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Guerre en poésie, poésie en guerre
War in Poetry: Breaking into Family and Everyday Life
The soldier poets of modern war had direct and brutal experience of the front line and their artistic works are thus connected with historical testimony or transformed into overflows of traumatised memories. Analyses of their collections abound and have been reinvigorated since the centenary of the First World War. Yet another series of articles on the war in poetry could, as a consequence, seem superfluous, but fewer studies have in fact been looking into the poetry of those who witnessed war as children or experienced it second-hand, through the stories of family members, through the transformation of their daily lives or, later, through history books or fiction or through the media—notably when they cover remembrance days, home or foreign conflicts.

Experts are still debating the consequences of post-traumatic stress disorder on war veterans, but since the 1990s, they have agreed on a series of symptoms such as depression, nightmares, and hallucinations, which may affect any person, including children, who is a victim of trauma,\(^1\) a Greek term for an open wound. It is perhaps no wonder that war scenes, conflict and violence should break into and impinge—through thematic or structural devastation—on the poems of soldiers’ wives or children, or in the texts of those who grew up during times of conflict and in their immediate aftermath. Poetry, on the other hand, can belligerently intrude into the relating of memories, breaking away from codes and forms, while asserting itself and attempting to survive in places where it may be least expected.

It is, however, difficult to assess the extent to which first, second or even third generations can be affected by events they have not been through and the way they can recapture their authenticity. “They fell from sea to earth, from grave to grave / and, griefless now, taught others how to grieve,”\(^2\) Scottish poet Iain Crichton Smith wrote, leaving aside the jingoistic aspect of war to emphasise younger generation-centred human concerns. The double question of ethics and aesthetics is nevertheless posed as authors are caught between truth and imagination. Beyond more or less conscious or fabricated memories, beyond loyal remembrance, there is a desire to appropriate war for oneself or to exorcise it. There are then history infractions when poets try to romanticise or demonise the conflict, when they write about facts distorted by the imagination of the children they were at the time, about events that have somehow
catalysed a nation or about personal impressions induced by the testimonies of others. This Miranda issue probes into these questions, focusing particularly on the notions of traces—notably real or invented testimony, exposition, reminiscences, haunting memories—and intrusion, namely, unexpected irruption, uncanny presence or formal or thematic breaches. It underscores the similarities and differences in the reactions and what could be called the war poetics of authors from England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, the United States and the Caribbean who write about the Second World War, conflicts in South-East Asia, Jerusalem or Hispaniola, as well as the Troubles. The reflections collected here emanate from a poet, from translators and critics, and span from first to third generation, creating a *mise en abyme* which not only deeply questions the authors’ writings but also the general interest in and reaction to war texts.

4 In a perfect balance between personal and academic reflections, critic and poet Roderick Watson discusses the “reverberation” of war in his own poetry and the way war affected the poets of his generation, notably through the comics children read and the games they played. He argues that war culture is part and parcel of modern British identity and national reconstruction, though events have different resonance in the different nations of the kingdom. As he reflects on the haunting shadows of the holocaust or the nuclear bombing of Japan, he expresses a “terrible sense of shame in the complicity of simply being human,” posing a deeply thought-provoking question: to what extent can war be turned into an identity-building myth, notably when it takes the “jolly guise of triumphalist popular culture”? He then analyses his own artistic response in the collection *True History on the Walls*, as a need for “poetic catharsis” to solve moral discomfort.

5 Images of the past returning is a theme Fanny Howe shares with Roderick Watson, though she has, in a way, found some symbiotic relation with the war visions distilled in *Lives of a Spirit*. Filiation and remembrance is what the female subject of her prose-poem discovers as she experiences a disruption of space and time and finds herself in a “non-space” “saturated with the presence-absence of the dead,” where “past and present constantly collide” and where she roams intermittently into a city Park and various cemeteries, including a war cemetery. Bénédicte Chorier-Fryd analyses not just the few specific references to war but the whole poem and shows the subject, constantly shifting from first to third person, is plunged into a spiritual meditation in which the figure of her late father is one of the key elements contributing to the spatio-temporal confusion. As shadowy presences from World War II gradually become both familiar and familial and as God’s “forgotten name” is recuringly associated with nameless soldiers, confusion allows “opposites [to] meet and merge” and create new meanings to life.

6 While Fanny Howe’s spirit eventually finds a harmonious place where she can take refuge, it seems poet-journalist James Fenton always finds himself “in the wrong place” and his mind and writings hover from the battle fields of South-East Asia to English gardens. Though these opposites may be reminiscent of the superimposition of war cemetery and city park, Sara Greaves argues that “the garden is a metaphor for the aesthetic or aestheticist strain in Fenton’s poetry, and ‘war’ is the voice of witness, residual in times of peace.” Fenton’s artistic response to his and other suffering men’s trauma is a healing process through language (notably nonsensical language), she suggests, borrowing Anzieu’s concept of “skin-ego” and originally adapting it, preferring to use the term “skin-voice”. Her approach as a translator can be considered
as a testimony of third-hand living of war insofar as she somehow had to endorse Fenton’s “skin-voice” in order to render his music in the French text owing to what she calls, with Henri Meschonnic, a “pellicular translation”.

Unlike Fenton’s “skin-voice”, language—or rather colonial language—is not a protecting cover for some West Indian authors who write about genocide or dictatorships and try to re-inhabit their history and find a trans-Caribbean identity. It may in fact serve as “an instrument of repression and death.” They will hence debunk, adapt or experiment with translation, resorting to multilingualism or simply to “non-translation”. Laëtitia Saint-Loubert defers to those authors on this point as she quotes them in French, Spanish, English and Creole to highlight the *poēsis* of trauma in Edwidge Danticat’s *The Farming of Bones* and Junot Díaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, 21st century novels which reflect on the Haitian massacre and the afro-phobic feelings that led to it and that are resurgent today. She argues that the inability to separate past from present results in what Gilron calls “syncopated temporality”, a notion that may echo Fanny Howe’s collision of past and present. Looking for the Word and an appropriate space is what Hispaniola-born authors share with Howe’s Spirit too. Laetitia Saint-Loubert defines translation as “snippets of Haitian Kreyòl and Spanish that re-create or ‘bring forth’ the original trauma” while also subverting and resisting it via a strange yet familiar topos where recovery may eventually take place, where history may be re-membered and identity renegotiated.

Bertrand Rouby and Fanny Quément, who both consider Northern Irish authors (Eavan Boland and Seamus Heaney, respectively), and the Troubles, further develop the idea that the written space is a place where trauma and violence can be confronted. The two poets diverge, however, in their bellicosity, as Boland attempts to contain violence while Heaney turns writing into a sonic weapon. When it comes to dealing with “tension between domestic and public spaces”, though, the two poets share similar images, including the fighting couple, as highlighted by Bertrand Rouby, as well as opposition between nature and more prosaic objects or landscapes.

While these oppositions may be reminiscent of Fenton’s war versus garden or of Fanny Howe’s city park versus war cemetery, it is interesting to note that contrary to them, Eavan Boland’s gardens and fields, in times of war, evoke violence. They are therefore closer to Danticat’s paradoxical representation of nature with the river Massacre and parsley as poison, or to Roderick Watson’s memory of collecting cartridges on the coast of Aberdeen. They are, moreover, opposed to domestic objects and intimacy. After an overview of Irish poetry on the Ulster conflict, Bertrand Rouby analyses how Boland, with her systematic connection of “political conflict with all cases of violence against women,” genderises the Troubles. The kitchen hence becomes a place of refuge and women’s private garden and place of sustenance, in all senses of the terms. It is, however, violated by seeds of violence planted in the Irish soil, as well as the media, notably with the narratives of the conflict on the radio.

The radio and the news of World War II as it infiltrated into houses brought Seamus Heaney his first account of conflict and gave him a particular sensitivity to sounds, notably war sounds, as they break into familiar Irish landscapes or domestic places. This is where Fanny Quément starts from to study the poet’s auditory relations with the Troubles. For what Roderick Watson metaphorically calls “the horror and the fascination of these old echoes coming through to a later and younger generation, like some fading radio transmission” become true sounds as a “background drone” of
rolling Orangemen Lambegs and chopping British helicopters somewhat reenact—or prolong—a war, eavesdropped on in childhood. Heaney, however, redirects sonic weapons and listening devices and makes the most of the creativity of military instruments to launch into poetic counterattacks in order to mark and redefine territories and to retune the Irish voice with his own.

As “a sough o’ war [goes] through the land”\(^3\) and resonates in time and space, writing ultimately becomes an ideal mode of reflection. Not only does it enable testimonies to be expressed through full visions or simple glimpses of violence or through echoes of past horror and trauma, it also acts as Athena’s shield-mirror where spaces and times can be superimposed and in which conflicts can be observed, differed and diffracted, figured and disfigured, translated or redirected against themselves. The writing space hence offers both a healing territory and a time for creation and meditation on life, identity and also on one’s ambiguous fascination for war and its imago.

NOTES


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Echoes and Shadows: Creative Interferences from World War II

Roderick Watson

This essay is a personal reflection on how reverberations from the Second World War have marked my childhood, and my own creative writing. I am also speaking for the shared experience of a particular generation of boys and men (the masculine bias is relevant) who grew up in the years after 1945 subject to the reinterpretations and distortions of a popular culture that glorified war. I will also offer some critical reflections on the part played by these acts of communal remembering and forgetting in the construction of modern British identity.

I was born in Aberdeen on the North-East coast of Scotland on 12 May 1943. This was “Black May”, when U boats were being sunk in the battle of the Atlantic, and the surrender of the Afrika Corps brought the Desert Campaign to an end. In Warsaw the ghetto uprising was savagely crushed and thousands of Jews were killed or sent to the camps. In Germany the RAF “Dam busters” attacked the Mohne and Eder dams, while the Allies were bombing Sardinia in the Mediterranean, as a feint for the invasion of Italy—actually planned for Sicily. The war was beginning to turn, but it was far from over.

I am, in a sense, a war baby, but can make no claim to the suffering and the trauma of so many thousands of babies and children who, even though they were lucky enough to survive the war, had to grow up in the ruins of Europe, Russia, Africa, Japan and the Middle East. In fact the war did not really touch me as a boy until the late ‘40s and ‘50s, when it came in lurid and paradoxically shadowy forms: simultaneously trivial, exciting and disturbing.

I remember ration books, because we used to play with those now finally redundant food stamps. I remember Anderson air-raid shelters squeezed into back gardens, and I played with the big bolts that fixed the Morrison shelters, which were steel tables designed for families to cower beneath. I remember the thrill of hearing Spitfire engines in the sky, and the concrete machine gun pillboxes along the coast of Aberdeen, exciting to explore, and marked in later years by rusting barbed wire and
the reek of stale urine. I owned an enviably large collection of spent 303 calibre brass cartridges. Everyone of my generation played with old gas masks. Their satchels were really good for carrying sandwiches and a thermos flask.

5 My father was a scientist so his was a reserved occupation during the war, not subject to conscription, but I kept his distinctively yellow steel helmet for many years. He was gas protection officer for the North of Scotland in the early days of the war when gas attacks were surely expected to happen. One of his friends had been the navigator on a Lancaster bomber, and I remember admiring and lusting after the superior glamour of his RAF officer’s cap, battered and faded blue.

6 On the 10th anniversary of the D-Day landings I pored over a large book of photographs specially published for the occasion. In a second-hand bookshop I bought a wartime issue of Jane’s Fighting Ships 1940, a serious reference book on the world’s navies, and I still have yellowing wartime booklets in my bookshelves, with instructions on Enemy Aircraft Recognition and useful tips from Invasion Tactics in the pioneering style of Scouting for Boys:

**Cooking on Hand-grenades**

If you want to make a fire without being seen, and have no wood, but some German hand grenades of the stick-grenade type, try this:

Unscrew the stick and take out the little metal detonator inside. Now you can see the explosive [. . .] take the powder of a German cartridge (it is forbidden and not always advisable to use your own) after removing the bullet, and pour it into the grenade. You can safely ignite the powder and with it the explosive of the grenade. It will burn with a long and lasting flame, and be sufficient to bring about four pints of water to the boil.

(Necker, 32.)

7 “Playing at war” was a major feature of my boyhood, and imagined battles between Brits and Germans (less commonly “Japs”) were at least as popular as those between “Cowboys and Indians”. (Political correctness begone!) As far as comic books go, I personally favoured rocket ships in the weekly Eagle, which was started in 1950, starring its front-page hero, the space-pilot Dan Dare and his attendant, the faithful batman Digby. (It seems the English class system was to be future-proof.) But I also read many titles from the hundreds of war comics that appeared on the British market in the mid to late 1950s, replete with useful German phrases such as “Achtung! Spitfeuren!”

8 We know that the aftermath of war can be traumatic, for many of those who experienced it, whether as civilians or soldiers. We know that this was seldom spoken about at the time, and that thousands suffered in silence, or regarded their troubles with something approaching shame. So what can one make of the remarkable resurgence of war films and war stories in Britain in the 1950s? Was there an ideologically nationalist agenda here, or some sort of healing and remembering, by way of re-enactment? Or a combination of the two? Perhaps the war comics of my youth represented a bizarre return of the repressed, for the generation that drew them, by which the tragedies and futilities of history were being replayed, not as a farce, but in the rather jolly guise of triumphantist popular culture?

de mémoire, “sites of memory” to note our cultural urge to identify or construct imaginative landmarks and objects, as icons of a glorious national past, and she links the rise of this tendency in Britain to the decline of Empire and Britain’s fading post-war standing, especially after the debacle of the Suez crisis in 1956.¹

From a similar perspective James Chapman’s study, British Comics: A Cultural History has this to say about the period of my growing up:

How can we explain the surge in the popularity of war comics towards the end of the 1950s? John Sutherland suggests that by then “the war was far enough away for the pain to have receded but the glory was still fondly remembered”. War comics can be seen as part of a cultural project to claim the “memory” of the Second World War for the generation of Britons born after the war had ended. (Chapman, 96.)

Chapman goes on to cite what he describes as “a boom in war-related fiction and non-fiction” at this time, and names over a dozen films in what he calls “a golden age for the war film in British cinema”.² He goes on to note that:

War comics were also a major part of what Michael Paris has, appropriately, termed “the pleasure culture of war” in post-war Britain.³ They were one of the means that allowed children to experience something of the thrill and excitement of war without being exposed to its dangers. (Chapman, 97.)

He notes that recruiting material for the armed forces was included in these comics, alongside advertising for war toys. Nor did the titles of these weeklies hide their martial and imperial aspirations, with names such as Eagle, Victor, Valiant, Lion. Comics for girls from this period were equally popular if less numerous, and their titles—Girl, School Friend and Bunty—were designed to reinforce middle class aspirations and gender stereotypes, with tales of nurses, dancers, boarding schools and horsewomen. But these never matched the market for boys’ war comics, which grew to hundreds of single-title graphic volumes, each telling specific tales of combat, mostly published by D. C. Thomson of Dundee and Alfred Harmsworth’s Amalgamated Press in London, later to become Fleetway under the Mirror Group.

Here is James Chapman again:

The war issues of Thriller Picture Library proved so popular that Amalgamated Press launched War Picture Library in 1958. This was followed by other libraries from the same stable—Air Ace Picture Library (1960-70), Battle Picture Library (1961-84) and War at Sea Picture Library (1962-5)—by D. C. Thomson’s Commando (1961–), and by several imitators from smaller publishers including Micron’s Combat Picture Library (1959-85) and C. H. Pearson’s Picture Stories of World War II (1960-5) and Air War Picture Stories (1961-2). At their height the picture libraries were each printing up to six new stories a month as well as reprints. Until they were discontinued in the mid-1980s, War Picture Library published 2,103 issues [ie: individual titles]; Battle Picture Library 1,706 issues and Combat Picture Library 1,212 issues, while Commando, which is still in print, passed 4,000 issues in 2007. (Chapman, 97.)

These are staggering numbers, and the political, ideological and gendering implications of such a national enterprise are particularly striking, not to say disturbing. It only remains to observe that the countries of Europe have not had anything like this level of popular juvenile fixation with World War II.

A few pictorial examples of this large and continuing commercial activity will suffice.
“Ramsay’s Raiders” seems to be an equal opportunity Commonwealth outfit since this supposed long-range desert group features troopers from England, Scotland and Australia. (More equal still, D. C. Thomson’s Commando series is now printed in Germany.)
“I Flew with Braddock”, appeared in comic strip format, but was mostly text-based, as here, in a series of tales supposedly recounted by George Bourne, his working class flight navigator. This allowed for more specific historical detail than was usual for the genre, but was notable for its portrait of Braddock as a non-commissioned officer (a flight sergeant) of extraordinary ability, notorious for his scruffy appearance and an absolute contempt for establishment authority. Here was a hero fit for the 1960s, in a trope that would become increasingly evident in cinema and popular culture as the decades progressed. Nevertheless the promotion of combat, courage and victory played a key part in the construction of British boyhood from the 50s to the 70s, if enlivened, in Braddock’s case, with a degree of class consciousness.

Such matters have not been confined to picture stories for boys, for the tales we tell ourselves from the second war still play a large part in the re-imagining of British national being. Beyond the school playground and the pulp fiction of our youth, the urge to reinhabit old stories of the Second World War has been a recurring feature in British culture, usually surfacing at moments of ideological misgiving or on the occasion of some notable anniversary.

Consider, for example, the narratives of national identity that have been constructed around the retreat from Dunkirk in 1940, with the moving story of “the little ships”, the fishing boats and pleasure craft that were recruited to the task. The 75th anniversary of the evacuation in 2015 was marked by a floating re-enactment of their journey, and a major Hollywood movie, directed by Christopher Nolan was released for a summer showing in 2017. Consider, too, the legendary and oft recounted drama of the
“Battle of Britain” with the special and undeniable glamour of “the few” in their Spitfires and Hurricanes.

These have become foundational myths of modern British identity, in the same way that the suffering at Gallipoli in the First War became a foundational myth of national identity for Australia and New Zealand, as it also did, in its turn, for Kemal Ataturk’s modern Turkey. (Or, if you like, the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314, or the 1320 Declaration of Arbroath for modern Scottish politics.)

But there is always another side to such narratives, as Scottish historian Catriona Macdonald has pointed out, by remembering that the story of Dunkirk had an entirely different resonance in Scotland. The evacuation of Dunkirk was only made possible because 10,000 men of the 51st Highland Division were ordered to stay behind to fight a rearguard action—and be captured. Macdonald notes that “In many Scottish homes the memory of this betrayal lived on beyond 1945. [The novelist] Eric Linklater commented: ‘To Scotland the news came like another Flodden.’”

There are many such counter-stories from the war that have not quite entered the popular imagination. Angus Calder’s groundbreaking study The People’s War. Britain 1939-1945, (first published in 1969) did much to illustrate this by recognising the social conflict that existed at the time, and the paradoxical ways in which the demands of total war overthrew the old conventions and shook the establishment (at least for a while) out of its unexamined privileges. Less than two months after the German surrender, after all, a widely felt need for social reform unseated Winston Churchill and led to the landslide victory for Labour in July 1945.

The narrative practices of remembering and forgetting, and the differences between individual memory and socially constructed memory, are rarely ideologically innocent. We seldom talk of the hundred of soldiers who stepped off their landing craft at Normandy and simply drowned. We seldom mention the thousands of young RAF pilots who crashed and died while learning to fly. (There were three thousand in Bomber Command alone.) We know, too, that the terrible ambiguities surrounding the bombing campaign meant that even in the heat of victory, the government decided not to award a campaign medal to that branch of the service. (To illustrate the power of different cultural contexts, I used to explain to students why the Baader Meinhoff terrorists, the Red Army Faction, chose those particular initials for their name. For civilians under bombardment in many German cities, the “Terrorflieger” crews of the RAF lacked the charm of dear old Biggles, the pilot hero of so many boys’ books by “Capt. W. E. Johns”.)

The tales we tell ourselves about ourselves are always revealing, whether it takes the form of war comics for boys or the popular entertainment of so many British television programmes based on the second war. Tales of plucky, embattled Brits facing comic or dangerous foreigners have been a popular weekly standby in British entertainment for many years. It would not be difficult to argue that such cultural expressions have played a part in the rise of English nationalism that characterised the Brexit vote of 2017, nor should we underestimate the near contemporary conjunction of the notable and widely celebrated anniversaries of Dunkirk (75 years, 2015), D-Day (70 years, 2014), and Churchill’s funeral (50 years, 2015).

I find myself deeply conflicted by the state-sponsored ceremonies by which the “national sacrifice” of the First World War is memorialized by the very governments that caused it. The road to conflict in the Second World War was less ambiguous, but no less disturbing in what amounts to the selective evasion of its true horrors by way of
ceremonial ritual. With such thoughts in mind, I have come to think more closely about the ways in which the terrible echoes of the second war have entered my own imaginative life.

26 In 2013 I was asked to edit an anthology of Scottish war verse for the Association for Scottish Literary Studies and joined forces with Dr David Goldie from the University of Strathclyde to produce our anthology From the Line: Scottish War Poetry 1914-1945. This was one of many projects in Britain that were timed to coincide with the centenary 1914-2014. But we wanted to think a little beyond that particular remit by recognizing the shifts in personal response that have been reflected in the poetry of two world wars, along with the even more striking changes in how these two global conflicts were perceived, carried out and represented.

27 In England in the late 1930s, for example, and especially in Scotland, there was very little appetite for another war. The experience of 1914-18 had been deeply disillusioning, and although the need to defeat Hitler was ultimately inescapable, many left-wing Scottish poets and thinkers resented having to enlist in what they saw as yet another struggle between rival imperialisms. Cecil Day Lewis’s poem “Where are the war poets?” spoke for many more in England when he regretted having to “defend the bad against the worst”.

28 In thinking of further differences between the two wars, it seems to me that 1939-1945 saw the final ghastly apotheosis of “total war”. Of course wars have always been bad news for civilian populations caught in the crossfire, but the increasing military importance of a nation’s home-based industrial output, and the growing capacity for aerial bombardment in the twentieth century, led to something quite new.

29 It is darkly ironic that in the 1920s one of the early theorists of strategic bombing, the Italian general Giulio Douhet, saw it as a guarantee that the years of slaughter in the trenches of the First World War would never, ever happen again. He thought that the prospect of immediate and total destruction from the skies would encourage peace, or at least settle conflicts swiftly and totally. He was terribly wrong. Nevertheless the ghastly policy of Mutually Assured atomic Destruction that so marked the Cold War in the years after 1945 may just, perhaps, have proved him right.

30 It seems extraordinary that, as a species, we became willing to exterminate, in one stroke, thousands and thousands of civilian men, women and children in the supposed “defence” of our own beliefs in freedom, justice and humanity. As a teenager I read John Hersey’s book on the survivors of Hiroshima and remember having recurrent dreams of nuclear extinction—that silent white flash. My copy was the Penguin Special paperback republished in 1958. I was young and passionate in my feelings about this, but I wasn’t wrong, and as first-year university students during the Cuban crisis in 1962, my generation was not alone in thinking that our time had come. After all, the principle of mass extermination had come of age (in every terrible sense) in the conflict of 1939-1945, and the shadow that haunted my generation was the suddenly shadowless fate of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

31 In fact the calculated fire-bombing of Tokyo, had already killed 100,000 people in a single night, which is more than were to perish under the atomic raids. Nevertheless the principle had been established and immediate immolation in the flash of a single device still retains a special horror. In 1965 a “Wednesday Play” for BBC TV was made by director Peter Watkins to show what would happen to Britain in the event of a nuclear attack. This mock documentary, The War Game, was so disturbing that the
government immediately banned it. Watkins’s film achieved a limited release in art cinemas, but was not to be publicly broadcast for another 20 years. I was equally haunted by the holocaust, by the photographic record, and surely the sheer impossibility of it—not the actual possibility of it. To confront the death camps was to encounter a terrible sense of shame, in the complicity of simply being human, of seeing what humans can do to each other. Such thoughts were part of our teenage years.

My own sense of the ambivalent and specially disturbing moral nature of the Second War (and the undeniable necessity of that war) came to crystallize around the aerial conflict, and especially the bombing campaign. I was struck by the extraordinary courage of the young aircrews, and their truly appalling losses; by the modernity and the technical glamour of the planes; by the inescapable ethical disgrace of area bombing. Randall Jarrell (who served in the US airforce) put it succinctly in a poem called “Losses”:

We read our mail and counted up our missions.
In bombers named for girls, we burned
the cities we had learned about in school

I became fascinated by the strangely mythic / mythmaking story of Major Claude Eatherly, the pilot of the weather plane that preceded both atomic bombings, who was supposed to have taken the collective responsibility for such an act onto his own shoulders, in a post-war life of self-harming and petty crime. English author John Wain wrote his sympathetic poem “A Song about Major Eatherly” in 1959, but William Bradford Huie’s 1964 book The Hiroshima Pilot, debunked Eatherly’s account as a self-serving fabrication.

The truth of this complex and muddled affair remains elusive. Nevertheless, the mythic resonance of the tale, and our desire to believe it, speaks of our need to seek poetic catharsis and to acknowledge some sort of moral accountability (even through the troubles of a single solitary, mendacious and disturbed man) at a time when everyone else seemed to be looking away. In a way much of what this essay has been exploring is a certain sense of belatedness that many of my generation may have experienced as we grew up in the years immediately after the global conflict of 1939-1945. This was the conflict, after all, that challenged understanding and expression alike, and led Theodor Adorno, to despair of poetry after Auschwitz.

It was in the process of thinking through what seemed to me to be the crucially and tragically distinctive nature of World War II, that I began to fully realize how some of the echoes and shadows from that conflict had come to the surface in my own creative writing.

True History on the Walls

My first large collection of poems was called True History on the Walls the second section of which was titled “to explain how it was” making specific reference to the conflict of 1939-45. The first poem of mine to be published in a poetry review (Akros I, 1) was inspired by the pomp and ceremony of the funeral of Winston Churchill on January 30th 1965. The event triggered a collectively sanitized, sentimentalized and triumphalist recollection of the war that made me uncomfortable at the time. (The part played by Churchill during the troubles in Ireland did not endear him to the Irish and their Scots
sympathisers.) I think some of that ambiguous discomfort is evident in the lines of “Poem with Black Border”.

POEM WITH BLACK BORDER
(W. S. Churchill d. 1965)
We were all there sand on the street
rattle of boots its the soldiers son
look its the soldiers here they come
why are their rifles upside down?
Heres the gun-carriage ah the gun-carriage
look at the chains and the soldiers son
I can see them now and remember it all.

Recollect Cigarette Cards
Some Air Raid Precautions
on the beaches quite a few
never so many in the blitz
see for miles by the fires
and hear Jerry coming over
RUM HUM RUM HUM

British Butterflies

Friends then everybody decent
help you out always cheery.
Remember the days and the nights
of our youth when we were alert
and Jerry coming over RUM HUM

Plane Spotter’s Guide
but Ethel and the Cartwrights went
RUM and the Browns HUM
and your Uncle Tom RUM HUM

Destroyers of the Fleet.
—saw curtains drawn in the afternoon
few coupons left in the book
evenings of radio and ruin
fire and water danced in the streets
holding hands and sirens on the rooftops
piped us underground Hush.
The taps froze that winter Hush.
I remember Margarine.

Sand for feet and soldiers with rifles
sailors in squares marching and horses
sabres and swords blanco and boots
bombers flying and guns being towed.
They’re turning I cant help it
they’re carrying I cant help it
I cant help it heres a tissue
its sad Ive got to cry heres a hanky.
Have my hanky Take my handkerchief.

Today Gathered together
Gathered together today
Gathered together today to mourn
(Sand on the street rattle of boots)
We were all there at the funeral
we all in
all in our finest
all in our finest hour.

(I remember Holding hands the Cigarette Cards)

37 In fact Churchill’s funeral was enacted once more on 30th January 2015. For this 50th anniversary the trip the coffin took down the Thames was recreated, producing, all over again exactly what had bothered me about the nationally self-regarding excess of the first occasion.

38 Here are extracts from David Cameron’s speech on the day:

“From the Battle of Omdurman to Britain’s acquisition of the H bomb there stretched nearly 60 years and throughout it all he was right at the heart of events. [. . ] But if there is one aspect of this man I admire more than any other—it is Churchill the patriot. He knew Britain was not just a place on the map but a force in the world, with a destiny to shape events and a duty to stand up for freedom.”

39 This may well be true. But the Battle of Omdurman and the invention of the H-bomb would not be my chosen examples of freedom and patriotism in action.

40 There are many poems of personal expression and reminiscence in True History on the Walls, but the controlling metaphor of the collection has to do with the past returning, when family history and history at large cannot be escaped or denied. It imagines memory as a kind of marking, like the marks left on surfaces by long use, by wear and tear, scratches, and the passing of time. The nature of graffiti is to signal that someone, now gone, was once there long enough to make a record, in a kind of intimate damage that is both creative and destructive. This was the theme of the long title poem, with its epigraph “You cannot get away from what has gone before” (p. 26), which mixed images of joy and pain in the past with family, personal and historical references, from Homer to the building of the (then) new Forth Road Bridge. Many of the other poems in the collection did something similar, invoking Charlie Parker and the invasion of Poland during a present-day walk round Edinburgh Castle. Similar images from the war have popped up in later work, such as the radio echoes of bomber pilots shouting to each other in combat during the American daylight raids that feature in the poem “Wavelengths” from Into the Blue Wavelengths, (pp. 65-7).

41 The poem “11 O’Clock High” references the roof of a room in the Eagle, a pub I used to visit in Cambridge, much frequented during the war by flying crew on leave from fighter and bomber stations all around Suffolk. These young men, with heavy odds against them, left their own silly and poignant memorials when they scrawled their names and messages on the walls and the roof, often burned on by cigarette lighters or candle flames.

11 O’CLOCK HIGH

—Propellers on the walls
and I can read the past
above the bar where they drank
and left their names scrawled
on the ceiling with candles and matches
stacking tables to reach the plaster,
and the names the squadrons were called.
Seniors of the public school
with concrete floors and narrow beds
dream of flying boots with knives concealed
and the innocent silk
map-of-Germany scarf.
Ordinary life was never so real
as vapour-trails chalked on the sky
exclusive true-blue cruel.)
More fragile than their planes in proof
untried and alive I drink bitter only
in the glare of the photographed dead.
They came from Oxford in their youth
certain of the truth
killed the Hun and won a place
at last for “Bonzo’s Pressure Boys”
loud and lost in their fur-lined gear
burned and burning on the roof.

(IS.)

42 In 1972 the Daily Express produced a sensational headline “Martin Bormann Discovered in South America” followed by a six-part series that included photographs of Bormann then and, reputedly, now. There had been much speculation over the years as to whether Hitler’s henchman had escaped from Europe to live as a businessman in Argentina, and here at last, apparently, were photographs to prove it.

43 Less convinced by this “likeness”, the affair led me to speculate on the difficulties of recognition and identity, compounded by questions of personal and collective responsibility, guilt, sacrifice and reparation. The comma inserted in the title of this poem changes the meaning of a direct question supposedly addressed to the reader, “Is this man Martin Bormann?”, into one addressed to Bormann himself—or the unfortunate person mistaken for him—as if they were being asked to explain, or indeed be answerable for, all the horrors that humankind is capable of: “Is this man, Martin Bormann?”

44 I didn’t know it at the time of writing, but after much fuss and excitement, “Martin Bormann” turned out to be an Argentinian school teacher, though I had cast him in an ambiguously humbler and more Christ-like role.

IS THIS MAN, MARTIN BORMANN?

In the country of Guatemala
they talked to me of genocide
I did not say much;
living the way I have
one becomes reserved,
and what could I have said?

I was always good with my hands
so I became a carpenter
and carried the boards myself
after the donkey died
of old age, or the beatings,
it hardly matters now.

“Why shouldn’t you
die for the Jews?"
I could not think of a suitable reply
and we are known by deeds
not talk, they say:
so they took my fingerprints away.

People argue in paper-shops
"The hair-line is somewhat similar
certainly he is older
and of course much thinner
but even changed in face and name
isn't he still the same?"

But one becomes reserved,
and soon it is too late
to explain how it was
for an odd job man
who did not always use
the very best materials.
(35.)

The poem “The Director of the Museum” references Professor Shogo Nagaoka, who survived the bombing of Hiroshima and later became the Director of the Peace Memorial Museum there. A geologist by profession, even in the immediate aftermath of the attack, he made a unique study of the effects of the blast, charting the desolation and the terrible metamorphosis of stone and flesh all around him. He is said to have observed that, in the long run, such scientific study was more important than individual survival. His work, *Hiroshima Under Atomic Bomb Attack*, was published five years later as a little booklet with photographs and plans in both Japanese and English. Simultaneously magnificent and terrible, his single-minded dedication gave me the poem.

THE DIRECTOR OF THE MUSEUM

I was on holiday in August
the University year was ended
but on that particular afternoon
when I walked into town
I saw that everything was changed
and it was time for me to find
(as so many had to do)
a technique for coming through.

So I numbered kerb-stones by the road
and placed them in linen bags
carefully labelled and stitched from flour sacks
for use when I was a student
of geology (it was years ago).
I hardly thought I would need them again,
Still I kept them and that is how
I started my collection.

It seems the fireball in the air
had spoiled the concrete slabs
used for the street and metre by metre
you can see its print on the face
of the pavement—fused cracked or merely
burned according to the distance from centre.
(I proved all this by later study
of my map and sample bags).

Curiosities came to light:
a mechanic’s spanner and hand
welded to the engine it was mending;
and you will all have heard
of the ball in the air that never came down
(I cut its shadow from a wall).
But the tea-cup that looks like a flower
has grown dull on my shelves

and I hardly know it any more
for the jewel among the ashes
found on those concentric shores
where I moved in a mineralogist’s dream;
until the time the cries died down
around me and dazed and awake I stood
in the suburbs and knew that I survived
(and the collection was complete).
(36-7.)

The poems “Black Forest” and “Welthistorische Perspektiven” referenced a dying soldier in Bavaria, and visions of Marlene Dietrich to generate a dream-like and dark beauty from creation, destruction and memory. These themes reappear strongly in the closing sequence “Fugue for Parker”, which mixes the creative breakthrough of jazz saxophonist Charlie Parker, and the beautiful complex music he created, with what was happening in Europe at the same time. Paul Klee’s painting “Death and Fire” was done in 1940, and the observation about pathos and distance comes from Antoine de St Exupéry who was a reconnaissance pilot in the French airforce during the battle for France in the same year —later recounted in his *Flight to Arras* (1942). The words of Parker himself are interwove in the text with phrases from Hans Frank, a senior Nazi proponent of the “final solution” who was tried at Nuremberg; the housecleaning of Poland is a phrase from Hitler himself, while the reference to a symphony recollects the Jewish musicians who were ordered to play for their captors in the camps. “Parker’s Mood” is a searing slow blues.

**FUGUE FOR PARKER**

“It was December 1939. Now, I’d been getting bored with the stereotyped changes that were being used all the time at that time, and I kept thinking there’s bound to be something else. I could hear it sometimes but I couldn’t play it.
Well, that night I was working over *Cherokee*, and, as I did, I found that by using the higher intervals of a chord as a melody line and backing them with appropriately related changes, I could play the thing I’d been hearing.
I came alive.”
—Charles Parker.
I
About the beautiful contrasts concerning
our walk to the Castle and the seasons of the wind
which ripple the stillness of puddles
and turn water round every cobble evenly
without exception. About the distances among us
—a continent between the turning of your head
and the movement of my hand in talk
of counterpoint—for a circus of reasons.

Yet few words for the real which is:
that will not stay to interpretation
but turns within us each alone
without exception unmarked by any historian
on the face of his event full maps.
And so few chronicles for Parker's inspiration
30 years ago with the foot of eagles
in Europe a chill day and winter coming—

II
December 1939 saw snow in the streets
and shoes thin Warsaw down and lines of men
at the railway pulled out in slow trains
—to the factories I kept thinking.
Between bands Parker made New York at last
in December 1939 he jammed at Clark Monroe's
the Upton House all night—a fast way blowing
from Kansas City (hammered it on the clarinet then).
Brown bundles of greasy flannel were piled in the van
—a clothes collection bound with string
and then the rich and secret colours spilled
at the housecleaning of Poland.

(“Gentlemen I must ask you to rid yourself
of all feeling of pity”). Bored
with the usual changes played in town
I kept thinking there's bound to be something else.

III
A painting of the period by Paul Klee
Death and Fire shows a child's effort at a skull
and a stick figure striding as drawn on a wall
with charcoal or chalk and not unfriendly looking.

"Pathos is the sense of distance" said the flyer
at 30,000 feet who saw compassion red
in hospital and nobility by the graves below
—“Death and fire inspire the best” he said.

And Parker took the habit again afraid of life
without its rest (heroin white compassion)
and although it was not given freely.
I could hear it sometimes but I couldn't play it.

IV
The cost: smoke is pillared above
the potato fields (frost bound and iron hard)
the fruits are black and shrunken uncollected
in the clay their rotting stems lie out of season

—and in the evening a symphony was performed
by the whole orchestra a first movement
of World History the inexorable purity of human values
towards a State in the likeness of the Lord.

He could hear it sometimes —a ghost alone
in the head the intricate structure of fugue
cut back to screaming pitch meaning without content

V
And came together in December 1939 saying—
i was working over “Cherokee” the housecleaning of Poland
and found that by using the higher intervals of a chord
the sense of distance as a melody line

and backing them the whole orchestra burned
with appropriately related changes a symphony
white heroin at screaming pitch greasy smoke
drawn on a wall I could play
the thing I’d been hearing rich and secret colours
alone without content
being he and intricate
I came alive.

We sheltered beside the antique cannon
with your hair around us like a flag
watched the litter fly like birds opened our mouths
and heard our heads roar in the passing air.
“... but all that is over” you said.
(42-4.)

This poem closed the section on “to explain how it was” and summarises much of what I have been exploring in this essay, with the horror and the fascination of these old echoes coming through to a later and younger generation, like some fading radio transmission from a past that thrills, horrifies and fascinates, and will not go away.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


NOTES

1. Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser seized control of the Suez Canal in 1956 and nationalised it, precipitating an invasion by Israeli, French and British forces that caused international condemnation and, without American support, a serious loss of face for Britain.

2. “The Wooden Horse, Angels One Five, The Cruel Sea, The Colditz Story, Above Us the Waves, The Dam Busters, The Battle of the River Plate, Reach for the Sky, Ill Met By Moonlight, Carve Her Name With Pride, Dunkirk and Sink the Bismark! were among the leading films at the British box office between 1950 and 1960.” (Chapman, 97.)


4. The same premise was particularly influential in later Hollywood films such as *The Dirty Dozen; The Great Escape; Kelly's Heroes; Inglorious Basterds.*

5. Flodden was the site of a catastrophic Scottish defeat in fighting the English on behalf of France and “the Auld Alliance” in 1513.

6. In comedy: “Dad’s Army” (9 years and endless repeats), “It Ain’t Half Hot Mum” (7 years), and “‘Allo ’Allo!” (10 years), in drama: “Colditz” (2 years), “Tenko” (3 years), “Home Fires” (2 years) and “Foyle’s War” (13 years).


8. First published in an entire issue of the *New Yorker* in 1946.


12. Omdurman saw Kitchener defeat the forces of the Mahdi in the Sudan, by killing 10,000 men with water-cooled Maxim machine guns. British casualties were 47 dead. Winston Churchill, said the Mahdi’s forces looked like a “twelfth-century Crusader army” equipped with spears, swords, and banners embroidered with Koranic texts.

14. “World-historical Perspectives” is the title of the second volume of Oswald Spengler’s *Decline of the West* (1923).

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**ABSTRACTS**

Academic and poet Roderick Watson reflects on memories of war and the popular culture of war that influenced his younger years only to reappear in the imagery of his later creative work. A critical reflection is offered on popular representations of the Second World War, and how these have become a foundational myth of modern British identity. Attention is paid to his first major collection *True History on the Walls* (1976) and the poems that make explicit reference to the conflict of 1939-45.

**INDEX**

*Keywords*: memory heritage and childhood, British war comics, popular sentiment in representations of Dunkirk and the Battle of Britain, the funeral of Winston Churchill, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, mythology of Claude Eatherly, Cuban crisis and atomic terror, Peter Watkins and *The War Game*, the holocaust, the Allied bombing campaign and area bombing, Roderick Watson *True History on the Walls*

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The War Cemetery and the City Park – “Saturated Landscapes” in Fanny Howe’s *The Lives of A Spirit*

Bénédicte Chorier-Fryd

1 *The Lives of a Spirit*, a long prose poem by Fanny Howe published in 1987—at a time when this American poet was still writing prose narratives and poetry as well as essays—is no wartime narrative poem, nor a lyrical exploration of the traumatic memories left by war in those who lived through it. Though it does not directly address war or its aftermath, it is discreetly haunted by the ghastly memories of World War II. Instead of lending themselves to a full-fledged narrative re-composition, these memories infiltrate the prose poem with the fleeting presence of wartime, or they surge up in mundane places—in particular the ordinary city park. In an unspecified urban American environment, the daily routine of an unnamed ageing female subject—the “spirit” in the title—takes her from her now empty home to a familiar park, while memories of her early years spent in wartime are interwoven with those of her more recent past. The dead are more actual to her than the living—her own dead, mother and father, as well as the anonymous residents of war graves. Far from being intrusive, the lingering presence of war is an essential part of the experience of the living spirit. This paper will first define the nature of the spirit and its relationship to her own history and story. It will then examine how wartime phantoms come to haunt what may be called the non-space of the city park she likes to escape to, saturating them with the co-presence of past and present.

A living spirit

2 *The Lives of a Spirit* offers a meditation on a female subject’s life, conducted from the dual point of view of a first person and an unidentified third-person narrator. It is divided into nine four- to ten-page long sections composed of brief, non-sequential paragraphs. It evokes moments and places in the life of this ‘spirit’ with total disregard for logical connections yet following an over-arching timeline. The “spirit” is followed
from her birth, or first incarnation as a baby girl, through her leaps in and out of various anonymous female bodies, to a final hovering between here and there, one body and another—or the same, enclosed within the walls of her “little cell” and sitting out on her “bench” in a park (LoS, 74).

What is most characteristic of this poem is its voice, lyrical and narrative at once, hovering between first and third person. This uncomfortable—at times disturbing—discursive stance is related to a theological position: Fanny Howe’s personal path took her from an initial militant form of atheism (as an activist in the Civil Rights movement) through conversion, to an unorthodox and possibly heretical form of Catholicism. In calling herself an “atheist Catholic” she foregrounds the human side of religious experience together with its inherent contradictions. In a talk with poet Leonard Schwartz she says:

In the end I depend on the relationship with another person who is wise and kind to come to an understanding of the emptiness in which we live. The other voice coming out of the other person and being heard by oneself — well, it’s shocking in many ways that we take it for granted. What is created in relationship with another person finally is a third presence. In Catholicism that would be the Holy Spirit rather than, you know, the father and the son. But it is a third presence that’s created out of this relationship between two. It can of course be hellish too.

This “third presence” is neither “I” nor “you” and it is spiritual. It arises from the relationship with the other and binds one to this other (“I depend on the relationship”), in keeping with the Augustinian definition of the religious as “that which binds” (from reliqare, ‘to bind up, bind together’”). This spirit takes shape in the first pages of The Lives of A Spirit, first manifesting herself in the third person as an unnamed female subject “racing aimlessly” (LoS, 9) on a wind-swept beach. In the next two paragraphs the same subject is given a voice (though no typographic markers signal the shift from third to first person), which falls silent again as the following paragraphs narrate the sudden arrival on the beach of a baby—the female form, the female voice, and the baby being three avatars of the “spirit” whose “lives” are to be recounted here.

In the initial moment of her incarnation, she shows up out of the blue (literally: “They surmised that she had floated from the stars in the navy blue sky”) on a wind-swept beach:

The baby might have been the least worthy of earth’s materials, lacking hardness as she did. It lay with its ankles crossed and its arms spread wide, like one who lives by her feelings. Nostrils are always placed in front of the mouth, but this baby’s lips, at the service of gum, tooth, and voice, protruded pink and soft. The application of her small fist to her lips made her, in all cases, the object of maternal desire. (LoS, 9-10)

The baby’s position mirrors that of Christ on the cross; birth and death are confused, which was heralded two paragraphs above by the evocation of a “funeral wreath” with “yellows and pinks, birthday colors” (LoS, 9). She is all mouth, “pink and soft” (LoS, 10); her gesture of yearning for the mother’s breast meets maternal desire: relationship is primeval.

This physical evocation is followed with a meditation on the effects of this baby’s presence among the living:

No one could doubt that this was a model something. Every part of her seemed extra, more than intention could handle, and raised the question: Is the body made to fit the needs of the soul, or vice-versa? Since her heart was a seething fountain of
blood, people longed to lean their ears to her chest to hear those sinews at work. Her damp skin, soft as a rose petal, was sweet to the cheek. And when she smiled, the world was all confection and air. (LoS, 10)

This is the beginning of a metaphysical inquiry into the issues of dualism. The baby seems the perfect embodiment of the Thomist model: a spirit indivisible from the flesh. She is a Christ-like figure, her heart both emblematic and vital with its “seething fountain of blood” and perceptible “sinews at work.” The imagery is sensual: “Her damp skin, soft as a rose petal, was sweet to the cheek”—an evocation reminiscent of the Song of Solomon; “confection” suggests both sweetness and creation while “air” is the breath of the spirit, its literal anima.

Soon the other third person in this opening, the female figure that had appeared “racing aimlessly now, purposefully then” on the same rocky shore, is no longer distinct from this baby who by the next section has grown into a girl and even, on the same page, a mother whose “children have all grown up” (LoS, 14). Her ages will henceforth continue to vary from one paragraph to the next. Point of view constantly oscillates between the first and third person, bringing about syntactic and temporal confusion, as in this passage from section 2:

Once, close on the earth, she lay down, making wings with her arms moving up and down. She scattered her books, bag and strap on the pavement, while I wondered: Why does she love where she was, but didn’t? And why am I where I am today? On my stroll around the park’s pond, I asked questions like that. Confusing it was—the way the world ran back from every step I took. [...] The dog barked ahead of her. There were sled tracks, next to the orderly print of birdclaws, dog-paws and garbage lids. (LoS, 14)

The girl laying down and moving her arms like a bird or an angel replicates the baby’s initial position on the beach, and the wondering subject’s questions emphasize her confusion, not just as to the “why” of her past and present, but also as to the where.

The park or the cemetery: a “non-space”

After the initial scene, when the spirit runs by a military graveyard on an “icy shore,” passing “rusty war crosses [that] tipped northeast” on “the top of a gnawed cliff,” the setting turns predominantly urban. She moves between indoor spaces (be they a boarding-school, a prison, a workplace or a home) and the outdoors, a vague urban space with streets and seldom-mentioned buildings. Her constant impulse, at all stages in her life, is to get out and run the streets to eventually reach a park—not any specific park, but a generic one, complete with lawns, trees, paths and benches. She is seldom at rest, yet neither is she driven by any purpose nor aiming at any specific resting spot. She “stroll[s] around the park’s pond” in a state of confusion as the “world [runs] back from every step [she takes].”

It is a shifting, unstable space she roams, a space of unstable definition where past and present constantly collide. It has been so from the beginning—of her life and of the text. The second section introduces the motif of the park while echoing that of the war cemetery, linking the two to the figure of the father:

Your father’s gone down from the park and into the forest. No smoking, now, where he’s at, and no dogs too. Papa wanted you always to be in training for that longest of sleeps. For him that training was the purpose of this life. (LoS, 15)
The death of the father is a departure into the wilderness, and the park serves as a tamed version of the forest, life being a preparation for death. The following paragraph reintroduces the motif of the graveyard, repeating the image of the “tipped” war crosses in the opening scene and allowing a shift back to the initial setting while not excluding the reference to another, urban graveyard, that of her father and of “other fathers”:

The grave markers of other fathers, by the way, tipped and grayed like a mouthful of rotten teeth. If the snow was trying to clean them, it couldn’t. But gale winds, blown down from the Arctic Circle, moved the stuff around, so it shifted its skirts around like that many loaves of flour [...]. (LoS, 15-16)

The park and the cemetery become confused in numerous instances, as in this observation which discreetly echoes the former:

You don’t often, by the way, come upon a perfect park. Mine is in November, late afternoon, and the elms are like stones. (LoS, 68)

Here repetition is also variation: “by the way” can no longer be understood literally, while in the first instance it could either be discursive or mean “by the path.” The “perfect park” shows stone-like trees evoking headstones in a graveyard, an image found above in “that garden of stones” (LoS, 67). Elsewhere, “[c]rosses and branches [catch] the attention of her quick bleak eye” (LoS, 22).

The meditation on the “perfect park” leads to a description of another graveyard:

[...] there’s another park I love, and this one is a boneyard, for real, designed and settled in the 18th century. A very great effort has gone into making the area pacific. A mist like incense dreams the hillocks, hummocks, topes, and holes. Especially at daybreak, but also late at night, when you come to make out on the heaving grave beds. (LoS, 69)

Shapes lose their definition as their names rhythmically resonate in an alliterative foursome (“hillocks, hummocks, topes, and holes”), as “mist” spreads over them like “incense” and the churchyard feels like the inside of a church. This familiar “boneyard” is a place of peace (“pacific”) and aesthetic harmony (“designed and settled”); it harbors the most vital instincts: the snow is like “loaves of flour,” the grave is “the least domestic bed on earth” (LoS, 36) on which couples “come to make out.” The park and the graveyard together condense time—times in the life of the spirit, and the times of birth, love, and death—into one place. This is a constant in the poem, and in one of the descriptions of these landscapes, the mention of the “field and furrow” of the park (LoS, 64) calls forth these few lines from Longfellow’s 1842 poem “God’s Acre”:

Comfort to those, who in the grave have sown
The seed that they had garnered in their hearts,
Their bread of life, alas! no more their own.
Into its furrows shall we all be cast

Howe’s “loaves of flour” echo Longfellow’s “bread of life”, and the poem resonates through The Lives of a Spirit. 5

The war cemetery glimpsed in the initial scene expands into a leitmotiv and merges with other graveyards, themselves confused with city parks. The vision of war crosses does not give way to an evocation of those whose bodies rest in these graves by the ocean, and the soldiers become “other fathers” whose haunting presence is marked by the “rotten teeth” of a gaping, but silent mouth. The war is not given a narrative, and the cemetery is no memorial, but could be defined as a “non-topos”, a notion crafted by Michel de Certeau in his elaboration on Freud’s concept of the return of the repressed.
De Certeau’s *Heterologies* were translated into English at the time Fanny Howe was writing her *Lives of a Spirit*, and there are strong connections between her poetry and his theoretical and historical work, which Howe explicitly explores in her essays. De Certeau’s conception of the relationship between literature and history provides a framework for the present exploration of the presence of war memories in Fanny Howe’s poetic meditation:

“[…] literature is the theoretic discourse of the historical process. It creates the non-topos where the effective operations of a society attain a formalization. Far from envisioning literature as the expression of a referential, it would be necessary to recognize here the analogue of that which for a long time mathematics has been for the exact sciences: a ‘logical’ discourse of history, the ‘fiction’ which allows it to be thought.” (*Heterologies*, 18)

Fanny Howe’s poetic treatment of the permanence of traumatic war memories manifests the return of the repressed in post-war collective or individual psyches. It is a kind of permanence that can only be manifested obliquely, which is figured in the second paragraph of the first section, immediately following the initial mention of the “rusty war crosses”: “A forgotten name moves in such fitful waves, engineered like tumbleweed across the mental floor.” (*LoS*, 9).

The “tumbleweed” is a vegetal ghost: as a diaspora it is both dead and alive, since its dead structure carries its seeds. In this long poem, a number of “forgotten name[s]” show up haphazardly—the tumbleweed is the ghost of all the nameless soldiers in the war cemetery, and it also manifests the absence of any name for this “spirit,” who remains “she” or “I” throughout. The “forgotten name” is also that of God, and this bears specific implications in Fanny Howe’s theology, poised in-between belief and doubt. The divine can only manifest itself negatively as a gap in the Father’s name, which is consistently written here in ancient scriptural fashion, with consonants only: “G-d.” Seeking the divine while knowing it is impossible to approach, defining it as what it is not—an apophatic theology⁷ that finds forceful expressions in Fanny Howe’s work, as in her 2000 novel *Indivisible*: “God’s inexistence is so deep, black and big, there is no way to see or name it. God is inert. Why bother with it then.” (*Radical Love*, 609).

God’s “forgotten name” haunts the spirit who instead of “bother[ing] with it” explores other gaps, lets other escaped names pull her into the depths of her memories. She roams in a non-space—the space of her visions she turns into language in this rambling account⁴. The presence-absence of the dead in a non-space opens up an initial gap that attracts the spirit in all her subsequent explorations.

### The phantoms of the past

Fanny Howe’s texts are scrupulous explorations of spiritual issues, yet she is uncomfortable with the transcendental, and the Logos may not be what she is searching for. At the end of the first section, the spirit asks: “Little word, who said me?” (*LoS*, 10). Is “little word” a pet-name for the Logos, is it gently debunking? What about the weakly performative “said” in place of a biblical “spake?” What she seeks to understand may be what Fanny Howe refers to in an essay on Beckett as “the contemporary logos,” no longer the absolute, distant, alien, indifferent God of the ancient Gnostic⁹ but the word incarnated in language, in a human mouth. “We may not know if there is a God, but we do know that there is a word.” (*The Wedding Dress*, “The
Contemporary Logos,” 75). This logos is manifested through the rambling words of the “spirit”, this ghostly third presence born of a relationship.

24 What the spirit in Lives… does know is that the “female body […] is a carrier of past and future” (LoS, 16) and that as such, she is the vehicle of memories that make the bulk of her meditations. Like the narrator in Indivisible, she has witnessed much:

I have seen terrible things that a living and powerful God, who was like a parent, would simply not allow to happen. I hate it when they give God attributes. God is not love or memory. / God is as plain as its meaningless name” (Radical Love, 606-607).

25 The “terrible things” that preclude the possibility of a “powerful God” never clearly surface in the spirit’s discourse, and the erratic path of the tumbleweed lays a pattern for the way the narrative progresses through space and time—here and there, back and forth, unpredictably. Yet the names one has forgotten, the scenes one has had to repress, the memory of the “terrible things” that should not have been allowed to happen—all will return “across the mental floor” like the ghost the tumbleweed is. In The Lives of A Spirit, the memories of traumatic experiences, including those of the war, are blown more or less violently across the disjointed pavement of the narrative (its disconnected paragraphs), colliding or merging with the sweeter memories of carefree youth or friendly encounters.

26 The female spirit’s repeated excursions out of her home, her school, her workplace, and her endless return to her favorite haunts—the city park and the cemetery—are constantly associated with her attempted liberation from the shackles of her life (“If I weren’t a slave walking in shackles…” 70), which come in various forms, notably as recurrent figures of male authority: the father, the forefathers, and the husband. Ironically, these escapes are also returns to an ever-present past; as she contemplates the park she loves to take refuge in, she muses:

[...] Each path was designed as if the next, at last, would represent progress; and each step was, paradoxically, drenched in the tangle and nostalgia of the old days. [...] the pleasure of reliving old flaws may be irresistible. (LoS, 64)

Seven o’clock in the morning and it’s just impossible just now to understand the presence of the sky, of trees. It’s like discovering that the void will not come in search of me one night; but more things of the past. (LoS, 67)

27 In her random exploration of her personal history as a baby, a child, a teenager, a young woman, a mother—approaching the present with death looming—disconnected fragments point to the central traumatic moment of World War II. Only three passages specifically evoke the war, and there is one allusion to operations in the Pacific towards the end (“a submarine foundered in a Pacific storm” 72). The first explicit reference emphasizes the sounds of war, or rather the way its aftermaths still resonate in the early days of peace, with “a shot split[ting] the air” and the voices of soldiers turning into “whispers”:

One night near the apartment a shot split the air and signals boomed from north to south. The hunched figure of a shabby private stood by the table sipping a cordial. It was the purple zone, time for evening prayers where those who say them say them, the war was ended and the witty sally between the men quickly turned into whispers. (LoS, 48)

28 In the second, the actual sounds of war are heard, and the violence of bombs is likened to that of the peremptory potentialities of conceptual language:
The horizon lifted a skydrop: buildings out of dimension, cornered lights and the sound of bombs like “isms” and “ologies.” (LoS, 57)

29 In the third explicit reference to the spirit’s experience of wartime, she takes refuge into blissful sleep/oblivion, again surrounded by the sound of explosions:

During naps, even as bombs are falling on the city limits, I often drop into G-d’s arms, because I am fatigued. (LoS, 73)

30 The lingering memory of the war also surfaces unexpectedly in domestic scenes, disconnected from wartime since they belong in the spirit’s adult life:

[...] one of her interiors had a cheerful fire burning in a woodstove with an iron door and flying sparks. [...]. Lightbulbs flickered at her footfall here, as if the sky were raining bombs. (LoS, 54)

31 This is followed with another simile, one that challenges the Heraclitean principle of mutability as expressed in the notion that “you could not step twice into the same river”:

Beside us, the water was soundless and still, as if it were a river that you could step in twice. [...] The body is to its shadow what a war is to storms. All technology. That’s the comfort of it. (54)

32 The river stops flowing—time stops and the flowing water turns into the still pond in the middle of the park/cemetery; this water can be stepped into twice or more, as “more things of the past” keep surfacing. The weather metaphor of the sky “raining bombs” has a counterpart in the logical proposition positing that “a war is to storms” what “the body is to its shadow.” A comforting continuum? Comfort in the “technology” of the body and of war? This logical continuum is allowed by the absence of a hiatus between past and present, war and peace, the dead and the living. The parks or graveyards that so attract the spirit are the stage where these opposites meet and merge. She pays close attention to their design and the landscapes they offer to her wandering eye. There is always a path, a pond, and a bridge; this generic landscape appears at the onset of the poem in the title to the first section: “white plate painted with more white”. This title is proleptic of a fragment from section two in which a complete landscape is delineated:

She munched the bread and envisioned a plate from her mother’s house: Imperial Ming, this white plate was painted with more white, snow, and cherry-red, hair-like branches. There was a bridge from blank to blank, floating.” (LoS, 13)

33 The white paint upon the white porcelain both obliterates and carries the memory of a landscape, the spectral presence of a floating bridge—a vision neatly contained in the metrical perfection of the final sentence in the paragraph. This vision provides a template for the subsequent evocations of the park or cemetery, a non-space saturated by the presence-absence of the dead.

34 In her essay on Thomas Hardy entitled “Incubus of the Forlorn”, Fanny Howe praises the novelist’s attention to landscapes and his descriptive capabilities. She writes: “A saturated landscape contains figures like phantoms made of paint that trail across canvasses” (WD, 97). Her parks and cemeteries offer such “saturated landscapes” to her “spirit”, who is both haunted by the memories of a ghastly past and alive with wonder at the natural world; in her in-between states the spirit experiences and manifests the contradictions of life, the ineffable experience of what Fanny Howe calls “wonder-horror” and reads in Beckett, another major figure in her intellectual pantheon:
I think of Beckett as not being religious in the usual sense but at least being alive, being truly alive, and horror-struck by it. Out of that threshold, the threshold of both horror and wonder, there is life, and life is everything.\textsuperscript{32}
Into its furrows shall we all be cast,
In the sure faith, that we shall rise again
At the great harvest, when the archangel’s blast
Shall winnow, like a fan, the chaff and grain.
Then shall the good stand in immortal bloom,
In the fair gardens of that second birth;
And each bright blossom mingle its perfume
With that of flowers, which never bloomed on earth.
With thy rude ploughshare, Death, turn up the sod,
And spread the furrow for the seed we sow;
This is the field and Acre of our God,
This is the place where human harvests grow!

NOTES

1. This paper draws partly from another paper, presented at the 2013 AFEA (French American Studies Association) conference in Angers. I am indebted to Richard Anker for his comments and suggestions.
2. Fanny Howe has since focused on poetry, essay writing and video, to the exclusion of narrative fiction.
5. See the whole poem annexed below.
6. De Certeau’s work on the case of collective possession at Loudun had a profound influence on Fanny Howe, which she evokes in her essay “Wonder-Horror”. She makes specific reference to de Certeau’s study of “Surin’s Melancholy” in *Heterologies* (101-115).
7. “[Ockham’s] central formulation, the *potentia absoluta*, combines two propositions that are in themselves incompatible: 1) meaning exists; 2) it is unthinkable. [...] God has ceased to be a signified, becoming purely a signifier, the mark of a truth henceforth absent from discourse [...].” (M. de Certeau, *Heterologies*, 108)
    “The unnameable origin does in fact make its appearance as a perpetual slippage of words toward that which deprives them of a stable meaning and frame of reference. But it does not give rise to a true designation. The words never finish leaving, [...] An operation is substituted for the Name.” (M. de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, 150)
8. This “non-space” may be read in light of Antoine Cazé’s work on poetry as a “non-space” for language. See CAZÉ, Antoine. « Vers une archéologie du collage : The Tablets d’Armand Schwerner », *Revue française d’études américaines* [special issue : *Poètes américains : architectes du langage*], vol. n° 103, no. 1, 2005, pp. 50-63).
9. Marcion
12. Interview with Leonard Schwartz.
ABSTRACTS

Fanny Howe’s 1987 long prose poem offers a meditation on a female subject’s life, conducted from the dual point of view of a first person – the ‘spirit’ in the title – and an unidentified third-person narrator. It is composed of brief, non-sequential paragraphs evoking moments and places in the life of the ‘spirit’ with total disregard for chronology or logical connections, yet overall following an over-arching timeline from her birth by the sea to the close of her life in some unnamed city park. As she muses over her various situations, confusion reigns regarding both time and space, which are not given as stable references but instead function as leitmotivs in a time that is neither then nor now, and a space that is neither here nor there – or both. The two places that provide landmarks in the urban landscape she roams – the cemetery and the city park – are non-spaces haunted by the phantoms of her wartime youth.

Le long poème en prose publié par Fanny Howe en 1987 offre une méditation sur la vie d’un sujet féminin, du double point de vue d’une première personne (l’« esprit » du titre) et d’une narratrice non identifiée qui s’exprime à la troisième personne. Le poème, un récit non-séquentiel, est composé de brefs paragraphes et fait fi de toute linéarité chronologique ou logique, tout en s’inscrivant largement dans un mouvement qui suit la vie de ce sujet depuis sa naissance au bord de la mer jusqu’à ses derniers jours quelque part dans une grande ville, dans un parc. Dans les évocations de divers moments de sa vie, temps et espace sont extrêmement confus et ne fournissent pas de repères stables mais fonctionnent comme leitmotivs dans un temps qui n’est ni présent, ni passé, et un espace qui n’est ni ici, ni ailleurs… mais tout à la fois. Les deux lieux récurrents dans l’espace urbain qu’elle arpente : le cimetière et le parc ; deux non-lieux hantés par les fantômes de son enfance en temps de guerre.

INDEX

Keywords: prose poem, time, war memory, trauma, ghost, spirit, non-space
Mots-clés: poème en prose, temps, souvenir de guerre, trauma, fantôme, esprit, non-lieu

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War in the Garden: Reading and Translating James Fenton’s Poetry

Sara Greaves

1 I first came across James Fenton’s experimental Oxford poems, his “found” poems, 25 years ago, subsequently discovering a very varied body of work that is lyrical and political, seemingly simple while highly sophisticated, sometimes resorting to restraint and understatement, sometimes quirky, surrealistic, unbridled. But it was his powerful war poems, the creations of a would-be hedonistic traveller caught in a physical—and mental—trap in Southeast Asia in the early seventies, that moved me to study and translate his poetry and to publish Côté guerre côté jardin: excursions dans la poésie de James Fenton (Greaves 2016). My aim here is to present briefly some of the salient points of discussion in that book, in particular Fenton’s poetry of witness, the notion of the “skin-voice”, derived from psychiatrist Didier Anzieu’s “skin-ego” (moi-peau), and its corollary, what I call “pellicular translation”.

2 Educated at a public school and at Oxford, where he met Christopher Hitchens and Martin Amis, among other well-known writers, and became an activist on the Trotskyist Left, Fenton has always balanced conflicting sides to his personality. An erudite, passionate critic of art, theatre and poetry, a writer of opera librettos and a book on gardening, he is also a man of action. A freelance journalist then foreign correspondent for the Guardian and the New Statesman in, especially, Southeast Asia, Fenton earned himself the title of “writer as lunatic”, adept at finding himself in All the Wrong Places, to quote part of the title of his 1993 collection of travel essays. Part humanist, part hedonist, drawing on a variety of styles and genres ranging from modernist collage to love lyrics to light verse to socio-political ballad narratives, featuring among others a teenage Khmer Rouge soldier or a Manila gangster, Fenton writes a poetry of witness. Although not included in Forché and Wu’s 2014 anthology, Poetry of Witness: The Tradition in English 1500-2001, his poetry constitutes, to quote the authors’ definition of poetry of witness, a “living archive” (Forché & Wu 26) that testifies to an experience of the extreme which, I contend, is not limited to the war poems but is felt throughout his œuvre. His poetry confronts the horrors of the 20th century, such as Nazism in “A German Requiem” (1983) and the Khmer Rouge genocide.
in the Cambodia poems, and visits various places of extreme tension or political violence such as Iran, Jerusalem or Tiananmen Square. In the case of the Cambodia poems, poetry was the form he ultimately turned to when the travel narrative he had planned proved too painful to write. The handful of poems he wrote instead are marked with the seal of experience, yet discreet and self-effacing, very different from the confessional strain that had entered British poetry via American poets in the sixties, epitomized perhaps by Sylvia Plath’s posthumous collection *Ariel* (1965). Fenton’s poetry is concerned with the suffering of others, framing his own disillusionment not merely as a personal defeat but, in the aftermath of the war in Vietnam, as a generational traumatism.

**Out of Danger**

3 The opposition between war and safety, and the presence of two poles in Fenton’s work, is suggested by the titles of his two principle collections of poetry, *Memory of War and Children in Exile: Poems 1968-1983* (1983) and *Out of Danger* (1994). These titles partly reflect the poet-journalist’s decision to stop covering war zones and move back to Britain, out of fear of a kind of war-zone addiction, as Fenton declared in a radio interview. Although a number of the poems in *Out of Danger* are set in places of high tension, he had returned to Britain and would succeed Seamus Heaney as Oxford Professor of Poetry from 1994 to 1999. However, the phrase “out of danger” is polysemic, meaning both away from danger, in safety, and constructed out of danger, where danger becomes a raw material like wood or stone. It can also mean “from” or “because of” as in “out of spite” or “out of anger”. This is highly suggestive of the reciprocal influence of the “war” and the “garden”, where the garden is a metaphor for the aesthetic or aestheticist strain in Fenton’s poetry, and “war” is the voice of witness, residual in times of peace.

4 The Cambodian and Vietnamese war poems display an “English” restraint and approach the horrors of war through euphemistic strategies such as an English nursery rhyme in “Cambodia” (1983), or the use of part-traditional part-experimental techniques in “Lines for Translation into Any Language” (1983) and “In a Notebook” (1983). Such methods contribute to a euphemising effect as discussed in relation to the Shoah by philosopher Giorgio Agamben, according to whom resorting to *euphemein*, while a necessary strategy for the avoidance of pain and horror, can also—in the case of the words “holocaust”, “incomprehensible” or “unutterable”, for instance—amount to shying away from precise naming and an eye-level confrontation with the facts (Agamben 76). In the case of Fenton’s poetry, euphemistic techniques, often linked to childhood, act as a filter and are enabling in the sense that they enhance the reader’s readiness to approach the recalcitrant matter of contemporary history. Moreover, the reader is, as it were, not left alone to digest the facts but accompanied as it were to the edge of the precipice... and back again, out of danger, like Dante the pilgrim with his guide Virgil, by an articulate humanism. In each of the following examples, taken from “Lines for Translation into Any Language”, “Cambodia” and “Dead Soldiers”, the poem is brought to a close under the aegis of a human presence responding with contained emotion to the tragic events that the poem steps back from:

11) When the victorious army arrived, they were welcomed by the fire brigade.
12) This was the only spontaneous demonstration in their favour.
13) Other spontaneous demonstrations in their favour were organised by the
victors.
(“Lines for Translation into Any Language”, 1983)

5 Set during the fall of Saigon, the poem ends on the repetition of “spontaneous demonstrations in their favour”, with the second occurrence contradicting the first (“the only…”, “other…”), thereby ratcheting up the bitter irony. Concise reporting is combined with a stance, a restrained yet appropriate expression of sickening disgust and sadness. The following blunt statements are again structured around repetitions, this time parallelisms and chiasmus, formulating a contained outrage:

One man to five. A million men to one.
And still they die. And still the war goes on.

(“Cambodia”, 1983)

6 And here the poet-journalist takes his leave of an impenetrable Cambodian reality with what can perhaps be remembered, rationalised, reported or drily surmised:

For the prince was fighting Sihanouk, his nephew,
And the Jockey Cap was ranged against his brother
Of whom I remember nothing more
Than an obscure reputation for virtue.
I have been told that the prince is still fighting
Somewhere in the Cardamoms or the Elephant Mountains.
But I doubt that the Jockey Cap would have survived his good connections.
I think the lunches would have done for him—
Either the lunches or the dead soldiers.

(“Dead Soldiers”, 1983)

7 The “dead soldiers” are both the war casualties and empty bottles of French brandy, redolent of the French colonial heritage in Indochina, the title phrase thus returning with a muted boomerang effect and dry humour to condemn imperialism.

Cross-pollination

8 Fenton’s poems—those dealing with socio-political themes but also certain of the love lyrics and short self-analytical fables—are haunted, through a process of cross-pollination, by the experience of war, in particular by the sense of guilt for involvement in a (collective) misreading\(^1\). Fenton had gone to Southeast Asia in the hope of witnessing a communist victory; he witnessed two within the same month of April 1975, one in Phnom Penh and one in Saigon, and was deeply affected by the ensuing catastrophe in Cambodia, a country he had come to love:

The villages are burnt, the cities void;
The morning light has left the river view;
The distant followers have been dismayed;
And I’m afraid, reading this passage now,
That everything I knew has been destroyed
By those whom I admired but never knew;
The laughing soldiers fought to their defeat
And I’m afraid most of my friends are dead\(^2\).

(“In a Notebook”, 1983)

9 The repeated phrase “I’m afraid” is noteworthy; it is a polite, euphemistic formula inadequate to the scale of horror depicted, thus throwing that horror into relief, while at the same time enacting the encounter between the Cambodian catastrophe and the idealistic, well-heeled young Englishman. The chiasmus “knew…destroyed / admired…
“knew”, in which the accentuated open vowels of the middle terms foreground the outrage, moral and intellectual, encapsulates with classical symmetry the collapse of knowledge and self-knowledge brought about by the misjudgement concerning the Khmer Rouge. Meanwhile the word “dismayed”, similarly euphemistic in its modern acceptation, echoes throughout the stanza in “void”, “afraid”, “destroyed”, “admired”, “afraid”. The lexeme also occurs in the later poetry and comes to seem emblematic of an experience both personal and generational.

In the much-admired “A German Requiem”, set in post-war Berlin, the poem stages a twisted mourning process. While the living construct a new life in denial of the past, seemingly only half alive as they collude in a deadly institutional amnesia ironically commemorated by special rites, the dead seem poignantly alive, their makeshift graves marked by the plaques on the doors of their former homes:

But when so many had died, so many and at such speed,
There were no cities waiting for the victims.
They unscrewed the name-plates from the shattered doorways
And carried them away with the coffins.
So the squares and parks were filled with the eloquence of young cemeteries:
The smell of fresh earth, the improvised crosses
And all the impossible directions in brass and enamel.

‘Doctor Gliedschirm, skin specialist, surgeries 14-16 hours or by appointment.’
Professor Sargnagel was buried with four degrees, two associate memberships
And instructions to tradesmen to use the back entrance.
Your uncle’s grave informed you that he lived on the third floor, left.
You were asked please to ring, and he would come down in the lift
To which one needed a key...

The seductiveness of the poem’s form is such that the reader is brought to collude in the characters’ neurosis and invited to share in an experience of the kind of denial of truth that collective memory draws on, in its transmission of history. Transmission and memory are also brought into focus in “A Staffordshire Murderer” (1983). Set in Lichfield in the Midlands, surrealistic imagery redolent of Monty Python and Beatrix Potter is used to explore the ways in which society embellishes its own perverse foundations, finding a teleology for crime in institutional violence, political, military or religious: “Surely these preachers are poisoners, these martyrs murderers?”

These poems can be contrasted with the long poem (196 lines) “Children in Exile” (1983), in which a genuine healing process unfolds involving a group of deeply traumatised Vietnamese and Cambodian refugee children. The speaker predicts that, unlike the inhabitants of Berlin or Lichfield, these children—who are exiles, separated from the social structures they were born into—will not be able to forget. Yet, he notes, they are growing up with a positive image of America. Fenton doesn’t leave the reader to ponder this paradox (“From five years of punishment for an offence / It took America five years to commit / These victim-children have been released on parole. / They will remember all of it.”), but articulates it with reference to W.H. Auden and counsels empathy:

Pretending to work, I retire to the study
And find a copy of The Dyer’s hand
Where I read: ‘An immigrant never knows what he wants,
Only what he does not want.’ I understand

What it is I have seen, how simple and how powerful
This flight, this negative ambition is
And how a girl in exile can gaze down into an olive grove
And wonder: ‘Is America like this?’

For it is we, not they, who cannot forgive America,
And it is we who travel, they who flee,
We who may choose exile, they who are forced out,
Take to the hot roads, take to the sea

Although not all of Fenton’s poems enact a lengthy healing process as this one does, the children’s recovery mirroring and motivating the speaker’s evolution, most nevertheless include what could be called a healing function. This can be understood as a process of intersubjective mediation and seen in relation to psychiatrist Didier Anzieu’s concept of the “skin-ego” (moi-peau).

**Skin-voice**

Didier Anzieu introduced the notion of a psychic envelope into French psychiatric circles in the seventies, and a translation of his book as *The Skin-Ego* was published in 1989 (Anzieu 1989). My study of James Fenton led me to develop this concept further and devise a similar notion, which I have called the “skin-voice” (voix-peau). This notion proves helpful to a reading of Fenton’s poetry as it casts the poetry’s musical effects of rhyme and rhythm as a sound envelope or sound bath (bain sonore), which engages the reader on a level beyond or below articulate language, that of prelinguistic babble or baby talk (into which the nonsense verse of one or two of Fenton’s poems, such as “Here Come the drum Majorettes!” almost flows over: “There’s a Gleb on a steppe in a dacha. / There’s a Glob on a dig on the slack side. / There’s a Glubb in the sand (he’s a pasha). / There’s a glib glammaglob in your backside”). Anzieu’s theory relies on a conception of the prelinguistic stage of a child’s development in which infant and mother mimic and interact with each other’s voice. It is this interactive “sound envelope”, constructed inter-subjectively through playful prelinguistic vocalisation, that provides the foundation for the “psychic envelope” of the future individual and which, according to Didier Anzieu, has many functions in common with skin. Thus, both skin and skin-ego contain the individual, provide protection from external aggression, are porous and allow for exchanges between inside and outside, and so on. The skin-voice of poetry such as Fenton’s appeals to the skin-ego by reactivating this period of pre-linguistic elaboration, re-positioning the reader both in and out of articulate language. In the case of Fenton’s poetry this re-positioning is not excessively destabilising and the reading experience as a whole can be said to reinforce the skin-ego, to “heal” it if you will, “containing” or “holding” the reader’s psyche reassuringly while enabling it to move beyond its protective “membrane”.

The psychiatrist’s notion of a “group envelope” is also highly relevant to this poetry which, through its use of light verse and classical forms as well as popular forms such as narrative ballads and rap, is for the most part an accessible poetry. Auden, Fenton’s mentor, considered light verse a more reliable indicator of the differences in sensibility of different eras than serious poetry, because of its reflection of the taste of the public rather than that of the poet (Carpenter 1981, 231). Fenton’s poetry, which draws on simple vocabulary and repetitions and, in some cases, comedy and humorous rhymes, achieves something of this generational appeal of light verse even though its themes
are serious. Although it experiments with varied techniques, the syntax is not fractured or disconnected, and rather than the extreme decentering techniques of postmodernism, or of French contemporary poetry writing in the wake of Romanian poet Paul Celan (who wrote in German), Fenton’s forms are not disconcerting and allow the reader to tread more familiar ground.

Indeed, the peculiar characteristics of the skin-voice lie in its capacity to resonate culturally and bodily while registering images of war, such as the fate of the refugee girls, the enumeration of the dead, the bombing of the cemetery. Fenton’s use of euphemism is a kind of negotiation with the reader, articulating the horror and the guilt of the young ideologue caught up with by history, and enabling the reader to receive this testimony of dismay. He thereby enriches collective memory in a lyrical-epic gesture that contributes to a fragmented historiography of the postcolonial aftermath and the Cold War.

In the 1994 collection, *Out of Danger*, the inflection taken after the dense war poems involves a release of tension: some of the love poems almost achieve light-heartedness, and some poems are bafflingly nonsensical. A hybridisation in terms of poetic techniques takes place and there is a move towards narrative ballads and the use of increasingly diverse registers. In “Cut-Throat Christ or the New Ballad of the Dosi Pares” (1994), for instance, the speaker inhabits the Manila underworld:

There’s a Christ for a whore and a Christ for a punk,
A Christ for a pickpocket and a drunk.
There’s a Christ for every sinner but one thing there aint—
There aint no Christ for any cut-price saint. […]

In “Here Come the Drum Majorettes!” (1994) the wordplay and nonsense confuse the satire:

There’s a girl with a fist full of fingers
There’s a man with a fist full of fivers.
There’s a thrill in a step as it lingers.
There’s a chance for a pair of salivas— […]

One short poem is entirely written in Tagalog. In spite of this diversity, after the experience of Cambodia, something of a change has occurred to the quality of language, similar perhaps to the words born of pain described by the writer-character in Aharon Appelfeld’s *L’amour soudain*:

“Words not linked to a source of suffering are not words but straw. All these years I have been moving towards places where I don’t belong, towards words that were not born within me.” She wanted to ask him what he meant by “words that were not born within me.” Ernest guessed her thoughts and said: “Words that were not born of my own pain” (Appelfeld 2004, 103).

Whether it be his own pain or that of other people, Fenton’s words thus come to cohere through their music as a sort of “group envelope” or collective skin-voice. If they are to be translated into another language, what is required will be a “pellicular translation” (*traduction pellissienne*), a poetic translation capable of resonating through the rhythms and culture of the target language in such a way as to reinforce a new collective skin-ego, enabling the readers in the other language to share the Englishman’s dilemmas while reactivating their own memories of war and, possibly, being brought to question their own thinking.
Pellicular translation

With the notion of pellicular translation, I aim to define a translation strategy which should not be thought of as the elaboration of an equivalent text but as an extension of the psychic sound envelope of the poem, stretched to embrace a wider community. It can helpfully be seen in terms of an overall metonymical shift rather than a metaphorical one, based on the principle of contiguity as much as analogy, on displacement rather than the replacement of one text by another. The notion of pellicular translation takes its cue from Henri Meschonnic’s emphasis on orality in literature and translation, and on his notion that the unit to be translated is not the discrete word, or linguistic sign, but the continuous discourse. The skin-voice is the product of the orality of the poem and a poetic discourse designed to articulate catastrophe, which awakens the body through rhythm and prosody; it is a touchstone to the psycho-sensory dimension of our relationship with language. Moreover, the emphasis on Anzieu’s psychic envelope in translation brings into play the personal history of the translator, who shuttles back and forth between languages and creates what might be seen as a bilingual, or rather interlingual, skin-voice. It is this voice that the reader of a translated text is reliant upon, a hybrid comprised of the voice of the author and the interlingual one of the translator, that is, with a text that fixes that voice at a certain moment, but which bears the brunt of countless restless crossings back and forth.

Given this aim of extending the sound envelope of the poem, thereby pursuing the attempt to contain and reinforce the psyche, in translating Fenton’s poetry I have given precedence to metrics over rhyme, on the grounds that metrical rhythm, whether regular (the same number of syllables, typically an even number, to a line) or irregular where appropriate, is a given of traditional French poetry and helpful to the elaboration of a sound envelope in this language, although I have welcomed rhyme wherever possible. The poem “In a Notebook” (1983) is composed of pentameters which alternate feminine and masculine rhymes or half-rhymes (consonance), except for the last three lines of each stanza, which are all feminine. I have translated these lines into alexandrines, which was a challenge, as some of the English lines are very dense, such as “From which the morning sun drew up a haze”. I have also dropped the masculine/feminine alternation, which would not be significant to a French ear unused to the alternate stressed and unstressed syllables of English accentual-syllabic verse. I have rhymed the final couplets of each stanza (there are five in all), and, rather than the narrative effect of the English syntax, allowed a more paratactic syntax to emerge. I have looked for sound similarity and contrast, and tried to find a voice that combines the gentle simplicity and delicate yet devastating precision of the English poem, by thinking of it as spoken in one continuous breath, while at the same time hindering the natural flow by a certain awkwardness and compactness of the syntax (“une rivière que surplombaient les arbres”, “c’est un ponton en forêt dans une clairière”...). Here is the first stanza:

There was a river overhung with trees
With wooden houses built along its shallows
From which the morning sun drew up a haze
And the gyrations of the early swallows
Paid no attention to the gentle breeze
Which spoke discreetly from the weeping willows.
There was a jetty by the forest clearing
Where a small boat was tugging at its mooring.
C'est une rivière que surplombaient des arbres,
Des cabanes sur pilotis longeaient les berges;
Au matin le soleil soulevait une brume,
Et les spirales des premières hirondelles
N'avaient que faire de cette brise tranquille
Qui bruissait doucement dans les saules pleureurs.

Resorting to a metrical form such as the alexandrine may seem a strange choice for modern poetry, nevertheless it enhances in my opinion the sense of creating an intersubjective space. As with writing constraints as practised and theorized by writers of the Oulipo group\textsuperscript{21}, translating into alexandrines both restricts and liberates, combining within the same words a discursive energy that is both impersonal and personal, such that the translated words become intensified and foreground their double status of belonging and not belonging to the translator, or for that matter to the poet.

In the following poem, a piece of light verse in trimeters entitled "God, a Poem"\textsuperscript{22} (1983), the twelve-syllable line was to prove insufficiently restrictive, in my view. The first translation (below), in alexandrines, is too loose and baggy; the second is composed of decasyllabics and includes irregular rhyme or half-rhyme, giving a more satisfactory result:

A nasty surprise in a sandwich,
A drawing-pin caught in your sock,
The limpest of shakes from a hand which
You’d thought would be firm as a rock,

A serious mistake in a nightie,
A grave disappointment all round
Is all that you’ll get from th’Almighty,
Is all that you’ll get underground.

1 - Une vilaine surprise dans un sandwich,
Une punaise prise là, dans ta chaussette,
La main la plus molle que l’on puisse serrer,
Que tu croyais solide comme un chêne.

Une grave méprise dans une nuisette,
Une déconvenue à tout point de vue
C'est tout ce que tu obtiendras du Tout-puissant
C'est tout ce que tu obtiendras dans le caveau.

2 - Un intrus malvenu dans un sandwich
Une punaise au fond de ta chaussette,
Une des poignes les plus molles que
Tu aurais pensé ferme comme un roc.

Une sérieuse méprise en nuisette,
Une déception à tout point de vue—
C'est tout ce que tu auras du Très-Haut
Tout ce que tu auras dans le caveau\textsuperscript{23}.
In some cases though, the rhyme cannot be neglected. The following love poem, “Hinterhof” (1994), is a sort of sophisticated nursery rhyme using ordinary words like those from traditional pop songs, “near”, “dear”, “true”, “new”, alongside a series of metonymical pairs, often doubled with effects of homophony and sound patterning: “rainbow / rain,” “wind / windowpane”, “fire / hearth” and so on. In French an equivalent lexical ordinariness would risk lying dead on the page, were it not for abundant internal rhyme and rhythmic effects:

Stay near to me and I’ll stay near to you—
As near as you are dear to me will do,
Near as the rainbow to the rain,
The west wind to the windowpane,
As fire to the hearth, as dawn to dew.
Stay true to me and I’ll stay true to you—
As true as you are new to me will do,
New as the rainbow in the spray,
Utterly new in every way,
New in the way that what you say is true.
Stay near to me, stay true to me. I’ll stay
As near, as true to you as heart could pray.
Heart never hoped that one might be
Half of the things you are to me—
The dawn, the fire, the rainbow and the day.

With this translated poem, the language seems at times to fork and reveal its double allegiance to self and other, with the translation of “new” by “extra”, for instance, in the second stanza, and the deviation from “New the way that what you say is true” to “Extra la manière dont tes mots sont sincères” (“Great the way what you say is sincere”). The choice of extra fulfils a metrical constraint while generating sound patterning within the stanza (moi, toi, extra, ira, extra, extra, extra...), as well as the cultural echoes of Léo Ferré’s well-known ballad, “C’est extra” and the revolutionary song “Ah ! ça ira, ça ira ça ira”, which loops back to the English poet’s revolutionary politics. Rather than perceiving this as an act of domesticating rewriting (one language / culture replaces the other, with a view to making the translated text more readily accessible to the reader), this example illustrates what I mean by pellicular translation in that it heightens awareness of the body in (its) language. For instance, “Aussi sincère que tu es extra ira” is slightly awkward to say: should one link the vowels ending and
beginning the last two words or separate them? The hesitation may be due as much to syntax as to phonetics, but the effect, I would contend, is to “prick” this French skin-voice, testing its sensitivity. The French-attuned ear might also pick up the pun "extrahira", with bittersweet humour, adding a cynical note to this display of elation as language takes the lead—while mirroring metatextually the themes of betrothal and betrayal common to love and translation...

27 Taken from Fenton’s 1987 collection Out of Danger “Hinterhof” seems to foreground the contradictory meanings of the title: set in a safe place, away from danger, while being made out of danger, out of that experience. Although not a combatant, Fenton’s war poetry was born of his own pain, and empathy, and behind the chiming buoyancy in this poem there lies a seriousness, a vulnerability. Its German title, “Hinterhof”, meaning back yard or back courtyard, is suggestive of a permanently quiet sombre space behind the cheery façade, redolent of Appelfeld’s opposition between “straw words” and words “born of [one’s] own pain”. It is this sombre note that the translation aims to re-enact beneath the froth, for instance with the slow articulation of the polysyndeton in the last line: “Le jour et la flamme et l’arc-en-ciel et l’aurore”.

28 We have seen that Fenton’s experience of war in Southeast Asia deepened and intensified his poetic language, to the extent that much of his later poetry seems to read as words of mourning, while the “garden” side has always been there, pulling towards exuberance and a lighter note. Both sides contribute to a poetry at once personal and political, grounded in the body and the body politic. Its “translatability”—to borrow a term from Walter Benjamin—appeals to the skin-ego and seems, through the meeting of languages in translation, to produce not so much a reine Sprache or “pure, universal language”26, as a (mis)fitting skin. That is, a language of translation stretched by the pull of interlingual contradictions, recalling Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt’s portrayal of the translator: a person wrongly accused, who has presumed to step out of his/her natural element, whose non-transparency is congruent with the experience of a speaker under pressure, about to burst into utterance:

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Meeresrauschen am Matterhorn, they used to say: the sound of the sea on the Matterhorn! Such is the fate of whoever has to say in French what he hears in German. There he stands, in the middle, between the two, like Georges Dandin in his garden, breathlessly flapping his arms. He is like a wrongly accused man and is bemused by his non-transparency: come and take a look at the German in me and you’ll understand everything; everything is crystal clear in me—how come you know nothing about it? This is the translator in the initial situation in which the need to speak is felt, at the exact point at which language comes about27.


