixed concept, but as an open construction site, where each of us is simultaneously a "self" in quest of truth, an "Other" to discover, and an actor in multiple becomings. In this article, we set out to explore the multiple and complex intersections. This theme, spanning philosophy, literature, psychoanalysis, and sociology, leads us to rethink the profound and ambivalent relationships between self and other.

Proust, in announcing his famous phrase in *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (1954), "a book is the product of another self than the one we manifest in our habits, in society, in our vices", extends Rimbaud's reflection while adopting a distinct perspective. Unlike Rimbaud, who evokes a radical otherness within identity (the "I" that becomes other), Proust emphasizes the coexistence of multiple layers of the "self", revealed by writing beyond the everyday. With *Les Identités meurtrières* (1998), Amin Maalouf offers a contemporary and enriching perspective on identity and otherness. He explores the notion of an intrinsically multiple and complex identity that subtly dialogues with Rimbaud and Proust's conception of a self in perpetual becoming, a "I" that never reduces to a single essence.

Beyond psychological interpretations, the narrative voice of the text has also been examined through the lens of dialogism. The theoretical contributions of Mikhail Bakhtin invite us to read literary discourse as a space where multiple voices intersect and interact. In *Le Horla*, the diary form offers precisely such a space: the narrator alternates between rational analysis, scientific curiosity, fear, and doubt. These shifting tones create the impression of an internal dialogue in which the subject confronts both his own thoughts and an increasingly intrusive alterity.

Any reflection on the fragmentation of the self in nineteenth-century literature inevitably echoes the poetic revolution initiated by Arthur Rimbaud. His famous assertion “*I is another*” opened a new way of thinking about subjectivity, suggesting that the self is not a stable center but rather a site of transformation and displacement. Although Rimbaud’s poetic experimentation differs from Maupassant’s narrative realism, both writers participate in a broader literary moment that questions the unity of the subject and explores the unsettling presence of otherness within the self.

Recent comparative approaches have therefore begun to situate *Le Horla* within a wider reflection on the crisis of modern subjectivity. By placing Maupassant’s narrative alongside the poetic insights of Rimbaud, critics underline a shared preoccupation with the instability of identity and the emergence of a divided consciousness. The self appears no longer as a coherent entity but as a dynamic field of tensions, voices, and perceptions. In this sense, researchers like Bouazza and Benaouf (2025) highlight how these forms negotiate the tension between a yearning for stable identity and the irruption of radical alterity.

Despite this extensive scholarship, the relationship between the crisis of the self and dialogic structures in *Le Horla* remains a fertile area for further inquiry. A closer attention to the narrative voice, its internal dialogues, and its echoes with Rimbaud’s conception of the self allows us to reconsider the text not merely as a fantastic tale but as a subtle exploration of subjectivity in crisis.

3. Methodology

This study follows an interpretative approach grounded in literary studies and draws on a close analytical reading of the text. The research focuses on the discursive forms, the structures of enunciation, and the tensions that shape the narrative voice in *Le Horla* by Guy de Maupassant. Such a perspective allows us to explore how the crisis of the self gradually emerges in the narrative through the intrusion of an alterity that transforms the narrator’s experience of identity. Mikhail Bakhtin’s theories enable us to reconceive the narrative voice as a space of confrontation between competing discourses. Accordingly, the present study proposes a novel dialogic approach by revealing the narrator’s intimate journal in *Le Horla* as an unprecedented polyphonic field, where scientific rationality, sensory perception, and the voice of anguish clash, a perspective largely unexplored amid the prevalence of psychoanalytic readings. This discursive multiplicity forges a fractured subject, torn between rational mastery and the vertigo of irrational otherness.

The theoretical framework of this research is primarily based on the notion of dialogism developed by Mikhail Bakhtin. From this perspective, literary discourse appears as a space shaped by a plurality of voices and enunciative positions. Applied to *Le Horla*, this approach highlights the coexistence of several registers of expression within the narrator’s diary, the voice of rational inquiry, the voice of anxiety, and the progressive emergence of an intrusive other presence that infiltrates the discourse. This multiplicity contributes to shaping the narrative as a site of tension where the narrator’s identity is constantly negotiated.

