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Renaissance(s)/Rebirth(s)

Foreword

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Foreword

Julie Neveux

Rebirth in language: a dialectic of emergence

- 1 The SAES 60th congress (originally to be hosted by the University of Tours in 2020, and eventually held online in 2021 due to the pandemic), focused on the notion of « Renaissance(s)/re-birth ». All the articles presented in this issue build upon communications presented in the workshop of the SSA (*Société de Stylistique Anglaise*, a group I have had the honor to lead since September 2021). They explore how processes of rebirth are always linked to some linguistic or stylistic dialectic, some tension between distinct forces, narrative perspectives, or rhetoric stakes. This tension ultimately resolves into a new, temporary birth. This birth might consist of the spiritual awakening of a character (M. Bourdeau), the voicing of an antagonistic self (F. Floquet), the re-creation of a transfigured reality (O. Glain, A. Terry, S. Béligon), or the public staging of a speaker's ethos in cases of political, multi-modal communication (L. Benoit à la Guillaume, G. Lacaze). Births turn out to be cyclical, constituting the point of emergence of a movement that has come to its end, that has been fully deployed. Giving birth to new, emergent realities, re-presenting them, might even been seen as the finality of all works of representation, be they artistic or political. Stylistics is 'indisciplinary' at heart, Sorlin (2014) emphasizes, as it 'will never adopt disciplinary blinders/blinkers. Given its conception of language as fundamentally contextualized, it can only exist as a cross- disciplinary field'.
- 2 Distinct aspects of language may be exploited to induce a re-presentation of reality, from particular phonetic traits, which, encoded in writing, try to capture some specific oral variety, to semantic components and grammatical markers (using 'you' instead of 'I'): at each level of a textual construction, language *re-presents* the ever-evasive 'reality'. It makes 'reality' salient and present (to the reader or the co-speaker).
- 3 Although the corpora and the theoretical frameworks vary from one paper to the other (literature, TV series, political discourse, cognitive stylistics, narratology, etc), they nonetheless all emphasize this paradox: no re-birth can be achieved outside this

dynamic interplay with what already exists, and needs to be given a new shape, a new existence. Each stylistic endeavor reveals a dialectic between what is given to us and what we, as speakers or writers, make of it; style, Lecercle (2018) claims, is itself a 'dialectical knot': 'between language and speech [...], interpellation and counter-interpellation, the collective and the individual'. Through style alone readers and co-speakers who give in to the power of narratives and story-telling may experience a sense of a rebirth, yielding to the re-creative power of words.

- 4 The first section focuses on narrative processes involving what could be described as new characterization and other selves.
- 5 **Marion Bourdeau** offers a beautiful and Bachelardian exploration of water in the work of the Irish author Colum McCann, in which she tracks the processes of rebirth as a dialectic, showing that his characters often undergo spiritual transformation through physical closeness with waterscapes. The recurring motif of waterscapes stands, she argues, for liminal states, between stasis and movement, as the characters often appear or emerge as salient figures against the background. Following Leech's (2008) definition of 'foregrounding', M. Bourdeau concentrates on salient patterns and calls 'spatialities of rebirth' these diegetic moments where the characters find themselves unsettled and moved by natural elements. Water has a symbolic power; it is treated rhythmically and stylistically by the narrative voice as a dynamic force empowering characters' agency, enabling them to reach a new understanding of themselves.
- 6 It is in Hemingway's writing (*For Whom the Bell Tolls*, *The Garden of Eden*, *The Old Man and the Sea*) that **Florence Floquet** examines the birth of an inner conflicting dialogue, or rather, a « duologue », within interior monologues. She points out how Hemingway's characters, in these three novels, at times develop a sense of 'disidentity' (Lai 1988) which questions the notion of a monolithic self (as studied by Neveux (2020) in another modernist writer, Katherine Mansfield). The atypical use of 'you' addressed by the I (speaking to themselves), along with reporting verbs, characterize a dialogic and dynamic moment of tension, often arising from dissatisfaction, where characters blame themselves for something they should have done (do) or have said (say). Their better self (the implicit I) voices this self-deprecation (addressed to you), the duologue re-presenting a moment of self-distanciation.
- 7 The second part of this issue tackles the way every work of art unfolds as a re-creation of reality, the creative process unveiling *e contrario* the impossibility to ever represent an 'objective' extralinguistic world. Linguistic representations always distort or give new shapes. The more visible the distortion is, the more humorous it might get; the less visible, the more strange, e-stranging. In art, re-presentation might also provide artistic sublimation to painful emotional experiences.
- 8 **Adeline Terry** addresses the notion of rebirth in an American sitcom, *How I Met your Mother* (CBS, 2005-2014) a TV series characterized by a complex and experimental narrative structure in which a particularly unreliable and romantic character/narrator, Future Ted, (the Ted Mosby of 2030), retrospectively tells his two children (in voiceover) the story of how he met their mother. But he never gets his story right, digresses repeatedly and keeps retelling and modifying the story as new diegetic elements abruptly come up, with each retelling, as explained by Lambrou (2020), creating a new narrative. A. Terry demonstrates how both audio and visual channels are used to play with and display the distorting power of storytelling, to the point where it seems improbable to ever come close to a realistic account of the original love