NOTES

1. I borrow this title from the title of an article by the poet (Fenton 1993).

2. The phrase was coined by editor Bill Buford: “For example, ten years ago, James Fenton went to Indochina to see the fall of Saigon. Just days before the North launched its invasion in the South, James Fenton could be seen strolling casually into an area occupied by Vietcong soldiers, sharing a coconut with them while noting the sound of approaching South Vietnamese army vehicles on patrol. And when Saigon did eventually fall, he not only joined in the looting of the US Embassy, but, on hearing that the first North Vietnamese tank had appeared in the city rushed out of his hotel, flagged it down, and hopped on the back. This I regard as lunatic conduct.” (Buford 5).

3. All the Wrong Places: Politics on the Outer Edge of the Pacific Rim. (Fenton 1988).

4. Fenton 2012, 4. All the poems quoted here are taken from this collection.
5. “And if the present book has a haphazard, aleatoric element, some of that is intended, some not. The section on Vietnam was written in the years following the fall of the South. During that time, I had intended to include a full account of my experiences in Cambodia. But I found it too painful, during the years of the Khmer Rouge regime, to touch that subject, and by now it is too late.” *All the Wrong Places*, idem., xiv.


17. Cf. George-Arthur Goldschmidt, German writer and translator, on the contrasting sensory experiences of different languages: “One of the properties of the French language is perhaps that it slips naturally within the physical intimacy of the speaker. My mother tongue, on the other hand, German, in which I of course am as fluent as in French and which I also use for my writing, has never, not even in childhood, given me this sense of fusion, as if German left less space for the individual but nevertheless forced one to participate to its sounds in a way that demands more physical effort: one has to breathe in deeply to speak German, and stretch one’s rib cage.” My translation. (Goldschmidt 1999, 140).


19. “The unit, for poetics, is something continuous—rhythm, prosody--; it is no longer of the discontinuous order, where the very distinction between source language and target language meets up with the opposition between signifier and signified. The targeter forgets that a way of thinking [une pensée] does something to language, and what it does is what is to be translated. And there, the opposition between source and target is no longer pertinent. Only the result counts” (Meschonnic 1999, A. Pym trans. 2009).


21. “The primary function of writing constraints is to stimulate creation: in limiting the imagination, they paradoxically reveal to the writer the extent of his or her freedom, which explains their efficiency where the production of texts is concerned. The text surges up beneath the pen, here and now, pushed by an external necessity that enables the writer to put up a resistance to internal forces which could prove adverse.” Paul Fournel, Postface to *Dear Reader*. D. Bellos trans. London, Pushkin Press, 2014. http://oulipo.net/fr/usage-de-la-contrainte/_ (in French).

22. Fenton 2012, 43.
23. Greaves,149.

26. “[...] all kinship of languages that goes beyond historical derivation is based on this: that in each of them individually one thing, in fact the same thing, is meant – something, however, that cannot be attained by any one language alone, but only by the totality of their mutually supplementary intentions: pure, universal language” (Benjamin, 301).

27. Goldschmidt 2013, 170, my translation.
ABSTRACTS

This article discusses the poetic language of James Fenton, in particular in the light of the impact of his experience as a journalist in Southeast Asia in the 1970s. It presents the « skin-voice », a notion derived from psychiatrist Didier Anzieu’s concept, le Moi-peau, and ends with a discussion of my translations of a selection of Fenton’s poetry, which can be found—along with a critical study and a translator’s postface—in Côté guerre coté jardin: excursions dans la poésie de James Fenton, Aix-en-Provence, Presses Universitaires de Provence, 2016.

INDEX

Mots-clés: guerre, jardin, poésie de témoignage, archive vivante, pollinisation croisée, euphemein, moi-peau, voix-peau, enveloppe sonore, traduction pellissienne

Keywords: war, garden, poetry of witness, living archive, cross-pollination, euphemein, skin-ego, skin-voice, sound envelope, pellicular translation

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Translating Caribbean thresholds of pain from without: Hispaniola out of bounds, Hispaniola unbound?

Laëtitia Saint-Loubert

“You tell the story, and then it’s retold as they wish, written in words you do not understand, in a language that is theirs, not yours.”

1 The Caribbean has a complex history of imperial conquests and (neo)colonial interventions that have given birth to numerous art forms in the region in order to translate experiences of violence and war, as well as memories of struggle and survival. Poetry has been one of the privileged forms of expression for such accounts throughout the islands and territories of the Caribbean, but has not been the sole format retained for the poeticizing of such historical events. Two diasporic accounts, a fictitious testimonio, The Farming of Bones (henceforth TFB), by Haitian writer Edwidge Danticat, and a post-modern tale of pseudo science-fiction by Dominican author Junot Díaz, The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao (TBWLOW), narrate the 1937 Massacre which took place on the border area of Dajabón, along the Massacre River separating the Dominican Republic from Haiti. Both novels were published less than ten years ago, and therefore share a certain temporal distance from the events they depict. Both novels were also originally written in English, “in translation” as it were, as Danticat and Díaz are respectively part of the Haitian and Dominican diasporas living in the United States and have privileged a language that is not the one in which the genocide of 1937 was experienced. However, TFB and TBWLOW do not offer a poeticising of the Parsley Massacre that erases linguistic difference, let alone condemn it. On the contrary, both novels re-insert, here and there, snippets of Haitian Kreyòl and Spanish that re-create or “bring forth” the original trauma experienced in Hispaniola. Given the recent turn of events which both Díaz and Danticat have characterized as a human rights crisis in the Dominican Republic, whereby hundreds of thousands of Dominican citizens have been at risk of being stripped of their citizenship on the grounds of their supposed Haitianess or “non Dominicanness”, the Afro-phobic sentiments that culminated in
the massacre back in 1937 continue to haunt the island of Hispaniola and its everyday life. As such, both novels, when read alongside, offer further insight into the literary treatment of past traumas re-emerging in our contemporary societies.

In this article, I suggest that *TFB* and *TBWLOW* can be read as sites of a multilingual poiesis or creation that manifests itself in the form of a writing in translation to potentially open up spaces of recovery from and re-membering of Hispaniola’s traumatic past. Translation will thus be primarily understood as a strategy of displacement (as both novels are written mostly in English and aimed primarily at global, not necessarily Caribbean-restricted audiences), as well as of deferment (as both narratives are told in hindsight). Translation is therefore a space of poetic expression that is located outside the bounds of the original site of conflict, in order to potentially break down its geographical as well as its ideological borders. It will also be understood as a non-transparent linguistic transfer that accepts and renders the presence of untranslatables as traces of the experience of trauma to open up possibilities of restoration. The Caribbean re-enactment of the biblical Shibboleth described by Danticat in *TFB* inscribes her testimonial within a universal intertext of racial discrimination and death based on linguistic profiling. In the context of Hispaniola, this “rewriting” of the Shibboleth has come to be known as the Parsley Massacre, *El Corte*, *Kout Kouto* or the Dominican Vespers, a traumatic event that I will analyse as one particular instance of suffering located in a series of otherwise horrendous events, suggesting a ripple effect of sorts whereby linguistic difference and language have time and again been used as a violent, if not an altogether lethal instrument of assimilation and repression in the Caribbean. Yet, when examining both texts from the angle of their temporal and spatial disjointedness, a “syncopated temporality” emerges (Gilroy) in which chronological time is disrupted and marginalised histories can be revisited and possibly re-membered. A sense of Unheimlichkeit or the feeling of something “strangely familiar” is simultaneously created through textual strategies that promote non-translation – through the refusal of unproblematised equivalencies – whilst aiming towards a decentred re-assessment of the Parsley Massacre. Ultimately, then, the survivor’s testimonial bears the stamp of a linguistic difference that echoes past traumas but also paves the way for the building of a transcultural, pan-Caribbean memory, allowing a re-farming (or re-affirming) of bones through a writing in translation that rejects transparency and opts instead for positing the unintelligibility of the world as a Caribbean condition in the face of cultural amnesia.

**Translation and Shibboleth**

In 1937, Afro-phobic, anti-Haitian dictator Trujillo ordered the massacre of Haitian labourers (braceros) in the border area of the Dominican Republic, an event known as the “Parsley Massacre” or “El Corte”, which saw the death of tens of thousands of Haitians and Dominicans alike. To distinguish Haitians from Dominicans, a litmus test was performed on the people attempting to flee and cross the border into Haiti: a sprig of parsley was held up to the fugitives’ faces and when asked what it was, those who were able to pronounce correctly the Spanish word *perejil* (parsley) were assumed to be Dominicans, hence spared death. It comes with little surprise then that parsley is used as a leitmotiv throughout *TFB*: as Amabelle’s (the main character’s) narrative progresses, the reader is made aware of several possible explanations as to the reason
why the word *perejil*, out of all expressions at hand, was chosen as a means of weeding out the people presumed of Haitian descent from the border area of Dajabón in the Dominican Republic. Those who were unable to pronounce the Spanish jota correctly were assumed to be Haitians and immediately killed, as Danticat depicts throughout her novel, and Díaz hints at in seemingly anecdotal fashion throughout the numerous footnotes he adds to *TBWLOW*. However, Danticat’s narrative principally differs from Díaz’s in its omnipresent focus on parsley which she intrinsically links with the 1937 massacre. Parsley is in fact seen as a *pharmakon* in Danticat’s novel, providing both the cure to an ailment—a key feature of the plot, as Amabelle’s late parents were both healers and drowned in the river Massacre while attempting to cross the border to get pots and medicinal herbs—and functioning as the poison itself. The novel thus oscillates in its various attempts at pinpointing the exact origin of this choice of word, as is shown by the uncertain nature of the rumours spreading on the association of parsley and death and later on which emerges again when the narrator witnesses one of her friend’s death, in which parsley is unequivocally associated with “cleansing”, a term that implies all the ambiguity of the *pharmakon*:

 [...] But parsley? Was it because it was so used, so commonplace, so abundantly at hand that everyone who desired a sprig could find one? We used parsley for our food, our teas, our baths, to cleanse our insides as well as our outsides. Perhaps the Generalissimo in some larger order was trying to do the same for his country. (Danticat 203)

The French translation, however, lifts some of the ambiguity present in the original ‘cleansing’, opting for a term that suggests bodily hygiene rather than large-scale murder: ‘Nous utilisions le persil pour nous nourrir, pour nos tisanes, nos bains, pour nous laver à l’extérieur autant qu’à l’intérieur’. The narrator’s inability to find coherence behind the dictator’s senseless actions, hinting, at the same time, at the possibility of some grander design of which she remains unaware but is highly sceptical, finds an echo, later, with Amabelle’s employer Señora Valencia and her own interpretation of the parsley test:

Your people did not trill their *r* the way we do, or pronounce the jota. ‘You can never hide as long as there is parsley nearby,’ the Generalissimo is believed to have said. On this island you walk too far and people speak a different language. Their own words reveal who belongs to what side. (Danticat 304)

This extract illustrates how linguistic difference served as an instrument of repression and even death in everyday life under Trujillo’s regime, whilst in Díaz’s text this particular event is also linked to repeated acts of violence throughout the Americas that re-connect the demise of indigenous peoples from the Caribbean with that of Native Americans, for example, thereby questioning the United States’ own involvement in negotiating its History. The following footnoted mention of *perejil* in *TBWLOW* further complicates instances of involvement and resistance in the face of ethnic cleansing, as is suggested by acts of blind acquiescence and *laissez-faire* on the part of civilians who become accomplice-witnesses:

As a general practice Abelard tried his best not to think about El Jefe at all, followed sort of the Tao of Dictator Avoidance, which was ironic considering that Abelard was unmatched in maintaining the outward appearance of the enthusiastic Trujillista. But what was even more ironic was that Abelard had a reputation for being able to keep his head down during the worst of the regime’s madness – for unseeing, as it were. In 1937, for example, while the Friends of the Dominican Republic were
Abelard is a fictional character created by Díaz that allows the author to connect historical facts and figures with the “hero’s” own family, as Abelard is Oscar’s grandfather. The verb “perejiling” here, coined by Díaz, left in Spanish and in a regular font in the footnote, translates onto the page the forced ingestion of parsley, whereas in Danticat’s novel, it is Amabelle’s body that becomes a site of trauma, as linguistic violence is made flesh and the scars of the past become visible, indelible even: “Now my flesh was simply a map of scars and bruises, a marré testament.” (Danticat, 225)

From thresholds of pain to thresholds of recovery: a “re-farming of bones”

The presence of linguistic difference and language contact in both novels corresponds to an act of translation that renders a certain “cultural authenticity” by using here and there snippets of languages supposed to express unfiltered experiences of trauma (Haitian Kreyòl and Spanish in the case of Danticat and mostly Spanglish or Dominican Spanish in the case of Díaz), whilst addressing global audiences in English. To a certain extent, linguistic difference could be interpreted as a counterpoint to the lacunae often encountered in trauma studies as the consequence of the impropriety of language to authentically render emotions such as pain, grief or sadness into actual words. In fact, both Danticat and Díaz have recourse, at times, to strategies invoking lacunae, using dashes, ellipses or typographical blanks for example, but also offer personal reconfigurations of language. Díaz, for one, proposes an explicitly provocative non-transparent translation, whilst Danticat offers a palimpsestic type of translation that suggests the presence of layers of interstitial inter-linguistic meaning and recalls, to a certain extent, Venuti’s concept of the “remainder” in translation. Although her novel was written in English, its language retains layers of Kreyòl, as is exemplified by its very title, which corresponds to a loose contextualization of “travay tè pou zo” in kreyòl, explained as “the farming of bones” in the novel (Danticat, 55). By retaining the intrinsic violence present in the Kreyòl proverb in the title to her novel, Danticat illustrates what Paul Bandia has referred to as “implicature” in his study of African proverbs translated for Western audiences in *Translation as Reparation*:

Proverbs are by nature dependent upon implicature as a communicative strategy. The writer as translator faces the choice of whether to repress this implicature by compensating for it in the translating language (either through footnotes or by incorporating supplementary material in the translation) or to retain the remainder, that peculiar aspect of the proverb which eludes assimilation or domestication by the hegemonic colonial language. (Bandia, 86)

Her translation into English of the Haitian proverb thus preserves the essence of the original image and its connotations of violence and possible death, while eluding complete assimilation when carried across in English, as the title remains at first enigmatic. Conversely, the French translation has opted for a more transparent title, *La Récolte douce des larmes* (transl. by Jacques Chabert, Grasset: Paris, 1999) which conveys a certain trace of suffering, but possibly associates it with a misleading sense of nostalgia absent from the original saying, while toning down the horror at the heart of the
massacre that is suggested with the bones. Thus, by opting for translations of the trauma of 1937 that do not present transparent, ready-made equivalents of the massacre but ground its origins in linguistic difference, Danticat and Díaz offer modes of reading Caribbean realities that are centred around a poiesis where the scars of the past turn into highly visible, no longer seamless sutures of intergenerational wounds that have yet to be healed. It could even be argued that translation, understood both as linguistic transfer as well as geographical displacement here (writing outside Hispaniola, in English mostly), offers a valid space of contestation for heretofore silenced or traumatised voices, provided that the language of rendition manages to avoid the pitfalls of mainstream market consumption when targeting global audiences. This would entail giving in to what Elena Machado Sáez refers to as an “effortless and uncomplicated” process of absorption in her study of Market Aesthetics and the promotion of postcolonial ethics, whereby translation could run the risk of commodifying ethnic or exotic literatures, unless it is guided by strategies of polyphonic decentring.

In TFB, the Haitian cane workers, this cheap labour force called “braceros” in the Dominican Republic, perhaps embody best the deeply ingrained sense of uprooting and marginalization that Caribbean individuals may experience in the region. As Sebastien, one of the cane workers, observes, “[t]hey say we are the crud at the bottom of the pot. They say some people don’t belong anywhere and that’s us. I say we are a group of vwayajè, wayfarers.” (Danticat, 56) By displacing the disgrace associated with his people (“crud at the bottom of the pot”) and translating it into vwayajè, a term that brings to mind pilgrims and pioneers alike, Sebastien transforms the notion of Unheimlichkeit (unhomeliness) into a powerful force that turns Haitian outcasts into potential harbingers of change. In a Haitian context, the uncanny recalls Alejo Carpentier’s real maravilloso, which he introduced in his prologue to El reino de este mundo, in which he depicts the Haitian Revolution. Although Carpentier does not limit lo real maravilloso to Haiti, but rather applies it to the Americas at large, he nonetheless grounds the extraordinary and the uncanny in the reality of Haiti as he experienced it, what he sums up as “lo maravilloso [que] fluya libremente de una realidad estrictamente seguida en todos sus detalles.” The fact that in Danticat’s novel Kreyòl is the language chosen to carry across this positive and somehow elevating characteristic further stresses the importance of the vernacular as an instrument of resistance to assimilation here. In fact, Unheimlichkeit or aiming towards a sense of unfamiliarity and the bizarre (or uncanny) where it applies to translation could further be interpreted, in both novels, as part of a strategy consisting in destabilizing the normative, and to a certain extent, repressive nature of a monolingual approach. As Edwin Gentzler explains in his introduction to Translation and Identity in the Americas, translation has been a powerful, far from neutral instrument in the region, and when used as a repressive tool, has been the cause of a “loss of identity and psychological trauma” (Gentzler, 3). It comes with no surprise then that diasporic writers Díaz and Danticat work on renegotiating the power imbalance initially present in the Caribbean, offering, each on their own terms, a refashioning of language that entails a complete turning of tables and a two-fold understanding of Unheimlichkeit: a concept that both recalls the experience of trauma linked to displacement which breeds a sense of unfamiliarity and loss, but one that also functions as a potential antidote (where the pharmakon is a cure) to assimilationist enterprises. In TBWLOW, the multiple allusions to the need of filling out the “páginas en blanco” of History—and, precisely, not its blank
pages—partake in Díaz’s strategy to both deconstruct and destabilize hegemonic discourses and try and redress this imbalance from marginal spaces and through “subaltern”22, heretofore silenced voices. His footnotes act, for instance, as digressions to the main plot and perturb the sense of familiarity the reader may have with the book object, all the more so as his numerous self-referential addenda circumvent any traditional, linear mode of reading and may be experienced as particularly unsettling, if not confusing. In Danticat’s novel, this dual reading of Unheimlichkeit can be found in the chronological breaks that are interspersed with the narrator’s testimony. In TTB, the main plot is clearly distinguished from what may be called dream sequences23 that appear in bold font and in which Amabelle is revisiting her past but is also trying to remember (both recall and refashion) the trauma she experienced, to “pass it on”, even if only in silence:

It is perhaps the great discomfort of those trying to silence the world to discover that we have voices sealed inside our heads, voices that with each passing day, grow even louder than the clamor of the world outside.

The slaughter is the only thing that is mine enough to pass on. All I want to do is find a place to lay it down now and again, a safe nest where it will neither be scattered by the winds, nor remain forever buried beneath the sod.

I just need to lay it down sometimes. Even in the rare silence of the night, with no faces around. (Danticat, 266)

The present tense used in this sequence adds a sense of immediacy that confirms the impossibility of separating past and present within the space of traumatic memory. This blending of time creates a temporal disjointedness, also present in Díaz’s novel. Whereas in the former, Danticat’s use of the dream sequences may arguably be interpreted as an expression of the return of the repressed, in TBLOW, Díaz plays with the notion of fukú, an untranslated Dominican Spanish expression to express the idea of a streak of bad luck, and deconstructs chronological time by going backwards and forwards in space as well as in time, recalling, somehow, Kurt Vonnegut’s own hero, Billy Pilgrim, who “has come unstuck in time” after witnessing the bombing of Dresden in Slaughterhouse-Five. Díaz further destabilizes his narrative by inserting science-fiction references—a strategy he shares with Vonnegut24—, incursions that put to the test the expected sense of authenticity that the narrator-witness is supposed to be entrusted with. In fact, science-fiction allows the Unheimlich, all the unspeakable aspects pertaining to trauma, to be recounted through an unusual narrative frame which could eventually help make sense of otherwise unfathomable actions when transposed to the realm of the supernatural.25

Caribbean experiences are thus inscribed within a “syncopated temporality”, whereby chronological time is out of synch and comes to represent discontinued and scattered, diasporic realities.26 Ultimately, then, the survivor’s testimonial bears the stamp of a linguistic difference that echoes past traumas but also paves the way for the building of a transcultural memory. The choice not to translate into English expressions left in Spanish or Kreyòl corresponds to a view of translation that should not aim towards transparency, and opts instead for positing the unintelligibility of the world as a Caribbean condition which entails living in the contact zone of colonial and neo-colonial encounters, whether it is somewhere in the Antilles or in diaspora.27
Translational counterspells, transnational re-memberings

12 The re-telling of the 1937 massacre by Caribbean writers from neighbouring islands and territories of Hispaniola allows for the creation of a transcultural memory for the region, based on archipelagic re-membering. This poiesis is two-fold; first, it consists in re-inscribing the (partially) silenced Parsley Massacre within Hispaniola’s history, and, to some extent, within larger narratives of trauma. Elissa L. Lister acknowledges this gap in official discourses on Hispaniola, particularly in the Dominican Republic, where she observes a “politics of oblivion”:

Les manifestations des politiques de l’oubli autour des événements de 1937 se retrouvent autant dans la pratique que dans les discours. [...] Cette absence contraste, cependant, avec l’emphase mise dans la description de l’occupation haitienne de 1822 à 1844, dans celles des incursions des hordes haïtiennes, ainsi décrites, dans le domaine dominicain tout au long du XIXème siècle et dans la comptabilisation des prétendues batailles et guerres qu’ils ont du livrer pour arriver à les contenir. Par ailleurs, quand bien même ils essaient d’apporter des points de vue et des approches critiques ou d’offrir une certaine minutie dans le traitement d’autres sujets, les manuels et les livres d’histoire dominicaine minimisent ou occultent l’extermination ; leurs auteurs deviennent ainsi, volontairement ou inconsciemment, les collaborateurs du discours institutionnalisé de la négation de l’holocauste. (Lister, 20-21)

13 In addition to retrieving repressed histories, the strategies of re-membering suggested here also consist in stitching back together fragments of Caribbean histories that form a mosaic-like whole, as long as they are considered from more than one site of remembrance and experience. In her collection of short-stories Encancaranublo y otros cuentos de naufragio, Ana Lydia Vega therefore transplants the original massacre, “el día de los hechos”, onto a contemporary Puerto Rican landscape, offering a re-enactm ent of the 1937 massacre whereby the owner of a laundromat of Haitian descent is found dead on the floor of his establishment. The story juxtaposes elements of the original setting with clear references to Puerto Rico, as can be observed in the following extract:

Fue durante la semana roja de no acordarse. El Benefactor había proclamado la muerte haitiana a todo lo largo del Masacre. La dominicanización de la frontera estaba en marcha. [...] Un brillo de armas filosas prendió el batey. A las seis de la mañana, Paula frotaba el piso con un cepillo para hacerle vomitar sangre de haitiano a las tablas sedientas.

Por eso, aquel día, Filemón Sagredo hijo, descendiente de tantos filemones matados y matones, estaba de cara en el Laundry Quisqueya de Río Piedras. (Vega, 25-26)

14 The initial site of ethnic cleansing, explicitly referred to in the first paragraph in expressions such as “a todo lo largo del Masacre” (“el Masacre” being the river here) or “la dominicanización estaba en marcha”, is transposed to another Caribbean setting (the popular neighbourhood of Río Piedras in the metro area of San Juan, Puerto Rico), where the Haitian character, Filemón Sagredo, is found dead, victim of a homicide motivated by deep-seated feelings of hatred and racial prejudice, just like his ancestors before him. This is suggested in the last sentence of the extract by the pluralized form “filemones”, derived from the character’s own name and reduced here to a common noun bereft of its humanity, as the absence of capitalization indicates. This transposition onto a Puerto Rican setting invites a broader reflection on the day-to-day treatment of historically ingrained prejudices and on identity issues in the region. In
The title story of her collection, “Encancaranublo”, Vega once again suggests the potentially divisive nature of linguistic difference in the region, as she brings together a Haitian, a Dominican and a Cuban on a boat bound for the US. In the story, the Haitian and Dominican characters are pitted against each other, but the initial bilateral conflict soon leads to a broader reflection on Caribbean complex identities:

- Get those niggers down there and let the spiks take care of ‘em.

Palabras que los incultos héroes no entendieron tan bien como nuestros bilingües lectores. Y tras de las cuales, los antillanos fueron cargados sin ternura hasta la cala del barco donde, entre cajas de madera y baúles mohosos, compartieron su primera mirada post naufragio: mixta de alivio y de susto sofrita en esperanzas ligeramente sancochadas.

Minutos después, el dominicano y el cubano tuvieron la grata experiencia de escuchar su lengua materna, algo maltratada pero siempre reconocible [...]. (Vega, 20)

The use of the derogatory “spiks” during this rescue scene as well as the reference to Puerto Rican Spanish being a bastardized version of Dominican or Cuban Spanish (“algo maltratada pero siempre reconocible”) denounce practices of linguistic profiling that took a deadly turn during the Parsley Massacre in Hispaniola and continue, to a certain extent, to permeate everyday life and exchanges in the Caribbean. Non-domesticating translation based precisely on the re-appraisal of linguistic difference and the appreciation of polyphonic variations can, in such a light, turn into a highly disruptive tool against discriminatory discourses of homogenisation that strictly define one’s identity along normative lines of language-nation/nation-language equivalency. In TFB, the refusal to say perejil and the decision to opt for the Kreyòl pèsi in the face of death, clearly inscribe the vernacular within a poetics of disruption and dignity that resists assimilation and somehow enables to reach a state of transcendence. This is evidenced in a key scene of the novel, in which Odette, a Haitian character who helps Amabelle and a group of fellow Haitians escape a theatrical re-enactment of the Shibboleth in the town square of Dajabón, later dies as the group is trying to cross the Massacre river.

The scene ends as follows:

She had saved us at the square, so we wanted to save her too. [...] As we sat there with Odette under a canopy of trees in the middle of a grassy field, she spat up the chest full of water she had collected in the river. With her parting breath, she mouthed in Kreyòl “pèsi”, not calmly and slowly as if she were asking for it at a roadside garden or open market, not questioning as if demanding of the face of Heaven the greater meaning of senseless acts, no effort to say “perejil” as if pleading for her life. [...]

The Generalissimo’s mind was surely as dark as death, but if he had heard Odette’s “pèsi,” it might have startled him, not the tears and supplications he would have expected, no shriek from unbound fear, but a provocation, a challenge, a dare. To the devil with your world, your grass, your wind, your water, you air, your words. You ask for perejil, I give you more. (Danticat, 203, emphases mine)

The syntactic structure that repeats in both paragraphs uses the correlative conjunctions “not... but” in a pattern that seems at first incomplete, as the second element introduced by the conjunction “but” is delayed and only appears at the end of the first sentence in the second paragraph. The structure therefore stresses the character’s act of resistance – her use of the Kreyòl pèsi – which becomes an act of linguistic resistance, ultimately described as “a provocation, a challenge, a dare”. More generally, Díaz’s use of “assertive nontranslation” (Ch’ien, 209), whereby the author inserts Spanish expressions without providing the reader with in-text translations, let
alone elements of gloss, participates in upsetting the general flow of the main narrative in English. The Anglophone reader is thus reminded of the presence of several layers of discourse, which imply the presence of cultural and/or historical references most likely unknown to him/her. This is the case in the following example:

The scandal! Remember the time and the place: Baní in the late fifties. [...] Factor in that he'd been caught not with one of his own class (though that might have also been a problem) but with the scholarship girl, una prieta to boot. (The fucking of poor prietas was considered standard operating procedure for elites just as long as it was kept on the do-lo, what is elsewhere called the Strom Thurmond Maneuver.).
(Díaz, 100)

Here, the interference created by the insertion of the term "prieta", which is not flanked by an English equivalent, allows Díaz to bring in the theme of interracial relationships. Although it remains to be seen whether most North-American readers would make sense of the word simply through the allusion to Strom Thurmond. To that end, the French translation of TBWLOW has similarly opted for the use of the Spanish term, while inserting a footnote to explain Díaz’s reference:

Quel scandale! Rappelez-vous l’époque et le lieu : Baní à la fin des années cinquante. [...] Notez bien que s’il ne s’était pas fait attraper avec une partenaire de la même classe sociale (même si ça aurait également pu poser problème) mais avec une boursière, une prieta par-dessus le marché. (Tringler les pauvres prietas était considéré parmi l’élite comme une procédure de rigueur, du moment que ça se faisait en loucedé, cette pratique ayant même été baptisée, ailleurs, La Méthode Strom Thurmond*.)

* En référence à James Strom Thurmond, homme politique américain, membre du Parti démocrate puis du Parti républicain (qui fut gouverneur de Caroline du Sud, candidat à la présidence des Etats-Unis et sénateur). Connu pour ses positions ségrégationnistes, il avait eu une fille illégitime avec sa bonne noire-américaine. (N.d.T.)
(Díaz, trans. by Laurence Viallet, 113–114; emphasis mine)

While Díaz’s use of parenthetical, and to a larger extent, “liminal” comments functions as a site of diegetic interferences,29 Viallet’s addition of footnotes in her translation operates on a more conventional level, whereby the translator intervenes on the text to lift possible ambiguities and ease access to the cultural subtext for a Francophone reader who may well not be familiar with it. On the contrary, when traditional acts of translation occur in TBWLOW, that is when translating directly one language (or word) into another, they can ironically turn into a double-edged sword, particularly when no longer operating within the interstices of difference and displacement. This is the case when Oscar returns to his native Dominican Republic in the last part of the novel and ultimately faces death there:

They waited respectfully for him to finish and then they said, their faces slowly disappearing in the gloom, Listen, we’ll let you go if you tell us what fuego means in English.
Fire, he blurted out, unable to help himself.
Oscar – (Díaz, 322)

Here, translation brings about the death of the Caribbean individual, who, by providing his assassins with the English equivalent of fuego actually utters a performative cry that signs his own death warrant; perhaps, this also marks the end to fukú, the curse that Oscar’s family and the island of Hispaniola were put under. TBWLOW could still be said to function as a polyphonous counterspell that wishes to re-dress the wounds of linguistic assimilation that Caribbean individuals have experienced, whether at home or when living in the diaspora, particularly as it promotes a subterranean poiesis of the
margins, in which the inner recesses of the text and its immediate surroundings, taking the form of footnotes, parenthetical asides or ellipses, help recover hidden layers of History and heretofore silenced experiences of trauma.

Danticat chooses, for her part, an afterword that takes the form of a tribute to the victims of the 1937 massacre as well as to “those who are still toiling in the cane fields”, which also bears the mark of multilingualism as a site of transcultural memory, as her acknowledgments are expressed in Kreyòl, Spanish and English. As such, both Danticat and Díaz could be said to promote acts of non-domesticating translation that disremember as much as they dis-member monolingual and national agendas.

**Conclusion**

Even if traces of mediation, which are overtly present in *TBWLOW*, yet more subtle in *TFB*, recall the necessity to beware of the agency and reliability bestowed upon any witness-narrator, such traces can also be read as fragments of a writing in translation that attempts to conjugate and accommodate local as well as transnational memories, without erasing the specificities of each site under study. Ultimately, then, when read as multilingual accounts that accept to restore multiple, mobile and intricate identities, *TFB* and *TBWLOW* promote acts of translation articulated around the visibility of linguistic difference which should be key to any study of the Caribbean literary landscape and its multilingual soundscape. Strategies of dis-location then emerge here and there in the liminal spaces of Danticat and Díaz’s novels and create a space for silenced voices that re-emerge and tell *their* story with *their own* words and in *their own* language. But a “poethics” of translation also emerges that frees memories of trauma and war from the shackles of assimilation and oblivion. On a practical level, such a “poethics” would entail more transnational collaborations as well as more translational incentives across the region in order to trigger distinct, yet complementary, pan-Caribbean responses to shared traumas and painful memories.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


NOTES

1. Words uttered by Sebastian, a victim of the Parsley Massacre. (Danticat, 246).
2. See for example Maria Cristina Fumagalli’s monograph on the border area of Hispaniola: “Border dwellers and exchanges, markets, in addition to site of violence: introduction of carnets to regulate the entrance of Haitians: ‘In 2012 it was established by Dominican authorities that Haitian occasional workers who live in the Haitian borderland should obtain a ‘carnet’ or ‘identification card’ valid for a year, which would give them permission to enter legally in the Dominican Republic. Two years later, however, these carnets have still not been issued and the migratory flux appears to be arbitrarily regulated, a system obviously open to abuse.’” Fumagalli,
Maria Cristina. *On the Edge: Writing the Border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic.* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015 (p. 8).

3. I use *poeisis* in the sense of creative production (from the Greek ποιήσις) as well as in the sense of craft in order to present translation not just as an art form, but as an embodied practice that produces a textual world of its own. I do not use the term in opposition to *praxis*, as theorized by Aristotle.

4. Danticat opens her novel with a quote (re)locating the episode of the biblical Shibboleth: “Jephthah called together the men of Gilead and fought against Ephraim. The Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan leading to Ephraim, and whenever a survivor of Ephraim said, “Let me cross over,” the men of Gilead asked him, “Are you an Ephraimite?” If he replied, “No.”, they said, “All right, say ‘Shibboleth.’” If he said, “Sibboleth,” because he could not pronounce the word correctly, they seized and killed him at the fords of the Jordan. Forty-thousand were killed at the time.” Edwidge Danticat, *The Farming of Bones* (London: Abacus, 1998), page unnumbered.

5. The choice of one term over the other in reference to the 1937 genocide is far from anecdotal and the act of naming cultural or historical events, as well as places or whole islands, is particularly revelatory in the Caribbean, where successive and at times simultaneously waves and forms of conquest and resistance have been echoed in the language chosen to map out geographies and temporalities alike.

6. Freud defines the uncanny as follows: “the “uncanny” is that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar.” Despite their seeming opposition, *heimlich* (what is familiar) and *unheimlich* (the uncanny or unfamiliar) are linked through their proximity to *geheim* (secret or withheld from others). See Freud (76,79).

7. Estimates vary. See Fumagalli (140-141) and Graziadei (247).

8. The main character’s life is for instance early on connected to former historical events, when Oscar’s mother fortuitously compares a younger Oscar, then in his prime, to young and dashing Porfirio Rubirosa, for instance, introduced as “a part-time former model and dashing man-about-town, Rubirosa famously married Trujillo’s daughter Flor de Oro in 1932, and even though they were divorced five years later, in the Year of the Haitian Genocide, homeboy managed to remain in El Jefe’s good graces throughout the regime’s long run.” (Díaz, 12) The capitalisation of the “Year of the Haitian Genocide” suggests a new landmark in Hispaniola’s history, whereby the ethnic cleansing that took place at the border between Haiti and the DR is recognized as such. This particular occurrence partakes in a more general attempt at deconstructing nationalist bents throughout TBWLOW, especially when strategies of naming and renaming are concerned, such as in terms like “Parsley Massacre” or “Dominican Vespers”, which correspond to the same historical reality but suggest different readings of the genocide.

9. “This pharmakon, this “medicine”, this philter, which acts as both remedy and poison, already introduces itself into the body of the discourse with all its ambivalence. This charm, this spellbinding virtue, this power of fascination, can be – alternately or simultaneously – beneficent or maleficent.” (Derrida, 70).

10. “Many had heard rumors of groups of Haitians being killed in the night because they could not manage to trill their “r” and utter a throaty “j” to ask for parsley, to say perejil.” (Danticat, 114)


12. In a footnote, Díaz draws a parallel between the various genocides of indigenous peoples in the Americas and situates them as the result of repeated imperial conquests which include the United States as a site of trauma, questioning at the same time official discourses and History: “23. Hatüey, in case you’ve forgotten, was the Taino Ho Chi Minh. When the Spaniards were committing First Genocide in the Dominican Republic, Hatüey left the Island and canoed to Cuba, looking for reinforcements, his voyage a precursor to trip Máximo Gómez would take almost three hundred years later. Casa Hatüey was named Hatüey because in Times Past it supposedly
had been owned by a descendant of the priest who tried to baptize Hatüey right before the Spaniards burned him at the stake. (What Hatüey said on that pyre is a legend in itself: Are there white people in Heaven? Then I’d rather go to Hell.) History, however, has not been kind to Hatüey. Unless something changes ASAP he will go out like his camarada Crazy Horse. Coffled to a beer, in a country not his own.” (Díaz, 212)

13. Myriam J. Chancy talks about a “culture-lacune” in her own experience as an immigrant, which she describes as “having no identity, or as having one filled with holes with what in French are referred to as lacunes” but that could be overcome, at least in her case, “by clinging to the vestiges of creole that lie dormant in [one’s] mind and by preserving a sense of self in an area of [one’s] consciousness that seems untranslatable.” (Chancy, 16)

14. Díaz constantly calls the reader’s attention to the margins of his text from where he interrogates the power dynamics at play on a diegetic level, as the flow of History and Oscar’s life are interrupted by contrapuntal notes. Interestingly, though, when Díaz peppers his text with Spanish words and expressions he does not footnote them. See, for example, his allusion to the scandal associated with “prietas” in the section entitled “Translational counterspells, translational re-memberings”.

15. Venuti defines the remainder as follows: “The collective force of linguistic forms that outstrips any individual’s control and complicates intended meanings”. (Venuti, 108)

16. The original meaning of “farm” is worth noting here, as the word was used in the sense of “banquet” or “feast” and brings to mind other Haitian writers, such as Jacques Stephen Alexis – acknowledged by Danticat at the end of TFB – and his novel Général Compère Soleil in which the main character, Hilarious Hilarion, is arrested for stealing food.

17. That is as long as the adjective “douce” is understood as “sweet” and not in its ironic sense. The English translation of Philoctète’s Le Peuple des Terres Mêlées invites to further reflection on editorial choices where titles are concerned, all the more so as the English translation, Massacre River (A New Directions Book, 2005, trans. by Linda Coverdale), connotes the horrors of the 1937 genocide, while the original title takes an opposite stance, focusing on harmony and cohabitation instead. Similarly, the Spanish translation of Philoctète’s novel opted for Perejil, a clear reference to the meaning attributed to the word in the Dominican context. See Lister, Elissa L. Le conflit haitiano-dominicain dans la littérature caribéenne. Pétion-Ville: C3 Éditions, 2013, p. 97.

18. Machado Sáez focuses on diasporic Caribbean authors who write historical fiction and observes: “Since Caribbean diasporic writers are positioned at the intersection of ethnic and world literatures, local and global histories, multicultural and postcolonial discourses, I argue that these authors have more in common with each other than with isolated ethnic or island literary traditions: first, their work expresses a postcolonial ethics of historical revision, and second, it struggles with the marketability of ethnicity. The novels strive to educate the mainstream readership about marginalized histories and avoid reifying any stereotypes their readers might bring to the text, chiefly the perception that ethnic writers should translate their cultures for effortless and uncomplicated market consumption.” (Machado Sáez, 2)

19. The term suggests displacement and endless erring too, a condition that recalls the figure of the Wandering Jew and, to some extent, the stigma associated with Haitianess. See for example the singling out of rayanos, border dwellers of the Dominican Republic, who “owing to their proximity to Haiti [were characterized as] backward, fetishist and primitive […].” Fumagalli (21-22).

20. Carpentier (11).

21. See the dual figure of La Malinche and her ambiguous status as translator turned traitor in historical accounts of the Americas. “During the Mexican period of nation building in the nineteenth century, Malinche was blamed for the downfall of the indigenous world.” Taylor (95)

22. In reference to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?”.
23. Dreams and nightmares are omnipresent in the novel. *TFB* opens with one such dream sequence, offset in bold, in which Amabelle is recalling a conversation she had with Sebastian about a recurring nightmare in which she kept seeing her parents drown in the river Massacre.

24. See for instance Vonnegut’s references to fictitious Trafalmadorians in *Slaughterhouse Five* and Díaz’s countless allusions to comic books, graphic novels and science fiction in *TBWLOW*.

25. See Lance Olsen’s *Ellipse of Uncertainty: An Introduction to Postmodern Fantasy*, in which he explores the fantastic genre as essentially postmodern and marked by contingent meaning.

26. Gilroy talks about the “syncopated temporality – a different rhythm of living and being” that Black counter-cultures added onto modernity. (Gilroy, 281)

27. In the same vein, I have chosen to leave quotes in French and Spanish untranslated, wishing to preserve the multilingual realities of the Caribbean without flanking them with an English equivalent.

28. Danticat, 188-203. The theatricality of the passage is repeatedly stressed in the chapter, as Trujillo’s presence in the cathedral of Dajabón leads to a scene of glee – the town is compared to a “carnival parade” (188) – which soon gives way to a re-enactment of the Parsley Massacre as Amabelle and her friends are assaulted and force-fed parsley by a group of young Dominican men. The simultaneity of the two performances (Trujillo’s celebration and the “sacrifice” of Haitians) creates a sense of *Unheimlichkeit* as the cheerful rhythms and lyrics of the traditional Dominican meringue “Compade Pedro Juan” destabilize the reader who is concomitantly witnessing a re-enactment of the massacre – or at least a prelude to it.

29. The term liminal is preferred to paratextual here for reasons similar to those underlined by Ellen McCracken, who talks of “ports of entry” whilst distancing herself from Genette’s terminology in the context of Díaz’s and Cisneros’s works: “Several decades after Genette’s classic study, the model of the portal is useful to understand the reshaping function of paratexts. These ports of entry through which we navigate before, during, and after reading the text effectively reconstitute the literary work so that it is unstable and mutating.” (McCracken, 5)

30. See the epigraph opening this contribution.

ABSTRACTS

This paper focuses on *The Farming of Bones*, a fictitious testimonio in which Haitian author Edwidge Danticat relates the 1937 genocide perpetrated against Haitians along the River Massacre in Hispaniola and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, a postmodern tale revisiting Trujillo’s dictatorship by Dominican author Junot Díaz. In the context of the Parsley Massacre, as the genocide came to be known, language served as an instrument of repression and death. Yet, as will be argued, a counter-poiesis of non-assimilative, multilingual translation can be observed in both novels and will be examined as a locus of re-generation. The sites of original and repeated trauma, marked by various silences, breaks, and blanks in both narratives will turn into sites of recovery, insofar as the two novels privilege acts of (re)telling and (re)memberring that escape the confines of repressive, monolinguistic tendencies and promote strategies of “assertive nontranslation” instead (Ch’ien). Díaz’s postmodern techniques, aimed at debunking Dominican myths whilst subverting traditional modes of writing and reading, will be studied alongside Danticat’s re-enactments of the Shibboleth to discuss how their decentring strategies may help build a transcultural Caribbean memory.
Cet article porte sur deux romans : *The Farming of Bones*, récit mémoriel fictif de l'auteur haïtienne Edwidge Danticat, qui retrace le parcours d'Amabelle, survivante du génocide de 1937 perpétré à l'encontre des Haïtiens le long de la rivière Massacre à Hispaniola, et *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, récit postmoderne de Junot Díaz, auteur dominicano-américain, qui explore, notamment, la dictature de Trujillo. Dans le contexte du Massacre du Persil ("Parsley Massacre"), expression qui désigne le génocide de 1937, la langue servit d'instrument de répression et de mort pour ceux qui ne parvenaient pas à prononcer le terme *perejil* (« persil », en espagnol) correctement. Il s’agira toutefois de montrer comment une contre-poétique de traduction non-domestiquante et hétérolingue permet de renégocier les traumatismes du passé, visibles à travers les silences, interstices et blancs émaillant les deux récits. Les romans deviennent alors lieux de recouvrement dans la mesure où ils privilégient des actes de re-membrement qui tentent de dépasser des tendances monolingues normatives et encouragent au contraire des stratégies de non-traduction permettant d’aboutir à des actes de reconstructions mémorielles. Les stratégies postmodernes de Díaz et les techniques d’écriture en filigrane de Danticat, auxquelles s’ajouteront d’autres poétiques elles aussi articulées autour d’un décentrement des langues, nous amèneront enfin à nous interroger sur les possibilités de (re)construction d’une mémoire pan-caribéenne.

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**Keywords**: Hispaniola, translation, Shibboleth, re-membering, thresholds of pain, thresholds of recovery

**Mots-clés**: Hispaniola, traduction, Shibboleth, re-mémoration/re-membrement, seuils de douleur, seuils de recouvrement

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“This sudden Irish fury”: beleaguered spaces in Eavan Boland’s *Domestic Violence*

Bertrand Rouby

1 Since the 1960s, many are the poets who have tackled the period known as The Troubles, though few with as much emphasis on domesticity as Eavan Boland. Together with Seamus Heaney, Derek Mahon and Michael Longley, she is one of a handful of Irish writers who have managed to address the issue of domestic conflicts with an equally concise and vivid style of writing, using tropes related to personal and shared experience. Drawing on metaphors and metonymies from everyday life and her immediate surroundings, Boland eschews the pitfalls of oblique or circuitous writing, even though her use of personal imagery makes for an indirect approach. Accordingly, most of her poems focus on the intersection of personal and political, with intimate memories revealing collective traumas.

2 As such, the title of her collection *Domestic Violence* (Boland 2007) is self-explanatory, with the Northern Ireland conflict being likened to a case of physical abuse between partners. The tone, as can be expected from a collection published in 2007, is not urgent or impassioned. Writing at a time when IRA decommissioning was complete and plans for a devolved government were well underway, Eavan Boland reflects on the aftermath of the Troubles and their imprint on the collective psyche. Examining the 1970s with the benefit of hindsight, she adopts a tone which is not so much one of moral outrage as, to borrow from Wordsworth, “emotion recollected in tranquillity” (Wordsworth 111). Partly for this reason, *Domestic Violence* was quickly heralded as one of Boland’s most significant achievements in the way that it traces the subtle delineations of public and private, social and domestic, both in physical and mental spaces.
Any investigation into the tensions between public and domestic inevitably involves issues of history and gender. In these respects, Eavan Boland holds a unique position as one of a few poets whose literary output spans the entire period of the Troubles and, even more significantly, as the leading female poet of her country. Should one attempt to trace a genealogy of Irish poets, as Frank Ormsby did in “Ulster Poetry and the Troubles”, one would identify three successive stages. First, Louis MacNeice addressed Irish history in his Autumn Journal through childhood memories, with deep personal undertones:

And I remember, when I was little, the fear
Bandied among the servants
That Casement would land at the pier (MacNeice 131).

For all that, MacNeice favours a broad perspective—this is not History seen through the small end of the telescope; the fears perceived as a child soon give way to a bitter examination of MacNeice’s Irish legacy in 1939, at a time when he had been living in England for twenty-two years. Mention should also be made of John Hewitt, whose work examines common legacy through personal history. The Bloody Brae, a dramatic poem written in 1936, broadcast in 1954 and performed on stage in 1957, is about the massacre of Roman Catholics by Cromwellian soldiers. Although Hewitt’s starting point is obviously less intimate than MacNeice’s, his approach also consists in examining a shared inheritance through personal recollections: “This is my country; my grandfather came here / and raised his walls and fenced the tangled waste” (Hewitt 407).

The late 1960s was a seminal period for Irish poetry as it saw the blossoming of a new generation led by Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley and Derek Mahon. That this coincided with the beginning of the Troubles, notably the civil rights march on Londonderry in 1968 and the Battle of the Bogside in 1969, reveals the close-knit interconnection between poetics and politics in Ireland at the time. In North (Heaney 49-91), probably the most famous collection about the Troubles, Seamus Heaney takes an autobiographical stance to discuss the impacts of the conflict on memory and sensibility. Heaney focuses on loci memoriae where private and public intersect, such as “Bogland” (Heaney 17), both a place laden with personal associations and one where the preservation of History is made palpable. What was only hinted at in MacNeice’s Autumn Journal becomes a full-fledged reflection on how a violent background can shape the author’s relation to language. This is mostly apparent in the concluding sequence, “Singing School,” which examines how poetic language bears the traces of cultural alienation: “I tried to write about the sycamores / And innovated a South Derry rhyme / With hushed and lulled full chimes for pushed and pulled” (Heaney 82).

Thirdly, Ulster poets such as Ciaran Carson, Paul Muldoon, or Tom Paulin, all of whom published their first major collections in the late 1970s, displayed an unprecedented tonal diversity ranging from sympathy to gallows humour when addressing the Ulster conflict. In “The More a Man Has the More a Man Wants,” a driver setting up a booby trap is described in macabre detail:

Once they collect his smithereens
he doesn’t quite add up.
They’re shy of a foot, and a calf which stems from his left shoe like a severely pruned-back shrub (Muldoon 93).

Whether with causticity or compassion, the interlacing of historical violence and private memory is a thread running through Irish poetry from the late 1960s to the end of the Troubles, with specific emphasis on questions of place and memory. Unlike Heaney, however, these writers focus on streets and other public spaces rather than home and family.

Eavan Boland’s first collection, 23 Poems, coincided with the outbreak of the Troubles in 1968. She gradually turned away from Greek mythology and focused increasingly on Ireland, exploring the layering of history and unrecorded experience: “I ought to tell their story and I will” (Boland 2008, 52); “I am writing / a woman out of legend” (Boland 2008, 237). Born and raised in Dublin, hers is admittedly not a first-hand experience of the conflict. Yet, bearing in mind that most Ulster poets left Belfast before the beginning of the Troubles to pursue their studies in Dublin—where Boland made friends with Longley and Mahon—the question of legitimacy appears secondary to that of mutual influence and emulation when addressing the Ulster conflict.

Leafing through later collections like In a Time of Violence or The Lost Land, both published in the 1990s, one would be forgiven for thinking that Boland speaks from a time capsule set in the 1970s. At first sight, her approach reminds one of Heaney’s insofar as she captures the reflection and distortions of History through the lens of personal recollection, with a similar interest in language. Sound and texture, so important in the works of Heaney and Muldoon, seem however to be downplayed in favour of semantic content and invocation:

all of it ending up almost every evening inside our speech—
cost canal ocean river stream and now mother” (Boland 2007, 36).

The poem begins as a recollection of the speaker’s mother, so that the words “our speech” refer just as much to the language of Irish women as to the Irish brogue, a language presented as recitation and litany by way of parataxis. Boland’s unique perspective is not just a matter of historical circumstance; it is closely linked to her position as Ireland’s foremost female poet.

“Domestic violence”—metaphor or metonymy?

Issues of gender are indeed central to Boland’s poetry as she has consistently explored the role of women in History and their understated legacy. Such is the case in “Inheritance,” a poem tracing

a history of want and women who struggled to make the nothing which was all they had into something they could leave behind (Boland 2007, 39).

As Michaela Schrage-Früh writes, Boland “places the Irish situation in a metaphorical relationship to a woman’s life” (Schrage-Früh 30), thus connecting political conflict with all cases of violence against women. Womanhood in Ireland has long been coterminous with confinement, whether in the domestic sphere—with an emphasis on
self-sacrifice also shared with Victorian England, as evidenced in Coventry Patmore’s “The Angel in the House”—or in institutions like the Magdalene Asylums providing for “fallen” women. No wonder then that metaphors involving domestic life and handicraft should frequently surface in Boland’s poetry: spinning and weaving act both as references to the daily occupations of numerous Irish women and a textile metaphor common to many women writers from George Eliot to Toni Morrison. “Silenced” broaches the theme of weaving, with a reference to the rape of Philomela (Boland 2007, 21), while “Irish Interior,” after an illustration published in 1888, contrasts the image of a woman spinning with a troubled political background (Boland 2007, 25). In both poems, the numerous caesuras created by full stops impart an impression of confinement:

Afterwards, she determined to tell a story another way. She began a tapestry.
She gathered skeins, colors.
She started weaving. (“Silenced”)

The woman sits and spins. She makes no sound. The man behind her stands by the door. There is always this: a background, a foreground. This much we know. They do not want to be here. The year is 1890. The inks have long since dried. (“Irish Interior”)

As portrayed in Boland’s poetry, there is however more to home life than just routine and domestic chores. Drawing the line between indoors and outdoors is a major theme in her recent collections and entails questions of preservation and identity, especially as the onset of the Troubles meant that public spaces were no longer safe. Such is the disruptive power of war that it turns what was a place of subjection into a possible shelter. Safeguarding an intimate, cocoon-like space in the face of adversity thus involves a redefinition of home as a place of refuge rather than constraint. Throughout Domestic Violence, Boland shows how conflicts are likely to encroach on the private sphere and contaminate the family unit of husband and wife, most tellingly in the eponymous poem staging a couple overhearing their neighbours quarrelling while pictures of battle and bloodshed are shown on television (Boland 2007, 13-15).

The association of private quarrels and public conflicts is made in two ways, one metonymic and one metaphorical. The former represents the land as an extension of the family unit, while the latter describes the warring factions as a feuding couple. Like any war fought on shared ground, the Irish conflict is seen as a family quarrel, a trope originating in Greek tragedy but possibly more blatant in a place where society was organised around kinship groups. Consequently, the perception of the British Isles, or of Republicans and Unionists, as a discordant couple was not new when Boland published Domestic Violence. A precedent was made by Seamus Heaney in “Act of Union” (Heaney 74-75), a poem presenting a cartographic vision of Britain and Ireland as husband and wife, with Ireland resolutely turning her back on Britain (“Your back is a firm line of eastern coast”). British coastlines are pictured as the outstretched limbs of an assertive male conqueror (“I am still imperially / Male”), while Ireland is the passive sufferer (“your tracked / And stretchmarked body”). Interestingly, Britain is personified and made to speak through prosopopoeia—not an easy choice for an Ulster poet to make—in alternating tones of guilt and wanton cruelty. The “union” is imposed on a reticent partner and results in images of sexual violence (“a gash breaking open the ferny bed”) and unwanted pregnancy. In the second stanza, an apparently forced
intercourse (“leaving you with the pain, / The rending process in the colony, / The battering ram”) spawns a “fifth column” whose fists already “beat / at [the addressee’s] borders.” In those lines, Heaney portrays the legacy of Anglo-Irish conflicts in terms of infiltration, with a possible reference to the collusion between British forces and loyalists. In its latter half, the poem displays an aggressive outlook culminating in a harrowing vision of delivery as a process leaving the female body “raw, like opened ground, again.” As to poetic form, “Act of Union” is divided into two parts of fourteen lines each with two significantly shorter lines on either side of the break. Each part reads like a truncated English sonnet, with three quatrains of alternating rhymes and a couplet, a neat separation which belies the “union” promised in the title. Far from consenting to the “act of union,” the two partners are locked in frozen antagonism, their positions no more likely to change than the contours of either island on the map.

Like Heaney, Boland also tackles the issue of mapping and conquest. Map-making is a recurrent motif in recent Irish poetry as barricades had turned Belfast into a city of labyrinthine complexity, both in terms of cartography and allegiances cutting across families and severing time-honoured loyalties. In “Becoming The Hand of John Speed,” the speaker literally retraces the English cartographer’s gesture of delineation and appropriation: “I take down my book and then I am / the agile mapping hand of John Speed / making The Kingdome of Ireland, 1612” (Boland 2007, 64). The same concern had been voiced thirteen years earlier in “That the Science of Cartography is Limited” (Boland 2008, 204), a poem about the “famine roads” which starving Irishmen were forced to build. Their labour resulted in a skein of criss-crossing lines leading nowhere, all of which were left out of official maps. In both poems, the speaker aims at reclaiming past history, adding a third dimension to an otherwise flat representation. Much in the same way as the anthropomorphic depiction offered by Heaney, the maps described in Boland’s poems present a two-dimensional picture, all hills flattened, all voices silenced: “Forests collapse, flattening all their wolves”; “its gannets, gulls, cormorants all stopped / from flying by their own silhouettes” (Boland 2007, 64-65). Accordingly, the land is pictured as a female body in a supine position, ready for the conqueror’s sword or the proverbially mightier pen—“ready and flat and yearning to be claimed” (Boland 2007, 65). As in Heaney’s poetry, mapping the land in anatomical terms is perceived as the first example of conquests breaking into women’s privacy.

As one would expect from a collection entitled *Domestic Violence*, Boland perceives Irish conflicts in terms of sexual assault and rape. That vision is merely suggested in the opening poem, with its quarrelling couple living next door to the speaker—

Their voices high, sharp:
nothing is ever entirely
right in the lives of those who love each other (Boland 2007, 13)

—and expanded in the next one, “How the Dance Came to the City.” Barring the title, the pronoun “it” used in the opening lines might very well refer to war: “It came with the scarlet tunics and rowel spurs,” taking “the same route as / the blight or with the nightly sweats that said fever” (Boland 2007, 16). The formal dances brought from overseas by “a sail riding the empire-blue haze” (Boland 2007, 16) end up in the picture of a naked girl being reflected in a man’s sword, “her face flush and wide-eyed” (Boland 2007, 17). While the speaker moves from the collective space of the ballroom to the private world of the bedrooms, such emblems as “the boots, the gloves, the whips, the flash of the cuirasses” (Boland 2007, 16) imply that civilization and violence are contiguous, not mutually exclusive, and that military presence results in violence.
against women. Boland bridges national politics and private concerns by means of metonymic extension more than metaphorical mapping, as her poems show how political tensions reverberate in the domestic sphere. Internal strife is seen as, quite literally, an invasion of privacy, best conveyed by images of burglary and rape.

Redefining the kitchen as a place of refuge

No wonder then that Eavan Boland should adopt an entirely different standpoint than the aggressively male stance voiced in “Act of Union.” In Domestic Violence as in earlier collections, there is a clear attempt at delineating a space of refuge and protection safe from encroachment. Throughout her books, Boland has consistently sought to mark out the places assigned to women, thereby giving voice to a community of oppressed subjects. The situation of women in Ireland is illustrated through spatial imagery and more precisely the kitchen and the garden, quite literally the topoi of women’s subjection and resistance. These spaces are thus placed at the crossroads of alienation and self-expression. In Domestic Violence, closed spaces are portrayed with various emblems of domesticity including plates, spinning wheels and, in “An Elegy for my Mother in Which She Scarcely Appears” (Boland 2007, 33-34), a singing kettle, a pair of brass firedogs and a wooden clotheshorse. All these items are linked to animal life, the singing kettle being overtly compared to birdsong, and point to a cyclical time pattern governed by the persistence of rituals as opposed to the chaotic effects of war. Each item is introduced by the phrase “there was,” painting an intentionally drab picture of a toned-down world, as if etched in aquatint.

In the formal arrangement of the eponymous “Domestic Violence” (Boland 2007, 13-15), inside and outside seem to be clearly separated, each space being confined within a numbered section of the text. The first stanza mentions a couple moving to the suburbs where they can overhear their neighbours quarrelling. In the next stanza, reports of the Troubles are brought by the media, while the last two stanzas meditate on success and failure, both in personal and collective ways. At least on the surface, such a neat layout suggests a similar division in terms of physical space, thus offering an easy retreat into sheltered territory. That territory, in this as in several earlier poems by Boland, is the kitchen where an ironical speaker ponders on her own anonymity and marginalization. Once a place of confinement and subjection, the kitchen is turned into a meditative space offering respite, if only for a while, from the vagaries of history: “if I can be safe in / the weak spring light in that kitchen” (Boland 2007, 14). However, this feeling is tempered by the conditional clause and the run-on line foregrounding the adjective “weak,” thus creating a sense of transience and insecurity. The resulting effect is one of fragile intimacy in the aftermath of the Troubles.

Precarious though it may be, the kitchen is portrayed as a possible haven from the intrusive violence of war. By virtue of synecdoche, kitchens and food appear in other poems via the recurrent motif of plates, mugs and cooking utensils, all of which are linked to various forms of sustenance, whether material or cultural. In several poems, the circular shape of plates and dishes prompts an escape from historical violence into the realm of myth. They present an alternative to linear time, either by opening a space of timeless contemplation or by creating narrative shortcuts. The alienating effects of history seem to be suspended at a time, the 1970s, when they were mainly present in the form of news reports on recent killings. The “blue plate” described in “How It Was
Once in Our Country” offers such an escape into an unchanging realm of “blueness”—merely looking at the plate becomes an immersive experience whereby one can delve into a “borderless / existence” (Boland 2007, 18). The recurrent sea imagery (“ocean-blue,” “under-wave blue,” “the mouth / of a harbor”) conveys an oceanic feeling which, in Freudian theory, points to the preservation of an earlier stage of development. In that case, nourishment should be understood as a form of psychic compensation for the feeling of dispossession which the political situation generates. While political concerns and wars initially seem far removed from the sheer “blueness” described in the poem, they resurface on three occasions—in the title, implying that the words “our country” belong to a distant past (“once”), in the final line about a mermaid who “stayed down there to escape the screams,” and implicitly in the enjambment of “borderless / existence” hinting at the border conflict. If the idyllic blue plate conjures up images of a world utterly untouched by war, the speaker also warns against the dangers of escapism, including the type of refuge sought in the mythical imagination.

A rather different shade of blue appears in the poem “In Season”: the “odd azure of / apple blossom” (Boland 2007, 52), not the sheer blueness of “How It Was Once in Our Country.” The poem depicts the silent drama of two painted figures chasing each other along the surface of the white and blue mug. The two protagonists are seen to pursue each other endlessly, a figure of recurrence which differs from the more tragic background mentioned in the collection. Here again, crockery and, by extension, the protected world of the kitchen, seems to promise an escape from linear time and wars.

As part of a supposedly sheltered domestic space defined by “the cotton edge of / the curtains” (Boland 2007, 52), plates and mugs are invested with significance, provided there is someone to uncover the narrative woven into the picture. For all that, there is no ignoring the fact that the place is marked by a history of confinement and subjection. Besides, the mention of blue earthenware is of historical import: Delftware made its way into Irish homes thanks to the first immigrant potters from the Low Countries, before being manufactured on native soil once clay deposits were found near Carrickfergus. Thus, blueness is the locus where history and myth intersect, a pigment fraught with historical undertones and yet perceived as the colour of permanence. This extends to the place where such utensils are kept, the kitchen, a world of timeless rituals and looming hostilities.

“(Statistics on the radio)”

“Domestic Violence” makes it clear however that safe dichotomies are quickly undermined by the intrusive presence of the media reporting on the Troubles and their relentless death tolls. Although the mention of the conflict is textually confined within the second part of the poem, their distant rumble erupts into the private sphere when the Irish landscapes are “made to shiver / into our ancient twelve by fifteen television” (Boland 2007, 13-14). While the section opens with long clauses and soft sibilants seeming to dilute the impact of the conflict (“In that season suddenly our island / Broke out its old sores for all to see”) and continues with a steady iambic rhythm (“the salt horizons and the Dublin hills, / the rivers, table mountains, Viking marshes / we thought we knew”), these devices are quickly replaced by a series of plosives (“which gave them back as gray and grayer tears”) and the pounding trochaic metre of “killings, killings, killings.” The media become a substitute for invading paramilitary
groups, their deceptive power enhanced by the poor quality of the pictures. Meanwhile, the symmetric use of the possessive pronoun ("our island"; "our [...] television"), far from conveying a sense of domesticity, tends to break down the barriers between near and far and to strengthen the synecdochic association of national and intimate. Even though the poem is neatly divided into four distinct parts, with the outbreak of the Troubles safely confined in the second section, the overlapping of personal and political undercuts any attempt to draw neat distinctions. Indeed, the third section concludes on a woman asking her husband the simple rhetorical question "what else could we have done?" (Boland 2007, 14), a stark reminder of how personal and collective quandaries can meet. Twenty years earlier, Boland had voiced a similar concern in "Naoise at Four," a poem set in a suburban kitchen where the television screen acts as a liminal space and a fragile interface: "nightly on our screen / [...] wounds open" (Boland 2008, 52). The presence of the television, substituting for open hostilities, makes the public-private boundary a very delicate one as it brings news of "this sudden Irish fury" (Boland 2008, 52).

23 Elsewhere in Domestic Violence, references are also made to the intrusive voice of the radio. In "Silenced," the mythical rape of Philomel by Tereus is brought in conjunction with an "unregarded story of violation" told by the radio (Boland 2007, 21). The substitution of "violation" for "rape" allows to stitch together myth and politics, with the added implication that Irish history is a tapestry silently woven by the dispossessed. The speaker insists that the radio "was there in the room as well" (Boland 2008, 52): as often happens in Boland's poetry, the use of place deixis contributes to blurring the lines between inside and outside. As the reports on the radio are "unregarded," the onus of telling the unacknowledged history of suffering women is displaced onto the writer. Radio is presented as a more ambiguous medium than television as it gives either a fully articulated narrative or just a string of blunt "statistics": "That was the year the news was always bad / (statistics on the radio)" (Boland 2007, 22).

24 In an attempt to preserve the textual space from intruding voices, "statistics on the radio" are safely bracketed, just as war reports are never rendered through direct speech. For a point of comparison, in David Harsent’s recent collection Legion, a series of war poems is interspersed with “Despatches” presented in italics and a disjointed form. By so doing, he achieves the same effect as John Dos Passos in The Big Money, with fragmented “newsreels” being read aloud by a disembodied voice. In Boland’s work, the reader is presented with an image of conflict after it has been woven into a narrative and appropriated. She hardly ever confronts the reader with an unmediated picture of war; instead, the speaker recollects the disruptive power of war, which has been filtered by successive layers of memory.

25 In 2007, at a time when Ireland was celebrated for its new-found prosperity under the triumphant moniker “Celtic tiger,” it may have been tempting to brush away recent history. Does the device of textual bracketing imply that it had finally become possible to look past the atrocities of recent battles? In "Silenced" as in several other poems by Boland, layout and punctuation stand in contradiction. Parenthetical remarks often make up single lines or even one-line stanzas, thus drawing attention to the margins of discourse. Bracketing should be understood as a strategy whereby the devastating effects of wars are contained, at least in the economy of the poem, and cut off from the main body of the text. A similar technique is used in "The Botanic Gardens," where
"guns on the pages of newspapers" are placed between dashes, giving tangible form to the statement made in the first line—"leaving aside dispute" (Boland 2007, 45). Like the suburban kitchens represented in her poems, Boland’s gardens appear as uncertain shelters where violence is more likely to erupt than the poetic structure implies. The written page, not the garden, is probably the only place where strict lines can be drawn between home and war.

The horse in the garden

The realm of gardens and sheds is often treated as a protective space in Boland’s earlier poems, at least in times of peace, not so much the hortus conclusus of Christian iconography as a space where rituals can be observed. With its imagery of natural growth and the attendant themes of weeding and seeding, the garden points to a cyclical time based on the predictable alternation of the seasons. It is, in Mircea Eliade’s words, the consoling realm of mythical time as opposed to the terrors of History. Boland’s gardens are inseparable from the liminal world of suburbia (“Domestic Violence,” “Suburban Woman,” “Falling Asleep to the Sound of Rain”), small towns and orderly lives, a world where “Everything seems near and purposeful. / And bright. And side by side” (Boland 2007, 56) and shoes are arranged “two by two” (Boland 2007, 56).

In the latter poem, the garden points to “a kinder time” of “peaceful evenings,” with several -ing forms (“getting sharper, growing older”) laying emphasis on steady growth, unhampered by distant wars. Suburbia is depicted as a place of tacit endurance, free as it is from the urban guerrilla and the scarred countryside of “Domestic Violence” where

the rivers, table mountains, Viking marshes
we thought we knew
had been made to shiver (Boland 2007, 13).

In times of war, however, suburban gardens are also likely to reveal the “divisive violence and fragmented identity within the individual psyche” (Allen-Randolph, 8) and the “irruption of the uncanny within the familiar, well-defined, ordered world of suburbia” (Amiot). In her haunting poem “The War Horse” (Boland 2008, 39-40), Boland charts the approach of political violence through the image of a seemingly harmless horse, or so the speaker would like to believe, ambling past a private house at night. Soon, it appears that the horse has uprooted “a leaf of our laurel hedge,” a traditional symbol of peace, a rose and a crocus described as “one of the screamless dead.” As in Fuseli’s Nightmare, the horse is an objective correlative of anxiety and a visible form for the uncanny, an association strengthened by the fact that horses are perceived as psychopomps in Celtic mythology. Over the course of the poem, the line between home and war becomes thinner, from a “line of defence” to “the subterfuge / of curtains.” The brutalities of war contaminate perception, invading not just gardens and kitchens but language too. The “War Horse” really is a Trojan horse, ushering military tropes into the language of the poem.

War breaks into private gardens by means of language, as shown in “Suburban Woman” (Boland 2008, 63-65). In the fourth section, warlike metaphors and tropes infiltrate the language of the poem as the female character tries to find shelter. While her house is located “between a space of truce,” equally distant from “town and country at each other’s throat,” she discovers that she is “caught in cross-fire” instead. Retreating in
her garden, she sees “veteran dead-nettles,” roses “trenched in ransoms” and her own
life falling “like military tribute or the tears / of shell-shocked men.” A compromise is
achieved in the final section when the kitchen-blind becomes “a white flag,” here again
between dashes. Yet, it is also stated that “no truce will heal” the survivors, the only
safe place being the blank page bearing the symptoms of contemporary traumas. The
traces and scars of recent history are bound to become part of psyche and language,
leading the speaker of “Naoise at Four” to wonder how they will be assimilated, if ever:

And I despair of what perspective
On this sudden Irish fury
Will solve it to a folk memory (Boland 2008, 53).

History is thus woven into the palimpsest of mythology, with the figure of Naoise
clearly referring to the Ulster cycle as the eponymous character was originally one of
the sons of Uisneach and the lover of Deirdre, once prophesied to bring discord among
the men of Ulster.

Archaeology and storytelling

Beyond garden fences, the entire Irish landscape appears to be in turmoil, echoing the
“heaving province” mentioned by Heaney (Heaney 74). Like him, Boland draws on
metaphors from geology to voice the essence of the land, one which remains slippery at
best, relying as it does on clay, peat and soggy grounds. Like the amber mentioned in
the poem of the same title, peat is a substance that both preserves and alters what it
contains. Bog bodies, signs and artefacts are damaged or trapped in “a flawed
translucence” (Boland 2007, 32), so that the land is like a palimpsest bearing the half-
ereased traces of a long-standing history. With the spatial and metaphorical shift from
the kitchen to the garden, the line of tension no longer runs between inside and outside
but stretches between surface and depth, raising questions of remembrance and
storytelling. Yet amber, like other inner spaces, is vulnerable, its comforts only
temporary at best, deceptive at worst. As implied by the recurrent use of “as if,” “as
though” and “seemed,” any idea of permanence is but a wilful delusion, a theme echoed
by Derek Mahon in his late collections where similar devices are used to sketch out a
world of Heraclitean impermanence and Buddhist volatility.

Not just an invasive force pushing at the boundaries of domestic life, war also appears
as a living creature stamping the ground, leaving an imprint for future generations to
uncover. The archaeological metaphor developed in several poems draws on the very
ground of Ireland, one in which damp and fog make for unstable footing. Archaeology
is called an art, “not a science, / nor a search for the actual” (Boland 2007, 23), a
perception which unsettles the grounding of authority and meaning. By exploring the
unacknowledged strata of collective memory, the speakers of Boland’s poems delineate
a shifting territory reminiscent of Seamus Heaney’s “opened ground” (Heaney 75). As
shown in “The Tollund Man” (Heaney 31-32), with its allusions to Norse sacrificial rites
and parallels with the Irish conflict, Heaney’s opened ground is a place where ancient
traumas may resurface, a fractured psychic space where repressed contents are
exposed and threaten to destabilize established structures. Yet, for all the violent
imagery contained in “The Tollund Man” and “Act of Union,” it is also a place of
negotiation, a ground for discussion between adverse parties. It is not merely the
violence of war but also the act of ploughing which may result in “opened ground.”
hence a notion of fertility often discussed in Heaney’s later poems. The Irish soil serves as a trope bringing together soil, whether tilled or excavated, and writing, with the furrows traced by the plough being equated with the lines written by the poet.

32 Like Heaney, Boland sees the Irish soil as a place of negotiation where a dubious inheritance is passed on. She mostly focuses on sutured spaces and battle-scarred areas, such as in the poem “Inheritance,” where the speaker broods on how little she has “to leave behind, to [her] daughters” while raising issues of ownership and misappropriation: “the ground I stood on was never really mine” (Boland 2007, 39). The post-conflict territories mentioned in Boland’s poems testify to a difficult healing process, and though she also resorts to metaphors drawn from archaeology, the emphasis lies on accommodation and transmission more than the shock of sudden disclosures.

33 “Wisdom,” one of the poems included in the eponymous section of Domestic Violence, details an archaeological finding with dramatic enjambments bridging past and present, remote and familiar: “the sustenance and restitution / of who we were once,” “the dust of everything / that had happened since” (Boland 2007, 23-24). The setting is both urban and intimate, with a strong hint that the ground is a figure for private memory (“digging up a city, my life”). Archaeology is called “an art of memory,” which echoes the references to Mnemosyne, mother of the nine Muses, in “To Memory” (Boland 2007, 47-48). This cross-reference helps define two uses of memory—one, which could be termed “public” or “official,” consisting in lists and catalogues while the other, more personal, is unified by the virtue of storytelling. Archaeology in Boland’s country is not “a painstaking / catalog of parts and bone fragments” (Boland 2007, 23), nor is it “a whole inventory of elements and fixed entities” (Boland 2007, 48), which is hardly suited to a land best defined in terms of dampness and fog. Since the art of Memory is vested in the Muses, the poet acts as a mouthpiece for silenced histories. Reclaiming “the secret history of a place” (Boland 2007, 43), including post-conflict trauma and accounts of women who were denied a place in history, implies moving away from “statistics on the radio” (Boland 2007, 22) and weaving personal narratives.

34 An example of such a personal narrative is found in “Still Life,” an ekphrastic poem written after a painting by William Harnett (Boland 2007, 19-20). Though not directly addressing the theme of war, “Still Life” illustrates how a violent history can break through the surface of aesthetic representation. In Harnett’s work as in Boland’s poem, a beggar woman from Clonakilty holds a shallow dish in one hand, a baby in another. The poem then moves on to discuss Harnett’s career and achievements, briefly conjuring reminiscences of the narrator’s own journey to Clonakilty before unexpectedly reverting to the initial picture, tersely adding between brackets that “the child, of course, was dead.” The poem creates a dramatic shortcut from past to present and representation to reality, thus presenting the result of deprivation instead of holding it at arm’s length. Here again, parentheses are used to foreground an aspect that might otherwise have appeared as a mere detail in the arrangement of the picture. Initially a flat, two-dimensional painting, the picture is given depth and substance by an added narrative. In that poem as in others, Boland does not so much graft a narrative onto flat images as uncover the backstory behind the picture. “Still Life” speaks about the “surfaces of things,” telling a story of difficult containment and the possible overflow of repressed memories: “the surfaces of things / can barely hold in what is under them” (Boland 2007, 20). Indeed, in a land defined by “damp” (Boland
2007, 50), “fog” and “mist” (Boland 2007, 36), there is no such thing as watertight separations. No amount of barricading will do—inhherited violence is always likely to resurface.

**Imported or native?**

There is nonetheless a measure of ambiguity as to the origin of violence, and whether it is imported or native. Heaney’s “Act of Union” seems to locate the origin of the Troubles in the intervention of an imperial power and the partition of Ireland. In Boland’s “Domestic Violence,” an initial description of Ireland “[breaking] out its old sores” (Boland 2007, 13) would suggest that violence is endemic, lying dormant until it flares up in periodical outbursts—a family problem, as it were. On the other hand, “How the Dance Came to the City,” which immediately follows “Domestic Violence,” seems to state the contrary. Dances were imported along with “the boots, the gloves, the whips, the flash of the cuirasses,” travelling “on the same route as / the blight and with the nightly sweats that said fever” (Boland 2007, 16). While the “blight” obviously refers to the failure of potato crops resulting in famine, “fever” is another word that defines Irish wars in Boland’s poetry—a fever once imported into Ireland, in this case. “Fever” is mentioned as a label imposed from outside and involving images of contagion and ruptured tissues: “contagion waiting for us / at every turn” (Boland 2007, 73), “its skin a map of wounds, its history a treatise of infections” (Boland 2007, 51). However, it is also embraced as part of Irish identity: “Ours was a nation of fever” (Boland 2007, 73). Boland envisions violence as, originally, the result of an external agency breaking into a familiar space and, as History unfolds, an inherited pattern repeated by the next generations. Once assimilated, it becomes an atavistic trait, a half-buried impulse which may surface in the most familiar surroundings. As such, it is a feature that both defines and threatens domesticity.

Taken as *topoi* of domesticity, the two series of spatial metaphors used by Eavan Boland, kitchens on the one hand and fields and gardens on the other, help define two stages in the interplay of war and private life. From an external force breaking into domestic spaces, violence becomes an inherited tendency implanted in the soil, which makes it all the more likely to erupt within families. From the private garden in “The War Horse” to the layered townscape of “Wisdom,” the references to the land construct a polarity of above and below rather than inside and outside. In both cases, Boland explores brittle surfaces and tell-tale indentations disclosing unheeded stories of violation. In terms of poetic form, the use of metonymy and synecdoche tends to ease out the tensions resulting from the use of self-contained stanzas and formal bracketing. Thus, the latent contradictions between public testimony and domestic recollection, craft and novelty, the fabulous and the familiar, find a formal resolution in the portrayal of metonymic spaces. By engaging with such liminal spaces and lines of tension, Eavan Boland manages to create the sense of a hard-earned truce or, at the very least, a difficult compromise best voiced in “Indoors”:
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I have always wanted a world that is cured of the outdoors.
A household without gods.
Walls arriving, entrances taking shape, verticals meeting horizontals: a where fetching a now. (Boland 2007, 51).


Consulted 17 October 2017.

NOTES

1. In this paper, the adjective “Irish” is used in a geographical sense.
2. In the words of John de Chastelain, who was responsible for overseeing the disarmament process, the last remaining weapons had been “put beyond use” two years earlier (“IRA arms decommissioned”, The Guardian, 26 September 2005).
ABSTRACTS

In her collection *Domestic Violence*, Eavan Boland examines the resonance of public conflicts in the private sphere, with specific emphasis on the Troubles. The link between political and domestic is made through an image also present in Seamus Heaney’s poetry, the antagonists as a feuding couple trying to negotiate a difficult truce. Building on that premise, Boland develops two series of images already contained in her previous work: kitchens and utensils, which symbolize a retreat or an escape from war into private spaces, and fields and gardens, which bear the traces of past conflicts. The former set of images elicits a vision of war pushing at the boundaries of domestic life, hence an inside-outside dichotomy. The latter, which is rooted in Irish soil, implies a polarity of above and below, preservation and revival. This double vision also corresponds to a historical sequence of invasion and assimilation, so that any outburst of violence is perceived as a resurgence of ingrained atavistic tendencies. In either case, Boland depicts an intimacy under siege, suggesting that the only place where violence can be contained is the written page.

Dans son recueil *Domestic Violence*, Eavan Boland examine les échos des combats civils dans la sphère privée, en s’intéressant tout particulièrement au conflit nord-irlandais. Le lien entre politique et vie familiale se tisse à l’aide d’une image également présente dans la poésie de Seamus Heaney, où les antagonistes apparaissent comme un couple essayant tant bien que mal de mettre fin à ses querelles. Dès lors, Boland développe deux séries d’images déjà contenues dans ses précédents recueils : d’une part, face à la guerre, cuisines et ustensiles symbolisent le repli ou la fuite dans les espaces privés ; de l’autre, champs et jardins gardent les traces des conflits passés. La première série inspire une vision de la guerre mettant à l’épreuve les frontières de la vie familiale, d’où une dichotomie entre intérieur et extérieur. La seconde, enracinée dans le sol irlandais, implique une polarité entre surface et profondeur, conservation et renouveau. Cette double vision correspond aussi à un processus historique d’invasion et d’assimilation, si bien que tout regain de violence est perçu comme la résurgence de tendances ataviques profondément ancrées. Dans les deux cas, Boland dépeint une intimité assiégée, dans l’idée que le seul lieu où la violence peut être contenue est le texte écrit.

INDEX

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Bugging the Bog: Sonic Warfare, Earwitnessing and Eavesdropping in the Works of Seamus Heaney

Fanny Quément

1 It was during World War II that Seamus Heaney’s sense of hearing developed, with one ear straining to the baize of the Cossor wireless that broadcast news, music or stories to the noisy family kitchen in Mossbawn, County Derry (O’Driscoll 2008, 360), and the other following up sonic clues that signalled the presence of mice on the ceiling or horses behind a wall (Heaney 1996a, 4). Heaney’s Nobel lecture, Crediting Poetry, tells how the child he was would listen to the adventures of spies and detectives like Dick Barton or Biggles (Heaney 1996a, 7-8) thanks to these radio waves which also transmitted “the frantic, piercing signaling of morse code” along with the broadcasters’ voices emerging from the static, that “little pandemonium of burbles and squeaks” (Heaney 1996a, 6). For the child, listening to the radio was like spying on coded messages to be deciphered. The kitchen would therefore regularly turn into a listening post. Thanks to impalpable electromagnetic waves, the military was insidiously infiltrating that most domestic space the hearth is.

2 Nevertheless, it seems that the soundscape of the whole farmland was quite preserved from the war, even from its loudest blasts. As Guy Woodward explains,

   “[t]he Northern Irish countryside was physically altered by the construction of airfields and military bases, by the influx of evacuees and refugees, and by the blackout, but rural areas were not targeted in air attacks and suffered far less as a result. (Woodward 81)

3 No wonder, then, that Heaney remembers his birthplace as a kind of rural cocoon hardly impacted by the war. The beginning of the following paragraph is one of Heaney’s most famous prose passages, but it is worth quoting it again:

   I would begin with the Greek word, *omphalos*, meaning the navel, and hence the stone that marked the centre of the world, and reapeat it, *omphalos, omphalos, omphalos*, until its blunt and falling music becomes the music of somebody pumping water at the pumps outside our back door. It is Co. Derry in the early 1940’s. The American bombers groan towards the aerodrome at Toomebridge, the American
troops manoeuvre in the fields along the road, but all of that great historical action
does not disturb the rhythms of the yard. There the pump stands, a slender, iron
idol, snouted, helmeted, dressed down with a sweeping handle, painted a dark
green and set on a concrete plinth, marking the centre of another world. (Heaney
1980, 17)

The groans and manoeuvres of the American air and land forces are not even static,
they cannot interfere with the rhythms of the rural world. They remain peripheral,
barely noticed, as if the spellbinding dactyls of the pump (“omphalos, omphalos,
omphalos”) had a centrifugal power keeping them at a distance. That green, helmeted iron soldier watched the borders of Mossbawn, and Heaney trusted it, for even when news of bombings and casualty came up on the wireless, “none of [...] these word-
spasms entered [him] as terror” (Heaney 1996a, 6). The farm and the family were intact
or, as he rephrased it at the dawn of the 21st century, “Wherever the world was, we
were somewhere else” (Heaney 2006, 11).

The situation was different with the Troubles. In Glanmore, County Wicklow—where
Heaney moved with his wife and children in 1972—news of the conflict was part of the
soundscape of the cottage the Heaneys were renting. It was not simply heard from a
distance, it was listened to as it mixed with the similarly recurrent sounds of nature: “I
found myself [...] listening to the rain in the trees and to the news of bombings closer to
home” (Heaney 1996a, 16). In this sentence, Heaney seems to grow aware of the fact
that he is actively listening to the news. This constitutes a major change from his
childhood experience. At the same time, the bombings feel “closer” to an adult’s home
that is no longer war-proof. A noise often associated with the Troubles and characteristic of the Northern Irish soundscape, namely, the helicopter drone, can be
heard in “Triptych” (“And [...] listened to the thick rotations / Of an army helicopter
patrolling,” Heaney 1979, 6), as well as in the ninth section of “Station Island” where it
mangles the curlews’ pastoral twittering: “only helicopters and curlews / Make their
maimed music” (Heaney 1984, 84). As with the news, the British helicopters are listened
to when the American planes were only vaguely heard in the distance during World
War II. Their presence still haunts District and Circle, published eight years after the
Good Friday Agreement, in which Heaney precisely recalls “the flash / Of one wild
glance, like ghost surveillance / From behind a gleam of helicopter glass” (Heaney 2006,
42), a strangely silent image in which the absence of sound may be as terrifying as in
Heaney’s nightmarish description of the Troubles, “a bad dream with no sound”
(Heaney 1975, 60).

The familiar sound of walkie-talkies also comes up in Heaney’s lines, with “the sergeant
with his on-off mike repeating / data about you, waiting for the squawk / of clearance”
in “The Frontier of Writing” (Heaney 1987, 6), and this uncollected haiku:

Springtime in Ulster:
Aerials in hedges, squawk
Of walkie-talkies. (O’Driscoll 2008, 213)

In both cases, sound has to do with frontiers or liminal spaces, their control and their
crossing. The very place of the onomatopoeia “squawk” (right before the enjambment
in both quotes) makes room for the word to resound and can be associated with the
idea of placing borders where there shouldn’t be any since the sentences are
unnaturally split. As the word “squawk” tears syntactical links apart, dispersing the
morphemes, the “squawk / of clearance” controls the citizens’ moves. Even if there was
probably no allusion intended, the phrase might remind some readers of the “squawk
box,” a directional crowd-dispersal weapon based on ultrasonic frequencies whose existence and trial was reported by the New Scientist on 20 September 1973 but denied by the British army (“Army tests new riot weapon”). As for the haiku, it is no reverdie and the hedges it evokes are no longer the domesticated place where hedge-schools can form.

Whether the squawk box was really used or not, the rattling of helicopters and the bleeps and screeches of walkie-talkies broke into civilians’ everyday lives and affected their minds, feeding the fears triggered by blasts and gunshots. Internalised, “tak[ing] up permanent residence in the body,” they can be heard again any time a victim’s memory is triggered and “play in post-traumatic stress disorder” (Obert 58). Such sounds were part of a sonic warfare, an insidious, protean and pervasive strategy relying on varied non-lethal sonic weapons ranging from the drums played in marches to the loud continuous sounds used as torture devices meant to make prisoners talk (Völcler 2011, 85). In this article, sonic warfare is to be understood as the use of sound as a weapon in the context of the Troubles, as in the examples given above. But it should also be more broadly conceived as a pervasive and elusive form of conflict similar to what Steve Goodman calls the “politics of frequency,” a politics based sometimes on “affective mobilization” through sound (Goodman 34), sometimes on an “ecology of fear” (Goodman 97-98) or other control methods. Sonic warfare is therefore a particularly intrusive form of war that can disturb daily life even when no military war has been officially declared. With its “signatures on [its] own frequency” (Heaney 1984, 94), Heaney’s poetic voice shares in this warfare. He engages in the politics of frequency and his work becomes intrinsically linked with earwitnessing and eavesdropping.

Heaney’s prose often merges the figure of the poet with that of the spy, recalling for instance how Marlowe “had tasted the thrills of espionage” before being denounced by informers (Heaney 1995, 18-19), or how the Mandelstams were spied on by Tolstoy (Heaney 1988, 71) when Osip’s nickname, M., sounded much like a code name. He explains that the poetry of Zbigniew Herbert is more than dissident poetry in so far as it attempts to “discover whether that inner citadel of human being is a selfish bolt hole or an attentive listening post,” an image that turns military eavesdropping into a poetic stance to be adopted at all times, in all circumstances. The association of the two figures—the poet and the spy—is not limited to Eastern European poets or to Heaney’s prose. In “On his Work in the English Tongue,” a poem dedicated to Ted Hughes, a bridge is turned into an “arch-ear to the ground, a listening post” (Heaney 2001, 61), and it seems that Heaney himself was intent on bugging the bog to draw inspiration from what he eavesdropped there: “I have always listened for poems, they come sometimes like bodies come out of a bog” (Heaney 1980, 34). The bog, like several other geographical spaces under study in this article, is a familiar place—yet it has its secrets.

Three aspects of sonic warfare will be addressed in order to examine its breaking-ins and Heaney’s poetic answers to them: the way sound defines territories and intrudes on them, spying as a poetic activity and the poetic voice as a sonic weapon.