The reflection is further enriched by a comparative perspective that brings the representation of alterity in Maupassant's narrative into dialogue with the poetic thought of Arthur Rimbaud. Rimbaud's well-known statement "*I is another*" illuminates the idea of a self-traversed by an inner alterity. In Rimbaud's poetics, this doubling opens a space for creative transformation, whereas in Maupassant's narrative it appears as a troubling and destabilizing experience that gradually leads to the erosion of identity. This comparison situates *Le Horla* within a broader reflection on the transformation of the modern self at the end of the nineteenth century. The analysis pays particular attention to the modes of enunciation that structure the short story. Focus is placed on shifts in discourse, variations in the narrative voice, and moments where alterity enters and reshapes the narrator's speech. These elements reveal a fragmented enunciation in which the narrator's identity is traversed by multiple voices. This discursive dynamic highlights the polyphonic dimension of the text and contributes to the representation of an unstable self.

Through this methodological approach, combining close textual reading, dialogic analysis, and a comparative perspective, the study seeks to show how *Le Horla* stages an identity shaped by the presence of the Other. Such a framework helps illuminate how Maupassant's narrative extends and transforms Rimbaud's reflection on alterity, portraying a self-caught in a continuous tension between self-appropriation and dissolution.

4. Analysis and Discussion

This section develops a close reading of *Le Horla* by Guy de Maupassant through the lens of dialogism, in order to explore the literary forms through which the crisis of the self takes shape. Particular attention is given to the narrator's discourse, where the diary form unfolds as a space of tension between multiple voices. This dynamic reveals an identity progressively shaped by the presence of an intrusive and destabilizing alterity. In dialogue with Arthur Rimbaud's poetic reflection on the splitting of the self, the analysis highlights how Maupassant's narrative constructs a fragmented identity, caught in an ongoing tension between self-appropriation and the unsettling experience of otherness.

4.1 Maupassant's "*Le Horla*": A Dialogical Exploration of Identity

The identity of the "I" as narrated in *Le Horla* by Guy de Maupassant, and as explored by Arthur Rimbaud in his "*I is another*," reveals a fundamental tension between the self and the Other. Indeed, the narrator asks himself where "these mysterious influences come from that change our happiness into discouragement and our confidence into distress?" (2005, p.16). For Rimbaud, the relationship with the Other enriches the self; the subject is decentered from itself, its essence lying preeminently in the "Other-I" within me rather than an objectified self, in fact, it manifests as a creative consciousness. In contemporary understanding, otherness "can be seen from another perspective, that of the opposition of the subject (I, me) to another subject, to another 'I' that differentiates itself from 'me'" (Benoit, 2008, p.148). This invites us to conceive of the subject both in relation to itself and in relation to others, in its plurality. This perspective emphasizes that the identity of the subject is not constructed solely through introspection but also through interaction with others. Thus, the subject defines and recognizes itself in relation to others, and its existence gains meaning within the framework of shared intersubjectivity. This point of view echoes the analyses of Paul Ricœur, for whom the Self as Another (1990) implies recognition of otherness as constitutive of personal identity. Whereas in Maupassant's work, it becomes a destructive threat, as evidenced by the main character's words when he states that his condition is becoming truly bizarre, saying: "As evening approaches, an incomprehensible anxiety overwhelms me, as if the night hides a terrible threat for me" (2005, p.18). However, this exploration of the self can only be fully understood by drawing on the notion of dialogism, as theorized by Mikhail Bakhtin.

Now, the dialogic principle at the heart of human interactions and literary texts posits that every identity, every voice, and every discourse is defined through a constant relationship with the Other. For Bakhtin, “every utterance, whether it belongs to literature or not, is rooted in a social context that profoundly marks it and is oriented toward a social horizon. Thus, each utterance, each word, carries within it a heterogeneous speech that constitutes it” (Piégay-Gros, 1996, p. 25).

