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Early American Surrealisms, 1920-1940

Surréalismes aux Etats-Unis, 1920- 1940

Americanizing Surrealism: Cultural Challenges in the Magnetic Fields

Anne Reynes-Delobel and Céline Mansanti

- 1 Any attempt at surveying American Surrealisms is likely to attract a certain amount of suspicion insofar as there has never existed such a thing as a large organic Surrealist movement in the United States. Instead, Surrealist activity in America has been characterized by interactions, exchanges, and influences in a number of heterogeneous fields, at different times and in different forms. Despite these discontinuities, between 1920 and 1940, contact with European Surrealism significantly shaped the cultural agendas of American writers and artists. As Dickran Tashjian showed in his 1995 seminal cultural history of Surrealism in America, the American avant-garde's ambivalent response to Surrealism "skewed the politics of American culture at its deepest reaches" (Tashjian 9). Over the past two decades, scholarly interest in the topic has continued to expand our understanding of the variety of practices carried out by American modernists in the attempt to forge their vernacular version of Surrealism and rearticulate the cultural life of the interwar United States.
- 2 The articles included in this issue of *Miranda* present recent scholarly research in the field of literary and visual modernism. They cover a range of subjects, from the role played by avant-garde little magazines to the idiosyncratic Surrealist poetics developed by a number of American writers, poets, and artists. They also reveal important but little-known aspects of the involvement of Breton and other fellow exiles in American culture and politics. The overall objective is to survey the affinities and tensions which marked the assimilation of Surrealism in the United States, and contributed an important chapter to the history of transnational modernism.

Surrealism as cultural challenge

- 3 European Surrealist exile in the United States led to the expansion of Surrealism through significant interactions within a wider network of artists, writers, and intellectuals. These exchanges and encounters were greatly facilitated by the work of a number of curators and art dealers, such as Peggy Guggenheim, Julien Levy, A. Everett

Austin Jr., and Alfred H. Barr who introduced European visual Surrealism in New York as early as 1931. Over the next decade a series of exhibits and publications fueled the interest of the American public. These included the 1931 *Newer Super-Realism* exhibition at the Wadsworth Athenaeum in Hartford, Connecticut, the 1932 *Surréalisme* show at the Levy Gallery in New York, and the 1936 *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* landmark exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. In this context, the arrival of exiled Surrealists in New York in 1941 was greeted with a feeling of goodwill and curiosity on the part of the younger generation of American artists who viewed Surrealism as an opportunity, using it as a chance to develop idiosyncratic forms of expression (Durozoi 393). Coincidentally, Surrealism transplanted to the New World underwent changes on American soil, absorbing and reflecting aspects of American life and culture.

- 4 American interest in Surrealism was characterized from the onset by an attempt to secure a footing in the cultural terrain so as to define a distinctly American artistic identity. In 1932-43, as has been pointed out by Stamatina Dimakopoulou, the Museum of Modern Art's policies sought to include Surrealism "to align a neglected American cultural history with the sources of modern art" (Dimakopoulou 748). Alfred Barr's decision to sponsor Disney animation art, commercial and folk art, as well as work by children and "the insane" in his major 1936 exhibition *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* provides a case in point. A decade earlier, several modernist little magazines had already wanted to absorb European Surrealism so as to express the idea of cultural appurtenance and identity. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, European-based American journals, such as *The Little Review*, *Broom*, and *transition*, brought French surrealism — both in French and in English — to an American readership with a view to encouraging transatlantic exchanges and stimulating the imagination of the younger generation of American writers and artists. For their editors, however, the choice to live in Europe was not to imitate European literature but to create a new form of writing that would revitalize American literature. One of the most enduring of these magazines, *transition*, went a step further by shifting the responsibility of re-articulating cross-national identities into the hands of the young American avant-garde.
- 5 Stemming from the Parisian-based magazine culture, *transition* (1927-38) was instrumental in publishing some fifty pieces by Breton, Aragon, Desnos, Eluard, and others. Yet its main editor, Eugène Jolas, was keen not to be identified as one of Breton's followers but rather as the promoter of an imaginary of circulation and exchange within the networked framework made possible by the magazine format. Shunning Bretonian doctrinaire programmes and established hierarchies, *transition* fueled a process of differentiation based on the creative possibilities offered by the American language. At the same time, a series of forums, letters, and questionnaires prompted contributors to define cultural differences on a variety of topics, including Europe, America, and Surrealism. Such editorial activism quickly delivered results: as early as 1928, Paul Bowles, Wayne Andrews, William Closson Emory, Whit Burnett, Leigh Hoffman, Charles Tracy, and Murray Godwin had published Surrealist writings in *transition*. In her analysis of the journal's literary and cultural achievements, Céline Mansanti has pointed out the main characteristics of this production, including a shift away from a literature derived from the unconscious towards an aesthetics of the fantastic, as well as an emphasis on film scenario and the fairy tale. Taking her cue from Jonathan Veitch, who has associated the term "Super-Realism" — first used by West in 1931 — with "excessive realism," Mansanti has examined the "Super-Realist"

path cut by William Carlos Williams, Nathanael West, and Murray Godwin in their exploration of the material, even scatological, body (Mansanti 200-49). In fostering these literary experiments, as Peter Brooker has noted, *transition* helped shape the cultural environment in which *View* magazine was born, in 1940, “when the exchange with Europe was enacted on the American soil” (Brooker 634).

- 6 Launched in New York in September 1940 by the Mississippi-born poet Charles Henri Ford, *View*, though not a Surrealist magazine, published the major productions of the movement and served as the main forum for exiled Surrealists until 1942, when Breton decided to found *VVV*. Ford, whose first Surrealist “thrill” came through *transition*, turned his attention to the “little magazine” with the aim of emulating inclusive and collaborative exchanges. An earlier editorial venture, *Blues*, which Ford edited from Mississippi in 1929-30, had provided a textual space for a young generation of poets who drew their inspiration from the international avant-gardes. Although several contributions to the magazine reveal the distinct influence of the surrealist experimentations carried out by Soupault and Breton, Ford was more intent on rejuvenating the American modernist idiom than on promoting Surrealism. His prolonged stay in Paris in the 1930s gave him an opportunity to meet the French Surrealists and socialize with the members of the expatriate circle. This first-hand experience further shaped his approach to a form of avant-gardism bringing together “fashionable transatlantic elements and neglected aspects of American talent” (Brooker 635).
- 7 The first issue of *View* appeared several months before the arrival of the Surrealist exiles in New York. Through a combination of literature, visual art, and cinema, the journal’s main objective was to bridge the gap between avant-garde and popular culture.¹ Beyond merely encouraging a dialogue between European and American surrealist views and experiments, Ford intended to use Surrealism as a means to investigate and reclaim marginalized cultural forms. In a context marked by a growing sense of disillusionment towards American conservatism and capitalism amongst writers and artists, *View*’s strong interest in naïve poetry and art, the fantastic, and the macabre stressed the importance, as Fabrice Flahutez has noted, “of a sort of paradigm of the poetic subconscious which was deeply rooted in the American culture” (Flahutez 24).