encounter. The romantic narrative project of the romantic character (honoring the myth-creating first time) is deflated through and through, providing an experience of playful destabilization whose aim is to create humour.

- 9 **Olivier Glain** uses his expertise in phonetic variation to investigate the scientificity of Lovecraft's representation of an Old Yankee variety, described as the *New England backwoods dialect*, in "The Picture in the House" (1920) and *The Shadow over Innsmouth* (1936). It appears that, although some phonetic traits of various sub-dialects of New England might be identified here and there, Lovecraft's encoding of the dialect spoken by Zadok Allen, the old drunkard in *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, does not evoke some of the central features of the expected New England dialect (non-rhoticity ; vowel with an [a :] quality). O. Glain foregrounds how the effort of the author-narrator to render 'an extreme form of Yankee dialect [he] had thought long extinct (*Picture*)' consists instead of a combination of linguistic and paralinguistic devices (Paralinguistic Vocal Features as formulated by Brown 1990), which create an *effet de réel* (Barthes 1968). Representing an unfamiliar orality is mainly meant to create 'cosmic horror' and trigger a process of defamiliarization, with readers embarking into an unknown territory, where reasonable expectations cease to be satisfied. Only there might they experience the power of 'weird fiction'.
- 10 Finally, **Stéphanie Beligon**, in lexical semantics, pays attention to the frequent uses of the nouns 'feeling' and 'emotion' in Woolf's *To The LightHouse* in order to shed light on the woolfian representation of the creative process. A semantic distinction can be established between the two nouns, 'feeling' designating a stabilized sentimental entity that the characters have come to acknowledge, whereas 'emotions' always refer to dynamic and unsettling forces. However, S. Béligon, building on Barrett's (2006) theory of 'core affect', highlights the continuity between the two experiences. As long as the painter Lily Briscoe is unable to express her profound emotions (the grief felt after the death of her friend, Mrs. Ramsay), she is also unable to paint. The author turns to Woolf's (1929) definition of 'reality' as what transcends the particular to make it part of a whole (creating meaning and permanence). When Lily Briscoe eventually transposes her emotion onto the canvas, the mission of art is fulfilled — sublimating emotions by re-presenting them.
- 11 The last section of this issue deals with ancient rhetorical techniques, such as the construction of the speaker's ethos, and their renewal within recent political communication.
- 12 **Luc Benoît à La Guillaume** analyzes the rebirth of the epideictic genre in American political discourse since 1970, arguing that Trump's communication perpetuates this renewed tradition. Praise, however, is, in Trump's rhetoric, always associated with blame, and his specific use of the epideictic genre should instead be understood as 'a style of thought'. Praising heroes of the day and blaming all those who do not conform to their values : this is how the former president has divided American society. This style, explains L. Benoît à la Guillaume, applying Hartog's (2012) analyses of 'presentism', results from a lack of vision. No values can be brought forth from the past nor projected unto the future. The present is thus the only dimension left to the professional rhetorician, whose focus narrows on daily events that are turned into spectacles of values. Trump's rhetoric aims solely at building ephemeral heroes and triggering immediate reactivity.

- 13 **Grégoire Lacaze** also works on political communication, but he chooses to focus on the new multi-modalities of social media, as exemplified by the publications of Boris Johnson, Jacob Rees-Mogg and Donald Trump. The author describes the careful staging of the visual dimension of communication today, or how politicians deliberately blur the frontier between the private and the public, intimacy and 'extimacy' ('extimité' as described by Paveau 2017). G. Lacaze draws from Caron's (2019) thorough study of digital communication to underline how each publication strives to project a particular identity (an *ethos*, a representation of the speaker). However, he warns that this endeavor might fail if the onlooker does not interpret it as planned, because the meaning of digital publications is 'co-constructed'.

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