In this introspective narrative, the dialogic dimension manifests itself both in the narrator’s inner conflict, torn between the self and the Other, between consciousness and madness, and in an implicit dialogue with other works, particularly between Rimbaud’s poetic vision and Maupassant’s narrative writing on the question of otherness. The narrator’s withdrawal into himself, conveyed through internal focalization, immerses us in his mental intimacy and in his perception of the monster that inhabits him. Through this focalization, the author succeeds in conveying the character’s growing anxiety, an anxiety that gradually takes hold of him, fueled by barely perceptible changes in his surroundings. Little by little, he comes to attribute these disturbances to a foreign presence. He then expresses his loss of control with poignant despair: “I am lost! Someone possesses my soul and governs it! Someone commands all my actions, all my movements, all my thoughts. I am nothing within myself anymore, nothing but a slave and terrified spectator of all the things I accomplish” (2005, p.36). His identity becomes porous, as he is unable to distinguish what comes from himself and what comes from the Horla.

In *Le Horla*, the narrator is caught in an incessant inner struggle: his “I” is confronted with an *Other* who acts in his place. This doubling, far from being purely external, reflects an internal dialogue in which identity wavers between mastery and dispossession. This tension between two conceptions of the “Other” fits within a broader theoretical framework, that of dialogism, as formulated by Mikhail Bakhtin, “a phenomenon whereby discourse brings heterogeneous voices into a confrontation, like the exchanges of a dialogue; often synonymous with plurivocality or polyphony” (Piégay-Gros, 1996, p. 180).

This dialectic suggests that the subject, far from being a fixed and autonomous entity, exists in constant interaction with other voices and influences. Chamoiseau (1997, p. 202) clearly affirms this when he writes: “The Other changes me and I change him. His contact animates me and I animate him. And these dislocations offer us horizons of survival; they unsettle us and amplify us.” Likewise, Kristeva emphasizes that “what Bakhtin hears in the word/discourse [...] is the division of the subject, split apart first because constituted by another, eventually becoming its own, and thereby multiple and elusive, polyphonic” (Kristeva, 1970, p.13).

This theory, applied to the analysis of Maupassant’s work, makes it possible to deepen our understanding of the identity crisis that runs through *Le Horla*, while also questioning the implications of Rimbaud’s vision of otherness. This dynamic of exchange is manifested in the interaction of inner voices, as illustrated in the following passage: “Someone possesses my soul and governs it! Someone commands me, compels me, dominates me!” (2005, p. 36). This struggle shows that the identity of the “I” is profoundly dialogic; it is constructed and undone through a constant confrontation with an internal alterity.

Thus, the narrator is faced with an otherness that invades his mind and threatens his psychological integrity. Through the story of a narrator-character who loses control over his own identity, *Le Horla* stages an identity crisis fueled by an intangible and overwhelming presence that imposes itself upon his mind, as shown in this passage:

I will kill him. I have seen him! I sat down last night at my table and pretended to write with great concentration. I knew he would come prowling around me, very close,

so close that perhaps I might touch him, seize him! And then! ... Then I would have the strength of the desperate; I would have my hands, my knees, my chest, my forehead, my teeth to strangle him, to crush him, to bite him, to tear him apart. (2005, p. 43).

In his diary, he describes a foreign force, the Horla, which seems to exert total power over him: "What is the matter with me? It is he, he, the Horla, who haunts me, who makes me think these mad thoughts! He is within me, he is becoming my soul; I will kill him!" (2005, p. 43). This experience recalls Rimbaud's formulation, "*I is another*," in which the subject finds himself dispossessed of his own identity, fragmented by another voice, another being that passes through him. In a study of *Le Horla*, Jung adds that "the double becomes actualized as soon as the subject is seized by an identity disturbance, as soon as he falters in his capacity to reflexively integrate the element of alterity that underlies his identity" (Jung, 2010, p. 157).