An American fantastic

- 8 The publication of the “Americana Fantastica” issue of *View* in January 1943 left no ambiguity as to the magazine’s cultural politics. The cover, designed by Joseph Cornell, was a collage juxtaposing diverse iconic elements of popular culture (Native Americans, trapeze and high wire artists, King Kong atop the Empire State Building, and so on) and the natural sublime (Niagara Falls). This pictorial story read as a poetic metaphor of the possibilities offered by indigenous material to the imagination. In an editorial article, Parker Tyler, a former contributor to *transition*, defined the American fantastic as an integral part of the romantic spirit, as Jolas had done before him. He also stressed its subversive and transgressive character:

The fantastic is the inalienable property of the untutored, the oppressed, the anarchic, and the amateur, at the moment when these feel the apocalyptic hug of contraries. (...) It is the real Constitution of a romantic State, and, being primarily

spatial in nature, organizes, without permission, boundaries that arbitrarily include all features of the social. (Tyler 1943, 5)

9 While this opposition to anti-establishment conservatism was in accordance with the tenets of Surrealism, the emphasis laid on the fantastic constituted a departure from the methodological principle of the “marvelous” favored by Breton.²

10 According to the definition given by Tyler, the fantastic coincided with the monstrous. “The monstrous,” he wrote, “is produced by desire without reason. (...) The child’s desire for the moon is monstrous, fantastic and violent.” *View* documented the monstrous with a degree of relish which war-refugee artists from Europe may have found disconcerting. For instance, an essay by Marius Bewley on the American macabre was illustrated with a medical photograph of a face wound. Another picture of maimed limbs was captioned: “Photograph your injuries at once. You cannot photograph your pains but you can photograph the wound. Time heals everything — so photograph it now.” In this essay, Bewley identified the macabre as the result of the conditions in a pioneer society:

The limits of American expansion were achieved by the exploitation of humans, the degradation of slaves, the extermination of natives, the careful cultivation of brutality and callousness. (...) But it was necessary that such rugged characteristics should appear, not as perversions, not as macabre, but as the natural expressions of a robust spirit. (Bewley 18)

11 Being “in close communication with the changes in national temperament,” the macabre sat comfortably in a tradition running in American literature from Crevecoeur to Hawthorne and Poe, Dick Tracy, and pulp fiction. In the mid-1920s, in a piece of improvisation entitled “Rome,” William Carlos Williams had extolled the murderous and the perverted element in American life as a way to reach for a sense of poetic reality. A few years later, in the same spirit, he praised Nathanael West’s use of newspapers as documentary evidence in *Miss Lonelyhearts* (1933) as an example of how writing could drag the known up from the unknown and thus reveal “our daily lack of depth in thought of others” (Williams 1933, 1-2). In leaving violent images almost bald, West combined the narrative efficacy of the comic strip with the naturalistic tradition of John Dos Passos and James T. Farrell.

12 As Mike Weaver has observed, acceptance of the aggression and violence in the American character drove writers to stress the importance of the sensual in art. In a letter written to William Carlos Williams in 1941, Robert Motherwell proposed to americanize Surrealism in four propositions,³ the second of which insisted on “the dignity and value of personal feelings” and “the *felt-content* of the organism’s experiencing.” Williams could not but agree. His foremost concern, Weaver stresses, was the correct naming of internal events (Weaver 140). In his *Novelette*, partially published in *transition* in 1930, Williams had also specifically associated his own notion of automatic writing with corporeal “relaxation” and “relief,” an idea⁴ he emphasized again in an article issued in *View* over a decade later:

Surrealism is just that: Don’t try. An incentive to creation. Only in the unknown lies the inevitable. To me Surrealism is to disclose without trying. Only thus shall we get a healthy literature. (...) OMIT the deductions. There’s a nice word, OMIT. It looks odd. Truncated. Rather close to VOMIT. It might save the world. Omit trying too hard, just enter and look about and do, etc., etc. (Williams 1942, 13)

13 Emphasis on the corporeal, scatological body also featured prominently in the description of Basno Snell’s mock-picaresque journey into the mucous innards of the

Trojan horse in Nathanael West's 1932 novel and, in a lesser measure, in Murray Godwin's *Work on Sidetrack*, serialized in *transition* in 1927 and 1929 (Mansanti 216-228).

- 14 In the letter addressed to Williams, Motherwell's fourth proposition that the American use of the dialectic method would effect "a union between normal consciousness and the unconscious" was also in agreement with Williams's and Tyler's views. According to Tyler's definition: "Surrealism combines in practice the representational value of the image (imagism) and the symbolic value of the image (symbolism) in a sort of dialectical play of values" (Tyler 1940, 44). Yet, as Marjorie Perloff has noted, such dialectic is almost diametrically opposed to the Surrealist definition of "pure psychic automatism" as resting on "neglected forms of associations, in the omnipotence of the dream, [and] in the disinterested play of thought" (Perloff 1996, n.p.). This skewed understanding of Surrealist dialectic (between the literal and the symbolic) casts another light on *View's* editorial choices. It explains, for instance, the journal's support of the Neo-Romantic painting of Tchelitchev. More broadly, it also indicates that, while welcoming Surrealism as a way to steer American art and writing away from the political sense of revolution which had dominated the 1930s, Williams and Tyler, like most of *View's* contributors, did not want to be submerged by a foreign movement. As Motherwell's third proposition made clear, their "revolutionism" would not align with Surrealism forays into the unconscious but would cut its own "trail,"⁵ guided by a sense of "increased *consciousness* of the *possibilities* inherent in *experiencing*."
- 15 Yet, despite its divergence from European Surrealism, *View* played a significant role in the development of the movement after 1940. Not only did Ford's journal facilitate exchanges and collaboration between European and American writers and artists, but it also introduced exiled Surrealists to the American context. Through the magazine, emigrant Surrealists discovered marginal or undervalued forms of popular expressions, and their potential for resistance to the mainstream. As Flahutez has observed, the concept of the "Great Transparent Ones" (*Grands Transparents*) developed by Breton and Matta in the 1940s, owes much to their growing familiarity with American mass culture — including science fiction, the fantastic, and the immensely popular pulp fiction magazines: "Ces *Grands Transparents* que Matta et Breton tentent de formuler sont puisés à la source d'auteurs américains et répondent à cette surenchère — notamment dans la culture populaire — de créer des mythes" (Flahutez 203).⁶ In facilitating the opening of Surrealism to American vernacular culture, *View* contributed to expanding the "limits not frontiers of Surrealism."⁷

Charting "impure" territories

- 16 Despite their awareness of the creative possibilities offered by American mass culture and popular forms of expression the European exiles did not display any particular interest in American material civilization *per se*. Instead, during the course of the 1940s, they went on to elaborate a new "global consciousness" for their time by forging a new poetics of space which combined various European esoteric traditions with North Amerindian cosmogony. The discovery of new landscapes and cultures had a tremendous impact on their view of art and magic. Direct contact with New York art dealers and curators also helped them further their knowledge of Native American — and more specifically Northwest Coast and Southwest — myths and symbols. Soon after their arrival in New York, Amerindian mythologies crystallized their theoretical

choices and prompted their tactical moves.⁸ Following a different route, the young American moderns who were intent on creating literature and art out the phenomena of American popular culture — vaudeville, slapstick, comic strips, cartoons, cinema, and the advertising industry — focused their attention of the kaleidoscopic life of the metropolitan, technological landscape.