(Ear)Drums and territories

Both the perception and the production of sound can be related to territorial behaviours. In line with to Roland Barthes’s “Écoute” and Deleuze and Guattari’s Mille
Plateaux, François J. Bonnet’s study of hearing is partly based on the idea that the ear is, first of all, the organ of fear, and that listening contributes to perceiving, constituting and defending a territory (Bonnet 42-58). An obvious Northern Irish example of the territorial dimension of sound is the use of drums by Orangemen marching to mark their territory, the loud drumming of the lambegs being a “soundmark,” a community sound that characterises a soundscape (Schafer 274). In that case, both eardrums and drums are involved in the problematic charting of territories belonging to enemy communities. However, as familiar as this sound may seem, Paul Moore explains that the “numerous visual constructs that act as symbolic information about identity [in Ulster]” have been much studied whereas “the role of sound as symbolic signifier has not been so readily accepted” (Moore 266). Similarly, Heaney’s imagery seems to have drawn more attention than his handling of the sonic dimension of the Troubles. Conor Cruise O’Brien is one of the few critics who emphasised the aural rather than the visual dimension of North in his 1975 review of the collection for The Listener. As important as the photographs from P. V. Glob’s The Bog People may have been to Heaney, his interest in sound should not be downplayed.

12 The sound of drums is as recurrent in Heaney’s works as the marching season in the Northern Irish calendar. As the following examples suggest, drumming functions sometimes as a signal or soundmark defining geopolitical territories, sometimes as a poetic device used to explore new territories. This analysis will rely on the terminology coined by R. Murray Schafer so as to identify clearly the various shapes drumming can take. Tracing the resonance of drums in Heaney’s lines will show that he conceives the poet as an earwitness to the ways in which individuals relate to the sonic environments of their everyday lives.

13 The first of Heaney’s “Ten Glosses” from Electric Light, entitled “The Marching Season,” presents drumming as a repeatedly predictable signal communicating a clear, univocal message:

‘What bloody man is that?’ ‘A drum, a drum!’
Prepossessed by what I know by heart,
I wait for Banquo and Macbeth to come
Unbowed, on cue, and scripted from the start. (Heaney 2001, 54)

14 The human being and the instrument are merged in the figure of the drum, a character entirely defined by his function as a messenger who becomes metonymically inseparable, even indistinguishable from his prop. Yet, paradoxically enough, this drum does not bring any piece of news. The Northern Irish marches are “scripted from the start” every year and Heaney knows the two plays—the universal Macbeth and the local drama—by heart. The signal broadcast during the marching season doesn’t bring any piece of news, it manifests again and again a threatening presence. Drums address eardrums to make their presence felt and instil fear. However, the way this gloss alludes to Macbeth also endows drumming with a literary potential that is tapped, as we shall see, in other poems.

15 In the second section of “Station Island,” the drum is more than a mere communications tool, though not yet a poetic instrument. Along with other elements of the soundscape, it takes part in the identity-building processes Paul Moore focused on. This is how Heaney’s persona addresses the ghost of William Carleton:

‘I come from County Derry,
born in earshot of an Hibernian hall
where a band of Ribbonmen played hymns to Mary.
By then the brotherhood was a frail procession
staggering home drunk on Patrick’s Day

in collarettes and sashes fringed with green.
Obedient strains like theirs tuned me first
and not that harp of unforgiving iron

the Fenians strung. A lot of what you wrote
I heard and did: this Lough Derg station,
flax-pullings, dances, summer crossroads chat

and the shaky local voice of education.
All that. And always, Orange drums.
And neighbours on the roads at night with guns.’ (Heaney 1984, 66)

16 The common opposition of orange and green is at the same time reflected and
complicated by the soundscape the lines compose: Marian hymns and Orange drums
reinforce the territorial separation, but this contrast is nuanced and the text is less
cliché than it may seem. Its ambiguities become striking when it is compared to the
prose version of the same memory in “Mossbawn”, written ten years earlier:

And the lift of the air is resonant, too, with vigorous musics. As summer evening
carries the fervent melancholy strain of hymn-singing from a gospel hall among the
fields, and the hawthorn blooms and the soft, white patens of the elderflower hang
dolorous in the hedges. Or the rattle of Orange drums from Aughrim Hill sets the
heart alert and watchful as a hare. (Heaney 1980, 20)

17 In the prose version, hymns are associated with a Christian imagery and a bucolic
landscape untainted yet by drunken singers. The territory is clearly polarised as
Mossbawn is superimposed on the site where the Battle of Aughrim was fought: the
choir is associated with a place of melancholy and suffering—the Latin roots of the
adjective “dolorous” ring with a Catholic timbre—under the threat of the approach-
ing drums. The soundscape reconstituted in “Station Island” differs from this version: it
creates a paradoxical mirror-effect between the two apparently opposed communities.

18 The dances (possibly involving crossings) and the small talk at crossroads are meeting
points proving the two sides were not always clearly separate. Interviewed by
O’Driscoll, Heaney remembered that as a child he would sometimes “[go] out to the end
of the lane at Mossbawn to watch an Orange band march and to wave at people [his
family] knew” (O’Driscoll 2008, 134). But the poem’s diction and sounds reveal a darker
mirroring. The phrase “in earshot” implies the existence of a territory defined and
covered or guarded by hearing, in which the child’s identity takes root, but there may
be more to it than that. The literal meaning of the ending “shot” is re-activated by the
“guns” mentioned a few lines below: the Marian hymns are suddenly and unexpectedly
associated with weaponry and violence. The child’s ear was impacted, informed,
scarred and maybe even traumatised by all these sounds. Believing that the owners of
the guns are necessarily Unionists would be a hasty deduction: “guns” doesn’t quite
rhyme with “drums” but partly echoes “education” and the Fenians’ “iron” harp,
whose strings resemble prison bars and whose tunes were supposed not to be part of
this soundscape. This pattern recalls Unionists don’t have a monopoly on weapons. The
“neighbours” could be from either side and the rhyming of “Derry” with “Mary”
eventually sounds as ironically clichéd as the clumsy association of “guns” with
“drums.” The poem blurs borders and superimposes territories, showing at the same
Moreover, the nominal sentence “And always, Orange drums” turns an intermittent, seasonal sound into a “keynote” (Schafer 272) constantly resounding, with a strong iambic rhythm recalling that political and cultural domination went hand in hand. A latent, drone-like drumming is in fact constantly lurking in Heaney’s soundscapes, but it is not always that of a lambeg. “The Catholic population also have their marching bands,” Moore stresses, adding that they are nevertheless associated with “softer, quieter tones” such as the bodhrán’s (270). Even if associating the bodhrán with republicanism and the lambeg with unionism is a historical aberration (Moore 271; Obert 47), it is one of the symbols around which identities and mindsets are built. Technically speaking, a lambeg is undeniably louder than a bodhrán, and is therefore hardly musically compatible with it, but the two have not always been culturally incompatible.

Reading Heaney’s work can help reconsider the simplistic opposition between the two kinds of drums. Heaney does employ ironic litotes to evoke the deafening and sickening sound of the lambegs in “Whatever You Say, Say Nothing”—“Last night you didn’t need a stethoscope / To hear the eructation of Orange drums” (Heaney 1975, 58)—but he also pictures “the big drum being hefted” by a Hib (O’Driscoll 134) and relies on figures of speech to amplify the sound of some other drums which, being tuned to Republican hymns, could exercise an influence. Thus, he suggests through diction and imagery what Ciaran Carson makes clear in the structure of _The Twelfth of Never_ (1998) by juxtaposing “Twelfth Day” and “The Ay O’Haitch,” dealing respectively with Protestant and Catholic marches as equal sources of “partisan noise pollution” (Obert 47).

For instance, the metaphor of “the whole country tun[ing] / to the muffled drumming / of ten thousand engines” in “Funeral Rites” (Heaney 1975, 17) sounds ominous: this drumming is a keynote sound pregnant with more sectarian violence, and the fact that it is “muffled” makes it all the more powerful. This drumming is echoed by the “purring” of a hearse at another funeral, that of a fisherman killed by a bomb planted in a pub:

> I missed his funeral,
> Those quiet walkers
> And sideways talkers
> Shoaling out of his lane
> To the respectable
> Purring of the hearse (Heaney 1979, 17)

The casual, offhand assertion “I missed his funeral” suggests it might have been a slip on the part of the poet who wants to “[s]tay clear of all processions” (Heaney 1984, 63). “Shoaling” turns the mourners into animals driven by a gregarious instinct while the metric parallelism of the lines “Those quiet walkers / And sideways talkers” evokes a cadence as regular as that of a marching drummer, something very different from the “rhythm” the poet discovers on his own on a boat by the end of the poem. In addition to the irony of the adjective “respectable”, one can hear a pun in “hearse,” the homophone of herse: the regular sound of the purring seems to work as a defensive gate deafening everyone as it falls. The verb “hear” is graphically present but muted, its central phoneme being buried deep down in the word “hearse.” Gathering behind their own sound barrier, the mourners can no longer hear anything.
The sound of drums therefore works as a signal, a keynote or a soundmark used by both communities to define territories, build identities and make their presence felt even if it is only ghostly. As such, it pervades everyday life and is likely to constitute a traumatic sound. However, it can also be freed from its geographical and historical context, thus turning out to be a poetic matter or matrix. A drumming different from that of the Orangemen and Hibs can be heard in Station Island:

Morning stir in the hostel. A pot
hooked on forged links. Soot flakes. Plumping water.
The open door letting in the sunlight.
Hearthsmoke rambling and a thud of earthenware

drumming me back until I saw the mug
beyond my reach on its high shelf, the one
patterned with cornflowers, blue sprig after sprig
repeating round it, as quiet as a milestone,

old and glazed and haircracked. (Heaney 1984, 87)

This indoor scene in still-life style is animated by sound effects that stimulate the speaker’s auditory imagination. Indeed, the structure and dynamics of this strongly visual poem rely on rhythm. With their series of nominal sentences, the first lines follow the movement of a progressive awakening. Their many full stops seem to separate rhythmical units without them showing any metric consistency. With the phrase “plumping water,” the meaning of which is matched by its plosives, one may think that some energy is being progressively released, especially since the sentences then lengthen with a momentum that keeps defying metrics. Even the smoke rings seem to be making noise since they are rambling and the imperative “hear the smoke” might be encrypted in the noun “hearthsmoke.” The enjambment from one stanza to another draws the readers’ attention to the verb “drumming,” interestingly used transitively with a human being (the speaker) as a direct complement. This drumming is not an object of perception, it is a subject taking control of the speaker’s memory, drawing him back to the primitive times of his childhood or even further back in history, for the milestone can be reminiscent of Delphi’s omphalos which, as mentioned before, was dear to Heaney. As the water is plumping he is pumping again. This is a perfect example of “anamnesis,” an “effect of reminiscence in which a past situation or atmosphere is brought back to the listener’s consciousness, provoked by a particular signal or sonic context” (Augoyard and Torgue, 21).

The pleasant reminiscence of a peaceful domestic space which is at the origin and the core of this poem is therefore triggered by a percussive, iterative sound like that produced by drums—or by fingertips marking beats, like Heaney’s on his steering wheel when driving made him coin new lines (O’Driscoll 446). The pattern printed on the mug offers a visual equivalent of a rhythm which is, this time, regular, with the repetition of the monosyllabic word “sprig” imitating the motif of the frieze. The milestone is not mute but “quiet” and the breaks signalled by the full stops are not silences but pauses thanks to which words can resound. This “drumming,” far from bringing back traumatic memories, leads the way to a new sonic realm.

Heaney’s work therefore testifies to the power of drumming, be it creative or destructive. Even though the impacts left by sounds are not as easily detectable as those left by bullets, Heaney shows “what a sonic body can do” (Goodman 16) to the land as a “giant body whose language reveals symptoms of real historical contusions”
(Hart 66), or to real bodies and minds. This is when the figure of the witness merges with that of the doctor. In “No Man’s Land the speaker introduces himself as a deserter who would be as helpless as a doctor facing a corpse if he came back to the battlefield:

I deserted, shut out
their wounds’ fierce awning,
those palms like streaming webs.

Must I crawl back now,
spirochete, abroad between
shred-hung wire and thorn,
to confront my smeared doorstep
and what lumpy dead?
Why do I unceasingly
arrive too late to condone
infected sutures
and ill-knit bone? (Heaney 1972, 30)

“Shut[ting] out” these wounds, the poet seems to refuse to speak for the “dumb mouths” they are, to borrow an image from Julius Caesar (Shakespeare 1623a, 249). But he cannot accept silence either and is therefore facing a dead end. Comparing himself to a bacterium (“spirochete”), he fears he might make the infection worse. He cannot cure but can observe and record, and the precision with which the bog bodies are described in Wintering Out and North are reminiscent of a coroner’s report. However, the Grauballe Man is not seen as a corpse: “Who will say ‘corpse’ / to his vivid cast?” (Heaney 1975, 36); and it is a living body that is auscultated in “Orange Drums, Tyrone, 1966”, for “The air is pounding like a stethoscope” (Heaney 1975, 68).

As eardrums are hit by sound-waves, so bodies and minds are marked by sound events presented again in the form of written words thanks to Heaney’s “echoic memory” (Bonnet 29). The readers are not exposed to the sounds themselves, but to their traces as recorded by the attentive author. When the poet-as-earwitness’ listening becomes more acute and active, he resembles a doctor sounding bodies and hoping that not all hearts will beat in step with sectarian drums. But the figure of the doctor is combined with another one for whom acute hearing matters as much: that of the spy always eavesdropping on his surroundings, as familiar as they may be.

The poet and the spy

If the poet’s first task is to listen, there is, however, an essential difference between the poet’s and the spy’s practices as conceived by Bonnet. According to him, the spy’s ear is trained to decipher, check or read information, thus losing its primary function (hearing all present or emerging sound events) and regrettably focusing on sounds that make sense like morphemes in speech (Bonnet 140). Looking for clues in a highly directional and selective way, the spy’s ears turn out to be deaf to the surroundings they should on the contrary embrace joyfully (Bonnet 147). Heaney’s conception of listening is much closer to this enthusiastic embracing than to the oriented eavesdropping Bonnet associates with spying, yet it remains metaphorically linked to the figure of the spy as analysed, this time, by Peter Szendy in his study of “the aesthetics of espionage.”
Wintering Out immediately invites the readers to be all ears so as to eavesdrop or “overhear” in the sense Szendy gives to this verb, taking the prefix “over” as a kind of superlative: to listen in the most intense way (Szendy 26). “Fodder,” the first poem in this collection, is indeed about “eaves” projecting from a haystack and “falling” as they weather (Heaney 1972, 3). The description takes on an auditory dimension: as “eaves” is a poetic word for “eyes,” it seems that the eyelids of some sleepy eyes are closing, and the linguistic components of the verb “eavesdrop” seem to be disseminated, encrypted in the participle “falling” and its subject “eaves.” The next poem, “Bog Oak,” can help decode this invitation to eavesdrop as the word is this time used in its full form:

I might tarry
with the moustached
dead, the creel-fillers,
or eavesdrop on
their hopeless wisdom (Heaney 1972, 4)

Eavesdropping and listening carefully remain central in Heaney’s later collections, even in poems that deal with marital or filial love. Field Work offers another occurrence of the word “eaves” with the line “Let me listen under your eaves” (Heaney 1979, 46) in a love poem to Marie, Heaney’s wife. The sonnet sequence “Clearances,” written after the death of Heaney’s mother, starts with the following imperative: “Teach me now to listen,
/to strike it rich behind the linear black” (Heaney 1987, 26). It seems that there exists a lode of sound the poet may learn how to tap so that his lines, printed in black ink, will address the ear as much as the eye.

While the omnipresence of surveillance devices is blatant in Carson’s works, cameras and bugs remain discretely concealed but nonetheless crucial in Heaney’s. Technology and its opaque terminology pervades Carson’s Belfast Confetti (1989, “Pye Pockerfones” 35, 78, “a Telescope Starlight II Night Observation Device (NOD) – Noddy, for short, […] the stoolie-pigeon spool” 38, “IR filter” 78, “surveillance radar” 92), where the structure of the panopticon turns out to be central (79). In his novel Exchange Place, it seems any character can be “a spy, at least in a manner of speaking” (2012, 92). The “parasitic transmitters, Trojan Horse transistors, synaptic grafts or buds” that may be “planted everywhere: in phones and door-handles and light fittings” (2012, 164) create an atmosphere of dissimulation and dissemblance where people are “talking of this when they mean that, doing that instead of this” (2012, 165). Heaney’s references to such devices are far less frequent, but North records once and for all the fact that places like hotels were bugged during the Troubles: “zoom lenses, recorders and coiled leads / Litter the hotels” (Heaney 1975, 57).

Even though direct references to the technology of surveillance remain occasional, Heaney developed a poetic interest in listening devices. For him, there exists a lode of sound he may learn how to tap so that his lines, printed in black ink, will address the ear as much as the eye. Carefully crafting each poem, the poet sometimes seems to end up wiretapping his own lines as an answer to the stifling atmosphere of constant surveillance. In “Mycenae Lookout,” a poem indirectly dealing with the Troubles as Heaney rewrites Aeschylus’s Oresteia, the watchman is paradoxically a “blind spot” condemned to silence as “the ox would lurch against the gong [his tongue] / And deaden it” (Heaney 1996b, 29). The reality of this war is then revealed through sound, not sight: the watchman can hear Clytemnestra’s “love-shout” resounding in the entire palace like a battle cry, but the watchman himself is spied on and has to watch his
tongue since the palace’s roof is “like an eardrum” (Heaney 1996b, 35). If the poet wants to gain sway, his post is therefore not so much the sentinel’s look-out as that giant eardrum dominating the scene. He has to perch on a listening post as Sweeney does on his beech, rising above the ivy’s “tapers” (Heaney 1984, 100), a word signalling that even the deepest forests can be bugged. As he taps the sap of this beech, the poet seems to wiretap nature so as to record its tapping rhythms in his lines. Bugging the bog, playing on words like “tapers” or building listening posts in his lines, Heaney appropriates the surveillance technologies he disapproves of so as to turn them into poetic weapons.

And he would wiretap all lines, not only his own. As a teacher, he intended to turn his students’ ears into “bugging devices,” a metaphor originating from his reading of Solzhenitzyn:

In his novel The First Circle, Solzhenitzyn sets the action in a prison camp on the outskirts of Moscow where the inmates are all highly skilled technicians forced to labour at projects dreamed up by Stalin. The most important of these is an attempt to devise a mechanism to bug a phone, but what is to be special about this particular bugging device is that it will not simply record the voice and the message but that it will identify the essential sound patterns of the speaker’s voice; it will discover, in the words of the narrative, ‘what it is that makes every human voice unique’, so that no matter how the speaker disguises his accent or changes his language, the fundamental structure of his voice will be caught. The idea was that a voice is like a fingerprint, possessing a constant and unique signature that can, like a fingerprint, be recorded and employed for identification. Now one of the purposes of a literary education as I experienced it was to turn the student’s ear into a poetic bugging device, so that a piece of verse denuded of name and date could be identified by its diction, tropes and cadences. And this secret policing of English verse was also based on the idea of a style as a signature. (Heaney 1980, 43)

This excerpt shows how crucial it is to make the difference between, on the one hand, the totalitarian listening denounced by Solzhenitzyn, a Stalinist dream in which people would be as deaf as Bonnet’s spies, and on the other, the poetic listening Heaney practices and trains his students for. Heaney’s approach to literature is not simply about close reading, it is about close listening, even if Charles Bernstein hadn’t coined the phrase yet. Learning how to identify a voice is a first step in a process of control and appropriation remedying the situation described in “The Ministry of Fear”: “Ulster was British but with no rights on / The English lyric” (Heaney 1975, 65). Countering the policy imposed by the Ministry of Fear, the poet-as-teacher and his students take control of metropolitan voices to make them fructify on their own ground, according to the double meaning of the participle “policing” (to regulate and to cultivate). Politics are meddling with aesthetics again. This time, the sonic battlefield is not the farm but the classroom and the poems themselves. Heaney’s daily task as a teaching poet reflected concerns that were both circumstantial and universal.

Still according to Heaney’s conception of teaching as explained through the bugging metaphor, listening is an active practice shared by writers and readers alike, a posture different from the one he sketches when describing Dorothy and William Wordsworth listening to the river-like sound of the air in the wood near Dove Cottage: “The couple listen, they surrender, the noise of water and the voice of the air minister to them” (Heaney 1980, 68). Heaney’s auditory experiences can be intense but they don’t imply a similar abandon. On the contrary, Heaney stages listeners carefully lending their ears
to their surrounding, with a tension that makes complete surrender impossible. See for instance how the following speaker from Station Island, someone guiding a child around a farm, insists on the fact that his ear is experienced, trained: “I heard much that you could not hear” (Heaney 1984, 36). One could also think of Heaney’s recurrent use of the word “strain”: in the excerpt from Mossbawn quoted above, the hymns that draw the listener’s attention form a “fervent melancholy strain” (Heaney 1980, 20) towards which the ear strains in its turn, as does that of the poet portrayed in Crediting Poetry, “straining to hear the totally persuasive voice behind all the other informing voices,” “straining towards a strain” (Heaney 1996a, 51). Heaney associates the tension of such strains with poetic maturity in an essay on Yeats stating that “the mature music is not a lulling but an alerting strain” (Heaney 1980, 72). From this perspective, sounds are bait to the ear but listeners remain active, tense, as their desire to listen is never fully satisfied.

Listening actively is part of Heaney’s “poetics of responsibility” (Ní Riordáin). It is important to “take the strain,” as Heaney says in the last line of “A Kite for Michael and Christopher (Heaney 1984, 44), handing over the string that directs the “tightened drumhead” of a kite flying over the land like one more eardrum surveying the place. As the last poem in North already suggested, the poet cares as much for the ear as for the people, for the two are linked:

I sit weighing and weighing
My responsible tristia.
For what? For the ear? For the people? (Heaney 1975, 73)

As he shoulders the responsibility to listen, the poet develops his own art of counter-intelligence (Quément 41-42). “I’m no Cold War hero,” said Heaney when asked if he had smuggled in or out any books or manuscripts when travelling between the eastern and western blocks. But he did portray himself as a secret agent at the service of poetry.

Contrary to what poems like “England’s Difficulty” or “Exposure” seem to suggest (Bennett 104; Vendler 87), the figure of the double agent might not be entirely negative. “[F]orked-tongue on the border-bit” (Heaney 1975, 58), “whispering morse (Heaney 1975, 60), Heaney could be considered as a traitor by any side: while some Irishmen and women must have felt the resentment clearly expressed by the nationalist Heaney meets on a train—“When, for fuck’s sake, are you going to write / Something for us?”—(Heaney 1996b, 25)—other readers thought that Heaney’s North was advocating for sectarian violence (Carson 1975) or feeding people with a simplistic ideology (Lloyd 13-40). The ambiguity of his position has been pointed out (Longley 140-69), but it might be a fruitful ambiguity rather than a deplorable one.

In fact, “England’s Difficulty” (Heaney 1998, 85) might not be so much about Ireland’s opportunity as about the poet’s responsibility. As the poem explains, the little Heaney’s everyday life during the Second World War mostly consisted in “mov[ing] like a double agent among the big concepts.” While nationalists hoping for the defeat of the UK praised Lord Haw Haw for his propaganda (“He’s an artist, this Haw Haw”), Heaney’s family sided with “the enemies of Ulster.” Heaney then recalls becoming “[a]n adept at banter,” “cross[ing] the lines with carefully enunciated passwords” and “report[ing] back to nobody,” thus elaborating a debatable but efficient defensive strategy. If the double agent can be seen as a figure of the poet it is because, in Heaney’s fictions, he is “neither internee nor informer” (Heaney 1975, 73), a “dual citizen” (Heaney 1987, 15)
with a “middle voice” whose “cunning” (Heaney 1975, 32) is to be differentiated from duplicity. As awful as wars may be, it seems there are strategies the poet can learn from them, listening from a distance. Alert and all ears, this ambassador from the “Republic of Conscience” (Heaney 1987, 15) served his fellow citizens without being at the service of any of the three parties involved in the conflict (republicans, unionists, and the British army). This is how his poetic voice became engaged in the peacebuilding process on the one hand, tapping into the “unifying power” of sound (Obert 10), especially music, and in a relentless daily sonic warfare on the other, a conflict of another kind that is partly independent from specifically Northern Irish issues.

Engaging in sonic warfare

Books may not make any sound but the poetic voice is a sonic weapon for Heaney. In “Whatever You Say Say Nothing,” he seems to take off a gag, refusing the silence imposed by the Northern Irish saying. Indeed, the normative voice of the community anonymously spreading the title’s imperative is answered by the poet’s individual statement “Yet I live here, I live here too, I sing” (Heaney 1975, 57), a statement echoed in the following section “Of the ‘wee six’ I sing” (Heaney 1975, 59), where the simple present sounds very much like that of a speech act. Written in response to a journalist in search of “views / On the Irish thing” (Heaney 1975, 57)—a typical euphemism—this poem opposes Heaney’s own voice and sound memories to the ubiquitous clichés in the media. A simple observation such as the one he makes in “Triptych,” “Our island is full of comfortless noises” (Heaney 1979, 5) constitutes, indirectly, a defense of poetry in times of war, when “Song and Suffering” (Heaney 1988, xii), as Heaney allegorically represented them, seem hardly compatible. Indeed, the allusion to the scene from The Tempest in which Caliban says to Stephano and Trinculo “Be not afeard, the isle is full of noises” (Shakespeare 1623b, 87) suggests that other sounds might win over the “comfortless noises.” As Heaney writes in his essay “On Poetry and Professing”: “‘Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not’: that, as a description of the good of poetry and of literature in general, will do” (Heaney 2002, 69-70). It is a moral principle that is phrased here: the root of poetic good is therefore in the listening and in the resounding. The silence imposed by the sirens that interrupted Heaney and David Hammond when they were on their way to record a few poems and songs (Heaney 1988, xii) was necessary, but temporary.

Moreover, it seems that Heaney’s intense listening and sonic resistance are not limited to the context of armed conflicts. For him both are part of an everyday life marked by conflicts or tensions. One can notice, for instance, that he draws attention to “the wrap-around vulgarity and vacuity of the muzak and media we’re all made to suffer” (O’Driscoll 2008, 469) and mentions the Muzak company again when comparing Oscar Wilde’s “Ballad of Reading Gaol” to Wilfred Owen’s war poetry (Heaney 1995, 94). Heaney experienced the spreading of Muzak’s background soundtracks around shops and diners and all sorts of venues since the company became successful as early as the 1950s. However, he may not have known that it was founded by a Major General, George Owen Squier, teaming with Harold Burris-Meyer, a master of theatrical scenery who, during World War II, had also helped the army with operations requiring sound effects (Volcler 2017). The Muzak backgrounds we are all “made to suffer” are only one instance of the increasingly common intermingling of the military with the civil,
especially through entertainment (Volcler 2017, Goodman), and of a pervasive sonic warfare going on in public and private spaces. As Muzak and its equivalents aimed at taking control of ears and minds, Heaney could only shoulder the responsibility to engage in the “politics of frequency” by broadcasting poetry, which he did literally, regularly and directly into people’s homes thanks to radio waves. Nevertheless, the radio is not Heaney’s only sonic weapon.

Comparing the power of lyricism to “the note of the soprano which cracks glass” (Heaney 1988, xx), Heaney metaphorically ranges poetry amongst the weapons based on high frequencies and ultrasounds like the “squawk-box” mentioned earlier. Surprisingly enough, the poet does have something in common with the engineers working on real sonic weapons to be used on frontlines, in cases of civil unrest, or simply on streets like the “mosquito” devices (originally conceived to get rid of rats) that were meant to drive young people away from places where they were considered as pests. This common point is an interest in what Steve Goodman calls the “unsound,” frequencies that cannot be heard because they are either too low or too high, but which are still sound-waves, sonic bodies likely to impact anyone exposed to them. “Sonic warfare is [...] as much about the logistics of imperception (unsound) as it is perception,” Steve Goodman writes (Goodman 31), and Heaney shares in this logic. While the word unsound “aptly describes the colonization of inaudible frequencies by control,” it “also names that which is not yet audible within the normal bandwidth of hearing—new rhythms, resonances, textures, and syntheses” (Goodman 228-229), that is to say some poets’ materials, as when Heaney speaks of T.S. Eliot’s “bat-frequency” (Heaney 2002, 29).

Bats find their way (and food) thanks to ultrasonic echo-sounding, a technique Heaney associates with another of his predecessors, James Joyce: “echo-sounding” (Heaney 1984, 94) is part of the advice he receives from the ghost of Joyce he meets in Station Island. In the same collection, “A Bat on the Road” begins with a quote from A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man: “A batlike soul waking to consciousness of itself in darkness and secrecy and loneliness” (Heaney 1984, 40; Joyce 144). Readers are invited to be all ears so as not to miss the “slight / bat-thump and flutter” coming with the following lines. This bat is not only the prostitute from Joyce’s novel. It is also a figure of the blind author:

fly away over ashpits and netting wire;
invited by the brush of a word like peignoir,
rustles and glimpses, shot silk, the stealth of floods
So close to me I could hear her breathing (Heaney 1984, 40)

These lines defy religious puritanism at the same time as they celebrate the subtle erotics of language (Allison 31): it is not the peignoir itself but its soft foreign sounds that tease the speaker, or an imperceptible breathing. Heaney’s italics signal the phrase comes again from A Portrait: these words about breathing were literally inspired by Joyce as they echoed in Heaney’s memory.

It seems, in fact, that there exists a whole broadcasting network of Irish poets relying on echo-location as a way to find one’s geographical and stylistic bearings. In her “Letter to Friends,” Leontia Flynn compares “the cacophony / of texts and tweets and emails” to “bat-squeaks in a cave / to steer us in the dark” (39), antiphonically relating to them to find her own mode of echo-sounding. One of Paul Muldoon’s most famous poems is his “Sonogram” (342), inspired by the use of ultrasound in medical imaging.
John Kilfeather, the narrator in Carson’s novel *Exchange Place*, also undergoes an echocardiogram, “familiarly referred to as an ECHO among the medical profession” (96) and remembers a friend of his who had “one of those big old Echo, or was it EKO valve radios” (133) which worked best in the dark.

With Eliot and Joyce as examples, Heaney makes room for the unsound and its subversive potential. Frequencies at risk of remaining unheard are an alternative bandwidth towards which the poet’s ear is straining, to the point that they seem to constitute a kind of alternative soundscape. Defining poetry as an “undersong” (Heaney 1991, 59) or “undermusic” (Heaney 1995, 29, 85, 135), Heaney draws attention to the powerful under or counter current it constitutes. Moreover, contrary to what the words “song” and “music” might seem to imply, these poetic frequencies on the threshold of hearing are not necessarily melodious. Sometimes they evoke the bass of a drone, like the “dynamo-hum” Heaney perceives in Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine* (Heaney 1995, 29) or the “turning, humming resonance” he enjoys in Dylan Thomas’s lines (Heaney 1995, 133). One may also think of “Wheels within Wheels” and the hum of the bike wheel Heaney loved to turn as a child: “the space between the hub and rim / hummed with transparency” (Heaney 1991, 46). In this synaesthetic experience, the humming is to the ear what transparency is to sight—something that is hardly hearable yet perceptible—and it is what makes both the memory and the lines powerful. It is also a droning sound, the antiphon to the drone of helicopters, like the poetic drumming resisting the drums of sectarianism.

A lengthy study of the poem “Canopy,” from Heaney’s last collection *The Human Chain*, will finally show how Heaney’s poetry may help readers regain control of their sonic environments and everyday lives in a state of constant sonic warfare. “Canopy” was written in memory of an installation set up by Winston David Ward in the yard of Harvard University: small speakers wrapped in fabric were hung in trees that were “turning a young green” (Heaney 2010, 44) when Heaney saw them. His description of the installation evokes subtle sounds on the threshold of silence:

Shadow Adam’s apples
That made sibilant ebb and flow,
Speech-gutterings, desultory

Hush and backwash and echo.
It was like a recording
Of antiphonal responses
In the congregation of leaves.

Or a wood that talked in its sleep.
Reeds on a riverbank
Going over and over their secret. (Heaney 2010, 44)

Hanging in the trees, the speakers are like talking fruit revealing what Roland Barthes called the “rustle” (*bruissement*) of language, for the sounds they broadcast are not so much those of nature as phonemes to be picked and relished.

“Canopy” shows the power of “echo” not simply because the word rhymes with “flow,” but because echoes multiply within the poem, to such an extent that Heaney’s personal memory of this installation can be appropriated in many different ways: the lines quoted above can trigger childhood memories of the reeds whispering Midas’s secret, or more scholarly reminiscences of antiphonal literary forms, and the poem is itself an answer to the scene from the *Divine Comedy* known as the wood of the suicides. Dante is
directly referred to: “Dante’s whispering wood— / The wood of the suicides— / Had been magicked to lover’s lane” (Heaney 2010, 45), but the text might also be alluding to Beckett. Indeed, the speakers are said to be like “bat-fruit in the gloaming”: if the image brings in again the significance of ultrasounds, the word “gloaming” might work as a double allusion, to the popular love song “Roamin’ in the Gloamin’” on the one hand, and Beckett’s draft for “Rough for Theatre I” entitled “The Gloaming” on the other. The latter is a fragment in which a character as blind as a bat expresses his nostalgia for twilight, the time of day when “Canopy” is set, and asks “[h]ow the trees are doing.” Heaney seems to answer that they are not doing so bad after all and to elaborate on the blind man’s last cue: “I can stay for hours listening to all the sounds” (Beckett 45).

In “Canopy,” Heaney manages to give an idea of what Ward’s installation sounded like at the same time as he mixes this memory with other sonic traces left by his readings and revived on the occasion of his visit or when writing the poem. It should be noted that the poem offers a positive experience of what Schafer called “schizophonia,” “the split between an original sound and its electroacoustic reproduction” (Schafer 273). Although Heaney is a lover of nature and its soundscapes, he doesn’t reject this canopy of sounds as the copy of a paradise lost, for schizophonia achieves something here—the affective mobilisation of an audience through sound:

People were cocking their ears,
Gathering, quietening,
Stepping on to the grass,
Stopping and holding hands. (Heaney 2010, 44)

As people “cock” their ears they are, in a way, arming themselves, standing ready to backfire. While most sonic weapons, especially the ones aiming at crowd dispersal, rely on centrifugal force, the power of this sound installation lies in the centripetal force it exerts on people who suddenly become aware of their surroundings and stop in the middle of their activities or thoughts to hold hands in this Human Chain, celebrating humane feelings as well as, maybe, humanities, since the scene takes place in Harvard Yard. Like Ward’s installation, Heaney’s lines contribute to a “tactical deployment whose objective is that of intensification, to the heightening of collective sensation, an attractive, almost magnetic, or vortical force, a force that sucks bodies in toward its source” (Goodman 34), firstly because they keep a trace of Ward’s ephemeral in situ artwork based on the most labile and fleeting material that sound is, and secondly because they might in their turn make people stop and cock their ears. As disconnected from political issues as it may seem, Heaney’s lyricism can nevertheless be considered as an engagement in a ubiquitous and ongoing sonic warfare.

While World War II hardly had any impact on Mossbawn and the family life there, the Troubles left many sonic traces in Heaney’s mind and lines. But there is something even worse than the sounds of bombs and sirens and constant surveillance: the obliteration of hearing, as in the silent nightmare Heaney imagines wars to be like (“a bad dream with no sound” Heaney 1975, 60). Whether in the context of an armed conflict like the Troubles, or in that of the more latent and yet deeply impacting sonic warfare going on in post-modern societies, Heaney praises listening as an essential principle. His entire work can be read as training for the ear. It testifies to the poet’s attention to his surroundings (sonic or other) and expects a similar attention from the reader-listener. Under the influence of the detective and secret agent stories he
listened to as a child, and later on in the context of the Troubles, Heaney grew conscious of the power of sound and the necessity to stay alert and listen even in times of peace. His poetic relation to military surveillance and sonic warfare may be defined as one of appropriation and subversion. If the bugging devices he developed were only metaphorical, he did appropriate for real another military tool that had quickly become part of the everyday life of civilians—the radio—by becoming a broadcaster literally involved in the politics of frequency at a time when the BBC was much dominated by English voices. Amongst the sound experts referred to throughout this article, Juliette Volcler, Steve Goodman and François J. Bonnet share the same concern: how can we re-appropriate our sonic environments to avoid being controlled through sounds and the ideologies they convey? Although it is nowhere near the experimental works Volcler has in mind, Heaney’s poetry constitutes one of the “passionate sonic gesture[s]” (“geste sonore passionné” Volcler 2011, 6) she calls for, or an aesthetic resistance that, quite unexpectedly, shares features with the afro-futurism studied by Goodman. Heaney explores what is imperceptible, unheard or unsound. In doing so, he walks on the same ground as that explored by the engineers working on sonic weapons, at the same time as he follows one of Bonnet’s paths out of the discursive and ideological uses of sound. While real sound-waves can trigger physical and psychological reactions that are hard to control, from a mere finger-drumming to deep anxiety, their re-production in poetry does not subject the readers to the same predetermined cause-effect relationships. On the contrary, Heaney’s verbal handling of soundscapes is likely to complicate and challenge these relations, revealing the mutability and the semantic richness of sounds that may have seemed univocal. Printed words belong in the realm of the unsound but can become sonic bodies and re-sound if readers train and strain their ears.

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ABSTRACTS

Although the violence of the Troubles is sometimes directly shown in Seamus Heaney's poetry, it is far more often indirectly suggested by sounds breaking into the domestic space or natural environment. In the poetic soundscapes his words compose, helicopter throbs and all sorts of drumming constitute a continuous background drone punctuated by many a blast. As it collects the various testimonies of a poet who was also an earwitness, this oeuvre keeps a trace of sonic attacks even if they do not leave impacts on walls or scars on bodies. This article will examine how Heaney's poetic voice appropriates military bugging devices and engages in a sonic warfare, retaliating against intrusive sound-waves that haunt minds as much as homes.

Si la violence des Troubles est parfois directement montrée dans la poésie de Seamus Heaney, elle est bien plus souvent indirectement suggérée par des intrusions sonores dans l'espace domestique ou l'environnement naturel. Dans le paysage sonore poétique que le poète élabore, le roulement des tambours et le vol des hélicoptères constituent un bourdon constant que ponctuent de nombreuses détonations. En tant qu'elle recueille divers témoignages auditifs, cette œuvre garde la trace d'attaques sonores bien que celles-ci ne laissent pas d'impact sur les murs ni de cicatrices sur les corps. Cet article propose de voir comment la voix poétique de Heaney détourné les dispositifs d'écoute militaires pour s'engager dans une guerre sonore, répondant aux ondes intrusives qui hantent les esprits comme autant de maisons.

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Mots-clés: Seamus Heaney, études du son, environnement sonore, Seconde Guerre mondiale, Troubles, espionnage

Keywords: Seamus Heaney, sound studies, sonic environment, World War II, Troubles, espionage
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Prospero's Island
Mr. Smith Goes West : La portée politique du jeu de James Stewart dans le Western (1939-1964)

David Roche

Avec Gary Cooper, Henry Fonda et bien sûr John Wayne, James Stewart est certainement la star masculine qui a le plus marqué l’histoire du Western hollywoodien classique. Mais contrairement aux trois autres, sa présence dans le Western est déséquilibrée, concentrée quasi exclusivement sur la deuxième moitié de sa carrière – Destry Rides Again / Femme ou démon (Universal, George Marshall, 1939) fait figure d’exception, tandis que Of Human Hearts (MGM, Clarence Brown, 1938) n’est pas à proprement parler un Western mais plutôt un mélodrame historique aux airs de pastorale qui se déroule dans un territoire déjà américain (l’Ohio, devenu État en 1803) et qui se clôt pendant la guerre de Sécession. Visiblement, la présence de Stewart dans le Western n’avait rien d’une évidence pour ses contemporains, et ce n’est d’ailleurs qu’après le succès de Winchester ’73 (Universal, Anthony Mann, 1950) que les producteurs de Broken Arrow / La Flèche brisée (20th Fox, Delmer Daves, 1950) ont décidé de sortir le film que Darryl Zanuck avait mis au placard (Davis 28). Ce tournant s’explique à la fois par la carrière de l’acteur et par le contexte culturel. En 1950, Stewart a 42 ans ; il cherche aussi bien à s’adapter au vieillissement qu’à innover en tant qu’artiste. La crédibilité de Stewart en tant que héros de Western s’explique aussi par la redéfinition de la masculinité qui, selon Wendy Chapman Peek, a lieu aux États-Unis à la suite de la Seconde Guerre mondiale ; cette nouvelle masculinité ne serait plus tournée uniquement vers une démonstration de force mais se définirait par la capacité à mener à bien ses objectifs : il s’agit avant tout d’être « compétent » (Peek prend d’ailleurs Broken Arrow comme exemple) (Peek 206-19 ; voir aussi Mayer 155). L’image de Stewart, si elle était aux antipodes de la masculinité dure chère à Theodore Roosevelt incarnée par des acteurs comme Cooper et Wayne, est plus en accord avec cette masculinité dont le courage et la ténacité ne reposent pas entièrement sur le physique.
Richard Dyer définit la « star image » comme un conglomérat d’éléments filmiques et paratextuels, comprenant les multiples rôles dans les films ainsi que les discours qui circulent dans les médias (articles, entretiens, publicités, etc.) (60, 63) ; la « star image » est quelque chose que l’industrie hollywoodienne tente de contrôler, mais elle dépasse au final l’image que veulent construire aussi bien la star que les studios. La « star image » de Stewart, c’est celle d’un homme du peuple, associé, selon son biographe Marc Eliot, aux « devoirs civiques » et à une « morale inébranlable » (31-32) ; le terme « folksy », qui évoque l’homme du peuple rustique, revient souvent pour la décrire (Davis 31-32).

Luc Moullet décrit Stewart comme « l’homme tel qu’il est » (123), capable d’interpréter aussi bien un personnage banal que d’exception (119), de se fondre dans un groupe (118). Stewart est, comme Henry Fonda, celui qui porte les valeurs populistes de la small town America, les valeurs de l’amabilité, de l’honnêteté et de la tradition associées à cette Amérique mythique resurgissant dans les années 1930. C’est cette image que l’on trouve, bien sûr, dans Mr. Smith Goes to Washington / Mr. Smith au sénat (Columbia, Frank Capra, 1939) mais aussi dans Destry Rides Again, dont les héros défendent les valeurs américaines – l’éducation et la justice – contre la corruption (qu’elle soit fédérale ou locale), avec bon sens, cœur et franchise. Selon Marguerite Chabrol, Stewart est aussi employé pour « dé-sophistiquer » certaines comédies screwball (216-17), adaptées de pièces de Broadway, telles que You Can’t Take It With You / Vous ne l'emporterez pas avec vous (Columbia, Capra, 1938) et The Philadelphia Story / Indiscrétions (MGM, George Cukor, 1940). Selon l’historien du cinéma Robert Sklar, le screwball visait à faire oublier les problèmes des classes populaires dans les années 1930 en se moquant des riches mais aussi en les rendant ridicules et donc sympathiques (207). Stewart remplace ainsi le Britannique Laurence Olivier dans l’adaptation filmique de No Time for Comedy / Finie la comédie (Warner Bros., William Keighley, 1940), américainise la Hongrie d’Ernst Lubitsch dans The Shop Around the Corner / Rendez-vous (MGM, 1940) (Moullet 117) et doit, avec Destry Rides Again et The Philadelphia Story, « réhabiliter auprès du grand public américain » Marlene Dietrich et Katherine Hepburn en les rendant plus « humaine[s] » (Coe 66).

Dans un article intitulé « The Star Auteur: Jimmy Stewart Out West », Alex Davis soutient que la Seconde Guerre mondiale a été un véritable tournant dans la vie et dans la carrière de la star. Celui-ci fait partie des acteurs américains comme Clark Gable et Henri Fonda qui partent au combat. L’industrie exploite alors cette décision pour renforcer l’image de la star comme homme du peuple et ambassadeur des valeurs américaines traditionnelles ; elle essaye d’étouffer les traits qui ne collent pas à cette image, dont les plaintes de Stewart concernant les conditions de vie dans l’armée et le traumatisme qu’il subit suite à sa dernière mission de combat (Davis 31-34). De toute évidence, Hollywood s’emploie à maintenir l’image du Mr. Smith de 1939. Au retour de la guerre, Stewart affirme vouloir tourner dans des comédies et surtout pas dans des films de guerre ; il s’illustre en tant que George Bailey dans un nouveau film de Capra, It’s a Wonderful Life / La Vie est belle (RKO, 1946), retrouve aussi la small town America dans Magic Town (RKO, William A. Wellman, 1947) et revient à la screwball avec You Gotta Stay Happy / L’extravagante Mlle Dee (Universal, H.C. Potter, 1948). Mais en 1948, Stewart signe aussi sa première collaboration avec Alfred Hitchcock avec Rope / La Corde (Warner Bros.) ; elle sera suivie par trois productions Paramount, Rear Window / Fenêtre sur cour (1954), The Man Who Knew Too Much / L’homme qui en savait trop (1956) et enfin Vertigo / Sueurs Froides (1958). Hitchcock met progressivement à jour un versant plus sombre de Stewart, entrapercu, selon Marguerite Chabrol, dans le personnage plus...

4 Il ne s’agit bien entendu pas de proposer une vision téléologique de la carrière de Stewart du « folksy » vers la noirceur1, mais plutôt de constater, à la suite de Murray Pomerance (61-85), la coexistence dans l’image de Stewart de Mr. Smith et de son double plus sombre, ainsi que la manière dont certains traits passent en arrière-plan au profit d’autres, et sont sollicités, bien entendu, selon les rôles – en 1959, Stewart incarne ainsi un nouvel avatar de Mr. Smith, l’avocat modeste Paul Biegler en quête de justice dans *Anatomy of a Murder / Anatomie d’un meurtre* d’Otto Preminger. Ce qui m’intéresse plus particulièrement, c’est d’explorer comment s’exprime le potentiel politique de l’image « populiste » de Stewart à travers son jeu, dans quelques-uns de ses Westerns, notamment *Destry Rides Again*, *Broken Arrow*, *The Naked Spur*, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* et *Cheyenne Autumn*. Car Stewart, ne l’oublions pas, est aussi celui qui se révolte au nom de ses valeurs. Comme Davis le souligne, « ce qui transparaît dans le personnage de Stewart [dans *Bend of the River / Les Affameurs* (Universal, Anthony Mann, 1952)] n’est pas le noble Destry, mais la détermination féroce de Mr. Smith au Sénat, cette fois-ci transformée en soif de vengeance » (37, je traduis). À travers une analyse qui doit tout aux méthodologies élaborées par James Naremore, Jacqueline Nacache, Christian Viviani et d’autres, et qui puise d’ailleurs dans leurs analyses du jeu de Stewart, ainsi que dans celles de Luc Moullet, je vais tenter de répondre à la question suivante : comment le jeu de Stewart participe-t-il à interroger les injustices qui découlent de la construction de l’Ouest et de l’idéologie qui la sous-tend ? Autrement dit, comment une approche qui s’inscrit dans la lignée de la politique des acteurs chère à Moullet peut-elle participer à une lecture culturelle et politique des films ?

5 Naremore décrit Stewart comme un acteur contemporain doué aussi bien pour un jeu tout en retenue que pour la pantomime, qui emploie des touches personnelles pour les moments émotionnels, par exemple quand Stewart mord son poing pour signifier le désarroi de son personnage (286). Viviani cite Stewart en exemple d’un comédien qui, comme Robert Mitchum, Robert De Niro ou Al Pacino, « développe un catalogue de gestes expressifs, relevant le plus souvent du registre du théâtral, qu’il utilise de manière delsartienne sans pour autant être totalement un pur adepte de Delsarte » (140). Comme François Delsarte, Stewart vise à exprimer le naturel par un geste précis ou une inflexion de voix singulière, loin de cette codification des gestes qu’est le delsartisme promu par l’acteur américain Steele MacKay et ses disciples (Damour 19, 30). Au sujet du jeu de Stewart dans *Rear Window*, Naremore écrit : « Son interprétation
est certainement de celles le plus souvent liées au médium cinématographique : concentrée sur le visage et la partie supérieure du corps, elle met l’accent sur les tonalités de la peau, l’expression des yeux et le grain de la voix. » (284) Naremore insiste également sur l’importance de la silhouette grande et maigre (« lankiness ») de Stewart qui évoque la vertu populiste d’un Lincoln, et affirme que les films de la seconde période de sa carrière comme The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance ont énormément joué sur son apparence filiforme et fragile pour augmenter la tension dramaturgique d’une scène (Naremore 286, 289). Compte tenu du travail précis que Moulet a proposé sur la gestuelle de Stewart, l’analyse qui suit va se concentrer sur les trois éléments soulignés par Naremore : posture, voix et regard.

**Posture et mouvement**

Le travail sur les postures et mouvements de Stewart dans Destry Rides Again est, dans l’ensemble, assez minimal. Sa grande taille (chez Frenchie, il tient à peine dans le cadre de la porte) fait qu’il domine les autres personnages, renforçant son statut de repère moral pour les spectateurs ; ainsi, il est toujours visible, même pris dans le tumulte de la foule dans le saloon et filmé en plongée. Ses postures – mains sur les hanches ou accoudé contre un poteau – évoquent cette douceur presque « féminine » associée aux valeurs pacifistes : il est celui qui descend de la calèche avec un canari et un parasol plutôt qu’avec des armes. Ses gestes plus violents – quand il tape un des hommes de Kent sur le dos et surtout quand il tire avec les revolvers de Creepy – sont effectués avec une nonchalance qui accompagne son ton ironique. L’association du corps de Stewart à la féminité est exploitée dès sa scène d’introduction, où il perd l’équilibre dans une calèche et tombe sur Janice Tyndall. Elle l’est plus longuement lors de son affrontement avec le personnage incarné par Marlene Dietrich, qui donne lieu à un combat sur le mode du slapstick ; la scène met en avant ses longues jambes et longs bras qui lui permettent de maintenir Dietrich à distance, mais qui donnent tout autant l’impression d’une perte d’équilibre inéluctable, voire d’une fragmentation du corps en plusieurs morceaux tant les membres paraissent se disjoindre (Fig. 1). Le corps de Stewart semble ainsi incarner à la fois la droiture morale (et participe ainsi à sa fonction de baromètre moral) et la difficulté de la maintenir (et donc la limite du projet de Destry).

[Fig. 1]
Dans *Broken Arrow*, la haute taille de Stewart (1m 90) signifie également la droiture de Jeffords, mais il la partage avec Jeff Chandler (1m 93) qui interprète Cochise. Sa démarche et ses mouvements sont généralement calmes, évoquant à la fois la confiance en soi de l’homme de l’Ouest mais aussi la confiance qu’il souhaitait inspirer en autrui ; elle participe pleinement de la caractérisation de Jeffords comme celui qui souhaite apporter la paix. Stewart emploie ses mains à plusieurs reprises, de manière à améliorer la communication avec les Apaches, mais aussi pour signifier son agacement envers les villageois, et enfin pour se battre. La gestuelle ne laisse donc aucune place à l’ambiguïté concernant la fonction de la star : Stewart est bien le repère moral autour duquel les autres personnages s’organisent de façon assez binaire.

Dans *The Naked Spur*, Stewart fait appel à son passé athlétique (il était sportif à Princeton) en adoptant dès le départ la posture, la démarche et la gestuelle de l’homme de l’Ouest ; la première scène présente Howard Kemp comme un professionnel capable de surprendre Tate et lui confisquer son fusil. Agile, débrouillard, efficace, maîtrisé, ses qualités sont évoquées dans le titre puisque c’est en jetant un éperon au visage de Ben que Kemp sauvera Lina. Ses mouvements sont brutaux et explosifs, comme quand il pousse son prisonnier, Ben, qui tente de monter les hommes les uns contre les autres, ou quand il sauve Lina d’un guerrier Blackfoot qu’il rosse à coups de rocher. Si Kemp maîtrise le plus souvent ses adversaires (lors de sa bagarre avec Roy ou quand Ben tente de s’échapper), le film joue néanmoins sur la possibilité du déséquilibre du corps de Stewart afin d’exprimer les faiblesses du personnage. Dès le départ, Kemp ne parvient pas àgrimper sur le rocher (Fig. 2) et doit donc accepter l’assistance de Roy ; plus tard, il chute de cheval suite à une fourberie de Ben, ce qui l’amènera à révéler sa vulnérabilité à la fois physique (il boite) et psychologique (en proie au délire, il fait un cauchemar dans lequel figure sa bien-aimée perdue). Le fait qu’il parvienne à grimper sur le rocher pour sauver Lina à la fin du film signale ainsi sa
rédemption : son physique est mis au service non plus de sa cupidité (ambition maintenant prise en charge par Roy qui avait initialement exprimé son désir pour Lina), mais de valeurs plus nobles comme la chevalerie et l’amour.

Fig. 2

*The Naked Spur* (Anthony Mann, 1953) : Kemp chute après avoir tenté de grimper une falaise.

*The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* fait grand usage de la posture de Stewart. Si le Sénateur est présenté comme un homme grand et droit à la démarche lente mais confiante, bref, à la hauteur de l’institution qu’il représente, le jeune Stoddard est celui qui ne cesse d’être mis au sol par les hommes de l’Ouest qu’il rencontre : Doniphon, mais surtout Valance qui le fouette, lui fait un croche-pied et l’oblige à s’accroupir pour ramasser son revolver (Fig. 3). La relation entre ces trois corps est établie lors de l’altercation entre Doniphon et Valance dans le restaurant où le morceau de viande au sol devient une métonymie du corps de Stewart ; plus tard, le revolver des hommes de l’Ouest amène Stoddard à adopter des postures inconfortables. Stewart est, bien plus encore que dans *The Naked Spur*, ce corps qui menace de s’écrouler. Lors de leur première rencontre, Doniphon tient Stoddard par le col d’abord pour le maîtriser, ensuite pour l’empêcher de s’évanouir. La capacité de Stoddard de mettre au sol Doniphon est alors le signe qu’il contient lui aussi une part de l’homme de l’Ouest – ce sera d’ailleurs le deuxième argument que Doniphon convoque pour soutenir la candidature de l’avocat. D’une « délicatesse “si féminine” », Stoddard est, selon Aimé Agnel, parvenu à « s’approprier les vertus » de l’homme de l’Ouest tout en conservant un « courage éthique […] qui trouve son fondement dans la part la plus féminine et la plus obscure de son être » (159-60). Le travail sur la droiture de Stewart est accentué par l’emploi très genre des costumes : le costume noir du Sénateur assoit une dignité que le jeune Stoddard perd quand il porte le tablier, dont la souplesse renforce l’impression de déséquilibre ; le jeune Stoddard acquiert une certaine dignité quand il
endosse un costume gris dans la salle de classe ou lors des élections. Le déséquilibre qui menace le corps de Stewart, c'est donc l'état sauvage qui menace le processus de civilisation. Replacé dans l'ordre chronologique, la transformation du corps de Stewart, en réussissant à synthétiser Est et Ouest, vient alors signifier la construction de la nation dont les trois personnages masculins incarnaient chacun une étape (Agnel 151) : d'une blancheur hystérique (Stewart donne au jeune Stoddard des gestes beaucoup plus nerveux qui rappellent certains de ses personnages chez Mann) qui se perd dans les intérieurs clairs, il devient une présence noire, sereine et solide qui interpelle le regard, en particulier à travers la posture lincolnienne qui clôt le film (Fig. 4) et qui n'est pas sans rappeler celle de Henri Fonda quand il est assis à son bureau ou dans une chaise lors du procès dans Young Mister Lincoln.

Fig. 3

*THE MAN WHO SHOT LIBERTY VALANCE (JOHN FORD, 1962) : STODDARD, AU SOL, ENTRE VALANCE ET DONIPHON.*
Dans *Cheyenne Autumn*, la posture recroquevillée et la gestuelle plus lente de Stewart évoquent en premier lieu le vieillissement, mais le film reprend aussi le jeu ironique de *Destry Rides Again* : la posture de Stewart indique la nonchalance d’Earp, qui tire sur un Texan en restant assis à table ; il assomme ledit Texan, puis lui tapote la jambe qu’il vient de soigner ; et ses longues jambes, initialement dissimulées sous la table ou cachées derrière le bar, prennent bien trop de place dans la calèche qu’il occupe avec Doc Holliday, le déséquilibre figurant le chaos de la « drôle d’armée » (« motley army ») et annonçant le basculement de la calèche à venir. Le cabotinage de Stewart participe largement à la déconstruction de la figure iconique de l’Ouest et du Western (Moullet 137).

**Voix**

Le grain de la voix de Stewart participe largement du caractère « folksy » de son image. Doucereuse, légèrement nasillarde, moins aiguë et plus profonde que celle de Henry Fonda, elle invoque déjà un sujet proprement américain, entre enfance et âge adulte. Le caractère « folksy » est renforcé par une prononciation parfois à la limite du « Southern drawl » (qui a tendance à diviser un son de voyelle en deux), alors même que Stewart est originaire de la Pennsylvanie et a fait ses études à Princeton. Son élocution est faite de modulations larges et fluides, mais il est aussi capable de balbutier d’une voix chevrotante comme dans *You Can’t Take It With You / Vous ne l'emporterez pas avec vous* (Columbia, Capra, 1938) (Moullet 113-14) ou de délivrer un phrasé plus « clipped » (sec) et sophistiqué (le cachet Princeton, sans doute) qui tend vers celui d’un Cary Grant et que Stewart déploie en particulier dans le registre comique (esprit, ironie, etc.). C’est cette amplitude qui permet à la voix de Stewart de passer de la tendresse et la compassion à une révolte tout aussi sincère et passionnée, en passant par un humour bienveillant ou une ironie laconique.
Dans *Destry Rides Again*, Stewart donne au héros une voix douce qui respire l'intelligence et inspire la confiance, tout en employant un dialecte rural typique des représentations de l'Ouest (« Howdy », « them first impressions »). Comme Lincoln, et notamment celui de son ami Henry Fonda apparu sur les écrans quelques mois plus tôt dans *Young Mister Lincoln / Vers sa destinée* (20th Fox, John Ford, 1939), Destry se plaît à raconter des histoires de personnes qu'il a/aurait connues en guise de leçons de vie, sur un ton souvent chantant et enjoué. En conversation, la voix de Destry/Stewart s'adapte à son interlocuteur : ton doux quand il s'adresse au fils Claggett qui, s'il est initialement attiré par les armes, sera conquis par le pacifisme de Destry et canalisera sa colère dans la confection de porte-serviettes en bois ; ton plus romantique avec Frenchy, interprétée par Marlene Dietrich, qui joue une *saloon girl* forcément au cœur d’or ; ton menaçant envers Creepy, véritable danger public qui tire son revolver dans la rue ; et ton plus méfiant avec Kent, interprété par Brian Donlevy (l'ignoble Barsh ee responsable de la mort de la mère de Jesse James dans le film éponyme de Henry King sorti plus tôt dans l’année), à nouveau dans la peau d’un malfrat aux allures de gangster. La voix de Stewart nous offre donc un repère clair qui renforce notre tendance à nous identifier à la star et fonctionne comme une sorte de baromètre moral permettant de juger la valeur de chaque personnage. Plus généralement, elle remet en question les valeurs de l'Ouest fondées sur la violence, comme lors de cette conversation avec le shérif Dimsdale où Stewart emploie un ton d'abord doux puis ensuite plus ferme : « My pa had these on in Tombstone. He got shot in the back. [...] Law and order. [...] My pa did it the old way, and I'm going to do it a new way. »

Néanmoins, *Destry Rides Again* montre les limites de l'éloquence de Mr. Smith dans le Far Ouest – et de l'ironie déployée initialement par Destry, souvent avec succès, pour désamorcer la violence – et anticipe à ce titre *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. Quand son ami le Sheriff Washington Dimsdale est mourant, Destry est incapable de terminer son histoire et la voix de Stewart se fait chevrotante. Destry devra alors endosser les valeurs de l'Ouest malgré lui pour libérer la ville de la corruption, et pour ce faire, Stewart devra en passer par l’aboiement et le silence, registres plus en adéquation avec la figure de l'homme de l'Ouest.

La voix de Stewart occupe une place centrale dans *Broken Arrow* à travers la voix off. Jeffords le narrateur exprime sur un ton doux et presque mélancolique (que la fin du récit justifiera) sa lassitude de la violence de l'Ouest et son expérience de l'empathie pour les victimes apaches. Ceci est particulièrement sensible lors de sa rencontre avec le jeune Apache quand Jeffords avoue que l'idée qu'une mère apache pouvait ressentir de la peine à la perte d'un enfant ne lui était jamais venue à l'esprit, mais aussi quand il exprime son horreur devant la punition infligée par les guerriers apaches au scalpeur, sa peur quand il se rend chez les Apaches pour la première fois, ou encore sa douleur suite à la mort de Sonseeahray. Stewart déploie un registre beaucoup plus large pour le Jeffords du temps du récit. La frustration et la colère de l'homme de l'Ouest s'expriment à plusieurs reprises dans le premier acte du film (notamment quand il s'oppose aux opinions des villageois blancs), Stewart augmentant le volume, montant dans les aigus et parfois accroissant le rythme d'élocution. C'est tout particulièrement le cas quand il donne une leçon d'histoire à Ben Slade qui lui reproche d’être trop proche des Apaches :

Hold on, let's get the facts straight. Cochise didn't start this war. A snooty little Lieutenant fresh out of the East started it. He flew a flag of truce which Cochise
honored and then he hanged Cochise's brother and five others under the flag. [...] You wanna know why I didn’t kill that Apache boy? Well for the same reason I wouldn’t kill your boy or scout for the army. I’m sick and tired of all this killing.

15 C’est bien la voix de Mr. Smith qui s’éérige en défenseur des valeurs de bon sens que nous retrouvons dans Broken Arrow. Plus tard, la voix de Stewart se fait calme et ferme quand il présente la proposition de Cochise aux villageois, agressive quand il défend l’honneur de Cochise dans le salon. Le changement indique alors le basculement de l’homme de l’Ouest touché au vif qui agit selon un sens moral personnel et naturel vers l’homme politique qui vise à inspirer confiance.

16 Dans les films de Mann, l’amplitude vocale de Stewart va permettre d’évoquer des ambiguïtés psychiques et morales, si bien que la cible de la critique véhiculée par Stewart est finalement le caractère pathologique de l’homme de l’Ouest (d’une certaine manière, c’est aussi ce que John Ford fait avec Fonda dans Fort Apache [1948] et avec Wayne dans The Searchers [1956]). La voix du justicier se retourne contre elle-même. Dans The Naked Spur, Stewart pose une voix de l’homme de l’Ouest archétypique : avec un ton plus grave et un phrasé plus monocorde, cette voix, habitée de plus de silences qu’à son habitude, prononce ordres et questions. C’est sur un ton calme que Kemp ordonne à Roy de les quitter, et sa voix demeure calme quand le groupe se retrouve face à face aux Blackfeet. Les ruptures dans la tonalité quand Stewart hurle ne signifient pas, ici, la révolte contre l’injustice mais, au contraire, son indifférence : « Quit actin’ like we was friends! It’s him they’re paying the reward for! », si bien que Ben, le prisonnier encore plus franchement hystérique que Kemp, paraît dans un premier temps plus dans l’empathie que Kemp (ce qui explique qu’il ait pu séduire Lina). Face à un Ben qui le psychanalyse (« Choosing the way to die, what’s the difference? Choosing the way to live, that’s the part. That’s what’s eating you, ain’t it, Howie? »), Kemp, en colère, exige le silence avec deux mots (« Shut up! »). Ces ruptures annoncent bien entendu le hurlement de Kemp quand il délire à cause de la fièvre, Stewart faisant alors déraller sa voix dans les aigus, puis son hurlement hystérique quand il ordonne à Ben de fuir en haletant. Ces fissures dans la voix de l’homme de l’Ouest expriment son trauma, bien sûr, mais c’est aussi à travers elles que Mr Smith va finir par se glisser, Stewart faisant alors appel à son célèbre registre « folksy » quand il parle avec Lina sur un ton nostalgique de sa vie pastorale d’antan. Le travail sur la voix de Stewart décrit alors un cheminement parallèle à celui, spatial, des personnages : l’homme de l’Ouest à la masculinité dure est un masque, un mécanisme de défense, qui signifie le refoulement du Mr. Smith populiste à travers des symptômes bien connus (anxiété, halètement, etc.).

17 Chez Ford, le jeu de Stewart sert aussi principalement une critique de son propre personnage, mais Liberty Valance et Cheyenne Autumn emploient deux approches différentes. Le film de 1962 invoque Mr. Smith et le récent Anatomy of a Murder pour nous positionner du côté de l’avocat dans la lutte pour la justice. Comme dans Broken Arrow, le film contraste la voix plus posée, solennelle mais aussi plus rauque du personnage plus âgé qui narre l’histoire – le Sénateur conserve néanmoins le caractère « folksy » grâce à un accent rappelant le « Southern drawl », signifiant sa proximité avec ses origines que démontre son retour pour la mort de Tom Doniphon – à celle plus instable du personnage plus jeune. Le la est donné dès le premier affrontement entre Stoddard et Valance, lors duquel l’avocat hurle : « I’m an attorney in law. I’ll see you in jail for this. » ; l’explosivité de l’homme de l’Est contraste avec le sang froid de l’homme
de l'Ouest. Il en est de même quand Stoddard rencontre Doniphon et bredouille cette fois-ci d'une voix douce et chevrotante : « I've got something to do. [...] I don't want a gun. I don't wanna kill him. I want to put him in jail. » Stoddard hurle à nouveau lors de la scène du steak : « Nobody fights my battles! ». Sur la Frontière, la voix de la raison est, paradoxalement, la voix de l'hystérique, et contrairement à chez Mann, il s'agit ici de l'hystérie de l'homme de l'Est « féminisé » (Doniphon le décrit comme un « lady's man »); il est significatif que Stoddard s'en prenne aussi à Hallie et ensuite à Doniphon quand il est question d'amour, ou quand il s'agit de cautionner le mensonge qui le transforme en homme de l'Ouest (Doniphon répond d'ailleurs : « You talk too much. »).

La voix de Stewart se stabilise quand Stoddard a l'occasion de faire corps avec l'institution, qu'il lise un texte de loi, explique le processus d'amendement de la Constitution ou le déroulement des élections ; son ton reprend confiance et s'élève quand il explique ce que signifie l'intégration à la nation : « Statehood means the protection of our farms and our fences, and it means schools for our children, and it means progress for the future. » Les modulations de voix de Stewart décrivent ainsi les tensions entre civilisation et sauvagerie, Est et Ouest, féminin et masculin, qui, dans le Western classique, sont souvent réparties entre personnage masculin et féminin (les Yorke dans Rio Grande [John Ford, 1950] pour citer un exemple paradigmique) (Slotkin 182, 289, 359-61).

Dans Cheyenne Autumn, Stewart propose, au contraire, un phrasé assez monocorde, désabusé ; dans un premier temps, il marmonne, le cigare à la bouche, ses propos ponctués juste d'une menace agacée envers un Texan, et plus tard, lors de la présentation de son « plan de campagne » qui consiste à éviter les Apaches, quand le vacarme environnant l'oblige à hurler. L'échec de Stoddard s'inscrit, en quelque sorte, dans ce qui est finalement une inversion de Mr. Smith : l'avocat est le défenseur d'un système fédéral plutôt que des valeurs de bon sens de l'Amérique profonde ; ce sont au contraire ces valeurs-là qu'il va devoir apprendre. Le Wyatt Earp de Cheyenne Autumn sert, quant à lui, à une démythification d'une icône de l'Ouest au niveau moral (manque de courage, d'empathie et de sens de l'honneur) plus que physique (après tout, Earp demeure un tireur habile).

**Regard**

Hitchcock l'avait compris, Stewart est aussi un regard : perçant, malicieux, inquiet (le regard vers la gauche noté par Moullet [119]). Si le casting de Stewart dans le rôle du photographe voyeur de Rear Window et les très gros plans du regard du détective dans Vertigo l'ont mis en évidence, le regard de Stewart joue un rôle fondamental dans les implications politiques de son jeu parce qu'il peut évoquer l'émerveillement face aux valeurs américaines, la générosité envers son prochain ou se faire accusateur contre les forces de la corruption.

Dans Destry Rides Again, le regard de Stewart accompagne la voix dans sa fonction de baromètre moral face à autrui. Quand Destry raconte ses histoires, le regard de Stewart, souvent dirigé vers le sol, évite ses interlocuteurs, du moins jusqu'à ce qu'il lève les yeux pour jauger l'effet de son histoire, autrement dit pour déterminer si son public a compris la morale. Le côté fantaisiste et déconnecté de Destry n'est donc qu'un leurre – son regard fuyant est sincère uniquement quand il traduit l'embarras de se trouver en situation intime avec Frenchy. Car le regard perçant de Stewart, souvent mis en avan...
par le chapeau de cowboy, est déjà celui de l’enquêteur, celui qui cherche à démêler la corruption et à résoudre le meurtre du Sheriff précédent : Destry regarde ses suspects droit dans les yeux quand il les questionne ; c’est le regard de Stewart qui traduit sa prise de conscience de la culpabilité du maire (Fig. 5). Rien d’étonnant, donc, à ce que l’échec de Destry soit aussi signifié par le regard : le chapeau de Stewart cache son visage quand il est contraint à reprendre les armes.

**Fig. 5**

*DESTRY RIDES AGAIN (GEORGE MARSHALL, 1939) : DESTRY JUGE DU REGARD LA CORRUPTION DU MAIRE.*

Le regard est tout aussi central que la voix dans *Broken Arrow*. Dans un film qui fait de l’homme de l’Ouest un témoin, celui dont nous allons suivre l’initiation dans le monde des Apaches, une large partie du discours pro-Indien de *Broken Arrow* transparaît à travers une dramaturgie du regard. Ceci est thématisé quand Milt accepte de laisser Jeffords utiliser son bureau pour les cours d’Apache et dit : « It’s your eyes. » Stewart est d’abord celui qui rencontre l’autre, à travers le jeune Apache qu’il sauve qui lui apprend que son frère et sa sœur sont morts à Big Creek en 1879 (Fig. 6) ; il est ensuite le témoin de la vengeance des guerriers apaches envers ceux qui les ont scalpés (« And they made me watch the ants come. ») ; de retour à la ville de l’Ouest, alors même qu’il fait part de sa lassitude des guerres indiennes, il s’agace des discours racistes qu’il entend à table (Fig. 7) ; il découvre ensuite les traditions apaches, entreprend une relation interraciale par l’intermédiaire d’un miroir, et enfin assiste à l’embuscade tendue par un groupe de blancs qui bafouent le traité de paix. Clairement, la narration, à travers des gros plans et plans rapprochés et des compositions centrées sur les yeux, nous invite à nous aligner sur le regard du personnage. Cette puissance du regard fait de Jeffords l’égal des Apaches dont son professeur Juan dit : « Apache eyes are quick. » et surtout de Cochise : « His eyes will see into your heart. »
Fig. 6

*BROKEN ARROW (DELMER SAVES, 1950) : JEFFORDS PREND CONSCIENCE DE L’HUMANITÉ DU JEUNE APACHE.*

Fig. 7

*BROKEN ARROW (DELMER SAVES, 1950) : JEFFORDS MESURE LE RACISME DE SES CONCITOYENS.*
Le regard de Stewart est tout aussi central dans *The Naked Spur*, dans lequel il s'associe à la voix dans la critique de l'homme de l'Ouest. Stewart adopte un regard perçant et nerveux qui exprime la méfiance au gré de ses rencontres avec des inconnus (Tate, Roy). Mais ce regard s'avère rapidement lié à un manque de contrôle plutôt qu'à une maîtrise, lié au malaise du personnage de Kemp quand au statut qu'il a adopté suite à la séparation avec sa bien-aimée; en témoignent les regards furtifs qu'il lance lorsque Ben révèle que Kemp est un chasseur de primes et non un homme de loi, et surtout le regard coléreux quand il provoque Ben en duel dans une scène qui se clôtrait justement sur le dos de Stewart (et donc sur la honte du personnage). Ce jeu du regard comme miroir d'une psyché traumatisée culmine par deux fois, de manière significative au contact avec Linda : au cœur du film quand il délire et la confond avec sa fiancée perdue Mary (Fig. 8), et à la fin du film quand il tente désespérément de résister à la rédemption que propose Linda en s'efforçant de maintenir coûte que coûte sa persona de chasseur de primes cupide. Dans *The Naked Spur*, le regard de l'homme de l'Ouest n'est pas le garant de valeurs nobles ; il est le symptôme d'un trauma de guerre. Le film nous invite ainsi à nous distancer de la star masculine pour nous aligner sur la star féminine, Janet Leigh, qui de témoin devient femme salvatrice. Leigh est ainsi celle qui apaise le jeu de Stewart, celle qui nous permet de retrouver Mr. Smith et Destry.

**Fig. 8**

*The Naked Spur* (Anthony Mann, 1953) : Kemp se réveille délirant.

Les films de Ford, contrairement à ceux de Mann et d’Hitchcock, ne puisent pas tant dans le registre pathologique de Stewart, mais ont en commun avec les films de Mann que la critique est dirigée vers le personnage incarné par Stewart. *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* contraste le Sénateur aguerri qui, comme Lincoln et comme le jeune Destry, baisse les yeux quand il raconte ses histoires, avec le jeune Stoddard, au regard déterminé et courageux, qui n'hésite pas à affronter Liberty Valance dès leur première
rencontre. Mais ce regard à la fois révolté par les mœurs de l'Ouest et généreux envers ses habitants est, in fine, un regard aveugle : il est le regard de l'homme de l'Est qui ne voit pas les limites de son discours, qui s'est trompé de lieu et de public, et qui n'est pas l'homme qui a mis fin au hors-la-loi, mais celui qui a bénéficié du regard bienveillant de l'homme de l'Ouest.

Cheyenne Autumn prolonge cette idée de l'aveuglement du personnage de Stewart, mais sur un registre plus comique. La scène de Dodge City, dont la place centrale dans la structure narrative vise à déconstruire le genre de l'intérieur, fait l'objet d'un « running joke » : Earp ne reconnaît pas Miss Plantagenet jusqu'au moment où il avoue à Doc Holliday : « By golly, I did know her in Wichita ». L'aveuglement (réel ou feint) d'Earp est présenté dès le début de la scène quand il ne réalise pas qu'il détient un as et cligne des yeux après s'être exclamé : « Oh, is that an ace? I must be blind as a bat. » (Fig. 9) Pendant le reste de la scène, Stewart, plus intéressé par le jeu de poker que par son rôle de Marshall, balaye du regard les humains (les autres joueurs, Miss Plantagenet), signalant une indifférence aux antipodes du regard plein de compassion associé à Stewart dans Mr. Smith, Destry Rides Again et Broken Arrow. Ici, son regard suspicieux est dirigé contre les autres joueurs, et donc sur sa défaite éventuelle ; même provoqué en duel, il n’a de temps que pour un bref coup d’œil alors même qu’il lâche un : « I don’t doubt your word, I just question your eyesight. »

Conclusion

Si l’évolution générale de la carrière de Stewart semble le mener du « folksy » vers une image plus ambiguë, voire névrotique, il serait plus juste de la considérer comme une exploration des possibles de l’acteur lui-même, aussi bien dans son jeu que dans son corps à proprement parler. Le jeu de Stewart repose indéniablement sur des caractères physiques – corps filiforme, regard perçant, grain de voix chaleureux – qui traversent sa filmographie par-delà les réalisateurs et les studios et deviennent signifiants dans un contexte donné (jeu, situation, récit). Ces éléments du jeu, que j’ai séparés pour faciliter l’analyse et pour mettre en avant les ressorts spécifiques de chacun, constituent en effet un ensemble ; comme les différents instruments d’un orchestre (Moullet décrit
fort justement Stewart comme un « homme-orchestre » [131]), comme les lignes harmoniques et rythmiques, elles peuvent s’allier, s’opposer, se nuancer. La constante, il me semble, réside dans la droiture morale – la dimension lincolnienne – associée à l’image de Stewart, et que posture, regard et voix contribuent à construire. Mais ces mêmes éléments peuvent tout aussi bien exprimer les failles dans cette droiture. C’est ainsi que, si Stewart incarne dans un premier temps Mr. Smith dans l’Ouest, celui qui accuse, celui qui repère l’injustice sur la Frontière et qui s’élève contre elle avec bon sens, courage et émotion, il devient chez Mann et chez Ford l’objet même du questionnement, l’icône – qu’il soit homme de l’Ouest ou de l’Est – que le film déconstruit, questionnement que l’échec de Destry à éviter la violence annonçait dans une moindre mesure. Plus précisément, la star vieillissante est capable d’incarner de multiples aspects parfois contradictoires de concert, non seulement du fait de son immense talent d’acteur, mais aussi du fait que son image a une histoire et que son corps en est tout imprégné. L’analyse de l’acteur est ainsi un outil précieux pour qui veut cerner la politique d’un film. Et force est de constater que, dans le cas d’une star, jeu et image entretiennent une relation dialogique et dynamique : le jeu d’une star ne relève pas uniquement des techniques actorales employées ; c’est aussi un jeu avec son image qui dépasse les éventuelles références intertextuelles.

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**BIBLIOGRAPHIE**


NOTES

1. C’est en ces termes que Luc Moullet décrit la carrière de Stewart : « On a ainsi un parcours très surprenant : la pureté naïve du jeune Smith, créé par Capra, qui luttait pour le bien public, ensuite le chacun pour soi, l’absence de toute solidarité manifestée à travers la violence (chez Mann) ou la passivité de l’adulte (chez Hitchcock), enfin vers les cinquante ans, le cynisme et la vénalité (chez Ford), on a là une progression négative qui contraste en tous points avec la carrière des trois autres grands. » (137)

2. Texte original : « What emerges in Stewart’s character is not the genteel Destry, but rather the determined ferociousness of Mr. Smith on the Senate floor, this time channeled into a need for vengeance ».

3. L’historien Richard Slotkin explique que, dans les romans de James Fenimore Cooper par exemple, les attitudes sur la question des guerres indiennes étaient conçues en termes genrés : « the opposition between “hard” and “soft” understandings of social and class questions embodied in the gendered contrast of Masculine and Feminine ways of thinking about Indian wars » (15-16).

RÉSUMÉS

Cet article propose de déterminer dans quelle mesure le jeu et la persona de James Stewart participent au discours politique de cinq Westerns, Femme ou démon (Marshall, 1939), La Flèche brisée (Daves, 1950), L’Appât (Mann, 1953), L’Homme qui tua Liberty Valance (Ford, 1962) et Les Cheyennes (Ford, 1964). L’analyse de la posture, de la voix et du regard révèle que la critique est de plus en plus dirigée envers les figures incarnées par Stewart (qu’il s’agisse de l’homme de l’Ouest ou de l’Est) plutôt que contre les forces auxquelles il s’oppose. Cette étude suggère que, dans le cas d’une star, jeu et image entretiennent une relation dialogique et dynamique : le jeu d’une star ne relève pas uniquement des techniques actoriales employées ; c’est aussi un jeu avec une image.
This article proposes to assess to what extent James Stewart’s acting and star image participate in the politics of five Westerns, Destry Rides Again (Marshall, 1939), Broken Arrow (Daves, 1950), The Naked Spur (Mann, 1953), The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance (Ford, 1962) and Cheyenne Autumn (Ford, 1964). Attention to posture, voice and looks reveals that the critique is increasingly directed at the figures Stewart embodies, be it the Man of the West or the East, rather than those he confronts. The study suggests that, in the case of a star, acting is as much an engagement with a specific role as with the star’s image.

INDEX

Keywords: James Stewart, Western, acting, star image, politics, ideology, masculinity, Delmer Daves, John Ford, Anthony Mann, George Marshall, Destry Rides Again, Broken Arrow, The Naked Spur, The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance, Cheyenne Autumn

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“We'll let the gooks play the Indians”
The Endurance of the Frontier Myth in the Hyperreality of Full Metal Jacket (Stanley Kubrick, 1987)
Vincent Jaunas

Upon their release, Stanley Kubrick’s films were often misunderstood and only acquired a cult status in the long run. Yet before Full Metal Jacket, none of them was ever accused of being uninventive. However, when in 1987 the director released his own take on the Vietnam War, influential American critic Roger Ebert considered that “this isn’t a bad film but it’s not a great film and in the recent history of movies about Vietnam Full Metal Jacket is too little and too late” (Ebert 1987). Released almost a decade after Michael Cimino's The Deer Hunter (1978) and Francis Ford Coppola's Apocalypse Now (1979), Kubrick's film even came after a new trend of 1980s Vietnam films such as the Rambo franchise or Oliver Stone’s Platoon (1986). Full Metal Jacket has been seen as a mere Kubrickian recycling of what had then become an established Vietnam iconography, whose most prominent characteristic is arguably the depiction of Vietnam as a metaphoric space, a New Frontier faced by a new generation of Americans. By having Private Joker (Matthew Modine), the film's main protagonist, invoke John Wayne in his very first line—“Is that you John Wayne? Is this me?”—Full Metal Jacket summons the myth of the frontiersman Wayne came to embody, and in this respect reworks a firmly established intertextual relation, one that Wayne himself helped construct by transposing both his WWII soldier and frontiersman persona in Vietnam with his 1968 pro-war film The Green Berets.

According to John Svendsen, Full Metal Jacket, unlike its predecessors, is characterized by a “total absence of myth-making [which] presents a radical critique of [Vietnam] war movies” (1989). I will argue that by becoming the film’s topic, the mythical weight of the war is approached through a reflexive lens that strives to prevent myth from structuring the movie’s narrative, to keep it at bay by, paradoxically, acknowledging its overwhelming influence in the shaping of one’s view of reality. In so doing, Full Metal Jacket questions the failure of the countercultural anti-frontier mythology of the 1970s and takes into account the 1980s’ neo-mythical approach of the war, by suggesting that
the frontier myth, although criticized and devalued, has survived and even gained strength as pure representation. In other words, instead of criticizing the nefarious influence of America’s mythical perception of the war—a theme that had already been explored for more than a decade before the release of *Full Metal Jacket*—Kubrick’s film examines the endurance of the myth as a lens through which one still shapes one’s reality, in spite of its obvious inadequacy.

### Vietnam War films, the frontier and the myth

Following John Fitzgerald Kennedy’s claim that the challenges faced by modern Americans represented a “New Frontier” (1960), the major events of the 1960s tended to be viewed through the lens of the mythical reenactment of the great pioneer spirit of American frontiersmen. According to John Hellman, “The new Kennedy administration presented the [soldiers] in Vietnam as symbols of a resurgence of the traditional American spirit of the frontier” (142). The New Frontier narrative, Richard Slotkin argues, harked back to the roots of America’s feeling of exceptionalism, relying on the Turnerian frontier narrative—the country’s conquest of the wild West endowed its inhabitants with a unique character that gave them the strength to accomplish their civilizing mission—in order to enforce a policy of “modernization” (1998, 492). Such a narrative aimed, then, to ensure public support for all of Kennedy’s agenda, be it economic reforms or geopolitical strategies. The New Frontier narrative sought to justify the country’s involvement in Asia by drawing a parallel between modern Vietnam and 19th century America. Americans had to intervene in Vietnam because this conflict represented the new step in the civilizing mission which, in the previous century, had justified the country’s appropriation of a wilderness occupied by savage Indians:

> The real power and relevance of the Indian War metaphor [to justify the US involvement in Vietnam] are rooted in its appropriateness as an expression of the New Frontier’s basic assumptions about the relation between “primitive” and “advanced” peoples: that the natives (‘savages’) or “fledging” or “less developed” nations lacked anything like the equivalent of the political culture of a Western nation-state. This bias […] became the doctrine of the new Frontier (Slotkin 1998, 493).

Unsurprisingly, such a narrative relied heavily on the influence of Western films, which, throughout the 20th century, had spread the frontier Narrative: “Kennedy’s heroic myth derived much of its force and resonance from the symbolism of the combat film and the Western” (Slotkin 1998, 504). The New Frontier narrative, itself fueled by cinema, was in turn spread by films, as various movies sought to justify America’s intervention in Vietnam by displaying the conflict through the lens of Kennedy’s—and, following his death, Lyndon Johnson’s—narrative. The most notorious (and explicit) example of such films is undoubtedly John Wayne’s *The Green Berets*, a film “conceived from the start as a work of propaganda to convince the American people that ‘it was necessary for us to be [in Vietnam]’” (Slotkin 1998, 520).

Even though Wayne’s film was scored by critics for “its dishonesty, its simplminded preachiness and its propagandistic use of imagery” (Slotkin 1998, 522), Slotkin argues that “what is interesting about the film is not the misrepresentation of the war-as-fought but the accuracy with which it reproduces and compounds the official misunderstanding and falsification of the conflict” (1998, 522-523). Released in 1968,
the film highlights—and fuels—the imposition of myth over the reality of the conflict, which, from the outset, had shaped America’s involvement in Vietnam. The film displays various frontier-inspired interpretations of the conflict highlighting the civilizing mission of the United States, most notably as the hero ends up adopting a Vietnamese child, becoming a father figure intent on shielding him from the savagery of the Vietcong. Moreover, the sheer presence of John Wayne, whose persona came to embody the quintessential frontiersman, suffices to turn Vietnam into a reenactment of the conquest of the West.¹

6 It took almost a decade before any American director openly denounced the country’s involvement in the war—Michael Cimino’s *The Deer Hunter*, the first major anti-Vietnam War fiction film, was released in 1978. However, given the mythical weight surrounding the conflict, it is unsurprising that prior denunciations of the conflict were expressed through obvious parables drawn in revisionist Westerns. Both *Soldier Blue* (Ralph Nelson, 1970) and *Little Big Man* (Arthur Penn, 1972) obliquely criticized the 1968 My Lai massacre of Vietnamese civilians by American soldiers through depictions of the 1864 Sand Creek Massacre and 1868 Washita River massacre (of Cheyenne men, women and children by George A. Custer’s cavalry regiment). When American directors started directly tackling the topic of Vietnam, the frontier myth logically became a recurring trope, to the point that the Western genre may be considered as an overarching architext shaping all Vietnam films.² Filmmakers from the New Hollywood, immersed as they were with the anti-war movement of the late 1960s, reworked the New Frontier ideology and proposed a counter-discourse which also acquired a mythical resonance. These artists were concerned with proposing a counter-myth, a depiction of Vietnam as the locus of the loss of American ideological naivety. Hellman, for instance, notes how in *The Deer Hunter* Michael survives the threat of “one shot” in the forced Russian roulette game and kills his Vietcong captors, but on his return to the American wilderness realizes [...] he must give up his previous frontier code of seeking to control nature by killing a deer with “one shot” (146).

7 As for *Apocalypse Now*, Coppola’s reworking of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* explicitly distorts the myth, since Americans are depicted as an imperialist people, a far cry from the collective representation of their founding fathers fleeing the tyranny and decadence of the British empire and regenerating through their taming of the wilderness. In *Apocalypse Now*, the wilderness is not a source of purification but a hindrance to be burnt down with napalm, the Marines’ helicopters becoming a genocidal version of the US Cavalry as depicted in classical Westerns; whereas the cavalry was traditionally portrayed as the protector of civilization, saving frontiersmen from the threat of the barbaric Other (saving, for instance, the stagecoach in John Ford’s 1939 eponymous film), Coppola’s airborne cavalry becomes synonymous with the tyrannical oppression exerted by a technologically superior imperial America towards defenseless natives.

8 Due to the weight of the American myth in the perception of the war, its cinematic representations not only tackled the frontier, but also addressed the very myth-making power of representation. Indeed, in addition to the aforementioned influence of Hollywood in the ideological justification of the conflict, the war itself was marked by an unprecedented amount of television coverage, which deeply shaped public perception. Michael Anderegg notes that “the Vietnam war was the most represented war in history, existing, to a great degree, as moving image” (1991, 02), while Martin Heusser considers that “the Vietnam War was a television war, a ‘living-room war’”
(Heusser 2003). News media originally helped propounding the image of the war as a "projected Western" (Hellman 142), in which American identity was to be reinforced and rejuvenated, but in the mid-1960s, TV news had shattered the myth and showed an entirely different facet of the war. Confronted with an unprecedented amount of war footage and graphic violence, the public faced disorientation as the mythical interpretative device that had been theirs no longer seemed to apply. Filmmakers thus sought to create a counter-myth out of the shattered remains of the original frontier spirit that had dominated the first part of the conflict (Thoret 2013), while also questioning the responsibility of audiovisual representations in the shaping of America’s ideology. *Apocalypse Now*’s famous depiction of TV crews staging the war so as to make it look more spectacular is a case in point. Anti-Vietnam War films thus still depicted Vietnam through the lens of the frontier myth, albeit with the intent of creating a counter-myth aiming to reveal the dark side of the frontier ideology, as well as the way it misshaped Americans’ perception of reality up until the Vietnam War.