However, unlike the Rimbaudian approach, which finds in this alterity a source of inspiration and liberation, as emphasized by Chamoiseau: "The Other changes me and I change him. His contact animates me and I animate him. And these dislocations offer us horizons of survival; they unsettle us and amplify us" (Chamoiseau, 1997, p. 202), Maupassant highlights the anxiety and deterioration generated by this experience when he writes: "I constantly have this dreadful sensation of an impending danger, this apprehension of a misfortune to come or of approaching death, this presentiment which is no doubt the onset of some still unknown illness, germinating in the blood and in the flesh" (2005, p. 17).

Dialogism, in this sense, manifests itself through a conflictual relationship between the narrator's self and that of the Horla. This "I" seeks to define and assert itself, yet it becomes increasingly dominated by the Other, who turns into an absolute master: "But which governs me, who is it, this invisible being? This unknowable one, this prowler of a supernatural race?" (2005, p. 37). This passage conveys the fracture of the self, in which the enunciating subject no longer recognizes himself as the master of his own thoughts or actions; it illustrates the impossibility of freeing oneself from the grip of the Other.

Thus, the narrator's identity is in crisis, dominated by another self that invades him in a form of tragic doubling and contributes to "producing a second level of meaning" (Quinche, 2005, p. 168). It is worth recalling that this reflection aligns with the Bakhtinian conception according to which every discourse is traversed by other voices. In *Le Horla*, this dialogism assumes an extreme and perverse form, as the "I" is constantly in tension with an intrinsic yet foreign voice that deprives it of autonomy.

4.2 *The Other as Figure of the Double*

This motif of the double is omnipresent in fantastic literature (Dostoevsky, Poe, Hoffmann) and it reflects in this context a psychological dissociation. The narrator perceives himself as foreign to his own-self, since the Horla acts in his place, drinks his water, breathes his air, gradually erasing his individuality. The narrator thus projects onto the Horla a part of himself that he can no longer control.

If this fascinating figure recurs so frequently in fantastic narratives of the late nineteenth century, it is because the major discoveries of the time, by unsettling established certainties, placed it at the very center of the revolution in knowledge and modern representations, as illustrated by these words: "Now I know, I sense it. The reign of man is over" (2005, p. 40). Indeed, the narrator-character is troubled by this dual aspect of the self; we observe here a total loss of control, where the subject becomes the object of a foreign force, as he states:

Then I returned home with my soul in turmoil; for I am certain now-certain as I am of the alternation of day and night-that there exists near me an invisible being who feeds

on milk and water, who can touch things, take them and move them about, endowed consequently with a material nature, though imperceptible to our senses, and who lives, like me, under my roof... (2005, p. 33).

This underscores the alternation between doubt and certainty, illustrating the splitting of the self. The narrator is haunted by a presence he can never see directly. This invisibility makes the Other even more terrifying: it is there without being there, a ghost that defies the laws of perception, "He is within me, he is becoming my soul; I will kill him!" (2005, p. 43). In this context, the play on perception conveys the instability of the "I" when confronted with alterity. Caught in this spiral of uncertainty, the narrator states:

Then I was a sleepwalker; I lived, without knowing it, that mysterious double life which makes one wonder whether there are two beings within us, or whether a foreign, unknowable and invisible being animates, at times when our soul lies dormant, our captive body, which obeys that other as it obeys ourselves, more than ourselves. (2005, p. 24)

The paradoxical expression "*I is another*," affirming that identity cannot be reduced to the conscious self, presupposes a dialogic identity in which the subject is enriched by alterity, whether through poetic inspiration or through self-transcendence. It evokes alterity constitutive of identity, where the subject reveals itself as a polyphonic space resonating with echoes of otherness, sometimes those of the unconscious, dreams, or myths, that deepen its being and its perception of the world.