- 17 In the second half of the 1920s and the early 1930s, Los Angeles became one of the privileged loci of an investigation of reality which blended surrealistic fantasy with nightmarish grotesquerie. In Hollywood, photographers Will Connell and William Mortensen combined photographic manipulation with cinematographic techniques to lampoon the film industry and mock Tinseltown kitsch. The city's modernity and "impurity" made it the very social and cultural opposite to the nationalist standards and values of the New Deal era. Moreover, by tapping into popular taste and exploring images of sex and violence that took their cue from the Universal monster movies of the 1920s and 1930s, Mortensen made himself particularly anathema to Ansel Adams and the Group f/64 exponents of "simple and direct presentation through purely photographic methods".⁹
- 18 In Nathanael West's 1939 novel, *The Day of the Locust*, Los Angeles is also placed in a diametrically antithetical relationship to the ideal of an "organic folk culture" emphasized by Regionalism. West used surrealistic montage techniques and convoluted imagery to turn the cityscape into the setting of a bizarre, endless masquerade. The novel describes how human beings are relentlessly incorporated into the modern commercialized, consumerist, and mechanized mass society of the metropolis. The only exceptions are foreign elements like Miguel, the "Mexican," who is made immune to assimilation into a nationalist agenda by his very "un-Americanness".¹⁰ In the novel's geography, California, like much of the American West, remains a sort of eccentric outpost in the nation's mind. Pursuing this line of reasoning, other writers came to identify the region with "the dream-ideal" of [their] age" and the very model of authenticity at a time when deceit and counterfeit were rampant. In "California Chronicle," published in *View* in 1940, Edouard Roditi wrote, reversing perspectives: "I hope that Hollywood may continue unchanged, a spot of non-sense in a world which is rapidly lapsing into gloomy ages of utter seriousness and hypocrisy" (Roditi 4).
- 19 In Troy Garrison's or Brion Gysin's depictions of the modern metropolis the urban places and spaces become social critiques. Garrison's "Plaza of the Psychopathic Angels" and Gysin's "That Secret Look" were both published in an issue of *View* edited by Nicolas Calas in 1941¹¹. Garrison's sordid depiction of San Francisco underscores the unglamorous side of the City by the Bay: "The southward tides of traffic and pedestrians move past rotted ancient structures whose windows reflect no light, past what must be the oldest cafe ... and, some five or six blocks away, flow through the backwash of 'B-girl' cafes, burlesques, pawnshops, and human wreckage" (Garrison, 4). Gysin's portrayal of New York City espouses the viewpoint of an outsider to picture the squalid dereliction beneath the garish sights and sounds of the city:

'A town that greets you standing up,' says a writer, and sure enough between the skyscrapers hand festoons of popcorn and ropes of candy beads. Chased by the searchlights of a World Premiere, or is it a 'Spectacle in the Sky' — a mock air raid, one of the rainbows that breathe up from the miasmic Times Square; the exhilaration of a million desires that carpets the sky from the seventeenth floor on up ... The streets below are like the stream of 'The Old Mill' or 'The Tunnel of Love' at Luna Park or Coney Island through whose fog of carbon monoxide you are swept

clutching your neighbor, past bright tableaux; the desert island, the cemetery by moonlight, the axe murderer in the kitchen or famous scenes from fiction. (Gysin, 7)

- 20 As in West's dystopian narration, the hallucinated sequence reveals the "pathos — most often, bathos — of Being as it is grotesquely contorted within the cartoonish dimensions of mass culture" (Veitch, xiii).

Critical pessimism and artistic responsibility

- 21 The convergence of social concerns and surrealist aesthetics in American modernist literature can be traced back to the early 1920s, when the exponents of an American "Super-Realism" defended the use of dark humor and pastiche as a way to encourage critical pessimism and artistic responsibility. The project emerged mainly in response to a fierce attack launched in January 1924 in *American Mercury* by H.L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan against a group of young writers and critics associated with "cosmopolitan" little magazines, including Malcolm Cowley, Matthew Josephson, Waldo Frank, Kenneth Burke, and Robert M. Coates. Using little magazines — such as *Broom*, *Aesthete 1925*, *The Little Review*, and later *transition* — as their main weapon, the group retaliated by fostering a poetics which rejected both the form of cultural progressivism expressed in Mencken's cynical journalistic realism and the model of unity and cohesion defended by Waldo Frank in *Our America* (1919). Instead, as Jonathan Eburne has convincingly demonstrated, it demanded "a degree of critical observation and distance that acknowledged the socially-verifiable presence of the grotesque, the absurd, and the dangerous, rather than sought to purge them from American artistic and intellectual life" (Eburne 537).
- 22 An example can be found in Robert M. Coates's *The Eater of Darkness*, published in Paris by Robert McAlmon's Contact Press in 1926. The novel, rife with pulp and modernist allusions, is an experiment in seeing. It tells the story of Charles Dograr a young artist who has just returned from Paris to embark on a killing spree across New York City with a strange, old man, the inventor of a sort of laser-like death ray. The series of objects the machine looks through humorously conflates major figures of the artistic and literary scene with the products of consumer culture:
- ...a bottle of glue ... the hands of the reader an orange ... a pack of cards a glass eye
two felt slippers the C in a Chop Suey sign a cigarette holder an umbrella Reginald
Marsh a bottle of gin Cigar store coupons, H.L. Mencken, a stiletto, Kenneth Burke,
a stethoscope, a Martini cocktail ... (Coates, 1929 29-32)
- 23 Yet, beneath the humor and modernist hijinks (including interpolated captions, fragmented syntax, unconventional typographic arrangements, an annotated diagram, listings, and footnotes) is a rather grim diagnosis of contemporary society. The text overwhelms the reader with the sensory overload of the urban, modern world, thus hindering any depth of understanding. Further degradation of analytical and creative ability is also presaged by the commodification of literary society illustrated by the metonymical objectification of such literary figures as Dreiser, Burke, or Mencken. As the book's central metaphor—the "x-ray bullet"— suggests, the artist's sole function is to record, machine-like, the violent, grotesque effect of urban capitalist consumer culture, not attempt to change them. In other words, to posit "reform as a project toward which art [can] aim—but which it [can] not itself fulfill" (Eburne 523). Like other exponents of a literary "Super-Realist" poetics, such as Williams and West, Coates

advocated a strong political and social consciousness, albeit one devoid of an affective content or spiritual telos.

- 24 In the realm of the visual arts, other attempts to appropriate Surrealism to the goals of social criticism included the experiments carried by a group of artists, sometimes referred to as Social Surrealists, whose principal exponents were O. Louis Guglielmi, Walter Quirt, and James Guy. As early as 1933, as Ilene Fort has underlined, these painters chose to confront national problems, including issues of unemployment, poverty, and workers' rights, by using surrealist techniques. Although they were not the product of psychic automatism but were based instead, as Ilene Fort has noted, on "life in the real, physical world," their paintings were "as frightening and hallucinatory as European artists' more personal vision while retaining their focus on social problems." Overall, Fort writes, "the radical esthetic of Surrealism enabled American artists to intensify their socio-political statements and thus to present familiar aspects of American life in a new perspective" (Fort 8).

Strange crossings

- 25 Nevertheless, not all early American surrealist experiments aimed at heightening critical consciousness and political awareness. An intriguing exception is the series of objects created in the early 1930s by artist Joseph Cornell and photographed by Lee Miller in 1933. One of them in particular, soberly titled *Object by Joseph Cornell*¹², provides a window into the ways in which these American artists seized upon the experiments with objects they found fomenting in European Surrealism to launch into a highly conscious commitment to exploration and clarification of their vernacular culture and imagination.
- 26 Both Cornell and Miller were only loosely affiliated with the Paris group. Cornell, though he refused the Surrealist moniker, was hailed by Julien Levy as "one of the very few Americans at the present time who can fully and creatively understand the surrealist viewpoint" (Levy 28). His receptiveness to the surrealist idiom, in particular to Max Ernst's collage techniques, attracted Levy's attention. The gallerist included several of the young artist's collages in his pioneering *Surrealism* exhibition of January 1932 before giving him his first solo show by the end of the same year.¹³ For this exhibition, Cornell made about six large "bell jar" objects, three of which he requested Miller — whom he had met through Levy — to photograph in her studio a few weeks later. One of these assemblages stands out among the others. Its composition seems less strictly aligned with Surrealism's figurative and natural iconography, such as hands, eyes, insects, or metronomes. Besides, its inspiration conflates Cornell's interest in surrealist psychic automatism and his passion for vernacular discarded Victorian artifacts.
- 27 *Object by Joseph Cornell* is a tall bell jar — a decorative object commonly used in nineteenth-century households to display dried flower bouquets, wax fruits or foliage, stuffed birds, model ships, clocks, and other handicrafts — containing an angel doll's head placed in a brass cup which is itself delicately balanced on the top rim of a wine glass.¹⁴ The doll's head is punctured by three needles with white threads attached to it. These threads hang loosely over the rim of the glass and their trailing ends are looped around its base. The object's composition and the way it is photographed lay the emphasis on the structure within the structure, thus abstracting the idea of pain

associated with the needles into a sealed, crystalline universe. Miller's ability to create curves, flares, and tiny reflections similar to stellar flashes gives the uncanny assemblage a peculiar aura. The combination of three-dimensional montage and photography forces a stronger sort of focalization — the circumscribed space into which the viewer peers seems to contain a mental image conjured up from infinite space.