Following the conservative backlash of the 1980s, a new wave of Vietnam films developed alongside the anti-war films still produced during this period (most notably Oliver Stone’s *Platoon* and Brian de Palma’s 1989 *Casualties of War*) and also reworked the frontier myth, albeit in a radically different way, since the trauma of Vietnam now had to be overcome. John Svendsen explains that in “the 80s […] The Vietnam War was seen as having been fought for noble ends, but Americans had been suffered to lose through self-imposed restraints” (Svendsen 1989). In other words, films such as the *Rambo* series were concerned with erasing the counter-myth of 1970s and to revalue the validity of the frontier ideology, which had not failed but had been failed by a lack of popular support; Sylvester Stallone thus became a new, Reaganian frontiersman—particularly in *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (George Cosmatos, 1985), where Rambo even uses a bow and arrows—whose strength and values were to wash away the Vietnam experience and reignite America’s frontier spirit.

In this context, Ebert’s claim that *Full Metal Jacket* comes too late is understandable. After Vietnam was written and re-written as a myth or as a counter-myth, as a new frontier or as an anti-frontier manifesto, Stanley Kubrick’s depiction of a war shaped by the distorted viewpoints of American soldiers quoting Western films may seem to rework what had, by then, become an established generic pattern. I would like to suggest that the film neither aims at proposing yet another version of the myth, or even at blaming past filmic and televsual representations for fostering a frontier mindset; instead, it addresses the palimpsest of audiovisual footage that shaped everyone’s experience of the war, in order to explore Americans’ ambiguous relation to representation and reality. During the shooting of *The Shining* (1980), Kubrick once stated he wasn’t interested in photographing reality but in “photographing the photography of reality.” Such a claim is all the more relevant regarding *Full Metal Jacket*, as ideology and representation are layered over the factual reality of the conflict which, as a result, tends to be erased.

The World as Representation

Through the character of Private Joker, employed as a combat correspondent, Kubrick shows how the reality of everyday fighting is immediately turned into a clear narrative fit for the ideal of the Marine-as-frontiersman. Reporters are told to write stories
depicting either a decisive American victory or how soldiers help the locals: “We run two basic stories here. Grunts who give half their pay to buy gooks toothbrush and deodorant—Winning of Hearts and Minds [...] and combat action which result in a kill—Winning the War” [48:12]. Kubrick’s famous mistrust of language finds here one of its most potent expressions. While the words of journalists ordered to emphasize the civilizing intent of the Marines turn Vietnam into a frontier narrative in which brave pioneers defeated a wild enemy and accomplished their manifest destiny while bringing civilization to an untamed land, viewers, on the other hand, witness the random, useless and unmotivated killing of men, women and children. When Joker and his photographer Rafterman take a helicopter to join a squad, they encounter a mad killer who shoots everything on sight and suggests “you should write a story about me” [56:00]. However, it has, by then, become apparent that the frontier narrative may only be written by distorting facts and erasing cumbersome elements.

By highlighting the gap between official propagandistic discourses and the audiovisual depiction, the film highlights how a mythical narrative is forcibly imposed upon reality, one which not only targets the American public at home but is also summoned by the soldiers themselves in order to give meaning to what they experience and cope with reality. Yet the Marines of Full Metal Jacket fight according to a narrative they obviously do not believe in. The few characters who seem to truly believe the myth of the soldier-as-frontiersman are constantly ridiculed. The most striking example is, no doubt, the anonymous colonel who reminds Joker about the ideological purpose of the war by disclaiming stereotypical ethnocentric biases of America’s civilizing mission: “We are here to help the Vietnamese, because inside every gook there is an American trying to get out” [61:32]. The ridicule of such a belief is accentuated by the scene itself as, while the colonel utters this sentence, a mass grave filled with the whitewashed bodies of Vietnamese casualties is visible in the background, thus implying the war to be more akin to a slaughter than to the advance of civilization (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1

The visuals ridicule the ideological vacuity of the Colonel (right)

The narrative indicates that these casualties are in fact victims of the Viet Cong, whose massacre Joker and Rafterman document so as to advertise the enemy’s barbarity. The
previously witnessed random killings made by the American helicopter shooter has made it clear that barbaric slaughters are committed on both sides; however, from the perspective of American officials, only the enemy’s acts must be pictured so, in order to enforce a coherent mythical narrative in which America has come to shield a people from their own barbarity. In addition, the film maintains the viewer in a state of confusion due to the fact that the whitewashed victims were, indeed, killed by Viet Cong, as this information is briefly given by Touchdown, who explains the situation to Joker during a dialog whose sound is drowned by helicopter and tank noises, so that this explanation may easily be missed upon a first viewing. The confused sense of an absurd, unexplained slaughter thus reinforces the utter inappropriateness of the colonel’s attempt at reaffirming a grand mythical narrative that would make sense of the conflict.

Such a display of the myth’s ideological vacuity reflects what characterizes, according to Jean-François Lyotard (1979), the advent of the postmodern condition: men have stopped believing in grand narratives. Treated as farce, the frontier myth that justifies the war ceases to be a structuring grand narrative. At first sight, such a criticism may, indeed, as Ebert pointed out, be viewed as symptomatic of the absence of novelty of Kubrick’s film. In both The Deer Hunter and Apocalypse Now, the ideological pointlessness of the war shakes the faith of a typical American frontiersman (Michael and Benjamin Willard) whose experience leads him to question his own mythical framework. However, I will now argue that unlike these films, Full Metal Jacket does not aim to reveal the inadequacy of such narratives, as no character is led to question his ideological beliefs and encourage viewers to do the same in the process. In the 1987 film, the characters’ lack of ideological faith is a pre-established fact, one which does not lead to any anti-war sentiment. Joker’s skepticism as to the ideological justification of the war is a case in point, since it manifests itself before the character even witnesses warfare, as implied by his provocative parody of John Wayne in the opening dialogue of the film when he arrives in Parris Island. Yet his lack of belief in the war’s mythical justification does not prevent him from actively playing his part, as do most Marines whose lack of belief is equally blatant.

The Endurance of a Discarded Myth

During the initial training section on Parris Island, fearsome Sergeant Hartman (R. Lee Ermey) turns his Marines into hard “killing machines” in an act of brainwashing surprisingly devoid of any ideological grounding. Even though he does not hesitate to compare Marines to God-sent soldiers or to summon American mythology, such messages lose all meaning as they get drowned in Hartman’s logorrhea and his wave of sexist, homophobic and scatological insults which evacuate any mythical didacticism. His only constant message is that Marines must look like Marines, and act like Marines. Hartman’s songs underline the character’s lack of ideological clarity:

> I love working for Uncle Sam (I love working for Uncle Sam).  
> Let’s me know just who I am (Let’s me know just who I am)  
> 1-2-3-4 United States Marine Corps (1-2-3-4 United States Marine Corps)  
> 1-2-3-4 I love the Marine Corps (1-2-3-4 I love the Marine Corps)  
> […]  
> I don’t know but I’ve been told (I don’t know but I’ve been told)  
> Eskimo pussy is mighty cold (Eskimo pussy is mighty cold) ([22:07 – 23:01])
The instructor’s first lines seem to make him a purveyor of the American myth: the belief in men’s need to find their true self through their involvement in warfare being reminiscent of Theodore Roosevelt’s argument in *The Winning of the West*, where the author argues that the fight of American pioneers against the uncivilized Indians enabled them to acquire a unique, superior character (Slotkin 1998, 52). However, the end of his song blurs the message and makes any ideological viewpoint moot, as it verges towards juvenile misogynistic nonsense. Expunged from all ideological clarity, all that remains from such a message is a gratuitous contempt of an Other whom one is taught to despise without any mythical justification, as suggested by the debasing portrayal of the female Eskimo. Even though the viewer understands the Marines are nonetheless taught ideologically coherent messages, such moments remain offscreen, and the Parris Island sequences emphasize the ideological groundlessness of Hartman’s training: while the Marines’ mission seems integrated within Kennedy’s New Frontier narrative—“Chaplain Charlie will tell you about how the free world will conquer communism,” Hartman declares on Christmas Eve [31:42]—the instructor goes as far as to name Kennedy’s killer, Lee Harvey Oswald, as the epitome of the perfect Marine, as he is about to teach his recruits long range shooting. The characters are thus required to conform to a set of attitudes that may originally have been shaped through a mythical definition of one’s identity, but which now appear devoid of any substance.

However, despite its satirical depiction of a narrative the characters appear detached from, *Full Metal Jacket* never suggests America’s frontier spirit does not determine the characters’ experience of the war. Nor does the film ambition to depict the reality beyond the myth. One scene epitomizes the film’s ambivalent subservience to the myth. Following the first battle faced by Joker once he has rejoined Cowboy’s squad, the song *Surfin’ Bird* (The Trashmen, 1963) starts playing, while a static shot shows a television crew in the foreground filming the battle taking place in the background [72:12-73:34]. The TV crew moves left, while filming the soldiers in the middle ground, whereas the enemy, invisible in the background, is being shot at (Fig. 2). As the TV crew reaches the left side of the screen, a tracking shot follows it and reveals various soldiers both shooting at the enemy and playing a role for the sake of the diegetic camera. As Cowboy’s squad enters the frame, the Marines, looking at the diegetic camera, pretend to be the heroes of a Western: “Is that you John Wayne, is this me?” Joker shouts, while Cowboy says: “Start the camera, this is Vietnam, the movie!” The soldiers then appoint themselves the roles they will play in this hypothetical film. Eightball argues that Joker could be John Wayne, whereas he himself would be a horse, etc. Animal Mother then suggests: “We’ll let the gooks play the Indians.”

Fig. 2
Through its reflexive depiction of the way the battlefield is being shaped by film, the scene highlights the frontier-biased depiction of the war that determines both the diegetic camera and the actions of the characters. Kubrick’s camera takes a step back and observes the way filmmaking shapes reality by inscribing it within a mythical narrative. In so doing, however, the film does not claim to show an objective depiction of Vietnam, stripped away from all mythical misperceptions. The camera follows the exact same path as the diegetic camera and seems to be drawn by the tracking shot initiated by the latter, as if the narration were inextricably connected to the mythical representation of reality. Far from providing a window onto an objective world, the film thus asserts audiovisual footage to arise from one’s subjective representation of reality, and in the process goes against the claim at authenticity, which various 1970s and 80s anti-war movies such as Stone’s *Platoon* professed. While these anti-war films held the promise of showing what the war was actually like, thus revealing a truth distorted by previous false mythical representations, *Full Metal Jacket* asserts that all filmmaking is necessarily subjective, and therefore on the side of myth; such metafilmic displays, however, enable the audience to develop a critical distance towards the subjective biases that determine both individual experiences and their representations. Such self-reflexive considerations do not make of *Full Metal Jacket* a film solely concerned about cinema, however. The work captures the experience of Vietnam as representation.

Indeed, by acknowledging the role of the TV camera as a *de facto* diegetic presence in the war, *Full Metal Jacket* posits that myth-making devices and factual reality are virtually indistinguishable co-presences that shaped the soldiers’ experiences of Vietnam. By highlighting the diegetic cameras mythologizing the war as it unfolds, the film shows Vietnam to be a spectacle existing only for the sake of its specularity. Even the Marines’ killing of the Vietcong seems motivated only by their desire to play at Cowboys vs Indians. In the Stanley Kubrick Archives, which store all of the director’s personal research to prepare his films, one may find an excerpt from Hannah Arendt’s *Crises of the Republic* underlined by Kubrick during the pre-production of *Full Metal Jacket*. This excerpt analyses how Americans did not so much fight “for their country’s survival – which was never at stake – as for its ‘image’ (...) the goal was now the image
itself” (Kubrick 1983). In Full Metal Jacket, however, it is the soldiers themselves who appear to consider the war as representation, and yet willingly decide to keep on playing their parts. Their goal is not the country’s image, but the shaping of their individual warrior image. By altering the actions of the characters who, encouraged by the camera eye, play at Cowboys vs Indians, the camera seems to determine their behavior more dramatically than the actual war, which is relegated to a distant background, hardly visible for the spectator. The characters may not be fighting for a cause they believe in, but they do fight in order to project an image of themselves, one fitting previous representations of American toughness, manliness, etc.

20 Such willingness to adopt a set of behavioral codes no one believes in may be seen as Kubrick’s response to the reactionary films of the 1980s, such as Rambo II. The Marines’ apparent unwillingness to stop play-acting like cowboys highlights how the imposition of myth over reality provides a regressive comfort that requires neither reality, nor even belief. The motto “We will defend to the death our right to be misinformed” (Fig. 3) can be read on a banner hanging next to a drawing of cartoon dog Snoopy in the office of the propaganda newspaper Stars and Stripes [53:39]. The eagerness with which the unreality of myth is chosen over the reality of the war evokes the decade’s regressive impulse and its willingness to both identify with images from an idealized pre-Vietnam America—exemplified by such films as Back to the Future (Robert Zemeckis, 1985)—and to use cinema as a way to fix the frontier myth after it was shaken by Vietnam (“Do we get to win this time?” famously exclaims Sylvester Stallone in Rambo II [3:26]). One’s willingness to play a role thus seems to stem from a human desire to conceal reality behind a comforting fiction. “Truth or Falsehood – it does not matter which any more, if your life depends on your acting as though you trusted,” Hannah Arendt writes in a passage underlined by Kubrick (Kubrick 1983).

Fig. 3

First to go, last to know: We will defend to the death our right to be misinformed

21 Full Metal Jacket suggests that, although the Vietnam experience may have destroyed America’s grand frontier narrative, the reenactment of the country’s mythical image lives on, despite its actors’ lack of belief in it. In Simulacra and Simulation, Jean Baudrillard refers to the Vietnam War and its Hollywood counterpart, Apocalypse Now,
as symptomatic of the loss of the reality traditionally associated with modernity, a loss which the philosopher terms “hyperreality”: in a world filled with images and representations, reality is lost as all that takes place becomes a simulation of previous images (Baudrillard 1981, 90).

The hyperreal quality of *Full Metal Jacket* was noted by Patrick Webster, for whom the film manifests “a loss of distinction between the real and the imagined” (132). Throughout the film, both the viewers and the characters seem stuck in a *mise en abyme* of filmic representations from which there is no way out, so that everything becomes representation. The mythical subtext of Western films takes precedence and shapes Vietnam in its image, so that the reality of the conflict becomes determined by the forms and conventions of Hollywood. In this respect, the mention of John Wayne can be seen as more than a mere reference to the mythical personification of America’s frontier spirit. Indeed, Wayne also plays the mythmaker in John Ford’s *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence* (1962), which concludes with the iconic phrase: “When the legend becomes fact, print the legend.” In *Full Metal Jacket*, which directly alludes to Ford’s film through Joker’s iconic quote (“Listen up, Pilgrim”), Kubrick ironically subverts this idea by suggesting that the legend, however unbelievable, has now managed to abandon reality altogether.

Cinema shapes the characters’ experience of Vietnam, which determines new representations which, in turn, contribute to fictionalize the war and shape the viewer’s own experience of it. Such entanglement is manifest during the interview given by Private Cowboy to the television crew, whose diegetic camera is, in this scene, aligned with the film’s camera. Cowboy describes the battle he has just experienced in Hue City (the aforementioned battle during which Marines play at Cowboys vs Indians) as “like a war, you know. What I thought about a war, what I though t a war was supposed to be. There’s the enemy, you kill’ em” [76:03-76:17].

By describing this battle as how “it was supposed to be” while speaking to a camera making a movie, private Cowboy shows how the characters’ experiences are grounded in fiction, thus turning Vietnam into a full-scale reenactment of an imagined war with a new frontier narrative. Ironically, the characters’ loss of belief in this grand narrative is replaced by a playacting of previous representations, which thus enables the myth of the American soldier as frontiersman to survive its own demise. Such playacting, in turn, will shape the experience of warfare of the implied viewers for whom this diegetic film is destined according to a mythical framework devoid of any truthful belief. The character’s playacting thus becomes the new vector of America’s mythical representation, one which evacuates the concept of reality itself and lives on in spite of it. In this scene, the fictionalization of reality is underlined by the reflexivity of Arliss Howard’s performance. Indeed, the actor paradoxically portrays Cowboy being filmed with an unprecedented level of naturalism—his many hesitations and ruptured sentences, combined with his look to the camera and his physical awkwardness (his whole body remains very stiff except for his left hand which he twitches nervously), realistically convey the impression of an amateur, who was unused to cameras and microphones, being interviewed (Fig. 4). Ironically, a particularly artificial scene is endowed with a naturalist quality: a real professional actor convincingly plays the role of an amateur behaving awkward in front of a camera. On the other hand, throughout the rest of the film, Howard’s performance is much more theatrical, as, despite the absence of diegetic cameras, his character appears to be constantly striving to play the
role of the badass, slang-wielding soldier which he had been taught to play on Parris Island (where he also received his Westerner nickname). If the reflexive dimension of *Apocalypse Now* suggests Hollywood-inspired clichés have distorted reality by staging it and turning the war into a spectacle, the metafictional dimension of *Full Metal Jacket* questions the very validity of the binary opposition between reality and fiction, as both have become intermingled to the point of indiscernibility.

Fig. 4

The paradoxical naturalism of Adiss’s performance in front of a diegetic camera

**Kubrick’s English Vietnam and the Wilderness as Frontier Space**

Through its hyperreal entanglement, the film questions the potential for Vietnam War movies to denounce the validity of previous ideological assumptions and representational clichés, a potential implicitly acknowledged by both countercultural and reactionary films. In this regard, *Full Metal Jacket*’s late release becomes relevant, as the film bases its metafictional reflection on an intertextual dialogue with the Vietnam War film subgenre. In depicting the reality of a conflict pre-determined by a palimpsest of audiovisual clichés, the film questions the very possibility of ever representing a reality devoid of its hyperreal excess baggage.

This is underlined by its ambivalent setting. At first sight, the latter may appear to express the overlapping of an objective reality and a subjective mythical perception through the superimposition of the characters’ self-conscious play-acting onto a highly realistic setting, one whose material reality is emphasized thanks to the careful attention given to details, spaces and textures. Kubrick declared:

> The whole area of combat was one complete area – it actually exists. One of the things I tried to do was give you a sense of where you were, where everything else was [...] this is something we tried to make beautifully clear (Cahill 1987).

Mario Falsetto notes how the film achieved such effects through emphasis “on the physical textures of this world. This is a Vietnam of concrete, metal black smoke, fire
and rubble”, while simultaneously arguing that “the film’s visual design features a heightened sense of unreality” (2001, 72). A feeling of unreality is indeed conveyed by the settings themselves, however realistic they may look, so that the apparent dichotomy between subjective perception and objective reality becomes blurred: the very possibility of representing a “real” Vietnam devoid of any mythical subtext is thus called into question.

Far from the jungle productions of the other major Vietnam films such as The Deer Hunter (shot in Thailand) or Apocalypse Now (shot in the Philippines), Kubrick famously chose to shoot the Vietnam scenes of Full Metal Jacket near London. He used an abandoned gasworks factory that he was free to demolish at will, in which he imported various authentic props, including real palm trees, which he juxtaposed to fake, plastic trees. Paradoxically, the result looks both highly realistic and unreal. The realistic depiction of the terrain, combined with the realistic depiction of a city being torn down—as the profilmic factory was indeed destroyed during the shooting—contrasts with the evocation of Vietnam through a set of imported iconic signs (Fig. 5).

The architectural style of the factory proves a far cry from the jungle landscapes associated with Vietnam, and yet it perfectly fits the kind of post-WWII functionalist architecture that could be found in the city of Hue where the last part of the film takes place. Ironically, the setting’s urban dimension is what strikes the viewer as the film’s most unreal quality, forcing the viewer to consider how Vietnam naturally came to be associated with a luxuriant jungle through layers and layers of past filmic representations which—whether pro or antiwar—required to transform Vietnam into a new wilderness, and the Vietnamese into a new tribe of Indians. The sense of unreality provoked by this urban Vietnam thus points to the perceptual distortions of the country induced by past representations—at least for the Westerner’s perspective which the film centers on.

The urban setting of Full Metal Jacket suggests that the reality of Vietnam was also shaped by past Western representations. Far from living in the wilderness, the
Vietnamese population is depicted as living in an environment which, with the exception of the palm trees, hardly differs from the West. Their lifestyle is shown as largely Europeanized (through the presence of French Colonial architecture, cars and advertising) and Americanized (the women in miniskirts). As implied through the omnipresence of pop songs and the lack of markers of a traditional Asian culture, Full Metal Jacket’s version of Vietnam is devoid of Orientalism. This paradoxically makes the setting look all the more unreal: this Americanized Vietnam does not correspond to the viewer’s cinematic expectation of an Oriental wilderness which Americans must either save (from a mythical perspective) or destroy (from a counter-mythical perspective). Kubrick’s English Vietnam thus underlines the mythical biases of Western culture by paradoxically depicting a country already shaped by Western representations (Fig. 6). As a result, subjective biases are both highlighted and shown as inextricably connected to reality.

Fig. 6

A westernized Vietnam

Joker and the Quest for Reality

In the hyperreal prison of Full Metal Jacket, Joker, the protagonist, stands out. Whereas most of the characters seem to derive pleasure from acting as though they believed, Joker constantly displays an ironic critical distance suggesting he is lucid as to the self-blinding impulse behind Vietnam’s hyperreality. He impersonates John Wayne to parody the virile play-acting of the soldiers, mocks his newspaper’s propaganda and even displays both a “born to kill” helmet and a peace button so as to “suggest something about the duality of Man [...] the Jungian thing” [61:16]. In a world of self-conscious actors, Joker’s distancing tactics suggest a longing for an objective, unbiased reality. The various close-ups of his eyes, highlighted by his round glasses, underline his desire to see past the mask of delusional myths in order to face reality, unfiltered and untainted, no matter how horrible.
Such desire is epitomized by his willingness to go to the front and face a real life-or-death situation. Baudrillard, Randy Laist argues, considers death—in its irrevocable reality—to mark the limits of any hyperreal system: “Forces of death continually threaten to undermine the superstructure of hyperreal exchange” (102). Joker displays signs of envy when his comrade teases him for not having the “thousand-yard stare,” a psychoanalytic term to refer to war traumas which, in Full Metal Jacket, becomes a badge of honor proving a soldier has been able to see humanity for what it really is: “It’s like you’ve really seen beyond” [50:29]. Ironically, however, Joker’s very desire to see past the veil of hyperreality and encounter a truth devoid of any mythical bias is itself hardly distinguishable from the other Marines’ mythical play-acting. Joker’s desire to acquire the thousand-yard stare is shared by his comrades and can also be interpreted as a desire for “regeneration through violence,” which Richard Slotkin (2010) argues to be at the core of the frontier myth; according to the cultural historian, the myth characterizes the pioneer’s escape from civilization, and into the wilderness, as an experience of regenerative violence, away from the corruption and falsity of civilization. Joker’s need to face death in order to see the reality of mankind can thus paradoxically be interpreted as a desire to tear down the mask of society typically associated with the frontier myth, one befitting Hellman’s assertion that “Vietnam’s new frontiersmen were implicitly depicted as following the original pioneers in escaping the [...] corruptions of civilization” (142). The character’s quest for unadorned truth, in effect, echoes the frontiersman’s virile acceptance of the violence of reality epitomized by the piercing, lucid gaze of John Wayne’s characters in the Westerns of John Ford.

The Marines’ progression inside Hué ironically evokes the regenerative experience of exploring the wilderness, as the maze of the burnt down city evokes some of the characteristics associated with the outdoor space of the Hollywood Western, albeit transposed in an urban environment. Joker’s squad, led by Cowboy, evokes the trope of the US cavalry claiming possession of a wild territory: a lateral tracking shot depicting the Marines running through the building in order to save their fallen comrade [94:45] notably evokes tracking shots depicting the cavalry charging to rescue the threatened civilians from the Indians in Westerns such as Stagecoach. On the other hand, the enemy sniper’s invisible menace is reminiscent of the way classical Westerns depict Indians as an invisible threat, blending with their wild environment and killing silently, a trope also visible in Stagecoach through the first arrow shot at the American travelers from an unseen enemy [70:31]. This parallel proves, however, highly ironic, as the Marines, unlike Western cavalymen, have neither purpose nor direction: the climactic conflict arises after the squad has gotten lost and happens to walk through an area guarded by an enemy sniper in an effort to reach their actual destination. Furthermore, the urban wilderness that is Hué hardly harbors the purifying potential of the mythical wilderness. Regeneration through violence proves highly problematic in this climactic conflict. The parallel between Hué and the Western’s regenerative wilderness thus reinforces the profound ambiguity of Joker’s quest for truth, as the inadequacy of Vietnam to fit the frontier myth paradoxically also suggests that Hué may not enable the protagonist to reach any untainted reality, as this very notion is essentially a mythical one.

Joker finally faces the reality of death, in the film’s last sequence which problematizes the protagonist’s quest for truth [103:18-109:59]. His killing the enemy sniper who was
begging for death is highly paradoxical: it is both an affirmation of toughness and an act of mercy. The moral conundrum at the heart of the scene cannot be easily resolved. Joker encounters the overwhelming reality of death; the music subsides, with just a few deep, cavernous notes, and a lengthy close-up of his face highlights the awesome complexity of his emotions (Fig. 7). Not only did Joker have mixed feelings about killing, but his enemy turned out to be a teenage girl who managed to kill three of his friends, therefore turning this final victory into a highly bittersweet, anticlimactic one—an act inadequate to fit any mythical framework.

Fig. 7

Joker staring at the awesome reality of death

Yet the overwhelming complexity of the scene is negated by Joker’s partners, who instantly integrate his killing within the mainframe of the frontier narrative and its ethos of regeneration through violence: by facing death in the eyes, Joker has proven his toughness; he is a “badass,” a true soldier. Rafterman’s high-pitched laughter and subsequent comments chillingly trivialize the awesomeness of what has been witnessed [107:30]. The character appears to celebrate a perfect, unilateral victory. In the final scene, Joker eventually seems to adopt such a simplified narrative: “I am in a world of shit, yes. But I am alive, and I am not afraid” [109:27]. The spectacle of the unadorned reality of death has been turned into a story of killing as part of a frontier bildungsroman, in which a man’s encounter with violence and savagery results in his symbolic rebirth, a regenerative experience indeed. The tragic outcome as to the imposition of this grand narrative upon reality is ironically evoked as the soldiers summon Mickey Mouse in the midst of a blazing urban Vietnam, thus distorting the ideal of the frontiersman shining the light of civilization through the wilderness. The jarring quality of the soundtrack suggests that the Mickey Mouse Theme Song expresses the need for the soldiers to cling to simple, regressive make-believe, while the imagery depicts a reality too baffling—and too bleak—to hold any meaning of its own (Fig. 8).
Jean Baudrillard refers to Mickey Mouse and more generally to Disney theme parks as representative of the loss of reality which is symptomatic of modernity (24). In Disneypark, the real is evinced as the world becomes fashioned in the image of an image: that is, a fake environment is constructed to refer to previous fictive representations. By singing along and asserting his desire to live on, Joker thus seems to abandon all desire to see past the filter of hyperreality and to wallow in the reassuring balm of mindless play-acting, where Mickey Mouse and John Wayne become interchangeable. Unbiased, objective reality is thus depicted as both unattainable and—if one nonetheless tries to reach it—too unbearable a presence to be faced without the support of a mythical framework. With *Full Metal Jacket*, consequently, Kubrick asserts that Vietnam did not represent an end to America’s mythical perceptual framework, despite its manifold denunciations, as such a grand narrative satisfies a fundamental, irrevocable human need to deny reality. That need lives on, in the demystified postmodern age, as a set of signs to imitate.

Kubrick’s hyperreality, unlike Baudrillard’s, does not stem from the sheer quantity of representations which govern our contemporary lives; rather, it results from the human desire to shield oneself from the absurdity of the world—one which, the film implies, cinema may easily satisfy if used as a purveyor of illusions. The adjective “absurd” is frequently associated with the Vietnam War, perceived by many as a useless butchery which provoked a deep feeling of senselessness to all its participants. In *Full Metal Jacket*, the absurdity of the war takes on a philosophical dimension akin to the speculations of Albert Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942). Beyond the veil of one’s mythical perception of the world lies the absurd reality of a universe which does not make any sense; absurdity thus arises from the disconnection between mankind’s desire to make sense of the world and its ontological senselessness (Camus 266). The 1987 film’s depiction of a reality which mankind is incapable to face thus suggests that the Vietnam War may have destroyed the credibility of the mythical framework which structured America’s self-representation, but its image lives on, as its reenactment enables humans to avert their eyes from the absurdity of a senseless world. The
frontier may be dead, but its image is immortal. For, as Joker’s final reaction implies, it is better to act as though the world made sense rather than to face its absurdity. The Marines who fight for the preservation of their hyperreality are, in effect, determined to “defend to the death [their] rights to be misinformed.”

BIBLIOGRAPHY


NOTES

1. Slotkin quotes P.F. Kluge’s 1972 article in Life, which summarizes John Wayne’s persona: “[Wayne] has been a leatherneck and he has been a Green Beret, but he has gone on being a cowboy” (Slotkin 1998, 513).

2. Gérard Genette defines architexts as indications of a text’s “taxonomic category” (11).

3. Pratap Rughani considers the 1968 Tet Offensive—central to the plot of Full Metal Jacket—to have marked a turning point in the representation of the war by the independent media, which ceased to massively support the war and began to depict it under a more negative light, through violent footage fueling anti-war sentiment and decribibilising both ideological justifications of the conflict and government-approved footage (2015, 320).


5. A failure analysed at length by such influential scholars as Michel Ciment (Ciment 2004).


7. The highly subjective quality of Kubrick’s films has been analyzed at length by Mario Falsetto (2001).

8. Platoon’s claim of authenticity was notably supported by Charlie Sheen, who opposes Coppola’s fantastic vision (“He wasn’t there.”) with Stone’s realism: “[Platoon shows] what the guys really went through” (Sheen 1986).

9. As Filippo Ulivieri points out, the film’s English setting was widely publicized prior to the film’s release. Journalists relished in highlighting what they saw as yet another eccentricity from the legendary director who refused to take a plane. Such publicity therefore encouraged the viewer’s perception of the setting as an unrealistic Vietnam (221-40).
10. “Some of the buildings were absolute carbon copies of the outer industrial areas of Hue,” Kubrick claimed (Cahill 1987).

11. Archival evidence suggests Kubrick was aware of the lack of Vietnamese perspective of the war, which could be reproached him. Screenplay co-writer Gustav Hasford wrote him, during pre-production, that “There should be a Vietnamese character to represent, summarize the Vietnamese position. We totally lack a Vietnamese point of view” (Hasford 1985). As an exploration of the way past representations still determine reality, however, the film’s absence of any alternate point of view is justified.


ABSTRACTS

This article focuses on the representation of the frontier myth as an ideological bias shaping one’s perception of the Vietnam War in Stanley Kubrick’s 1987 Full Metal Jacket. This article argues that whereas various Vietnam War films released prior to Full Metal Jacket depicted the frontier myth as a distorting lens imposed upon the reality of the conflict, the specificity of Kubrick’s film lies in its depiction of the myth as a narrative believed by no one, yet actively played out by everyone. Such a paradoxical endurance of a discarded myth is examined through Jean Baudrillard’s notion of “hyperreality”, which sheds light on the metafictional and phenomenological dimensions of Full Metal Jacket as an exploration of both the impossibility to access an unbiased perception of reality and the attractiveness of representation.

INDEX

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Neo Frontier Cinema: Rewriting the Frontier Narrative from the Margins in *Meek’s Cutoff* (Kelly Reichardt, 2010), *Songs My Brother Taught Me* (Chloe Zhao, 2015) and *The Rider* (Chloe Zhao, 2017)

Hervé Mayer

1 The myth of the American frontier has provided the United States with a national mythology since the late 19th century, and has been explored most directly on screen in the genre of the Western. According to this mythology, the frontier is a cultural metaphor designating the meeting point between civilized territories and the savage wilderness beyond. The frontier is a vague concept, laden with imperial ideology and a history of colonization (Limerick and White 94-95). Its geographical referent is unstable and ill-defined; its historical relevance is a subject of debate among historians. But it is, in effect, a powerful metaphor to grasp the complex nature and multifaceted impact of Euro-American encounters with otherness in the colonization of North America. And it was promoted in the late 19th century as the bedrock of American exceptionalism and the focal point of a national mythology.

2 What cultural historians such as Richard Slotkin refer to as the myth of the frontier can be defined in simple terms as the belief that the frontier is the birthplace of the American nation, of its democratic polity, its capitalistic economy and its national identity (Slotkin 10). In other words, the frontier myth tells us that the modern American nation is born in the experience of colonization.

3 Since the emergence of narrative cinema, films have explored and challenged this myth, along with its imperialist ideological underpinnings. Westerns, as well as science fiction, war films or urban crime fictions, have obscured and exposed the central contradiction of a liberal nation claiming to be born out of a history of empire. Starting
in the 1950s, these critical evaluations of frontier mythology also developed within what some film scholars have termed post-Westerns, generic hybrids that critically engage with the West and Western genre from a contemporary standpoint. 4

Challenges to American frontier mythology have always existed in marginal as well as mainstream cinema, but they have become more overt and have drawn more critical attention since the late 1960s. The influence of auteur theory in film reception and production, the emergence of a marketable form of independent cinema alongside Hollywood majors (Berra 2008), along with an oppositional social and political context, explain a widespread desire to rewrite the national narrative of the frontier in ways more critical of the white man’s story and more inclusive of marginal and alternative viewpoints.

New films exploring frontier narratives emerged that built upon and developed different strategies to achieve the rewriting of national mythology. The most important of these strategies is the foregrounding of alternative perspectives on the history of colonization. Points of view and narratives that remained largely excluded from the national imaginary as well as the historiography of the American West became the focal point of revisionist Westerns (Kitses 17-19) and the road movie genre that emerged at the same time. The primary alternative was the Indian, whose imagined point of view had provided an opposite gaze on westward conquest since the time of silent Westerns, and whose mythical nobleness, ecological concerns and transcendentalist spirituality profoundly shaped countercultural aspirations, in films ranging from Easy Rider (Dennis Hopper, 1969) to Sunchaser (Michael Cimino, 1996).

In addition to the Indian perspective, other marginal perspectives came to the foreground of revisionist Westerns and road movies, in films ranging from Thelma & Louise (Ridley Scott, 1991) to Boys Don’t Cry (Kimberley Pierce, 1999) and Brokeback Mountain (Ang Lee, 2005). These films (or their characters) are often torn between a criticism of triumphalist imperial mythology and an appropriation of that same mythology to reclaim the Americanness of their marginalized heroes. Minorities are included in the national imaginary by investing the cowboy ethos and frontier myth that historically produced their exclusion. The case in point here is Easy Rider, with its indianized hippies who are also proto-pioneers dreaming of renewed colonial discovery.

A second strategy consists in playing with the seminal trajectory of westward movement across the continent and its linear, progressive qualities. Narrative trajectories are inverted, diverted, interrupted or slowed down to the point of exhaustion. When the American continent has been thoroughly civilized and there are no more wild spaces to explore, characters go south to Mexico in the tradition of Stagecoach (John Ford, 1939), or north to Alaska—the female drifter of Wendy and Lucy (Kelly Reichardt, 2008). That is, unless they are stopped by the constraining forces of the law on the way as in Vanishing Point (Richard Sarafian, 1971) and Badlands (Terrence Malick, 1972) or end up wandering endlessly in the wilderness, as in The Searchers (John Ford, 1956), Vanishing Point and Gerry (Gus Van Sant, 2002).

Yet another strategy, also present in revisionist Westerns and road movies, consists in claiming to expose the truth behind the legend, the historical reality behind the myth. The tension between myth and history, which was a structural principle of the Western, is thus tilted in favor of history. In art cinema about the frontier since the 1960s, this tendency has taken the form of a social-realist approach inspired by...
modernist European cinema. Rejecting mainstream Hollywood storytelling in favor of a social realist aesthetic, such films emphasize the daily difficulties of common people, the social and economic marginalization of certain populations, their destitution and plight sometimes elicitting voyeurism as much as political criticism of the failed American dream (the inbred hillbillies in John Boorman’s 1972 Deliverance come to mind). This social-realist trend can be seen in a variety of films from Midnight Cowboy (John Schlesinger, 1969) and Scarecrow (Jerry Schatzberg, 1973) to Stranger Than Paradise (Jim Jarmusch, 1984), Boys Don’t Cry, and more recent films like Frozen River (Courtney Hunt, 2008) and American Honey (Andrea Arnold, 2016).

Finally, against an imperial mindset that pictured the frontier as a racial and cultural divide, a line whose defense and impermeability ensured the purity of civilization, many films constructed the frontier as a contact zone, a middle ground of mixing cultures, a frontera or borderland, that is, a place of interactions and exchanges, of cooperation and mutual transformation. Since Rose O’ Salem Town (David W. Griffith, 1910) and The Searchers, and more recently in Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada (Tommy Lee Jones, 2005), the frontier has been depicted as a shared, mediating space where identity is redefined as a process and where hybridity prevails.

These strategies—alternative perspectives and trajectories over the white man’s westward conquest; historical or social realism over the myth of the West; and cultural dynamics over fixed identities—are not mutually exclusive. Films intending to rewrite frontier narratives usually combine them to produce fresh perspectives on a resilient national mythology. This mythology, in the words of Meek’s Cutoff’s screenwriter Jon Raymond, “still dictates how people envision the world” in the early 21st century.

Kelly Reichardt’s Western Meek’s Cutoff (2010) and Chloe Zhao’s post-Westerns Songs My Brother Taught Me (2015) and The Rider (2017) are examples of films combining alternative viewpoints and narrative trajectories with historical realism and dynamic identities in a way that also engages with some of these strategies’ individual limits.

Meek’s Cutoff is inspired by the true story of a group of settlers on the Oregon Trail in 1845, fatally led astray by their incompetent guide Stephen Meek. In the film, the event’s setting and period are maintained, but the group is reduced to three families in three wagons, and Stephen Meek is characterized as a boisterous story-teller in the tall-tale tradition of Mark Twain, as well as a racist, self-aggrandized Indian killer. The film starts with the crossing of a river and water supplies at their peak, only to develop into a slow, painful exhaustion of resources and bodies in the crossing of a dry, endless Great American desert. Hope comes in the form of a Native taken captive, who may or may not lead the party to water and their salvation. The dominant perspective on the story is that of the women, and specifically that of one female character, Emily Tetherow (Michelle Williams) who eventually takes up the direction of the party. Adopting a social realist aesthetic, the film is characterized by long takes, very long shots and the physicality that define contemporary slow cinema for Tiago de Luca, as well as its striking 1:37.1 screen format which constrains the perspective on the overwhelming landscape.

Songs My Brother Taught Me and The Rider were both shot on and around the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota. Both are about social life and culture on the present-day Oglala Sioux reservation, and both focus on young male protagonists with clear goals (escaping the reservation or getting back to rodeo). In both cases, their love for, and desire to protect, their younger or mentally disabled sisters lead them to renounce
their dreams and embrace their family. If both films superficially embody one side of
the cultural coin in the contemporary West—the Native American perspective in Songs
and the poor cowboy perspective in The Rider—they depict a network of exchanges,
miscegenation, acculturation, and syncretism that challenges notions of fixed and
distinct political identities. The narratives of these films are denser than in Meek’s
Cutoff, and their pace is relatively faster, but they retain a distinct artistic quality in
their elliptical editing and narration, and their blend of social realism and contemplative lyricism to explore the line between myth and history in the imaginary
of the West.

Meek’s Cutoff and Zhao’s two films are contemporary rewritings of the frontier myth
that are similar in many ways and complementary in others. Both play the mythologies
of the American West against the realities and consequences of settler colonialism.
Both provide alternative perspectives on the politics of empire. Both construct the
Western frontier as a zone of contact, a shared space of dynamic and hybrid identities.
And both challenge the original epic story of linear conquest by redefining what it
means to inhabit the Great American desert. But they also differ in their preferred
focus for cultural and political rewriting: Meek’s Cutoff’s main work centers on its
alternative feminine perspective and on a deflation of the myth in its original historical
terrain; Zhao’s films are more about producing a postcolonial perspective on the
contemporary West as a marginalized yet fascinating frontera.

Realism and Female Agency in the Historical West in
Meek’s Cutoff

How the Social-Realist Rendering of History Deflates the Myth of
the West

Meek’s Cutoff opens on a card announcing the film’s title and setting in Oregon in 1845
(Fig. 1). The words are crudely sewn on a wagon canvass, framed by the silhouette of a
tree and a myriad of stars, the image itself creating a childlike yet forbidding
impression. This balance between innocence and fear is emphasized by the musical
score, with notes that blend the harmonious with the atonal. It is made clear from this
opening image that what fuels the settlers’ hopes in moving west on the Oregon Trail
(the mythical virgin lands of economic betterment, of moral and social renewal
associated with the West) will also be the cause of their physical and psychological
downfall. With this opening, Meek’s Cutoff indicates that it will converse with a tradition
of films that presented the American desert as a puritan wilderness, an obstacle to the
forces of civilization, and a source of corruption rather than of redemption for the
civilized soul. A haunting hypotext to Reichardt’s film is The Searchers, whose main
character Ethan Edwards is corrupted by the savagery of the frontier. Other imagery
that comes to mind includes the teeth-like rock formations framed by ominous sounds
in the opening of The Hills Have Eyes (Wes Craven, 1977), as well as the opening shot of
There Will Be Blood (Paul Thomas Anderson, 2007), with the same grinding strings
evoking the demonic character of the desert.
The tension between the innocence of myth and the violence of history is tipped towards the latter by the first shot, which establishes the realist style and distant but constricted viewpoint on the characters’ westward (leftward) journey (Fig. 2). All the elements that traditionally make up the spectacular, epic form of the Western and contribute to the triumphalist myth of westward conquest—widescreen format, open vistas, swelling music, sweeping camera movements, engaging action and dialogues, forward-driven narrative—are stripped down, leaving the viewer with the prosaic, raw and sometimes painful reality of settler colonialism. Meek’s Cutoff’s realism is resolutely historical, informed not only by careful attention to costume and props (as is often the case in more mainstream historical films), but also by primary sources such as 19th-century settlers’ diaries and journals. The story focuses on the daily routine of life on a wagon journey, the repetition of alienating and arduous tasks to ensure survival, from grinding coffee and kneading bread to building a fire or finding water, with inspiration drawn by director Reichardt from early docudramas films like Nanook of the North (Robert Flaherty, 1922).
The slow depletion of water supplies and gradual exhaustion of the characters are mirrored in the absence of spectacular features: the limited film format, minimalist narrative, sparse dialogue, music and action, and slow pace (with long takes of 10 to 30 seconds), refuse the easy pleasures of mainstream cinema and force upon the viewer the slow progression of an obstinate wandering through nothingness, with no guarantee of ever arriving somewhere. Some critics (Dan Kois) complained about how exhausting the film was, probably out of cultural fatigue at having to labor through yet another scarcely rewarding art film (Kois 2011), and Reichardt’s style has often been described as dry and anti-sensualist. In *Meek’s Cutoff*, however, it serves to express a sense of the consuming dimension of the characters’ journey.

The relative absence of music emphasizes the isolation of the characters in the great void and desert silence surrounding them. But the consequent foregrounding of foley sounds also serves to transform the familiar tones of rolling wagons into the foreboding fracas of a thunderstorm. The creation of a sense of alienation from what is familiar (both in the viewer’s common perception of reality and generic expectations regarding the Western) is a central strategy of the film. This sense of alienation is heightened by the ambiguous situation of the viewer, who is positioned uncomfortably close to the characters’ plight yet never given access to their inner lives. The bonnets and beards hinder direct access to faces, which remain often distant, decentered or turned away—this is notably the case in the introducing shots (Fig. 3). They are enveloped in an air of mystery, which invites viewers to actively scrutinize the screen surface for meaning, thus mirroring the characters’ own sense of loss and search for redemptive signs on the blank surface of the desert.
The monotonous landscape, often filmed in static shots and left unmoved by the passing of the characters, remains indifferent to human suffering and the futile scheme of Western colonization. Its barrenness, emphasized by a low positioning of the camera that cuts off western skies, belies any hope of wealth and betterment in migrating west, while its overwhelming presence, desperately unbounded in the narrow screen format, works to further alienate the characters from their quest and themselves, their purpose lost and sound mind altered to a trancelike state. One scene (Fig. 4) suggests Victor Sjöström’s *The Wind* (1928), in which the main female character played by Lillian Gish loses her sanity to the desert wind (White 224).
In such a dry, unblinking take on the unsettling routine of westward migration, even the sunset cinematography, usually associated with the triumphant direction of Manifest Destiny or the transcendentalist ethos of a sacred landscape, is turned into symbolic torture and the promise of death, with the backlit, dark silhouettes appearing to be lashed by brutal lens flares (Fig. 5), as Elena Gorfinkel has noted (130). With the magic-hour light turned into a threat, every element of mythical dimension is deflated, the story reduced to the individual scale of micro-history and the inglorious experience of settlers, visionaries or fools, on a strange continent.
An Alternative Trajectory to Westward Conquest

The dissolves in the sunset sequence point to a specific construction of cinematographic time and space that belies any notion of progression. Borders between moments and places are blurred in a seamless continuum; the dissolves between sequences are dilated to emphasize the absence of starting or ending point in a scene (see for instance the end of the opening sequence). This continuum is heightened by the atonal music, which refuses the slightest form of melodic line and embraces instead a kind of shapeless atmosphere. Along with the absence of time boundaries, the slow pace and repetitive patterns of the narrative can be added to the list of elements resisting the sense of linear progression.

Progress in time is undermined just as it is in space. In the opening title, the film’s subject (the tragic historical event known as Meek’s Cutoff), a central narrative element (the hope for water evoked by the tree and stars) and final image (the tree) are all already established, defusing any idea of narrative progression from beginning to end, just as the immediate recognition that the characters are “lost” in the introducing sequence—a character carving the word on a log—forestalls any linear westward trajectory. By the time the film has reached its’ concluding fade-out, no tangible progress has been made, and the characters and viewers have no idea whether they are ever closer to a resolution than when they started off. The long shots of characters walking in the landscape, virtually immobile in the frame, emphasize the absence of progression in spite of their movements. Though it starts with a leftward trajectory, Meek’s Cutoff ultimately wanders off in circular movements which seem to lead to quasi-stasis.
This anti-epic take on the Western is the setting for an alternative, subaltern perspective on the white man’s story: the white female settler. The women’s active participation in the colonization of the West is established in the introducing sequence, and their point of view is adopted through a positioning of the camera on their side of the wagons. The male deliberations as to the direction of the caravan are set in the distance, their voices muted, so that the viewer, like the female characters, struggles to get a sense of what is being decided (Fig. 6).

There is a clear gendered hierarchy at work on the wagon trail, which is later contested by Emily Tetherow’s superior clarity as to the predicament of the party and true nature of their guide. Indeed, Stephen Meek, the archetypal Western hero, proves to be nothing but a useless, loudmouth trickster. And while the men show signs of vulnerability and pusillanimity, the women do most of the daily work and use rifles in decisive ways, to alert the men when a Native is seen and later to protect the Native from the racist fear of Meek (Fig. 7).
Although such an alliance of Native and female clout eventually reverses the white man’s domination, when Meek yields command of the party to Mrs Tetherow and the Indian in the ending sequence, the film never idealizes such alliance but instead emphasizes the women’s, and particularly Emily’s, participation in the colonizing scheme. As Patricia White convincingly argues, such recognition of the white woman’s active position within the framework of colonial enterprise signals the refusal to establish the film’s subaltern perspective as a universal counter-narrative to the white man’s story (224). Such universal pretention would only suppress the multiplicity of other subaltern narratives on the history of colonization and reproduce the oppression and erasure of imperial narration. The characterization of Emily is a clear acknowledgement of this: she may have less power than the men, but she is nonetheless privileged for being white and embraces that privilege in expressions of casual racism. At one point, she complains about “working like niggers, once again,” while at another, she frowns upon Meek for practicing miscegenation with Indians. Once the Native is captured and taken along, women label him “a man-child” and make racist comments like “they don’t think of life the way we do.” Emily even goes so far as to give him a lesson in civilization: “You can’t imagine what we’ve done, the cities we’ve built,” even though the claim sounds hollow in the midst of such a barren landscape. Emily provides help and protection to the Native not out of humanistic sentiment, but out of interest (“I want him to owe me something.”). The creation of a debt, a practice that historically served the subjugation of Native Americans, is here performed by women.

Meek’s Cutoff aims not so much to rewrite the history of the American West as to acknowledge the limitations of any such history. The film format encloses the
perspective on the infinite West, just as the women’s perspectives are framed and limited by their bonnets. Emily eventually assumes the leadership of the party, but even then, when she is seen deciding on whether or not to continue following the Indian, her gaze on the “savage” is obstructed and reframed by the branches of a half-dead tree, whose virtual apparition in the concluding sequence may or may not be a sign of salvation (Fig. 8). One is tempted, as White argues (224), to see in this thematization of limited perspectives the white female director’s sense of her own particular viewpoint when shooting the history of the West.

Fig. 8

Emily's gaze on the “savage” is reframed by the branches of a half-dead tree.

Cinéma-Vérité vs Myth on the Post-Colonial Frontera in Songs My Brother Taught Me and The Rider

Tensions between Myth and Social Realism

Chloe Zhao’s first two films foreground the tension between myth and reality in a similar way as Meek’s Cutoff, although myth is here retained as a narrative element and driving motivation for the characters. The opening of The Rider, which focuses more directly on the mythology of the cowboy and rodeo culture, problematizes the tension between myth and reality as an aesthetic clash: the artificially lit, warmly colored, slow-motion, close-ups of a horse’s body parts and shiny fur on the rodeo arena (Fig. 9) versus the natural light, cold color scheme, normal speed, of a wounded man waking up in a trailer home (Fig. 10).
The artificially lit, warmly colored, slow-motion, close-ups of a horse's body parts.

Fig. 10

Natural light, cold color scheme shots of Brady waking up in his trailer.

The horse sequence is thus framed as a dream, its sleek aesthetic an indication of the myth's capacity to distort perception and fuel desire, its fragmented approach to the horse's body and blurred evocation of spectacle a recognition of the partial nature of a mesmerized gaze. This establishes the central narrative tension for the whole film, with a character drawn by an irresistible force to the practice of rodeo even though that practice is shown to be brutally violent to the riders' bodies and may cost the character his life.

Myth is retained in The Rider as in Songs through the main characters' special relationship with the Western landscape. Magic-hour cinematography is not given a foreboding quality as in Meek’s, but preserves its mythical dimensions, here played out through beautifully balanced shots of characters looking at the desert landscape in embedded contemplation (Fig. 11). What Zhao stages, in these sequences, is the sacred wilderness of the transcendentalists, the wilderness as a place of revelation where human beings come closest to hearing God. One can suspect that the director was herself influenced by such mythical images of the West, since she described herself in interviews as an urbanite feeling stuck in the big cities; she even added, “When you're stuck historically you go west” (Tartaglione 2017). What drew her to South Dakota was the feeling of being connected with a past unchanged, a contrast to the rapidly
changing urban China the director grew up in. Zhao welcomed the change as refreshing and eye-opening. Such an attitude towards the rural West may stem from yet another cliché attached to the region and its people as being closer to primitive truths and natural roots, and thus offering a source of regeneration.

Fig. 11

The Western landscape preserves its mythical dimensions in The Rider.

However, the characters who connect with the landscape are not the indianized whites of the revisionist Western or road movies, but are Native Americans. The focus is not the white gaze on virgin lands that need conquering but the Native intimacy to a land he or she loves, understands and inhabits. The mythic imagery of the West is still present, Western landscapes and an esoteric connection to them are still celebrated, but the myth has been appropriated and redefined by the indigenous population at the center of the narrative. The native Westerners of Zhao’s films embrace the Western desert as their home, and their connection with it is intimate as much as historical, for instance through generational transmission from the old-timers seen in Songs. One scene in Songs explicitly rewrites the mythical iconography of the sunset from a postcolonial perspective by connecting it to Native American revival; Oglala artist Travis, obsessed with the number 7, explains its importance in the Bible and Oglala culture, and identifies the young Jashaun with the first generation of renewal since the Indian wars of the 19th century (Fig. 12). Zhao’s films thus participate in the decolonization of Western mythology by having indigenous characters redefine its meaning.
This rewriting of the Western landscape’s mythical qualities as the place of Native American regeneration is balanced with a docu-fiction, social realist approach to life on a present-day reservation. Zhao’s films are striking, first and foremost, because of their incredible power as cinéma vérité. Non-professional actors were hired to play fictionalized versions of themselves on sets, which are marginally tampered versions of their living and working places. The epitome of the confusion between documentary and drama is encapsulated in a sequence of The Rider, when the character of the wounded rodeo rider is shown watching the real-life YouTube video of the actor’s rodeo accident, which happened only five months before shooting (Erbland 2017). Fiction is foregrounded by a sustained musical score, classical narrative structure and careful visual compositions, but the raw materiality of the filmic world seeps through every shot in their sustained attention to textures, bodies and faces (Fig 13). Where Meek’s Cutoff refused access to the interiority of its characters, Zhao’s films build a striking intimacy with theirs, scrutinizing their expressions and movements for signs of strength or vulnerability. Emotional investment in the story is deep, reinforced by the constant movement of the handheld camera. The films’ politics devolve from the empathy for the marginalized they strive to elicit.
Zhao was interested in exploring “a part of the country demonized for probably voting for Trump, but,” she adds, “they are humans” (Tartaglione 2017). This expression of humanist sentiments blended with socio-political concerns can be seen in the way she engages with her material. Realism, in Zhao’s films, has a strong social dimension. Life in trailer parks surviving on low-paying jobs and smuggling, families turned dysfunctional by the toll of poverty and alcohol, social perspectives among the youth limited by their environment, and, more frontally in Songs, cultural genocide and revival among Native American communities (Fig. 14), are documented with tactful sympathy. Judgments are never laid on mothers abandoning their children or young riders risking their lives for a show. The absence of narrative contextualization invites the viewer to adopt an open-minded view, accepting things as they present themselves, reconstructing a coherent filmic world rather than laying judgment upon it. Camera positions that alternate distant and close shots, combined with shallow focus composition and a sustained use of racking focus to direct the gaze, construct a form of empathetic observation that serves to level social and cultural differences between viewers and characters.
Fig. 14

Social realism in Songs and the politics of Native American communities.

The Politics of the Frontera

Zhao referred to The Rider as “my version of a feminine gaze on one of the most masculine images in American culture” (Tartaglione 2017). Gender is certainly one of the central concerns of her films. The character of Jashaun in Songs is a gender hybrid full of transformative potential. Through costuming (her father’s riding jacket, pig’s mask to pass as older or ceremonial dress) and social practices (boxing with her brother and painting her toenails with a friend while donning a mustache, Fig. 15), she reveals the constructed nature of identity and embraces the freedom to compose one’s self by performing across normative gender roles (Ben-Youssef 2018). The character of Brady in The Rider struggles as well with gender roles, in the form of the masculine cowboy icon which he strives to emulate against his own vulnerability and sense of community. Zhao’s films treat gender as a construct and document their characters’ strategies of negotiation between, under and across gender norms. The result is a queering of gender categories, which gives characters their subtle psychological complexity.
The desire to queer the normative categories of identity politics is also visible in the way Zhao’s films treat race and culture. As Zhao expressed in interviews for a French blog, “you know, the cowboys we see in *The Rider* have Native blood as well. The characters in both my films live on the same reservation. To me it’s not about the color of the skin, I mean they all live together, but it was interesting for me to show both sides” (Wagner 2017). For *The Village Voice*, the director more clearly emphasized the Sioux identity of her cowboy characters in *The Rider*, although many of them look white (Eribi 2017). At first glance, one may be tempted to distinguish between the films in terms of their overall perspective on the reservation. *Songs* adopts a more Native American perspective, with strong political commentary on neocolonial violence, while *The Rider* explores the fascination for a culture historically associated with white colonialism. Both films, however, construct the reservation as a *frontera* where races and cultures not only meet, but are mixed and acculturated to the point of indistinction.

Zhao is not interested in labels, and the style of her films works to soften racial and cultural lines. The absence of narrative contextualization prevents preconceived categories to determine the viewer’s reception of the film, while the handheld camera expresses the blurring of boundaries in the unstable or fluid relation between on- and offscreen. Such instability largely participates in the psychological characterization (for instance, when Jashaun visits the burnt remnants of her father’s house, or when Brady wakes up in the middle of the night to look at his head injury in the mirror), while fluid movements build up a sense of community (for instance, in the scenes connecting Jashaun and her brother Johnny to the landscape in *Songs*, or the moments of camaraderie preceding the campfire scene of *The Rider*); it also works to destabilize the limits of the frame and open onto holistic perspectives (e.g., the embers of campfires or desert dust elevating and disappearing into the air at key moments in *Songs*, Fig. 16). In addition to these poetic elements, what allows Zhao to rewrite the frontier myth in a progressive and inclusive way is, again, the construction of characters that transcend and explode colonial categories.
In *Songs*, Oglala children dream of becoming bull riders and Oglala men sing cowboy songs and revere rodeo stars, while the same community sustains local hip hop artists celebrating life on the Rez. Funerals are organized in Christian churches, and burials are performed by the same congregation to the sound of Oglala songs (Fig. 17). Illegal concerts offer both heavy metal and *a cappella* tribal songs. The young Jashaun blossoms in performing tribal dances in her ceremonial dress, but it is the pop music hit of the time that brings her closer to her brother. In *The Rider*, cowboys look white yet they spontaneously sing an Oglala song at a bonfire reunion. Rodeo allegedly comes from white folklore, but it is here practiced, watched and celebrated by the residents of the reservation. Despite the painful efforts of white historians and storytellers to erase the Hispanic origins of cowboy culture, *The Rider* suggests that this culture belongs to anyone who wants to make it their own. And above all, if there are differences in tone and focus between Zhao’s two films, they are bridged in that they both document one same and single place, the Pine Ridge reservation, with shooting locations such as the rodeo arena and the badlands and actors playing secondary characters visible in both. Between races, cultures and stories, lines are blurred, so that the American West regains, in Zhao’s films, its complex and dynamic identity as a *frontera*.
Conclusion

Meek’s Cutoff and Zhao’s films are successful rewritings of imperial frontier narratives because, each in their own way, they stage and transcend the limits of the strategies historically adopted to perform these rewritings. Avoiding the pretention of an all-encompassing Other perspective on the history of the West, or the soothing narrative of a cross-racial alliance against white male supremacy, Meek’s Cutoff seeks the humility, sincerity and self-awareness a progressive approach to the history of the American West should be grounded in. With a blend of harsh realism, anti-triumphalism, slow cinema and a female perspective conscious of its limitations, the film rewrites the frontier narrative as a story full of questions and possibilities. Rather than certainty and triumphalism, we are given caution and undecidability, which is probably the closest to what settlers experienced in the 19th century West, and demonstrates an acute sensibility to the layered complexity of identity politics. In disregarding the fixed categories of identity politics and in presenting the contemporary West as a site of gender hybridity and racial fluidity, Songs My Brother Taught Me and The Rider redeem the frontier myth of its imperial trappings and rewrite the marginal West as a place with transformative potential. The icons of Western mythologies—the sunset, the cowboy, the Western landscape—are appropriated and redefined by native characters, thus participating in the decolonization of the national imaginary. All three films resort to the major revisionist strategies of post-Western cinema—alternative perspectives and trajectories; historical or social realism; and dynamic identities—but balance and perfect them through limited perception, recognition of the power of myth, or mise en abyme of identity construction. Reichardt’s film does not challenge the fixed structures of opposed identities on the Western frontier, but seeks, rather, to reveal the intricate hierarchies of race and gender at play in the power structure of imperial conquest. Zhao’s films embrace a postcolonial perspective on the contemporary West as a product of Western colonization, yet a place that transcends the binary oppositions of imperialism historically inscribed upon it. As films whose
critical gazes emerge from the margins of American film production, they provide a
decentered and eventually empowering perspective on the imperial politics of Western
mythology.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY


NOTES

1. According to Richard Slotkin’s analysis of the myth of the frontier in 20th century American culture, Westerns are “storyforms whose connection to the characteristic images, characters, and references of frontier mythology is observably direct” (25).

2. Stephen Aron: “Reconfigured as the lands where separate polities converged and competed, and where distinct cultures collided and occasionally coincided, the frontier unfolds the history of the great West in ways that Turner never imagined” (128).

3. Slotkin: “In 1893 the Frontier was no longer (as Turner saw it) a geographical place and a set of facts requiring a historical explanation. Through the agency of writers like [Frederick Jackson]
Turner and [Theodore] Roosevelt it was becoming a set of symbols that constituted an explanation of history. Its significance as a mythic space began to outweigh its importance as a real place, with its own peculiar geography, politics, and cultures” (61).


5. The influential American critic Andrew Sarris was the standard-bearer of auteur cinema in the US from the 1960s to the 1980s, starting with his 1968 publication on

6. See David Laderman’s conception of the road movie as essentially linked to subversion, “explor[ing] the ‘borders’ (the status quo conventions) of American society” (2), a genre whose “core of rebellion and cultural critique becomes greatly enhanced and expanded” when “driven by drivers previously consigned to the sidelines”. (179).

7. By the 1960s, the Western, road movie, and American cinema in general developed a “growing preoccupation with native Americans as a source of ecological agency. [...] The American Indian ‘other’, in spite of remaining firmly in the background within the dominant Hollywood genres, has nonetheless become a primary focus for progressive ecological values” (Brereton 98-99). Maurizia Natali defines this particular film as a “New Age narrative of ‘spiritual healing’” (120).

8. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark: “After *Thelma & Louise*, Hollywood began to recognize again the increasing hospitality of the road to the marginalized and alienated – not only women (*Leaving Normal*), but also gays (*My Own Private Idaho*, *The Living End*, *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything!*), lesbians (*Boys on the Side*, *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*), and people of color (*Get on the Bus, Fled, Powwow Highway*) – and to renew the road’s historical currency” (12).

9. A post-Western, in the words of director Ang Lee, is a film in which “the viewer has to rethink the parameters of the Western, adjust its ‘frame,’ to comprehend the inclusion of [the male characters’] desire” (Campbell, *The Rhizomatic West* 180).

10. See Robert Ray’s observation about what he called the Left movies of the late 1960s and 1970s: “The Left movies that superficially acknowledged the invalidation of western lifestyles and values typically glorified the very myths they appeared to disown” (310).

11. Barbara Klinger: “Through its vast, unpopulated, unmodernized, romantic vistas of natural Western glories, the film unquestioningly supports one of the foundations of American ideology – frontierism – a myth that had become a virtual *lingua franca* in traditional nationalistic discourses in the late 1960s” (192).

12. Road movies are especially prone to such directional reconfigurations, as illustrated by the maps of narrative trajectories opening each chapter in Bernard Benoliel and Jean-Baptiste Thoret’s *Road Movie, USA*.

13. Discussing *Easy Rider* and *Kes* (Ken Loach, 1969), John Berra writes that “these were cinematic works that sought to reach new levels of social-realism by integrating production method with subject matter, resulting in the absorption of the audience in an acute filmic depiction of reality. [...] Such methods created a new form of film production, one that would come to be termed ‘independent’ for both its unique aesthetic approach, and its socio-political thinking.” (12). Focusing on the American road movie of the New Hollywood, Laderman further notes that it “imports the following from postwar European film modernism: elliptical narrative structure and self-reflexive devices; elusive development of alienated characters; bold traveling shots and montage sequences” (5).

14. Borrowed from Mary Louise Pratt. Pratt defines the contact zone as “the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, racial inequality, and intractable conflict” (6).

15. The expression “middle ground” was coined by historian Richard White (1991) to designate the meeting space of peoples and cultures in North America during the colonial period.
16. As defined and described in the seminal, hybrid essay by Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La Frontera*. 

17. This film celebrates a joint rescue by Indians and a trapper of a white girl condemned to the stake by Puritan elders in colonial New England. In the ending scene, while the Indian chief and trapper shake hands on the body of the white female who will wed the white man, her gaze is set on the native body, full of repressed desires and possibilities.

18. Mathew Carter: “[Three Burials] explodes the notion of a border through its presentation of the various characters and their relationships, all of whom cross ‘borders’ of one kind or another: racial, marital, lawful, political, social, economic and cultural” (185).


20. Introducing his discussion of the works of Carlos Reygadas, Tsai Ming-liang and Gus Van Sant, Tiago de Luca observes that what he calls a new realist aesthetic is “steeped in the hyperbolic application of the long take, which promotes a sensuous viewing experience anchored in materiality and duration” (1).


22. Ibid.

23. In the sense that it blends documentary and fiction at the stylistic and narrative levels. Zhao’s films are firmly and explicitly grounded in fiction, but their material has strong ties to real people, locations and events.

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**ABSTRACTS**

This article discusses Kelly Reichardt’s *Meek’s Cutoff* (2010) and Chloe Zhao’s *Songs My Brother Taught Me* (2015) and *The Rider* (2017) as contemporary rewritings of the Western genre and frontier mythology. I argue that the three films play the mythologies of the American West against the realities and consequences of settler colonialism, provide alternative perspectives on the politics of empire, construct the Western frontier as a contact zone, and challenge the original epic story of linear conquest by redefining what it means to travel or live in the Great American desert. I also underline how these films differ in their preferred focus for cultural and political rewriting: *Meek’s Cutoff* mainly centers on its alternative feminine perspective and on a deflation of the myth in its original historical terrain, while Zhao’s films are more about producing a postcolonial perspective on the contemporary West as a marginalized yet fascinating *frontera*.

Cet article analyse *La Dernière piste* (*Meek’s Cutoff*, Kelly Reichardt, 2010), *Les Chansons que mes frères m’ont apprises* (*Songs My Brother Taught Me*, Chloe Zhao, 2015) et *The Rider* (*Chloe Zhao, 2017*) comme des exemples contemporains de réécritures cinématographiques du genre du Western et du mythe de la Frontière. J’y montre que les trois films révèlent l’histoire de la colonisation derrière les mythes de l’Ouest, proposent une perspective alternative sur l’impérialisme américain, construisent l’Ouest comme une zone de contact et concurrencent le récit épique d’une conquête linéaire en envisageant la traversée du désert américain autrement. Je distingue également les trois films par les stratégies de réécriture préférées : *Meek’s Cutoff* se concentre sur la construction d’une perspective alternative féminine dans l’Ouest historique du 19e siècle,
tandis que les films de Zhao produisent une perspective contemporaine sur l'Ouest comme un espace postcolonial marginal autant que fascinant.

INDEX

**Keywords:** Western, West, frontier myth, myth, frontier, history, imperialism, ideology, United States, independent cinema, cinema

**Mots-clés:** histoire, mythe, western, États-Unis, Ouest, mythe de la frontière, frontière, impérialisme, politique, cinéma indépendant, cinéma

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Du roman à la scène : *Les Noms* et *Mao II* de Don DeLillo vus par Julien Gosselin

Critique

Aliette Ventéjoux

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**Informations sur la pièce**

2. Metteur en scène : Julien Gosselin
3. Comédiens, comédiennes : Rémi Alexandre, Guillaume Bachelé, Adama Diop, Joseph Drouet, Denis Eyriey, Antoine Ferron, Noémie Gantier, Carine Goron, Alexandre Lecroc-Lecerf, Frédéric Leidgens, Caroline Mounier, Victoria Quesnel, Maxence Vandevelde
4. Compagnie : Si vous pouviez lécher mon cœur
5. Traduction : Marianne Véron
6. Scénographe : Hubert Colas
7. Assistant à la mise en scène : Kaspar Tainturier-Fink
8. Création musicale : Rémi Alexandre, Guillaume Bachelé, Maxence Vandevelde
9. Création lumière : Nicolas Joubert assisté d’Arnaud Godest
10. Création vidéo : Jérémie Bernaert, Pierre Martin
11. Création sonore : Julien Feryn
12. Costumes : Caroline Tavernier assistée d’Angélique Legrand
13. Accessoires : Guillaume Lepert
Liens

14 Odéon Théâtre de l'Europe : https://www.theatre-odeon.eu/

15 Compagnie Si vous pouviez lécher mon cœur : http://www.lechermoncoeur.fr/

Critique

16 Après la création des Particules élémentaires et de 2666, Julien Gosselin s’attaque cette fois-ci à l’œuvre de DeLillo, plus particulièrement à trois romans, Joueurs, Mao II et Les Noms, qui ont été présentés pour la première fois à Avignon en 2018. Ils étaient joués en novembre et décembre aux Ateliers Berthier à Paris. La trilogie y était donnée le week-end, et les pièces seules pouvaient être vues en soirée durant la semaine. N’ayant pas eu la chance de pouvoir assister à la « représentation marathon » (plus de 9h d’affilée prévues pour les trois pièces) du samedi 8 décembre qui a été annulée–pour des raisons qui n’étaient en rien liées au spectacle–j’ai pu me procurer des places pour les représentations auxquelles je pouvais encore assister et ai pu voir Les Noms et Mao II, dont il sera ici question.

17 Les fils conducteurs entre les romans choisis par Gosselin, et traduits en français par Marianne Véron, sont multiples, mais les plus frappants restent le la violence et le langage. Dans Les Noms (1982), une secte mystérieuse assassine ses victimes de manière à ce que leurs initiales correspondent à celles du lieu où elles sont exécutées (par exemple, Michaelsis Kalliambetos est tué dans un village dont le nom est Mikro Kamini). Le nom de la secte n’est autre que Ta Onómata, qui signifie « les noms » en grec. Mao II dresse le portrait d’un écrivain qui a décidé de se retirer du monde mais qui finit par sortir de sa retraite et se retrouve en prise avec le terrorisme des années 1990 au Moyen-Orient. Si, au début du texte, une photographe vient jusqu’à lui pour le prendre en photo, c’est déjà pour souligner le pouvoir du langage des images qui prend une ampleur certaine dans la mise en scène.

18 Dans les deux pièces, le spectacle n’advient pas seulement sur scène, mais aussi sur un écran qui domine la scène, disparaît parfois pour ensuite réapparaître et se substituer à celle-ci. Les comédien-ne-s sont filmé-e-s en permanence, et ce jeu de caméra, s’il peut sembler déroutant au début, s’intègre parfaitement à la mise en scène des pièces. D’après les concepteur et réalisateur vidéo, Pierre Martin et Jérémie Bernaert, « cette présence de la vidéo s’est imposée de manière organique parce que le travail sur l’image permet paradoxalement de restituer la qualité purement littéraire des textes »

19 Par l’usage de l’écran, Gosselin questionne la place de l’image dans notre société, le rôle qu’elle joue désormais, et force le spectateur à se demander si ce rôle est semblable à celui du langage, ou s’il lui est devenu supérieur. Tel un shrapnel organique, pour reprendre une expression DeLillo lui-même, les images sont aujourd’hui partie intégrante de notre société. C’est en effet la sensation dont le public fait l’expérience, étant happé par les différentes images qui s’immiscent en lui, comme le shrapnel, qu’elles soient projetées sur l’écran, tel un film, ou qu’elles transparaissent à travers les comédien-ne-s. Si le choix du metteur en scène de laisser une place si importante à l’écran peut tout d’abord étonner le public, et que nous pouvons parfois nous demander où se trouve la frontière entre cinéma et théâtre, ce quatrième mur dressé entre le public et la troupe ne remet pas en question le caractère théâtral des pièces. En effet,
même si la troupe passe parfois de longs moments hors-scène, choix inhabituel pour le théâtre, la musique, la fumée, l’odeur de cigarette, ou les ombres de leurs corps, nous rappellent qu’ils sont toujours là et n’ont pas été effacés par l’écran. Ce choix signale par ailleurs la prédominance de l’objet télévision dans les années où les romans de DeLillo ont été écrits, et permet de poursuivre le questionnement lancé par l’auteur sur la puissance totale de la télévision et des images, au détriment de l’écrit et des mots. Se pose également la question du pouvoir de la littérature dans nos sociétés où violence, terreur et images vont désormais de concert.

Le début de Mao II est surprenant pour qui est un peu familier du texte de DeLillo : le roman s’ouvre en effet sur deux photos de foules, puis sur la description des mariés « en masse » de la secte Moon, dans un stade. Au contraire, la pièce débute avec l’apparition sur l’écran d’une jeune femme en robe de mariée, alors que sur la scène la comédienne qui interprète Brita explique ce qui arrive à cette jeune mariée.

Si Gosselin fait le choix du particulier par rapport au collectif, l’urgence du texte, les différentes langues parlées par la comédienne Carine Goron, ainsi que la musique et la voix de cette dernière, toujours plus fortes, font en sorte de donner l’impression au spectateur qu’une foule est belle et bien présente, comme dans le Yankee Stadium mentionné au début du roman. Le public est happé dans l’urgence du texte, qu’il comprenne ou non les langues dans lesquelles s’exprime la jeune femme.

L’écran devient ensuite un écran d’ordinateur, sur lequel le texte est écrit au fur et à mesure. Des erreurs apparaissent, qui sont corrigées. Un peu plus loin, dans une mise en abyme de l’acte d’écriture, le metteur en scène fait apparaître sur l’écran les mots que l’écrivain trace sur une feuille, assis à son bureau sur scène. L’acte d’écriture devient alors visible sur la page et sur l’écran, se révélant au spectateur devenu lecteur, dans un premier basculement de l’image vers le texte. L’écran peut enfin être parfois simplement une page, sur laquelle apparaît un nom, comme les noms qui annoncent les différentes parties des deux romans.

Une scène m’a particulièrement interpellée, celle où Brita (la photographe venue pour faire des images de Bill Gray) et Karen (la jeune mariée du début) courent dans le décor (une sorte de cage carrée qui représentent des couloirs dans lesquels des gens courent en sens inverse). La salle est envahie de fumée, et les comédiennes tournent en rond dans une fuite qui n’en finit plus. Cette scène m’a rappelé un passage de Falling Man, autre roman de DeLillo traitant du terrorisme, lorsque Florence Givens raconte sa descente pour s’échapper du World Trade Center. Les couleurs noires et blanches qui dominent cette scène, ainsi que la fumée toujours présente, entretiennent l’impression d’assister à une catastrophe.

Il faut également noter que l’écrivain Bill Gray (joué par Frédéric Leidgens), personnage central du roman, apparaît comme un trait d’union entre le questionnement sur la place de l’image et sur celui de la place du terrorisme dans nos sociétés contemporaines. Il a en effet décidé de se retirer du monde et accepte difficilement qu’une photographe, Brita (jouée par Noémie Garnier) vienne faire son portrait. Par ailleurs, lorsqu’il décide enfin de sortir de sa solitude, c’est pour être finalement victime du terrorisme dont il analyse ainsi la place : « There’s a curious knot that binds novelists and terrorists. In the West we become famous effigies as our books lose the power to shape and influence. [...] Years ago I used to think that it was possible for a novelist to alter the inner life of the culture. Now bomb-makers and gunmen have taken that territory. They make raids on human consciousness. What writers used to do
when they were all incorporated. » En plaçant ces mots dans la bouche d’un écrivain, DeLillo et Gosselin nous invitent peut-être à nous arrêter sur leur place dans la société contemporaine, rappelant encore et toujours l’importance des noms et de leur tissage, et entre autres celui du nom « terroriste » lui-même, bien souvent utilisé de manière inconsiderée.

Entre Mao II et Les Noms, une nouvelle de DeLillo sert d’interlude. « Le Marteau et la faucille », court texte datant de 20116, soumet le public à une autre forme de violence, financière cette fois-ci. Réflexion sur le capitalisme, cette nouvelle nous abreuve de noms de villes et de places boursières–le nom de Dubaï, répété à l’infini, résonne encore–pendant le monologue époustouflant du comédien Joseph Drouet, seul face à la salle, accompagné lui aussi par la musique lancinante qui, comme sa diction, par moment s’embralle et nous transmet l’urgence qui habite ces places financières. En sortant le public de la problématique du terrorisme, cet interlude se veut sans doute être une respiration, mais il devient rapidement suffocant, car les problèmes qu’il aborde ne sont pas plus réjouissants, bien au contraire. La voix du comédien est traitée, elle a des sonorités presque mécaniques, automatiques, faisant allusion au caractère inhumain des marchés financiers. Quant à ce qui est des couleurs qui restent attachées à ce texte, on ne sera pas étonné de se rappeler du rouge. Dénonciation du capitalisme et de la folie des marchés, d’une autre forme de violence de ce monde, il n’en apparaît pas moins presque hors contexte pour le spectateur qui ne voit pas les trois pièces d’affilée. L’univers proposé est tellement différent que de celui de Mao II que l’on a l’impression d’avoir assisté à une autre pièce, alors qu’on aurait préféré rester encore un peu avec les personnages de Mao II et les sensations procurées par la pièce qui vient juste de s’achever7. Cela n’enlève malgré tout rien à la puissance du texte, ni à la performance du comédien, et le texte trouve probablement encore plus toute sa place au cours de la trilogie.

Sur les deux pièces vues, et si toutes les deux méritent leur succès, c’est tout de même Les Noms qui m’auront le plus marquée, bousculée, touchée.

Le titre l’annonce, et le spectacle le montre : le sujet du texte n’est pas seulement le terrorisme, mais bel et bien le langage, l’écriture, les mots eux-mêmes. Qu’ils apparaissent à l’écran ou soient prononcés par les comédien-ne-s, ou déformés par le jeune enfant de Kathryn et James, Tap, qui écrit un roman, les noms sont au cœur de la pièce. Tap n’est pas seulement un écrivain en herbe, il joue aussi avec la langue orale, et parle le « Ob » avec sa mère. Cela consiste à insérer o-b au cœur des mots : « You insert o-b in certain parts of words. » Il résiste ainsi d’une certaine manière à l’oral, inventant une nouvelle forme de langage, mais dans laquelle il est également difficile de ne pas lire le préfixe -ob de « oblitération ». Ce rapport particulier au langage est rendu sur scène par l’absence de l’enfant, dont les mots apparaissent sur l’écran avec les comédien-ne-s jouant ses parents dialoguent, instaurant un lien surprenant entre l’écran–qui devient lui aussi comédien le temps d’une scène en donnant le point de vue de l’enfant–et les deux comédien-ne-s qui se trouvent sur scène, mais aussi entre l’écrit et l’oral. L’écrit de Tap est d’ailleurs lui aussi particulier, comme le démontrent les phrases qui apparaissent sur l’écran et dont la grammaire, l’orthographe et la syntaxe sont pour le moins originales, à l’image du roman qu’il écrit, « a nonfiction novel »9.

Une scène marquante reste sans doute la dispute entre James (Adama Diop) et Kathryn (Victoria Quesnel) qui a lieu durant un changement de plateau : le monde s’agite autour d’eux mais ils ne semblent pas s’en apercevoir et restent tout entier concentrés sur leur...
échange, sur les mots qu’ils prononcent, qui deviennent de plus en plus forts, de plus en plus durs, et parfois même complètement incompréhensibles. Le verbe leur échappe, et échappe au public, perdu dans des hurlements et soulignant l’aspect souvent problématique du langage. Il n’y a pas de répit, pas de temps morts entre les répliques ; les mots fusent. Les comédien-ne-s, quant à eux, sont parfois dos au public sur scène, mais lui font malgré tout parfaitement face grâce à l’intermédiaire de l’écran, comme l’illustre la photo ci-dessous où l’on peut voir Valérie Quesnel.

Fig. 1

Les Noms, Julien Gosselin.
Crédit @Simon Gosselin

Les quelques longueurs du monologue de fin, au cours duquel Owen Brademas (joué par Frédéric Leidgens) revient sur son enfance au sein d’une église des États-Unis, et sur la difficulté de son accès au langage du groupe à cette époque, sont effacées par la toute dernière scène. Les Noms s’achèvent en effet en une glossolalie à couper le souffle, les cris et vociférations des comédiennes se mélangent à une basse qui vous prend aux tripes, un sentiment de terreur pure envahit le spectateur qui accepte de se laisser emporter, et assiste impuissant à cette apocalypse qui advient sur scène, rendue encore plus crédible par la pluie qui dégouline sur les comédiennes. Trempés, hurlant en toute langue, en transe, ils finissent nus et quasi muets, et il semble que le langage finisse par échapper au sens, plus aucune pensée n’est articulée, et finalement tout s’arrête net.

Si l’on peut parier que la fin de la trilogie marque l’épuisement du spectateur, des comédiennes, des musiciens, des caméramans et techniciens, il est certain que le texte de DeLillo, comme la mise en scène de Gosselin, soulignent que jamais n’advient l’épuisement du verbe.
NOTES


2. C’est dans son roman Falling Man, que DeLillo introduit l’image du shrapnel organique. Un docteur explique à Keith (un survivant des attaques du 11 septembre), ce qu’est un shrapnel organique : “A student is sitting in a café. She survives the attack. Then, months later, they find these little, like, pellets of flesh, human flesh that got driven into the skin. They call this organic shrapnel.” (Falling Man, 16).


4. Nous notons ici que ces photos n’apparaissent pas dans la traduction française.


7. La sensation est probablement différente lorsque l’on voit les trois pièces d’affilée.


9. Ibid.

RÉSUMÉS

Compte rendu de deux des pièces de la trilogie (Joueurs, Mao II, Les Noms) adaptée des romans de DeLillo, mis en scène par Julien Gosselin.

Performance review of two of the three plays of the trilogy adapted from Don DeLillo’s novels (Players, Mao II, The Names), directed by Julien Gosselin.

INDEX

Mots-clés : Don DeLillo, écran, image, Julien Gosselin, langage, littérature contemporaine, mots, Si vous pouviez lécher mon cœur, terreur, terrorisme, théâtre

Thèmes : Theater

Keywords : contemporary literature, Don DeLillo, image, Julien Gosselin, language, screen, Si vous pouviez lécher mon cœur, terror, terrorism, theatre
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In Interview with American Playwright Mark SaFranko

John S. Bak

Introduction to Mark SaFranko and to the Ariel Project

Fig. 1

MARK SAFRANKO
Auteur en résidence internationale en lorraine

1 Born 23 December 1950 in Trenton, New Jersey, Mark SaFranko is one of the last Renaissance men. Writer, painter, musician, SaFranko is also a playwright, whose one-act and full-length plays date from the early 1990s to 2018 and have been produced at home in New York and Connecticut, as well as abroad in Londonderry (Northern Ireland) and Cork (Eire). In 1992, his one-act play *The Bitch-Goddess* was selected Best Play of the Village Gate One-Act Festival in New York.
SaFranko is currently in Nancy, France, where he is writer-in-residence at the Université de Lorraine as part of its ARIEL project for 2018-19. ARIEL, the acronym for “Author in International Residence in Lorraine,” offers a four-month residence to an international artist who conducts master classes with university students and interacts with the general public by giving readings and occasional lectures. The program, run by the university’s UFR ALL-Nancy and IUT Nancy-Charlemagne, was created to bridge the artistic gap between university and general publics, to showcase Lorraine’s cultural heritage, and to support the Grand Est Region’s efforts to diversify its international interests.

The ARIEL project carries three main goals: creativity and reflection on the creative process, translation, and mediatization. The following interview, which took place in Nancy on 26 November 2018, was intended to address all three project goals with respect to Mark SaFranko’s career in the American and international theatre.

For more information on the ARIEL PROJECT: http://residence-ariel.fr/

In Interview with Mark SaFranko

John S. Bak: Being of man of many talents, where does playwriting fit into the hierarchy of what you see as your main artistic focus? Can you talk about your formal training in the theatre and how it prepared you to become a playwright?

Mark SaFranko: There was no formal training. My training consisted of spending time in the theatre, watching and studying plays, reading plays and trying to figure out what makes them work. I regard writing for the theatre as an essential part of the fabric of my entire writing life. It’s just another thread, so to speak.

J.B.: Your plays have been produced both in America and abroad, sometimes in translation. Could you talk for a few minutes about your international experiences? Do you find that European audiences respond to your work differently than American audiences and, if so, why is that the case?

SaFranko: I actually haven’t ever seen one of my plays produced on foreign soil, so I’m not at all certain how European audiences responded. The reviews of the productions have been positive, I can say that.

J.B.: Have you worked closely with your foreign translators? What were the major obstacles you encountered in the translating process? Were they more linguistic- or culture-based hurdles?

SaFranko: The single instance of one of my plays being translated was Seedy, or Minable, into French. The play remains unproduced either in the U.S. or in Europe, but it was published in France. I had no contact whatsoever with the translator, which is highly unusual in my experiences with translators.

J.B.: Your plays are frequently situated in the East of the U.S., often New York City. And yet, the West coast is referenced, usually Hollywood, which leaves the impression that you find that there exists an antithetical relationship between film-culture Los Angeles and theatre-culture New York (or even fake versus real). Both Sharon Striker in The Promise and Eddie Tilsen in Seedy, for instance, refer to film casting directors as looking at “strips of raw meat” when they select actors for roles. Many are the names of serious writers who have been seduced by Hollywood’s allure. Do you see yourself as being strictly a playwright, or would you accept scriptwriting offers were Hollywood to come calling?

SaFranko: Of course the money of a screenwriting gig would be too tempting to turn down. I’ve written several spec scripts based on my own work, but none has been
produced, which is not an unusual occurrence in the film world. I'm fond of saying that when you insert an electrical plug on a film set it costs a million dollars, and therein lies the rub. The money involved in film production makes a finished product mostly a fantasy. As far as the antithetical relationship is concerned, it's been my observation that in the past New York actors liked to think that doing “pure” theatre was somehow superior to falling for the allure of Hollywood, but I'm not sure that's still the case. The boundaries between the worlds have grown more muddled, especially since “stars” are often needed to make New York theatre productions stay afloat and turn a profit.

J.B.: Hungry actors and actresses populate your plays, willing to do near anything to get a part, like Wendy in *The Promise* or Eddie in *Seedy*. Both Eddie and Sharon hound talent agents, like Harvey Gillman in *The Promise*, and the message that comes across is that actors are “cold” until they get a part, and then they need to stay “hot” and in the limelight, no matter what it takes. Is this your experience with the theatre?

SaFranko: My experience is that most actors stay cold! The truth is that very, very, very few actors ever get to a significant place in either theatre or film. It’s about as brutal a business as there is. And when you think about it, the barriers to entry are few. You don’t have to play an instrument, you don’t have to write something, you don’t have to be able to paint a picture. All you have to do is say the lines that someone else wrote, and you’re an actor. So anyone can do it. This generates a lot of hope on the part of the dreamers and wannabes. And once you do it, you have to hope that you're well connected, or look good in front of the camera, or have a certain charisma that makes people want to look at you. And that you are very, very lucky.

J.B.: Prostitution is a common theme in your plays, the way we all sell ourselves to make ends meet, whether it is the exotic dancer Tracy Sinnett (Esmeralda) with Eddie in *Seedy* or Edwin Reaves with John Campbell and his company in *Incident in the Combat Zone*, or the actors Eddie and Sharon just discussed. Life is learning about the limits and consequences, to ourselves and others, of our self-prostitution, no?

SaFranko: I think that since we are all victims to at least some extent, it's a matter of learning how to reconcile oneself to the form of prostitution we’re trapped in.

J.B.: Because self-prostitution intimates self-preservation in your plays, and the stage or screen are often the media in which this financial transaction takes place, false appearances becomes a key theme in your work. As Eddie says about Tracy/Esmeralda: “It's hard to tell with you what's real and what's not” when she is no longer wearing her wig. Acting is about appearances, of course, but are we all just play-acting in life in order to survive?