The Rimbaudian "I", in decomposition and metamorphosis, seeks to open itself to a broader universe, ceasing to be an autonomous entity in order to become a site of reception for other realities, a weaving of shifting identities. It paves the way for a poetic exploration of identity as a dynamic and multiple process, in which the individual draws upon alterity to constitute itself. From this perspective, the Other is not an intruder but an inventive extension of the self, enabling the subject to reinvent itself. It is a poetic vision of subjectivity, where identity is continuously made and unmade in perpetual movement.

It is worth noting that this tension between a divided "I", fertile in Rimbaud yet destructive in Maupassant, finds a particular resonance in Proust's thought. In *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (1954, p. 127), Proust asserts that a book "is the product of another self than the one we manifest in our habits, in society, in our vices." Like Rimbaud, he acknowledges the existence of a "deep self," the source of creation, distinct from the social or everyday *self*. Whereas Rimbaud valorizes this inner alterity as a poetic driving force, and Maupassant portrays it as an alienating threat, Proust situates it at the very heart of the literary process, making it the foundation of all authentic writing. This perspective allows us to conceive of the Other as the very condition of the possibility of the work itself.

In Maupassant's work, alterity takes on a much darker dimension. He extends this reflection in *Le Horla*, but radically transforms its scope: alterity, far from being a space of creativity, becomes a source of threat and dissolution. Maupassant offers a diametrically opposed vision, suggesting that if the "I" is another, it is not enriched but annihilated by this other self. Thus, his narrator-character does not discover a creative dimension, but rather a devastating force that threatens his psychological integrity, as the relationship between the self and the "Other" turns into a struggle in which the "*self*" fades before the external entity.

It now seems relevant to interpret this short story as a dialogic response to Rimbaud, a narrative staging of the dialectic between the same and the other that explores the limits and dangers of this conception. In this sense, the Rimbaudian dialogic "I" becomes, in Guy de Maupassant, a tormented "I", incapable of sustaining itself in front of the Other. Instead of serving as a catalyst for the elevation of consciousness, the Other becomes a parasite, an

invader that destroys the psychological integrity of the self. In this novel, the narrator fails to transcend his own identity; he drowns in it. Alterity becomes a force that compels him to submit to a foreign will, thereby annihilating any possibility of creation or liberation.

The story closes with the emergence of a new master who governs the self: “The house was now nothing but a horrible and magnificent pyre, a monstrous pyre lighting up the whole earth, a pyre where men were burning, and where He was burning too, He, my prisoner, the new Being, the new master, the Horla!” (2005, p. 47). In this framework, *Le Horla* can be read as an existential response to Rimbaud’s vision of alterity, where dialogism serves to understand how otherness, whether internal or external, shapes identity, at times elevating it, at times annihilating it, echoing Chamoiseau’s words (1997, p. 202): “Each Self contains an open part of Others, and at the edge of each Self there remains, trembling, the impenetrable part of Others.”

Thus, Maupassant exposes the dark side of alterity, which may lead to madness and destruction: “Decidedly, I am mad! And yet!” (2005, p. 24). The narrator’s is transformed into a figure dispossessed of its identity, incapable of establishing a genuine dialogue with others. This chronicle permits us to perceive polyphonic internal voices: that of a conscious ‘I’ desperately attempting to understand and master what escapes it, and that of the Horla, a dominant and destabilizing presence that defies all logical coherence. As this monster, as Stéphanie Dalleau explains:

The monster would thus become the focal point where two antagonistic worlds intersect; its resemblance to man brings about the abolition of the boundaries between the human, considered as the norm, and the monstrous. The shift from monstrosity to humanity consequently calls into question the very identity of Man (2014, p. 13-14).

This constitutes a polyphony that places the narrator and the Other in tension, illustrating a conflictual dialogism in which the “I” confronts an inner struggle impossible to overcome: “With a furious leap, like a rebellious beast about to disembowel its tamer, I crossed my room to seize him, to embrace him, to kill him!...” (2005; p. 39).