- 28 Photographing a severed head in a bell jar was nothing really new. As early as 1926, Claude Cahun had already done it in a series of self-portraits. In 1930, Man Ray and Lee Miller, who were then working together in Paris, collaborated on a photomontage portraying the head of a friend of Miller's in a domed glass bell. ¹⁵ While this previous experiment may have served as inspiration or influence for Cornell and Miller,¹⁶ the bell jar object featuring the doll's head owes much to the artist's personal interests and beliefs. By bringing together different basic household items, as if for some kind of simple science experiment, the assemblage points at Cornell's autodidactic experience and polymathic tendencies. Moreover, if the needles and threads hint at the power of the surrealist object to puncture the thin veneer of reality and call forth a higher state of perceptual intuition, they may also contain an allusion to the Christian Scientist belief in the power of Mind over the physical conditions of the body¹⁷ and, accordingly, to Cornell's own belief in the "healthier possibilities" of Surrealism¹⁸. Preserved in Miller's photograph, *Object by Joseph Cornell* is a fascinating combination of highly personal beliefs and shared aesthetic values resulting from the two artists' momentary association in the same sub-surrealist world. The eerily beautiful image they created shows how surrealist artistic practices intersected and were renegotiated across transcultural lines, making transnational Surrealism more akin to a shifting constellation than an organized network.
- 29 As this brief overview has attempted to suggest, early American Surrealisms were closely connected to the 1920s and 1930s international, transatlantic little magazine culture. They participated in a crucial effort to shape a vernacular modernism which would retain the critical, oppositional edge of the European avant-gardes. While this movement gained significant momentum with the arrival of the European exiles in New York at the beginning of the 1940s, it was deeply rooted in the 1920s and early 1930s when the debate about "nativist" and "internationalist," or "cosmopolitan" and "universalist" issues contributed to a remapping of the geographies of American literary modernism. In light of these facts, the notion that "the American contribution to Surrealism only occurred in New York at the end of the 1930s" (Lévy 20) seems slightly misconceived. Based on a specifically local and indigenous understanding of the fantastic, American Surrealism was also characterized by its deep commitment to political and social issues. Its complex, biased relationship with European Surrealism has often been compared to an unresolved set of dialogues. Yet, it was also marked by decisive, fruitful exchanges which profoundly influenced the historical development of Surrealism.

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NOTES

1. As Dimakopoulou has observed, *View* emerged in New York at the same time as Abstract Expressionism. Ford's editorial choice set the journal in direct opposition to Clement Greenberg's views of the antagonist relation between the avant-garde and mass culture (Dimakopoulou 738).
2. In his preface to Pierre Mabilie's *Mirror of the Marvelous* (1962), Breton remarked that "nothing defines [the marvellous] better than setting it in opposition to the 'fantastic'. The fantastic nearly always falls under the order of inconsequential fiction, while the marvellous illuminates the further extreme of vital movement and engages the entire emotional realm" (xvi). In other words, the marvelous emerges from reality, whereas the fantastic opposes reality. Whereas the fantastic relies on visual shock, the marvelous emerges primarily from language. American surrealist phantasmagorias are usually safely contained within the limits of a parallel world, whether it is a dream or a scenario; reality itself is not radically put into question.
3. Letter from Robert Motherwell to W.C. Williams (3 December 1941). Qtd. in Weaver (139-40).
4. "For relaxation, relief. To have nothing in my head—to freshen my eye by that till I see, smell, know and can reason and be." *A Novelette. transition* 19-20 (June 1930): 286.
5. Significantly, in 1932, the slogan of the second series of Williams and West's *Contact* magazine was, already, "*Contact* will attempt to cut a trail through the American jungle without the use of a European compass." *Contact* 1 (February 1932): n.p.
6. "While tapping into American pulp culture, the *Great Transparent Ones* which Breton and Matta were trying to formulate also resisted American mythmaking frenzy." On the influence of American pulp fiction and fantasy on Surrealism, see Flahutez (200-218).

7. The phrase refers to “Limites non-frontières du surréalisme,” a speech given by Breton at the New Burlington Galleries in London, in June 1936.
8. In April 1942, in Mexico City, Wolfgang Paalen launched the journal *Dyn* which aimed at integrating “Amerindian forms into the consciousness of modern art” (Paalen 1943, n.p.). By pursuing serious scientific and anthropological interests, *Dyn* meant to break away from what Paalen felt was excessive poetic interpretation in the Surrealist approach to reality. In his eyes, reliance on the idealized exotic Other and the “picturesquely local” had rendered Breton and his circle “incapable of assimilating what there [was] of importance in American thought” (Paalen 1943, 81). Breton and Duchamp retaliated by making the issue of Indian art and mythology one of the core elements in the search for a new collective myth, as is obvious in their decision to publish anthropological and ethnological essays in the newly-founded *VVV* magazine (June 1942), and to combine surrealist objects and Amerindian art in the *First Papers of Surrealism* exhibition (November 1942).
9. Quoted from the Group f/64 1932 manifesto.
10. For an analysis of West’s preoccupation with the nationalist thrust in regional writing, see Gano (2009).
11. On this topic, see also Suárez (1997).
12. This bell jar object no longer exists. Cornell sent a print of Miller’s photograph to André Breton. Another one was exhibited at the show *Surrealism: Objects Photographs Collages Documents* presented at the Zabriskie Gallery in New York, in 1936. The original negatives are held in the Lee Miller Archives, East Sussex, England.
13. “Objects by Joseph Cornell: Minutiae, Glass Bells, Shadow Boxes, Coups d’Oeil, Jouets Surréalistes,” Julien Levy Gallery. New York, November 1932.
14. Cornell later recycled several of these items into his first *Soap Bubble Set* (1936). For an enlightening discussion of the *Soap Bubble Set* series, see Hoving (2006).
15. Man Ray’s *Hommage à D.A.F. de Sade* and its variant (attributed to Miller), *Tanja Ramm and Bell Jar: Variant of Hommage à D.A.F. de Sade*. Both pictures were made in Man Ray’s studio on the same day. A discussion of these bell jar objects can be found in Reynes-Delobel (2016).
16. Unfortunately, neither Cornell nor Miller commented on their collaboration. It is thus impossible to know how much interaction went between them. Interestingly, Miller also photographed another montage by Cornell in another series probably realized at about the same time. This object, entitled, *Twelve Needles Dancing on the Point of an Angel*, juxtaposes Cornell’s head with a number of found or constructed objects including a schooner, a mane of yellow hair, and the small brass cup used in *Object by Joseph Cornell*. If we do not know which series came first, the two obviously overlap.
17. Cornell converted to Christian Science in 1925 and remained a devout Christian Scientist until his death in 1972. Further examination of Cornell’s object would probably entail an investigation into the topic of light, electricity, and magnetism, and the possibility of a crossover from theosophy to Christian Science.
18. “I believe that surrealism has healthier possibilities than have been developed” (Cornell to Alfred Barr, November 13, 1936).