SaFranko: I think yes, to a greater or lesser degree. It’s unavoidable. I think it’s why it so often happens that we don’t know who is lying right next to us in bed, so to speak.

J.B.: You are a painter as well as a playwright, and art figures at times in your plays, as in *Seedy*, for instance, where Eddie points out the original Fischls, Dalis, and Saint Johns to Tracy/Esmeralda: “Some collection, huh? Hank’s ‘investments.’” Since your plays are often about power struggles, and money nearly always plays a part in that equation, what is your take on the marriage of art and money?

SaFranko: On one level it’s complicated, and on another it’s quite simple. Very few artists make money at their profession. We all want it, we all need it, but the rewards go to only a small percentage of the people working at it. Nowadays, it seems to me that genuine art is further and further removed from what is commercially successful, especially in the U.S. Anything that doesn’t earn significantly—regardless...
of its artistic worth—is considered beneath contempt and will have a very difficult
time finding an audience.

J.B.: Because money is such a major concern with your characters, some for survival and
others for excessive pleasure, your plays contain frequent attacks on hypocrisy, often
against conservative “family values” that are false fronts for greed. As Jean Simonsen
admits in Incident in the Combat Zone: “All of you at the top, you’re all the same aren’t you?
And all this ridiculous propaganda about country, and family values, and touching one
another’s lives, it’s all just trash, just a pile of lies.....” Can you elaborate on this, since
playwriting is itself inherently hypocritical? I mean, it offers up pretense as reality, and
pursues artistic results, but still desires box-office success?

SaFranko: Well, you’ve found me out! And yes, you are correct: we can uncover
hypocrisy in ourselves at practically every turn.

J.B.: Fame is another common theme in your plays, from Wendy to Eddie to the Suspect in
Interrogation # 2, who says: ’We have no identity without fame.’ This last play was written
in 2002, before the likes of a Kim Kardashian or a YouTuber, who today seek out fame at
nearly any cost. Is celebrity an American phenomenon, or least different from other cultural
notions of fame, and who is ultimately responsible for this mad push, the individual him- or
herself, the media machine, the consumer?

SaFranko: It looks to me that the mad pursuit of celebrity is a peculiarly American
disease. Not that it probably doesn’t exist elsewhere, but it seems particularly rabid
in the U.S. Why? What this signifies is a profound emptiness in the psyche and soul of
the American. What else but a void would account for such a powerful urge to be seen
and known? When you think about it, it’s extraordinarily sad. And the disease has
progressed to the point where some skill or talent isn’t even required for notoriety. I
mean, look at who many of the most famous people in the world are.

J.B.: One of the recurrent messages in your plays is honor thy benefactor, a common theme
in Georgian theatre. The idea is that, in the entertainment business at least, it is all about
being loyal to and paying back those who have lent you a helping hand. As Eddie says of
Hank’s generosity: “Payback, he said, for helping him out way back when. That’s the way
this business is supposed to work for people with any kind of memory.” Eddie utters
something similar in Seedy, Reaves confesses it to John and to Jean in Incident in the
Combat Zone, and we find Harvey saying it to Wendy in The Promise. And yet, Eddie won’t
show Tracy the grace that Hank showed him when he was down and out. Does this justify
his murder in the end the play, a sort of instant karma or poetic justice?

SaFranko: I would say probably yes.

J.B.: Let’s talk a bit about your philosophy of life. In your play The Promise, the pro/
an antagonist Harvey says, “You know when free will operates? In–what’s the word?–
retrospect. That’s when. In re–tro–spect. The free-will fairytale has caused more
unnecessary guilt than any other idea in the history of the world.” Is this your philosophical
musing or just a casual line spoken by an opportunist?

SaFranko: You know, it is actually largely what I believe, I suppose. I’m something of
a determinist. Once character is set, do we have much choice about anything? How
does the cliché go? Character is destiny.

J.B.: I’d like now to turn to the relationships between genders in your play, surely one of their
dominant themes. You have two strippers, Esmeralda (Tracy Sinnett) in Seedy and Wendy
La Brava (Josie Kamenitski) in The Promise. Many of your female characters, from Wendy
to Tracy to the Suspect’s victim, bear tattoos and piercings. And many of your male
characters are openly misogynistic and see women as sexed or sexual objects, such as
Jack and Paul in The Bitch-Goddess, who are both relentless in their criticism of Irene as a
former partner. Even the Suspect in Interrogation # 2 says bluntly: “I wouldn't fuck her with your dick.” Would you care to elaborate?

SaFranko: Well, this is the characters speaking, not me. Many men have this outlook on women, though not often to such an extreme. I happen to be honest enough to record those words and thoughts—not that I’m looking for credit. As far as the body markings are concerned, it makes for a dramatic sight on stage, doesn’t it?

J.B.: And yet, despite your male characters’ rather abusive views about women, you are critical of predatory sexuality, as seen with Harvey in The Promise. Written in 2002, The Promise is certainly relevant today, nonethemore given that the lead character’s name is Harvey, an eerie premonition of Harvey Weinstein. However, in spite of Harvey’s obvious despicable treatment of his female clientele, it is Wendy who says: “Sometimes people have to be used on the way up, but that’s just the way it is.....” Do you see the couch audition culture of Hollywood as a simple quid pro quo, given the “glut” of actors and the “damn few parts” available for them all?

SaFranko: I think many actors—especially attractive women—would agree with your assessment.

J.B.: Is gender equality possible then, at least in the entertainment business? Or is infidelity, another recurrent theme in your plays, unavoidable? I mean, the list of the unfaithful in your plays runs long. Harvey cheats on his wife and lies to her in The Promise, just like Eddie in Seedy. “Well, with the wife and kid gone, what’s to stop me?” The character Ferdy Venturi lived up “in the Valley before his wife caught him with the neighbor’s daughter and kicked him out.” John Campbell cheats on his wife with young boys in Incident in the Combat Zone. Even Irene is far from the perfect partner for either Jack Royko (any reference to Mike?) or Paul Tenucci in The Bitch-Goddess. Is fidelity, like the stage itself, an illusion?

SaFranko: I would think so. But people are wired differently. Some people are made for fidelity. However, when a person becomes more and more famous, or rich, or prominent, perhaps fidelity is difficult because the opportunities for extracurricular activity increase exponentially.

J.B.: In The Promise and in No…?, you seem to be searching for gender complicity to the sexual problem confronting Americans (and even the French) that differentiates mutual desire from sexual harassment or abuse. Again, given the #MeToo movement, was No…? your response to the many accusations sweeping through various male-dominated industries and was it, perhaps, even influenced by David Mamet’s Oleanna, a similar response nearly three decades earlier? Are you taking sides in the debate or do you just want to show how all incidents have two perspectives, and that both genders need to see things from the other’s side? After all, even Eddie is propositioned in Seedy. “Merle Moonaker wanted to get into our pants, see? And he looked into my eyes, and he knew right away he wasn’t getting my cock—no way—see what I mean? That’s what it really was.” For you, it is not simply a female issue, but one that affects all who must bow to power, though surely women have historically been more abused than men, no?

SaFranko: While I did see Oleanna many years ago, the play was not at all in my mind when I wrote No…? It was inspired by a different experience altogether, and I did want to show that such incidents can have different perspectives, though by no means always. Because absolutely, women have been more abused than men.

J.B.: Your plays often paint a fine line between sexual consent and rape, as with John and Liz in No…?, and, to a certain extent, with Eddie and Tracy/Esmeralda in Seedy and John Campbell and his young trade Brent in Incident in the Combat Zone. Rape, power, money and business are all uncomfortably intertwined here. As Reaves tells Campbell, “I made it clear to my contact at The Times that we would consider substantially cutting our advertising, if not pulling it altogether. And why strain a mutually profitable relationship?” Is America ultimately responsible for the current gender war being waged because it has always
equated sex, power and money in the workplace? Or are individuals alone to blame for not keeping it in their pants? Or, again, are we all complicit?

SaFranko: That’s an incredibly complex question. And I don’t know the answer to it. I will say, however, that another old saw applies here as well: absolute power corrupts absolutely, I believe it goes.

J.B.: Let’s lighten up the discussion a bit now. Humor in your plays often serves a dual function: to coax a laugh out of the audience and to carry a fairly dark double entendre, such as with the naked John Campbell running down the streets in *Incident in the Combat Zone* and being told “And the people who called the police couldn’t tell you from Adam.” Or again, with Paul Tenucci in *The Bitch-Goddess* turning away from his wife Irene’s casket and saying “Goodnight, Irene, I’ll see you tomorrow,” a close echo of the refrain from the popular Lead Belly song “Goodnight, Irene” (1933) about the singer’s distraught past with his faithless love Irene and his desire to get even with her in his dreams. Do you see yourself as a writer of dark comedies, social dramas or human tragedies?

SaFranko: That’s a very good question, and I realize now that you’ve made me think about it that much of the humor in my writing surfaces in my plays. Is it intentional? I don’t know. But I would say that humor notwithstanding, I’m probably a writer of human tragedies.

J.B.: Finally, as you know, I’m a big Tennessee Williams fan, and I noticed in your plays many references to his life and work. Your plays are often cut into scenes, as were a few of his, mostly notably The Glass Menagerie and A Streetcar Named Desire. There is also a specific reference to Streetcar and an “inconsistent Southern accent” in *The Promise* and the allusion to the “kindness of strangers” in *Seedy*. In her long monologue at the opening of scene seven of *The Promise*, Sharon muses: “Many talented people have been rejected. I remind myself of that every single morning when I wake up alone in my bed out in Jersey. Think of them: Van Gogh. Strindberg. Tennessee Williams in his later years.” Could you discuss a bit your interests in Williams and in his work?

SaFranko: Well, it began when I played Stanley in *Streetcar* back in 1971 on a college stage. I was twenty years old at the time. The play had a strong effect on me, and I got interested in Williams as an artist, and, as you know, there was a lot to become acquainted with. I became a particular fan, ironically, of several of his early short stories. *Streetcar* remains a favorite, as well as the story and screenplay of *One Arm*. I’m also fond of *Kingdom of Earth*, *The Red Devil Battery Sign*, *Suddenly Last Summer* and many of the one-acts. And I also love the novel *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone*. He left quite a legacy.

J.B.: Thank you so much, Mark, for our talk. I think it is safe to say that I, and all the readers, have learned a lot about your artistic vision and your theatrical talents to project that vision on the stage. I wish you the best in all your future playwriting endeavors.
Entretien avec l’auteur Mark SaFranko en résidence à Nancy dans le cadre du Projet ARIEL.

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Mots-clés: acteurs/actrices, argent, The Bitch Goddess culture du monde du cinéma/théâtre, gloire, humour, Incident in the Combat Zone, inégalités de genres, Interrogation # 2, The Promise, prostitution, public, Seedy, traduction

Subjects: Theater

Keywords: Actors/actresses, audiences, The Bitch Goddess, fame, film/theatre culture, humor, gender inequalities, Incident in the Combat Zone, Interrogation # 2, money, The Promise, prostitution, Seedy, translation

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Miranda, 18 | 2019
Reparadise de Gwenaël Morin ou la dépolitisation d’un spectacle historiquement subversif.
Critique de Reparadise de Gwenaël Morin
Camille Mayer

Re-Paradise: lien internet
1 http://www.nanterre-amandiers.com/2017-2018/re-paradise/

Re-Paradise: distribution
2 Dates : 4, 5, 11, 12, 18, 19, 25, 26 mai 2018
3 Lieu : Théâtre Amandiers-Nanterre, Atelier
4 Durée : 1h50
5 Spectacle de Gwénaël Morin à partir de Paradise Now, création collective du Living Theatre (retranscription originale de la pièce : Judith Malina, Julian Beck ; traduction en français : Elsa Rooke)
Re-Paradise de Gwenaël Morin ou la dépolitisation d’un spectacle historiquement subversif.


maintenant ». La lumière blanche est toujours tournée vers le public. Pour Gwenaël Morin comme pour le Living Theatre, le spectacle se termine dans la rue, « le théâtre est dans la rue. La rue appartient aux gens. Libérez le théâtre. Libérez la rue. Commencez » la Révolution.

Fig. 1

TENTURES ACCROCHÉES SUR UN PAN DU MUR DU THÉÂTRE NANTERRE-AMANDIERS, REPRENANT LE DÉROULÉ DU SPECTACLE AVEC SES HUIT ÉCHELONS ET, POUR CHACUN D'ENTRE EUX, LE RITE, LA VISION ET L'ACTION.

Crédit photo : Camille Mayer.

Si la version de Gwenaël Morin est fidèle à l'originale, c'est en réalité au niveau du processus de création que des modifications ont été faites, et que tout semble se jouer. Sa troupe n’est composée que de douze comédien.ne.s lorsqu’elle se lance dans ce projet. Le spectacle du Living Theatre en compte trente-six, qui vivent en communauté anarchiste depuis des années et ont effectué ensemble de multiples créations. Au Living Theatre, les répétitions sont journalières, les expérimentations théâtrales : « le Living n’est rien d’autre qu’un de ces groupes, une de ces communautés, vouées à l’étude des problèmes posés par l’expression théâtrale. [...] C’est comme cela que nous apprenons vraiment, car il y a initiation et transmission de la connaissance en même temps qu’expérimentation pratique de celle-ci ». La création de Paradise Now est collective, libre de droits pour n’importe quelle communauté qui souhaiterait la jouer. C’est un aboutissement du travail communautaire et de la mise en place des principes anarchistes de non-domination et de déhiérarchisation. Dans un entretien, Julian Beck explique même la difficulté de se mettre en retrait, de quitter sa position d’initiateur pour laisser à chacun la place de s’exprimer. Cela est toutefois nécessaire : selon eux, un.e artiste ne peut pas prêcher une parole qu’il ne tente lui-même de mettre en action. Ce n’est pas l’ambition de Gwenaël Morin ni de sa troupe, qui va recruter les vingt-quatre comédien.ne.s manquant.e.s.

L’objectif du spectacle, selon le Living Theatre, était de préparer les artistes à travers le processus de création—tout comme les spectateur.ice.s grâce à la représentation—à la
révolution. Julian Beck expliquera les positions de la troupe en ces termes « D’un côté, nous rêvons d’un théâtre si puissant que les gens le quittent pour s’engager dans la révolution, d’un autre côté, on espère que le travail que nous accomplissons au théâtre sert les besoins du public et le guide vers une action politique et économique qui les aide à sortir de leur camisole de force ». Gwenaël Morin ne tente pas, en décidant de mettre en scène ce spectacle, de créer une communauté anarchiste éphémère composée d’artistes amateur.ices. Il conserve son statut de metteur en scène et fait appel à des comédien.ne.s alors rémunéré.e.s. D’un point de vue dramaturgique, cela a un impact sur le spectacle, qui passe de cinq à six heures de représentation lorsqu’il est joué par le Living Theatre à deux heures de représentation avec la troupe de Gwenaël Morin. Le metteur en scène s’en explique, « pour pouvoir mener ces scènes d’impro[visations], il faut avoir beaucoup travaillé ensemble avec les acteurs, sur d’autres choses, et ça, nous, on n’avait pas les moyens ». Les scènes d’« actions » sont donc raccourcies. Les différences de jeu entre l’originale et la version de Gwenaël Morin proviennent de cette non-ambition politique, qui a coupé court à l’expérimentation longue durée et donc aux Actions.

13 *Paradise Now* était construit autour d’improvisations spontanées, de la part des artistes et du public. Le Living n’était dans une recherche esthétique qu’à partir de leur propos. Judith Malina dira d’ailleurs « concevoir le théâtre comme un acte politique et le contenu comme instigateur de la forme ». Comment alors représenter un spectacle qui se veut révolutionnaire si sa substance provoque les moyens de sa mise en scène, mais que les artistes ne sont pas dans une optique politique ? C’est là tout le dilemme du projet de Gwenaël Morin, qui nous mène à nous interroger sur une problématique nécessairement politique : la relation du spectacle à l’institution. Pour le Living Theatre, la nécessité de créer une société anarchiste participait aussi de leur volonté de ne plus faire partie du monde capitaliste et de ne plus être dans des rapports financiers. Chez Gwenaël Morin, les comédien.ne.s sont payé.e.s au cachet. Le spectacle reçoit deux sources de financement pour sa création, l’une du théâtre du Point du Jour et l’autre du CDN Nanterre-Amandiers. Il s’inscrit alors de fait dans la catégorie du théâtre subventionné français, et s’oppose directement à la pratique théâtrale du Living Theatre qui tentait à tout prix de s’extraire de ce théâtre dominant et de ce qu’il représentait. Le Living, qui dénonçait le théâtre bourgeois et la marchandisation de la culture voit aujourd’hui son spectacle rejué au cœur de l’institution théâtrale française, le centre dramatique national Nanterre-Amandiers, par un metteur en scène lui-même bien installé, alors directeur d’un théâtre lyonnais. Plus encore, tandis que la révolution de juillet 1968 portait en elle la revendication d’un théâtre gratuit et ouvert à tou.te.s, le politique est là encore désamorcé : les représentations à Nanterre-Amandiers sont payantes.

14 Mais alors, comment recevoir cette proposition théâtrale ? Si Gwenaël Morin se met en difficulté en décidant de mettre en scène cet héritage colossal et révolutionnaire, il ne faut pas oublier ses objectifs artistiques propres, et regarder à tout prix cette mise en scène à travers le regard du Living. Toute l’ambition de Gwenaël Morin est de nous faire nous demander « pourquoi ? » Pourquoi, aujourd’hui, cinquante ans après les révolutions de mai et juin 1968, mettre à nouveau en scène ce spectacle ? Qu’est-ce que cela fait aux spectateurs et spectatrices ? Quelle place donne-t-on aujourd’hui aux idéologies politiques révolutionnaires ? À l’anarchisme ? À la liberté individuelle et collective ? L’artiste n’a que peu de connaissances sur l’anarchisme, sur le théâtre radical américain des années 1970 et sur le Living Theatre. Son travail est de se mettre
« en empathie totale avec ce qui est écrit », dit-il. « Du coup, je n’ai aucun exercice critique. Je n’utilise pas les pièces, quelles qu’elles soient comme une espèce de support de réflexion ou comme une manière... Je n’essaie pas de les orienter dans un sens qui serait conforme. [...] Je prête le flanc à tous les stéréotypes et à toutes les idées reçues qui sont consécutives de la part superficielle de ma propre culture en fait, et c’est d’une certaine ce qui m’intéresse au bout du compte19 ». Gwenaël Morin soulève ici une interrogation bien plus importante que celle de savoir comment mettre en scène aujourd’hui les pièces d’hier en conservant leur substance et leur caractère subversif lorsque le contexte politique et social a évolué. Il ne s’agit plus de se demander comment traduire les événements politiques du passé, ou comment réadapter une pièce de théâtre politique historique, mais plutôt et simplement de se demander l’objectif que l’on fixe au théâtre lui-même.

Le pari semble en fait réussi : si la transformation du public est difficilement perceptible, ce spectacle soulève des interrogations essentielles, tant au monde du théâtre qu’à la vie politique du spectateur ou de la spectatrice. Il interroge la nécessité de réactiver les œuvres du passé, voire de les réadapter. Gwenaël Morin ici n’effectue ni une reconstitution historique – il n’a pas d’ambition scientifique dans la mise en scène de ce spectacle – ni une réadaptation. Cette dernière aurait nécessité une nouvelle traduction théâtrale : le contexte de représentation n’est plus le même, les interprètes sont différents, le public a une autre perception du théâtre et du subversif. Réadapter cette pièce aurait signifié en conserver sa substance politique et son ambition révolutionnaire pour que le public les perçoive. En effet, plutôt qu’une reconstitution ou une réadaptation, le metteur en scène a produit un hommage, qui, bien que dépolitisé, aura au moins eu le mérite de remettre sur le devant de la scène cette troupe américaine historique et ses luttes. À défaut d’une transformation du spectateur ou la spectatrice, cette version aura contribué à modifier les relations de travail au sein de l’équipe artistique. Selon Gwenaël Morin lui-même, ce spectacle l’a transformé et sa mise en scène a eu un impact fort sur les comédien.ne.s « C’est la première fois que je monte une pièce qui me transforme autant dans sa pratique. Quand on [a] mont[é] la pièce, ce que ça a généré entre nous, dans l’équipe [...], une espèce de... les gens [de l’équipe] étaient tous amoureux les uns des autres20 ». Il ne s’agit pas pour l’artiste ici de promouvoir une nouvelle société, mais bien de voir comment celle dans laquelle on vit réagit cinquante ans plus tard à ces discours. L’aspect révolutionnaire de ce spectacle historique se cachait peut-être, depuis le début, non pas dans sa représentation, mais dans son processus de création.

NOTES

2. Dramaturge, scénographe et metteur en scène français, il dirige depuis 2014 le centre dramatique national Nanterre-Amandiers.
3. Nous faisons ici référence au Théâtre permanent de G. Morin et ses mises en scène de Racine, Molière, Sophocle, Tchekov, Shakespeare, etc.).


8. Voir la traduction distribuée durant le spectacle de Paradise Now par Elsa Rooke pour Gwenaël Morin, p. 2.


10. J. Malina et J. Beck (éd.), Paradise now, op. cit. « La pièce Paradise Now n’est pas une propriété privée : il n’y a pas de droits de représentation à payer ; c’est gratuit ; pour toute communauté qui souhaiterait la jouer. » traduction personnelle de l’extrait suivant : « The play “Paradise Now” is not private property; there are no performance royalties to pay; it is free; for any community that wants to play it ».


15. Pour les réactions de spectateurs, voir J.-J. Lebel, Entretiens avec le living theatre, op. cit.

16. Id., p.9.


18. Notons que la représentation au Théâtre du Point du Jour était gratuite, comme beaucoup de représentations de G. Morin lors de ses cinq années de direction de structure.


20. Interview personnelle avec Gwenaël Morin, le 02/11/2018 à Lyon, p. 16.

RÉSUMÉS


Review of Gwenaël Morin’s Re-Paradise presented at the national dramatic center of Theatre Nanterre-Amandier for the Festival “Mondes Possibles” celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of May 1968.
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Keywords : Political theatre, anarchism, subversive, reactivation, reenactment, adaptation, Gwenaël Morin, Living Theatre, CND Nanterre-Amandiers, Théâtre du Point du jour, American revolutionary theatre, Paradise Now, 1968

Thèmes : Theater

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The Cane by Mark Ravenhill and A Very Very Very Dark Matter by Martin McDonagh
Performance Review
William C. Boles

Factual information about the shows

1 The Cane by Mark Ravenhill–Royal Court Theatre Downstairs, December 22, 2018
2 Director: Vicky Featherstone
3 Designer: Chloe Lamford
4 Lighting Designer: Natasha Chivers
5 Sound Designer: David McSeveney
6 Fight Director: Bret Yount
7 Cast: Alun Armstrong, Maggie Steed, Nicola Walker
Maggie Steed as Maureen and Nicole Walker as Anna.
Credits: Johan Persson.
Fig. 2

Alun Armstrong as Edward.
Credits: Johan Persson.

Fig. 3

Maggie Steed as Maureen and Alun Armstrong as Edward.
Credits: Johan Persson.

A Very Very Very Dark Matter by Martin McDonagh–Bridge Theatre, December 22, 2018
Director: Matthew Dunster
Designer: Anna Fleischle
Lighting Designer: Philip Gladwell
Sound Designer: George Dennis
Music: James Maloney
Illusions: Chris Fisher
Video Designer: Finn Ross
Fight Directors: Rachel Bown-Williams and Ruth Cooper-Brown, RC Annie Ltd.
Cast: Tom Waits, Johnetta Eula’Mae Ackles, Jim Broadbent, Lee Knight, Paul Bradley, Ryan Pope, Graeme Hawley, Kundai Kanyama, Phil Daniels, Elizabeth Berrington

Fig. 4

Jim Broadbent (Hans), James Roberts (Charles Jr), Regan Garcia (Walter), Audrey Hayhurst (Kate), Elizabeth Berrington (Catherine), and Phil Daniels (Dickens) (left to right).
Credits: Manuel Harlan.
Johnetta Eula'Mae Ackles (Marjory) and Jim Broadbent (Hans).
Credits: Manuel Harlan.

Johnetta Eula'Mae Ackles (Marjory) and Jim Broadbent (Hans).
Credits: Manuel Harlan.
During the heydays of Cool Britannia in the mid-1990s, the theatre world had numerous voices appearing on the stage, but two of the most successful figures amidst this burgeoning talent of new playwrights were Mark Ravenhill and Martin McDonagh. Ravenhill, who immediately caught the attention of the theatre world and international press, became the “it” writer because of the notoriety of his play *Shopping and Fucking*, which, due to refurbishments at the Royal Court, ran in the West End at the Ambassadors Theatre, placing his E-taking, rim giving, and phone sex selling characters on the same dramatic plane as *The Phantom of the Opera*, Agatha Christie’s *The Mousetrap*, and the students guarding the barricades in *Les Misérables*. Its title, too, bestowed on it a sense of notoriety and prurient attraction, especially to the younger theatre goers, an age group that theatres were trying to (and are still trying to) attract into their spaces. The experience, a tub-thumping, techno-filled, stampede to your seat when the doors opened, brought in the crowds, brought the press coverage, provoked outrage from just about everyone under the age of 30, and made the theatre lively and rebellious once again. Martin McDonagh’s play, in some regard, existed on the other end of the spectrum from Ravenhill’s. *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* was a one set, well-made play that harkened back to an Ireland of old, featuring a wind-swept landscape, lilting language, limited television reception, and bad biscuits, but with a twinge and a twinkle of violence, depravity, and dangerous family skirmishes. The play hinged on secrets being revealed, revenge being enacted, love being lost, and a murder leading to madness. While Ravenhill’s play was embedded in the contemporary moment of the 1990s, McDonagh’s was not. It could have been set just about at any time in Ireland since the end of World War II. More than twenty years later both playwrights have continued to maintain active careers as playwrights, unlike some of their theatrical peers from the 1990s, who disappeared from the boards after the In-Yer-Face movement ended. Fortuitously, in the winter of 2018 both writers had productions on at the same time in London, and, interestingly, the one-set, well-made play was now being offered by Ravenhill, while a far more playful, time-travel jumping, Tom Waits narrated, multiple set piece play was McDonagh’s latest work.

Mark Ravenhill’s *The Cane*, which finds him back at the Royal Court Theatre, is invested in two areas of interest, a bankrupt family dynamic between daughter and parents and dramatic changes taking place in the British educational system, and by the play’s end both are intermingled. The play’s premise is that Anna, the prodigal daughter, has returned home to visit her mother Maureen and father Edward just as protestors have begun picketing their house. The reason for the demonstration is that Edward, when it was legal in the past, wielded the cane at his school, providing corporeal punishment to misbehaving boys. On the verge of a celebratory retirement from his school position this information about his former punitive actions against former students has been discovered and students have now begun to protest, sometime vociferously and vituperatively against him. While the students gather outside his home, he is trying to write a report defending his school’s poor performance during its latest evaluation in hopes of it not being taken over by an educational consortium, for whom his daughter works and which is why she has returned to her childhood home after a many year absence. The piece, a 100-minute slow burn of revelatory secrets and
recriminations, is driven through Ravenhill’s attention to character development and the strength of the actors.

20 I must confess that being an American some of the politics behind the educational sub-plot of the rescinding of the school’s independence was a bit foreign to me. But the comments I overheard from my fellow audience members as we left the theatre indicated that Ravenhill had captured the troubling contemporary dynamics of British school politics. Despite my ignorance on these details, the play’s focus on the institutional regard for paperwork for the sake of paperwork, the glomming on to a systemic language that has no intrinsic meaning, and the ultimate uselessness of fighting the system when the fix is in is something clear to any audience member, British or not.

21 However, the main story line deals with the cane and its use as well as the role of violence in regard to punishments, whether it be familial or institutional. More specifically, Ravenhill is interested in violence and its lasting repercussions. The set displays that power as on the back wall there are slash marks cutting through the wall paper and wall, which we later learn happened when Anna took up an axe and went after her father in a fit of rage when she was younger. The parents, citing financial reasons, have never had the wall repaired; hence, the anger inherent in the family dynamic has remained impaled there and become a constant in Edward and Maureen’s life. The director Vicky Featherstone frames the characters effectively against these slashes, as the rising linguistic violence between the family members echoes the past physical violence that occurred in the same room. The slashes on the wall, while perhaps a bit heavy handed and maybe a bit unbelievable in a practical sense, as the attack happened almost twenty-five years earlier, is effective though when considered in the light of the cane itself, which leaves behind welts on the punished student’s hand. The attack on the skin parallels with the attack on the wall.

22 Ravenhill’s play cannot be watched without recognizing its connection to the #metoo and Time’s Up movements, where a white male’s previous privileged actions come back to haunt him through angry recriminations and vocal protests. Ravenhill though posits a slightly different situation. The caning of students, when Edward performed the punishments, were legal and part of the institutional rules of the school system. He was not striking the students out of his own whims and a need to exact power, which is unlike the situations of the #metoo movement where authority figures misused their power to prey on the weak. Instead, Ravenhill goes to great narrative lengths to justify the action of the caning. Edward has spirited a book away from the school which lists every caning he did. While the list is extensive, what is stressed is the fact that each beating was signed off by Edward’s headmaster and the child’s own parent. These punishments then were not conducted in a vacuum. In this case Edward was merely an actor in a much larger system of discipline. His argument though falls on the deaf ears of his wife and daughter, who blame him for his involvement in those acts.

23 The question then becomes at whom is Ravenhill aiming the play’s ire? Is it the children outside who are protesting without understanding the context of Edward’s actions? Is the play attacking Anna who is angry about her father’s role in the use of the cane and manipulates him to cane her at the play’s end, prompting her to go outside to show the broken, bloody skin of her hand to the mob? Is it Edward who has kept this secret from his wife all these years and secretly secreted the cane in the attic for years instead of destroying it? Or is it Maureen who refuses to acknowledge the
truth of the dire situation in which her husband finds himself through the growing protest outside their home? Ultimately, the choice is up to the audience based on their own perspective as they approach the play’s subject matter. In doing so, Ravenhill provides a tantalizing dilemma that provokes the audience to dig beyond our usual knee-jerk reactions to #metoo headlines because the deeper we dig into this family’s story, the more complex the relationships and actions become with no guide to the right answer.

At one point in *The Cane* Edward climbs a ladder into his attic to bring down the cane that he has hidden there for many years. In Martin McDonagh’s *A Very Very Very Dark Matter* an attic also hides a potent secret, the exposure of which will cause not only professional damage to its owner’s career but also to the world’s geo-politics when it comes to nineteenth century colonialism in the Congo. While Ravenhill’s play is a thoughtful treatise on contemporary issues, McDonagh’s play is darkly fun and an exercise in, at times, stinging silliness. *A Very Very Very Dark Matter*’s premise is quite simple in that it posits that Hans Christian Anderson never wrote any of his child pleasing stories. Instead, locked in his attic in a three by three by three-foot box is a Congolese pygmy woman named Marjory, who writes all his stories, to which he makes the occasional superficial changes. (For example, as the play opens we discover that her most recent piece of writing for him was “The Little Black Mermaid,” which he has changed to “The Little Mermaid.”) Anderson, written by McDonagh to be part simpleton, part homosexual, part torturer, and part bad carpenter, relishes the successes her stories bring him, even though he cannot always correctly pronounce the words she uses to craft the stories. (The play opens brilliantly with Anderson clearly reading one of her stories for the very first time, as he shares it haltingly and at times with befuddlement before his adoring public.)

The play fractures into two narratives shortly after the play’s premise is established. The first involves Anderson, who learns that Charles Dickens also has a Congolese pygmy in his attic who writes all his novels. He travels to London to confront Dickens, leaving Marjory with a few week’s rations of sausages. Some of McDonagh’s best comedic and acerbic writing occurs between the linguistic struggles of Anderson and Dickens to communicate, as Anderson speaks only a hilarious pidgin English as he strives to get Dickens to admit to also having a pygmy in his attic. Jim Broadbent’s performance as Hans Christian Anderson was a marvel of comedic and zany energy and strikingly different from the last time he appeared in a McDonagh play, as the interrogator Tupolski he played in *The Pillowman* at the National Theatre.

The connection to Broadbent’s previous performance is telling because one cannot help but think of *The Pillowman* while watching *A Very Very Very Dark Matter*. Both pieces share the same focus on authors and the power of storytelling, while also offering a darker secret behind the literary inspiration of the writers. Whereas Anderson never writes his stories but relies on Marjory, Katchurian had his own inspiration in the attic in the form of his tortured brother, and both authors keep their inspirations under lock and key. An oppressive government is also present in both plays. Whereas Ariel and Tupolski, representing an unnamed, fictional totalitarian government, interrogate Katchurian to discover why kids are being murdered just like in his stories, in *A Very Very Very Dark Matter* the Belgian government and its role in the mass murder of almost ten million Congolese drives the action of the second plot of the play, which involves Marjory.
While the idea that Anderson might have a Congolese pygmy woman hidden in his attic seems ridiculous, McDonagh ups the quotient of unpredictability by also presenting her as a time travelling Congolese pygmy woman, who has travelled to the past after having seen her family and village massacred by the Belgian invaders. She travels to the past, so that she can arm herself and return to her present to enact vengeance on those who killed her family. During her travels, though, she was unfortunately detained by Anderson and imprisoned in his attic. Also time travelling are two dead Belgian soldiers who have pursued Marjory to Anderson’s attic to prevent her from murdering them in the future. (They fail, in a hail of bullets that leaves a blood splattered set). It is worth pointing out that McDonagh does not worry about explaining how this time travelling scenario works. The audience just has to accept the convention. If they do not, then it will make for a long evening for them. McDonagh even makes a joke about the confusion scenario he has created with the time travelling element, as Anderson tells Marjory that he gets confused whenever he tries to understand how she ended up in his time period.

Race has played a part in McDonagh’s films—with the discussion of a race war in In Bruges and racial tensions as a driving force in Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri. Of McDonagh’s plays A Very Very Very Dark Matter is the first play of his to embed itself in the issue of race, specifically in the nature of the oppression of the African population by European imperialists who looked to conquer the continent and its people in any manner possible, including the genocide of a population. In addition, he highlights the appropriation of a Congolese culture by Anderson and Dickens, who both use their Congolese prisoners’ ability to tell mesmerizing stories to better themselves financially. And yet, through his use of the time travelling device, McDonagh’s play suggests a possible rewrite to the mass murder of ten million Congolese citizens. After facing off with the two, time travelling assassins, Marjory escapes her bondage from Anderson and wielding the weapons she has taken from the two dead soldiers, she walks out of Anderson’s attic with the expressed purpose of returning home and taking on the Belgian imperialists and saving the Congo. In a play filled with incredibly funny set pieces, perhaps the most memorable moment is this Tarantino-esque ending as she departs fully armed, seeking a potential future that will erase the cruelties enacted by King Leopold the Second’s troops, much like Quentin Tarantino’s Django Unchained offers a violent revision of the American South in the nineteenth century. Unlike in The Cane, where the past can return and punish those in the present, A Very Very Very Dark Matter offers the possibility that the past can be revisited with the opportunity for the future to be changed, as those who previously experienced oppression at the hands of the privileged will be given another chance to write the wrongs done to them.


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Subjects: Theater
Keywords: family, gender, stories/History, politics, British theatre
Mots-clés: famille, genre, histoire/Histoire, politique, théâtre britannique

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Professor
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“In this day and rage”: Albee’s Martha Avenged in Ferocious Feminist Rewriting

Performance Review

Valentine Vasak

Everyone’s Fine with Virginia Woolf: weblink to Elevator Repair Service webpage:

1 https://www.elevator.org/shows/everyones-fine-with-virginia-woolf/
April Matthis as Honey, Annie McNamara as Martha in Elevator Repair Service's Everyone's Fine With Virginia Woolf

CREDITS: PHOTO BY JOAN MARCUS

Vin Knight as George, Mike Iveson as Nick and Annie McNamara as Martha in Elevator Repair Service's Everyone's Fine With Virginia Woolf

CREDITS: PHOTO BY JOAN MARCUS
About the performance

A play by Kate Scelsa for Elevator Repair Service

Directed by John Collins

With: Lindsay Hockaday, Mike Iveson, Vin Knight, April Matthis, Annie McNamara

Scenic Design: Louisa Thomson

Costume Design: Kaye Voyce

Lighting Design: Ryan Seelig

Sound Design: Ben Williams

Properties Design: Amanda Villalobos

Stage Manager: Maurina Lioce

Assistant Stage Manager: Elizabeth Emanuel

Production Manager: Liz Nielsen

Technical Director: Aaron Amodt

Director of Development: Marilyn Haines

Finance Manager: Lucy Mallett

Associate Producer: Lindsay Hockaday

Producer: Ariana Smart Truman

Review

More than a decade after the premiere of Gatz, their seven-hour long take on The Great Gatsby, New York based ensemble Elevator Repair Service digs at Edward Albee’s iconic 1962 play Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf. Catering to the learned theater buff, the play invites its audience to yield to the tangled web (or as Albee would say “wangled teb”\(^1\)) of intertextual allusions woven by playwright Kate Scelsa. Very aptly labeled “meta to the max” by New York Times critic\(^2\) Ben Brantley, this spunky feminist variation on Albee’s text unashamedly posits hyper-referentiality as a source of theatrical delight. In fact, in Elevator Repair Service’s version, all characters are deeply engaged with literature: George now teaches the plays of Tennessee Williams and willfully indulges in late-night bombastic renditions of famous monologues delivered to a reluctant audience. Vin Knight’s histrionics and extravagant Southern Belle accent come through as both tribute to and parody of the masterpieces of American drama. As for Nick (Mike Iveson), besides teaching, his not-so-secret hobby consists in writing mpreg (male pregnancy) slash fiction about the Twilight saga, fantasizing carrying the child of a vampire. This combination of highbrow and lowbrow culture, American drama 101 syllabus material and pop culture werewolf romances, very pointedly challenges our cultural hierarchies. Whereas the play is laden with references to the “triumvirate who dominated the post-war American theater”\(^3\)—Albee, Miller and Williams—the hints are most of the time parodic. As the performance unfolds, it appears that the textual material of some of the most famous monologues of American drama is merely a canvas, opening up to a multiplicity of interpretative fancies, preferably reversing the gender usually assigned to the roles in order to expose the artificiality of gender
conventions. It comes as no surprise then that in this self-referential, metafictional theatrical moment, there is no room for a conventional plot: whereas secrecy played a major part in Albee’s play, Scelsa’s rewriting opens on Martha’s assertion that she has revealed all of her couple’s secrets to Nick and Honey during the faculty party to just get them out of the way. The tension inherent to Albee’s play is thus immediately deflated. By revealing key elements of the plot seconds into the performance, the playwright takes it for granted that the spectator is acquainted with the specifics of *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, if not, she’s in for a few spoilers. If this constant play on intertextuality sometimes verges on didactic text analysis, Elevator Repair Service’s performance draws the audience’s attention to the ways in which interpersonal relationships are mediated by cultural representations. Just like the characters onstage, we spectators are beings woven out of literary fabric.

However, the citational quality of the play does not simply waver between tribute and mockery, it serves a political agenda. Indeed, the production does not merely approach the pantheon of American letters with a mixture of esteem and sass, it is teeming with feminist anger. In a conversation with director John Collins published in the performance program, playwright Kate Scelsa expresses her will to challenge our (mis)representations of female rage: “I’ve always been very interested in whether or not embodying that kind of female rage could be seen as sympathetic. Even powerful. Or if those women just become the shrew. Which means their rage can be dismissed”. Besides, at the end of the interview, Scelsa lays out plainly her motivation for challenging Albee’s play: “Martha must be avenged”. As the performance unfolds, the need to reevaluate the way female anger is staged by male creators becomes more urgent. At the end of the play, the suburban living room setting disappears, it is replaced by a couch placed in the center of a bare stage. A female PhD student/vampire who “feeds on neuroses” is sitting in majesty. Describing the setting as a Purgatory, she reproaches George for “Painting a willful middle-aged woman who likes to have fun as a shrewish monster”.

However timeless this reenactment of Judgment Day may seem, the play is adamantly rooted in its socio-historical context and reveals itself as topical and aiming for ultra-contemporaneity. Scelsa’s project to put irate feminists in the limelight definitely captures the zeitgeist of a post-Weinstein America. “In this day and rage” (to quote from the vampire), Martha must be avenged and the political value of her wrath must be acknowledged. This celebration of feminist fury is often conveyed with humor: when during casual conversation with George Nick drops a reference to *Annie Hall*, the former walks away from him in complete terror, knowing as he does that Martha will not tolerate a mention of Woody Allen in her house. In fact, when Annie McNamara reenters the stage, she claims with flaring nostrils that she can smell that someone made a reference to the abhorrent director. To dispel the foulness of the utterance and purify the house, she proceeds to performing a sage-burning ritual in the living room. The question raised by this ritual and by the play at large could be the following: is the American stage a safe space for women? Ironically, when the men chat in the living room, Martha and Honey withdraw to the kitchen where Martha attempts to strike a friendship with Honey, or as Honey views it, to engage in “Bechdel banter” 4. Yet, later in the play, Honey, trapped in her shallow characterization, exits the room, hoping to find protagonist status offstage. Whereas Martha’s powerful godlike figure belongs centerstage, Honey’s more subdued character leaves in search of a play (or a room) of
her own. Needless to say, this elaborately playful and vindictive staging of gender politics also makes a dent into preconceptions about masculinity. To that respect, *Everyone's Fine With Virginia Woolf* clearly identifies George and Nick as (more or less) closeted homosexuals. Albee’s equivocal homosocial small talk between Harry and George has given way to genderbending acts as well as the open disclosing of not-so-hidden homosexual fantasies so that if there ever was gayness in Albee’s work it is now fully out. According to one negative review of the performance, under the guise of celebrating feminist values, this caricature of gayness verges on homophobia. Whether we view the play’s insistence upon gayness as celebratory or whether we wince at it, Elevator Repair Service’s project to both expose and confront Albee’s gender politics is definitely successful; *Everyone’s Fine With Virginia Woolf* appears as a valuable attempt to update and reassess the way Broadway roles constrain and limit our definitions of gender roles.

Indeed, as the evening unfolds, it gradually becomes clear that this reconfiguration of gender roles and relationships is part of a larger strategy of global destabilization. The New York theatre goer is introduced to the culturally familiar environment of the New Carthage living room only better to be unsettled in her expectations. To that respect, the radical reshuffling of familiar landmarks is one of the main tenets of the play. Elevator Repair Service’s comedy cheerfully embraces the precariousness of our modern existences and delights in the chaos that occurs when preconceptions are deconstructed. It first targets economic precariousness: Nick’s obsequious attitude and his erratic behavior result from his eagerness to get tenure, as if the lack of consistency of his character was nothing but the consequence of an unfavorable professional balance of power. But this instability takes on larger metaphysical proportions. The set designed by Louisa Thomson exemplifies the overwhelming loss of bearings introduced by the performance: reminiscent of many Broadway living room sets, her decor lays bare its artificiality and flatness through the resort to a painted backdrop. Besides, its frail-looking wooden frame immediately strikes us as fake and reflects a deep-rooted sense of instability. This lack of authenticity is fully exposed when Honey and Nick enter: Martha takes their coat and tries to hang them to the painted coat rack. Of course, it is nothing but an illustration on a completely flat backdrop and the coats limply collapse to the floor. This element of visual comedy reminds us that in this phony setting, there is no actual source of certainty that one may cling to—or hang to for that matter. Could this overwhelming falsity be the reason why all the plants that Martha tries to grow wilt and die? Is there room for organic survival in such a hostile environment? In any case, there is no way out of this nightmarish “post-irony suburban nightmare” as Honey terms it, since whoever exits the room ends up in the garage and can do nothing but wait for his or her cue to reenter the stage. In the end, actors and spectators alike seem to be trapped in the same claustrophobic unreliable environment, where everything rings hollow. In the last act of the play, the whole set is swept aside, dissolved into nothingness, but the Purgatory-couch shrouded in artificial smoke that replaces it offers no comfort whatsoever. Even more disconcerting is the final entrance of a robot, yet another citational reference (to Rich Maxwell’s play *Joe*) that perfects the complete blurring of landmarks that the audience has been experiencing for 75 minutes. This hyper-referential patchwork esthetics, combining gritty humor and existential angst is both a jibe at and acknowledgment of our difficult quest for familiarity and reliability. The overpowering sense of instability that lingers after the curtain call seems to suggest that as helpless creatures lost in a maze of
cultural signs, struggling to make sense of the referential prodigality, we’d better laugh about it all. If, besides the clarity of its endorsement of Martha’s feminist rage, *Everyone’s Fine With Virginia Woolf* baffles us with its undecidability it is most certainly because, as Martha very aptly articulates it “ambiguous times call for ambiguous narratives”.

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NOTES


4. In the script of the play, Scelsa provides a footnote explaining this reference: “‘Bechdel banter’ – referring to the ‘Bechdel Test,’ named after cartoonist Alison Bechdel, in which something is said to ‘pass the Bechdel Test’ if it contains a scene of two female characters talking about something other than a man.”


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ABSTRACTS


INDEX

**Mots-clés:** théâtre américain, Kate Scelsa, Elevator Repair Service, réécriture méta-théâtrale, parodie, féminisme, monde universitaire, fiction slash

**Subjects:** Theater

**Keywords:** American Theatre, Kate Scelsa, Edward Albee, Elevator Repair Service, metatheatrical rewriting, parody, feminism, academia, slash fiction
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Deaf People and Performance: the Example of Sirens
An interview with Rosalind Hoy, Performer and Creative Producer of Zoo Co Theatre Company

Michael Richardson

Zoo Co : Website
wearezooco.co.uk
The cast of Sirens: (L to R) Florence O’Mahony, Fleur Rooth, Rosalind Hoy and Jamal Ajala
Credits: Photograph by Yoona Park

The Interview

There is an inherent connection between deaf cultural practices and theatrical performance. Leith (2016) has described the deaf community as ‘corp-oral’, using signed language storytelling for the transmission of culture from one individual to another, and Wilson (2006) suggests that the addition of formality and convention transforms storytelling from everyday interaction to performance. From within the deaf community, Miles and Fant (1976) suggest that signed languages are naturally theatrical, often exaggerated in everyday conversation to produce a more dramatic visual language in a manner that can be harnessed on stage.

Unsurprisingly, there has been a strong tradition of theatre within the deaf community. At the amateur level, deaf schools and deaf clubs traditionally included their own drama societies, and in the UK and US these would compete in regional and national competitions. Professionally, the National Theatre of the Deaf (NTD) in the US was groundbreaking in putting deaf people and signed language on stage and in the public eye, and this was matched in many other countries, including the British Theatre of the Deaf and the Theatre of Mimicry and Gesture in Moscow, to name but two.

This picture is, however, only representative of the mid- and late-20th century. In more recent years, deaf theatre has been in decline. The closure of deaf schools and deaf clubs has removed centres of amateur activity, and funding cuts have curtailed the activities of professional companies, often terminally. Additionally, the almost ideological attachment of theatre venues to the sign language interpreted performance...
as a means of engaging deaf spectators with hearing (spoken language) theatre only contributes to alienating deaf people, as the technique typically employed is not considered effective by deaf spectators as a means of providing access.

Interpreted theatre notwithstanding, there are still some examples of work that foreground deaf people and signed languages onstage, by companies that are either deaf-led, or at least led by deaf and hearing people together. Their ambition is not, however, the “deaf theatre” of Miles and Fant (1976), in which deaf actors play deaf characters who use a signed language to re-present elements of the deaf experience on stage. Instead, they create bilingual theatre using signed and spoken languages, and aim to offer equality of participation for deaf and hearing spectators. In the US for example, the NTD spawned Deaf West, which reflects the linguistic diversity of the deaf community by working in both American Sign Language and spoken English. Similar work is created in the UK by, for example, Deafinitely Theatre and the Deaf and Hearing Ensemble.

Funding for such companies is limited, and they rarely create more than one new production each year. In contrast, where companies are better resourced, the casting of deaf actors remains uncommon. Indeed, in the UK, it is only recently that deaf actors have joined the ensembles of the Globe Theatre in London and the Royal Shakespeare Company. Most regional producing venues, The Royal National Theatre in London and the National Theatre of Scotland are yet to follow suit, the latter despite the graduation of a cohort of deaf actors from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in 2018, and the earlier passing of the British Sign Language (BSL) (Scotland) Act in 2015, which encourages the use of BSL by publicly funded institutions. Conley, a deaf writer, is unsure why theatre-makers do not use signed languages in theatre more often, particularly given their inherent ability to connect meaning to emotion. He suspects that fear of a negative response from hearing spectators prevents them from following in the footsteps of directors such as Peter Sellars and Robert Wilson in working with deaf actors.

One company in the UK which is breaking the mould is Zoo Co. A small touring theatre company based in Croydon in the UK, Zoo Co decided to work with a deaf actor and incorporate BSL into their theatre making for their 2018 play Sirens, created for the 2018 Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Despite their long-stated aim being to “break down the barriers between mainstream theatre and theatre that is deemed suitable for people with different needs”, by ensuring that “everyone has a seat at the table … within our touring work, engagement models and organisation as a whole”, this was a new departure for the company. Previously their drive towards high quality accessible performances had led them to focus on “a ‘Relaxed Performance as Standard’ model for all of our shows. This means that the usual, uptight rules that apply to being a member of the audience are relaxed. The show will stay exactly the same but if you need to get up, go out, come back in, make some noise, eat some food, or wriggle about, you are more than welcome to and you won’t be picked out or called upon for doing so”.

This open attitude is linked to a desire “to explore issues that are current, important and relevant to a diverse range of people through inventive and visual storytelling, comedy and clowning … to play lightly with things that matter deeply”. These interdependent factors made the idea of casting a deaf actor a relatively small step, and “2018 saw Zoo Co take a massive leap in its capacity to create accessible work, by
creating our first ever BSL inclusive and deaf accessible show in a fully open rehearsal space”.

9 The trigger for this development was the decision to base a new work on the Greek myth of the Sirens, characters, often mistaken for mermaids, “whose voices were so alluring that any sailor floating past couldn’t help but throw themselves from their ships in order to get to them”. Over time the Sirens have become “synonymous with negative portrayals of women ... we wanted to change this story and tell it from the perspective of these much neglected, often misunderstood women ... we began thinking about what would happen if the Sirens met a man who couldn’t hear their voices. Although a ‘fiercely feminist’ show, we wanted to see the story from a male perspective too and see what an interaction between a Siren and a man might look like”.

10 For Zoo Co, with its drive for accessibility, the decision to write a male character that couldn’t hear meant “it was vital that we worked with a deaf actor to make the story believable and authentic to an audience and to the character”. Deaf actor Jamal Ajala was cast as Tobi, the deaf character. This gave the company the opportunity in the creative process “to explore ways that a deaf BSL user might communicate with what can only be described as three ‘aliens’ at the beginning of the show”. They could also demonstrate “how this new language becomes a lifeline for the three hearing characters [the Sirens] when it is their only way to communicate” without driving men to their deaths. In addition they were able to put elements of the deaf experience on stage. “Our work is created through improvisation and devising so it is inevitable that the actors’ direct experiences inform what eventually goes onto the stage.” Having Ajala within the company had a direct impact on the performance material. For example, in Sirens we see Tobi “ordering some food from a fast food chain ... and being scolded by the worker who said he’d been calling him for a long time”. This represented a theatricalised version of a real incident from Ajala’s life.

11 Developing and rehearsing Sirens was novel for Zoo Co not only as a source of material drawn from the lives of deaf people. In reality it was a “different experience from any of our previous rehearsal processes. It was so important that from the beginning everyone had an awareness of how to make this show as accessible as possible to all of our audiences”. Linguistic difficulties were the most pressing. “We soon realised the challenges of a bilingual rehearsal room and the very different level of concentration it takes to communicate in BSL, especially when most of the room is very new to the skill! This meant we had to learn quickly, and we did. Following 6 days of lessons, the primary team had very basic BSL. We then leapt into a five-week rehearsal process, followed by a tour and a month at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. We tried to use as little English as possible to ensure that everyone in the room could be included in conversations, and when that became tricky, we were fortunate enough to be supported by two BSL/English interpreters who could make sure that everything was clear.”

12 The interpreters were not the only additional personnel in the rehearsal room. “We also worked with a Deaf consultant who was, alongside Jamal, able to inform the process and offer advice on what would and wouldn’t be accessible or important to a deaf audience. As a small ensemble we don’t often have the ability to stretch our resources to include an outside eye to watch the process, but in this instance it was vital and so important in ensuring we made a high quality, accessible show”.

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Apart from the linguistic and cultural issues, which were relatively easily resolved by learning BSL and employing a deaf consultant, the other major change to the rehearsal process concerned the script. “As a devising company, we often memorise our lines throughout rehearsals and write up the script in the last week, ready for the technical rehearsals. For Sirens it was important that we had the script earlier in the process, as most scenes had to be translated into BSL for us all to learn, and then back-translated into English for them to be put into the captions”, a process that takes additional time. “Whereas often we create scenes that inform the show but might not make it into the final performance, every word felt very precious in this process, and getting them onto paper felt integral to that process”.

Other impacts of casting a deaf actor within the ensemble were entirely beneficial. “As a devising theatre company, we often end up sitting around and chatting about things for far too long. This wasn’t an option in this rehearsal room. We worked most effectively when we got up on our feet and just tried things. This made for a very proactive rehearsal room where it felt like we were making decisions and progressing through the piece really quickly”. Additionally, working alongside a deaf actor allowed the hearing members of the company to develop not only their language competencies, but also their understanding of techniques for telling stories visually, a central plank of Zoo Co’s theatricality. In particular the ensemble developed its skills in Visual Vernacular, a creative technique in which non-iconic signed language is eschewed in favour of mime with iconic gesture and the use of cinematic techniques such as close-ups, long shots, shifting perspectives, role shift, freeze frame and slow motion. In Sirens, “Visual Vernacular … became a really integral element to our story and character development. It was a skill none of us had ever used before and it was so exciting to develop a new technique within our existing physical storytelling style”.

Casting a deaf actor also required the hearing performers to undertake deaf awareness training, and this linked “directly to creating a strong ensemble. We pride ourselves on our inclusive, supportive rehearsal room, and this was made stronger by ensuring every person in the room could contribute to conversation; that every person was empowered to collaborate on all aspects of the creative process; and that staging was suitable so that actors and audience could see signing clearly… Being an effective ensemble is about considering the needs of those you work with and ensuring those needs are catered to for the betterment of the whole process”.

The aim of the creative process was “to ensure everyone who watched Sirens could connect to the story and characters as much as the person they were sitting next to”. Central to this was the integrated use of BSL within the performances, not only by Ajala but also by the hearing actors. In performance this seamlessly merged with Zoo Co’s trademark visual style. “As a company which enjoys using lots of different physical techniques to tell a story, we tried to up our game in terms of visual humour, visual vernacular and visual storytelling to ensure it was as entertaining as possible for all our audience. As we use clowning in our work, the over the top nature of the characters also lent itself well to the facial expressions that are so important in BSL”.

Additionally the production was “creatively captioned”, as an element of the projections used throughout the performance. “The captions were somewhat personalised, for example, one character’s lines were always written in yellow, another character’s in pink. Also the captions were placed close to the character that was speaking at the time. We hoped this would ensure as high a level of access as possible:
we have all too often visited theatres where captions are placed so far from the stage that it is nearly impossible for the audience to read them and watch the show at the same time. We wanted to make sure they were fully integrated in the piece, which also meant we could play around with them and, at times, have the characters interact with the projected words and images”.

One of the aims of Zoo Co’s approach throughout *Sirens* was “to put a hearing audience, who are so used to watching a show that they can wholly access, into the shoes of deaf audience members who often encounter barriers when visiting the theatre. The captions ensured that the spoken scenes could be accessed by deaf spectators, and equally that the signed scenes could be accessed by those who couldn’t use BSL. It was really interesting to speak to our hearing audiences after the show and see their reaction to being on the other side of things”.

Of course audience response is difficult to quantify, but feedback was generally positive. This was reflected by the critical response, for example the British Theatre Guide described *Sirens* as “signed and captioned, this is an inclusive show that doesn’t feel laboured at any point ... [its] BSL-inclusive storyline and use of creative captions offered something to a deaf audience that was otherwise not available throughout the rest of the Fringe”. One comment made repeatedly was the bravery of a company in highlighting the deaf experience in a show that also tackled queer relationships and sexual harassment. “*Sirens* unapologetically tackles all three of those and more. I think that often, theatre-makers are frightened to experiment with bringing in more than one topic in the fear that things might feel shoehorned in, but as we work in a devising process, all the experiences seen within *Sirens* are directly related to someone you see on stage and so came authentically into the show”.

To summarise, then, in *Sirens* Zoo Co have extended their ambition for accessibility by the simple act of employing a deaf actor. Rather than side-lining him within the devising process, they created a rehearsal room that was fully inclusive, by learning BSL and by employing BSL/English interpreters and a Deaf consultant to represent the deaf audience at rehearsals. Each of these steps they took by thinking through the requirements both of working with a deaf actor and of creating material suitable for deaf spectators, a bottom up approach that in many ways successfully matches the guidelines for producing a signed language performance created by Miles and Fant (1976) and expanded upon by Allen (1977)

For Zoo Co, “the greatest takeaway from the experience has been the power of visual storytelling. We have always regarded ourselves as a highly visual company, but working with deaf people has shown us a whole new meaning to the word, and our work has flourished for it”. Since creating *Sirens*, they “have gone on to make another BSL-inclusive family show, once again working with a deaf and hearing ensemble. *Messy* explores ADHD in young girls and is a very visual, inclusive show that is touring in Spring 2019”. We will also be returning to *Sirens* ... as we take it on tour across the UK. Having a deaf actor is imperative to both of these shows, and we look forward to exploring how our ongoing work can continue to serve a deaf audience”.

Zoo Co’s approach sends a strong message to other theatre-makers. “Overall the changes to the actual process in order to accommodate a deaf actor were quite minimal”. As “devising processes are very much led by the people in the room, they inevitably adapt to suit those there”. Working on *Sirens* “proved that, as long as you have the right people in the room, creating accessible work doesn’t need to be the
unachievable feat that it is often regarded as”. Indeed, the lead artists of Zoo Co found it inspirational. “We hope to continue to build our output and continue to create work that stretches the boundaries of accessibility, until theatre becomes a place without barriers to anybody, and inclusive performances are the norm not the exception”. Furthermore, they challenge others to do the same: “If it’s possible for a company of our size, then larger, more established companies should be doing more”.

NOTES

1. I use ‘deaf’ to encompass the wide range of audio-linguistic practices found within that community. Audiologically, deaf people may be born deaf, late deafened, deaf blind, hard of hearing, or hearing members of deaf families who use a signed language as a first language. They may use signed or spoken language, or a blend of both (although the focus of this interview is the use of signed languages in theatre).
5. See http://www.ntd.org/
10. See http://www.deafwest.org/
11. See www.deafinitelytheatre.co.uk
15. https://www.britishtheatreguide.info/reviews/sirens-pleasance-court-16419
ABSTRACTS

Interview with Rosalind Hoy of Zoo Co, outlining the decision to work with a deaf actor, and exploring the impact on the company and its creative processes.

Entretien avec Rosalind Hoy de Zoo Co qui revient sur la décision de la compagnie de travail avec un comédien sourd. Les conséquences de ce choix sur le travail de la compagnie et son processus de création sont abordées.

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Subjects: Theater
Keywords: Zoo Co, Sirens, deaf theatre, signed language theatre, captions, accessibility, audience engagement
Mots-clés: Zoo Co, Sirens, théâtre sourd, théâtre en langue des signes, sous-titrage, accessibilité, implication du public

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Music, dance
An Interview with Mark SaFranko: The Songwriter

Jean-Philippe Heberlé

This interview with the American writer and songwriter Mark SaFranko was conducted in Nancy, France, on 10 January 2019 during the writer’s residency at the University of Lorraine from 1 October 2018 to 31 January 2019 within the ARIEL project. This project – Auteur en Résidence Internationale en Lorraine – was initiated by Céline Sabiron, Barbara Schmidt and Emmy Peultier. Thank you to Barbara Schmidt for suggesting this interview.
Preamble

Jean-Philippe Heberlé (JPH): Mark SaFranko, you are a writer, composer, songwriter, musician, painter and actor.

Mark SaFranko (MSF): I have been those things at various times.

JPH: This interview is about your activity as a musician, especially as a composer and songwriter. How would you define yourself? Would you define yourself as a songwriter or composer?

MSF: Musically, probably a songwriter, although my compositional activities have spread out more widely as time has gone on into everything from ambient music to atonal things and what I call cinematic sort of music, so it’s become more diffused I’d say.

JPH: In fact, I have asked you this question because some of your albums are purely instrumental, aren’t they?

MSF: That’s correct.

JPH: Like Music from an Unmade Movie for example?

MSF: Yes, that’s one, that was the first one.

JPH: And it was based on a fictitious film I assume?

MSF: No, one was one of my stories that was adapted into a screenplay and it was actually half shot; the film was half shot and then left unfinished because of funding problems. And the second was a screenplay they wrote based on one of my novels from an Austrian film maker that couldn’t put the deal together for. So, they were compositions on that record for sequences of two films that were never made. And rather than say Music from Unmade films, it sounded better to say Music from an Unmade Movie.

JPH: Your latest record is Some Kind of Mood and it is also an instrumental album?

MSF: That is also true.

JPH: So how did you come up with this idea of an instrumental album this time? It is not based on a film project, is it?

MSF: No, those influences come from sort of everywhere and sometimes it’s frankly nothing more than a matter of the dearth of lyrical ideas and something begins to form and I sit there, play with it until it sounds like a composition, then I already hear other parts forming, so I know that I can do something with it as an instrumental piece and that’s how they happen. So, as I said, sometimes they’re really nothing more than a lack of lyrical ideas.

JPH: Would you consider yourself an American songwriter? Is there anything specifically American in your music or lyrics?

MSF: Probably over the years. It’s a bit comical, but I’m playing a show, a solo show in Besançon on January 23rd and I’m doing like a dozen songs and I noticed that the word Texas (places in Texas, the state of Texas) has come up in a few songs, and I’ve been writing songs for longer than I care to recall, 45 years or something. And for some reasons, Texas has come up in several songs and I never set foot in the state, so that makes me a quintessential state of mind let’s say. A friend of mine here said, because we were laughing about that, “you know any place you mention in America sounds good in a song, not for me but for anyone”.

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JPH: What about your musical training?

MSF: I took lessons from a very early age, I actually began playing the accordion because I came from a Polish neighborhood where the accordion was the instrument of choice actually. They played polkas, I didn’t. I remember loving the Irish folk songs and the Italian folk songs, and I played classical music on the accordion. And then I got bored as I went into my teen years and contemporaneously with the explosion of the British invasion I switched to the guitar.

JPH: So, you had some classical music training to a certain extent. What about jazz?

MSF: Yes, I guess you could say classical training, but I’m not particularly a jazz fan. I sort of lean on the now infamous John Lennon’s quote: “All jazz is shit.” I don’t think that’s strictly true because they are classic jazz masters who I actually really like, like Thelonious Monk, John Coltrane, the two that pop into mind and then I certainly lose the train after that. I just don’t respond to it the way I do to many other different kinds of what you call popular music, or classical music which I still love. So, I wouldn’t call myself particularly a jazz aficionado.

JPH: Did you attend any songwriter’s workshop or anything of that kind?

MSF: No, I never set foot in any one of those.

JPH: In a recent interview on French Television (France 3 Grand Est) you said that you use different parts of your brain when you write songs/compose music or write a novel/a play, but how do you decide to write an album or a novel for instance? Is it a deliberate choice from you or do you leave it to chance?

MSF: Well I have a very strict sort of works schedule which is I get out of bed every day and I work on my novels, stories or plays, whatever I’m doing there because I’m best known as that, even though I’ve been a musician longer than I’ve been a writer of plays and novels and stories and then I switch into a musical mode later in the day. So, the actual work structure is not left to chance but things occur to me all the time that I jot down in notebooks actually that I will revisit, and I know I can feel it is going to be a novel, play or story versus it’s going to be a piece of music. So, the inspiration is chance let’s say, but the actual structure is not chance at all. And I am a great, an avid believer that there are no such things as inspiration, you certainly work, that’s the only thing that makes sense to me. Ideas occur all the time and I assume they occur to everyone.

JPH: Writing novels, plays, short stories and songs seem to be at the core of your creative process while painting and being an actor are rather secondary to them. Would you agree with that?

MSF: Yes, I would say so. I’m not an actor anymore.

The Creative Process

JPH: Does your work as a novelist/playwright influence the way you write your songs and vice versa?

MSF: I would say not at all except that I consider them part of the same process, it’s just that I am doing something different when I’m composing a piece of music or writing a lyric but they’re really part of the same process and one does not really impact the other because they come from slightly different angles internally.
JPH: So, you are saying that writing songs or novels is part of the same creative process. Do you see any connection between painting, music and writing?

MSF: Well, maybe with the instrumental work because as an aquarellist so much of it is accident when doing watercolors and that also happens musically with the instrumental music, but I actually view painting as an activity in which all that other stuff gets shut off and there is a silence. That is almost a zen like meditation for me when I paint, that’s another part of the brain altogether, for me anyway. Somewhere deep in those synapses. It’s a very nice break from that constant churning of words and sounds. You know I was in a museum and was explaining to someone the other day: whenever I’m surrounded by paintings I have this tremendous urge to give everything up and spend the rest of my life painting if I could. I don’t know if I will ever do that but it’s very tempting. I’ve always liked the Picasso quotation. It’s one that is always stuck with me: “The goal is to get back to doing what children do when they knew nothing”. Obviously, I don’t know if great painters do that, but for me it’s meaningful.

JPH: When you compose, which comes first? The music or the words? Both?

MSF: My methods of composition changed a lot over the decades. When I was younger I had no idea what to do, I would sit down with the guitar usually and plonk away until a lyrical idea manifested itself. A lot of times that was very unsuccessful because you could sit there, plonk and nothing happened. I did process and wrote a lot of songs that way. Now I would have a very specific idea about something that I want and I find on one level that it’s easier to go on with an idea than sitting there and waiting for something to happen which was what I did when I was younger. Usually when it is a song with lyrics, the idea for the lyric will come first then the song fills it out. With the instrumentals, I sit there and still plonk, but now I don’t worry so much about the lyrical content because it is coming in a different way.

JPH: How do you decide between writing an instrumental or vocal album? Is it a conscious process?

MSF: For instance, for this last record that you mentioned Some Kind of Mood, I had a few instrumentals written and then I started thinking, well I want to fill this out to make it 40 or 45 minutes and I started looking for ideas to expand it into an album. And the same thing happens with the other songs I start. When I have five written songs, well I say I need 3, 4 or 5 more to make an album.

JPH: What lyricists do you like most? Did they have any influence on your work? Were you most particularly influenced by the lyricists of musicals for instance?

MSF: Well, I think no one can discount the influence of Bob Dylan who in many ways I think is probably the most important songwriter. The Nobel Price notwithstanding, he has a tremendous influence on a lot people, although I often like to say about him that one thing that is really overlooked, in my estimation, being a person that writes music, is how incredibly good his music is. Because people say he can’t sing, he is a lyricist, well I happen to think he is the greatest singer who ever lived because no one ever conveys emotions in a lot of ways as he has over the years. He is a superb composer of music really, if you throw the lyrics out really.

And there are so many lyricists. There are some people that say that the greatest American song ever written was “As Time Goes by” by Herman Hupfeld who happened to be buried within one mile from where I live in New Jersey actually and lived right around the corner. He was actually quite a successful Broadway musical
writer back in the twenties I think it was the teens and twenties. “As Time Goes by” if I’m not mistaken was in the 1920s. I’m not a particular fan of musicals but there are songs from shows that live out as being great stand-alone pieces of course. And there is that old American tradition of songwriting, I mean the Irish songwriters. There are so many influences in lyrics that it is almost impossible to begin to enumerate them all.

JPH: What about your musical influences? Who are you influenced by?

MSF: Whether or not it is an influence, there are a lot of influences. For me I’ve always liked the French composers Debussy, Ravel, Scriabine – out of Russia. I’m not a particular fan of the Germans, but you hear them all the time. I like a lot of the Avant-garde composers, like John Cage who is someone that does sip in my work when I lapse into the atonal. They introduced many other elements into music. I am a great great fan of the cinema soundtrack. I happen to love Ryuichi Sakamoto who has composed a great deal of great soundtracks, although my favorite soundtrack of all time may very well be Gato Barbieri’s Last Tango in Paris which I never tire of listening to from point A to Point Z. I’m also a great lover of the soundtrack of Chinatown, Jerry Goldsmith’s soundtrack which is an interesting one because it contains a really great theme that’s worked around through the entire album. There are also very interesting atonal sounds that are going on in it too. So, whether or not I do anything like those people I think is open to debate but I certainly listen to them repeatedly. And in many ways, I am also still stuck in the British Invasion because there is so much that came out of that in my opinion. Now it’s of course a cliché, because people say well with the Brits it was recycled American blues and rock, but they spewed it up again with a tremendous amount of originality. And the European influence came in there. It was also a very influential movement for me.

JPH: Are you also influenced by Indian music? I think for example of “Indian Hum” from Music from an Unmade Film.

MSF: I am actually. The people I’m most familiar with are Shankar father and daughter. I’ve seen both of them, I had the fortune of seeing both of them play live and the daughter is unbelievably good. From the first time I heard the instrument [The sitar] I responded to it and I love the ragas.

JPH: They are actually some passages with a sitar in your music.

MSF: Yes, I do use the sitar. I actually own a Jerry Jones sitar. Jerry Jones is a very good Nashville luthier who since has unfortunately gone out of business. Their sitars were based on the old Coral ones that were made in the sixties. The quality was not that great but everybody used them. And these are very beautiful instruments that I really enjoy using whenever I can.

JPH: The first songs of yours I listened to was “Sooner or later” which seems to be your best-known song. It seems to me you were musically influenced by Lou Reed for this one? Am I mistaken or not?

MSF: That’s my most streamed song for some reason. I’m not a particular fan of Lou Reed and have never have been, but well you couldn’t help but hear him. He is in the background of a lot of music that you hear but I’ve not been a particular fan of his. You respond to some people more than others. For some reason that song is statistically the most streamed song that I have written and I have no clue why because I don’t play live, hardly ever, so the feedback is just what I see that is streaming. So, I have no idea why that song is streamed as much as it is. I’m not sure.
I think it is a pretty good performance because I like some performances of mine much better than others. Sometimes I’m really disappointed with what I’ve done but being a one-person band you know I’m limited. Sometimes I say to myself: God, I wish I had a better guitar player; God, I wish I had a better bass player; but unfortunately, it’s all me.

JPH: Which instruments do you play to perform or compose?

MSF: Piano and guitar that’s what I use.

The Recording Process

JPH: Do you use a home studio?

MSF: I do now, but I learned everything that I know about recording in a 16-track analogue studio back in the seventies/eighties and then of course they went out, nobody uses analogue, the big reels and everything. But I find myself from the beginning fascinated by what the producers did. I was not one of those people that just went out into the booth and perform, I always saw myself looking over the shoulder of the producer or the engineer, just watching what he did and tried to steal everything that I could from that. So now I have a 24-track Yamaha which is now obsolete because everybody else uses Pro Tools now, I don’t.

JPH: So, you don’t book a professional studio anymore?

MSF: I do not.

JPH: But you did in the past?

MSF: I used it all the time but they cost me all my money.

JPH: Did you hire musicians at that time?

MSF: Well, I worked largely with the producer who played a lot of different instruments and my brother who is a very accomplished musician played on a lot of my early recordings.

JPH: You’ve said before that you are a one-person band, but do you still hire musicians?

MSF: No, I just play everything myself and I do it really in the interest of time. I do a certain thing all day long and I find dealing with musicians can be some sort of problematic, they don’t show up, etc. So, in the interest of time, I just do everything myself and I own basses, I have pianos and a lot of guitars. I’m able to jerry-rig. When you watch those in the studio you can learn enough tricks to make, I think, a song sound half decent. And since I consider myself to be primarily a songwriter than like a master musician what I want to do is present the song. I don’t know how it comes across but that’s what I like. Aside from the instrumental stuff the other songs are really built to be covered by other people.

JPH: When you get into your home studio, do you get into it with an idea or a finished song or do you still experiment during the recording process?

MSF: I’m always going with a finished song. However, since I now control the means of production and the clock isn’t running on the money, there are accidents that occur that I would now leave. The early recordings were – I don’t want to say stiff – strongly within the parameter of what I had to do exactly because I needed to come out with something that was done and now there is more flexibility because I’m not
on the clock. And I hear the accidents, other people wouldn’t of course, sometimes they come out really to my liking.

The Releasing Process

JPH: You seem to have your own record label, don’t you?
MSF: Yes!
JPH: And it’s called River Jack Records, isn’t it?
MSF: River Jack Records, yes!
JPH: Is it your own choice to be more independent or is it a necessity because it is difficult to secure a recording contract with a label?
MSF: Well, it’s the latter. What happened was really very much a fortuitous accident. For years I used to submit my songs, but it was a whole different era back in the seventies/eighties, then things started to change. I would submit my songs to publishers, record companies I had a couple of closed calls with a record company at one point for one song, then I just became very discouraged and did not know what to do and in that meantime the digital revolution took place the home studio then emerged and most importantly Spotify and all these streaming services opened up the doors to everyone, everybody so it was kind of like I just hung around and eventually the game itself changed and since I was legitimately getting my literary work publish by companies that were not me – because I resolved not to self-publish – I felt that I could indulge in that process as a musician because I have certainly proven myself as an artist and this way I don’t have to go through an impossible thing plus the fact that I am probably way out of step with what goes on in the pop music world. I am completely out of step with that, so I wouldn’t probably be a viable alternative for any recording company anyway, although I have wondered about those instrumental records and I’ve told myself that I might find a company that would release them. I think I might try to do that at some point, if I could find the right company.
JPH: Do you release albums on a regular basis? Once a year? Or even several a year?
MSF: Several of them were released the same year because those records were done years ago and the means of getting them out then opened up, so I had them sitting there. So that’s what happened with those. But I just work steadily until there’s enough for a record when I consider it to be a finished record it goes out, that’s basically what I do now.

Conclusion

JPH: It seems to me that the themes (difficult relationships, violence, identity, love, psychological traumas, etc.) you deal with in your books (novels, plays, etc.) and in your songs are similar or interconnected and that everything is part of one larger piece, there’s a certain unity, some kind of “conceptual continuity” to use Frank Zappa’s term for the description of his craftsmanship. Would you agree with that?
MSF: I would say that is largely true. You can’t probably stray too far from your principal concern as an artist. I remember Patricia Highsmith once saying that an artist has two or three themes that’s basically what you’re blessed with/cursed with
and you write about these two or three themes over and over again in different
guises and I think that’s probably true in my case. And I would say there are
interconnected. If I sat down and looked at them closely I’m sure I would see
interconnections. This residency has been a sort of revelation for me because there is
a whole committee translating one of my novels that is coming out *The Suicide* and
there are things in the book that I never knew existed. People have pointed out
things to me in my work that I was completely unaware of because I execute it to the
best of my ability and then it’s gone when it’s published or something I don’t give it
much thought, but I suppose if I look closely I will see things that I’m just simply
unaware of because as I work very instinctively things occur and I will try to roll with
them. One of the things I have fortunately become rather good at is silencing that
critical voice that starts to tell you this is no good or blah blah blah because then you
won’t get much work done. There are times when you’ll judge your product inferior
later on but the actual execution of it has to be devoid of the critical voice.

JPH: The song of yours you prefer is “I Still Don’t Know Who I Am,” but if you had to advise
one or two albums of yours to anyone who is not acquainted with your music, which one
would you recommend to them because it best sums up your musical activity?

MSF: It would take me a while to give you an answer. What surprised me recently,
some people that regularly listened to my work have really liked this new record
*Some Kind of Mood*. I don’t know if it is better than the other instrumental album, it’s
hard for me to choose. I might take *Music for an Unmade Movie* over this one but I like
a lot of what happens on this new record. I would say that one. Otherwise, I would say
*Looking* because it contains a fairly representative sample of the different types of
compositions that I do. It’s also performed pretty well, I think. But frankly, several of
the other albums would serve the same purpose.

JPH: Now my last question, some kind of desert island question. If you had to choose
between one activity only (literature/songwriting/composition/painting) which one would
you pick up? To put it more simply if you had the choice to bring a pen or a guitar on a
desert island, which one would you choose and why?

MSF: That’s a tough question. It is a tough question because you could amuse yourself
with the guitar, you could entertain yourself because with a pen what could you do
with it. Maybe I would take the guitar which is even a surprise to myself actually. You
could play endlessly until your strings broke and they would. Then I don’t know what
you would do if the strings broke. Then you could beat on it and use it as a drum so to
speak. So maybe I’d take the guitar because as I said you could entertain yourself with
it more than a pen.

3 To discover or know more about Mark SaFranko’s music, here is a selection of his
albums that can be listened to on various streaming services:

5 - *Looking* (2012)
6 - *Sooner or Later* (2012)
7 - *Music from an Unmade Movie* (2013) (Instrumental album)
8 - *Square One* (2017)
9 - *Some Kind of Mood* (2018) (Instrumental album)
INDEX

Keywords: Mark SaFranko, American songwriter, instrumental music, songs, recording process
Subjects: Music
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Political satire and music: Humorous (and political) songs in Donald Trump's America

Aurélie Denat

Why study satirical songs?

1 It all started with the terrorist attacks of November 2015 in Paris. The world was shocked by the events, and among messages of support on Facebook there was a Youtube video, shared thousands of times, by a British comedian who had a satirical show in America. This man, John Oliver, with his show Last Week Tonight, managed to make me (and millions of people) laugh with his take on the tragedy that had struck. My interest in the genre of political satire was born, and this is how I get my news now on what happens in the US and the UK. As I live in France, I watch these videos on Youtube. One of the features of this platform is an algorithm that allows the website to adjust its propositions to what you have watched before. This is how Youtube recommends other political shows like Saturday Night Live for example. This show is different from shows such as Last Week Tonight, the Late Show with Stephen Colbert or the Late Late Show with James Corden in that it is composed of sketches and not stand up comedy (or very little). Among its part-of-life parodies, mock-news and fake TV shows there are humorous songs, often with a political undertone. The focus here will be on five music videos created during the Trump era, starting from the presidential election campaign 2016 to the mid-term election of 2018. What is the use of humorous songs for political satire? What do they – as musical numbers – add to the overall satirical discourse? The five songs under study have been picked among political shows or Youtube performers that specialise in humorous and parody songs or sketches.

2 The title of the first video (V1) is Make America Great Again. It was created by the collective Laughter Trump's Hate (LTH). LTH was at the origin of a website mostly composed of funny videos. The sole aim of the website was to prevent the election of Trump by shedding light – in a humorous way – on his many faults and dangerous
political ideas. The site was discontinued the day following the election for it had failed in its mission. The title is directly inspired by Donald Trump's campaign slogan: "Make America Great Again", today mentioned through its acronym MAGA. The music used here has a 1930s flavour that can also call to mind the musicals of old times. However, the visual style translates more of a 1950s atmosphere. The elements mentioned in the song lyrics relate to events and legislation that go all the way back to slavery. This song bears witness to a division faced by the country and illustrates the saying "ignorance is bliss". The lyrics remind us of a time when sciences (both hard and soft) were not as advanced as they are now. A happy few – straight white males – were blissfully ignorant of the damage their way of life caused to other communities – women, Blacks, Mexican and Jews. The video that accompanies the song serves as a mere illustration of the lyrics. The tone is light, the music is engaging, the tune is pleasing, but the subject and the language used are dark and depressing.

The second song (V2) stages a rap battle between Donald Trump and Hilary Clinton and is entitled Donald Trump vs Hillary Clinton. It was created by the Youtube channel Epic Rap Battles of History (ERB), a channel famous for its satirical rap battles. The main features are contradictory figures of pop cultures (Doc Brown vs Doctor Who), fictional and real people (Jack the Ripper vs Hannibal Lecter), non-contemporary historical figures (George Washington vs William Wallace). However, this particular song is a rare instance in which the two persons opposed are both real and contemporary, namely the candidates of the 2016 elections: Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. The music here is computer-generated. This song was published on Youtube on October 26, 2016, six days after the last presidential debate. This music video is a confrontation between the two politicians where American symbolism is largely present. The language used is colloquial, and verbal assaults are coming from both fronts. This song testifies to a sharp division between the two protagonists.

The third music video (V3) is an R'n'B type of song, an excerpt from the 2017 Thanksgiving show of Saturday Night Live. Saturday Night Live is a satirical show, using sketch-like performances to shed light on cultural and political events. The musical number is entitled Come back Barack. The style is close to that of numerous R'n'B music videos of the late 1990s to the early 2000s. The music is a ballad sung by three men. It seems, at first, to be a break-up song. The main theme is regret, and the song contains a plea to the former American president, Barack Obama, to come back into office. The language is familiar, but there is no swearing involved. The lexical fields used are those of break-up and romantic relationships. The theme of division is also important, though less blatant than in the other videos, and the type of satire employed is rather light.

The fourth song (V4) is also an R'n'B song. It is the parody of an existing song, both of them bearing the title It wasn't me. In the original version by rapper Shaggy, a man is caught cheating on his girlfriend with his neighbour, and his friend advises him to say that it wasn't him. Shaggy sings his part again but the theme has slightly changed. In the Late Late Show with James Corden's version, the duet stages President Trump and Robert Mueller, the man in charge of the investigation on the links between Donald Trump's presidential campaign and Russia, which is viewed as treason. Shaggy who portrays Donald Trump, is an African-American rapper who uses familiar and colloquial language. James Corden, who resorts to a standard language, portrays Special Counsel Robert Mueller. The song is then one of confrontation, and division. It aims to
question presidential powers, especially as it refers to the dismissal of FBI director James Comey, which led to the appointment of Robert Mueller.

The last song (V5), entitled *We're stuck in this together*, is an excerpt from *the Late Show with Stephen Colbert*. The style used here is that of musical theatre, involving a piece of American-sounding music, close to country music. The song was especially written for the mid-term elections of 2018. The tune is light and catchy. The main theme is the schism that the country has experienced since the 2016 elections. This division is acknowledged, and the singer asks for re-unification in order to overcome this crisis. This musical number sums up the past two years of Donald Trump's presidency by giving it a metaphorical twist. It also relies heavily on the representation of American identity. Through its metaphorical language and visual representations of the central metaphor ("The US is a submarine"), the song is a call for unity.

Studying satire and especially satirical songs can be achieved from different angles. They can be considered as a musical number, a video or a discourse. The latter – our focus here – can be studied through literary analysis or linguistic analysis. The framework chosen here is that of a hybrid field, the child of literature and linguistics: stylistics. The part played by the literary approach will be materialise through the attempts at a definition of satire, in the first part of this paper. The contribution of linguistics will take the form of the use of the Semantic Script Theory of Humour that relies heavily on frame semantics. This theory will be explained in the second part and illustrated by specific examples. These two frameworks will be used in an attempt to answer the following question: how far does humour help the singers reach their target? The answer will be divided into two parts: the first part will be an attempt at a thorough definition of satire; the second part will focus on frame semantics and humour, more specifically on the Semantic Script Theory of Humour.

**What is satire?**

Satire is not a genre but a form. It is a form in that it it covers any types of work and is not limited by specific characteristics as lengths, genre, subject... Formal satire had a short life-span and no longer exists. Formal satire was a lyrical poem in Ancient Greece, it was tragic, and comprised of an unlimited number of verses. Soon, humour was added and the works that were supposed to be read became performed in theater and so on. The principle of satire interested people much more than the form it took. Today the style of satire is hard to define because of the disparities in the genre, forms, media, and lengths of work seen as satirical. The central principle of satire is to both inform and entertain. Satire attacks dullness more than vice. The satirical work was born from both the indignation of the satirists and their need to convey a message and sometimes even call for action. No matter the genre, the form, the medium or the length, a work of satire binds together, first of all, moral and aesthetic functions. Satire also provides a link between irony and banter, and the perfect fusion of the two is what creates the humour that characterises satire. The satirist has also a crucial role to play in society, educating people by making them laugh. Serious issues are tackled by means of a light style that will enable people to understand the problem and gather the appropriate information. If, nowadays, satire is associated with humour, it was not always the case. At the beginning, satire was a tragic genre, but today it is perceived as a humorous form. Humour cannot be explored without mentioning satire as a type of humour.
alongside light humour, dark humour, dirty humour, etc. The humour of satire relies on exaggeration. It is usually aimed at an individual or an institution seen as authoritative. The central principle of this type of humour is the play on scripts: the transition from one meaning to another creates humour.

In the twentieth century, the difference between satire and mockery began to be blurred. Yet, while mockery tends to remain on the surface, satire has a carefully researched background and goes deep into its subject. In both cases the tone is light, but while mockery is simply mockery and has no substantial foundation, satire supports a well-informed point of view. Today, with the growth of social media, anyone can become a satirist or at least relay satire, only by hitting the "share" button on the websites of social networks. For these types of videos and especially those from such TV shows as V3, V4 and V5, ratings do not include Youtube views. The videos are then spread across the web. Political and News satire is focused on current news. Political satire is a category of News satire that relates to public matters, such as public life, legislation and government. Some satirists, such as LTH and ERB, only exist online, and may finance their creations through the patronage of the internet users and advertising contracts (as is the case of ERB).

Satire can take several forms and lengths, but it is limited in the sense that it needs to follow the rules of a specific mode to exist as such. Satire has to both inform and entertain: it can either be personal or work on a larger scale. Broad (or general) satire targets society in general, or at least a large portion of it, by highlighting its flaws and inconsistencies. This is the case in the third video with the following quote "we didn't know just what we had" (V3) which is a direct reference to the way polls and voters treated President Obama during his second term, giving the control of Congress to the Republicans and making it more difficult for him to reform the country. The whole country then becomes the target of satire. In the case of personal satire, the target is an individual chosen as the poster boy (or girl) of a vice or a specific ideology. In the second video, Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton are both, in turn, the target. "The Art of the Deal" (V2) refers to a book which Donald Trump wrote on negotiations; his track record as a businessman is being grilled because a huge number of his companies have gone bankrupt or are being on trial. Broad versus personal is not the only contrast to be observed in satire; another one is implicit versus explicit.

In the case of explicit satire, the individual or the chunk of society that is criticised is directly attacked, the words are used with their denoted meaning. "That's assault brutha" (V2) is a direct attack aiming at Trump as a comment on words he pronounced on tape: "Grab her by the pussy". In implicit satire, the language is metaphorical, and rests on the connoted meaning of the word, as in "I miss those good old carefree days" (V1). In this example, the utterance refers to a time when ignorance was bliss. Everything is implied: women's condition, domestic violence, systemic racism, segregation, slavery, etc.

As mentioned earlier on, humour has an advantage: it can help remember information. However, an entire text cannot be humorous; there will be serious moments and lighter ones. It is the balance of the two that makes a text humorous and light even when it deals with deep and rather dark subjects. Humour is used every day to share a point of view or convey a specific message. Humour in general and, more specifically, satire are based on context. Puns can only be understood in specific settings. Satire, in particular,
depends on recent events, and humour in this case is often temporary: the context of the humorous discourse might soon not be relevant any more, or the references used for the jokes might be outdated. The audience also has an important role to play in the delivery of a discourse. The laughs mark the end of a joke, the lack of reaction shows that the joke is not perceived as funny, and booing may signal its inappropriateness. The discourse has to be written while bearing in mind the targeted audience, their demographic, their beliefs and ideologies, and the setting in which the humorous message will be delivered.