4.3 Dialogism as Reflection of the Human Condition

By bringing together dialogism and discourse analysis, we will attempt to demonstrate that *Le Horla* offers a deeper reflection on identity and alterity, in which the narrator’s very language becomes the reflection of a struggle between the “I” and the Other. For Bakhtin, human identity is fundamentally dialogic; it is defined not through unity, but through a permanent interaction with external and internal forces. In *Aesthetics of Verbal Creation*, he writes:

The object of a speaker’s discourse, whatever it may be, is not the object of the discourse in its first time in any utterance, and the speaker is not the first to address it. The object has already, so to speak, been spoken about, disputed, illuminated and judged in various ways; it is the site where different points of view, worldviews, and tendencies intersect, meet, and diverge (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 301).

In *Le Horla*, this dialogic dynamic becomes a metaphor for the human condition, marked by a constant fracture between the individual and the Other, in which human identity appears fragile and plural, and what is supposed to enrich the self may also threaten and destroy it. This implies that the subject, far from being a stable and autonomous entity, is always in relation to other voices and influences. Such a structure enables a polyphony in which different inner voices oppose one another, revealing a persistent tension between viewpoints. Alterity, in this context, can become destabilizing, even heartbreaking, highlighting the fragility of human identity. It is precisely this extreme experience that reflects the complexity of the relationship to oneself and to others. Émile Benveniste (1974, p. 82)

underscores this when he states that “in enunciation, language is employed to express a certain relation to the world,” thereby emphasizing that every act of speech engages a subjectivity and a single vision of reality.

The staging of the crisis of the self in *Le Horla* shows that man is never sheltered from forces that pass through him and degenerate him, as evidenced by the tragic exclamation: “Woe to us! Woe to man! He has come, the... the... what is his name... the... it seems to me he is shouting his name to me, and I cannot hear it... yes... he is shouting it... I am listening... I cannot... repeat... the... Horla... I have heard... the Horla... it is he... the Horla... he has come!...” (2005, p. 41).

This discourse reveals the unspeakable and the emotions which, according to Ruth Amossy (2009, p. 196), “are expressed through syntactic processes such as word order, exclamatory sentences, interjections [...] The repeated interjection here conveys the violence of an emotion that has no words to express itself.” Through this novel, the narrator, who loses control of his own identity, portrays a crisis of the self that conveys a profound anxiety in the face of an ineffable threat, embodying the loss of bearings when confronted with a terrifying alterity. The hesitation over the name underscores the difficulty of naming, and therefore mastering, what disrupts the inner order, thereby revealing the vulnerability of man when faced with the unknown. This collapse shows that discourse itself unsettles the unity of the subject, and that enunciation may be the very cause of its fragmentation. As Stéphanie Dalleau confirms, this type of character “allows the evocation of the unhappy and conflictual relationship between the being and the World through powerful, furious images responding to an aesthetics of excess and contrast” (2014, p. 23).

It is worth recalling that for Dominique Maingueneau, discourse is never neutral; it is embedded in a scene of enunciation, a posture, and a framework. The narrator of *Le Horla* thus adopts the posture of a man struggling with an elusive force, and through this scene he becomes the mirror of humanity weakened by the unknown. This fragility is expressed in the very act of enunciation when he asks in terror: “But he who governs me, who is he, this invisible being? This unknowable one, this prowler of a supernatural race?” (2005, p. 37).

Through this breathless and anguished question, the speaker stages a dispossession of the self, revealing a fracture between the speaking subject and his own consciousness. The “invisible” and the “unknowable” point to a radical alterity, an external force that escapes all rational understanding, a figure of the double or the Other in a psychological, even metaphysical sense. Thus, for Maupassant as for Rimbaud, it is not merely a matter of a monster or a ghost; this experience represents a metaphor of internal alterity, where the Other is not always an external being but a suppressed or unconscious dimension of the self, in which “moral and/or physical monstrosity perfectly embodies man’s need for revolt, a revolt against the established order, against norms” (Dalleau, 2014, p. 12).

In this way, it echoes modern fears-madness, loss of control, the dissolution of the subject. The enunciative analysis of this short story undeniably highlights, through the narrator’s own speech, a profound identity crisis and a troubled confrontation with the Other.