INDEX

Keywords: American national cultural identity, American surrealism, avant-garde, fantastic, grotesque, interwar United States, literary and visual modernism, little magazines, localism, macabre, magic, modernity, monstrous, popular culture, social criticism, super-realism, technologies, transatlantic exchanges, violence

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Keep on Waking : Charles Henri Ford, Camp, and Surrealism

Alexander Howard

Modernism, Innovation, Camp

- 1 The American poet, multimedia artist, experimental filmmaker, and editor Charles Henri Ford (1908–2002) occupies a curious position in the annals of literary and aesthetic history. A difficult figure to pin down at the best of times, the oft—overlooked Ford was an important second—generation modernist little magazine editor and America’s first Surrealist poet.¹ If one looks closely enough, it soon becomes apparent that Ford was involved in many of crucial avant-garde scenes of the last century. However, despite the breadth and depth of his artistic interests and literary achievements, scant critical attention has been paid to the Mississippi-born Ford. That is, until relatively recently. Towards the end of the 1990s, a small number of critical studies that engaged with aspects of Ford’s literary and aesthetic output began to emerge. For example, in *Libidinal Currents: Sexuality and the Shaping of Modernism* (1998), Joseph Allan Boone describes the manner in which Ford’s early experimental novel *The Young and Evil* (1933) “links configurations of urban space to the marginalized sexual identities and the practices that such sites engender” (Boone 257).² On a slightly different note, Dickran Tashjian, in his art—historical *A Boatload of Madmen: Surrealism and the American Avant-Garde 1920-1950* (2001), discusses some features of Ford’s various aesthetic and editorial ventures in depth.³
- 2 There is certainly much to admire in Tashjian’s account of the dissemination of Surrealism on the shores of the United States, which, amongst other things, considers the respective merits of Ford’s Mississippi—based modernist periodical *Blues: a Magazine of New Rhythms* (1929–1930) and his long—running art journal *View* (1940-1947), over the course of two consecutive chapters. Tashjian has some positive things to say about both magazines in *A Boatload of Madmen*. His praise for *Blues* is figured in terms of (primarily unrealised) potentiality. In his estimation, Ford’s second—generation little modernist magazine “had the potential of being both indigenous and

international in its makeup” (Tashjian 138). Tashjian is similarly approving when he turns his attention to the later *View*. Tashjian singles out Ford’s editorial efforts on this highly influential New York-based art journal for praise. He suggests, somewhat paradoxically, that Ford’s editorial “eclecticism” ensured that *View* had, by 1944, “stabilized into something more than a catch-as-catch-can little magazine” (Tashjian 196, 200).

- 3 Despite the presence of these and other such flattering comments, Tashjian’s appraisal of Ford’s achievements is far from being unequivocally positive. Indeed, at times, he seems almost oddly determined to damn Ford with liberal lashings of the very faintest praise.⁴ This is especially true when it comes to *Blues*. Having first posited that a heady “combination of naiveté and nerve allowed Ford to write to notable avant-garde figures and ask for contributions to a new little magazine starting out in the provinces of Mississippi” (Tashjian 138), he then suggests that *Blues* nevertheless failed to live up to expectations. According to Tashjian, “*Blues* was not on the cutting edge of innovation in the late 1920s. *The Little Review* and other magazines had beaten Ford to the punch earlier in the decade” (Tashjian 155). Yet Tashjian also feels compelled to add, with more than just a hint of condescension, that his intention here “is not so much to expose Ford’s youthful enthusiasm (he was barely twenty years old) as to reveal the skill with which he created the *illusion of innovation*” (Tashjian 155, emphasis added). Finally, Tashjian brings proceedings to a close by suggesting that, even in these early stages, “Ford was a master of publicity, if not for the avant-garde, then certainly for *Blues*, and indirectly for himself” (Tashjian 155).
- 4 Tashjian’s analysis is, in some respects, absolutely correct : the historical record shows that Ford did indeed display a remarkable flair for publicity and self-promotion from the very outset of his career in the arts.⁵ In equal measure, however, we might just as easily say that Tashjian gets it wrong in certain ways when it comes to Ford.⁶ I am thinking specifically of Tashjian’s backhanded compliment about Ford’s quasi — mystical ability when it comes to the task of conjuring up illusions of literary and aesthetic innovation. There is far more to Ford — and half — forgotten ventures such as *Blues* — than mere smoke and mirrors. This is something that I want to debate in the following article. In particular, I seek here to detail some of the ways in which we might indeed speak of Ford as an intuitive aesthetic innovator. This becomes clear if we consider the overarching trajectory of Ford’s longstanding involvement with the Surrealist movement. In what follows, I want to propose that Ford, in his own inimitable fashion, encourages us to think critically about Surrealism. Accordingly, I want to scrutinize some of the ways in which Ford engaged with Surrealism over the course of his long and varied career. Drawing on published poetry, periodicals, experimental fiction, freshly unearthed archival material, and pre-existing secondary criticism, I aim to show that Ford was far more critically engaged than has been previously suggested.⁷ In particular, I want to consider the manner in which Ford sought to conceptually transform Surrealism, both in his own work and in the output of similarly-minded writers and artists whom he inspired and influenced.
- 5 Of especial interest in this regard is what I will, in the final section of this article, describe as Ford’s “Camp” sensibility. But first : what is Camp ? In a sense it depends on whom you decide to ask. For example, in the introduction to their co-edited collection *Out in Culture : Gay, Lesbian, and Queer Essays in Popular Culture* (1995), Corey K. Creekmur and Alexander Doty posit that gays and lesbians relate to mass-produced popular

culture *differently*, via “an alternative or negotiated, if not always fully subversive, reception of the products and messages of popular culture — and, of course, by producing popular literature, film, music, television, photography and fashion within mainstream mass culture industries (Creekmur and Doty 1). Developing this point, Creekmur and Doty note that many gay and lesbian producers and consumers of popular culture have, at different times, interrogated the ways in which they might be able to access culturally prominent — and predominantly heteronormative — modes and means of aesthetic representation without risking the loss of, nor denying, their status as queer agents. To put it another way, gays and lesbians have, according to Creekmur and Doty, often asked just “how they might participate without necessarily assimilating, and how they might take pleasure in, and make affirmative meanings out of, experiences and artifacts that they have been told do not offer queer pleasures and meanings” (Creekmur and Doty 1-2). Significantly, this is where, for Creekmur and Doty at least, the concept of Camp comes into play ; they highlight the fact that “[f]or some time (at least since the model embodied by Oscar Wilde), this queerly “different” experience of mass culture was most evident, if coded, in the ironic, scandalous sensibility known as *camp* — perhaps gay culture’s crucial contribution to modernism” (Creekmur and Doty 2).

- 6 There are a number of things to be said about this far-reaching, initially surprising claim. Let us begin by considering what Creekmur and Doty have to say about the seemingly “scandalous sensibility” that goes by the name of Camp. By turns “casual and severe, affectionate and ironic,” Camp serves, or rather served, in Creekmur and Doty’s estimation, “to deflate the pretensions of mainstream culture while elevating what that same culture devalued or repressed, thus providing a strategy for rewriting and questioning the meanings and values of mainstream representations” (Creekmur and Doty 2). Interestingly, this take on the matter of Camp dovetails neatly with the stance taken by Susan Sontag in her seminal, if perpetually problematic “Notes on ‘Camp’” (1964). In these “Notes,” which are dedicated to the memory of the aforementioned Wilde, Sontag had cause to describe the Camp “eye” as having “the power to transform experience” (Sontag 277). The Camp “eye,” or “sensibility” is, for Sontag, “one that is alive to a double sense in which some things can be taken” (Sontag 281). This, she argues, “comes out clearly in the vulgar use of the word Camp as a verb, “to camp,” something that people do” (Sontag 281). “To camp,” in the sense that Sontag understands the term, is to engage with, or to seek resource to, “a mode of seduction” — a mode of seduction which, in her reading, “employs flamboyant mannerisms susceptible of a double interpretation ; gestures full of duplicity, with a witty meaning for cognoscenti and another, more impersonal, for outsiders” (Sontag 281). Moreover, as is well known, and as we will discuss later in this piece, Sontag strives in her “Notes” to emphasise, in a manner not all that dissimilar to Creekmur and Doty, the aesthetic character of this most ‘seductive’ of critical terms. Bearing all this in mind, I want in this piece to suggest that Ford always appreciated the importance and potential of Camp. I want also to suggest that he intuitively and positively responded to Camp’s tantalizing promise of an alternative, “supplementary” set of critical values and aesthetic standards detached from what Sontag once described, famously, as “the good-bad axis of ordinary aesthetic judgment” (Sontag 286). Having done so, this article will draw to a close with a necessarily provisional sketch of some of the ways in which Ford’s discernibly Camp aesthetic and literary sensibility can be said to have underwritten his hitherto overlooked modification of Surrealism.