In order to convince its audience, satire has long been constructed with a narrative arc. The discourse of satire is structured in a logical string of arguments that will ultimately lead to the main discussion and the point of view of the satirist on a given subject. One of the main features of satire is also the personal attack of public figures. In the past, satire was differentiated from lampoon, which is a form of mockery aimed at a specific individual. Even though personal satire is not a lampoon, it can sometimes resort to this device. Often used in satire is the comical device known as *reductio ad absurdum*, which rests on exaggeration. It is a traditional rhetorical strategy whose goal is to show how an opponent's argument, if stretched far enough, can have ridiculous consequences. This device is often used to fight someone's case and show the ridicule behind someone's argument. An example from the corpus would be the reduction of several arguments of Trump to a single sentence: "I'll create jobs tearing down mosques." (V2). Satire is deeply embedded in a specific context, and the use of symbols is not rare. The aim here is to create a sense of identity and cohesion, referring to common knowledge. It is particularly important in these five videos where the main theme is division. This schism is made obvious by references to the Civil War that divided America in the 1860s. The conflict is referred to through the presence of Abraham Lincoln and the use of his own words. The president of the Civil War (whose politics might have triggered it) is physically present in two videos – V2 and V5 – although not to the same extent. Here is an excerpt from V5:

STEPHEN COLBERT: But we can't split up that's not what we're about.
Besides, we tried that once.
ABE LINCOLN: And look how that turned out.

In V2, Abraham Lincoln's lines cover the last quarter of the song. Two of his lines are particularly interesting. "Of the people, by the people, for the people" which concludes the song is a famous quote from Abraham Lincoln, taken from the Gettysburg Address given after the victory of the Union (the Northerners) over the Confederates (the Southerners) during the Civil War. In that address, he did not condemn the South, nor vilified the fallen, but asked for unity, just as this fictional Abraham Lincoln is demanding unity. The same process may be observed in the following line: "You got brother blocking brother on their facebook feed". This line has two functions: first, it lessens the volatility of the situation by acknowledging that this "Civil War" mostly takes place on social media; second, it links the situation to Abraham Lincoln's word by transferring one of his quotes to another cultural reality. This quote – "brother fighting brother" – was a reference to brothers being on opposite sides of the war (in neighbouring states), and Americans in general being opposed to one another. We find another reference to American identity, more subtle and aimed at an American audience. Even though government and Church were set apart from each other very early in their history (if not from the very beginning), the United States are a highly religious country. This belief of being the people selected by God as stated in "City
Upon a Hill speech” was hinted at again throughout the country’s History. The most striking and well-known proof is the pledge of allegiance to the American flag (“I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”) The part of the pledge that interests us here is the phrase "One Nation under God" (added during the Cold War in 1954). In one of the shots from V5, we can see Stephen Colbert standing in front of the voting booth, arms spread on either side of his body, with an overhead projector shedding direct light on his face, talking about God. Another reference to this deep belief in God is a not so subtle allusion, to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 22, verse 39: "Love thy neighbour as thyself”. In V5, one of the lines is "You've got no choice but to love thy neighbour," which is a direct reference to this specific verse of the Gospel. In the United States, this quote is essential for it recalls the nation's choice to become independent by uniting the thirteen colonies in spite of their various differences and making them love one another since they were on the same continent. This quote is of such paramount importance that it is even the title of a TV show released in 2013.

Satire heavily relies on those types of cultural references, but it also, to a large extent, rests on humour. The kind of humour used – the shift of script – relies on frame semantics, which will be explored in the second part of this paper.

Verbal humour and frame semantics

In order to understand what verbal humour entails we need to examine two linguistic concepts: frame semantics and the differences between the dictionary definition and the encyclopedic definition. Frame semantics, which is part of cognitive linguistics, states that someone's knowledge is organised through frames (or boxes). This theory of semantics by Charles J. Fillmore acknowledges the existence of two types of entities: profile and base. The base is the knowledge of a conceptual structure that is presupposed by the profile's concept. LARK, for instance, is a profile of the base BIRD. The difference between a dictionary definition and an encyclopedic one lies in the scope of each one. The dictionary definition defines the word itself and its grammatical function and nature, whereas the encyclopedic one explains the concept and the context that the word points at. One word or concept can relate to more than one base. It is then called polysemic. The profile MOUSE, for example, belongs to both bases ANIMAL and TECHNOLOGY. In V2, the word FIRE is used as the profile of two bases in the following case: "You fire celebrities on The Apprentice / Mutha fucka I fire Ben Laden". The first occurrence relates to the base EMPLOYMENT and the second to the base VIOLENCE, for in this case FIRE is a synonym for EXECUTE. The play on the polysemy of a word can also co-occur, as is the case in the following example from V5: "Today we got to pull the lever". This phrase is used as the conclusion of a long metaphor comparing the US to a submarine (this comparison will be examined later on). The zeugma "pull the lever" relates to two meanings. In the context of a submarine, the denoted meaning is used: by pulling the lever, the submarine resurfaces. The second meaning plays on connotations. In the US and the context of elections PULL THE LEVER means "lift the curtain of the voting booth", and by extension "vote". The two meanings are conveyed here, as a way perhaps to show the correlation between the two: voting would mean getting out of a difficult situation (as...
in the case of a sinking submarine). The last example that could be used here is that of a visual pun in V4. The pun relies on the idiom "pants on fire". In this extract, Robert Mueller accuses Donald Trump of being a liar by saying "I think your pants are on fire"; he then uses the idiom in its context. However, smoke emanates from the president's trousers but not fire. The pun could be a visual pun with a double meaning. The fact that there are no flames could be – except for a technical issue – an allusion to another idiom: "There's nos smoke without fire". This could be a reference to the "Witch Hunt", a rhetoric Donald Trump uses to explain why he is the target of FBI investigations while claiming he is innocent of any wrongdoings. It could be a way for the creator of this music video to signal that, according to him, there would be no investigation if there were no wrongdoings.

17 We can go even further in examining frame semantics by analysing a metaphor. We can examine every item in an excerpt built on an extended metaphor to see what concept of knowledge it will trigger. The following metaphor is taken from V5:

We're in this big American boat together
But surprise, it's a submarine
We slammed the hatch
There was water on the floor
It rose so fast
Who built this thing with screen doors?
We may collapse
From all the pressure
But if we do,
At least we'll all crumble together
No one agreed to bring provisions
On this submarine
And someone emptied out all the fire extinguishers
And filled them up with gasoline
We've lost all communications
With anyone up above.

18 Each element in this metaphorical sequence relies on a stronger meaning. Two years worth of news is packed here. The sentence "We're in this big American boat together" – an echo of the idiom "to be on the same boat" – is used here to introduce the metaphor "The US is a submarine". The idea of a submarine – as opposed to a ship – suggests an enclosed space, inescapable. A boat can also be a cruise ship, a transport ship, a ferry, but a submarine is most of the time a scientific tool or a powerful tool of warfare. The idea here seems to be that the country is at war against the rest of the world. "We slammed the hatch" refers to the isolationist politics promoted by Donald Trump and his people. From the start, during the campaign, the main political line was to put America first. Trump made it clear that international cooperation was not one of his interests. During the first two years of his presidency, he withdrew from the Paris Climate Agreement, triggered political conflicts with democratically elected world leaders – French President Emmanuel Macron, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and most famously, only a few days after being sworn in, Australia's Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull over immigration. "There was water on the floor" suggests that the submarine is already sinking. The "water" can refer to the many issues the country was facing at that time. Those issues were made worse by a schism between the two major ideologies. The schism was obvious during the debate over The Patient Protection and Affordable Act (or Obamacare for the opposition to the project). The rise of right-wing populism across the Western world,
the massive immigration of people coming from countries at war, fleeing famine or natural catastrophes, the terrorists attacks, the remains of the 2008 financial crisis, tension over race, school shootings, police shootings, gun control, etc. The political tensions in the country increased in the wake of the presidential election and the close result. The 2016 election was, for most people, a last hope to fix what was perceived as a broken country. "It rose so fast" refers to the situation getting worse after the election. The solutions suggested, such as building a wall to stop immigration, caging up children, banning Muslims from entering the country, threatening war with Canada and others, were considered as immoral by most people. This phrase and the one before may be a reference to a common idiom in the US, "be in deep waters", which relates to an overwhelming situation. The next element that deserves attention is the use of "screen doors", which suggests the existence of a weak protection against outside attacks, and trouble coming from every side, as seen in the video. Screen doors are supposed to protect only against mosquitoes or other inconveniences, not against big issues. "We may collapse from all the pressure" reinforces the metaphor of a submarine while drawing a parallel with a plane and the depressurisation of a cabin, a device enhanced by the illustrations. The idea put forward here is that of an imploding country. Togetherness is important in this musical number, as suggested by the phrase "At least we'll all crumble together" which hints at imminent danger of collapse. However, knowing that they're "stuck here together", they might as well go down as a block rather than divided. The use of "provisions" might highlight the American way of financing the government that relies on a budget voted regularly. If the budget is not voted, then part of the Government is shut down. Under the Trump era (up until the song was made), the Government went through two shutdowns. The first one occurred on January 20, 2018, and lasted a little less than four days during which 600,000 employees lost their pay. The second one occurred three weeks later, for an agreement had not been found, but it lasted only a few hours, not long enough for federal employees to be furloughed. The image of "fire extinguishers" being filled up with "gasoline" might be a reference to diplomatic attempts made to avoid protests, stop investigations and keep international communications open and constantly undermined by the president or a member of his senior staff. Each crisis (a fire in this analogy) is exacerbated (by adding fuel to the fire): Kim Jung Hun criticises the government, Trump insults him via Twitter; more and more immigrants enter the US through the Southern border, Trump and his administration have the parents incarcerated and their children put in cages; arming teachers is considered as a means to avoid school shootings, etc. The last element of the metaphor, "We've lost all communications/ with anyone up above," relates to what has been said before about cutting communications with other democratically elected leaders. It can also be related to the idea that the American people is the chosen one and that they lost touch with the "bigman upstairs". In the metaphor, the United States is a submarine, while the other countries, especially allies, are boats hovering on the surface. The relationship between Donald Trump and America's allies has been endangered by the withdrawal of the Paris Climate Agreement, the tariffs placed on Canadian and European goods, the threats against Canada and Australia, the insults made to Germany and the German chancellor, etc.

Satire is therefore a potent combination of information and humour. It aims at rendering a message more understandable. It uses humour to do so, more specifically verbal humour. The Semantic Script Theory of Humour (or SSTH) plays on this
distinction. In the branch of SSTH that concerns verbal humour – the General Theory of Verbal Humour (or GTVH) –, the forced passage from one base to the other creates humour. It does not always involve only one word but can be an association of several profiles belonging to the same base, the base being then switched more or less abruptly. A joke is always composed of three elements: a set-up, an incongruity and a punchline. The most common jokes, two-part jokes, consist of a set-up and a punchline, the incongruity occurring in either part. In the case of a three-part joke, the incongruity is then expressed on its own in the middle section and semantically separates, therefore, the set-up from the punchline.

In his book *Speech Play and Verbal Art*, Joel Sherzer defines a joke as follows:

"The term joke [...] refers to a discourse unit consisting of two parts: the set-up and the punchline. The punchline contains an element of surprise vis-à-vis the set-up; it is this surprising relationship between the set-up and the punchline that is the source of humour."

Jokes as a whole are defined by four aspects: the encyclopedic nature of their meaning, salience, the inclusion of discourse, prototypicality. Cognitive linguistics, as science, could provide answers to the question of how a joke is understood and identified as such. By confronting cognitive linguistics and humour, experts are acknowledging that the mechanisms are the same: conceptualisation, frame, space, structuring model, presupposition and usage-based language. Humour can be perceived as a marked, though not irregular, kind of language use.

Let us now consider the following three-part joke:

This time of year, I get thankful babe, thankful for you
But now you’re gone and I don’t know what to do
You were so intelligent, you were so strong
Waited my whole life for you so damn long.
And now I’m seeing you moving on
And I’m begging you to come back home.
Every night I turn the TV on and cry
I’ll say why
I feel like we are all going to die
So come back Barack.

Here the set-up, the first part that ends with the phrase "come back home", is – as every set-up – a short text that explains the initial situation and expounds the first script (or base). The script is that of a romantic break-up and the departure of the singer’s lover. The second part ending with "we are all going to die" is the incongruity. It is the pivotal part, for it lays bare the discrepancies between the two scripts present in the joke and denies, in a way, the meaning of the first script. The incongruity is gradual: the first section could still be related to the first script (a show that they may have watched together) but the second part ("I’ll say why / I feel like we are all going to die") is out of place. It leads one to wonder why a break-up would affect "all" and why it would cause death. The third part of the joke, the punchline "So come back Barack" is where the first script is denied and the second comes into play. This explicit reference to Barack Obama and to the presence of his photograph in the music video creates humour because it solves the incongruity. This type of joke, where the difference between one script and the other is so obvious, is known as a garden-path joke.

Comparisons and zeugma help a speaker relay information. Music and staging make it easier to remember. Puns and jokes make it fun. The combination of these three
functions is what makes a satirical song a useful tool in spreading a message and, above all, what enables the message to leave an impact on its audience. Five videos do not, of course, provide enough data to eventually formulate a general theory on the constitution of parody songs, and their role in political satire. A larger corpus would be required to create a reliable model of analysis that could then be applied to other humorous and political songs, not only in the US but across the world.

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Subjects: Music
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"Nouvelles en musique" : interview en Ré de Delphine Chartier et Olivier Borne

Nathalie Vincent-Arnaud

Le 19 janvier 2019 à l’Île de Ré, la Nuit de la Lecture s’est parée, pour sa troisième édition, des couleurs mêlées d’une célèbre nouvelle de Carver et d’une guitare aux accents rock et country. Ce deuxième chapitre de la série "Nouvelles en musique", inaugurée en octobre 2018 avec des textes de Poe, Joyce et Truman Capote, a de nouveau réuni la voix de Delphine Chartier et la guitare d’Olivier Borne, ce dernier prêtant également sa voix à certaines séquences dialoguées du texte (dont on sait tout l’enjeu qu’elles comportent chez Carver).

Après avoir effectué l’essentiel de sa carrière à l’Université Toulouse-Jean Jaurès comme professeur de littérature et de traduction au Département d’études anglophones et au CeTIM (Centre d’études de Traduction, Interprétation et Médiation linguistique), Delphine Chartier consacre à présent une partie de son temps aux enregistrements de textes littéraires et artistiques à destination des aveugles et des malvoyants dans le cadre de l’association Valentin Haüy. Traducteur, interprète et formateur en anglais, Olivier Borne est également guitariste pop-rock. Si leurs formations respectives d’anglicistes semblent les avoir naturellement poussés vers des auteurs anglophones, c’est en revanche les traductions françaises des textes que Delphine Chartier a souhaité privilégier à l’attention d’un public non nécessairement rompu aux subtilités de la langue d’origine.

La rencontre entre le texte, "Dites aux femmes qu’on va faire un tour", et la musique, est subtile, souvent évidente, parfois troublante. De l’instauration d’un climat aux résonances d’un implicite glaçant, elle évoque les méandres du road movie en miniature auquel la lecture ainsi effectuée confronte immanquablement le spectateur. L’entretien réalisé a porté pour l’essentiel sur les principes de cette conjonction dont la réussite se mesure à son pouvoir évocateur et à la tension dramatique qu’elle suscite.
Nathalie Vincent-Arnaud : Qui est à l’initiative de ce projet "Nouvelles en musique" ? Avez-vous été sollicités ou avez-vous vous-mêmes eu cette idée ?

Delphine Chartier : C’est un projet qui me trottaient dans la tête depuis un moment déjà mais je ne connaissais pas de musicien et je ne savais pas trop comment procéder. Et, à l’occasion de la fête de la musique, j’en ai parlé à Julie Baudran, la directrice de la médiathèque de Sainte-Marie de Ré, qui s’est montrée très enthousiaste. J’avais d’abord pensé à un violoncelliste parce que je trouve que c’est l’instrument le plus proche de la voix mais Julie connaissait Olivier qui est guitariste, elle nous a présentés et nous nous sommes tout de suite entendus.

Ce que je voulais, outre l’accompagnement musical, c’était regrouper plusieurs nouvelles (trois ou quatre en fonction de leur longueur) sous une thématique commune pour montrer à quel point l’écriture importe pour donner une couleur dramatique, comique, poétique au récit d’un moment de la vie d’un personnage. Par exemple, pour notre deuxième lecture que j’ai intitulée "N’en faites pas toute une histoire", j’ai choisi trois textes dont le point commun est d’être des récits de faits divers dont les titres ne laissent rien supposer de l’horreur à venir : "L’homme qui aimait les fleurs", "Un agneau providentiel", "Dites aux femmes qu’on va faire un tour". A chaque fois, il y a un ou plusieurs morts. La sixième victime d’un tueur en série pour Stephen King, un époux infidèle pour Roald Dahl, deux jeunes filles que le hasard a mis sur la route de deux rednecks pour Carver. J’y ai ajouté un bref récit de Régis Jauffret qui introduit la figure de l’écrivain, celui qui avance comme "un char d’assaut", met en scène ces faits divers pour en faire une histoire, une fiction bien sûr d’où mon avertissement au public : N’en faites pas toute une histoire !

Nous avons convenu avec Julie de proposer une lecture trimestrielle et elle a tout de suite introduit l’idée d’annoncer des chapitres, une façon de fidéliser l’auditoire. Le premier chapitre était intitulé Portraits. Le chapitre programmé au printemps sera intitulé "Au jardin" et il réunira, autour de La Grande Jatte de Seurat, des textes de V. Woolf, K. Mansfield et P. Lively. Et nous espérons bien faire la lecture dans le jardin de la médiathèque !
Olivier Borne : C’est une belle idée de Delphine, elle a discuté du projet avec Julie Baudran (la fantastique directrice de la médiathèque de Sainte-Marie de Ré) qui lui a proposé de tenter l’aventure avec moi.

Nathalie V.A. : Pourquoi précisément le genre de la nouvelle ? Envisageriez-vous aussi d’autres genres ?

Delphine C. : J’ai envie de citer Baudelaire : "La nouvelle a sur le roman à vastes proportions cet immense avantage que sa brièveté ajoute à l’intensité de l’effet. Cette lecture, qui peut être accomplie tout d’une haleine, laisse dans l’esprit un souvenir bien plus puissant qu’une lecture brisée, interrompue souvent par le tracas des affaires et le soin des intérêts mondains". De plus, je dirais que, pour moi, l’un des intérêts de la nouvelle, quand elle est lue à voix haute, réside dans la chute. Qu’elle soit ironique, parodique, ouverte ou fermée, la conclusion est en tout cas le focalisateur.

Mais je ne m’interdis pas de choisir de courts récits. Ce qui importe, c’est que le texte soit un tout et non un fragment et qu’il provoque chez l’auditeur un plaisir esthétique en décrivant ou racontant une expérience singulière. Je partage l’avis d’Eric Emmanuel Schmitt à ce sujet quand il affirme que l’essentiel est de s’attacher l’auditeur, de l’empoigner à la première phrase pour l’amener à la dernière, sans arrêt, sans escale.

Olivier B. : C’est Delphine qui est notamment versée dans ce genre littéraire, elle déniche des textes incroyables. Oui, pourquoi pas d’autres genres ?

Nathalie V.A. : Olivier, aviez-vous déjà accompagné des lectures de textes, et comment avez-vous accueilli cette idée ?

Olivier B. : Oui, j’avais déjà illustré musicalement un texte sur la vie et l’œuvre de Federico García Lorca lu par l’acteur Michel Pilorgé. J’étais très enthousiaste quand Delphine m’a proposé ce projet !

Nathalie V.A. : Le titre "Nouvelles en musique" suggère que c’est le texte qui a la primeur et qui est "servi" par la musique. Est-ce votre conception, et comment envisagez-vous le rôle de la musique ?

Delphine C. : La nouvelle est un genre littéraire que j’apprécie énormément en tant que lectrice et sur lequel j’ai longtemps travaillé avec les étudiants qui préparaient le CAPES d’anglais. Au fil des années, il m’est arrivé, pour les besoins du concours, de mettre en regard texte et image. Il me semble que, par sa concentration sur un seul effet qui vise à l’essentiel, la nouvelle présente des ressemblances frappantes avec la peinture, unissant le verbal et le pictural. Dans le document que nous distribuons lors de chaque séance de lecture, figure un tableau qui illustre le thème retenu. Pour "Portraits", c’était le tableau de Robert Sully, celui-là même qui avait inspiré Edgar Poe pour "Le portrait ovale". Pour N’en faites pas toute une histoire, c’est une toile en noir et blanc de Edward Hopper, Night Shadows (1921), qui distille un climat d’angoisse avec une vue en plongée sur deux silhouettes furtives.

En revanche, l’association texte et musique est une nouveauté. Les mots ont leur musicalité, j’ai envie de dire que le texte, c’est l’équivalent de la partition pour l’instrument de musique, il a une force intrinsèque que la musique fait rayonner. Avec la musique, on va plus loin dans la compréhension du texte.
Olivier B. : La musique illustre le propos, le pimente parfois, le souligne. Quelquefois elle joue le rôle d’un interlude. Parfois le texte et la musique voyagent ensemble.

Nathalie V.A. : Olivier, quel genre de musique jouez-vous habituellement, et dans quel cadre ? Delphine, quel genre de musique a habituellement ta préférence ? Dans quelle mesure ces habitudes de jeu ou ces préférences ont-elles influencé vos choix musicaux pour ces lectures ?

Olivier B. : Je joue habituellement du pop rock de toutes les couleurs. J’aime écrire et composer majoritairement en anglais (c’est la musique qui m’a fait aimer l’anglais !) et en français.

Delphine C. : J’ai des goûts assez éclectiques en musique. Il fut un temps où j’écoutais aussi bien Barbara que Leonard Cohen, Tom Waits ou Bruce Springsteen. Aujourd’hui, ce que j’écoute à la maison varie en fonction de mon humeur, du moment de la journée ou du temps qu’il fait. C’est ainsi que le soir, j’écoute plutôt du jazz mais je peux aussi me laisser envouter par la voix de Matthias Goerne chantant Le Voyage d’hiver. J’aime aussi beaucoup la musique baroque et les voix de haute-contre. La voix cristalline de Philippe Jaroussky me transporte. Mais là, je fais une totale confiance à Olivier, c’est lui le maître !

Nathalie V.A. : Olivier, quels sont les éléments des textes qui, en général, influencent vos choix musicaux ? S’agit-il de compositions ?

Olivier B. : Je dirais que ce sont les ambiances, les surprises, les virages déployés par les auteurs qui orientent la musique. Ce sont des compositions : pour chaque nouvelle, je propose à Delphine des couleurs, des mélodies, parfois des rythmes que je développe.

Nathalie V.A. : Pour la nouvelle de Carver, la musique intervient en prélude à la lecture, puis sous forme d’interludes (parfois en fondu enchaîné avec la lecture), puis en guise de clôture. Est-ce un schéma général, ou varie-t-il en fonction des textes, et de quelle manière effectuez-vous ces choix ?

Delphine C. : Non, ce n’est pas un schéma général, tout dépend de la nature des nouvelles. L’idée est d’accompagner le texte, de mettre en valeur certains passages soit pour accompagner un indice (un miaulement de chat, signal du meurtre à venir), soit pour souligner un trait de caractère d’un personnage, soit pour créer une atmosphère, une ambiance…

Olivier B. : Il n’y a pas de schéma général. Chaque nouvelle a sa propre identité : c’est un des plaisirs de ce projet, il est toujours renouvelé. C’est toute l’alchimie que nous avons développée. Le plus amusant, c’est que 96 pour cent du temps nous sentons la présence ou l’absence de musique aux mêmes moments.

Nathalie V.A. : Delphine, la musique influence-t-elle ta perception du texte et ta manière de le rendre ?

Delphine C. : Peut-être pas ma perception du texte parce que je l’ai d’abord choisi pour ses qualités strictement littéraires mais ma manière de le rendre, certainement. Quand Olivier m’a proposé ses compositions, nous répétons ensemble et il m’arrive de modifier certaines intonations ou le rythme d’une phrase.

Nathalie V.A. : Comme très souvent chez Carver, la fin de la nouvelle est aussi abrupte qu’implicite, générant le trouble, voire le malaise, du lecteur. J’ai été frappée par le choix du
morceau qui clôture la nouvelle et qui me semble particulièrement consonant avec cette fin en eaux troubles. Pouvez-vous évoquer un peu ce morceau, son esprit, son origine ?

Olivier B. : Effectivement, cette nouvelle et son dénouement, laisse un arrière-goût de malaise. J’avoue que j’ai eu du mal à y entrer : je l’ai approchée comme un documentaire. Pour la scène finale, qui est évoquée par touches "glaciales", après en avoir discuté avec Delphine, j’ai essayé de la transposer en accords et en intensité par des arpèges mineurs et appuyés.

Nathalie V.A. : Les autres musiques qui apparaissent sous forme de préludes ou d’interludes, tout au long de votre session, semblent faire référence à des standards country mais aussi épouser les références musicales qui sont celles des personnages (Elvis Presley, Bill Haley, etc.). Comment cela a-t-il été conçu et dans quel but ?

Delphine C. : nous faisons, chacun de notre côté, un premier repérage des moments du texte qui nous semblent propices à une intervention musicale. Nous nous sommes rendu compte que, très souvent, nous avions prévu une intervention de la musique aux mêmes moments. En prélude, c’est une préparation de l’auditeur à une situation, on lui donne un ancrage géographique, ça fonctionne un peu comme un indice sans toutefois déflorer quoi que ce soit. En l’occurrence, pour Carver, une musique country. Dans le corps du texte, cela peut en effet épouser les références musicales des personnages mais aussi annoncer un évènement dramatique, prolonger le suspense, attirer l’attention sur un détail capital pour la suite de l’histoire...

Olivier B. : Je crois que j’ai essayé de retranscrire la réalité de l’isolement de certains rednecks, et la musique, par le biais du rock, est une des rares formes de culture qui parvient jusqu’à eux par l’intermédiaire de la radio, tout au moins à l’époque. Évoquer cette musique nous est apparu comme une évidence.

Nathalie V.A. : La première session de “Nouvelles en musique” avait pour thème le portrait. N’ayant pas eu accès aux musiques ni aux textes eux-mêmes, j’aimerais savoir comment a été pensée cette articulation entre texte et musique et ce qui est de nature, dans les musiques choisies et composées, à évoquer cette notion de portrait.

Delphine C. : J’avais envie de rendre hommage à Edgar Poe, en commençant par "Le portrait ovale". Puis de faire un saut dans le temps, de quitter le domaine du gothique et du fantastique pour présenter "Eveline", une nouvelle dans laquelle, Joyce, à la manière d’un peintre impressionniste, capte la lumière d’un instant, saisit des sensations fugaces, des couleurs, des odeurs, des sons alors que les souvenirs se télescopent dans l’esprit de la jeune fille. Et dans un registre plus léger, deux textes de Truman Capote, "Mr Jones" et "Une lampe à la fenêtre". Là, nous avons plutôt joué sur la création d’une atmosphère autour de chaque portrait.

Olivier B. : Pour chaque portrait, c’est la progression inhérente à la nouvelle qui m’a guidé. Dans quasiment tous les cas, nous avons perçu les étapes de cette progression aux mêmes moments.

Un portrait, c’est l’histoire singulière d’une personne : c’est ce que j’ai essayé de rendre en musique en trouvant une signature mélodique unique à chaque portrait.

Nathalie V.A. : Vous êtes tous deux traducteurs, et je ne peux y voir un simple fruit du hasard dans le travail commun que vous proposez. Qu’en pensez-vous ?

Delphine C. : Tout texte est en lui-même une traduction, ne serait-ce que parce que le langage, dans son essence même, est déjà une traduction. Dans notre cas, on pourrait
parler de complémentarité entre deux signifiants, linguistique et musical. En ce sens, nous ne sommes pas loin de nous faire les apôtres d’une traduction intersémiotique.... Olivier B. : Un seul mot, en anglais celui-là : serendipity.

ANNEXES

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Thèmes : Music  
Keywords : short stories, reading, music, guitar, translation  
Mots-clés : nouvelles, lecture, musique, guitare, traduction

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“One Night in Hackney”: From Punk Kids to Cyberdogs

Clara Kunakey

1 This is the story of a young girl who visited London for the first time. In 2017 she moved to the south of England and happened to live in the Borough of Hackney in the east end of the English capital city. There, she came to share a flat with a thirty-eight-year-old independent DJ nicknamed Tago. The man, as an eccentric sheriff from The Legend of Kaspar Hauser, taught her the art of DJing and introduced her to techno music. Quickly, the girl got interested in this genre and started to develop her own library and skills in mixing. At some point, he made her listen to the local anthem of “One Night in Hackney”. With this track, they have both developed a real attachment to their neighbourhood while spending nights chatting about it and incorporating it to their own sets.

2 This is the story that led me to write this essay about the specificity of the techno scene in the Borough of Hackney. Even though the English acid house scene and its fans calmed down and reintegrated London’s clubland in the late 1990s and early 2000s after the police repression that followed the excesses of the 1992 edition of the Castlemorton free festival, Hackney remained an oddity and a rebel in the city’s electronic music scene. As a punk child, it has always been faithful to the underground background of techno music whilst developing its own subgenres using London’s typical acid house sounds from the 1990s dance music, such as acid techno of which the Dynamo City’s track mentioned above is a good example.

3 By using these latter’s track and looking at the history of the techno music movement in Detroit and London—thanks to Techno Rebels and Generation Ecstasy respectively written by Dan Sicko and Simon Reynolds—I will try to understand the particularity of acid techno as a crossroads influenced by both the techno music coming from the American city of Detroit and the rave and warehouse parties culture from the English capital city in the area of east London and more specifically of Hackney.

4 I have then decided to study, in a first part, the production context and the origins of acid techno to analyse the track “One Night in Hackney” and try to understand its
technical elements as a legacy of the techno, punk rock, and acid house scenes. In a second part, I will focus on the English legacy of the rave culture of the early 1990s in warehouse parties of east London, especially the use of drugs which is now linked to the techno environment, and I will look at how the people attending those events have taken the social codes surrounding techno music to their ownership and have transformed them. Eventually, it seems interesting to question the geographical area in which acid techno is produced and to compare it with Detroit, in order to understand this evolution of British dance music as a cultural and identity tribute to its past and as a resistance force against the gentrification phenomenon which is now striking east London.

A crossroads between punk rock, Detroit techno and acid house

5 Founded in Hackney in 1993 by three friends—Chris Knowles, Julian Sandell and Aaron Northmore—the Stay Up Forever Records label has quickly become a pioneer in the domain of acid techno as the three men have actually created and developed this new subgenre. The three young producers met during the year 1990 while they were squatting at the same abandoned places in the London Borough of Hackney. As they were living and evolving in this underground milieu, they naturally came to make electronic music with a punk rock background as Chris Knowles mentions in an interview that he gave to the Venezuelan online electronic music channel DJProfile.TV on 16 December 2015.

We were back in London and I met Julian and Aaron. We started DJing together because we came from the same punk rock scene and we didn’t really know much about electronic music and we didn’t know much about DJing, but we really got interested in electronic music. And together we started doing parties and learning to DJ to a scene of people that were really not ravers. And from that, we did a few parties and then we really got locked into it and that’s how it started for us.

6 Knowles, who was also playing in a punk rock band at that time, got disappointed by this scene and the complexity in producing and distributing this music which was getting more and more commercial. “In the ‘80s, I got really disillusioned with playing in bands. We got a deal and got some problems with our record company and stuff. And at the same time, I started to listen more to electronica,” says Knowles. There is no doubt that even though they were attracted by the freedom implied by the electronic music DIY aspect, the three self-called Liberators remained faithful to their punk rock origins while creating the samples that they would use in the composition of their acid techno tracks as a means to differentiate themselves from the acid house movement that was enjoying an increasing popularity among the 1990s London audience.

7 This aspect of acid techno is particularly noticeable in “One Night in Hackney”, a track composed by Dynamo City, a duo formed by DJs Chris Knowles (aka Chris Liberator) and Henry Cullin (aka D.A.V.E. The Drummer) and released in January 2004 by the Stay Up Forever Records label. Indeed, this parody of Oliver Chesler’s (aka The Horrorist) 1996 “One Night in New York City”, in which a narrator tells us the story of a young naïve man who happens to party in “an old abandoned warehouse” in Hackney during his first time in London, demonstrates the qualities of acid techno as a “darkcore” meeting point between techno, acid house and punk rock music. It seems quite tricky to deal
with the musical aspects of techno in general, especially in terms of melody as this genre is mainly based on mixed sampled sounds of drums and bass that are so modified that it is hard to find their origins. Even though some DJs make their samples recognizable, like David August who used melodies and an a cappella song from David Lynch’s *Mulholland Drive* in his live session at the Boiler Room in Berlin⁸, most DJs in their own tracks tend to erase any distinctive character from the sounds they have used to make them, and Chris Liberator and D.A.V.E. The Drummer are no exception to this rule. It seems difficult to describe precisely the sound of techno music. This is maybe why, most of the time, critics and scholars use clear terms like “murky and grim” (Sicko 44) or “the mechanistic repetition, the synthetic and electronic textures” (Reynolds 24), that may look quite vague and that hardly evoke anything for the neophytes and even for the listener who has no clue about electronically composed music. I will not be an exception in this paper, though I will try to explain a few technical aspects of “One Night in Hackney” and the effect they produce on the listener.

Among the endless list of devices used by Chris Liberator and D.A.V.E. The Drummer to create their tracks, two of them are particularly recognizable in “One Night in Hackney”—the Roland TB-303 bass synthesizer and the Roland TR-909 rhythm composer. The first one is an indispensable tool in the making of the acid sound which has been democratized by Chicago’s acid house scene in the 1990s. According to the description made on the Roland online shop:

> The TB-303 was imbued with three vital functions that combined to create its unique, slippery “acid” sound: the basic-yet-almost-impenetrable step sequencer, the Accent that punched accented notes to greater heights, and that inimitable Slide function that didn’t remotely emulate the sound of a fretless bass. ("Roland TB-303 Acid House Flashback")

These functions are materialized by six knobs at the top of the machine.

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⁹ These functions are materialized by six knobs at the top of the machine.

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Roland TB-303 Panel
In other words, these six knobs, when turned to their maximum level, combined with the oscillator in square wave position, create a distorted, saturated, squelchy bass sound. This, added to the very artificial drums sounds produced by the Roland TR-909, gives a grainy touch to the track that we can also find in punk rock music. All these samples, which follow the classic 4/4 techno pattern, may have been mixed around 145 BPM (beats per minutes) by the two DJs which is typical of acid techno that is generally mixed between 145 BPM and 155 BPM and thus faster than techno music or acid house which are mixed between 118 and 135 BPM. When I say “may,” it is because most DJ software programs like Serato or Virtual DJ naturally read the track at 145.41 BPM. This odd number might be due to the echo and reverb effects that Christ Liberator and D.A.V.E. The Drummer have applied onto the hi-hat, and the snare samples which may have initially been recorded at a faster tempo than the other samples composing the track. Even if it does not create a delay, this effect seems to be a good illustration of Ansgar Jerrentrup saying that “the amount of delay in the rhythm can be adjusted so that the selected impulse is repeated completely outside of the basic meter, and thus is able to sound confusing and forced.” (Jerrentrup). There is no doubt indeed that this track is somehow disorienting, and its mixed raw, fat and heavy samples are very hard to be distinguished because of the distortion operated on them. The listener may be lost in this amount of sounds and grinds which may make his brain disjunct as he cannot identify the sounds anymore. Some may even feel uncomfortable as they only perceive this track as an accumulation of unpleasant, nasty noises. The feeling of uncanny can be found back in the late 1992 “darkside” or “darkcore” movement in the British electronic music scene which was experimenting with the sounds and going further in the use of samples to translate the feeling of awkwardness felt by the ravers who were overdoing drugs. These latter frequently suffered from deep dark side effects such as confusion, depression, anxiety or even paranoia and auditory hallucinations (Reynolds 207). “Darkside” tracks artificially tried to reproduce this experience with sounds. Simon Reynolds has technically described the “darkcore” movement:

> The darkside producers gave their breakbeats a brittle, metallic sound, like scuttling claws; they layered beats to form a dense mesh of convoluted, convulsive polyrhythms, inducing a febrile feel of in-the-pocket funk and out-of-body delirium. [...] Harking back to the heavily treated timbres of fifties musique concrète and post-punk industrial music, darkside’s repertoire of noises abducted the listener into the auto-hallucinatory malaise of schizophrenia. (Reynolds, 207-208)

This schizophrenic feeling is produced in “One Night in Hackney” by the multiplicity of rhythms and the sampled voice of Chris Liberator on which the echo and reverb effects are applied to make it sound like a demoniac, ghostly voice coming almost from another world. These different effects are actually a way for acid techno music producers to keep the dancers active and to stimulate their brain activity along their sets.

There is no doubt that acid techno and its peculiar polyphony voluntarily reduced to a noisy effect has been influenced by “darkcore”. If both subgenres—which imitate the distorted and unclear sound of punk rock songs—may be interpreted as an opposition to rave culture and its excesses, London acid techno can rather be understood as an evolution of it.
“The London Sound”: a musical evolution of British rave culture

In May 1992, Castlemorton free festival for travellers hosted almost twenty thousand ravers in quest of a new promised land countering the United Kingdom’s conservative legal restrictions on clubbing. The one-week-long acid house and techno party happened to be a meeting point for posh clubbers who wanted to expand the party above clubland limits and punk rock underground travellers who already knew a bit about electronic music and got introduced to the rave phenomenon. However, as the BBC mentions:

What started out as a small free festival for travellers not only went down in history as the biggest illegal rave ever held in the UK, but resulted in a trial costing £ 4m and the passing of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act. (Chester)

Section 63, part V of the Act aims to facilitate police intervention when it aims to prevent or stop:

A gathering on land in the open air of 100 or more persons (whether or not trespassers) at which amplified music is played during the night (with or without intermissions) and is such as, by reason of its loudness and duration and the time at which it is played, is likely to cause serious distress to the inhabitants of the locality. (Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, part V sec. 63)

It is specified that “‘music’ includes sounds wholly or predominantly characterised by the emission of a succession of repetitive beats.” (Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, part V sec. 63). This last statement not only aims to prevent raves in which techno music would be played but even questions the very quality of this genre as a form of music, thus confirming more or less the previous remarks about its readability and its impermeability to some people’s ear.

During the following years though, the legal restrictions on clubland in the United Kingdom have been released and the massive united crowd from Castlemorton split. The posh acid house ravers gradually went back to clubs as punk backgrounded people went back to warehouses to develop their own style of dance music aiming to differentiate themselves from the first ones. As Knowles says:

We were interested in electronic music, but we were like not punks, but we were from an underground squatting scene. We weren’t like ravers. The ravers that came out in 1989-1990, they liked house music and rave music. They were of a kind of person that wasn’t really the kind of people we were. We went to raves, we loved it, but people were quite well dressed, and we were quite crusty looking, like not dressed up, not fashion people. So, when we started doing our parties, we were doing it for the kind of people that we were. Not ravers. But as you know, in the history of rave that soon flourished in England in 1991-1992, there was a lot of big parties for more people like us. The whole underground rave scene started, and this became a massive thing as well. But yeah, definitely, we weren’t from the same building blocks. 11

Those prejudices could be seen on the other side of the British electronic scene as well. “Despite their populist rhetoric and antagonism toward traditional clubland elitism, the original Balearic scenesters were horrified by the arrival of the great unwashed and unhip,” Reynolds says (Reynolds 68). Even though they shared a short moment of communion, the dichotomy between elitist clubbers/ravers and warehouse party-goers remained and increased as British rave culture conformed itself to establishment and club business. At the same time, warehouse electronic music producers started to
develop a new self-conscious subgenre in techno music based on the anti-establishment philosophy inherited from the punk rock culture, and a “drug-based culture” influenced by the British acid house music scene.

This “drug-based” anti-establishment culture is particularly noticeable in Chris Liberator’s and D.A.V.E. The Drummer’s “One Night in Hackney” as the main protagonist is ending his story by taking “ecstasy”, “ketamine”, “cocaine”, “speed”, “acids” and drinking “fifteen cans of Stella” and laughing with another man that he has just met and that he calls “dude”. There is a real contrast between the general dark tone of this track and the casualness surrounding the topic of drug consumption. The latter is rather introduced as a way for the characters to socialize and to befriend. This behaviour, quite common in these parties, led me to question the effect of techno music on social interactions. According to Jean-Michel Vives’ and Jacques Cabassut’s work, techno music—which is based on a continuity of timbres and rhythms as I have formerly mentioned—would be a way for its listeners to find access to the original voice as an object free from any meaning, and thus it would imprison them into the direct materiality of sound. In their article “Les enjeux vocaux de la dynamique subjective rencontrée à l’occasion du rassemblement adolescent techno”, they write: “la techno, en comblant le sujet, noie ce dernier dans un rapport jouissif du bios du corps qui ne saurait à lui seul faire lien social.” (Vives and Cabassut). Techno music thus seems to be a factor in party-goers’ isolation. Indeed, sober techno listeners tend to act as if they were hypnotized by the music. They are plunged into a functional dancing trance by the rhythms and the sounds and they do not even pay attention to what is around them. Moreover, this isolation may have been increased by a traditional English puritanism that had been revived since the 1980s by the conservative policies of both Margaret Thatcher and John Major. Drugs such as ecstasy and MDMA, which were introduced in the UK by acid house DJs and rich rave attendees who discovered it in Ibiza, were appropriated by people coming from the underground scene as a cure to social inhibition induced by techno music. It is interesting to notice that “MDMA is known to evoke experiences of empathy and compassion.” (McDaniel). The quest for empathy might be interpreted as a way for party-goers to share a communal feeling and to create a united marginalized group outside society, thus confirming Simon Reynolds’ point of view when he writes that “warehouse party offered rare opportunities for the working class to experience a sense of collective identity, to belong to a ‘we’ rather than an atomized impotent ‘I’.” (Reynolds 64).

As these drugs were becoming less popular in a calmer clubland especially because of tabloids’ reports, the very same MDMA and ecstasy were adopted by the warehouses regular people. I want to argue that the social link created by such drugs surrounding the acid techno played in the warehouse environment is actually a way for people who attend these parties to empower themselves as an anti-establishment force against the gentrification movement in the English capital city that tries to claim ownership of their territory.

A uniting cultural force against gentrification

Undoubtedly, the need of feeling a collective identity shared by deprived people in order to resist well-off youth has been taken into account by the Belleville Three in their creative process surrounding the original techno sound. When they met in the
suburbs of Detroit in the United States, in the early 1980s, Juan Atkins, Derrick May and Kevin Saunderson—three young African-American musicians who got inspired by German rock band Kraftwerk’s electronic sounds, and Alvin Toffler’s future theory developed in *The Third Wave*—took over the use of electronic devices to produce a new form of electronic music that would differentiate them from the music played by students in Detroit’s high school social clubs’ parties. The members of these social clubs, who had displaced the parties into the suburban areas of Detroit to free themselves from clubbing, were horrified by the unprivileged people who attended their parties, and they gradually started to apply the traditional forms of racism and classism that were dividing the city at that time.

The craftsman quality of electronic music blended with the idea “[...] that technology need not be big, costly, or complex in order to be ‘sophisticated’,”12 (Alvin Toffler cited by Sicko 12) have certainly motivated this deprived generation to take Detroit’s past glory back. Indeed, the city, which had been the flower of the American car industry, had been abandoned during the deindustrialization period, and fragmented because of the lack of public transport. The different neighbourhoods suffered from racial, social and class prejudices coming from the others. However, people from Detroit, who were left on the sidelines of American economic development, shared a same feeling of abandonment as they were “dehumanized and disempowered.” (Sicko 35). As Reynolds mentions, “Atkins and May both attribute the dreaminess of Detroit techno to the desolation of the city, which May describes in terms of a sensory and cultural deprivation.” (Reynolds 21). Techno music thus appears to be a paradoxical home-made music influenced by the vestiges of the industrial era. The cultural deprivation of Detroit can be explained by the fact that the city was almost only based on the automobile industry and the plants that were composing it. The car industry was the only cultural factor that united Detroit’s population. Thus, when the latter died, so did the feeling of belonging to a community for the inhabitants. It seems then natural that the Belleville Three, who shared a feeling of attachment to the urban milieu they had all experienced, used this industrial, cultural, and architectural legacy as a source for their creativity, resorting to mechanical sounds, hammer-like beats and strident high-pitched samples evoking the factory environment. Techno music can then be understood as a way to revive a collective memory, whilst creating a new form of culture. It is an empowering force creating communities on given territories. Thanks to techno, people that were formerly divided in individual entities were then reunited around a shared cultural element giving them a feeling of identity and a sense of belonging. Techno seems to be linked to the space in which it was developed. This is what makes Detroit’s electronic music unique and differentiates it from its European subgenres that are mostly linked to the fall of Berlin’s wall.

This link between space and music was pursued by Chris Liberator who decided to remain in London after the Castlemorton events and the police repressions that led a lot of techno lovers to go into exile in France where they spread the teknivals’ and free parties’ subculture. “We [did not] want to go to France, and our music [was] not going to become what we [wanted] to do. [...] We stayed in London and the London sound was acid techno.”13 However, regarding Hackney’s acid techno, it is possible to find a form of specificity and exception. Indeed, the history of this music—which had been influenced by the English acid house culture inherited from Chicago’s house music, and from punk rock music—is pretty close to Detroit’s. This might be due to Hackney’s
rather similar geographical and architectural environment. Indeed, the London Borough of Hackney, located in the east end, has been marked by industrialization and the spread of factories since the 18th century. The area was then divided between plants in Hackney Wick—in the east—and a dormitory-town in the central and southern parts of the neighbourhood. The “multi-ethnic class borough” (Brown), that was only united around its industrial activities, was highly suffering from poverty. All those social and economic problems increased with the deindustrialization that struck the area during the 1960s. As Juliet Davis says:

\[
\text{The departure of firms may have in some senses reflected the fulfilment of the industrial decentralization dreams laid down in earlier decades, but the unplanned effect from the early 1980s was unemployment and a new kind of economic marginality. (Davis)}
\]

Hackney was then divided between different populaces who fragmented themselves as the unique commune cultural and economic element binding them together fell apart. Whence, the borough that had been abandoned by the rest of the city became a squatting place for the underground people who were inspired by this along with acid house and Detroit’s techno music, and who started to create a new electronic subculture. Nevertheless, unlike Detroit’s techno or London’s acid house, Hackney’s acid techno became tainted with a darker touch, partly inherited from its punk background which certainly reflects the disillusionment experienced by the inhabitants of the borough at that time. This musical characteristic may have played a significant part in the union between the different populaces crossing the barriers of race, class and gender as they were meeting and partying together in warehouses.

Acid techno, which played the initial role of federating warehouse culture in this borough and was offering a possibility for its people to escape from their reality during party times, opened a new dimension in this area. For the past few years, the London Borough of Hackney has been facing a gradual movement of gentrification. A new wealthy population is then investing this space and the consequence of such a phenomenon, even though it increases the quality of life in the neighbourhood, results in a displacement of local populations. Hence, acid techno—and more specifically the anthem of “One Night in Hackney”, which celebrates warehouse culture—has become a resistance power for natives of this part of London. As Kimberley Brown explains:

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\text{With a [symbolic cultural] practice [...] the young people can potentially claim a material right to Hackney that extends beyond their moral claim, imagined spaces of the ethnic community and/or shared cultural history and experience. (Brown)}
\]

Indeed, acid techno, by popularizing warehouse parties for the inhabitants of Hackney, has indirectly given to these people the ownership of these particular spaces.

In this essay I have tried to show that the acid techno scene founded by the Liberators with the Stay Up Forever Records label is based on a self-conscious scene that has exploited the technical and musical characteristics of London acid house and the philosophy linking techno to its environment borrowed from Detroit. The combination of both criteria allowed them to empower the local population of Hackney as they remained faithful to this borough and have based their headquarters at E9 6QH. Their love for this eastern part of London is shown by their 2004 track of “One Night in Hackney” in which they celebrate the culture of warehouse parties which has become a resistance force for the natives from this neighbourhood against clubland elitism and gentrification.

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However, with the globalization and the diffusion of techno music and its subgenres around the world, it seems interesting to study the impact of what Chris Liberator calls the “London sound” and its paradoxical effects on foreign people who find a resonance in it and yet do not live in Hackney or even in London.

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NOTES

This science fiction feature film tells the story of Kaspar Hauser (Silvia Calderoni), a young man
who mysteriously washes up on an island in an unknown world. He is taken in by a sheriff
(Vincent Gallo) who is going to protect him and to teach him how to become a DJ.
2004. 12” acid techno vinyl, 6 min 59s. London.
4. Reynolds, Simon. Generation Ecstasy: into the world of techno and rave culture. New York:
5. See the section “About Us” of the Stay Up Forever Record label online shop.
6. The three DJs are generally called by their stage names, Chris Liberator, Julian Liberator and
Aaron Liberator. Their real names are quite hard to find, yet, Harry Sword mentions them in his
article “Where Techno Met Punk: London’s Acid Techno Underground of the ‘90s”.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=dy8wi6bqbi5&t=671s, accessed, 18 December 2018.
8. Chris Liberator’s interview for the Brazilian Youtube Channel DJ Ban - Electronic Music Center,
Showcase: Chris Liberator @ Ban TV 14/11/2014, available on Youtube, https://www.youtube.com/
watch?v=jdKUYU85LWv0&t=3613s, accessed, 18 December 2018.
9. In this track, The Horrorist already used a narrative voice to tell a darker story than the one of
the young man in Hackney as an underage girl is raped by “a really cute guy” that she met during
a party in a club of New York City.
See The Horrorist. “One Night in New York City”. One Night in New York City (vinyl). Things To
10. In his live session at the Boiler Room in 2014, David August used the “Mulholland Drive” track
composed by Angelo Badalamenti for David Lynch’s film of the same name to introduce his set,
and later he remixed the song “Llorando” interpreted by Rebekah Del Rio in the very same
movie.
See David August Boiler Room Berlin Live Set (14 April 2015), Boiler Room.TV, available on Youtube,
www.youtube.com/watch?v=dy8wi6bqbi5&t=671s, accessed, 18 December 2018.
12. “The techno-rebels contend that technology need not be big, costly, or complex in order to be
’sophisticated.’”
13. Chris Liberator’s interview for the Brazilian Youtube Channel DJ Ban - Electronic Music
Center, Showcase: Chris Liberator @ Ban TV 14/11/2014, available on Youtube, https://
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ABSTRACTS

This essay focuses on the acid techno movement initiated by the Stay Up Forever Records label in the early 1990s in the United Kingdom. Through the analysis of the emblematic track “One Night in Hackney”, composed by Dynamo City, the present study will explore the particularities of this subgenre of Detroit’s techno music. As a hybrid child of both London’s acid house and the underground punk rock scene, this new musical trend is part of the philosophical legacy which links techno music to the Motor City’s abandoned urban space in which it saw the light of day. Considering the tragical fates of both Detroit and Hackney faced with deindustrialization, one may then interpret acid techno as a unifying force for the inhabitants of this borough of London, which would thus allow them to assert a cultural claim on this space and to fight against the gentrification phenomenon which is now striking the eastern area of the English capital city.

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Mots-clés: musique, techno, acid techno, Londres, Hackney, Detroit, Castlemorton, rave, entrepôt, gentrification

Keywords: music, techno music, acid techno, London, Hackney, Detroit, Castlemorton, rave, warehouse, gentrification

Subjects: Music

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Miranda, 18 | 2019
Ariel's Corner

David Roche (dir.)

Film, TV, Video
Conference Report: 
Transnationalism and Imperialism: 
New Perspectives on the Western 
Conference organized by Hervé Mayer, David Roche and Marianne Kac-Vergne. Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3, November 15-16, 2018

Manon Lefebvre and Katia Marcellin

1 This two-day conference, whose topic expands on the Agrégation externe d’anglais curriculum, was organized by Hervé Mayer (EMMA, EA741, Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3), David Roche (CAS, EA801, Université Toulouse II Jean Jaurès) and Marianne Kac-Vergne (CORPUS, EA4295, Université de Picardie Jules Verne) in November 2018, and is a follow-up to a symposium organized by Hervé Mayer at Université Paul Valéry Montpellier 3, on December 8, 2017, entitled “Politics of the Western: a Revisionist Genre.” It was recorded and videos of the participants will soon be available at https://www.canal-u.tv/producteurs/um3/themes#element_2.

2 The aim of this conference was not only to explore the impact and reception of American Western movies beyond the borders of the United States, but also to highlight the immense diversity of the genre by looking at Westerns produced throughout the world. Through this transnational prism, the conference organizers sought to underscore the complexity of the Western, a genre that is too often reduced to the expression of American exceptionalism. Studying the Western’s ideology and values from this perspective thus makes a comparatist approach possible: the defining features of the genre can be seen as yet another expression of the imperialist ideology, at work in French or British colonial movies for instance. When looking at contemporary productions, it seems that the Western, or at least the appropriation of its more salient aspects, has become a genre particularly suited to the examination and criticism of racial issues related either to colonialism and postcolonialism or to questions of immigration and integration.

3 These were some of the points that were discussed, among others, over the course of this conference by fifteen speakers. Each panel was devoted to Westerns produced in
certain geographic areas, while analyzing their relation to American Westerns. The first day included a roundtable in which participants discussed contemporary Western film studies, a topic which was also addressed by two keynote speakers, Matthew Carter on the first day, and Andrew Patrick Nelson on the second day.

The first panel focused on American Westerns as export products. Patrick Adamson (University of Saint Andrews) studied silent epic Westerns produced by Paramount and Fox during the 1920s, that is when Westerns truly started turning towards historical aspects. Adamson argued that these films were aimed at regaining some level of global harmony. He highlighted the fact that the First World War had left some scars which cinema, as a mass media, was designed to heal. He insisted on how successful they were all over the world, but also on how they were adapted to a variety of audiences. Adamson specifically showed how references to the Old World were added during screenings in London, how Maoris were presented as similar to Native Americans in New Zealand so as to create a broader sense of “the other,” or how intertitles were changed to erase the word “American.” The overall plots remained the same but those tiny details helped the public identify with the diegetic world, enabling American history to remain relevant beyond its national boundaries.

Costanza Salvi (Bologna University) attempted to assess the American and Irish influences in John Ford’s Cavalry trilogy (1948-1950). The American director actually added Irish references that were not in the original stories that he adapted. She explained that he increasingly portrayed Native Americans as degenerates and drunkards, which provided his films with moments of slapstick comedy. She pinpointed the Shakespearean heritage at work there, creating a parallel between Native Americans and Irishmen under British rule. Ford’s Westerns also took after Shakespeare’s plays in other respects, such as the dilemma between violence and duty. According to Salvi, the Irish undertones in the portrayal of Native Americans fulfill comic purposes while providing the audience with racial stereotypes. She also showed that the celebration of the cavalry was actually intended as a praise of American democracy. As an American of Irish descent, Ford said he found himself on both sides of his Westerns, just like his ancestors, who could identify both with Natives, because of their experience in the Old World, and with settlers.

Céline Murillo (Université Sorbonne Paris Cité) addressed the question of transnational Hollywood through a discussion of the figure of the “Mimic Indian,” based on Homi Bhabha’s definition of mimicry in “Of Mimicry and Man” (1984), as a practice reserved to a class of interpreters in colonial contexts and “in which to be Anglicized is emphatically not to be English.” Her analysis explored three main functions of mimicry through various figures of “Mimic Indians” in Hollywood Westerns, focusing first on the “mimic as a tool” as exemplified by Juan in Broken Arrow (Delmer Daves, 1950), whose subaltern status is emphasized by his disposability once he has fulfilled his mission of teaching Apache to the white man Jeffords. Devil’s Doorway (Anthony Mann, 1950) was presented as illustrating a second aspect of mimicry, namely its lethal function, as Lance Poole’s death might be seen as the result of his unsuccessful attempts to mimic the whites and reject his Indian origins. Finally, the character of Lone Watie in The Outlaw Josey Wales (Clint Eastwood, 1974) was analyzed as a revisionist counterpoint to Juan, who, through a conscious practice of mimicry, navigates an interstitial space and is not relegated to a subaltern position.
The first keynote speaker of the conference, Matthew Carter (Manchester Metropolitan University), explored the hybridity of the Western through its increasingly transnational dimension. Starting with an overview of the academic productions on the subject, in which he analyzed the shift from a perception of the Western as a paradigmatic example of American exceptionalism to a more global approach, Carter went on to discuss the transgeneric and transnational nature of the contemporary Western, while highlighting that these features were also present in earlier productions (as emblematically illustrated by European film directors such as Sergio Leone or Sergio Corbucci). Focusing on the way in which certain European “Post-Westerns” such as Michelangelo Antonioni’s Zabriskie Point (1970) or Wim Wenders’s Paris, Texas (1984) offered a comment on the Frontier myth, Carter then emphasized the increasingly transnational dimension of contemporary Westerns. Through the example of two Westerns set along the US-Mexico border in a contemporary setting, Lone Star (John Sayles, 1996) and Three Burials (Tommy Lee Jones, 2005), he showed how the influence of global politics led directors to question the ideology of Empire building, concluding that by substituting the ongoing realities of tensions along a North/South border to the myth of the Frontier, these films offered a more complex outlook on the fundamentally hybrid nature of American identities.

Jenny Barrett (Edge Hill University, Ormskirk) opened the second panel, devoted to South American and Pacific Westerns, with a discussion of Lisandro Alonso’s Jauja (2014), a Western set in Argentina. Her analysis addressed the tension between the film’s excess of references to classical Westerns, especially to The Searchers (John Ford, 1956), and its simultaneous distancing from the conventions of the genre, resulting in a self-conscious narration requiring the viewer’s active participation. According to Barrett, the cinematic excess of the film could therefore be understood as constituting a whole other film running alongside the main series of actions, whose plot would be one of negation, highlighting the male protagonist’s failure as a hero and resisting the conventions of the classical Western.

Seung-Hwan Shin (University of Pittsburgh) presented a paper on the Manchurian Western, focusing first on the historical and theoretical context in which this genre developed. Commenting on the mythic quality of the Western, he explained that the West, as both a real place and a site of epic romance, had to be invented as a fantasy in the case of the Manchurian Western, the impossibility of a West thus being a precondition for the development of the genre. He then showed how, in The Good, the Bad, the Weird (Kim Jee-woon, 2008), the Western served the purpose of commenting on national history and nation-building while also allowing for the emergence of a minoritarian discourse through a “weirding of national history.”

Matthew Carter, Andrew Patrick Nelson, Marek Paryz, Jesús Ángel González Lopez and Fareed Ben-Youssef gathered with Hervé Mayer for a roundtable which closed the first day of discussions. They first wondered how transnationalism, which derives from postcolonial studies, can shed light on the genre of the Western. Paryz reminded the audience of the Western’s archetypal structure, rejoining Ben-Youssef who talked about the inherent tension between victim and victimizer. Nelson and Carter, on the other hand, wanted to underline the sense of community which emerges from Westerns. Mayer then steered the debate towards what differentiates the Western from other instances of colonial cinema, which González Lopez sees mostly as a question of quality of the product. Carter emphasized the role of Hollywood’s hegemony in the
setting apart of the Western, and Ben-Youssef reflected on the responsibilities of the transnational scholar. They then took turns in exposing the specifics of the Western and its perception as an academic object in their countries of origin, which led González to declare that the more a film distances itself from the time of the Conquest and from the West, the more it becomes a Post-Western.

The second day of the conference was mainly devoted to those Westerns which are removed from the traditional definition of the Western, films produced in Europe during the 1960s and even as recently as the beginning of the 21st century. Marek Paryz (University of Warsaw) opened the first panel with a study of Austrian director Andreas Prochaska’s film *The Dark Valley* (2014). Paryz, whose field of research is mostly concerned with postcolonialism and imperialism in American literature and cinema, argued that the film is representative of the savior trope, a typically American formula, which is often used in transnational Post-Westerns and generally focuses on specific ethnic communities. In this type of Western, a powerful, white, male protagonist rescues a community from repression and injustice. Paryz stated that there was, however, no racial context in *The Dark Valley*, so that it doesn’t have to concern itself with political correctness.

Jesús Ángel González López (Universidad de Cantabria, Santander) referred to Neil Campbell’s definition of the Post-Western in order to show how two French movies, *Adieu Gary* (Nassim Amaouche, 2009) and *Les Cowboys* (Thomas Bidegain, 2015), could qualify as Post-Westerns, insofar as they contained many intertextual references to classical Westerns and sought to create a dialogue with them. Noting that both films addressed the issue of minorities and Islam in France, he concluded on the malleability of the Western, quoting the directors of these movies, according to whom the Western’s traditionally intolerant and racially prejudiced opposition between cowboys and Indians can be easily appropriated in order to comment on contemporary realities such as the French model of integration.

The second keynote speaker of the conference was Andrew Patrick Nelson (Montana State University). While acknowledging that, as a scholar whose research centers almost exclusively on the most American of American Westerns, his participation in a conference on the topic of transnational Western might seem paradoxical, he proposed to question the apparently surprising success abroad of a genre that is supposed to embody the quintessence of the United States’ identity. His paper analyzed the evolution of the Western and of the various studies devoted to this genre. After defining these studies as falling into three main categories, namely structuralist, evolutionist and auteur approaches, he contended that most studies of the Western have tended to focus more on larger theoretical concepts pertaining to the genre than on the movies themselves. As an example, he showed how the cinematic quality of *The Searchers* was only acknowledged belatedly, even though critics had noted the extent of its influence on a variety of films. Addressing the characteristics of the “Classical Western,” Nelson argued not only that the most influential Westerns had paradoxically been produced outside the U.S., but also that this category had been invented by critics, thus leading to a binary conception of Westerns as being either “Classical Westerns” or “Post-Westerns.” Although he acknowledged the lasting cinematic and cultural influence of the Western, Nelson finally noted that the Western no longer belongs to popular culture but has become a specialty genre.
The last panel of the conference focused on postcolonial (Post)-Westerns, produced between the 1950s and 2017. Fareed Ben-Youssef (NYU Shanghai) studied how post-9/11 international genre films disrupt the official discourse of the American War on Terror. He gave a paper on Chloe Zhao’s two feature films, *Songs My Brothers Taught Me* (2015) and *The Rider* (2017), which both revolve around the lives of contemporary Native American youths. Ben-Youssef particularly insisted on the danger of representations because they shape the way people see themselves. Zhao’s characters have “a full sense of the West,” meaning that their dreams are infused with its glorious past. The Sino-American director portrays her heroes’ difficulty to cope, be it with accidents or even death. According to Ben-Youssef, what matters is that, in the end, these characters find themselves. He concluded on a quotation from the director, stating that her movies are a way of understanding her identity, which is why they convey a sense of in-betweenness (Zhao herself has declared that she has a “liquid sense of identity”).

Delphine Robic-Diaz (Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3) then presented the film *Les tripes au soleil*, directed by Claude-Bernard Aubert in 1957. A specialist of postcolonial representations in French cinema, Robic-Diaz had the opportunity to discuss the film with the director himself, who told her his aim was to create a movie about the absurdity of war. She explained how his films were designed to end the taboo of racism, which was still taboo in 1950s France. In the context of the Algerian War, *Les tripes au soleil* was first censored and then banned for export, sanctions that the film crew were able to overturn into a marketing plan. The film portrays two ethnic communities unable to live together. Robic-Diaz emphasized the paradoxical nature of the classification of the film as a Western, since, for once, white protagonists do not win, leading her to declare that it both questions and alters its genre.

Hadrien Fontanaud (Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3), who is writing a PhD on David Lean, took the floor with a talk about *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962). He shed light on the connection between American Westerns and British Empire films, which usually portray a white protagonist in a contested space, pinpointing how the desert in *Lawrence of Arabia* may remind viewers of Monument Valley. Fontanaud argued that the hostile wilderness was mirrored in the Arabs’ way of life, insisting on the way they play the part that Native Americans normally get in traditional Westerns, but also in the portrayal of Lawrence himself, who has to confront his own savagery in the desert. He specifically linked the failure of the white hero, portrayed as arrogant and delusional, to the failure of the British Empire.

In the last presentation of the conference, Samira Nadkarni (independent scholar) offered a reading of Amit Masurkar’s *Newton* (2017) as a postcolonial Western in which the region of Chhattisgarh, ridden by the conflict between the government and the Naxal guerrilla factions, becomes India’s new Frontier. *Newton* appropriates the conventions of the Western to comment on western colonialism by introducing echoes between the Adivasi community, portrayed as voiceless dominated characters, and the Native in Classical Westerns, and insisting on the protagonist’s attempts to establish himself as an enlightened hero.

The speakers in this very interesting two-day conference pondered on the diversity of movies which can be labeled Westerns, even when they are quite removed from the time and place of the Conquest of the West. They analyzed a wide variety of films, from John Ford’s more classical Westerns to other films whose belonging to the genre is
more disputed, even though Western influences cannot be denied. The speakers also
tackled the imperialistic aspects at work in Westerns and Post-Westerns, and showed
how the figure of the Other, usually Native Americans in classical Westerns, could be
transposed to other native people when the setting of the film moved away from the
U.S. They showed that this transposition sometimes served commercial purposes at the
same time as it displayed a power struggle between two communities, which is typical
of the genre of the Western. Speakers, however, also shed light on the fact that the
Western was not only defined by those conflicts, but also by an atmosphere linked to
the wilderness, which could be recreated in arid landscapes reminiscent of the
American West. The conference included a discussion on Western film studies
throughout the world, underscoring the many venues of research which remain to be
explored in this field.

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Keywords: Western, Post-Western, transnationalism, ideology, imperialism, colonialism, post-
colonialism, Native Americans, American exceptionalism, Hollywood, hybridity,
transculturalism, cinema
Subjects: Film

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American Network Series of the 1980s
A two-day conference organized by Claire Cornillon and Sarah Hatchuel
Université Paul Valéry Montpellier 3, February 21-22, 2019

David Roche

1 This was a follow-up conference to the one-day symposium on American Network Series of the 1950s-1970s, organized by Claire Cornillon and Dennis Tredy in 2018. This series of conference was backed by GUEST, a research group on television series. Its aim is to stimulate research on American television series of the past, notably in order to better contextualize the contemporary series that receive more attention in television and media history. The conference on the 1980s was thus aimed to pursue venues opened by Todd Gitlin’s *Inside Prime Time* (2000[1983]), Jane Feuer’s *Seeing through the Eighties: Television and Reaganism* (1995) and Robert J. Thompson’s *Television’s Second Golden Age* (1997). Groundbreaking shows including *Cheers* (NBC, 1982-1993), *Dynasty* (ABC, 1981-1989), *Hill Street Blues* (NBC, 1981-1987), *L.A. Law* (NBC, 1986-1994), *Miami Vice* (NBC, 1984-1990), *thirtysomething* (ABC, 1987-1991) and *V* (NBC, 1983-1984), were examined alongside works that have received less academic attention.

2 The first day kicked off with two talks on ABC’s prestige mini-series. In “Robert Mitchum vs Hitler: apogée et mort de la min-série historique épique au cours des 1980s,” Marjolaine Boutet (Université Picardie Jules Verne, Amiens) looked at how the two big-budget WWII historical epics *Winds of War* (1983) and *War and Remembrance* (1988-1989) evinced the end of ABC’s dominance of the American networks in the 1980s; she then explored the strategies used to “Americanize” the representation of the Shoah in both mini-series and touched on their influence on later works like *Schindler’s List* (Steven Spielberg, 1993). Sarah Hatchuel’s (Université Paul Valéry Montpellier 3) “Négociations narratives, éthiques et idéologiques de la mini-série: le cas de *Masada* (ABC, 1981)” interrogated the ambiguous spectatorial terms of a mini-series that invites Americans to side with the zealots rather than with the Roman Empire; she then emphasized how the mini-series reflexively announces its reluctance to end in the dialogue, an end it will choose to ellipticize, thus calling into question the mini-series’ very raison d’être.
The three afternoon talks dealt with gender politics in series. In “Quand les networks renoncent aux « tits and ass »: vers une déréification du corps féminin?,” Benjamin Campion (Université Paul Valéry Montpellier 3) analyzed the credits of four 1980s crime series—*Magnum, P.I.* (CBS, 1980-1988), *The Fall Guy* (ABC, 1981-1986), *Miami Vice* and *Hunter* (NBC, 1984-1991)—in order to counter Gitlin’s claim that the networks were increasingly reluctant to fetishize the female body. Conversely, Stéphane Sawas (Inalco, Cerlom, Paris), in “There’s more than one kind of man! Hommes et masculinités dans *Dynastie* (ABC, 1981-1989),” suggested that the presence of an openly gay character, Steven, not only opposed the hegemony of the heterosexual male patriarch, Blake Carrington, but contaminated the representation of masculinity throughout the serial, fetishizing male bodies and proposing alternative models of masculinity. Finally, in “Masculinité et technologie dans les séries américaines des années 1980,” Jules Sandeau (Université Boreaux Montaigne), examined the relationship between masculinity and technology in the post-Vietnam context whereby military discourses increasingly emphasized the technological; thus, in shows like *Airwolf* (CBS, 1984-1986), *Knight Rider* (NBC, 1982-1986) and *MacGyver* (ABC, 1985-1992), the hero’s masculinity is safeguarded through his mastery of feminized machines and computers, but it is also redefined according to the terms of a more sensitive New Man.

Friday opened with Julie Richard’s (Université Picardie Jules Verne) talk “Les séries de network des années 1980: un nouveau statut pour la peine capitale,” which examined how the increasing use of the death penalty in the 1970s and 1980s is reflected in crime series such as *Miami Vice*, *L.A. Law* (NBC, 1986-1994) and *In the Heat of the Night* (NBC, 1988-1992; CBS, 1992-1995), where capital punishment is discussed and, by the end of the decade, even depicted (for instance in S2E11 of *In the Heat of the Night*). In “A Working-class Hero is Something to Be . . . Except in a Sitcom: Interrogating the Ideological Structures of the American Sitcom in *Married … with Children* (Fox, 1986-1997),” David Roche (Université Toulouse Jean Jaurès) examined the political potential of working-class protagonist Al Bundy in the overall context of American sitcoms from the 1950s to the late 1980s, inscribing Fox’s anti-Cosby Show in the legacy of *The Life of Riley* (NBC, 1953-1958) and especially *All in the Family* (CBS, 1971-1979). By paying particular attention to the Labor Day episode “We’ll Follow the Sun” (S5E1), he argued that Bundy’s failure to fully live out the role of working-class hero is tied to the ideological structures of the sitcom genre which had become resolutely middle-class in the Reagan years. Vincent Souladié (Université Toulouse Jean Jaurès), in “‘I’m nobody. Who are you?’ Voix générationnelle et voix poétique dans *thirtysomething* (ABC, 1987-1991),” used the character of Gary Shepherd as an entry point into the ground-breaking serial, which deploys an aesthetics of the banal that relies largely on dialogue and gestures more characteristic of independent cinema. In “Coach Is His Nickname and Misunderstanding Deixis Is His Game: *Cheers* (NBC, 1982-1985),” Virginie Iché (Université Paul Valéry Montpellier 3), examined how the bartender’s misunderstandings of deixis (such as you, we, this, that) contribute to distinguish from the other characters and making him a part of the group and the sitcom’s comedy dynamics.

In “TV Series in the Reagan Era: The Case of *V* (1983) and *V The Final Battle* (1984),” Donna Andréolle (Université Grenoble Stendhal) attempted to reassess the politics of the show. Initially conceived as an affirmation of US patriotism, and relying on two conservative tropes (including the invasion narratives of the 1950s), the franchise’s
nonetheless has more progressive tendencies, including the female villain Diana, a discussion on abortion and echoes of resistance in Vietnam and Central America. Finally, in “Diurnal and Nocturnal Cityscapes in Miami Vice,” Jean Du Verger (Université de Franche-Comté, Besançon), emphasized the sophisticated aesthetics of the ground-breaking crime show, and especially how its visual treatment of the city of Miami was indebted to noir and neo-noir and Brian DePalma’s recent remake of Scarface (1983) and nonetheless fairly realistic sociologically speaking.

To be continued in 2020 . . . with American Network Series of the 1990s.

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Notre Top 10 des films anglophones de 2018
David Roche et Vincent Souladié

En dépit des discussions sur l’avenir du cinéma, sur la place de Netflix et des autres plateformes, sur la mutation des modes de consommation et sur ce qui constitue un film à l’ère du numérique et d’Internet et du soi-disant post-cinéma, 2018 aura décidément été une année de haute tenue en termes de qualité de la production internationale, avec des films splendides comme \textit{Beoning} (Corée du sud, Chang-dong Lee), \textit{Cold War} (Pologne/UK/France, Pawel Pawlikowski), \textit{Leto} (Russie/France, Kirill Serebrennikov) et \textit{Roma} (Mexique/USA, Alfonso Cuarón, 2018). Le cinéma américain, australien et britannique n’aura pas été de reste non plus. Si des blockbusters comme \textit{The Meg} (China/USA, Jon Turteltaub) n’ont fait que confirmer ce que l’on savait déjà – que la bonhomie de Jason Statham ne suffirait jamais à nous faire avaler un énième requin en images de synthèse quelle qu’en soit la taille –, le succès de \textit{Black Panther} (USA, Ryan Coogler) lui a permis d’être le premier film de superhéros nommé aux Oscars dans la catégorie Meilleur Film, et a posé des questions tout à fait pertinentes sur ce qui fait qu’un film est progressiste ou non, le blockbuster postulant implicitement qu’à l’image de Luke Cage, un superhéros noir n’est pas un superhéros universel. \textit{Green Book} (USA, Peter Farrelly), qui a reçu l’Oscar du Meilleur Film, a aussi posé des questions intéressantes : tétanisée par le spectre de l’Oscar de \textit{Driving Miss Daisy} (USA, Bruce Beresford, 1989), dont le \textit{feel-good movie} de Farrelly renverse le postulat, la critique n’a pas toujours été sensible à la manière dont le film intègre la rencontre entre les personnages de Mahershala Ali et de Viggo Mortensen (tous deux excellents) dans des enjeux intersectionnels (classe sociale, ethnie, sexualité) qui complexifient le binarisme blanc/noir. À l’inverse, c’est la qualité artistique qui, aux yeux de nombreux critiques et internautes, aura été ignorée par l’Académie, concernant par exemple la prestation d’Ethan Hawke dans \textit{First Reformed} (USA/UK/ Australie, Paul Schrader), récit d’un prêtre alcoolique en pleine crise de foi/e. \textit{Mary Queen of Scots} (UK/USA, Josie Rourke) souffre d’une bande musicale lourde, et on peut se poser la question de la pertinence d’un tel film seulement cinq ans après le long-métrage du même nom de Thomas Imbach (Suisse/France) ; néanmoins, Saoirse Ronan
et Margot Robbie assoient leur place parmi les actrices les plus talentueuses de leur génération. C'est aussi le talent des acteurs et actrices (KiKi Layne, Stephan James, Regina King, Colman Domingo – tous excellents) qui fait l'intérêt principal de *If Beale Street Could Talk* (USA), adapté du roman de James Baldwin, le très attendu successeur de *Moonlight* (USA, 2016), prouvant que, si le film a moins su séduire la critique, peut-être en partie à cause de sa timidité structurelle, il prouve la capacité du metteur en scène Barry Jenkins à diriger des acteurs. L'adaptation du roman de Richard Ford, *Wildlife* (USA, Paul Dano), a elle aussi permis à Carey Mulligan et à Jake Gyllenhaal de briller à nouveau, malgré un film qui joue peut-être un peu trop la carte de la sobriété. Touchante découverte que celle de l'actrice Elsie Fisher et du réalisateur Bo Burnham, avec ce premier long métrage, *Eighth Grade* (USA), *coming of age film* qui, sur un mode plus naturaliste que *Unfriended* (USA, Levan Gabriadze, 2014) et moins brutal que *Catfish* (USA, Henry Joost et Ariel Schulman, 2010), pèse les potentialités d'expression et d'oppression des nouvelles technologies qui exacerbent les difficultés de la vie adolescente. Quant à l'acteur John Krasinski, il signe son troisième long métrage, *A Quiet Place* (USA), un film d'horreur qui, comme son nom l'indique et comme le récent *Don't Breathe* (USA, Fede Alvarez, 2016), exploite le pouvoir du silence au cinéma. Certains cinéastes plus confirmés ont proposé des films intrigants. *The House That Jack Built* (Danemark, France/Suède/Allemagne/Belgique), Lars von Trier reprend l'idée de la figure du tueur en série comme artiste – idée récemment exploitée par la série *Hannibal* (NBC, 2013-2015) – afin de proposer une métaphiction qui explore la pulsion créatrice et destructrice. Steve McQueen, épaulé par Gillian Flynn, l'auteure de *Gone Girl* (USA, Fede Alvarez, 2014), exploite le pouvoir du silence au cinéma. Seul le temps pourra nous dire si *Under the Silver Lake* (USA) est bien le digne successeur du magistral *It Follows* (USA, 2015), mais il est au crédit de David Robert Mitchell d'avoir prolongé ses préoccupations majeures (la jeunesse et la culture populaire américaines contemporaines) tout en essayant d'explorer une veine du fantastique plus littéraire (influence de William Burroughs, Philip K. Dick ou encore Thomas Pynchon).
BlacKkKlansman / J’ai infiltré le Ku Klux Klan (USA, Spike Lee)

Les longs métrages tournés par Spike Lee ces dix dernières années n’avaient pas vraiment attiré l’attention, si bien que son retour en grâce avec BlacKkKlansman n’a pas manqué de surprendre. Preuve qu’il est toujours maladroit de catégoriser une œuvre en cours, les derniers films de Lee à avoir connu un succès public et critique avaient été trop rapidement reçus comme des « œuvres de la maturité » (25th Hour, 2002 ; Inside Man, 2006) en raison de leur ton sérieux et de la rigueur plutôt classique de leur mise en scène. Plus d’une décennie plus tard, BlacKkKlansman change de direction et retrouve la fraîcheur, la spontanéité, la modestie, l’humour juvénile, et aussi la hargne politique des premiers films. L’entreprise est pourtant sérieuse, sous la forme d’un buddy movie (porté par les excellents Adam Driver et John David Washington), il s’agit d’un polar d’infiltration dans les milieux du Ku Klux Klan à la fin des années soixante-dix, dont l’intrigue se conclut avec un intense suspense sur une tentative d’attentat. Mais Spike Lee ne se laisse pas enfermer dans un genre et dans une seule approche dramatique, il pratique un brassage de tonalités qui parviennent toutes à s’équilibrer : les codes de la blacksploitation y sont repris avec autant d’ironie que de nostalgie, le discours pamphlétaire y est asséné avec espièglerie, les congrégations racistes de l’Amérique profonde sont tournées en ridicule sans perdre de leur pouvoir d’inquiétude et d’horreur. La légèreté insuffle alors un rythme, agrémenté d’une riche bande musicale, grâce auquel les idées politiques du cinéaste sont assenées sans solennité mais avec urgence et sincérité. Les historiens du cinéma pourront trouver à redire à la vision a priori caricaturale que Spike Lee donne du cinéma classique hollywoodien et de la vision raciste que celui-ci présentait de l’esclavage. BlacKkKlansman s’ouvre ainsi par une séquence d’Autant en emporte le vent (Victor Fleming, 1939), tandis que Naissance d’une Nation (D.W. Griffith, 1915) est regardé et célébré religieusement par les personnages pro-aryens du film. Même s’ils étaient depuis longtemps tombés de leur piédestal classique, ces deux modèles sont frontalement attaqués et présentés aux jeunes générations de spectateurs comme l’exemple d’un cinéma qu’il faut dénoncer, sinon oublier pour avancer. Pourtant, le propos n’est peut-être pas si transparent. La modernité exaltante de la mise en scène de Spike Lee ne l’empêche pas non plus d’avoir recours à des moyens formels qui ont fait leur preuve depuis bien longtemps. Ainsi la montée en puissance du suspense lors de la séquence du climax final se fonde sur un rigoureux montage alterné, dont on se souvient qu’il avait trouvé son premier usage stimulant dans la dernière partie de Naissance d’une Nation. Spike Lee ne peut plus décréter innocemment que tous les cinéastes doivent quelque chose à Griffith, comme Orson Welles ou Stanley Kubrick l’avaient déclaré avant lui, puisqu’il attaque très ouvertement le contenu on ne peut plus controversé de ce film séminal, mettant en scène la naissance épique et salvatrice du Ku Klux Klan. En revanche, l’invention esthétique de ce film s’expose comme un legs immuable dont il convient d’utiliser le pouvoir d’exaltation idéologique à de nouvelles fins. Le montage alterné comme prise de guerre en somme. Plus pugnace et impétueux que jamais, Spike Lee tombe en revanche dans des travers prosélytes qui n’étaient pas du tout nécessaires lorsqu’il choisit de conclure son film par des images d’archives des émeutes racistes survenues à Charlottesville en 2017. Ce point d’orgue, déjà présent dans le livre originel de Ron
Stallworth, apparaît redondant et exige du public qu'il quitte la salle avec un sentiment d'indignation univoque et pompeux, que la mise en scène était déjà parvenue à inspirer de manière plus subtile.

The Favourite / La Favorite (Irlande/UK/USA, Yorgos Lanthimos)

À ce stade de sa carrière, Yórgos Lánthimos ne surprend plus autant qu'il avait pu le faire avec Canine (2009) ou The Lobster (2015). C'est bien le moindre reproche que l'on peut faire à son dernier opus, dont il n'a pourtant pas signé le scénario (écrit par Deborah Davis et Tony McNamara) : le caractère sulfureux qui vient lentement bousculer les codes canoniques du film en costume feutré est attendu dès le départ. Cela n'empêche pas The Favorite de proposer une reconstitution jubilatoire de la royauté décadente de la Reine Anne et de ses relations de dépendance amoureuse avec ses sujets, dans la Grande-Bretagne du début du XVIIIème siècle. Bien sûr, Lánthimos n'a aucun intérêt à s'en tenir à la vérité historique et à la traiter avec respect et authenticité, il ramène plutôt celle-ci à sa manière personnelle de dépeindre le monde et puise dans l'anecdote et la légende de quoi nourrir son humour noir et ses obsessions artistiques, un peu comme avait pu le faire Sofia Coppola avec Marie Antoinette (2006), dans un registre très différent. L'autarcie du huis-clos ridiculise le pouvoir des décisions militaires et politiques, jeu désincarné auquel la reine, ogre puéril excellente ment interprétée par l'actrice oscarisée Olivia Colman, participe à peine. Par ailleurs, Emma Stone et Rachel Weisz excellents dans leur rôle de favorites manipulatrices se disputant le rôle de la plus perverse. Les personnages masculins qui les entourent sont volontairement fades et inconsistants, ils n'ont pas même le bénéfice de la médiocrité ou du ridicule. Les actrices ont ainsi toutes la place pour développer la richesse de leur jeu et imposer leur présence physique, que Lánthimos n'érotise jamais, contrairement à ce que son sujet pourrait lui dicter, préférant donner à leurs corps une densité charnelle dérangeante. Pour donner vie à ce nouvel environnement claustrophobe régi par des règles saugrenues et malsaines, comme l'étaient ceux de ses films précédents, la mise en scène de Lánthimos n’est pas modeste mais aussi emphatique et expressive qu’elle pourrait l’être chez Kubrick, à qui il emprunte quelques idées formelles (les travellings virtuoses dans les couloirs du palais, l’usage d’objectifs déformants, le grand angle et la géométrisation du décor, les éclairages clair-obscurs). Cette emphase, aidée d’une bande-son oppressante, procure plus que jamais le malaise tant elle met en valeur l’outrance des situations, leur grotesque ou leur violence psychologique.

First Man / First Man : le premier homme sur la lune (USA/Japan, Damien Chazelle)

Grand oubli de l'Oscar 2019, ce biopic du jeune prodige Damien Chazelle sur l'astronaute Neil Armstrong se présente comme l'anti-Apollo 13 (USA, Ron Howard, 1995) : à l'instar de l'envoutant Jackie (USA/Chile/Hong Kong/Allemagne/Angleterre, Pablo Larraín, 2016), il s'agit d'interroger une figure mythique américaine, et de l'écarter du mythe en la révélant dans ses contradictions proprement humaines.
Plastiquement, l’Armstrong interprété par Ryan Gosling a tout du héros hollywoodien, certes, mais le protagoniste est avant tout un chercheur qui se réfugie dans le travail et qui est mu par un idéal non pas patriotique mais scientifique : il n’adhère pas à l’image du cowboy kennedien affrontant l’ennemi soviétique, mais à une vision de l’effort collectif dans lequel les découvertes soviétiques sont un apport précieux. Comme dans certains films de guerre contemporain, dont *The Hurt Locker / Démineurs* (USA, Kathryn Bigelow, 2008), l’héroïsme s’avère relever de la pathologie sans qu’il y ait pour autant jugement moral sur la personne. Mais ce n’est pas tant ça qu’on retiendra de *First Man*. Le troisième film de Chazelle est une expérience kinétique, où l’on vit chaque expérience scientifique de l’intérieur. C’est un film qui s’efforce de transmettre le vertige du ciel et de l’espace à travers une esthétique sensorielle : caméra tremblante, gros plan claustrophobe qui contraste avec les plans généraux de l’immensité des cieux, et bien sûr, de la part de celui qui a été révélé avec les films musicaux Whiplash (USA, 2014) et *La La Land* (USA/Hong Kong, 2016), disjonctions auditives entre le vacarme et un silence tout aussi menaçant. *First Man* est l’objet parfait pour une appréhension du cinéma comme « expérience incarnée », approche très prisée dans les études cinématographiques nord-américaines. Dès la scène d’ouverture, nous, spectateurs confortablement installés dans une vaste salle de cinéma, sommes transportés dans l’espace réduit et fragile du cockpit, alors que les bruits environnants de tôles nous font ressentir la fragilité de ce qui nous sépare du vide. Le jeu tout en contrôle de Ryan Gosling exprime, d’une part, l’entêtement du scientifique, mais au niveau sensible, ce visage en gros plan est aussi la surface, voire l’écran, sur laquelle nous projetons nos angoisses, nos interprétations et, in fine, nos idéaux et notre idéologie. L’esthétique kinétique et les sublimes scènes d’action font plus que structurer le film, elles en sont le fond même. En nous donnant accès à l’intériorité d’Armstrong et en insistant sur l’écart entre les discours politiques et scientifiques et l’expérience intime, la conclusion du film nous invite alors à reconsidérer notre rapport aux figures réelles et imaginaires qui éveillent nos désirs et que nous édifions en mythe, plus précisément à la manière dont nous vivons, ressentons à travers elle.

**Hereditary / Hérédité** (USA, Ari Aster)

La voie ouverte par le cinéma fantastique américain des années 2010 est absolument passionnante. Alors qu’on aurait pu le croire balisé de toute part, le genre parvient encore à surprendre par son exigence et son imprévisibilité. Quelles que soient leur différences, David Robert Mitchell, Robert Eggers, Alex Garland, Jordan Peele, David Lowery et Ari Aster (qui signe avec *Hérédité* son tout premier long métrage) seront bientôt identifiés comme une génération innovante qui a su se tenir à l’écart des modes commerciales, incarnées par James Wan et ses épigones, pour réinventer un fantastique intellectuel et expérimental. De par son phénomène générationnel, et sans fer de lance, ce renouveau est sans doute plus important encore que ne le fut la découverte des premiers films américains de M. Night Shyamalan il y a vingt ans, lequel incarnait un peu à lui seul une ambition artistique comparable à ce qui survient aujourd’hui (alors qu’il s’avère à la vision de *Glass* que Shyamalan n’est plus en phase avec la rigueur et l’inventivité actuelle). Concernant *Hérédité*, tout s’est joué pour nous dès les premières secondes du film, et sans même savoir quelle serait l’intrigue. Alors que le film s’ouvre en plan d’ensemble sur une grande maison de poupées, la caméra s’en approche lentement pour nous faire contempler la précision des détails décoratifs de son
intérieur miniature. Nous nous sommes dit que si ce plan a priori banal se concluait de manière aussi intelligente et audacieuse que nous étions en train de l’anticiper, le film méritierait de figurer dans le top de l’année. N’en disons pas plus. Difficile d’ailleurs de décrire une œuvre qui propose tant de retournements de situation que l’on est loin de tous voir venir. La première partie, mélodrame familial anxiogène, fascine par sa lenteur et son retour aux sources du gothique, tandis que le virage surprenant qui survient à mi-film est de nature à dérouter irrémédiablement l’audience. Il est pourtant remarquable de voir un cinéaste pousser le spectateur hors de sa zone de confort et faire librement évoluer son récit filmique vers une exubérance qui pourrait paraître incongrue. Quoiqu’il en soit, tout ne repose pas sur ces surprises dramatiques mais sur la manière unique qu’a Ari Aster d’instiller une atmosphère suffocante à partir d’une raideur froide des mouvements et d’une exploitation inconfortable du silence. Toni Colette (évidemment empruntée au Sixième Sens de Shyamalan) apporte à son jeu une fébrilité que contrebalance la profondeur et la rationalité de Gabriel Byrne, mais c’est la jeune actrice Milly Shapiro qui vole la vedette aux acteurs confirmés. Son personnage de freaks ne ressemble en rien aux adolescents auxquels le fantastique domestique nous demande en général de nous identifier. L’enfance n’est plus un territoire innocent en proie aux cauchemars, elle fait littéralement corps avec la terreur.