Unable to endure this coexistence with his Other, the narrator resorts to a radical solution: burning down his house in order to destroy the Horla. Yet the destruction of the Other also implies his own, confirming the total fusion between the two entities. The dramatic end of this self, marked by a tone of uncertainty underscored by the phrase “dead... perhaps...” (2005, p. 47), prompts us to question the true nature of the inner Other. Is it truly annihilated, or, on the contrary, irreversibly integrated into his own being? This ambiguity, conveyed through the hesitant clausula, highlights an existential in between state, neither complete disappearance nor total fusion.

We may therefore ask whether the Other has not become an inseparable part of the self, remaining both present and uncertain, neither entirely erased nor definitively merged, but oscillating between absence and inner presence. In this sense, internal focalization, by confining us within the narrator's mind, allows us to experience from within the gradual rise of his alienation. His inability to question his perceptions reinforces the Horla's domination: it is no longer mere doubt, but an absolute reality that takes control of his thought. This focalization thus places us in a paradoxical situation, we are convinced that the narrator is delirious, which reflects the psychological hold of the Horla over his mind.

Consequently, the discourse is not limited to a simple exchange between two voices; it is based on a double enunciation. This configuration, combining both an address to an internal interlocutor and a resonance for the reader, reflects the tension between the apparent unity of discourse and the fragmentation of being. The "I" in this short story also personifies a brokenhearted people, at times resigned and passive, at times seized by brutal revolt. To illustrate this ambivalence, the narrator observes lucidly:

Those who govern them are equally foolish; but instead of obeying men, they obey principles, which can only be silly, sterile and false precisely because they are principles, that is to say, ideas reputed certain and unchanging, in this world where nothing is certain, since light is an illusion, since sound is an illusion. (2005, p. 26)

This passage illustrates the constitutive tension of double enunciation. On the one hand, there is the narrative voice, which conveys the human condition as a shared reality; on the other, the enunciation of erroneous principles that the people blindly follow. These are generally statements in which "the reader is taken aside by [the writer], who makes him his companion [...] after having considered him as a witness-actor" (Selka, 2019, p. 66). Thus, discourse becomes a reflection of this condition, at once coherent in its collective enunciation and fragmented in its internal incongruities, torn between adherence and rebellion.

By bringing together the contributions of Benveniste, Amossy, and Maingueneau, it becomes clear that the short story *Le Horla* stages an enunciating subject struggling with himself, within a discourse in which identity wavers and argumentation becomes a desperate attempt to maintain internal coherence. Maupassant's "I" is not an isolated clinical case; it is the symptom of an era, of modernity in crisis, in which the human being discovers that he is no longer master of himself. In this way, the author gives discursive form to the modern human condition, torn between reason and chaos, between self and otherness. The confrontation between the "I" and the Other in this story resonates beyond the narrator's internal dynamic. It highlights a constitutive fragility of human identity, in which being is constructed, but also deconstructed, through contact with the Other.

The instability of the self has long occupied a prominent place in modern and contemporary reflections on subjectivity. From Kant to Valéry, numerous thinkers have questioned both the ontological stability of the subject and the conditions under which consciousness can be constituted as a unified instance. Among the studies that have recently revisited these issues, Saber Idoudi's *The Valéryan Self between Kantianism and Nihilism* (2022) offers a particularly illuminating comparative perspective. Revisiting Kant's conception of the transcendental subject (Kant, 1980) alongside Valéry's exploration of the empirical and affective dimensions of selfhood (Valéry, 1973), Idoudi identifies a constitutive tension between two ways of conceiving the self. On the one hand, the Kantian subject appears as the formal condition of the unity of experience; on the other, the Valéryan self emerges as a psychological and impulsive reality, exposed to passions, affects, and internal division. As Idoudi (2022, p. 154) observes, the Kantian self "is therefore neither intuition nor

concept, but the simple form of consciousness," whereas the Valéryan self remains inseparable from the fluctuations of the ego scriptor.