Mississippi, New York, Paris

- 7 In order to evaluate Ford's career-long interest in Surrealism, we need first to know a little more about his background. Ford was born on 10 February 1908, in Hazlehurst, Mississippi, into a relatively prosperous, and somewhat peripatetic, family of hoteliers. By the time he reached early adolescence, Ford had begun to feel increasingly isolated and creatively frustrated in the South, which he tended to figure in terms of conservatism and conformity.⁸ Ford's frustration is palpable in his adolescent memoir, *I Will Be What I Am* (which spans the period between 1922 and 1928). In this unpublished document, Ford rails against what he perceives as the provincialism and cultural conservatism surrounding him in the South, whilst calling for "new sensations, new friends, [and a] new environment" (Ford *Will*, 91). What is more, Ford also emphasizes the fact "I must not live my life at home – sheltered and without pain. There isn't the slightest doubt but that I would become a hopeless neurotic. For that reason I must go to New York" (94). However, Ford lacked the requisite financial and familial freedom to relocate to New York at the time of writing (in 1928). Realizing this, he found other, inventive ways to circumvent his geographical and cultural isolation, be these things real or imagined.⁹
- 8 Modernist little magazine culture was particularly important for Ford at this early juncture in his life and literary career. It offered him a means with which to forge meaningful literary connections that also traversed significant geographical distances, whilst simultaneously affording him the opportunity to announce his arrival on what was by the late 1920s a decidedly overcrowded avant-garde literary scene. Charged by his reading of William Stanley Braithwaite's annual *Anthology of Magazine Verse*, and inspired by his initial encounter with the Harlem Renaissance poet Kathleen Tankersley Young, Ford began editing and publishing his *Blues: a Magazine of New Rhythms* in Columbus, Mississippi in February 1929.¹⁰ Ford's *Blues* attracted a great deal of critical attention from a number of established literary figures. William Carlos Williams, Gertrude Stein, and Ezra Pound all singled *Blues* out for praise.¹¹ Pound, for one, had much to say about *Blues*, which he once referred to as Ford's "local show" (Ford, *Parents* 618). Pound certainly saw potential in Ford's project. We can see this in a letter Pound sent to Joseph Vogel on 23 January 1929, in which he states his belief that there was "a chance [in *Blues*] for the best thing since *The Little Review* and certainly the best thing done in America without European help" (Pound, *Letters* 223).
- 9 Pound's remark about Ford's Mississippi-based *Blues* being possibly "the best thing done in America without European help" is intriguing. In a roundabout fashion, this comment hints at a certain degree of cultural anxiety on Pound's part. Much like his modernist ally and long-suffering friend William Carlos Williams, Pound hoped that Ford's nascent "local" project would remain a strictly American affair. Bearing this in mind, it seems quite reasonable to suggest that sort of literature promoted in the nine issues of Ford's second-generation modernist magazine, would have rendered Pound somewhat surprised and left him more than just a little deflated. From the very beginning, Ford's *Blues* was a resolutely cosmopolitan affair. Ford, it seems fair to say, had no interest in merely showcasing instances of "local" American literary talent in his *Blues*. Instead, he desired to construct a textual "haven for the unorthodox in America and for those writers living abroad who though writing in English have

decided that america and [the] american environment are not hospitable to creative work” (Uncredited n.p.).¹² Tellingly, this textual haven, which was referred to as “the big blue blasphemous baby of Charles Henri Ford,” and which was also advertised, revealingly, as a “Bi-sexual Bi-Monthly,” assumed the form of a metaphorical crucible in which a variety of decidedly diverse, and, more often than not, openly queer outlooks were able to interact, clash, and flourish without fear of reappraisal or chastisement (Ford, “Scrapbook” n.p.).

10 We might say that Pound’s mistake was to assume that these issues pertained to locality, and to nationality. To put it another way, perhaps Pound failed to appreciate that Ford was less interested in the notion of nationality than in defining a distinctive literary and aesthetic sensibility of a non-normative persuasion, something that prefigures his subsequent engagement with ideas of Camp. Ford intuitively grasped the fact that the very nature of modernist little magazine culture, which Suzanne W. Churchill has described as uniquely “intimate and social” (Churchill 179), actively encouraged and aided the development of just such a creative sensibility, whilst also stimulating artistic associations between like-minded individuals who were sometimes separated by large geographical expanses, such as the Atlantic Ocean. In order better to achieve his aims, and so as more nimbly to sidestep his adolescent isolation, Ford proved himself quite willing to reach out, to take advice, and to accept “help” from European sources. Significantly, one source of assistance came from the well-known American expatriate poet and editor Eugene Jolas, who was based in Paris.

11 Ford clearly admired Jolas, so much so that he eventually approached him to join the editorial board of *Blues*¹³. Above all, Ford was much taken with Jolas’s influential second-generation modernist little magazine *transition*, in which, as an aspiring, artistically-inclined teenager living in the South, he first discovered surrealist-inflected instances of literary avant-gardism. Interviewed in 1987 by Bruce Wolmer, Ford details the way in which his initial encounter with *transition*, and his reading of Jolas’s work, shaped his own creative praxis. Ford’s response to the question “Who were you influenced by in *transition*?” is worth quoting in full:

Eugene Jolas himself. Later on I discovered Paul Eluard and André Breton and the poet Benjamin Péret. But my first surrealist thrill came from a nonmember [sic] of the official group who was, however, an advocate of surrealism — Jolas himself. I remember that distinctly. (Wolmer n.p.)

12 Ford’s response is highly suggestive, resonating in relation to his decades-long engagement with all things officially Surrealist, as both a committed “advocate” and, significantly, as an inquisitive non-member. In equal measure, Ford’s retrospective account of his initial introduction to Jolas’s *transition* is useful. It captures something of the sensual, almost physical “thrill” he experienced when first coming into contact with surrealist materials. This experience, when combined with, and complemented by, his subsequent reading of prominent Surrealist poets such as Breton, Éluard, and Péret, were to electrify many, if not all, of his subsequent literary, aesthetic, and editorial ventures.¹⁴

13 Knowing this, it should come as no surprise to find surrealist traces, elements, and tropes contained in the pages of Ford’s *Blues*. For example, contributions such as Parker Tyler’s poem “This Dreaming Image” allude to prominent works of literary Surrealism, whilst also dialoguing with established principles of Poundian Imagism.¹⁵ Similarly, in Édouard Roditi’s “Séance” we find an elliptic narrative scene informed by surrealist

uncanniness, as well as motifs indebted to Freudian psychoanalysis. Finally, and wholly unsurprisingly, we find evidence of Surrealist influence in Ford's various contributions to *Blues*. Consider his "Suite," which owes a clear debt to the pioneering creative experiments carried out by Surrealist writers like André Breton and Philippe Soupault. In the opening lines of this prose piece, which was published in the seventh issue of *Blues*, Ford achieves a disorientating, trance-like, and even hallucinatory literary effect through his use of long, winding, and unpunctuated sentences. Having generated a trance-like effect (in language that consciously approximates Surrealist automatism), Ford then alternates between longer sentences and shorter, more declamatory statements. This syntactical variability serves to heighten the disorientating sensation that one experiences whilst reading this example of Ford's early prose. All things considered, the formal patterning of this particular piece reads as an emulation of foundational Surrealist texts like Breton and Soupault's *Les Champs magnétiques* (1920). And much like *Les Champs magnétiques*, an internal logic and coherence underwrites the appearance of nonsensicality generated in this instance of Ford's early writing.