**Isle of Dogs / L’île aux chiens (Allemagne/USA, Wes Anderson)**

Il est possible que le neuvième long métrage de Wes Anderson soit un ton légèrement en-dessous de ses grands chefs d’œuvre que sont Moonrise Kingdom (USA, 2012) et The Grand Budapest Hotel (USA/Allemagne, 2014). Mais l’énergie du film n’en est pas moins puissamment jubilatoire. Il n’y a pas tromperie sur la marchandise : qui vient chercher du Anderson trouvera du Anderson. D’un point de vue esthétique, il s’agit avant tout d’une synthèse de Fantastic Mr. Fox (USA, 2009), première incursion dans l’animation « stop motion » du cinéaste américain, et de The Grand Budapest Hotel, dont il emprunte à la fois le rythme, les décors miniatures, le festival chromatique, et l’approche fabulatrice au contexte historique. Cette fois-ci, la poétique andersonnienne, avec ses plans frontaux et ses dialogues énoncés sur un ton laconique, est mise au service de la quête d’un garçon japonais nommé Atari pour son chien, Spots, qui l’amènera sur une île où les chiens ont été mis en exil suite à une épidémie de chien fou (« dog flu ») ; face à cette preuve que l’homme demeure le meilleur ami du chien malgré la politique discriminatoire du maire de Megasaki, une meute de chiens abandonnés finira par apporter son aide à l’enfant. Cette quête sur fond de dystopie propose ainsi une allégorie qui, grâce à la figure anthropomorphisée du chien, le meilleur ami de l’homme, parvient à fusionner les préoccupations contemporaines, d’une part pour le monde animal et par extension pour l’environnement, et d’autre part pour les catastrophes humanitaires comme le sort des réfugiés. L’île apocalyptique est donc à la fois un monde pollué et un camp de concentration. Et la politique du maire y est, sans surprise, fondée sur l’oubli, voire le déni d’un quelconque problème et de l’« humanité » des chiens. Une attitude que l’on retrouve chez un grand nombre des puissants de ce monde. Or, c’est ici que le défi technique et esthétique fait partie liée avec le propos : le projet est d’insuffler la vie non seulement dans l’animal mais dans sa version artificielle assumée. C’est à ce niveau-ci que le casting de choc joue un rôle.
central. Car les voix de Bryan Cranston (Chief), d’Edward Norton (Rex), de Jeff Goldblum (Duke), de Bill Murray (Boss), de Frances McDormand (Interpreter Nelson), ou de Scarlett Johansson (Nutmeg) sont pleinement identifiables, et les acteurs s’en donnent à cœur joie pour animer les visages souvent très figés des chiens avec des modulations de voix discrètes qui n’enfreignent pas le ton anti-mélodramatique andersonien. Enfin, cette chorale de voix de stars américaines permet de mieux mettre en valeur la voix du jeune acteur Koyu Rankin, et donc la voix de l’autre (l’humain, l’enfant, le japonais). C’est maintenant avec impatience que nous attendons de voir comment Anderson va explorer l’histoire de son pays d’adoption, la France, dans The French Dispatch, dont la sortie est prévue en 2020.

**The Mule / La Mule (USA, Clint Eastwood)**

Il est habitude de reconnaître que la part la plus passionnante de l’œuvre de Clint Eastwood réside dans l’autoportrait ambigu qu’il y dessine en filigrane depuis ses débuts. Or, d’Impitoyable à Gran Torino, voilà plusieurs décennies qu’il continue de se filmer dans des fictions crépusculaires qui semblent signer à chaque fois ses adieux à l’écran. Jamais cinéaste n’a autant sublimé sa sortie qu’à l’ordre nouveau du cinéma et de la société, pour poser une fois encore cette question coutumière : que reste-t-il aujourd’hui de Clint Eastwood ? Ses apparitions en tête d’affiche d’un nouveau film annoncent toujours un rendez-vous avec les restes de son image, donnant lieu en guise de constat à une problématique figurative et dramatique. Tout le capital sympathie du personnage provient de cette non-appartenance résolue à un monde qui le dénigre et qu’il prend de haut tout en essayant de le rattraper à son rythme. Nul ne peut prédire si The Mule sera bel et bien son dernier rôle, mais il fait à nouveau de celui-ci l’incarnation de valeurs anciennes qu’il confronte à l’ordre nouveau du cinéma et de la société, pour poser une fois encore cette question coutumière : que reste-t-il aujourd’hui de Clint Eastwood ? Ses apparitions en tête d’affiche d’un nouveau film annoncent toujours un rendez-vous avec les restes de son image, donnant lieu en guise de constat à une problématique figurative et dramatique. Tout le capital sympathie du personnage provient de cette non-appartenance résolue à un monde qui le dénigre et qu’il prend de haut tout en essayant de le rattraper à son rythme. De même qu’Eastwood manifestait dans The Rookie (1990) son essoufflement face aux buddy movies d’action des années 1980, qui avaient su damer le pion au cinéma dont il était autrefois le maître, on pourrait reconnaître avec une certaine ironie que la lenteur et la mélancolie de The Mule en fait l’anti Fast & Furious, sa réponse inattendue aux actioners motorisés qui prennent le narco-trafic à la frontière mexicaine comme cadre narratif exotique et spectaculaire. Le film n’en est pas moins dynamique, il donne même des leçons quant à la manière de réguler la tension dramatique par le montage sans gaspillage d’énergie, en maniant avec aplomb l’art de l’ellipse et de l’esquisse. Eastwood a compris depuis longtemps qu’il ne pouvait continuer à exister à l’écran qu’en tant que contre-modèle, face aux générations successives de héros d’action, auxquels il n’a plus de compte à rendre depuis longtemps, et face à sa propre image figée dans le passé des années 1970, à laquelle il se sait toujours comparé aujourd’hui (jusqu’à il y a 10 ans, un énième Dirty Harry était encore réclamé par les fans). Dans Gran Torino, Eastwood défiait encore ses adversaires de son regard d’aigle et de son index tendu. Dans The Mule, l’acteur force le trait du dépérissement physique (s’il exhibe sans gêne la peau vieillie de son corps à demi nu, cette démarche lente et voutée n’est pas la sienne) et se présente pour la première fois comme une figure douloureusement fragile. Le cinéaste s’amuse avec malice de l’ambiguïté insoluble de la double image humaniste et réactionnaire avec laquelle il a forgé sa persona, et que sont venus récemment brouiller ses prises de positions politiques en public, voire ses films dont les nuances étaient plus difficiles à cerner (American Sniper, 2014 ; The 15 :17 to Paris, 2018). En redevenant une figure filmique en
chair et en os dans *The Mule*, Eastwood sait très bien qu’il se rend à nouveau insaisissable et intouchable.

**The Rider (USA, Chloé Zhao)**

8 Brady Blackburn, un cavalier spécialisé dans le **bronc riding** (sans selle), voit sa carrière, sa passion et son identité remises en question par une chute qui lui provoque une fracture crânienne : finira-t-il par remonter à cheval au prix de sa vie ? C’est cette histoire simple que raconte le deuxième long métrage de Chloé Zhao, réalisatrice chinoise relocalisée dans le Dakota. Zhao a un talent rare pour rendre évidente des situations sensibles, pour faire jaillir la poésie de l’ordinaire, comme pour diriger des acteurs non professionnels dans leur milieu d’origine, à commencer par le touchant Brady Jandreau dans le rôle principal. Avec son premier film, *Songs My Brothers Taught Me* (2015), *The Rider* forme une sorte de diptyque sur la réserve Pine Ridge du Dakota du Sud habité par les Lakota Sioux. On y décèle une persistance du souffle mythique de l’Ouest régénéré non pas par la violence, comme le voulait Theodore Roosevelt, mais par la rencontre entre les cultures, plus proche du modèle de la *frontera* proposée par la poétesse Gloria Anzaldúa (voir l’article d’Hervé Mayer dans ce numéro de 2019-04-17T17:19:00 Miranda). Les amérindiens que documente Zhao vivent dans des conditions économiques difficiles, mais démontrent également une expérience culturelle riche et hybride qui intègre les contraires : cultures cowboy et traditionnelles, heavy metal, hip-hop et chants traditionnels, intégration dans l’espace traditionnel et dans une société qui a transformé l’Ouest en spectacle. Ce qui pose problème, ce ne sont pas tant les tensions liées aux politiques identitaires que la vie elle-même, la survie, et donc les choix éthiques. Et c’est dans cette question de l’invention de soi, de l’agentivité, que les champs éthiques, politiques et poétiques se rejoignent. C’est que, pour le Rider, ces éléments ne sont pas en contradiction mais existent dans un plan d’immanence : le spectacle qu’offre le rodéo ne s’inscrit pas tant dans une compétition masculine entre cowboys (on n’est dans l’émulation du dépassement de soi plus que dans la compétition individuelle) que dans cette relation intime que Brady Blackburn et ses amis entretiennent avec le monde naturel, comme ce cheval caractériel qu’il apprivoise dans une séquence quasi-documentaire. Avec une caméra qui colle aux corps tout en les intégrant harmonieusement à leur environnement, Zhao dépeint un Ouest qui retient toute sa poésie, mais débarrassé du sensationnalisme du mythe et de son idéologie, pathétique et nostalgique, de la masculinité dure. C’est ainsi qu’à travers le choix effectué dans le film par le personnage de Blackburn, *The Rider* se démarque délibérément du splendide *The Wrestler* (Darren Aronofsky, 2008), comme l’a d’ailleurs souligné la cinéaste elle-même.

**The Sisters Brothers / Les Frères Sisters (France, Espagne, Roumanie, USA, Jacques Audiard)**

9 Quoi de mieux que de se lancer dans son premier long métrage en anglais sinon en se prêtant au plus américain des genres, le western ? C’est le choix qu’a fait Jacques Audiard, en collaboration avec son scénariste attitré Thomas Bidegain, en portant à l’écran le roman du canadien Patrick DeWitt. Porté par un casting de rêve – John C. Reilly, Joaquin Phoenix, Jake Gyllenhaal et le moins connu mais tout aussi excellent Riz
Ahmed –, *Les Sisters Brothers* est peut-être le plus grand western depuis *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* / *L’Assassinat de Jesse James par le lâche Robert Ford* (USA/Canada/UK, Andrew Dominik, 2007). La force du film vient tout d’abord d’un récit qui subvertit les conventions narratives et idéologiques du western à chaque point tournant tout en maintenant une logique implacable. Loin des thèses de Theodore Roosevelt sur la force régénératrice de la violence et de son application assez stricte dans le western classique ou de son détournement parfois nihiliste dans le western italien ou révisionniste, les frères Sisters, chasseurs de prime des plus convenus, vont, à la suite du détective John Morris, effectuer le parcours du renoncement de l’individualisme et de la violence – et donc de la chasse à l’homme – pour embrasser le travail collectif, parcours qui les amènera à revenir vers une sérénité féminine inscrite dans leur nom de famille même. La bifurcation narrative sur l’orpaillage est un véritable morceau de bravoure narratif, le cinéma classique ayant généralement employé la chasse à l’or comme un arrière-plan à un récit à la dramaturgie plus sensationnelle (*The Hanging Tree* / *La colline des potences* [USA, Delmer Daves, 1959]) ou comme une alternative possible à la trajectoire du héros (*Bend of the River* / *Les affameurs* [Antony Mann, 1952]) – l’une des meilleures histoires du sympathique film anthologique *The Ballad of Buster Scruggs* / *La ballade de Buster Scruggs* (USA, Ethan et Joel Coen) s’empare également de ce sujet, avec un Tom Waits tout en grimaces et grognements. Le film offre également des moments de poésie inoubliables, à commencer par le *gunfight* nocturne inaugural dans lequel l’écran plongé dans un noir total est subitement illuminé par des jets de feu. Cette poésie culmine avec la première démonstration de la solution inventée par Hermann Kermitt Warm pour révéler la présence de l’or dans une rivière, qui trace des nuées vertes à l’écran – scènes qui font basculer le récit dans le fantastique, la folie de l’or donnant lieu à une fantaisie scientifique digne d’Edgar Poe. Le tout est renforcé par une musique composée par Alexandre Desplat, fraîchement oscarisé pour *The Shape of Water* (USA, Guillermo del Toro, 2017, tantôt entraînante, tantôt lugubre, où le mélodique est contaminé par la dissonance. On l’aura compris, avec ses qualités à la fois actoriales, narratives et plastiques, le sans faute d’Audiard et de son équipe, récompensé par quatre fois aux Césars (dont meilleur réalisateur et meilleure photographie), est de toute évidence un autre grand oublié des Oscars 2019.

**Sorry to Bother You** (USA, Boots Riley)

Premier long métrage du rappeur et militant afro-américain, *Sorry to Bother You* est une fable hilarante, branchée, politique, déliante, délicieuse, qui s’inscrit dans une longue tradition de la satire anglo-saxonne remontant au moins jusqu’à Jonathan Swift, l’auteur des *Voyages de Gulliver* (1726) et de la « proposition modeste » (1729) (pour résoudre le problème de la pauvreté en Irlande, il suffirait de dévorer leurs enfants). Le récit se déroule à Oakland, la ville des Blank Panthers. Cassius Green, un trentenaire à la peine dont le nom associe deux icônes afro-américains (Mohammed Ali et Al Green), accepte un emploi dans un service de télévente. Après des débuts laborieux, il finit par suivre le conseil d’un vieux sage du métier, Langston (Danny Glover), qui lui conseille de « prendre sa voix de blanc » pour améliorer son taux de ventes. Le succès de Cassius est alors quasi-immédiat et entre en conflit avec la lutte des employés de la boîte, mené par un syndicaliste coréen-américain nommé Squeeze, et soutenue par la petite amie de Cassius, une artiste nommée Detroit (Tessa Thompson). Tous les ingrédients
sont réunis pour un double récit classique articulant la romcom avec le film militant, où le protagoniste doit choisir entre personnel ou collectif. Ce choix est incarné par la figure de l’artiste féministe, dont le nom renvoie à une ville dont l’histoire est empreinte d’enjeux économiques (l’industrie automobile) et raciaux (voir le récent film de Kathryn Bigelow). Mais c’est alors que Boots Riley décide de faire appel à l’esprit de Swift pour dériver vers un troisième genre : la SF horrifique ainsi que le film de zombie classique (comme White Zombie [Victor Halperin, 1932]) qui associe le maître des zombies à un capitaliste. L’hybridation générique du film (qui concerne aussi la bande son) est alors entièrement mise au service d’une vision politique à la fois post-marxiste et intersectionnelle, preuve s’il en faut que le post-modernisme n’est en rien synonyme de désengagement politique. C’est ainsi que Sorry to Bother You examine l’articulation entre les questions raciales, sociales et féministes et les incorpore, à travers les écarts générations et certains personnages, dans une perspective historique spéciﬁquement américaine. Le film, avec ses références intertextuelles et notamment la référence à Swift, s’inscrit à son tour dans une dénonciation de l’histoire mondiale de l’oppression d’un groupe privilégié sur la majorité des humains dont les pratiques néolibérales globalisées contemporaines ne sont qu’une nouvelle déclinaison. Parce que le pouvoir qu’on fait miroiter à Cassius ne relève aucunement de l’agentivité : bien au contraire, il est synonyme d’assujettissement total et d’exploitation, comme quand on l’oblige à rapper simplement parce qu’il est noir. C’est ainsi que Sorry to Bother You développe, à notre sens, un propos d’une subtilité bien plus grande que le plus convenu mais néanmoins touchant The Hate U Give (USA, George Tillman Jr.). Boots Riley nous met alors face à un paradoxe concernant l’art politique, soulevé par les ﬁlms de Quentin Tarantino : que la nuance que requiert une perspective intersectionnelle passe peut-être par le grotesque, le monstrueux, l’excès, le fantastique et l’hybridiété, autrement dit par des modes, des ﬁgures ou des esthétiques qui mettent justement en tension les limites de l’identité.

Sweet Country (Australie, Warwick Thornton)

Retour magistral du chef-op/réalisateur aborigène, huit ans après le magniﬁque Samson & Delilah (2009). Primé à plusieurs festivals australiens et vainqueur de la caméra d’Or à Cannes, ce troisième long métrage a malheureusement connu une brève vie en salle et a été rapidement distribué sur Netflix, même s’il demeure plus visible que le très réussi western sud-africain Five Fingers for Marseille (Afrique du Sud, Michael Matthews, 2018), avec son allégorie qui semble conﬁrmer les thèses de Benedict Anderson pour qui une nation naît d’une lutte fraternelle. Avec Sweet Country, Thornton nous offre un western du point de vue aborigène et s’inscrit en ce sens dans la ﬁlialement du Tracker (Australie, 2002) de Rolf de Heer. La déconstruction du western passe par un renversement du postulat de The Searchers / La Prisonière du désert (1956) de John Ford : ici, c’est un indigène, Sam Kelly, qui a commis un meurtre par légitime défense qui est pourchassé par un homme de loi fou. Mais l’hommage vise avant tout à souligner la différence : l’homme blanc australien ne sera jamais l’américain mythique qui connaît les indiens, il ne parviendra jamais à maîtriser le territoire australien et ne devra sa vie qu’à la clémence de Sam Kelly. En nommant son héros après le célèbre hors-la-loi australien qui, en 1906, était justement le sujet du premier ﬁlm australien – lequel est d’ailleurs projeté dans le village –, Thornton inscrit son récit dans une histoire cinématographique résolument australienne et postcoloniale, notamment avec cette

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Mots-clés : cinéma américain, cinéma australien, cinéma britannique, BlacKkKlansman : J’ai infiltré le Ku Klux Klan, La Favorite, First Man : le premier homme sur la lune, Hérédité, L’île aux chiens, La Mule, The Rider, Les Frères Sisters, Sorry to Bother You, Sweet Country

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Thèmes : Film

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British visual arts
Review of the exhibition “Edward Burne-Jones: Pre-Raphaelite Visionary” at Tate Britain (24/10/2018 – 24/02/2019)

Ludovic Le Saux

1 A few days before the opening of the exhibition on Edward Burne-Jones, Tate Britain released a tantalising trailer for this unique event, as no exhibition devoted to the Victorian artist had been held since 1998 – in his hometown, Birmingham – and for over forty years in London. Featuring three mesmerising tableaux vivants of pictures by Burne-Jones (Laus Veneris, Love among the Ruins, and The Rose Bower), the trailer highlights the approach adopted by Chief Curator Alison Smith, and Assistant Curator Tim Batchelor: the exhibition sheds light on the universality and complexity of the artist’s intriguing dream world.

2 With over 150 pieces – including lesser known or more rarely exhibited ones, such as drawings, jewellery, or a decorated piano – in very diverse media, the large exhibition showcases Burne-Jones’s multi-faceted personality and artistic practice. From the eerie series on Perseus and Sleeping Beauty, to striking stained glass panels and intimate portraits, or comic drawings, the seven rooms of the exhibition act as so many layers of the artist’s mind, which the viewer is invited to explore thanks to clear plates and accessible explanations. The succession of rooms is organised in a more or less chronological order, thus foregrounding the artist’s developments from his first exploration years, his achievements as a draughtsman, to his large pictures of the 1870s, his portraits, and series paintings. The progression of the exhibition also minutely underlines Burne-Jones’s peculiarity as an artist who studied at university, and not at art school; and the different figures in his circle, who influenced or fuelled his art, such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti – who encouraged his imaginative powers – or his life-long friend William Morris. The last room offers an enlightening conclusion to the exhibition, by grouping together multiple examples of Burne-Jones’s talent as a designer for the decorative arts, which he practised throughout his life, notably thanks
to the firm Morris & Co., which he co-founded in 1861. The spacious display in most of the rooms allows for pleasurable moments of contemplation – most needed in the breath-taking third room, which brings together most of Burne-Jones’s large-scale paintings.

3 Upon entering the first room of the exhibition, a feeling of intimacy prevails. Although the dim lighting sometimes obscures the works on display – especially his early drawings in pen and ink, often hard to take in completely with so little light –, it also introduces the viewer to Burne-Jones’s dream world. His striking use of colour – though less nuanced than in his later work – catches the eye in these early pieces. The viewer is immersed in the composition of the three panels of *The Annunciation and Adoration of the Magi* (1861), in which gold plays a structuring role amidst the blues and reds. Likewise, the mystical quality of his stained-glass panel *The Calling of Saint Peter* (ca.1857), completed before the creation of Morris & Co, is mostly conveyed by the otherworldly blue eyes of the three figures. The artist’s intricate attention to detail – of colour, line, figure, texture – appears quite clearly in his early works and is further illustrated in the series of drawings displayed in the following room, devoted to “Burne-Jones as a Draughtsman”. The large number of drawings and studies is both daunting and highly moving, as it reveals Burne-Jones’s industrious perfectionism and self-taught assimilation of earlier models – notably from the Renaissance for his drawings, as Colin Cruise underlines in the catalogue, on the subject of his studies of Titian and Tintoretto (Smith 78). Although they were mostly preparatory works for larger painted compositions, many studies of hands, feet and other body parts are works of art in their own right, emphasising Burne-Jones’s fascination for the beauty and materiality of flesh and skin. For instance, his study for the Michelangelesque King in *The Wheel of Fortune* (1883) focuses on the twisted lines of muscles and the tormented ruggedness of skin, while the face is barely sketched.

4 Pleasantly enough, the room also offers a lighter counterpoint to Burne-Jones’s minute studies by unveiling a lesser known trait of his personality through his comic drawings and caricatures. Although only a small number of these comic drawings are displayed, they enable the viewer to discover the artist’s tongue-in-cheek and sometimes unapologetic humour, as well as his self-mockery – for example in the illustrated letter endearingly signed “Your poor Bapapa” which he sent to his granddaughter Angela when he had “caught a bad cold”, and in which he is seen bundled up in a blanket. The favourite target of this humour was probably his friend William Morris, of whom he drew many caricatures teasing Topsy’s (Morris’s nickname) “enslaved passion” for Iceland and “raw fish” or the long evenings they spent reading poetry. In his 1861 pen and ink drawing *William Morris Reading Poetry to Edward Burne-Jones*, a slumbering, emaciated Burne-Jones painfulely endures a reading session by a large and dishevelled Morris, thereby revealing Burne-Jones’s affectionate, though nonetheless mordant use of drawing, sometimes at the expense of his friends, but also of himself.

5 In sharp contrast to the more intimate studies and drawings, the third room acts as a pivotal moment in the exhibition. Burne-Jones’s large-scale paintings take up all the space, in a stirring display of colour, light, and mythical settings and characters. The explanatory plate at the entrance of the room details Burne-Jones’s explorations between 1870 and 1877, during which his imagination was given free rein, leading to an impressive number of varied pictures that were to establish his international reputation. Probably one of the most celebrated of these large-scale paintings in the
room, *Love among the Ruins* (in a private collection) was completed around 1873 and provides a striking example of the artist’s unique intertwining of contradictory qualities. The picture is characterised by the feeling of both peacefulness and uneasiness it evokes. The composition foregrounds the two figures, as they take up almost half of the picture. Their unstable posture conveys an impression of fragile balance which points to the ephemerality of the protection provided by the blossomed briar. Just like the zither the male figure is barely holding between his legs, the female character is in an intermediary, indefinite position: her body is twisted, as she is half kneeling, half leaning against her lover’s body. The shelter offered by the ruins - a sort of shrine for love to bloom in like the briar - is therefore counterbalanced by the precariousness in which the two figures are frozen. Loosely based on a Robert Browning poem of the same title, the painting highlights Burne-Jones’s ideal of love and passion as the ultimate expression and experience of the senses.

As the trailer for the exhibition shows, the frailty and, at the same time, the power that the picture conveys make it still very accessible to contemporary viewers. Indeed, the trailer pays homage both to the androgynous appearance of Burne-Jones’s male figures and to his universal sense of love and peril by casting two women in its reenactment of *Love among the Ruins*.

Perhaps one of the pictures that is most suggestive of Burne-Jones’s appeal to ambiguous situations or characters, is his 1886 *The Depths of the Sea*, which first catches the viewer’s eye by its size and unusual vertical disposition. In her article “At Work: Burne-Jones’s Studio, Materials and Techniques”, Alison Smith notes: “For an artist known as the quintessential Victorian visionary dreamer, it may seem something of a paradox that Burne-Jones’s creations should have a hard crystalline quality. Far from being light and airy, his pictures are workman-like and solid, so that draperies have the weight and feel of stone, and flowers a precious metallic nature” (Smith 23). I would not go as far as Alison Smith, for I believe that the uniqueness of Burne-Jones’s art lies precisely in this constant mingling of conflicting properties. *The Depths of the Sea* does have a “light and airy” quality at first sight. The verticality of the frame as well as the elongated position of the mermaid and of the man she is clasping, echo that of the stone columns in the background which seem to extend beyond the frame. The impression of weightlessness is further reinforced by the instable glittering depths, as well as the bubbles at the top of the picture, which direct the viewer’s gaze upwards. The watery element suffuses the whole composition through the gracious curves described by the man’s body and hair, the reduced palette shading off into subdued colours, and the surreal, almost diaphanous light emanating from the two figures. Yet this “airiness” is perplexing: the viewer is made uneasy by the no-less intriguing smile of the enthralling mermaid, whose silvery scales are coloured in a metallic hue. And as Alison Smith suggests, all the elements of the composition are counterbalanced by something of “the weight and feel of stone”. The composition of the painting is structured by a subtle balance of opposing forces. While the airy bubbles float upwards, the viewer’s gaze is dragged downwards by the mermaid’s clutch. Likewise, the spiralling light conveys a feeling of ensnaring which emphasises the corporeality of the drowning man.

Throughout the exhibition, the intricate intermediality of Burne-Jones’s artistic practice is thus highlighted. The curators indeed chose to include William Morris’s lines that accompany *The Briar Rose* series – albeit in poor lighting unfortunately. Thanks to this, the viewer is offered a reading of the paintings: Morris’s poems
somehow complete the story as they invite the viewer to imagine the next panels by “smit[ing] this sleeping world awake” (Morris IX 190). The last room displays yet another intermedial example of Burne-Jones’s art with the tapestry panel *Pomona*, which he designed around 1885. Here again, the panel is framed by verses written by Morris, who also designed the foliaged background. Very rarely exhibited, the tapestry is first unusual because of its large dimensions and the swirling elegance of the acanthus leaves. As Suzanne Fagence Cooper explains in her article entitled “Burne-Jones as Designer”, the size of the leaves was criticised at the time because they dwarfed the figure of the goddess (Smith 207). Yet the leaves also draw attention to the somewhat faded colours of the drapes, as well as to the intriguing melancholy of Pomona’s face. As Morris’s line suggests, Pomona seems to emerge from the mirthful plenty of acanthus leaves, as “[f]orever more a hope unseen” (Morris IX 193). Burne-Jones and Morris did revive an “unseen” subject typical of medieval weaving, just as they revived the art of tapestry.

By displaying a large number of Burne-Jones’s achievements in very different media, the exhibition therefore allows the viewer to grasp the complexity and ambiguities of his art, which oscillates constantly between fleeting ethereality and incarnate fleshliness. A ramified, appealing and rich figure of Victorian England, Edward Burne-Jones is honoured in this exceptional exhibition at Tate Britain which, much like the reclining woman in the trailer’s *tableau vivant* of *The Rose Bower*, who symbolically opens her eyes, invites us to take another look and brush the “dusky cobwebs” aside to delve into Burne-Jones’s atemporal world of painted dreams.

### NOTES

1. The trailer was directed by James Henry, with music by Tom Ashbourne, and can be found at this address: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WaS3QkZsCMU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WaS3QkZsCMU)


3. The letter is reproduced in the catalogue (Smith 117).

4. Burne-Jones is reported to have announced William Morris’s return from Iceland in these terms: “Mr. Morris has come back more enslaved with passion for ice and snow and raw fish than ever – I fear I shall never drag him to Italy again.” (Morris, May (ed.). *The Collected Works of William Morris, With an Introduction by his Daughter May Morris* (1911). 24 vols. X. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. 13). I am referring to a caricature of Morris as a fat Eskimo eating raw fish in Iceland that was not on display.

5. Following his resignation from the Watercolour Society, after his 1870 picture *Phyllis and Demophoon* caused too much of a scandal due to the male nude – which Burne-Jones refused to cover up.
6. A feeling he shared with most of his friends and in particular William Morris, who wrote a long poem in the form of a morality in 1872, the title of which, *Love is Enough*, brings to the fore the importance of love.

7. To take up an adjective Walter Pater indirectly used in the title of his 1864 essay “Diaphaneitè” published posthumously in 1895. In his introduction to the Oxford edition of Pater’s *Studies*, Matthew Beaumont explains that Pater’s dream of a “utopian society” is embodied in “the ‘diaphanous’ type... – innocent, transparent – [which] incarnates ‘the human body in its beauty’. (...) It effects a perfect communion of body and spirit.” (Beaumont xii) There is something of Pater’s “diaphanous” ideal in Burne-Jones’s wan figures and ambiguous use of light. The strange, otherworldly quality of Burne-Jones’s characters may also echo the diaphanous type defined by Pater in “Diaphaneitè” as “a relic from the classical age”, with its “eternal outline of the antique”, as both men shared the same passion for an idealised past. (Pater, Walter. *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. 138)

8. Many pictures exemplify Burne-Jones’s fascination for the materialised rendering of thin, almost impalpable materials or surfaces, such as the reflections on water of the male figures in the background of his 1882 picture *The Mill*.

9. Taken from William Morris’s poem “Another for the Briar Rose”, which did not appear with Burne-Jones’s series, but was subsequently written and included in his 1891 collection *Poems by the Way*. (Morris IX, 191)
Exposition *Vanité, identité, sexualité*,
Grayson Perry

Olivier Thircuir

1 Helsinki, Museum of contemporary Art Kiasma
2 13 avril – 2 septembre 2018
3 Paris, Musée de la Monnaie
4 19 octobre 2018 - 3 février 2019
5 Commissaire : Lucia Pesapane

**Craft of art**

6 L'exposition de Grayson Perry manifeste une réinvention de l’art décoratif pour servir une satire de la société britannique.

7 Patience et humilité sont siglées sur le réservoir rose bonbon du custom de Grayson Perry. Son deux-roues vrombit rive gauche de ses éclats acidulés. C’est une moto aux roues bleu électrique, percées de larges perforations, avec une généreuse selle de mobylette, frangée de lanières de cuir. Sur le porte-bagage, un reliquaire portatif pour accueillir Alan Measles, un doudou, fétiche, porteur depuis l’enfance des valeurs masculine de l’artiste qui se travestit pour dévoiler les ressorts d’une société en crise: *vanité, masculinité et sexualité*. C’est donc à moto que Grayson Perry braque, depuis le 10 octobre 2018, les valeurs de l’Hôtel de la Monnaie. Ce faisant, il propose des représentations désaxées de la souveraineté britannique, de ses majestés, de ses invisibilités, de ses non-dits, de ses fondements. On peut certes poser comme hypothèse que l’institution de la Monnaie frappe sur son avers les valeurs faciales d’un état, sur son revers le visage de son souverain. Ici le peuple, là, la reine. De son côté, Perry use de cet espace hautement symbolique qu’est la Monnaie pour proposer son droit de tirage (*licence to kill* contre un impérialisme guerrier), son droit de battre monnaie (feu sur l’ordre financier de la City), sa réflexion sur un code viril à dégonfler (*vanité* du mâle), sur une émission de valeurs (masculinité, sexualité) : Grayson Perry y oppose une
histoire du Brexit, humble, touche à tout, un spectacle rebelle et pauvre, dans une série de contre-exemples qui glorifient une salutaire médiocrité, riche d’une culture aux hybridités plurielles, un éloge du common people.

**Fine arts rechapés**

8 Perry représente les paradoxes de la société britannique en utilisant des techniques modestes qui ont fait leurs preuves au Royaume-Uni depuis les inventions du mouvement art and craft. L’humilité et la patience s’exprime par la gravure, l’art de la tapisserie, ou l’art de la mode ; mais la céramique aussi pour dégonfler nos petits volumes ou la sculpture en fonte, dont la rouille évoque une mémoire ouvrière, orpheline de ses modèles de vie et de ville.

9 La robe et le cape sont surpiquées de maints rapiécages, boutonnées de symboles voyeurs, gonflées d’appendices mammaires bene pendants : il s’agit de protéger l’exhibition de Claire, double travesti de Perry. Des robes de Claire qui travestissent l’artiste, déniaient les pudeurs néoclassiques du l’amateur parisien autant que l’ego d’une capitale de la fashion. S’invente en ces bord de Seine, en face du Louvre, ain’it Mr. Ingres, une nouvelle odalisque de bande dessinée, gonades et pénis offerts à l’intaille xylographiée (Reclining Artist 1). Populaire, Perry préfère la robe de Françoise à la toilette de la duchesse de Guermantes. Le vêtement féminin hybride jouxte alors la nudité mâle pour proposer une masculinité féminisée et désarmée.

**Map of nowhere**


**Britain is best**

11 Enfin, l’art majeur de celui qui se définit comme un control freak : technique superbement maîtrisée qui a valu le Turner prize en 2003 à ce potier génial, le craftsman le plus doué de sa génération. Son art réinventé de la céramique souffle sur la vanité de
l'esprit anglais, et pour recouvrir cette panse d'ale gonflée (Queen's Bitter), et pour moquer ce narcissisme jingoistic, par un jeu irisé de transparences délicates, à même de refléter les fantasmes d'une société toujours corsetée dans un syllabus érotique étiré, comme au temps de Jane Austen. Car s'il s'inspire de l'art d'un Bernard Leach, il en renouvelle le classicisme formel par une abondance et un jeu de contraste où les incrustations polychromes exhibent les tensions sociales, anthropologiques et érotiques du royaume éliabethain des années 2010. L'artiste s'y manifeste avec le plus de réussite : on y admire sa patience, son wit, un art de la couleur que le tissage généré par ordinateur ne peut égaler dans les tapisseries.

Pour circuler allègrement dans ce fatras de conflictualités, l'art de la customisation de la moto est donc le vecteur dégénéré qui désigne un ennemi esthétique : l'académisme mâle et prétentieux des élites capitalistes dont les flux sont canalisés depuis la City. Cheers Mister Hirst ! Avec cette exposition débordante, voici de la mécanique pour fluidifier la circulation des idées, de l'humour pour dérouter les humeurs, et de la semence faite à la main pour projeter, du royaume de Harvey au pays de Denis Papin, les liquides refroidis du fiasco néo-thatchérien. La cape et la chape dévoilent l'homo anglicus et ses sacrements blasphémés par un doudou divinisé. Sous les robes et les tapisseries de Perry se dévoile un artiste en Pénélope. C'est la kraft de Perry au sens d'une puissance, non pas souveraine, mais patiemment féminine et créatrice.

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Keywords : art, identity, new masculinity, hospitality, sexuality, society, vanity, ceramic, tapestry
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Ariel's Corner

Sophie Maruejouls (dir.)

American visual arts
Piecing the Puzzle Together: An Interview with Writer and Artist Mark SaFranko

Entretien avec l’écrivain américain Mark SaFranko dans le cadre du projet ARIEL (Auteurs en Résidence Internationale En Lorraine), le 20 décembre 2018

Claudine Armand
Claudine Armand: I will start out by asking a question about your childhood. Did you feel at an early age that you had a propensity for art?

Mark SaFranko: None whatsoever. That grew later, although I guess I was still quite young when I felt a propensity, but I didn’t know what to do to express it so...but no, in childhood, none whatsoever.

CA: How old were you when you started to draw?

MSF: I was in my early twenties.

CA: Were your parents interested in art?

MSF: Not at all, not at all, they were both what you would call blue-collar workers, you know, living in an industrial city. They were both children of immigrants and my mother was forced to drop out of school at the age of twelve to go to work. My father went very early into the war and they had no sort of cultural awareness at all, they came from a very working class family.

CA: As you grew up, did you go to museums in New York?

MSF: No, not at all. Never, nobody went.

CA: Nobody encouraged you?

MSF: No, there was no encouragement whatsoever, and I’m not exaggerating. It’s funny that you’re asking me this question because I was thinking about these issues the other night as a result of watching something on TV. I’m still baffled to this day about how I ended up doing what I’m doing, I’m confounded by it in some ways, actually. No, there was no encouragement whatsoever. There wasn’t a novel within miles of the house, in these industrial row houses, you know, that’s where I lived and...
there wasn’t a painting on the wall. There was religious iconography. I came from a very strict Roman Catholic family.

CA: You may have seen icons?

MSF: You did see icons. But whether that translated to Matisse or Picasso I don’t think so [laughter].

CA: What’s an ordinary day like and what time of the day do you draw? Is it an activity you do just to loosen up?

MSF: No, I actually have gone through periods of my life when I was quite serious about it. I know I’m a little self-deprecating about it, but I’ve put in a lot of work and I tend to draw and paint in the evenings after my hours of literary work are done. I find it very absorbing, like a Zen meditation. I often reflect on the differences between a literary life, a musical life, a painting life, and how really different they are and what they require from the whole organism in order to function and the very different processes, although they have the same source.

CA: Let’s talk about your watercolors and the exhibition at the library. You’ve done a few landscapes, a few cityscapes and some still lives, but it seems that portraits and self-portraits dominate, right?

MSF: Right, and fish, I like fish. And you might call some of them abstractions too.

Fig. 2

I try to sort of tackle everything, and there are some oversized paintings as well that are more complex than what we saw in the show. I didn’t bring them with me for obvious reasons, I couldn’t really transport them. There are a lot of other self-portraits, other fish that I brought, there are still lives, paintings of cluttered rooms,
buildings, one of a house in Greenwich, England, one of a church in Greenwich Village in New York. There’re probably some other abstractions, some whimsical paintings and there are paintings of vases.

Fig. 3

CA: As I was looking at the self-portraits the other day, I thought about the recurrent trope in art history of the artist and his/her model. Your self-portraits are frontal views, the figure stares out at the viewer, it never avoids the viewer’s gaze. What accounts for the desire to represent yourself or to represent the self?

MSF: Perhaps it harkens back to what we were just talking about, where I came from and what I ended up doing in a way, which is sort of interesting. If I showed you a wide array of the self-portraits I’ve done, now that I think about it – I haven’t really thought about it until now – but they look vastly different from one another. Early on I became quite fascinated with the idea or the notion of the multifaceted artist who has many identities, many voices, and many forms of expression. This goes back to people like Da Vinci really, who had a staggering amount of selves that always intrigued me. I always had the urge for multifaceted expression and I became, I don’t want to say bored, but limited by doing just one thing. And while my literary work became ultimately the dominant piece of my life, I could never flush the other things out of my system. But to answer your question, I guess I was always intrigued, actually in many cases I used a mirror, I set up the mirror in front of myself, a large mirror and what comes out is really very interesting, the paintings are different one from the next, they differ vastly. I’m not sure why that happens because they’re not realistic renderings of myself and sometimes I think the drawings themselves are quite good but I don’t think they look anything like me, so it’s a bit of a puzzle to
myself actually. But perhaps it’s easy, a somewhat easy thing to do to paint yourself or some rendering of yourself.

CA: I like the bluish self-portrait at the entrance of the show.

MSF: That’s my favorite.

That’s actually a copy of another artist and his name slips my memory right now. It doesn’t look like anything he did, but I was intrigued with the color schemes of the painting and I tried to execute my own version of it. But I’m blanking on his name, he was on the cover of an art magazine I saw one time.

CA: Is he a contemporary artist?

MSF: I believe yes, relatively contemporary, but you can see the roots of Rouault in it, for instance. There are many people that you can see in that artist.

CA: Painting self-portraits means looking inwards, trying to capture something invisible, but the revelation can only be partial, and so isn’t self-portraiture a way of playing with one’s own image?

MSF: Absolutely, it is.

CA: And a way of challenging the spectator, a sort of hide-and-seek game of appearing and disappearing?

MSF: I would say yes, except that in my case, my limitations as an artist probably subvert that notion to some extent. Sometimes when I’m dissatisfied with my basic rendering of something, I let it go into other areas and that’s of course the beauty of the watercolor. You can do wash after wash, unlike oil, which perhaps gets a little bit
more set in stone and you have to understand technically exactly what you want to render. I mean, the watercolor to me, a certain type of watercolor, is a much more playful means of expression and that always intrigued me about the medium. I learned that actually from Henry Miller, who was also obviously a well-known writer in France, an American writer who made his reputation in France. He was a lifelong aquarellist who often said he actually preferred being a painter to a writer and he spent many years working as a watercolorist, full-time at times, he did nothing but paint. His paintings are surreal, whimsical but they burst with a really interesting feeling of life. And I learned a lot from reading about his techniques in watercolor, so he was a central influence for me. And then, of course, there are certain artists that one could never hope to... I mean John Marin for me is probably the greatest watercolorist who ever lived. He also spent a lot of time in France, but to me, he took the medium into a completely different phase and I hesitate to even know what to call it, he could do anything with watercolor. But there are so many other great artists, like Paul Klee, another one I greatly admire, or Kandinsky. I like 20th century painters who have left the formal behind and painting became a different thing. I mean obviously that has its roots in Picasso and Matisse and Cézanne, who is maybe the greatest master of the medium. But all the works of those painters reveal the incredible range of things you could do with the medium. I mean I know some people consider it inferior to oil painting, but I never did and it’s the accident that comes with the form that to me is absolutely fascinating, when the painting bleeds to one side of the paper and there’s this effect that you didn’t intend but looks spectacular whether or not it’s artistically, you would call it, accomplished.

CA: John Marin was influenced by Cubism and Futurism. There’s a lot of energy, force, and movement in his watercolors, as we can see in the Brooklyn Bridge series with its dynamic compositions.

MSF: He was very much influenced by what was going on in Europe because he spent years here before he went back, and I always found New York skyscrapers, the way he makes them tilt toward each other, to be fascinating. There’s a tension in it.

CA: It’s very unstable.

MSF: Very. He’s a very unusual painter. I’m a little surprised that people don’t talk about him more. You know, when you think about the history of watercolor, he in many ways to me, is the bridge between a more classical expression and the modern age, and people don’t talk about him that much, I mean he’s not in the conversations one of the names that you always hear.

CA: Marin was close to Alfred Stieglitz, the great modern photographer of New York. I was wondering if you’re also interested in photography?

MSF: Secondarily. My wife takes much better pictures than I do. She’s much more interested in photography and I’m not sure why I don’t take pictures because I’m vitally interested in cinema, in filmmaking, but still photography has just been something I’ve never spent any time with. The last thing I wanted to add to my record was filmmaking, but it’s kind of late for that now in my life, and you need millions and millions of dollars to do it half decently, although the technology’s changed now, but having worked as an actor and seen the ins and outs of the theater and film world, it’s very complicated and to do it well you need a lot of expertise around you. And that means you have to have money. And I don’t know that I could live for several years with nothing but one script, because that’s what you have to be
able to do. Very few filmmakers, except perhaps Woody Allen, can make a film every year. It’s impossible because of the money involved. And even really highly successful, critically successful filmmakers scramble for money, so it’s really hard to do and a couple of times I came close to trying, but perhaps thought better of it in the end and didn’t.

CA: Do you enjoy looking at photographs?

MSF: Yes, some. Diane Arbus is an interesting photographer, obviously, to me. I appreciate photographs but I don’t spend a lot of time...I’d rather look at paintings, which brings me actually to...I was at the Pompidou Center this past weekend in Metz, and there was an interesting exhibit on color. I don’t know if you’ve seen it?

So you have color, and then the top two floors were paintings. I couldn’t help thinking that I appreciated the top two floors much more than I did the bottom two floors, and I was thinking about how those first two floors, which were about color, were rebellions against tradition, like people want to go beyond the confines of the canvas but I’m not so sure how successful it ever is. I don’t know what you thought.

I’m not so sure that it’s as successful as that old form, you know, where you take the paintbrush and you do what you have to do in a confined space. I understand the urge to rebel against it because if you’ve read the words of the people working on the first two floors, they’re struggling to break out of the confines of the traditional, but for myself I’m not sure how successful it is all the time.

CA: That’s the exhibit Painting the Night?

MSF: Yes, that’s what I’ve been referring to, the two top floors.

CA: I haven’t seen it yet.

MSF: Oh it’s great.

CA: Can we paint the night?

MSF: A lot of people did a very good job of it. Yes, I think so. That was the highlight of the whole exhibit, I thought, Painting the Night.

CA: You said you like 20th century art. Watercolor was also the favorite medium of the Modernists thanks to its capacity to catch fleeting moments of life and the potential of the white paper which, to me, is akin to the writer’s white page or the painter’s blank canvas. Watercolor is a tough and challenging medium, isn’t it?

MSF: It is, and it’s very exciting.

CA: Because you can’t go back to it?

MSF: No, you can’t go back to it, that is true. You can’t go back to it but you can transform it constantly, you know, you can take a painting like that and just paint over it, completely and use that as a wash. So it can be transformed endlessly, of course it becomes a big mess, that’s theoretical, it will become a big mess but you can transform what starts out as an abortion of sorts into something interesting. But I’m not so sure. Don’t people always revert to oil in canvas though? I mean, they always seem to revert to it – why is that, when watercolor does give you a tremendous amount of possibilities?

CA: I guess with oil you can add more layers and therefore totally transform the texture.

MSF: That’s true. People always say watercolor is hard, I don’t know why. It is hard but I hope for something that looks interesting, colorful, and beautiful in some way,
and since I’m not really a representational painter, the accidents in watercolor can be very fortuitous and come out looking really interesting.

Fig. 5

CA: I had another look last night at the Self-Portrait with Three Eyes, which is just in front of us when we enter the exhibition room. Is it a wink at Picasso when he portrays Dora Maar or women with disjointed features and asymmetrical eyes, as in Les Demoiselles d’Avignon?
MSF: No, honestly that painting was the result of enormous frustration. I had done a couple of watercolors and was very unhappy with what was coming out and just slathered a lot of paint and said, you know, since I can’t do anything right now that I like, I’m just going to go crazy and just put anything into this. Someone mentioned Basquiat with that painting, and perhaps there’s a little bit of that.

CA: I don’t really see a parallel with Basquiat.

MSF: No.

CA: The figures in Basquiat’s portraits are more skeleton-like, aren’t they?

MSF: Right. Perhaps some of the distortions in that watercolor you were referring to are what people picked up. To answer your question, it’s not a conscious wink at Picasso.

CA: I’m interested in your use of color. I suppose you like the fish because they have so many colors, and nuances, and textures?

MSF: Yeah, I find them relatively easy to render as well. I’ve done a lot of fish. The colors in fish are fascinating to me. I actually tried to draw some reptiles, like snakes, because their scales, the color patterns on the scales are stunning. People don’t realize that you have to see them in full sunlight to appreciate them, but they’re surprisingly difficult to render well. So the fish I revert to because I think there is a simplicity in the form and then you can do a lot of interesting things once you have the form in place and they come in such variegated colors.
CA: I love the little beach houses on stilts. This watercolor exudes so much warmth and it reminds me of Matisse. I suppose Matisse is an inspiration for you?

MSF: You know, you can’t get around him. To me, he’s maybe the most indispensable artist in many ways. The color in Matisse is unique and I don’t think you’ve ever seen this in any major artist, there’s a simple rendering of the magic of life in all of Matisse, that’s why I love his work. I’ve come to more and more grudging love of Picasso, who in some ways I did not understand when I was younger because he can be cold and sometimes more difficult to appreciate. But there’s no getting away from Matisse.

Fig. 7

THREE BEACH HOUSES UNDER STORM CLOUDS
© MARK SAFRANKO

CA: So do you use color for its expressive values?

MSF: Absolutely.

CA: And/or is it to draw attention to the picture plane as Abstract Expressionist artist Hans Hofmann did with his push and pull technique?

MSF: My use of the paint is so instinctive that I have a difficult time answering that question. Once I start, I try to achieve some striking visual value, and that comes about through a really judicious use of color and paint. I’ve ruined many watercolors by not knowing when to stop, so it’s a fine line that one treads as a watercolorist that you have to know how and when to stop.
CA: In your novels and short stories there's a special mood that, in my opinion, is evocative of Edward Hopper, in particular his engravings Night Shadows and A Corner. Do you agree?

MSF: I do. I don't know if you've read the Max Zajack novels, which are very different from the ones I believe you've read – the psychological suspense, the crime-based novels, they are somewhat Edward Hopper, yes – but the Max Zajack novels are very different and a lot of the short stories are different from each other, so I'm not sure that it’s always there, but that’s one segment of them.

CA: How do you respond to abstract art and to the American Abstract Expressionists like Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, those artists who forged a genuine American art form?

MSF: I like some of them, others I don’t. Sometimes I think they work better than others, and I really don’t feel qualified to speak about this on one level because I’m not an art critic. Perhaps they don’t speak to me as vitally as some other forms do, but when you look at someone like Paul Klee, let’s say, for me they’re much more alive. The watercolors could be triangles or boxes, I don’t know what he’s doing sometimes, but to me, they can be much more vital and alive than...

CA: Than a Barnett Newman?

MSF: Yes.

CA: How do you respond to works that intermingle the visual and the aural, like Mark Rothko's monochromatic paintings in Rothko's Chapel in Houston combined to Morton Feldman's minimalist music?

MSF: I'm actually more fascinated with the minimalist music than I am with the painting. I have an appreciation for some of the works by Rothko but I'd rather look
at Lucian Freud, a great favorite of mine. To go back to the music, I’m totally intrigued by John Cage, that sort of complete dissociation from formal music is fascinating for me. I have a couple of instrumental albums out which flirt with Cagean, I’d say, ambient music or cinematic music. All these categories can be very misleading in a way, that’s why I’ll pick the artist rather than the school, because ultimately art to me is solely what you, as a viewer, listener, or reader respond to. It’s a matter of opinion, it’s a matter of your own psyche, there’s no right and wrong. When it comes to art, we all simply have our preferences and I always like to say that art is not golf, where nowadays, especially when the camera’s on the player, you cannot make a mistake. It’s a game which I appreciate in some ways because you have to be the best player to win. In art anything is possible, your likes are as good as mine or hers.

CA: You mentioned Lucian Freud. Do you like his self-portraits?

MSF: I love them, I love the self-portraits.

CA: Why?

MSF: Very difficult to put into words. They just appeal to the eye. But perhaps my favorite modern painter – I find him absolutely fascinating although I guess he’s been a fad in the New York downtown scene but I think he’s incredible – is Eric Fischl. The paintings are so soaked in psychological nuance that they are absolutely like miniature cinema to me in a way, or cinema on canvas and yet they achieve this effect by virtue of a single image. I don’t know, but he’s always fascinated me, Eric Fischl.

CA: I heard on YouTube, a piece of music of yours called Francis Bacon: A Painting in Sound which consists of a collision of various music instruments, sounds, voices, and screams.

MSF: And gunshots.

CA: Could you explain what triggered this piece?

MSF: I had long been a great fan of Francis Bacon, I considered him one of the great painters of all time, and I wanted to create a soundscape that really threw off all form and that was the result. I just laid layer after layer of noise down and spontaneously, although running through that song are pieces of another song that I wrote. You can hear it in parts as it makes its way through the piece. I got my son to play piano and drums on that as well, and I played the vast majority of the instruments but he’s actually on that recording, which is very rare for me because now I play all instruments myself, in the service of time and efficiency. I play many different instruments.

CA: Amazing.

MSF: Well I don’t know, but anyway, that’s interesting, I don’t know what you thought of that when you listened to it?

CA: I liked it.

MSF: You liked it?

CA: Yes, I liked its heterogeneity and the way it reached a cacophonous crescendo.

MSF: I had a good time with that. I’m not sure...there was one part of it that I didn’t like, which the listener would never pick up, but I didn’t like the series of gunshots in it, there were a couple of repetitions of the gunshots, and I really should have taken one of them out.
CA: Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud were very close friends. In an interview with David Sylvester, Bacon once said: “The sitter is someone of flesh and blood and what has to be caught is their emanation. I’m not talking in a spiritual way or anything like that – that is the last thing I believe in. But there are always emanations from people, whoever they are, though some people’s are stronger than others.” How do you understand this statement?

MSF: My first response is that the emanation is definitely coming from the sitter, meaning the model, and I mean, in Bacon’s work you have the emanation of almost all that is hideous in the human corporeal and psychological beings. He catches obviously the grotesque, the distortions that are the product of our...I’m trying to find a word that works adequately, I want to say ‘demonic’ selves but that may be too extreme. It’s something else, it’s another word that I want to use and I can’t think of what it might be right now. Not demonic so much as...[Silence].

CA: Monstrous?

MSF: Monstrous is a good word and perhaps, you know, other people have...Picasso has done the same thing, but perhaps no one more effectively than Bacon.

CA: What do you think of the “screaming” popes?

MSF: It’s a fascinating series, but all of his stuff is. I just looked at it the other day, I saw a retrospective exhibition of Bacon at the MET just a few years ago. It was overwhelming.

CA: I see a close link between your writing and your music. Writing implies constraints whereas watercolor partakes of a more playful practice, doesn’t it?

MSF: I think it does. People have tried to do in writing what a playful watercolor achieves but I’m not so sure that the results are as pleasing or effective, but that’s me, I feel I have to be a writer again when I write, whatever that means, and when I’m a painter, I’m doing something completely different.

CA: Would you say it helps to find a sort of balance?

MSF: Oh, I think all of those things are an attempt by me to find a psychic balance, no question about it. I need them for psychic balance and one of the reasons I wrote those Max Zajack novels, which are sort of autobiographical, and then The Suicide and these other novels that are crime or literary or whatever, is because when I’m doing one I need after a while, after being submerged and immersed in one form, I need to change it, again for psychic balance, I think. I get bored too with the same thing over and over again, I find it makes me stale but since I still have energy to do something I go to a different medium or a different type or novel or story, whatever it might be.

CA: To go back to the self-portraits, when I look at some of them, I’m reminded of Andy Warhol’s camouflage self-portraits, or his portraits in profile like The Shadow. In your self-portraits, the figure looks rather distant, a little austere even, and they sometimes have a mask-like quality. French philosopher Jacques Derrida said that the painter who makes his self-portrait only captures his own ruins, his “specter.” I was wondering how you react to that statement.

MSF: That’s interesting, there’s a great deal of truth in it. Actually this harkens back to what I often say about the writing. As soon as you apply pen to paper or finger to a keyboard, the truth is distorted and becomes something else. You can never capture the entirety of yourself or experience or even a moment accurately because as soon as it comes out, it is distorted. I think Proust came very close, and even a book like Tropic of Capricorn by Henry Miller or maybe Céline’s first two big novels, they came close to trying to harness and really capture the authenticity of a life lived on
simultaneous and different levels, but it’s ultimately always unsuccessful, for one reason or another, because so much is brought to bear on one moment of human experience. It means your entire history, everything around you, in the environment, it’s impossible to capture because of all the complexities that go into that, and how it’s filtered through human consciousness. I don’t mean this to sound extremely pretentious, I’m trying to explain how one arrives at whatever the truth is, and does that really matter in the long run anyway? Is our whole spectrum of experience a whole series of self-deceptions anyway? Is there such a thing as truth? I don’t think there is, so I think that what the philosopher was saying is true, but perhaps it doesn’t go far enough, in a way. That’s a complicated answer...I don’t know, coming from me it’s probably a pretty accurate answer about what I’d like to say about that. I hope it makes some sense – I don’t know if it does.

Fig. 9

DISTORTED FACE
© MARK SAFRANKO

CA: In one of your lectures you said that “works of art are never finished, they are abandoned.”

MSF: It’s not mine, but I do like it though.

CA: What do you mean by ‘abandoned’?

MSF: I think that we’re all sculptors. Let’s say we have a block of granite or marble, and you have an image in your mind of what you’d like to execute, and you go about trying to do that and obviously some of the Renaissance masters came as close to perfection as anyone has, but for myself I think you have something you want to execute, and you do your best to achieve that execution. And then after trying over and over and over again to achieve this perfection, you realize that it’s impossible,
and hence the work is abandoned – that’s how I interpret that. Some of my other favorite sayings about all of art and this go for painting as well: it was Somerset Maugham who said: “There are three rules for writing the novel. Unfortunately, no one knows what they are.” That’s one of my favorites, and the late William Goldman, the screenwriter and novelist who just died very recently, famously said, and I think this is true, when he talked about the art of movie making: “No one knows anything.” And what he was referring to there was that no one really understands how to make a really good movie, they are accidental and that applies to art too.

CA: I suppose that self-portraiture as a subject matter is related to your interest in “human character”?

MSF: Yes, that’s true. Let’s take the blue self-portraits, we can call them self-portraits, but they don’t look like me and any affect or meaning is really brought by the viewer. I wouldn’t know what to say about that in terms of myself – I mean, what is it? I don’t know. It says something, but what does it say? I think that’s more in the viewer’s eye.

CA: In the eye of the beholder.

MSF: Absolutely.

CA: Finally, who are you, Mark SaFranko? Andy Warhol used to say: “If you want to know all about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface of my paintings and films and me and there I am. There’s nothing behind it.”

MSF: I guess there’s a great deal of truth in that. I wrote a song, in fact I’m playing a solo show in Besancon on January 23rd and I haven’t done a show on my own for years now but I’ll end it with a song that I think is one of my best, called “I Still Don’t Know Who I Am.” It’s out there on Spotify and I think it’s one of my best songs, it kind of sums up my feelings about myself. I don’t know, and it goes way back to what we were saying at the beginning, which is I’m baffled about how I got to where I got, I have no idea how or why. Coming from my background, I have no clue how I actually ended up where I ended up, I don’t really know. But that’s a good quote from Warhol.

CA: Is Warhol an artist you like?

MSF: Not particularly. My only Andy Warhol story is that one year my wife and I went to the New York Art Expo, which is held in the Jacob Javits Center, it’s a huge hall where they do car shows and the book fair is there but they do this art show, and I went up to buy my ticket to go in and standing in front of me was Andy Warhol. So that was sort of interesting, he was right in front of me.

CA: Wearing a wig?

MSF: The wig stood out like a sore thumb. And I realized, interestingly, that one thing that does sort of intrigue me about Warhol is that we come from the same Eastern Catholic Church Rite, because he comes from the same exact area that I do in Europe, and my father was in the Greek Catholic Church, they came from the same Greek Eastern Rite Church.

CA: And he changed his name.

MSF: Yes, his name was Andrew Warhola.

CA: What about your name?

MSF: It’s a Slovak name, but it underwent some kind of a mutation. It got the capital F which is a little Balzacian in its pretentiousness, and people often mistake it for an Italian name, which it’s not because of the “ko” in it. Actually there are Jewish
families with the name, which I don't quite understand, and I see that nowadays most of the SaFrankos with that spelling are in Croatia, Hungary, and Slovakia.

CA: Finally, are all those activities – writing, drawing, composing, playing music – part of the numerous pieces of the puzzle that the reader/viewer/listener is to bring together to get a better grasp of Mark SaFranko?

MSF: I would think that would be it, yes. I would think so but... [silence], you know, I'm not so sure that it does capture the whole of who I am because in each one of those perhaps something of a persona emerges, and what's missed and what is not visible, is the profound self-doubt, anxiety, depression maybe, that lies behind some of these activities and it's not seen – well maybe it is seen, I don't know, I don't know. Again, that's more for the viewer to sort of decide. I can't remember his name, he's a writer, he's dead now, but he said “no writer writes about anything but himself,” and I immediately responded to that because even with all of these masks that I wear, it's all me there but I don't know how full the portrait is.

CA: And who is that "me"?

MSF: That's a good question. Who is it? Or you could make the case that there's nobody there, and this is all an attempt to construct somebody, an attempt to construct something because I certainly didn't feel, you know, that great about myself as a kid, but other people might say that there's evidence of a very strong ego in all of this too. So what's the truth? What's the truth?
CA: Those can be the final words.
MSF: What is the truth?
CA: Thank you so much, Mark.

NOTES
1. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rY9hLcpjg2I

ENDNOTES

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*Keywords*: visual art, self-portraiture, watercolor, text, image and sound
*Subjects*: American art
*Mots-clés*: arts plastiques, autoportraits, aquarelles, rapports texte/image/son

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Laurent Curelly, *An Anatomy of an English Radical Newspaper: The Moderate (1648-9)*

Alexandra Sippel

REFERENCES

Laurent Curelly’s title is a tribute to the many Anatomies that were published in the early seventeenth century—not least to Burton’s Anatomy of Melancholy: the preface to the fifth edition lends an introductory quote that reveals and derides the contemporary crave for news. An Anatomy of an English Radical Newspaper: The Moderate (1648-9) indeed “dissects” [4] the 66 issues of The Moderate that were published between June 1648 and September 1649. The author further resorts to the metaphor of forensics in his introduction: “this book will look at The Moderate as an organ that is made up of cells (or news items) and relates to a body (its political, social, cultural and commercial environment)” [6]. In his short and to-the-point introduction, Curelly provides a short history of how newsheets became fashionable reading in seventeenth-century England, after the imported model of Dutch corantos that fuelled religious and political controversy from the 1620s onward. The turmoil of Stuart England was propitious to the development of public interest in periodicals narrating the latest developments of the mounting tensions between King and Parliament. If several historians (like Joseph Frank and Joad Raymond) have addressed the big picture of the rise to prominence, and influence, of the press in seventeenth-century England, Curelly sets out on the mission of carrying out a microscopic examination of The Moderate. Joad Raymond drew on Habermas and his idea that the press was part and parcel of the rise of the middling classes and capitalism, while Jason McElligott broached the royalist print that vindicated the established order. Though these monographs and a few others did mention The Moderate in passing, no comprehensive study had analysed the contents of this newsheet in so much detail yet. An Anatomy of an English Radical Newspaper is organised in six main chapters. The author first examines “The Moderate and the Civil War Press” to account for the creation of the newspaper and its existence in a highly competitive news environment. The next chapters focus on a type of “cell” of the press organ, starting with “Editorials” in chapter 2 and “Petitions” in chapter 3. Chapter 4 addresses “Foreign News”, chapter 5 “News Reports from England, Scotland and
Chapter One (“The Moderate and the Civil War Press”) opens on a reminder of the main events which studded the years 1648 and 1649 and which provided newsheets with an endless source of (sometimes sensationalised) news and editorial comments. These catered to readers supporting the monarchy (such newsbooks were often called “Mercuries”) as well as to supporters of Parliament. Curelly lays particular emphasis on the fact that newsheets were “commercial products” [9] and that competition was as fierce in the seventeenth century as it is now. Such issues as circulation and profits featured high among editors’ concerns. How The Moderate developed strategies to stand out in this competitive environment is an essential dimension of this first chapter—and indeed of the whole book. Seventeenth-century readers “could choose from a wide array of periodicals that expressed various opinions” [10], but editorial stances were more often than not commanded by commercial interest rather than by the editors’ ideological convictions only. Five main parliamentary papers had been on the news market since 1642. Some kept clear of religious matters while others adopted distinctively Presbyterian or anti-Presbyterian stances. Their support to the Levellers’ cause also differed. The Moderate Intelligencer, whose title and layout was initially pillaged by The Moderate’s editor, was a rather “middle-of-the-road”, “non-controversial” paper [12]. Curelly convincingly contends that the editorial stance chosen by The Moderate was at least partly part of a broader gambit to gain competitive edge against more lukewarm papers. Its radical stance made it more appealing to the Army and its supporters. Unlike The Moderate Intelligencer whose editor is well-identified as John Dillingham, Curelly shows how it is difficult to ascribe The Moderate to any specific author. Many contemporary and later writings pointed an accusing finger to Gilbert Mabbott who was the State Licenser then, and had proven sympathetic to the Levellers’ cause by licensing their pamphlets. He never clearly claimed authorship for The Moderate, perhaps for commercial reasons too as his lowly birth might have deterred potential readers. All in all, it appears that the editor’s strategy was successful as The Moderate went to print for about thirteen months whilst in most cases, counterfeit newspapers did not produce more than one issue.

Chapter Two examines “Editorials” as the first essential cells that made up The Moderate. Including editorials was not novel, and both royalist and parliamentarian newsbooks did so, even though they tended to be less frequent than in The Moderate. According to Curelly, The Moderate’s editorials “have become benchmarks of Civil War radicalism” [32]. In the newsheet, they tended to be more articulate than those published in Mercuries, and to provide genuine added value. Publishing editorials also proved an efficient way of mimicking the layout of The Moderate Intelligencer in an attempt to steal some of its readership away to The Moderate. Editorials are addressed under three heads: “Presbyterians v. Independents” (in August and September 1648), “The People v. the King” (from late September 1648 to February 1649), and “Levellers v. Commonwealth” (from January 1649 to the end of May 1649). There are overlaps between them as opposition to the King was to be found throughout and support to the Levellers’ Agreement of the People was also frequently expressed. Each time, The Moderate sided with the more popular and/or the more radical party. Distrust of the Presbyterian party particularly emerged after the publication of The Solemn League and Covenant that allegedly robbed the people of the “only true Covenant – a bond of divine
nature between God and his people” [37]. Opposition between the people and the king
drew a lot on the Levellers’ rhetoric and denunciation of Charles I’s French sympathies,
as well as of his tyrannical tendencies. This legitimised a Rule of *Salus Populi Suprema Lex*
and *The Moderate’s* editorials promoted the Independents’ and the Levellers’ views. The
newspaper aimed at providing education for the people to help it break free from its
voluntary servitude. The Leveller motif of the Norman Yoke was a frequent
topos of parliamentary newsheets, especially of *The Moderate*. Though the following chapters
are dedicated to other cells like petitions or newsheets, Curelly never fails to show
how these pieces too were skilfully editorialised by the author.

Chapter 3 provides ample evidence of this as the minute study of petitions printed in
the pages of *The Moderate* further demonstrates that the editor was a proponent of
radical views. An introductory reminder insists that petitioning Parliament was a
“common political practice” [71] and that historians such as Jason Peacey and David
Zaret have demonstrated that as printing developed, petitions turned into a separate
genre that contributed to shaping public opinion. Deciding whether any specific
petition should be printed at all, or whether only excerpts were to be rendered
available was essentially an editorial choice. In a highly competitive news market, it
was also a commercial decision: offering one’s readers a full text rather than excerpts
or a summary was also a way of gaining competitive edge and attracting a larger
readership. Curelly first details “army petitions” before turning to “Leveller petitions”,
even though he also shows how their concerns overlapped. Twelve army petitions
“presented to Lieutenant-General Lord Fairfax by officers and the rank and file” [72]
were published in the last months of 1648. They offer topical details about the army’s
reactions to such burning issues as the debates surrounding the Treaty of Newport, or
reveal the soldiers’ grievances (often connected to the payment of arrears) as well as
the army’s aspiration for a new institutional settlement. These texts were often
inspired by *The Agreement of the People* that had been adopted by the Levellers during
the Putney Debates in 1647, or by the *Army Remonstrance* of June 1647. The major
institutional change that petitioners aspired to was a shift to a “contract-based form of
government replacing royal absolutism” [74]. The second of these documents was too
long to be printed out in full, but Curelly once again sheds light onto the different ways
in which rival newsheets included parts of it, especially contrasting the strategy of *The
Moderate* with that of *The Moderate Intelligencer*. The former devoted several issues to
parts of *The Remonstrance* or petitions that drew on its contents, and mostly on its claim
for popular sovereignty. As *The Moderate* most likely addressed readers in the Army,
these petitions contributed to boost its sales, while diffusing demands for radical
political and institutional changes. Later army petitions published in 1649 “blended
traditional Army grievances (…) with Leveller demands” [77]. Leveller petitions fall into
three categories: petitions with Leveller motifs, those penned by Levellers, and,
especially when the leading figures of the movement were awaiting trial, petitions
defending the Levellers. In September 1648, *The Moderate* printed *The Large Petition*
in full, while others only published the main headlines, summaries of, or allusions to this
text in their own columns. This seminal petition was later used as a model by many
other petitioners as it blended institutional demands (about politics or religion) and
“typical Army claims” [81], with an introductory preamble. On 26 February 1649,
Lilburne, the famous Leveller leader, presented his *Englands New Chains Discovered to
Parliament*, which was reprinted in full in the pages of *The Moderate*. This book
demanded that the Rump Parliament should adopt the Levellers’ *Agreement of the People*
to strengthen the power of a truly representative Parliament over an appointed Council of State. Publishing it was therefore potentially subversive, even more so as in the same issue of The Moderate were printed Lilburne’s address to Parliament and a supportive editorial. Indeed, it was “the only paper that was overtly critical of the Commonwealth oligarchy as embodied by the Council of State” [87]. After the arrest of Leveller leaders in late March 1648, The Moderate published several petitions supporting their release from the Tower and their freedom of speech. The paper published several of these, and even once added the Speaker’s answer to the petitioners with an editorial comment questioning the validity of the Speaker’s arguments. Other newsbooks were much more cautious in their editorialising policy. The wives of imprisoned Levellers also wrote petitions in defence of their husbands, and Curelly highlights the novelty of these petitions that did not focus on their private problems but grappled with collective political and institutional questions. They vindicated their action with cultural references that pervaded the Leveller movement such as the example of biblical heroines or the alleged freedom of women in Anglo-Saxon times, while displaying all the attributes of female modesty and virtue. Most newsbooks printed at least passages from the women’s first petition (23 April 1649), though not in full, and often with sarcastic comments. The Moderate was the only one to publish the second petition in full (5 May 1649). Not only did this text bring forth the claims of women as a political group, but it also asserted that they had been created equal with men, and were therefore entitled to the same political rights (such as petitioning). They even used the same wording as their husbands in their attacks on the Rump. Though The Moderate did not add editorial comments, the mere choice of publishing this document was “an act of defiance against the Commonwealth” [95]. What is also significant is that The Moderate did not insert disclaimers next to pieces critical of Cromwell’s new regime, which led some historians to describe the newsheet as “the organ of the Leveller party” though Curelly demonstrates why this view should at least be qualified.

Chapter Four addresses the inclusion of foreign news in The Moderate. Seventeenth-century newsheets already had correspondents in key places, especially in Europe, who provided them with newsletters. They also relied on news dispatch from major European commercial hubs. News from various countries was translated and circulated via commercial or diplomatic channels. The Moderate Intelligencer occasionally inserted foreign news in its pages, but such items became much more frequent after Charles I’s trial once there were fewer spectacular events at home. It mostly drew on “the Dutch post” and “the French post” [98]. The Moderate published international news in its first couple of issues, at least partly “to cover up the forgery from which it originated” [99] as it had adopted the layout of The Moderate Intelligencer. As the second civil war raged, though, no foreign news was printed for three months at the end of 1648. It also corresponded to a change in the format of the newsheet that temporarily passed from twelve to eight pages. Six monographs have been published since 2009 that provide recent analyses of European news networks in the early modern period. Curelly shows how the way these networks were organised also shaped the newspapers’ layout as it “followed the canonical linear order of manuscript newsletters as was imposed by postal routes” [101]. International comparisons reveal that The Moderate Intelligencer and The Moderate organised their foreign news columns in ways similar to Théophraste Renaudot’s contemporary Gazette. And though the editor of The Moderate was careful of mimicking The Moderate Intelligencer, the latter was much more thorough in his reporting of foreign news. Though foreign news came from across Europe, the main
source of material was from France, especially during the Fronde era. As a radical newsbook siding with the people against Charles I’s tyranny, it comes as no surprise that *The Moderate* should have related the French rebellion even though it targeted Cardinal Mazarin more than the regent or King Louis XIV himself. As Curelly points out, “The Fronde offered *The Moderate’s* editor the opportunity to highlight the parallels between two peoples breaking free from the bondage they were in” [113]. Besides, “The news from France allowed him to post-rationalise the New Model Army’s efforts to resist tyrannical rule, which culminated in the purge of Westminster Parliament” [116]. *The Moderate* went to great lengths to publish accounts from France whenever possible and despite the scarcity of news that filtered during the most troubled times. There too, the editor decidedly sided with the people against their accusers. Mazarinades were even printed in the winter of 1649, possibly as an anti-monarchical gesture.

Chapter Five delves into news reports from England, Scotland and Ireland. The novelty of the 1640s was that printing domestic news no longer was illegal as it had been in the 1620s and 1630s. After publishing mere accounts of parliamentary proceedings, newspapers turned to more “substantial weekly servings of domestic news fare” [123]. Curelly insists that news from the three kingdoms was by no means uniform and that “it defies monolithic interpretative strategies” [127]. As a newspaper destined to Army readers, *The Moderate* related the various stages in the civil wars, paying special attention to sieges. It is unclear whether *The Moderate* derived its information about the eleven-week siege of Colchester (from June to September 1648) from a correspondent or thanks to soldiers’ letters. It is quite likely that the newspaper did send a correspondent to the nine-month siege of Pontefract in Yorkshire that also began in June 1648. Commercial concerns are visible in the way the editor sometimes peppered the news with sensationalism to meet the competition of other newspapers like the *Mercurius Militaris* that also targeted the Army. News from Scotland was rare until 1649 and came either through Edinburgh or through cities in the North of England like Newcastle or Berwick. Much news was provided by letters addressed to MPs, which makes it difficult to interpret their authors or even their perspectives, even though it is possible to identify the authors’ social background—often as merchants opposing the king, and as Englishmen spreading prejudiced comments against the Scots. The conflict opposing the Engagers to Cromwell’s troops, and the uprisings it provoked in the south of Scotland were reported, as were the complex debates over the acknowledgement of *The Solemn League and Covenant* by Charles I in 1648 and by Charles II after February 1649. As with news from England, *The Moderate* sided with Cromwell’s troops and opposing the Engager Army and showed distrust of Presbyterians. Leveller motifs even resurfaced in some letters. As for Ireland, it was mostly covered after the king’s execution, especially during Cromwell’s campaign in the summer of 1649. Only seven pieces originated from Ireland while the rest was written in England, though it was based on accounts (mostly found in letters) from Ireland. There too, sieges proved valuable material for newsheets. That of Drogheda, and its subsequent fall in September featured in two issues of *The Moderate* and on one occasion, the letter provided the customary vision of providential history, ascribing the victory of Cromwell’s army to God’s will. It makes for an interesting editorial choice as it published letters supportive of the army, but also of Cromwell. Curelly shows how difficult it is to make sense of the sometimes contradictory letters that were published about the Irish question: either it stemmed from a deliberate editorial choice of
providing an exact depiction of Ireland’s complicated situation in 1649 and/or catering to soldiers on both sides of the conflict; or it just proved interesting material that was worth printing. Yet, the analysis of news from the three kingdoms allowed Curelly to conclude that “a dominant voice may be heard in it, one that expressed support of the New Model Army at large and of soldiers in particular” [158].

7 Chapter Six is entitled “Domestic News: Main News and Advertisement.” The Moderate, like other contemporary newspapers, did not seem to have a definite editorial line when it came to deciding whether or not to print or mention a given Act of Parliament. On the other hand, the advertisements published in the weekly can provide today’s readers with an insight into the editor’s commitments, even though they were also, and perhaps primarily, a source of income for a modern newspaper. Book advertisements are the most enlightening ones: they addressed divinity, politics, social issues and sciences but the first two categories largely dominated the rest. Besides, the mere fact that books were advertised testifies to the “development of literacy” and “the availability of affordable books” [166]. What stands out is that most books about divinity and politics showed overlapping concerns and more often than not, well fitted in the pages of The Moderate for their defence of Leveller ideas. As far as domestic news is concerned, The Moderate adopted a different, more radical stance, than the original Moderate Intelligencer in its defence of the people, especially when it came to reporting on the Treaty of Newport. Also The Moderate alone expressed its approval of Pride’s Purge on 6 Dec. 1648. The king’s trial also featured high among the important pieces of domestic news that found their way into the pages of the weekly. Curelly hints at the way other papers reported these same events to highlight how divisive these events were. They also inflamed public opinion and curiosity, so much so that providing detailed, sometimes verbatim accounts, of the events was yet again a way of enhancing a paper’s competitive edge. This approach enables him to beef up the traditional contention that “Mabbott authored The Moderate” because he was a “fierce opponent of monarchy” and that “the report on the King’s trial dovetailed with his anti-kingly editorials” [187]. Later in 1649 The Moderate was the only newsbook that sympathetically reported on the Levellers’ and even on the Diggers’ activities rather than relying on official propaganda.

8 Curelly does indeed propose a very thorough dissection of each cell within The Moderate, thus making clear how it was “an organ” in the troubled context of the years 1648 and 1649. Rather than an organ of the Leveller party as it had been described in earlier historical accounts, The Moderate was “a radical newsbook” that “relentlessly defended the people against those it regarded as its oppressors” [201]. The long quotations enable twenty-first century readers to catch a glimpse of how the news mattered to the readers of The Moderate. It is also an effective way of enabling them to look over his shoulder, as it were, and to partake in the dissection operation. In his introduction, Curelly states that his “aim is not to construct yet another historical narrative of the period, but rather to try and apprehend the essence of this newspaper” [5]. An Anatomy of an English Radical Newspaper is indeed first and foremost an in-depth analysis of this specific weekly newsheet. Yet readers whose interest lies in the history of the press, or even of the radical press, in general, will find all the necessary insights into the historical context to make sense of The Moderate against the complex backdrop of England at the height of the second civil war. Those familiar with these events will even more fully enjoy analyses of the way petitions or newsletters were editorialised. The bibliography is organised in three chapters (“History of the Civil Wars and the
international context”, “Political theory, radical politics and radical religion”, and “News, print and censorship”), which contributes to making it easy for readers to satisfy their curiosity in one or the other of these fields. All in all, the author succeeds in demonstrating that The Moderate’s editor upheld principles opposing all tyrannies—whether the would-be absolutism of Charles I, or Cromwell’s own brand of republicanism—while closely monitoring its readers’ interest, and hence its commercial success in the cutthroat competition of seventeenth-century press.

INDEX

**Keywords:** Civil wars, Commonwealth, Diggers, Levellers, news market, periodical press, petition, Presbyterians, Protectorate, public opinion, radicalism, republicanism, the Fronde

**Mots-clés:** Guerres civiles, République, Diggers, Niveleurs, marché de l’information, presse périodique, pétition, presbytérianisme, opinion publique, radicalisme, républicanisme, Fronde

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**RÉFÉRENCE**


Le premier chapitre, « Le patriotisme de deux sociétés radicales londoniennes », s’interroge sur les différentes déclinaisons du « patriotisme » des radicaux du XVIIIe siècle, et sur ce que les Sociétés souhaitaient transmettre au travers de leurs publications, souvent distribuées gratuitement « au peuple anglais » [25]. Leurs membres étaient issus des classes moyennes plus aisées ; beaucoup étaient des dissidents religieux, pleinement conscients de la « discordance entre leur exclusion légale des processus politiques et leur stature financière (ou intellectuelle) qui en fait presque des membres de l’Establishment » [31]. S’ils se revendiquent « patriotes », c’est en prenant soin de donner une nouvelle acception au terme pour le libérer des soupçons de trahison qu’il portait depuis les années 1640. À partir des années 1720, l’opposition « patriote » a pour cible Robert Walpole, accusé de dévoyer l’idéal Whig. Rapidement toutefois, « [l’]analyse, la dissection, le dévoilement, les classifications du faux patriotisme deviennent des outils polémiques usuels » [33] et quand l’affaire des élections du Middlesex éclate, « le patriotisme constitue une arme à double tranchant » [35]. Le sulfureux Wilkes se revendique lui aussi patriote, et le manifeste par l’expression de sa défiance à l’encontre des influences écossaises sur George III. Si les radicaux soutiennent la réforme parlementaire et dénoncent le refus de la Chambre des Communes de laisser siéger Wilkes malgré son élection à quatre reprises, ils sont bien plus circonspects sur ses intentions et sur le décalage entre ce qu’il professe et la façon dont il utilise le soutien populaire (y compris financier) à son propre avantage. L’idéal patriotique n’est donc pas à chercher chez cet « incendiaire » [40], mais dans la figure du roi patriote célébré par le Tory Bolingbroke en 1738 (The Idea of a Patriot King), seul
apté à veiller au bien du peuple dans un pays politiquement divisé depuis la montée des factions Whig et Tory. Georges III avait représenté cet idéal à son couronnement, mais R. Duthille montre bien comment James Burgh décrit la déception ressentie par les radicaux au fil de son règne. L’expression « Patriot King » ne disparaît pas pour autant, et « devient la marque d’une opposition respectueuse de la constitution » [41]. En analysant une lettre inédite de Cartwright adressée à Georges III, R. Duthille montre comment le premier recourut à la rhétorique du roi patriote pour appeler le second à défendre les intérêts du peuple dans son ensemble plutôt que ceux de l’aristocratie. La souveraineté populaire est en effet au cœur du discours radical. Les radicaux exhortent à la vigilance quant à toute dérive tyrannique, qu’elle soit l’œuvre du roi, de l’aristocratie ou, même, du parlement. Cela soulève la question des différentes théorisations des libertés anglaises, entre constitutionnalisme et jusnaturalisme.

Le deuxième chapitre invite le lecteur à dépasser l’opposition traditionnelle établie par l’historiographie entre discours jusnaturaliste et discours constitutionnaliste, entre les références au droit universel qui devrait se manifester pleinement en Grande-Bretagne comme dans les colonies américaines, et droit des Anglais tel qu’il s’est constitué depuis l’ère anglo-saxonne. R. Duthille emprunte à James Epstein l’expression « idiomè constitutionnaliste », un ensemble de pratiques et de codes oratoires, propre à l’Angleterre, qui s’inscrit dans les pratiques politiques du royaume : les pétitions et les rituels de sociabilité comme les toasts, très codifiés, lors des banquets organisés par les sociétés radicales sont constitutives du discours radical au même titre que les écrits. L’approche jusnaturaliste, bien plus abstraite, ne bénéficie pas du même arsenal et reste circonscrite au discours, oral ou écrit. Le fond s’exprime aussi dans la forme : le discours jusnaturaliste, principalement employé par Price, se caractérise par la volonté de s’adapter au lectorat anglais en débarrassant la rhétorique de ses pesanteurs cicéroniennes. À la suite de Laboucheix, l’auteur souligne que Price était socratique, et que l’abstraction du droit naturel correspondait en outre bien à son esprit scientifique ainsi qu’à ses compétences de pasteur et d’exégète. Les Observations de Price sont donc concises et rigoureuses, et son droit naturel est appliqué au cas particulier de l’Angleterre. Les écrits de Cartwright et les rituels des sociétés radicales s’inscrivent plutôt dans la tradition constitutionnaliste : l’exemple des banquets où chaque convive portait un toast à un héros de la cause du peuple, « impose à la Société d’exprimer des revendications de façon concise et consensuelle » [59]. C’est là une pratique typiquement constitutionnaliste. Stylistiquement parlant, les constitutionnalistes empruntent aux Common Lawyers le fastidieux travail de compilation des précédents qui permet d’élaborer une « rhétorique de la confirmation » [60]. C’est la conformité aux lois anglaises depuis l’époque saxonne qui atteste de la légitimité d’un modèle institutionnel. Le constitutionnalisme se prête mieux à la vulgarisation et la Society for Constitutional Information offre donc des abrégés qui reprennent les textes fondamentaux que sont la Magna Carta ou le Bill of Rights, que les lecteurs comprenaient bien. L’auteur démontre enfin que, si Price préférait les arguments jusnaturalistes et Cartwright ceux tirés du droit anglais, chacun était parfaitement capable d’emprunter à l’autre registre, et ne s’en privait pas, en particulier lorsque la forme servait mieux ses arguments. Ainsi sur la question américaine, les autorités opposées à l’indépendance des colonies avaient-elles monopolisé les arguments constitutionnalistes, et les radicaux empruntèrent donc la rhétorique jusnaturaliste ; tandis que Price recourut au constitutionnalisme pour mettre les Communes en garde contre le précédent qu’elles
créaient en faisant entrer parmi les députés un candidat quatre fois vaincu lors de l’élection du Middlesex.

Le troisième chapitre offre une analyse plus précise des écrits et discours de Price, dont *le Discours sur l’amour de la patrie* de 1789 est cependant étudié ultérieurement dans le dernier chapitre de l’ouvrage. Price développe « un universalisme à l’anglaise, un discours fondé sur le droit naturel mais pétri de références nationales » [86]. L’analyse des *Observations* de 1776 concernant la guerre de l’indépendance américaine démontre à quel point il influença les débats sur la question coloniale, mais aussi, plus largement, sur le droit naturel en général. S’il a recours à la rhétorique jusnaturaliste plutôt que constitutionnaliste, c’est parce que la situation américaine est sans précédent ; en outre, cette approche requiert l’honnêteté intellectuelle des destinataires et vise à « inculquer à son lecteur une attitude de citoyen du monde » enracinée dans l’acceptation du droit naturel qui transcende les frontières et les époques [88]. Price développe une acception large du *breach of trust* lockéen, qui justifie que le peuple se souvèle contre les dépositaires de l’autorité (non seulement d’un roi despotique, mais aussi du Parlement dont Blackstone défendait l’omnipotence). Pour pleinement jouir de sa citoyenneté, le peuple doit être actif et Price déplore sa passivité. En tant que dissident, il s’identifie aux colons américains et exige pour ses coreligionnaires à la fois la liberté politique et la liberté religieuse, plutôt que la simple tolérance accordée aux non-conformistes, et révocable à tout instant à la seule discrétion du prince. C’est chez Locke qu’il faut trouver les origines de la défense de la liberté religieuse. En matière politique, l’interprétation radicale de Locke est étayée par les écrits des philosophes français, en particulier Montesquieu et de Lolme, tous deux intéressés par le modèle constitutionnel anglais. L’influence des échanges entre Cartwright et Price contribue également à l’élaboration de leurs discours respectifs. Ainsi, le constitutionnalisme du premier vient confirmer le jusnaturalisme du second en ce qui concerne les revendications radicales concernant la souveraineté populaire. Les Whigs de cour sont accusés de l’avoir enterrée depuis Walpole. R. Duthille souligne la modernité de Price qui voit dans les colons américains l’avenir et le progrès de la vertu et de la liberté : « les Américains se réclament du droit des Anglais, et les radicaux les perçoivent même comme de meilleurs Anglais que ceux de la métropole » [109]. C’est vers eux, et non vers le passé de la Rome antique, qu’il faut chercher la liberté pour Price, ce qui le distingue au sein du mouvement radical qui était encore très attaché au modèle de la vertu antique.