Although Idoudi's analysis primarily concerns Valéry, the tensions it brings to light provide a fruitful comparative framework for approaching *Le Horla*. Maupassant radicalizes this inner division by relocating it within the fantastic mode: the conflict no longer unfolds solely between transcendental form and empirical experience but takes the shape of a dialogic confrontation between the narrator's voice and an intrusive alterity that undermines the coherence of the self. Read alongside Rimbaud's famous assertion that "*I is another*," *Le Horla* stages a subject traversed by competing voices, in which identity appears less as a stable essence than as an unstable process continually negotiated through encounters with otherness. In this way, Kant's concern for the unity of consciousness, Valéry's exploration of inner multiplicity, and Idoudi's comparative insights collectively illuminate how Maupassant transforms broader philosophical reflections on the divided self into a narrative experience of dialogic fragmentation and inner dispossession.

This dialogical dynamic of the self finds a particularly striking echo in *Le Horla*, where Rimbaud's "*I is another*" serves as a key to interpretation. The subject is indeed decentered and crossed by another voice that speaks within him. Thus, the reflection on the "self" developed by Valéry, drawing on Kantian thought, extends into a radical fictionalization of the crisis of the subject, in which the self no longer appears as a unifying instance of consciousness, but rather as the site of a confrontation between identity and otherness, between self-mastery and inner dispossession, as Lévi-Strauss recommended in his essay: "Identity consists less in postulating or affirming it than in remaking it, reconstructing it" (1977, p. 58).

5. Conclusion

In sum, *Le Horla* appears as a privileged terrain for observing how dialogism accounts for the crisis of the self through figures of the fragmented "I," and for grasping the complexity of the relations between the "I" and the Other. By placing Maupassant's inner rupture in perspective with Rimbaud's formulation "*I is another*," this study has enabled a dialogue between two conceptions of identity marked by otherness. At the crossroads of the fantastic, self-writing, and subjective disintegration, *Le Horla* thus presents a shattered, diffracted voice that reveals the deep tensions of the modern subject.

Whereas Rimbaud envisions a liberating perspective on otherness, conceiving identity as a mosaic of experiences, emotions, and perceptions, Maupassant offers a much darker vision, revealing the dangers inherent in this dialogical relationship. In this way, the text highlights the profound tensions between the desire for identity construction and the threat posed by otherness, urging us to question the fragility of human existence in the face of what escapes our control. For the "I" is first constituted through identification with an external image, yet this image is always incomplete and carries within it the illusion of a coherent self. In this case, invasive otherness could represent the irruption of the real, undermining the illusion of a stable identity.

The narrator thus finds himself confronted with an otherness that destabilizes his perception of the self, and the Horla, as an entity, becomes the manifestation of a weakness within the subject, a representation of what eludes his mastery. Indeed, otherness is experienced here as an intrusion that disrupts the narrator's psychological balance and illustrates a total loss of control over his existence. Finally, through this study, dialogism emerges as a fundamental interpretive key for better understanding the human condition, intrinsically marked by tension with the "Other self" that inhabits us, whether creative or

destructive. The short story *Le Horla* illustrates this universal truth by staging a tragic struggle between identity and otherness.

Beyond the specific case of *Le Horla*, this study underscores the broader relevance of dialogism for contemporary literary theory, discourse analysis, and identity studies. By combining Bakhtinian dialogism, enunciative analysis, and an intertextual perspective informed by Rimbaud's reflection on otherness, it highlights the heuristic value of approaching subjectivity as a dynamic and relational process shaped by competing voices. Such an approach invites further exploration of the ways in which identity crises are narratively configured across different literary traditions and historical contexts. It may prove particularly fruitful for the study of other fantastic narratives, modernist writings, or texts staging forms of inner division and alterity. In this respect, the dialogic reading proposed here sheds further light on the instability of the self and on the discursive processes through which human identity continually takes shape and transforms itself.

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