- 14 It is, however, just as important to note that whilst the short-lived *Blues* contained discernible surrealist elements, Ford did not conceive of his first literary and editorial venture, which was mainly concerned with what I have described elsewhere as the "belated renovation" of first-generation Anglo-American modernism, as a literary organ dedicated to the investigation and promotion of Surrealism.¹⁶ Nevertheless, Ford's formative experiences as both a writer and as a second-generation modernist little magazine editor helped him to refine some of the literary and publishing strategies that he was to use when later seeking to adapt pre-existing Surrealist precepts more to his own liking. Chief amongst these was the idea that inclusive, and simultaneously expansive, collaborative exchange could foster the conditions for the expression of new literary forms and aesthetic ideas. Notably, these collaborative exchanges were often conducted via that archetypally modern medium of everyday communication: the international postal network. This communication network had a particularly vital role to play when it came to *Blues*. Isolated in the Deep South, Ford had yet to meet any of his contributors when he started work on *Blues*.¹⁷ Hence the importance of the postal network for Ford: it afforded him ample opportunity to establish friendships and working relationships with other artists and writers. Most valuably, it served to introduce him to the queer bohemian poet Parker Tyler (1904-1974), who was to play a significant role in Ford's life and literary career.
- 15 Parker Tyler had been born into a fairly peripatetic family in the American South (in New Orleans). Arriving in New York at the age of 20, Tyler quickly established himself in the historically queer enclave of Greenwich Village. Having struck up a correspondence with Ford (who was still in Mississippi), Tyler encouraged the younger poet to visit him in New York, which he did in January 1929. Not long after *Blues* went into print, Tyler also assumed an associate position on the editorial board of Ford's modernist little magazine. Tyler's role in the development of *Blues* denotes the beginning of what was to become an extremely fruitful period of collaborative exchange and dialogue with the likeminded Ford. After *Blues* ceased publication in late 1930, Tyler and Ford began work on their highly experimental text *The Young and Evil*. Drawn from their shared personal experiences as young single men in Greenwich Village, this scandalous, sexually brazen, and quasi-Rabelaisian novel is important for a variety of reasons. For one, it is a foundational text of what has come to be known as queer modernism.¹⁸ Additionally, in the context of the current discussion, *The Young*

and Evil can, in certain respects, be read as a companion piece to Ford's modernist little magazine. That is to say, like the earlier *Blues*, it can be conceptualized as a kind of non-normative textual haven, where, in the words of Joseph Allan Boone, "homosexuality is the norm rather than the exception" (Boone 252). In other words, what we have here is a collaborative creative gesture that strives to, if we were to crib from Scott Herring's critical account of queer slumming during the 1920s and 1930s, "reveal that entrenched boundaries between homosexuality and heterosexuality in an urban social scene are purely imaginary, that queer admixture might be more important than the stable identification of a stigmatized minority group (Herring, *Queering* 145).¹⁹ Finally, in a fashion similar to the earlier *Blues*, epistolary exchanges carried along the postal network played an important role in the construction of *The Young and Evil*, which Ford and Tyler worked on separately from three very different locations: Mississippi, New York, and Paris.

- 16 Ford sailed to France in May 1931, ostensibly to finish work on *The Young and Evil*, to which we will return later. He continued to correspond with Tyler once he reached the French capital. According to Steven Watson, "Ford arrived in a Paris that had been thoroughly colonized by expatriates and he immediately negotiated his way through its social circuits" (Watson n.p.). Soon after arriving, the socially adept Ford established himself as a member of Gertrude Stein's salon, where he was first introduced to his future lover, the displaced Russian Neo-Romantic painter Pavel Tchelitchew. Whilst living in Paris, Ford also had ample opportunity to establish artistic and literary contacts, and to seek out more in the way of thrills, whether of a sexual or surreal nature.²⁰ What is more, as will later become clear, the first-hand experience and detailed knowledge of the Parisian art-world that Ford accrued during this period was to set him in exceptionally good stead when he was forced to return to New York on the eve of the Second World War, especially when it came to the issue of his subsequent critique and attempted modification of Surrealism.

Commitment, Collaboration, Chainpoems

- 17 Ford interspersed his time in Paris with various trips abroad, returning periodically to the United States throughout the 1930s. It was on one such return trip that Ford formed a productive working relationship with James Laughlin, the Connecticut-based editor and publisher of *New Directions*, with whom he published his first full-length collection of poems, *The Garden of Disorder* (1938). Around the same time, Ford was also involved in the creation of the 1940 imprint of Laughlin's annual *New Directions in Prose and Poetry*. Ford's creative and editorial contributions to the 1940 volume of *New Directions in Prose and Poetry* are noteworthy; they reveal much about Ford's interest in, and his commitment to, the promotion of Surrealism on the shores of the United States. As well as highlighting new developments in poetry and prose, the 1940 edition of Laughlin's anthology served as a showcase for Surrealism in America, including as it did a substantial "Surrealist Anthology" edited by Nicolas Calas, a "Surrealist Pocket Dictionary" (also by Calas), and a number of curiously entitled "Chainpoems" which had been selected for inclusion by Ford.²¹
- 18 Ford's chainpoem venture was a collective experiment, featuring a variety of poets from a number of different countries. Before work on a chainpoem began, a preliminary list with the names and postal addresses of the selected "chainpoets"

would be circulated amongst the chosen contributors. In receipt of this list, one of the selected poets would then write an opening line, before sending the manuscript to the

next [poet] on the list (which has been drawn up in advance by whoever starts the chainpoem), together with the list itself, and so the chainpoem revolves to completion. Anyone may decide he has written the concluding line, in which case he makes copies of the chainpoem and sends one to each chainpoet on the list. (Ford "Chainpoem," 369)

- 19 These literary experiments are interesting because they productively complicate notions of poetic autonomy. In Ford's words, a chainpoem was

not only an intellectual sport but a collective invention. However, it is not a product of social collaboration in the sense that architecture is. Each poet is architect, supervisor, bricklayer, etc., of the construction. The blueprint of the chainpoem is the anonymous shape lying in a hypothetical joint imagination, which builds as though the poem were a series of either mathematical or dream progressions. (Ford "Chainpoem," 369)

- 20 Based as they are in a "hypothetical joint imagination," Ford's chainpoems attempted poetically to approximate Carl Jung's conception of a collective unconsciousness. Ford's phrasing certainly has a Jungian ring to it. For instance, his evocation of an "anonymous shape" residing at the bottom of a "joint imagination" is evidently indebted to Jung's famous definition of the psychoanalytical archetype. As described in Jung's seminal essay "On the Psychology of the Unconscious" (1917), the typical primordial archetype is an "idea that has been stamped on the human brain for aeons. That is why it lies ready to hand in the unconscious of every man. Only, certain conditions are needed to cause it to appear" (Jung 69). Reading this, we get the sense that Ford's chainpoem venture represented an ambitious attempt to tap into the hidden reservoir of these "greatest and best thoughts of man [which] shape themselves upon these primordial images as upon a blueprint" (Jung 69).

- 21 But this is not all. Whilst outlining the method of collective composition, Ford emphasizes the avant-garde heritage of the chainpoems:

[A]fter the first line is written, the problem of each poet, in turn, is to provide a line which may both "contradict" and carry forward the preceding line. The chain poet may attempt to include his unique style and make it intelligible to the poem; in which case the chainpoem will have a logical and spontaneous growth. Alternatively, using the surrealist approach, he may automatically add a line that springs from whatever is suggested by the preceding line. (Ford "Chainpoem," 369)

- 22 Ford's chainpoems were, as we can see, indebted to Surrealist approaches. More precisely, the chainpoems were inspired by the technique of Surrealism automatism, and, in particular, "le cadavre exquis" (or "exquisite corpse"), which was a method of collaborative practice in which a series of images or words were collectively assembled. Mary Ann Caws notes that this well-known Surrealist practice "combined communality, performance, and personality" in order to take "the measure of the collective mind" (Caws *Erotics*, 223). Caws also suggests that the point of this playful creative practice "is both collective and automatic: the unleashing of the marvelous or the irrational in a group, with each individual effort working toward the final result greater than the sum of its parts" (Caws *Erotics*, 228). Ford's chainpoems should be thought of in similar terms. Best thought of as a transnational version of Surrealist exquisite corpse, one that was, significantly, conducted across the international postal relay system, the chainpoems were intended as playful poetic extensions of an irrational, subjective, and collective imagination.