Cartwright offre une image spéculaire de Price : il représente « la constitution anglaise normée par le droit naturel » (chapitre 4). R. Duthille pose en introduction de ce chapitre une question provocatrice : « était-il un mythographe assumé ? » [115]. La rhétorique de Cartwright repose sur le constitutionnalisme, même s’il emploie aussi le langage du droit naturel, qu’il applique même aux tribus indiennes de chasseurs-cueilleurs des terres vierges du Labrador : comme Price, il opte pour une interprétation radicale de Locke pour dénoncer la confiscation de leurs terres au motif que leur mode de vie ne repose pas sur la propriété au sens où elle était entendue par les Anglais. Les mêmes principes le poussent à prendre la défense des colons américains et à s’élever pour leur autonomie législative et fiscale. Dans *Take your choice*, Cartwright « expose les grandes lignes de son programme radical, appelé à être adopté par la SCI lors de sa fondation en 1780 » [122]. Le jusnaturalisme vient renforcer le constitutionnalisme pour démontrer la légitimité de la révolte des colons américains. En matière de droits individuels, Cartwright se montre plus radical encore que Price dans sa défense du
suffrage universel, considérant que ceux qui n’ont que leur force de travail en sont propriétaires et peuvent prétendre au droit de vote sur la base de cette propriété. En 1780, sa Declaration of Rights [...] vient confirmer son soutien au suffrage universel masculin et à l’annualité des élections, présentée comme une pratique constitutionnelle ancienne (saxonne). Cartwright s’inscrit dans une longue tradition réanimée par Obadiah Hulme en 1771 dans Historical Essay on the English Constitution, qui fait l’apologie des héros saxons (Alfred du Wessex et Edouard le Confesseur), modèles de vertu civique, et de leur défense patriotique de l’Angleterre et de ses libertés. La révolution s’entend comme le retour à cet âge d’or. Contrairement à Price, Cartwright cède à la célébration des vertus antiques, et en particulier de l’idéal du citoyen-soldat : Rome et Athènes offrent un modèle militaire tandis que l’Angleterre saxonne représente l’idéal politique. Les radicaux s’illustrent également par leur exaltation « de l’esprit plus que du détail de la lettre » de la Grande Charte de 1215 [135]. Wyvill en 1780 se revendiquait des barons de Runnymede pour restaurer toute sa vigueur à la constitution de 1688, constitution que nombre de radicaux croyaient menacée par le roi et ses conseillers. À la fin de ce chapitre, R. Duthille peut conclure que c’est surtout dans le discours de vulgarisation que Cartwright fait œuvre de « mythographe » recourant à l’idéalisation de l’Angleterre saxonne d’Alfred ; les textes et discours destinés aux cercles plus cultivés s’inspiraient quant à eux davantage des compilations de précédents des Common Lawyers.

Le cinquième chapitre pose l’épineuse question du peuple : « Le peuple aux urnes, le peuple en armes : tous citoyens ? ». L’auteur s’attache en introduction à montrer à quel point le terme de « peuple » était source de débats. Alors qu’une toute petite minorité de la population anglaise ou écossaise jouit du droit de vote, l’extension de la citoyenneté prônée par les radicaux achoppe sur leurs différentes acceptions du suffrage universel, qu’ils approuvent en théorie. Les radicaux vont plus loin que le Whig Burke qui voulait inclure les propriétaires de biens mobiliers, et défendent, comme Price, le principe du droit de vote de tous les « agents indépendants ». Cela ne clarifie rien dans la mesure où la définition de l’indépendance prête à confusion, comme le souligne Wesley. Les radicaux ne sont pas insensibles aux craintes qu’inspirent les émeutes populaires, comme en 1768 (élection du Middlesex) ou 1780 (Gordon riots) et leur discours est multiple et complexe. R. Duthille analyse la question de la réforme institutionnelle et du suffrage à la lumière des échanges des radicaux au sujet de la lettre des Volontaires de Belfast ; il montre en particulier l’éventail des propositions des radicaux quant à l’extension du suffrage, depuis les points d’accord (sur l’inclusion des Catholiques) jusqu’aux points plus sensibles (comme le montant d’un cens électoral). En ce qui concerne les femmes, le consensus est en revanche de mise puisque les radicaux ne remettent pas en question le statut de feme covert en vertu duquel les femmes sont représentées par les hommes dont elles dépendent et n’ont donc pas besoin de voter elles-mêmes. Vers la fin de la période étudiée, les femmes prennent part aux débats publics, mais dans des domaines qui correspondent à leurs qualités innées : philanthropie, abolitionnisme et éducation des jeunes filles. Sur la question du suffrage des hommes pauvres, R. Duthille montre que Cartwright est de loin le plus radical et que sa défense du suffrage universel s’inscrit dans la logique de son engagement radical : tout homme possède au moins sa réputation et sa force de travail, et paie des taxes sur les biens de consommation. Au nom du jusnaturalisme et du principe selon lequel toute taxation doit valoir représentation, tous peuvent donc prétendre élire leurs députés à bulletin secret pour préserver leur liberté de choix.
Nombreux sont ceux qui ne sont favorables qu'à un abaissement du cens électoral. Si la « citoyenneté est une activité », « il faut réveiller le pouvoir latent du peuple, pour qu'il exige la restauration de ses droits perdus » [168-9], sans pour autant concéder trop d'influence à la populace – la mob. La question du citoyen-soldat est encore plus problématique quand il s'agit du port d'armes et de l'inclusion dans la milice, « seule institution à même de défendre les libertés constitutionnelles » [173]. Les miliciens, en tant que défenseurs de la patrie, devaient avoir le droit de vote. Les femmes ne pouvant porter les armes, il était évident qu'elles ne pouvaient être autorisées à voter. Mais l'inclusion du peuple dans la milice pose la question du port d'armes, et « les radicaux sont embarrassés par ce sujet » [177], a fortiori lors des périodes d'émeutes populaires. Lors des Gordon Riots, ils tendent à appeler « le peuple » à prendre les armes pour mettre fin au soulèvement. Granville Sharp défend une approche constitutionnaliste basée sur les exemples antique et saxon : le tirage au sort et la formation militaire universelle doivent permettre de faire naître un peuple de citoyens soldats libres et vertueux : « La milice et le droit de vote sont deux modalités par lesquelles réconcilier le peuple avec les institutions » [183].

7 Le chapitre 6, « Projets britanniques et solidarités atlantiques » s'attache à éclairer la façon dont le discours des libertés anglaises s'est diffusé au Pays de Galles, en Écosse et en Irlande, et comment il a évolué sous l'effet des échanges entre les marges de la Grande-Bretagne et la métropole londonienne pour se répandre au-delà des mers. En 1768, Wilkes représente un cas à part, « un symptôme de résistance à la britannisation » [185] dans ses attaques contre l'influence croissante des Écossais. Si Linda Colley s'est penchée plus en détail sur l'élaboration d'une identité britannique « au creuset des guerres du dix-huitième siècle », elle n'a pas abordé le rôle des radicaux dans la définition du patriotisme britannique. R. Duthille vient combler ce manque en explorant « la britannisation des réseaux et du discours radicaux » [186]. La question de la réforme parlementaire se pose différemment au Pays de Galles dans la mesure où la nation était encore largement rurale et dominée par les élites foncières. Un pamphlet radical anglais est cependant mis en avant : le Dialogue entre un érudit et un paysan, diffusé en 1783 par la société réformiste du comté de Flint, effraya la gentry qui redoute que l'enseignement du contractualisme et du principe de l'universalité du port d'armes ne pousse les paysans à la révolte. La situation de l'Écosse est fort différente et un mouvement de réforme de la représentation (burgh reform) se répand dès 1782 en raison de la très faible représentativité des députés écosais aux Communes. Les Observations de Price et les réponses de ses détracteurs paraissent dans la presse et les lieux de sociabilité et de débats ne manquent pas, en particulier à Édimbourg. MacCrugar représente bien les radicaux écosais qui souhaitaient « faire la démonstration qu'en dépit d'antécédents historiques peu prometteurs (tel le jacobitisme), ils méritent la liberté et sauront la défendre » [194]. La SCI célébre l'aspiration écosaise à l'indépendance, mais les projets de réformes sont mis en échec par le Parlement, et ce sont les Écossais qui s'érigent en donneurs de leçons à leurs frères anglais pour la restauration de leurs droits anciens. « Le discours 'anglo-britannique' des Écossais se structure autour d'une idéologie Whig fondée sur le respect de la constitution britannique et des libertés gagnées lors de la Glorieuse Révolution. Il s'agit donc bien d'une north britishness et pas d'une simple 'anglicité'« [197]. L'Irlande, comme les colonies américaines, vient poser la question impériale et coloniale : « le parallèle entre les Irlandais et les colons américains s'imposait : les uns comme les autres obéissaient à des lois votées dans un parlement, à Westminster, où ils n'étaient
pas représentés ; ils subissaient également les restrictions économiques imposées par un système mercantiliste [...] » [201]. Cartwright et Price s’élèveront tous deux pour défendre les droits des Irlandais (au libre-échange et à la représentation). Les Volontaires Irlandais sont célébrés lors des dîners de la SCI où est vantée leur vertu civique. C’est ce discours, plus que l’opposition à un ennemi commun (selon la thèse de L. Colley), qui soulève l’identité britannique dans les années 1780. Le cadre impérial se prête bien à l’esprit universaliste de Richard Price qui voit dans le progrès de la liberté en Irlande et en Amérique la promesse de son extension au monde. La question de l’Amérique est plus complexe puisque les radicaux défendent à la fois la réconciliation avec la métropole et la défense des droits des colons, deux idéaux incompatibles. R. Duthille montre comment le discours radical a défendu l’autonomie législative et fiscale des colonies, sans pour autant prendre fait et cause pour leur indépendance totale avant la fin de la guerre. L’influence religieuse est particulièrement importante dans le discours radical sur la guerre d’indépendance : « L’Amérique [...] offre une promesse de régénération. Cette vision s’inscrit dans la lignée du millénarisme protestant anglais, mais aussi dans les débats internationaux sur l’avenir des jeunes États-Unis et leur capacité à régénérer le vieux continent » [212]. La problématique du luxe s’inscrit dans les nouveaux rapports économiques qui devaient lier l’Angleterre à ses voisins immédiats et à ses colonies. La plupart des radicaux considèrent qu’il est indispensable de supplanter le mercantilisme par un système de libre-échange, de « doux commerce » selon le mot de Montesquieu, afin de parvenir à une paix mondiale perpétuelle. Price développe cependant une réflexion plus complexe dans la mesure où, si son universalisme lui fait préférer le libre-échange, il n’en redoute pas moins les conséquences néfastes du commerce qui menace la frugalité, condition nécessaire de la vertu républicaine. C’est ainsi qu’il encourage les États-Unis à développer leur autarcie et à préférer la vertu à la richesse. À cette fin, les États-Unis doivent à ses yeux développer des institutions fédérales fortes, à même de promouvoir la vertu. L’abolition de l’esclavage est pour Price une autre condition indispensable pour que les États-Unis remplissent la mission assignée par la Providence. Granville Sharp et son ami Cartwright furent aussi des défenseurs déterminés des esclaves. Mais, si tous les radicaux dénoncent l’esclavage métaphorique subi par les Anglais plongés sous le joug de monarques tentés par l’absolutisme, le mouvement abolitionniste resta assez marginal à l’époque considérée, en partie parce que certains membres des sociétés radicales bénéficieraient directement de la traite ou de l’esclavage, étant proches « des milieux mercantiles de Londres » [228].

Le dernier chapitre de l’ouvrage vient clore la période en offrant une analyse du célèbre Discours sur l’amour de la patrie de Price (1789), mais en s’attachant à étudier des passages moins connus et moins commentés jusqu’à présent. Ce discours représente une « synthèse du patriotisme radical à l’aube de la révolution française ». Ce sermon basé sur la prière pour la paix de Jérusalem dans le Psaume 122 fut prononcé par Price pour le cent unième anniversaire de la Glorieuse Révolution, et au lendemain de la Révolution française. Il illustre à merveille le cosmopolitisme positif, vecteur de bienveillance universelle, et l’optimisme de Price. Il connotait plusieurs éditions, et des extraits furent diffusés dans les pamphlets de la SCI. Cette publication marque le début en Angleterre du débat sur la Révolution française, ce qui se vérifie encore plus après la publication par Burke de ses Reflections on the Revolution in France en novembre 1790. Le sermon de Price fut en outre diffusé outre-Manche, à l’Assemblée nationale et parmi les clubs jacobins parisiens. Comme le souligne R. Duthille, « le Discours peut se lire comme
l’aboutissement de plusieurs traditions ; [...] il offre la théorisation la plus élaborée du patriotism dans le corpus radical » [232]. L’analyse de ce discours permet à l’auteur d’apporter un éclairage anglais sur le rapport entre patriotism et cosmopolitisme auquel Price donne un sens résolument universaliste. L’exégèse du symbolisme de Jérusalem dans le débat sur la bienveillance due aux proches ou au reste du monde joue un rôle essentiel tant religion et politique se recoupent : les Anglicans suivent la ligne définie par William Laud pour qui Jérusalem est « la communauté indissoluble de l’Église et de l’État » [216] et représente donc la volonté de restaurer l’unité politique et religieuse de la nation. Pour Shaftesbury et Price, en revanche, Jérusalem représente la communauté liée par la morale et la politique plus que par la terre, même si Shaftesbury la voyait incarnée dans les élites foncières en lien avec l’Europe, si ce n’est le monde tandis que Price incluait (étonnamment) les marchands pour les bénéfices que leur activité apportait au Pays. Richard Price et Joseph Priestley incluent pleinement l’éducation (en tant que progrès individuel et collectif continu) dans leur vision du patriotism à visée universaliste, ce qui fait dire à l’auteur que « le débat sur la compatibilité du patriotism et de la bienveillance universelle était donc politisé dès 1776 » [242]. Les débats autour du cosmopolitisme et du patriotism deviennent courants à partir de la guerre d’Indépendance, opposant Whigs conservateurs et radicaux, et parfois même les radicaux entre eux. Andrew Kippis, qui prêcha le sermon du centenaire, adopte une position similaire à celle de Cartwright, célébrant 1688 comme l’œuvre du peuple et non de la noblesse, dans la ‘révolution’ qui devait ramener les Anglais à leur liberté saxonne. Les trois principes défendus par la Revolutionary Society étaient la souveraineté populaire, le droit de résistance à l’abus de pouvoir, et les libertés fondamentales (religion, expression, élections, procès par jury...). Price aussi insiste sur le rôle du peuple plutôt que des élites et va plus loin en affirmant le droit du peuple à prendre part à « la modification continue du régime politique » [257]. Dans la péroraison finale, il célèbre la Révolution française comme une « réplique de la Glorieuse Révolution » et y voit le signe d’un progrès destiné à s’étendre au monde entier. Le progrès des Lumières, depuis Milton et les dissidents du dix-septième siècle jusqu’aux philosophes français vient se mêler aux nombreuses références bibliques typiques du discours dissident pour offrir « un exemple remarquable du millénarisme politique de Price qui interprète le millénaire comme le long règne de la liberté politique et de la félicité humaine ici-bas, précédant le jugement dernier » [261]. En 1790, les membres de la Society révolutionnaire célébrent la Fête de la Fédération, non sans truffer leurs discours d’hommages aux grands héros Whigs, depuis le roi Alfred jusqu’à Locke, montrant que « l’optimisme de Price, sa foi dans la paix universelle et dans la réconciliation avec la France viennent se surimposer aux anciennes strates de patriotism, non les effacer » [264].

R. Duthille conclut sur le destin opposé des deux sociétés radicales : la Revolutionary Society, qui était devenue plus visible avec le centenaire de la Glorieuse Révolution, est durement touchée par les attaques de Burke contre Price à partir de novembre 1790. La SCI quant à elle, reprend des couleurs dans les années 1780 à la faveur de la Révolution française, portant haut les revendications des réformateurs du parlement. Elles sont toutes deux privées de la rhétorique constitutionnaliste quand celle-ci est reprise par Burke et subissent une répression ferme après le début de la guerre en 1793. Pour ne rien arranger, la Révolution française s’avère être une cause de division parmi les membres des différentes sociétés. Le discours radical des années 1768-1789 ne s’éteignit pourtant pas totalement puisque Cartwright le porta encore dans les années 1820,
cherchez « à internationaliser, à universaliser la tradition radicale dans laquelle il s’inscrit » [282-3]. Dans cet ouvrage passionnant, Rémy Duthille parvient à dépeindre « le discours radical », au singulier, en montrant en quoi les rhétoriques des radicaux, depuis leurs pratiques de sociabilité jusqu’à leurs discours ou écrits, à destination du grand public ou de leurs propres rangs, s’inscrivent dans un courant qui tire son unité de son attachement aux libertés et à la vertu du peuple. L’analyse de riches sources primaires est en permanence mise en rapport avec l’historiographie et permet à l’auteur d’apporter des éclairages sur certaines approches d’historiens, de les confirmer ou de les nuancer avec finesse.

INDEX

**Mots-clés :** radicalisme, peuple, patriotisme, cosmopolitisme, universalisme, droit naturel, jusnaturalisme, droit coutumier, constitutionnalisme, Whiggisme, dissidence religieuse, Glorieuse Révolution, Révolution américaine, Révolution française, réforme parlementaire, Déclaration des Droits, colonies, impérialisme, commerce, luxe, vertu civique, liberté saxonne, millénarisme politique, suffrage universel, milice

**Keywords :** radicalism, people, patriotism, cosmopolitanism, universalism, natural law, common law, Whiggism, dissent, Glorious Revolution, American Revolution, French Revolution, parliamentary reform, Bill of Rights, colonies, imperialism, commerce, free-trade, luxury, civic virtue, Saxon freedoms, political millenarianism, universal suffrage, militia

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Géraldine Gadbin-George et Juliette Ringeisen-Biardeaud, (dir.), Partir en Solitaire : Conséquences du Brexit aujourd’hui et demain

Jeremy Elmerich

RÉFÉRENCE

Le 23 juin 2016, le peuple britannique décidait de quitter l’Union européenne à la majorité de 51,9 %. À l’incertitude de la campagne et du résultat de la consultation succédait celle des conséquences concrètes de ce verdict. Ce divorce s’apprêtait-il à faire deux perdants, ou bien l’un des deux protagonistes allait-il tirer son épingle du jeu ? Quid des conséquences pour l’Union européenne ? La sortie du Royaume-Uni dévierait-elle la route du navire européen, et les contestations nombreuses dont il fait l’objet le ferait-elle chavirer pour de bon ; ou bien cette sortie serait-elle au contraire le point de départ d’une collaboration de bon aloi entre les membres de l’UE, condition nécessaire à ce que le vaisseau vogue sereinement vers l’horizon de son rêve européen ? Ces questionnements, qui font fi des nombreuses critiques entourant les modalités de la construction européenne et de sa relation aux États-nations qui composent l’UE trouveront assurément leurs réponses dans les mois et les années à venir, le Brexit apparaissant en effet comme un véritable catalyseur invitant chaque État membre à adopter une position à son endroit. Mais c’est bien davantage du devenir du Royaume-Uni dont s’intéresse Partir en solitaire. Publié en octobre 2018 et faisant suite au colloque interdisciplinaire organisé à l’Université Panthéon-Assas le 1er juin 2017, l’ouvrage dirigé par Géraldine Gadbin-George et Juliette Ringeisen-Biardeaud propose un état des lieux politique, juridique, économique, social, symbolique et identitaire – épousant en quelque mesure les « quatre catégories de problématiques, liées à la compétitivité, la souveraineté, l’immigration et à la gouvernance économique » (11-12) identifiées par David Cameron dans sa lettre à Donald Tusk.

Structuré en neuf chapitres, Partir en solitaire débute par un riche rappel de faits consignés par les co-directrices de l’ouvrage ; rappel poursuivi par Pauline Schnapper dans son chapitre intitulé « Brexit and the disruption in British politics » (p.17-29). La professeure de civilisation britannique à l’Université Sorbonne Nouvelle y souligne que les clivages politiques1 ont été reconfigurés notamment autour de l’enjeu du maintien au sein ou de la sortie de l’Union européenne, et que de nouvelles lignes de divisions
sont apparues entre générations, entre le nord de la Grande-Bretagne et le sud, entre les gagnants de la mondialisation et des perdants retranchés sur leurs identités culturelles, ou plus sommairement et pour le dire avec les mots de Christophe Guilluy, entre les grandes métropoles britanniques et le « Royaume-Uni périphérique » ; ces lignes s’étant perpétuées lors de l’élection générale de 2017. Au moyen d’une analyse historique minutieuse, elle retrace la généalogie de ce clivage, sans pour autant manquer d’identifier les conséquences du primat de cet enjeu sur les acteurs du monde politique. Certaines considérations auraient toutefois gagné à être éclaircies ; ainsi est-il notamment de la mention des adhésions partisanes (particulièrement au Parti conservateur) ou de la participation électorale, toutes deux en déclin. Il est difficile d’établir si l’auteure juge ici que ces désaffiliations sont imputables aux lignes de démarcation susmentionnées, ou bien si ces faits viennent davantage souligner que l’aspiration au renforcement de la souveraineté britannique s’effectue paradoxalement avec un parlement pieds et poings liés au résultat du référendum du 26 juin 2016. Le risque d’une re-centralisation des pouvoirs dans les mains de l’État central ouvre par ailleurs de manière habile au deuxième chapitre, écrit par Nathalie Duclos, portant sur les dilemmes stratégiques du mouvement indépendantiste écossais suite au résultat du référendum sur le Brexit. Grâce à une étude fine des discours tenus par les principales figures de ce mouvement, et notamment du SNP dont les figures principales (au premier rang desquelles la Première Ministre Nicola Sturgeon) embrassaient un européisme sans réserve, elle souligne les divisions qui ont parcouru le parti. D’une part, une frange tenait à l’organisation d’un référendum d’indépendance dans les délais les plus brefs, tandis qu’une autre favorisait d’attendre le résultat des négociations sur la sortie du Royaume-Uni, pour appeler à sa tenue. De plus, elle souligne que l’europhilie n’est pas une position unanime parmi le mouvement indépendantiste. Ceci n’a toutefois pas empêché les plus sceptiques de réclamer que l’on pose à nouveau formellement la question de l’indépendance, sur le motif de la réitération du déficit démocratique subi par une Écosse une nouvelle fois contrainte par un choix britannique, quoique supporté par l’écrasante majorité anglaise. Le panorama que dresse Nathalie Duclos ne manque d’aucun détail. Ainsi souligne-t-elle également que les entités extérieures au SNP (telles que le Radical Independence Campaign et le mouvement indépendantiste socialiste RISE) les plus à gauche du spectre nationaliste écossais, et qui sont également les plus eurosceptiques, n’ont pas manqué de réitérer la nécessité de l’indépendance au même motif.

Le texte qui lui succède est sans doute le plus original de cet ouvrage. Rédigé par le Lord britannique et historien de formation Kenneth O. Morgan, il s’appuie notamment sur les travaux de Pierre Nora et ses célèbres Lieux de mémoire pour dessiner une cartographie brillante des discours, les situant ainsi que le choix du 26 juin 2016 dans la continuité de l’imaginaire de la britannicité, et notamment des représentations héritées de la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Quoique ce chapitre pêche parfois par un déterminisme excessif confinant la décision de sortie de l’UE à la dépendance au sentier, la minutie de l’examen produit ne manque pas d’éclairer la motivation d’un événement historique d’envergure. Un portrait d’ensemble eut requis de proposer une analyse semblable des références héritées du passé et mobilisées par les Remainers, et la qualité de l’écriture de ce chapitre ne manque pas de nous le faire regretter.

Les quatre chapitres qui suivent se penchent plus en détail sur les questionnements d’ordre juridique soulevés par le Brexit. Robert Lane s’intéresse ainsi aux questions de citoyenneté, et aux conséquences tant pour les citoyens britanniques que pour les...
citoyens des pays de l’Union européenne, sans manquer d’approcher l’épineuse question de la frontière nord-irlandaise. Devant un tel va-et-vient du regard entre la loupe et le surplomb, on eut désiré que l’auteur formule quelque proposition normative. La rédaction de ce chapitre est manifestement présidée par un remarquable esprit de synthèse et d’analyse, que n’a pas à lui envier Aurélie Duffy-Meunier lorsqu’elle s’intéresse à l’enjeu des droits de l’Homme et des conséquences du retrait prochain du Royaume-Uni d’un ordre juridique neuf et qu’il a notablement contribué à former. En ouverture, l’auteure se demande si « le nationalisme qui a sous-tendu le Brexit va offrir les conditions nécessaires à un nouvel élan constitutionnel aboutissant sur une constitution écrite » (114). La question est loin d’être inintéressante, et l’auteure évoquant par ailleurs les frictions entre les nations constitutives soulignées de part en part dans cet ouvrage, on remarquera avec surprise l’absence notable de toute référence aux écrits sur le fédéralisme de Michael Burgess. Cette absence se fait d’autant plus sentir dans le texte d’Elizabeth Gibson-Morgan quant au devenir de la constitution britannique. Cette sortie du Royaume-Uni de l'UE suscite ainsi un nombre conséquent de questionnements relatifs à la réattribution de compétences partagées, tant entre les institutions centrales et les institutions dévolues qu’entre les institutions centrales elles-mêmes. Soulignant les risques démocratiques liés tant à une éventuelle re-centralisation des pouvoirs qu’aux vides juridiques laissés par la sortie de l’ordre européen, l’auteure manque toutefois de cette rigueur démocratique lorsqu’elle se satisfait que la Chambre des Lords puisse la jouer solo. Bien que cette institution ait assuré un rôle de garant de l’ordre constitutionnel au cours des derniers mois, l’auteure ne s’offusque pas de ce qu’il s’oppose, parfois avec véhémence, à la volonté exprimée démocratiquement le 26 juin 2016. Néanmoins, elle identifie avec beaucoup de justesse le retournement des attitudes quant à cette institution. En effet, elle remarque que nombreux sont ceux qui s’opposaient à cette institution, la jugeant non-démocratique, et qui lui trouvent aujourd’hui quelque vertu tandis qu’elle rend plus complexe la marche vers le Brexit. À l’inverse, nombre de ses anciens défenseurs les plus obligés étaient des Brexiteers, et ont par suite rejoint les rangs de la remise en cause de la Chambre des Lords.

5 Les conséquences du Brexit sur la coopération judiciaire en matière pénale sont au cœur de la réflexion d’Akila Taleb-Karlsson. L’enjeu, non dépourvu d’intérêt, permet de souligner l’attitude britannique tout au long de la construction européenne et les demandes incessantes de traitement différencié. La synthèse analytique ne manque ainsi pas de valeur, quoiqu’elle se fonde très abondamment sur deux auteurs, Valsamis Mitsilegas et John R. Spencer cités à quatorze (!) reprises en quinze pages. De plus, et alors que l’écrit se distingue par sa remarquable neutralité axiologique, elle est brutalement rompue dans ses dernières lignes, par un appel à un Winston Churchill désirant que chaque citoyen européen puisse dire d’un autre pays qu’il est aussi le sien. Cette adresse est ponctuée des mots de l’auteure : « puissent ces espoirs se matérialiser un jour » (138). On rappellera ici à l’usage qu’en dépit de son désir de collaborer avec l’Europe, Winston Churchill déclara également ceci : « si la Grande-Bretagne doit choisir entre l’Europe et le grand large, elle choisira toujours le grand large ».

6 Le regard vers le lointain guide également la réflexion de Thibaud Harrois, qui s’interroge quant à la place future du Royaume-Uni. En effet, nombreux ont été les partisans du Brexit affirmant que la sortie de l’UE serait l’occasion de renouer les liens avec les anciennes colonies et les membres du Commonwealth. Toutefois, l’auteur relève que cette stratégie pourrait bien se solder par un échec puisque nombre de ces
pays ont acté des partenariats avec l’Union européenne. Comme Thibaud Harrois le souligne, Theresa May a bien pu donner des gages à ses partenaires historiques, au premier rang desquels les États-Unis d’Amérique, mais l’approche isolationniste adoptée par Donald Trump apporte un lot conséquent d’incertitudes. L’incertitude est également le mot d’ordre du chapitre d’Alexis Chommeloux, qui s’intéresse à la manière dont le monde des affaires se prépare au Brexit. Revenant abondamment sur la campagne, et particulièrement sur la manière dont le camp des Brexiteers s’est adonné aux déclarations démagogiques, il souligne la manière dont le monde des affaires s’est largement investi en faveur du maintien dans l’UE. À la suite de ce référendum, le lien qui l’unissait (particulièrement la Confederation of British Industry) au Parti conservateur paraissait s’être passablement étiolé. Au cours des mois qui ont suivi, la CBI a renouvelé sa contribution, produisant rapports et expertises afin de garantir le meilleur sort possible à l’économie britannique. Reste qu’à l’incertitude qui a caractérisé la période pré-Brexit succédera un nouveau temps d’adaptation, mais aussi la réouverture de nouveaux possibles et de nouvelles opportunités.

En conclusion, il ressort que les auteurs sont largement parvenus à échapper au piège prospectif. L’état des lieux proposé couvre l’essentiel des enjeux que suscite la sortie prochaine du Royaume-Uni de l’Union européenne. La finesse de l’écriture en rend la lecture des plus agréables. On regrettera toutefois que l’exigence de neutralité axiologique ait été si peu observée, les jugements de valeurs succédant parfois inopportunément aux jugements de faits. De plus, la question nord-irlandaise aurait mérité a minima un article entier sinon un ouvrage comme ne manquent pas de le souligner Géraldine Gadbin-George et Juliette Ringeisen-Biardeaud (15), tant le Brexit y suppose une multiplicité de conséquence et tant elle a joué et joue encore un rôle considérable dans les négociations et prises de positions.

NOTES

1. En réalité, les sondages révélaient des écarts trop faibles pour que les auteurs puissent s’avancer à dire que le résultat s’est figuré « contre toute attente » (Introduction – 12).
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Mots-clés : Royaume-Uni, Brexit, Union européenne, Partir en solitaire

Keywords : United Kingdom, Brexit, European Union, Going solo

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George S. Schuyler, *Black No More. Ou le récit d'étranges et merveilleux travaux scientifiques au pays de la liberté entre 1933 et 1940 après J.-C*  

Christine Dualé

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**RÉFÉRENCE**


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1 Que se passerait-il si l’Amérique réglait son problème racial en donnant la possibilité aux Noirs de devenir blancs grâce à un procédé médical ? C’est ce que le bien nommé docteur Junius Crookman, un escroc de génie, propose à la communauté noire de Harlem au début des années 1930 grâce à un mystérieux procédé de son invention. Max
Disher se porte immédiatement volontaire et laisse « sa vie de nègre derrière lui » (42) car sa peau est devenue « couleur de porc » (42). Aux termes d’aventures rocambolesques, liées aux préjugés raciaux encouragés par une société qui a su établir « la frontière raciale » (59), Max Disher arrive à tirer avantage de sa nouvelle situation et sa nouvelle vie est prétexte à proposer une satire de la Renaissance de Harlem alors que les intellectuels noirs se préoccupaient de construire la culture noire américaine et appelaient à la fierté raciale.


3 Dès la dédicace, le message de George Schuyler se veut provocateur puisque le roman commence sur ces mots : « Ce livre est dédié à tous les Caucasiens de la grande République qui peuvent faire remonter leurs origines jusqu’à la dixième génération et affirmer sans ciller que leur arbre généalogique n’a pas la moindre branche, brindille ou feuille noires » (15). La question du métissage, encore très tabou dans les années 1930, est abordée dès les premières pages à travers un lexique riche et tout en nuance dont la traduction très fine permet d’évaluer le grand talent d’observateur, doublé d’une grande subtilité, de George Schuyler. Toutes les nuances de couleur de peau et les métissages possibles sont décrits par Schuyler et témoignent de ses qualités littéraires et de sa grande maîtrise du lexique qui est fort bien rendu en français. La palette des couleurs est riche et précise : « sa peau était marron clair » (21) ; « sa belle nègresse dorée » (21) ; « ma damnée jaunasse » (22). Mais Max Disher et son acolyte, Bunny Brown, préfèrent « les filles café au lait » (23) aux vraies « nègresses » ou aux femmes couleur « charbon » (23). George Schuyler propose donc une solution au sujet le plus épineux de la société américaine. [...] S’il n’y avait plus de Noirs, il n’y aurait plus de problème noir » (63).

4 Black No More raconte les aventures de Max Disher qui rêve d’une vie sans obstacles et de laisser « derrière [lui] les insultes, l’ostracisme, la ségrégation et la discrimination » (67). Hypnotisé par une superbe blonde rencontrée dans un bar de Harlem et qui lui refuse une danse puisqu’elle « ne danse jamais avec les nègres » (28), il se prend à rêver d’un monde inverse, l’antithèse de ce qu’il connaît depuis toujours : « il rêva qu’il dansait avec elle, dînait avec elle, roulait en voiture avec elle, siégeait à côté d’elle sur un trône en or pendant que des millions d’esclaves blancs entravés se prosterneraient devant lui » (29). Après l’intervention du Dr Crookman, Max Disher devient le blanc Matthew Fisher et voit son rêve prémonitoire se réaliser. Cependant, cette transformation est avant tout le résultat d’une manœuvre opportuniste où l’idéologie
Maniant l'ironie et le sarcasme avec habileté, les aventures du héros de George Schuyler ne sont pas sans rappeler celles d'un autre personnage, Jesse B. Simple, créé par Langston Hughes une décennie plus tard. Hughes avait déjà répondu à « The Negro-Art Hokum », que Schuyler avait publié en 1926 dans « The Nation », avec son célèbre manifeste « The Negro Artist and The Racial Mountain ». Schuyleravançait que les Noirs américains n’avaient pu créer une forme d’art qui traduise et reflète leur culture en raison de l’influence de la culture blanche : « there’s no such thing as African-American art because of the influence of white models and participations of Whites. African American art is just American art » (“The Negro-Art Hokum,” George S. Schuyler, Nation 122 (June 16, 1926) : 662–3). Pour George Schuyler, Blancs et Noirs étaient exposés à la même culture et il n’existait pas un art noir américain, ce en quoi il s’opposait à Hughes qui lui répondit à travers son manifeste en exhortant les artistes et écrivains noirs à se débarrasser du complexe d’infériorité et à revendiquer leur fierté raciale : « J’ai honte pour le poète noir qui dit « je veux être un poète, pas un poète nègre », comme si le monde de sa race n’était pas aussi intéressant qu’un autre monde » (Hughes, in Richet, ed, 1993, 131). Avec Jesse B. Simple, Langston Hughes réagit au héros de Schuyler mais en proposant un personnage qui convenait à la fois aux stéréotypes des Blancs et des Noirs. En réinvestissant les stéréotypes et en se les réappropriant, Hughes remit subtilement en cause le système dominant. Grâce à l’autodérision et au vocabulaire de son personnage il proposa des effets de drôlerie et de mise à distance tout en révélant une culture noire protéiforme, produit de la culture blanche mais aussi de l’expérience noire. Son succès fut immédiat alors que le portrait incisif de Max Disher/ Matthew Fisher et le point de vue beaucoup plus radical de George Schuyler ne lui offrirent pas la reconnaissance escomptée. Schuyler rejetait aussi la masse populaire, qu’elle soit blanche ou noire, pour son manque d’éducation et son provincialisme mais il n’hésita pas non plus à satiriser l’élite noire dans Black No More. Avec son héros, Schuyler dénonce l’endoctrinement idéologique et religieux dont étaient victimes le prolétariat blanc avec le Ku Klux Klan, et les Noirs avec la religion : « la similarité entre cette réunion et les orgies religieuses des Noirs les plus ignorants l’amusait. […] Il se rendit vite compte qu’ils goberaient n’importe quoi s’il le braillait avec assez de force et de conviction » (88).
pour les Noirs qui « arrivaient du Sud en troupeaux sans cesse plus nombreux »

(99) pour fuir la violence et la ségrégation raciale ; ce que confirme l'historien Ira Berlin dans The Making of African America. The Four Great Migrations (2010):

If greatness is measured by size, the Great Migration was great indeed. Between America’s entry into the European war and the stock market crash in 1929, black men and women left the South at an average rate of 500 per day, or more than 15,000 per month. The evacuation of the black belt was particularly striking. [...] By 1930, more than 1.3 million resided outside the South, nearly triple the number at the turn of the century (Berlin 154).


Toute l’ambiguïté de Schuyler réside dans son double discours mêlant à la fois fierté raciale et rejet de son appartenance, proposant une attitude extrémiste pour audissitôt la fustiger. Il exprime, en définitive, son insatisfaction que l’on soit d’un côté ou de l’autre de « la ligne de couleur » (the color line). Cette œuvre satirique, révèle aussi un auteur aux connaissances encyclopédiques et très en avance sur son temps puisqu’il évoque, bien avant la relecture des années 1990, l’héritage et le métissage multiculturels américains dans une langue très maîtrisée et impeccablement traduite. « Original et atypique, le roman de Schuyler nous offre un point de vue décapant sur l’hypocrisie, la démagogie et les magouilles populistes accompagnant l’obsession américaine pour la
couleur de peau» (Reed, Préface). Ce roman montre aussi que les intellectuels de la Renaissance de Harlem ne parlèrent pas tous d’une seule et même voix et que ce mouvement fut loin d’être uniforme.

Comme le rappelle Ishamel Reed dans l’introduction au roman, « il n’y a rien de comparable » (11) à Black No More. Ce livre qui n’a pas eu la reconnaissance littéraire qu’il méritait, car il ne correspondait pas aux dictats de l’époque et la devançait, doit à présent être considéré pour ce qu’il est : « un classique américain » (11). La traduction très soignée et réussie de Thierry Beauchamp invite les lecteurs francophones à découvrir ou redécouvrir cette œuvre oubliée mais aussi le Harlem des années 1930 à travers un observateur à la marge intellectuelle mais un témoin subtil, intelligent et drôle de son époque.

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Mots-clés : antihéros, discrimination, fable, Harlem, humour, littérature afro-américaine, pamphlet, problème racial, relations Blancs/Noirs, Renaissance de Harlem, satire

Keywords : African American literature, anti hero, discrimination, Harlem, Harlem Renaissance, humor, lampoon, racial problem, satire, Whites/Blacks relations

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Arnaud Dubois, Jean-Baptiste Eczet, Adeline Grand-Clément et Charlotte Ribeyrol (ed.), *Arcs-en-ciel et couleurs*

Armelle Sabatier

**RÉFÉRENCE**

« On se doit, à propos de la couleur, de toucher à la philosophie, à la théorie du langage, à la psychologie cognitive, à l’histoire culturelle, à l’histoire des sciences, à l’histoire de l’art. Peu de thèmes réclament autant d’interdisciplinarité ». Les propos de Jacques Le Rider sur le caractère polymorphe inhérent à toute étude sur la/les couleur(s) son t, encore une fois, parfaitement illustrés par le très bel ouvrage collectif consacré aux liens entre les couleurs et le phénomène météorologique de l’arc-en-ciel. Dans ce volume, des universitaires issus de disciplines différentes ont réuni douze chapitres structurés en triptyque, qui interrogent le lien apparemment indissociable entre l’arc-en-ciel et le spectre des couleurs, une construction culturelle profondément ancrée dans nos sociétés occidentales et qui façonne la perception des couleurs chez les Occidentaux depuis presque trois siècles. Une cinquantaine d’illustrations en couleurs, de très grande qualité, viennent étayer les diverses argumentations des auteurs, sans compter de nombreuses reproductions en noir et blanc insérées dans le texte de certains chapitres. Les chapitres, extrêmement savants et rigoureux, comportent, à chaque fois, une bibliographie très riche.

Le point de départ de cette étude transversale, qui englobe des sociétés et des siècles très divers, met en lumière le préjugé tenace (même pour les chercheurs avertis qui ont participé à ce volume) selon lequel l’arc-en-ciel est lié à la couleur, plus particulièrement aux sept couleurs mises en évidence par Isaac Newton, dès la fin du XVIIème siècle, lors de ses expérimentations sur la lumière : cette révolution scientifique a été théorisée dans son Traité d’Optique (1704). Or, comme le souligne l’introduction, l’ordre des couleurs ne correspond pas au phénomène naturel que nous percevons dans le réel : « sa polychromie s’inscrit dans des formes bien définies et obéit à des conventions » (p.7). Le prisme établi par Newton, reposant sur sept couleurs est devenu au fil du temps, et encore de nos jours « l’index des couleurs, voire de la couleur » (p.9). L’équivalence entre le spectre des couleurs et l’arc-en-ciel théorisé par Newton finit par s’imposer au XIXème siècle. Néanmoins, les conclusions des travaux scientifiques de
Newton ont été contestées par de nombreux auteurs, en particulier Johann Goethe qui s’oppose à cette rationalisation des couleurs dans son ouvrage *Théorie des couleurs*, publié en 1810. Ainsi, à cette époque émergent deux approches différentes de la couleur : celle de Newton qui s’appuie sur les lois de la physique, donc des « couleurs objectives », et la théorie de Goethe qui défend la perception subjective des couleurs, une perception qui varie d’une culture à une autre (« couleurs subjectives »). Il est à noter que cette division existe encore de nos jours : la perception des couleurs ne se limite pas à la neuroscience, aussi passionnante soit-elle. Notre cerveau est aussi influencé par la culture, les croyances et les coutumes de la société dans laquelle il évolue, comme l’ont déjà démontré de nombreuses études, comme celles de John Gage (*Colour and Culture*, 1993 ; *Colour and Meaning*, 1999) ou encore les volumes consacrés à l’histoire symbolique des couleurs publiés par l’historien médiéviste Michel Pastoureau. L’approche interdisciplinaire des douze études du présent volume confirme cette vision relativiste de la couleur (par opposition à la vision universaliste de la couleur défendue par Berlin et Kay en 1969). La démarche partagée par tous les auteurs consiste à prendre de la distance avec le système newtonien, à « détisser » (pour reprendre la métaphore de John Keats citée dans l’introduction), en quelque sorte, les liens entre arc-en-ciel et couleurs afin d’offrir de nouvelles perspectives sur ce phénomène naturel.

3 Ces regards croisés sur l’arc-en-ciel construisent un nouveau prisme de la couleur en suivant trois directions. La première partie de l’ouvrage remet en question les savoirs et la rationalisation des couleurs de l’arc-en-ciel établis par Newton au travers d’études anthropologiques, linguistiques et littéraires consacrées à des sociétés très éloignées. Ainsi, le chapitre d’Arnaud Dubois ouvre la réflexion avec l’analyse d’une enquête menée par un groupe de chercheurs de Cambridge, en 1898, lors d’une mission d’un an dans le détroit de Torres, situé entre la Papouasie-Nouvelle-Guinée et l’Australie. Le rapport issu de cette mission aborde, entre autres, la question de la perception de l’arc-en-ciel chez cette tribu, une perception très différente des Britanniques venus les observer. La société victorienne où les théories du physicien anglais commencent à devenir la norme et qui connaît une révolution dans la production des couleurs avec l’avènement des couleurs de synthèse, rejette, en partie, cette rationalisation du spectre des couleurs. Comme le démontre Charlotte Ribeyrol dans le chapitre 4, les poètes anglais tels que John Keats ou encore Oscar Wilde, refusent de réduire la couleur à une rationalisation scientifique qui ne rend pas compte de la complexité et de la diversité de la perception humaine des couleurs. Les deux autres chapitres de cette première partie commencent à annoncer les constats de la deuxième partie. L’étude sur le Japon ainsi que celle consacrée aux Mursi, une tribu composée d’agropasteurs transhumants du Sud-Ouest éthiopien, détissent l’arc-en-ciel newtonien. Dans son chapitre sur le Japon (du XVIIème au XIXème siècles), Marie Parmentier démontre que les théories scientifiques, entre autres celles de Newton, imposées sous l’ère Meiji à la société japonaise, n’ont pas pour autant supplanté des croyances plus anciennes qui subsistent encore aujourd’hui.

4 C’est surtout dans la deuxième partie que le postulat newtonien vacille véritablement dans la mesure où, dans les sociétés anciennes, ce phénomène météorologique pouvait être tout simplement invisible. Ce paradoxe est savamment expliqué par Sylvie Donnat dans son chapitre centré sur l’Égypte ancienne : l’arc-en-ciel serait inexistant à cette époque, du moins dans les textes disponibles à ce jour. L’auteur avance une raison purement météorologique, à savoir que ce phénomène naturel est plutôt rare dans ces


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INDEX

Keywords: anthropology, Bible, colours, Egypt, Ethiopia, Japan, light, purple, Quetzalcoatl, rainbow, Torres strait

Mots-clés: anthropologie, arc-en-ciel, Bible, couleurs, détroit de Torres, Égypte, Éthiopie, Japon, lumière, pourpre, Quetzalcoatl

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Charlotte Gould, *Artangel and Financing British Art: Adapting to Social and Economic Change*

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REFERENCES

Since Iain Pears’s *The Discovery of Painting* (1988) and David Solkin’s *Painting for Money* (1993), art historians have demonstrated the fruitfulness of exploring British art through the lens of the art market, patronage and cultural policies. They have shown that the funding models of art, whether they involve institutions or patronage, or both, actually shape art practices as much as they respond to artists’ creativity.

Charlotte Gould’s book, which explores the contemporary social, economic and institutional contexts of art in Britain through the case study of Artangel, is a noteworthy addition to this relatively new branch of scholarship.

Artangel is an independent art commissioning agency, created in 1985, whose main activity has consisted in promoting and funding adventurous artistic creation in the context of a major paradigm shift in cultural production, and especially in response to the emergence of cultural capitalism and to the unreliability of public funding in post-consensus Britain. Its original approach combines a flexible hybridised funding model (with funds being provided by Arts Council England, private donors as well as corporate sponsors), active participation towards the completion of contemporary artistic projects rather than simple funding, and at the same time a conscious decision to give artists as much creative independence as possible in order to advance the cause of contemporary art. As Gould puts it, Artangel “allow artists to commission themselves”. The agency’s lasting success in the last thirty years is due to its adaptability to changing social, political and economic conditions, and above all to its ability to embrace the new terms of artistic creation. This includes its awareness of the central importance of the interaction of art and place in contemporary creation (it has actually become a leader in location finding), and its acceptance of the ephemeral in productions that are embedded in transient spatial and temporal contexts.

Gould’s study of Artangel is a compelling exploration of the recent reshaping of the art world in an age when the distinctions between private and public patronage are
becoming blurred and when the process of creation has become as important as the product, often leading to ephemeral, “pop-up”, interventions, and productions in which the locus of creation is merged with that of exhibition.

The book highlights the intricate connection between artistic forms and funding models through a thorough exposition of the mechanisms and fluctuation of funding for art since the 1980s, and examines a wide range of responses to the shifting forms of state funding that have been experimented with since the first Thatcher government.

It also explores Artangel’s contribution to the redefinition of the location of art in the post-museum age, at a time when the boundaries between public and private, aesthetic and commercial spaces are being redrawn. It raises important questions about the recent redefinitions of the public sphere, their contested nature, and the way they shape spectatorship and creation, without seeing these new conditions as necessarily a source of constraints on artistic expressions. It especially highlights Artangel’s encouragement of site-specific creations that play a vital role in contemporary urban environments and cultural geographies, by reviving depressed areas, by retrieving hidden or underlying meanings that official urban planning decisions had suppressed, as well as by interacting with the fabric of everyday life and thereby fusing the processes of artistic creation with those of the city. At the same time, it does not hide the fact that these creative uses of urban spaces have an ambiguous status, especially when they contribute to gentrification processes or are instrumentalised by developers, and can be a source of social tensions, for example when works of art are inserted in poor neighbourhoods, as in the case of Roger Hiorn’s 2010 Seizure (pp. 103-104) or planned in contested spaces (pp. 107-110).

There are many thought-provoking pages on Artangel’s interactions with the recent reconfigurations of London, and its predilection for transitional and unstable spaces, often caught in the midst of redevelopment projects, that are in themselves a source of innovation and whose latent energy can be fused into the artwork. Numerous examples of creative uses of London’s transitory fabric and in-between spaces are given, including Daniel Silver’s 2013 Dig, a pretend archaeological site in near King’s Cross, Richard Wentworth’s An Area of Outstanding Unnatural Beauty (2002), a 10-week multi-activity programme around the same King’s Cross area at a time when it was being redeveloped, or Roger Hiorn’s Seizure.

Gould makes it obvious that Artangel is more than an illustration, but a lens through which the contemporary art world, its creative and productive mechanisms, its agents and institutional framework, as well as its discursive processes of production, may be understood. And as she examines how Artangel has navigated the ambiguities of the post-consensus context in Britain, which saw the disengagement of the state and various forms of cultural capitalism alternate with regenerative and socially committed cultural policies, while the boundaries between private and public spheres oscillated and evolved, she gives the reader a good idea of the bigger picture. The history of the agency provides a remarkable insight into the new spirit of artistic production, its new focus on project and process rather than product, on “a certain type of experience” and on the siting of works rather than the commodification of art.

Because of this new focus, the task of the art historian is as much to account for the processes of production, financing, location hunting, as it is to describe the product. Gould’s study is a very convincing illustration of this new requirement, of the necessity to approach the production process differently, through all its facets, especially its...
interaction with specific locations and the meaningful contexts that these provide. Yet, occasionally, the reader may experience a desire to know more about the artworks themselves. The numerous artistic projects that are mentioned are very convincing illustrations of what Artangel stands for and of the numerous contexts, agencies and intentions at work in the creation of contemporary art, yet they may remain tantalisingly elusive to a reader who expects more concrete evocations. It is difficult not to read Gould’s study without wanting to know more about the configurations, however transient, of some of the Inner City performances (1998-99), of Andy Goldsworthy’s *On Hampstead Heath* (1985-86), of Ben Rivers’ 2015 project *The Two Eyes are not Brothers*, or of the *A Room for London* project (p. 99), for example.

Perhaps, however, these artworks have to remain elusive, as their *raison d’être* is precisely the transient part they play in the life of the city, which can be experienced better than it can be captured. In which case Gould’s book is a very persuasive evocation of the new artistic paradigm that Artangel represents, in the age of “post-object” art, in which the cultural importance of the artwork matters more than its actual presence. It also underscores the exclusive nature (and possible elitism) of projects that were in many cases only accessible to a restricted number of viewers, and may only be appreciated through virtual afterlives. The book’s main value, however, lies in its ability to convey the thriving and innovative art scene of Britain, of London in particular, in the last three decades, and to highlight its connections with changing socio-economic conditions, ideological commitments and cultural policies. As such, it raises many compelling issues for anyone with an interest in contemporary art, British cultural policies, and also contemporary British society.

### INDEX

**Keywords:** cultural policies, contemporary art, patronage, creative processes, site-specificity, London

**Mots-clés:** politiques culturelles, art contemporain, mécénat, processus créatifs, art in situ, Londres

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Dans sa présentation de la revue *Les Temps Modernes*, qui paraît chez Gallimard à partir d’octobre 1945, Jean-Paul Sartre revendique l’engagement de l’écrivain dans son époque : « Puisque l’écrivain n’a aucun moyen de s’évader, » écrit-il, « nous voulons..."
qu’il embrasse étroitement son époque ; elle est sa chance unique, elle s’est faite pour lui et il est fait pour elle ». C’est cette rencontre, jadis reniée par le modernisme, qui se trouve au cœur de Matière à réflexion, publié en 2018 par Catherine Bernard aux Presses Universitaires de Paris Sorbonne. Sous-titré Du corps politique dans la littérature et les arts visuels britanniques contemporains, cet ouvrage soigné de 362 pages s’attache à examiner la manière dont la représentation artistique met en forme et réfléchit le politique dans un contexte de crise. Spécialiste de la modernité esthétique et auteur, entre autres, d’une édition critique d’essais de Virginia Woolf, Catherine Bernard se penche en particulier sur les effets de la dérégulation économique sur les pratiques esthétiques. Dans un contexte de dérèglement du tissu social exacerbé par les effets du libéralisme économique thatcherien, écrivains et artistes, nous dit-elle, « retournent le sentiment de crise contre lui-même pour en faire un moment d’intellection historique » (19). Ainsi c’est bien une renaissance qu’évoque ici Catherine Bernard, pour qui le concept de représentation, loin de l’épuisement qu’on a pu lui prêter, se trouve « réincarné et revitalisé » (303) par la création littéraire et artistique britannique contemporaine. « Plus que jamais, » nous dit-elle, « la littérature et les arts plastiques britanniques se veulent comptables de ce qui nous délie et nous lie » (21).

Ouvrage érudit, dont le propos s’appuie sur des sources nombreuses, variées et maîtrisées, tant du point de vue du corpus primaire que de l’appareil critique qui permet de l’appréhender, Matière à réflexion propose ainsi un parcours analytique optimiste au terme duquel l’imbrication entre art et société se trouve réaffirmée : « l’art et l’écriture pensent le monde, car ils sont à son contact » (304). Certes, ce constat n’est pas nouveau. Espace de production et de mise en scène, la représentation constitue l’un des rouages essentiels de la culture dont elle construit, par des moyens visuels autant que verbaux, certains positionnements idéologiques. Roland Barthes rappelle que l’image « est un objet travaillé, choisi, composé, construit, traité selon des normes professionnelles, esthétiques ou idéologiques, qui sont autant de facteurs de connotation ». Elle n’est pas seulement perçue, elle est « relue, elle est lue, rattachée plus ou moins consciemment, par le public qui la consomme, à une réserve traditionnelle de signes ». Ainsi, loin de n’être que spectateur de l’image, celui qui la regarde en fait partie intégrante, projetant sur celle-ci des constructions et valeurs « toujours élaborés par une société et une histoire définies ». Mais par-delà cette présence de l’artiste dans son époque, l’originalité de l’approche de Catherine Bernard consiste à aborder cet engagement au prisme de la sensation. Dans Matière à réflexion, c’est la matérialité même de l’œuvre, et pas seulement son sujet, qui réfléchit, qui fait réfléchir sur le politique. Charpentée en trois temps — « sonder l’imaginaire malade du monde contemporain » (30) (chapitres 1 et 2), « incarner la mémoire collective » (141) (chapitre 3) et « faire société malgré tout » (chapitres 4 et 5) — la trajectoire analytique de l’ouvrage nous mène de la désagrégation sociale au « bruissement du nous » (286), du démembrement aux « entrelacs complexes du sens et de la sensation » (70).

soi » et mise en œuvre, nous dit Bernard, sous la forme d’une vision allégorique exacerbée, devient ici une forme de résistance à la fin du monde, à la fin d’un monde. Fracturer la forme pour ne pas disparaître. Dans cette « dramaturgie du politique » (88), le corps — physique, social — devient lisible. Et tandis que les romans de guerre donnent à voir la « nudité même des rapports de force » (89), formule empruntée à Foucault, l’image, celle de McQueen dans <em>Hunger</em> (2008), par exemple, « fait de la matière organique le vecteur d’une réflexion politique sur la citoyenneté » (112). Le partage du sensible s’inscrit ici dans une perspective <em>from below</em>, où focalisation interne et corps subalternes meurtris révèlent les mécanismes du trauma (95).


5 Le corps — charnel, textuel — ainsi investi comme lieu de reconstruction ; ne reste alors à l’art qu’à repenser, à réinventer la communauté. C’est là l’objet des deux derniers chapitres, « Corps habités/corps habitant » et « Multitudes et communauté », où, explique Catherine Bernard, la notion de représentation esthétique et politique se voit court-circuitée au profit d’expressions, de présents « labiles, fugaces, insaisissables » (186). Au « morcellement qui les tenait indéfiniment à distance de leur propre temps, » il s’agit ainsi pour les humbles et déclassés qui peuplent les films de Ken Loach comme les récits d’Irvine Welsh, de Zadie Smith ou de Caryl Phillips, d’opposer ce que Jacques Rancière nomme « une fragmentation qui leur en rend la maîtrise et construit un possible nouveau ».4 Reconquérir le temps, c’est reconquérir le visible. C’est par une écriture de la colère autant que par la multiplicité des voix narratives que s’opère cette reconquête, toujours en devenir : « Le commun reste, plus que jamais, à imaginer » (310).

6 Solidement nourrie par la production littéraire, artistique et théorique contemporaine, ainsi qu’en attestent une bibliographie de 37 pages qui fait la part belle aux textes critiques et un index fourni et subdivisé en trois catégories (écrivains, artistes et cinéastes, philosophes et critiques), cette étude constitue de toute évidence une référence essentielle pour les spécialistes des questions abordées. Peut-être s’adresse-t-elle moins directement à un public plus large — celui, par exemple, des anglicistes ou des amateurs de littérature britannique — en raison de la technicité de la terminologie utilisée par endroits, qui peut parfois faire écran à la démonstration. Comme si Catherine Bernard elle-même hésitait à entrer en contact avec cette matière qui nourrit son propos, comme si à la peau meurtrie de son corpus elle opposait un argumentaire lisse, policé : une peau lissée. Et tandis que son lecteur est d’emblée saisi par la puissance de certaines œuvres citées, il peut, en fonction de sa formation théorique, se trouver dérouté par la formulation quelque peu absconse de leur analyse (116). Restent la finesse, la précision et le ciselé de <em>Matière à réflexion</em>. Reste également
l’apport considérable de cette étude à la confluence de la littérature, de l’esthétique et de la philosophie, qui donne la mesure des liens unissant art, société, fiction et politique.

NOTES

3. Ibid., 940.
4. Ibid., 946.
6. Ibid., 37.

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Mots-clés : littérature, arts visuels, cinéma, peinture, politique britannique 20ème siècle, Thatchérisme
Keywords : literature, visual arts, cinema, painting, 20th c. British politics, Thatcherism

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Ana Mª Manzanas Calvo, Jesús Benito Sánchez, *Hospitality in American Literature and Culture. Spaces, Bodies, Borders*

Isabelle Keller-Privat

REFERENCES

Ana Mª Manzanas Calvo and Jesús Benito Sánchez’s analysis of hospitality in American literature and culture is a seminal study. It does not only offer a rejuvenated and intensely stimulating perspective on American immigrant literature and visual arts in a beautifully written and consistent essay, but it also explores the ethics and praxis of hospitality through a simultaneously comprehensive and analytical approach that foregrounds paramount issues in modern day Humanities.

The volume first investigates what the authors have called “a genealogy of hospitality” (n.p.) and delves into the ambivalent etymology that confronts hospitality and hostility, the guest and the ghost, hospitality and hostipitalizing. Relying on Derrida and Schérer’s work, this philological approach artfully blends in with the examination of ancient and biblical practices of hospitality that are powerfully pitted against the cruel inhospitality of our contemporary history. Hospitality is thus reappraised in the introduction as “a critical lens”, a “paradigm” (7) that enables the authors to reread American culture. Progressively, we are shown how hospitality functions as a trope that reconfigures our relation to space and borders, the self and the other, as well as our perception of time. Indeed, hospitality alters established geographical and intellectual borders and opens up new forms of exchange through which the identity of the Self is constantly questioned.

The first chapter of the book, “Re-Placing Hospitality: (In)hospitable Sites in American Literature” examines the historical loci of hospitality, from the Hebrew Bible to classic American literature: Thoreau’s Walden, Melville’s “Bartelby, the Scrivener,” or Walt Whitman’s “Song of Myself”. Questioning the way Western narratives of hospitality have “turned from a discourse of generosity into a discourse of spatiality and (dis)placement” (19) the authors explore the dichotomy between centrality and alterity, and remind the reader that hospitality initially occurred in the desert, a place of deterritorialization, as Deleuze argues, and not in the striated, territorialized space
of the polis. Therefore, the Self originally encounters the Other in a place where none of them is at-home, through a gesture that is according to Derrida “the deconstruction of the at-home” (Acts of Religion, 364; qtd 23). This principle of indetermination highlights the moving, unstable essence of hospitality that appears therefore not merely as a given individual or social fact, but as a process through which the Self welcomes vulnerability. The superb analysis of Genesis (24), leads the authors to posit hospitality as an ethics of impermanence and dispossession, a momentum of self-abnegation that is both placed and out-of-place, and displaces the dweller on the threshold. Asserting that “place gives way to responsibility” (30), the authors examine issues of power and control that come into play in the politics of hospitality and offer an insightful analysis of Emerson and Melville, finally stating that “it is in Bartleby’s death that the lawyer elicits his final response and assumes ethical responsibility for the Other” (37). The authors go on to explore the articulation between ethical and political hospitality and focus on “Colonial hospitality and the usurpation of lands” that lead them to reframe Kant’s thesis towards “Perpetual Peace”. Legalized hospitality is thus brought into sharp contrast with Emerson’s “full rencontre front to front with his fellow” (Essays and Lectures 521; qtd 35) since it reduces the other to a bodily presence offered a temporary sheltered abode that confines him/her. The narrow, juridical enforcement of the laws of hospitality as defined by Kant is at work, the authors argue, in the institutional inscription of hospitality in the Declaration of Independence that defines the US “as a hosting and hospitable republic” (45) which nonetheless establishes a conditional form of hospitality, reasserting the all-powerful status of the new state. The history of American hospitality, through which Old World immigrants had become the guests of indigenous peoples, before acting as hosts to future generations of migrants while denying the rights of their former hosts is recorded to highlight the complexity of the praxis of hospitality in American culture. From Caliban’s address to Prospero in The Tempest, to Lesley Marmon Silko’s Ceremony (1977), the authors delve into the spectre of inhospitality and show how the host, turned into an unwanted guest, may enact his/her own reempowerment. If the history of hospitality is inseparable from that of inhospitality, turning, as the authors contend, the Promised Land into the Land of Nod and the contemporary guest into an excluded ghost, it also fosters the dream of a communal ideal that relentlessly unsettles self-contained, hegemonic entities.

The second chapter, entitled “Embodying Hospitality. Biopolitics and Capitalist Flows in Steven Spielberg’s The Terminal and Stephen Frears’s Dirty Pretty Things” examines the liminal position of the undocumented migrant in a world where the smooth space of the Land of Nod has become a ruthlessly striated one, crisscrossed by fences, borders and silent, all-seeing monitoring systems. In this dystopic world questions of identity are intimately bound up with political issues of national preservation that do not necessarily entail the protection of the individual’s rights. In such a system the individual is absorbed only to be either incorporated or excluded by the body of the nation-state which the authors define as “thriving on the imposition and multiplication of borders [...] that work at many different levels beyond the geographical” (63) and create inner places of exclusion where the migrant is alienated spatially, legally, linguistically and symbolically in “places of inclusive exclusion” (63). And yet, these redundant bodies, the authors point out, outlining what could be called the bio-ecopolitics of hospitality, usher in a radically new economy by altering the rules of exchange and bringing in new blood to our decaying Western civilization. As
Schérer remarks, “hospitality has and is an economy, in the full sense of the word, because it constantly reestablishes the production and circulation of a flux that would otherwise petrify and impoverish itself” (Zeus hospitalier 126). Must genuine, unconditional and free hospitality necessarily challenge the rules of the Law, as an ethical response and an individual praxis that constantly infringes upon the secular order? Such a Derridean conceptualization of hospitality would then imply a resistance to the hegemony of the state and define hospitality as the praxis of the impossible in a world of binding certainties. Such is the fate of the wandering characters in The Terminal and Dirty Pretty Things where hospitality—or rather hostipitality—serves to ensure the despotic power of the host. In the latter case, the abject embodiment of such power is conveyed by the scars of the migrant organ donors who, far from being the parasites they are supposed to be, turn out to be the very blood and marrow inhospitable economic forces feed upon.

In the third chapter, entitled “Cannibalistic Hospitality. Alex Rivera’s Sleep Dealer,” the reader is brought to ponder the process of incorporation whereby the migrant is absorbed and transformed by the host, to the point that his Otherness is negated and destroyed. Incorporation thus conveys the inherent fear of the Other as the uncanny other and echoes the encounter between Polyphemus and Ulysses which is aptly interpreted by the authors as an instance of cannibalism that “rewrites the discourse of hospitality, for it implies the total dissolution of boundaries” (84). Naturally, such an extreme form of hospitality is resonant with our own colonial and postcolonial history. Alex Rivera’s mock documentary “Why Cybraceros?” and his movie Sleep Dealer shift the focus to the political nature of the individual gesture of hospitality by placing the host in a position of ownership and power and neutralizing the guest into a disposable object of capitalistic production. As individuals are turned into the dismembered bodies of an anonymous labor force, the essay shows how “the human body enters the machine power” and how “within the body the boundaries between hospitality and cannibalism become more entangled” (96-7). The discourse of sci-fi dystopia exposes the perverse nature of a form of Manifest Destiny that enforces the limitless expansion of a mechanistic world where border crossing and cultural exchanges only confine the subject further; any hope of geographical or social mobility, or of humane encounter is crushed. Such is the counter-narrative of the American Dream.

Chapter 4, “We the People of the International Hotel” and the Hotel State: Karen T. Yamashita’s I Hotel, delves into unexpected places of belonging, more specifically the hotel, which despite its economic function within the tourist industry, may also be reappropriated as a displaced home. Based on a careful analysis of Karen T. Yamashita’s I Hotel, this chapter explores what is left of hospitality when the workforce that was initially welcomed becomes unwanted. Such a “sick hospitality” (107) that distinguishes between inclusion (always momentary, and conditional) and belonging (always atemporal, and unconditional) creates inner pockets of exclusion, in-between, grey zones where the migrant must invent new forms of belonging. Out-of-place, yet deeply rooted in a cornered space, the migrant “transforms non-belonging into the genesis for new political articulations” (109). As a result, the authors show how the hotel can operate as a reversible threshold: it is a heterotopia, an alien space transformed by the ageing, dispossessed characters, into a shelter that fosters a renewed community. From a place conceived as a means of “gatekeeping” (113) the hotel comes to provide a home away from home: it turns into an entrenched place of resistance where the characters deploy a democratic form of belonging, a political dwelling of the inhospitable. The
authors thus powerfully show how the hotel may be viewed as a paradoxical “final Destination” (114), a place that articulates memory and commitment, occupation of and dissensus within the common space, and that ultimately redefines the paradigms of belonging. Yamishita’s art lies in the reterritorialization of American history and of Native American myths that confronts the reader with the endless possibilities of a new kind of commonality.

7 In the fifth chapter, “Between Hospitality and Hostility”. Junot Díaz’s “Invierno” invites the reader to confront a family despot, the epitome of Derrida’s paterfamilias, a Dominican father who transforms hospitality into hostility when welcoming his family at JFK airport only to lock them up in the apartment of a new immigrant neighborhood still under construction. While revisiting the topos of mobility, this chapter broadens the scope of the inquiry to include issues of narrative and linguistic hospitality and envisages the power relation between the dominant language of the host and the precarious, marginalized language and narrative of the guest. Confining his wife in the apartment, the father thus bars her from entering a foreign language, and creates another, embedded space of alienation, denying the relational essence of space as a “site of exchanges and coexisting trajectories” (140). Such an insightful demonstration echoes Andrew Benjamin’s hypothesis: “Being-in-common […] marks the primordiality of relationality, and thus what counts as human being needs to be incorporated within a relational ontology” (Place, Commonality and Judgment, 29). Simultaneously, the authors show how the social and linguistic isolation imposed by the father is mirrored and exacerbated by the spatial isolation of the entire community established in the vicinity of a landfill, “a diseased and infectious site, […] a spatial stereotype for unwanted guests” (142).

8 In chapter 6, “Between Hosts and Guests. Ernesto Quiñonez’s Chango’s Fire and Mastery over Place”, the authors further interrogate the logics of an inhospitable urbanism that alienates migrant workers and wonder who is ever permanently at home in a big city. The novel reads as a reappraisal of the urban planning policy of Manhattan that fosters the imaginary self-enclosed spaces where the characters are made to feel the weight of social, ethnic and economic hierarchies. The Barrio, according to the authors, thus stands out as the epitome of “the dissonant, the different, the non-integrable” (155), another locus of memory and resistance, “on the border of extinction” (157). Such spaces bear the imprint of time, of destruction or mere deterioration through sheer neglect, embedded in an ongoing history of deliberate disregard. They are the unseen places of a neglected form of belonging, of a traumatic identity that Julio brings back to life in his narrative. The authors convincingly argue that “eviction and dislocation delineate the contours of the Barrio, and become part of its inner logic […], a pattern that creates what can be called a structural place.” (158) The structuring power of the dismantled, traumatic space, is heightened by the polyphonic reworking of African American spirituals into Latino spirituals, creating a linguistic “architecture of hospitality” (161). Likewise the adoption of Spanglish operates as a “way of repossessing the Barrio and creating a verbal city” (162), a gesture which is strongly reminiscent of Edmond Jabès’s defence of “the hospitality of the book” that metamorphoses the broken and the discarded into something riotously alive. The authors thus convincingly show how “language becomes the place of hospitality” (163), the ideal home of the dispossessed where the Other, the particular, the dissimilar, the uncanny can be made at home. The artful conclusion of this chapter brings the reader to envisage the epistemological implications of literature and the arts that bring us to
realize that “to know always implies to know as Other, with the help of the disruptive power of the imagination” (164).

The last chapter, “Guest/Ghost Object in the Garden. George Saunders’s “The Sempli
calpa Girl Diaries””, is indubitably the climax of the entire monograph that throws the reader into a haunted and haunting world, spurring him to question the invisibility of the Other. The migrant returns as a ghostly guest through the ethereal figures of achromatic immigrant women fluttering in the wind, like the spectral daffodils decorating the gardens of blind, soulless masters. Hanging on a line, like breathing clothes, they embody the devitalized other, the modern version of Billie Holliday’s “Strange Fruit,” who have been simultaneously disempowered and disembodied and turned into signifiers of ostentatious wealth. The garden functions as an anti-Eden where the fruit of knowledge has been replaced by the fruit of consumption. The denial of the immigrant workers’ humanity also entails a devitalization of the natural space: the garden becomes a sinister stage, inhabited by hollow women—“Shape without form, shade without colour, / Paralysed force, gesture without motion” (Eliot, The Hollow Men, 79). Saunders’s gardens usher in an Eliotian “hollow valley” (81) where the birthday gift converts into a deathly performance that dehumanizes the viewer in return. The spectacle is truly obscene, in all senses of the phrase: it throws into the limelight the violent reality that underlies the economic hegemony of the ruling class; as such, it is a perfect illustration of Baudrillard’s definition of the obscene as the apparition of reality: “[...] visible things do not terminate in obscurity and in silence; they vanish into what is more visible than the visible: obscenity” (Selected Writings, Mark Poster ed., Stanford UP 2002 188). And this obscene spectacle is also, in the etymological sense of the word, an ominous sight that will eventually destroy the family’s American Dream: the migrant girls finally run away, leaving the father up to his eyes in debt. Through their final exit, they reveal themselves as being far more than the expected powerless extras: they become the agents of an economic and social reversal that disempowers the affluent, successful family. This power reversal acts as a foil to the initial reversal of hospitality and foregrounds the precarious essence of economic success as fleeing guests and dispossessed hosts eventually come to share the same fate: “They become homeless in a new version of the Land of Nod. Those around them simply register their suffering, a pain that cannot be stopped” (183).

The ethical resonance and the metaphysical and literary significance of this essay is brought about by a superb co-writing that powerfully articulates structural, symbolic and theoretical paradigms to weld a cogent and illuminating investigation of American literature and arts. Through the lens of hospitality, Ana Mª Manzanas Calvo and Jesús Benito Sánchez do not only draw our attention to perceptive works of art and to the ethical commitment at stake: they also urge us to reread the world through the focus of arts and acknowledge the duty of attention and care for the Other that behoves artists, readers and spectators alike.
INDEX

Keywords: contemporary American literature, hospitality, hostility, spectrality, host, guest, space, nomadology, corporality, border, migration, citizenship, identity, nation-state, politics, alterity, belonging, temporality, gift, hotel, cannibalism, incorporation, labor force, globalization, deterritorialization, community, history, Law, language, urbanism, memory

Mots-clés: littérature américaine contemporaine, hospitalité, hostilité, spectralité, hôte, invité, spacialité, nomadologie, corporéité, frontières, migration, citoyenneté, identité, état-nation, politique, altérité, appartenance, temporalité, don, hôtel, cannibalisme, assimilation, main d’œuvre, globalisation, déterritorialisation, communauté, Histoire, droit, langage, urbanisme, mémoire

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Karen McCarthy Woolf (ed.), *Unwritten - Caribbean Poems After the First World War*

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REFERENCES

Unwritten - Caribbean Poems After the First World War is a collection of poems which were inspired by the First World War and written by new and established Caribbean poets. The poems were commissioned by 14-18 NOW, the UK's national program for the centenary of the First World War, the British Council, and BBC. Contains Strong Language. It is thus a creative and imaginative response to the trauma of the First World War, but from a Caribbean and diasporic perspective.

Karen Mc Carthy Woolf's introduction replaces the poems and the whole project in their context. The War Poets (Rupert Brooke, Wilfred Owen, Isaac Rosenberg, Siegfried Sassoon) are of course the main point of departure here as they collectively changed the way the First World War was perceived and have had such an impact on British people's view of the war.

As rightly pointed out by the editor, the present collection by no means tries to diminish the importance or the impact of the War Poets, but tries to complement it by providing a new perspective on this tragic event.

The poets explore various aspects of the Caribbean contribution to the First World War, reacting to specific events or to family stories told by their relatives. An important aim of this collection is to make historical archives come to life by focusing on the human element hidden under archival material. A case in point is the story of the Verdala, a ship which carried about a thousand men who were part of the Third Jamaica Contingent. In March 1916, the ship diverted from its course off Halifax and was hit by a blizzard. The West Indian soldiers, who were inadequately clothed and protected, suffered disproportionately. Frostbite was a major problem and there were over a hundred amputations when the Verdala landed in Canada. This tragic incident is addressed by two young poets in this collection, Charnell Lucien, from Trinidad, and Vladimir Lucien, from St Lucia.
In his "Verdala Chronicles", Vladimir Lucien tells the Verdala story from the point of view of a Caribbean soldier leaving his home island, to be met with a different kind of enemy: not the German troops he expected, but a cold blizzard:

For days, the ship remained out in the bay watching Halifax, Halifax watching it - us.

For days the snow's serene bombardment.

For days our ship rocked gently in
the water's consoling arms, the frigid soft-spoken air

like a useless secretary, bringing no news. (102)

Charnell Lucien's "Broken Letters" and Tanya Shirley's "Letter from France" resort to the letter format, as letters are often what remains in the official archives and help us to understand the trauma experienced by soldiers and their families.

Tanya Shirley's "December 6, 1918: Taranto, Italy" tells the tale of the Taranto rebellion in 1918, when black soldiers were forced to clean latrines and to take the place of Italian workers. Caribbean mythology meets history in this poem as Shirley introduces the semi-mythical character of Nanny of the Maroons, a Jamaican eighteenth-century Maroon leader, to convey the idea of Caribbean soldiers' combativeness and spirit of resistance:

Nanny say I not cleaning any more latrines,
not toiling for no raise of pay.

Nanny say slice a pigeon ope, mix the blood
with gun powder and grave dirt. Smear the face. (112)

Shirley's poem establishes a link between the First World War and the First and Second Maroon Wars in Jamaica, when the Maroons were often led by obeahmen or obeahwomen, like Nanny, who were feared and respected on account of their magical powers.

Other outstanding poems in this collection seek to recover lost voices or presences in the mother country. For instance, Anthony Joseph's "Pride" is about George Arthur Roberts, a Caribbean man who fought in both World Wars and lived in Camberwell for many years on the same housing estate as the poet himself. In September 2016, a plaque was unveiled in Roberts' honour and the estate caretaker, Andrew, seemed to be taking special pride in that event. Past and present are brought together as Andrew, a "rare groover, West London, Jamaican, London soul man" (83), gets to know about Roberts, a "Battalion Bomber" (83) who was "known to throw bombs like coconuts"(83).

Another voice recovered by the creative process is that Norman Washington Manley, one of the founding fathers of the Jamaican nation. Manley's vivid account of his war experience inspired Anthony Joseph's "Salt" as well as a beautiful and poetic essay by his grand-daughter, Rachel Manley ("Brothers in Arms") which focuses on her uncle, Roy Manley, who never came back from the war.

This collection also features beautiful pieces by Kat François, Ishion Hutchinson and Malika Booker, and should have a particular resonance in the light of the recent Windrush scandal which shook Britain in 2018. The Windrush generation recently made the headlines when The Guardian revealed that about 50,000 people faced deportation if they could not prove that they had a legal right to reside and work in the
UK. In fact, it was revealed by the media that people of West Indian origin who had been residing in the UK for 40 or 50 years were taken to detention centres to be deported to Jamaica, a country most of them had left at an early age. What happened was that the original Windrush settlers who came in 1948 travelled on "British" passports as countries like Jamaica or Trinidad were British colonies at the time, and the 1948 Nationality Act granted them British citizenship. In 1971 a Commonwealth Immigration Act was passed and restricted access to British citizenship to the people who could prove that one of their grand-parents was born in the UK or had British nationality. The people who came before the passage of this Act had the possibility to formalise their residency status by applying for a British passport, which they had a right to. Many simply forgot to do so, assuming that the British passport they had travelled on in 1948 was still valid. The people who came before 1973 were granted leave to remain by the Home Office and many did not apply for a British passport.

12 In 2013 when Theresa May was Home Secretary, the government adopted a policy which consisted in making Britain a "hostile environment for illegal immigrants". The new law required employers, landlords and the NHS to ask for evidence of citizenship or immigration status. Apparently, some Home Office officials applied the law systematically and when Caribbean people were unable to produce documentation that proved that they had been in residence in the UK for decades, they were threatened with deportation. Some of them were unable to produce adequate documentation as the landing cards used by immigrants in 1948 were destroyed by the Home Office. Proof that these people had been paying taxes in the UK was not accepted. Some Caribbean people lost their jobs, disability benefits or were denied entry back into the UK after visiting relatives in Jamaica. Some of them are still stuck in Jamaica where they are completely lost.

13 It seems that the Home Office had set removal targets and that officials applied the guidelines quite zealously. The Windrush scandal led to the resignation of Amber Rudd, the Home Secretary, in May 2018 and to her replacement by Sajid Javid. Rudd had originally claimed that there were no removal targets set by the Home Office, but The Guardian published a leaked memo which proved that there were such targets.

14 In her thoughtful introduction, Karen McCarthy Woolf draws a parallel between the British government's treatment of Caribbean soldiers during the First World War and the "erroneous and callous deportation" (15) of Caribbean people from the Windrush generation which she refers to as "acts of political vandalism" (15). It is hoped that the present collection will set the record straight concerning Caribbean people's contribution to British life and culture.

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**Keywords**: First World War, Caribbean poetry, Windrush

**Mots-clés**: Première guerre mondiale, poésie des Caraïbes, Windrush
Alexandra Lapierre, *Avec toute ma colère. Mère et fille : le duel à mort.* Maud et Nancy Cunard

Christine Dualé

RÉFÉRENCE


Photographiée par Man Ray en 1926 les avant-bras parés de ses bracelets d’ivoire dont elle tirait une grande fierté, Nancy Cunard est certainement plus connue du grand public pour ce portrait qui incarne la beauté et l’élégance féminine des années folles et son image de « femme fatale » (23) que pour son engagement intellectuel. « Dès leurs
premiers romans, Aldous Huxley et Michael Arlen la décrivent comme une croqueuse d’hommes. Une vamp. L’archétype de la séductrice d’après-guerre » (23). Son rôle majeur et son action dans le monde intellectuel sont pourtant indéniables, elle qui fut une icône, une muse, adulée des artistes et des intellectuels. D’ailleurs, nombreux sont ceux qui louèrent sa « virtuosité intellectuelle » (197).

Dans son essai The Fighting Lady (1926), Georges Sadoul reconnaît : « s’il y eut jamais dans ce siècle une Lady, une grande dame dans le vrai sens du terme, par son intelligence, sa culture universelle, son courage, son désintéressement, ce fut Nancy Cunard » (29) et il ajoute : « l’allure de Nancy frappait et retenait. On voyait d’abord ses yeux très bleus, assez étranges ; son visage fin et osseux ; la crinière léonine de ses cheveux blonds ; puis on s’étonnait de voir ses bras minces, recouverts, des poignets aux épaules, par des bracelets africains en ivoire, dont elle avait la passion » (29-30). On sait aussi très peu sur la mère de Nancy, Maud Cunard, mécène des arts, « l’incarnation de la muse et de la mécène américaine, dans l’Angleterre de Churchill. Le type même de la femme de pouvoir durant l’entre-deux-guerres » (22) qui influença la haute société britannique pendant la première moitié du vingtième siècle.

Sur la base d’évènements ayant réellement eu lieu, Alexandra Lapierre fait remonter avec émotion et sensibilité les souvenirs de Maud et Nancy Cunard afin de retracer leur relation conflictuelle. À travers les portraits croisés de ces deux femmes singulières et paradoxales, Alexandra Lapierre entraîne ses lecteurs dans la vie tumultueuse et romanesque de deux personnalités flamboyantes de l’entre-deux-guerres. Habituée des biographies de femmes oubliées, elle nous fait cette fois découvrir le conflit mère-fille, la tragédie entre Lady Maud-Emerald Cunard et Nancy Cunard ; « deux lutteuses qui auraient pu s’aimer mais ne cessèrent de se manquer, tels deux amants dont les élan ne coïncident jamais » (11). Mais ce roman est aussi une enquête, menée de main de maître par Alexandra Lapierre, pour décrire ce huis clos psychologique et comprendre « les blessures qu’elles s’étaient infligées l’une à l’autre » (21). Le roman s’appuie sur les traces laissées par chacune des actrices de ce drame mais aussi par l’entourage proche. Alexandra Lapierre confie à ce propos : « j’ai reproduit leurs propres paroles dans mes dialogues et mes interrogatoires. Et je me suis systématiquement appuyée sur les écrits des témoins de leurs causes » (12).

Le roman se divise en cinq parties, nous pourrions même dire cinq actes car la vie de Maud et Nancy Cunard s’est jouée comme une pièce de théâtre, une tragédie grecque. Après l’évocation des raisons ayant poussé Alexandra Lapierre à écrire ce roman dans le livre premier (« L’affaire Cunard »), elle nous fait découvrir le monde de Maud et Nancy Cunard en revenant sur leur passé et en les faisant parler. Le livre second (« L’ombre, l’image et le double ») revient sur les origines du conflit entre les deux femmes et le rôle de Diane Cooper, fille illégitime du Duc de Rutland, amie intime de Maud et de Nancy et à laquelle Alexandra Lapierre donne le rôle de médiatrice afin de tenter de résoudre la rupture entre la mère et la fille.

Le lecteur apprend beaucoup sur le passé de Maud Cunard tout au long du roman mais aussi à travers le livre troisième (« Histoire de Maud ») où Alexandra Lapierre se livre aux portraits croisés de ses deux héroïnes. Si Nancy Cunard fut influente dans le Paris des années folles, sa mère, Maud Cunard, le fut tout autant dans l’Angleterre de la Belle Époque et il est très intéressant de voir à quel point ces deux femmes jouèrent des rôles non négligeables dans l’histoire intellectuelle et artistique de leur époque.
Maud Alice Burke, mondaine américaine, est devenue Lady Maud Emerald Cunard en se mariant à l’aristocrate anglais Bache Cunard, héritier de la flotte de paquebots The Cunard Line. Remariée, maîtresse de l’écrivain George Moore pendant de nombreuses années puis du chef d’orchestre Thomas Beecham, Maud Cunard va vivre à sa guise et se consacrer entièrement à la musique ce qui la mène à délaisser sa fille dont la grande solitude est perceptible très tôt. Dépourvue d’instinct maternel, Maud Cunard disait d’ailleurs : « c’est tellement vulgaire d’avoir des enfants! » (124). Nancy est donc confiée à des nurses et des gouvernantes, s’évade grâce à la lecture et tente d’oublier la jalousie supposée de sa mère. Elle côtoie aussi les amants de sa mère et commence, par son intermédiaire, à entretenir des relations ambiguës avec eux. Le cadre du conflit est alors posé : « *her Ladyship* ne supportait pas que j’aie une relation avec lui [George Moore]. Elle se montrait envers nous d’une jalousie féroce. Et ni l’un ni l’autre, nous ne nous en apercevions, tant elle était habile à manipuler nos sentiments... Je me souviens d’un drame à propos d’un roman que j’avais lu en cachette. Mon premier roman. [...] G.M. m’a surprise dans la bibliothèque, le livre à la main, et nous en avons longuement discuté tous les deux. Le malheur a voulu que Miss Scarth [ma gouvernante] entende notre conversation et la rapporte à Milady. Je te laisse imaginer le pugilat » (136-137).

Installée à Londres en 1911 (au 20 Cavendish Street, précisément) Maud Cunard transforme la décoration de son hôtel particulier, fait se rencontrer des artistes d’avant-garde et reçoit tout ce qu’il y a de plus nouveaux et de plus bohème; elle réussit ainsi à conquérir l’aristocratie anglaise. Avec son amant, le chef d’orchestre Thomas Beecham, ils introduisent Nijinski à Londres et imposent les Ballets Russes, « l’aventure la plus excitante » (144) que Maud Cunard ait jamais connue. À cette époque, Nancy a déjà quinze ans, elle se sent très seule et s’ennuie aussi beaucoup car « elle trouvait la terre entière rasoir » (181). Le décor du conflit qui va se jouer est alors définitivement planté.


Nancy Cunard va devenir ainsi le symbole de l’avant-garde anglo-saxonne et française en évoluant parmi les intellectuels avant-gardistes et surréalistes de son époque. Elle est le symbole de la liberté féminine dans une société dominée par le poids des traditions. « Sa beauté, ses audaces, son goût pour l’excès, son appétit pour les hommes et pour les femmes avaient provoqué une multitude de scandales qui éclatèrent à Londres, à New York et à Paris pendant l’entre-deux-guerres » (20). Elle séduisit T.S. Eliot et entretient une liaison avec Ezra Pound. Nous apprenons aussi qu’elle vit pour l’écriture et publie ses premiers poèmes. À vingt-quatre ans, après un avortement dans de mauvaises conditions, elle décide de ne pas avoir d’enfant afin de ne pas reproduire le même schéma mère-fille qu’elle vit avec sa mère. Éprise de liberté absolue, elle
souhaite « ne pas reproduire ces appels dans le désert » (213) mais aussi bénéficier « d’une liberté sexuelle totale » (212).


12 Si Nancy ne partageait aucun des préjugés de sa mère et a lutté sans relâche contre le racisme, sa vision et sa compréhension de la culture noire américaine furent celles de son époque et témoignent d’une forme d’ignorance empreinte de la culture blanche...
colonialiste. Henry Crowder reste malgré tout son grand amour, « la référence absolue de l’existence » (267), « LE point fixe » (266) dans la vie de Nancy Cunard.

Le livre cinquième clarifie aussi ce que le lecteur pressentait déjà et permet de comprendre la rage de Nancy et son conflit de toute une vie avec sa mère qui ne voulut jamais admettre l’ambiguïté et la perversité d’un de ses amants avec sa propre fille alors âgée de quatorze ans. Le voile est définitivement levé sur ce besoin de renouveau permanent et cette angoisse du passé. Maud Cunard décède en 1948 et ne déshérite pas totalement sa fille mais Nancy n’est pas libérée pour autant. Elle voyage beaucoup et « sa vie reste une fuite en avant, une course éperdue vers l’Ailleurs » (315).


C’est avec une émotion palpable qu’Alexandra Lapierre nous amène au terme de la vie de Nancy Cunard redevenue, grâce à ce roman biographique, ce qu’elle n’a cessé d’être : « porte-parole et précurseur de toutes les grandes causes d’aujourd’hui [et qui] éclaire le présent comme un phare » (319). Ce sont ses combats, sa force et sa liberté absolue qui demeurent et qu’Alexandra Lapierre fait originalement revivre ici. Les combats d’« une femme sans contraintes ni limites. Sans entraves sociales, sans entraves intellectuelles, sans entraves sexuelles » (18), tout simplement, les combats d’une femme d’exception.

INDEX

**Keywords** : Anger, aristocracy, bohemian life, black culture, conflict between mother and daughter, cult of the art, freedom, Hours Press, music, patroness of the arts, racism, rage, revolt, roaring twenties, Russian Ballets, salon, unfairness, xenophobia

**Mots-clés** : Années folles, aristocratie, Ballets Russes, bohème, colère, conflit mère-fille, culte de l’art, culture noire, Hours Press, injustices, liberté, mécène, musique, racisme, rage, révolte, salon mondain, xénophobie

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