- 23 The following, self-evidently titled “International Chainpoem” serves to convey a clear sense of the depth and breadth of the collaborative poetic network as envisioned and established by Ford:

When a parasol is cooled in the crystal garden,
 one spire radiates and the other turns round;
 a toad, the Unwanted, counts the ribs’ teardrops
 while I mark each idol in its dregs.
 There is a shredded voice, there are three fingers
 that follow to the end a dancing gesture
 and pose a legend under the turning shade
 where the girl’s waterfall drops its piece.
 Then balls of ennui burst one by one,
 by and by metallic metres escape from ceramic pipes.
 Oh sun, glass of cloud, adrift in the vast sky,
 spell me out a sonnet of a steel necklace. (Ford “International,” 370)

- 24 Themes of circularity are foregrounded in this chainpoem, as “one spire radiates and the other turns round” under the similarly “turning shade”. In addition, the formal patterning of this “International Chainpoem” follows the same pattern of surreal inversion and incongruous juxtaposition displayed in many of the other chainpoem collaborations published in the 1940 edition of Laughlin’s *New Directions*. Notions of transmutation also inform this particular chainpoem. For instance, “teardrops” seemingly cascade from a “girl’s waterfall” before turning into “balls of ennui” which then “burst one by one”. Similarly, on a related note, a process of clearly discernible process of alchemical transmogrification can be discerned in the poem, as “the crystal garden” gives way to an image of “metallic metres” leaking from “ceramic pipes”.
- 25 Whilst of variable quality, poems such as the above are indicative of Ford’s desire to branch out and establish increasingly expansive networks of poetic communication. There are two points of interest to be borne in mind here. The first concerns the manner in which this collaborative, circular project – featuring as it does poetic voices of a regional and cosmopolitan persuasion – complicates conventionally received critical wisdom as regards deracination.²² The second centers on the way in which the chainpoem venture has been organised along specifically Surrealist lines. This becomes apparent when we consider the list of those who contributed to Ford’s chainpoem venture. Almost all of Ford’s contributors to the aforementioned “International Chainpoem” were, in some shape or form, inspired by Surrealism²³. Two lines belong to the British poets Dorian Cooke and Norman McCaig, who were members of the sadly overlooked “New Apocalypse” (which was itself an off-shoot of surrealist-inflected Neo-Romanticism). Four lines belong to Americans: Ford, the faithful, trusted Parker Tyler, Gordon Sylander, and George Marion O’Donnell. The remaining six lines belong to Japanese “VOU” poets, who were led by Katue Kitasono, himself a devotee to the Surrealist cause. Yet we would do well to remember that these chainpoem writers were not officially associated with the Surrealist movement as conceived and controlled by the infamously draconian figure of André Breton. Sometimes referred to disparagingly as the “Pope” of Surrealism, Breton’s watchful, even suspicious, guardianship of the Surrealist group has been well documented. Determined to maintain his position at the head of the Surrealist table, Breton oversaw participation in, and expulsion from, the officially sanctioned movement, entry into which remained a closely guarded privilege limited to a relatively small circle of accredited participants. Surrealist accreditation, or lack thereof, seems not to have concerned Ford in the slightest. Certainly, this lack

of official accreditation did not prevent Ford from repeatedly affirming his commitment to the Surrealist enterprise.

Surrealism, Somnambulism, Imaginationism

- 26 Ford articulates his commitment to the precepts of Surrealism in his poetry of the late 1930s and the early 1940s. Consider the following lines, which are taken from Ford's collection *The Overturned Lake* (1941):

To tone down language is to tongue-tie the pulse,
meter of mood, tape-line of longing,
and so we are boosted by the measureless dream
and awake to an algebra whose symbols cry havoc. (Ford *Lake*, 51)

- 27 "Comedy of Belief" contains a number of allusions to the central tenets of Surrealism. To begin with, Ford's remark about the "tape-line of longing" can be read as a reference to the primary role that desire plays in Surrealist thought and literature. According to Jennifer Mundy, "[t]he word desire runs like a silver thread through the poetry and writings of the surrealist group in all its phases" (Mundy 5). For the Surrealists, "desire was the authentic voice of the inner self" (Mundy 5). Notions of love and desire certainly play an important role in Breton's work. For instance, in his poetic meditation *L'Amour fou* (1937), Breton asserts that love can function "as a fundamental principle for moral as well as cultural progress" (Breton *Love*, 77). According to Breton, literary activity represents "a tried and tested means" with which "to fix the sensitive and moving world on a single being as well as a permanent force of anticipation" (Breton *Love*, 77). That is to say, concentrated poetic activity can provide a means with which we can better understand (the objects of) our desire and affection.
- 28 Ford's declaration that "we are boosted by the measureless dream" also relates to conceptions of Surrealism. As is well known, Breton and his followers looked to the Freudian unconscious and the attendant psychoanalytic interpretation of dreams for artistic inspiration. Dismissing formal divisions between conscious and unconscious states of existence in *Les Vases communicants* (1932), Breton argues that "[t]he poet to come will surmount the depressing idea of the irreparable divorce between action and dream" (Breton *Vessels*, 146). Breton also argues that via a fusion of conscious and unconscious states of perception, the Surrealist poet might restore "man to the heart of the universe, extracting him for a second from his debilitating adventure and reminding him that he is, for every pain and every joy exterior to himself, an indefinitely perfectible place of resolution and resonance" (Breton *Vessels*, 146). This allows us better to understand Ford's reference to the "measureless dream" in his "Comedy of Belief." Following Breton, Ford is suggesting that a committed exploration of the "measureless" reservoirs that underpin subjective perception might awaken a new kind of poetic "algebra" whose seemingly irrational "symbols" might "cry havoc" and thereby tear apart previously held antimonies pertaining to objective and subjective experience.²⁴
- 29 Equally, Ford was not content merely to praise or reaffirm conceptual notions set forth in Bretonian Surrealism. Rather, he sought also to differentiate his approach and outlook from that of the card-carrying members of the Surrealist group. This becomes apparent when we consider Ford's "Notes on Neo-Modernism" (c.1944). These fragmentary notes, which are tucked away in a folder of miscellanea in Ford's archive

at the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, Texas, are significant. They shed light on the scale of Ford's dialogue with Surrealism. Reading these notes, we get the sense that Ford had grown frustrated with orthodox Bretonian Surrealism. This much is evident in the section of Ford's "Notes on Neo-Modernism" which proffers a "Critique of Pure Surrealism". This commentary reads both as a critique *and* as a call to arms. Suggesting that as a "vice nouveau" orthodox Surrealism "has lost its appeal, [and] its novelty" (Ford "Notes," n.p.) Charles Henri Ford here announces his divergence from the aesthetic strictures outlined by Breton.²⁵

- 30 Conscious of the fact that Surrealism had begun to attract significant amounts of public and critical attention in the United States during the late 1930s and early 1940s, Ford proposes, in highly suggestive language, to bring Surrealism "out from [the] underground" (Ford "Notes," n.p.). In his critique, Ford envisions a transformative reworking of what he believed to be a conceptually stunted Surrealism. *Imaginationism* is the so-bad-it's-almost good name that Ford gives to his proposed modification of Surrealism. Ford also emphasizes the avant-garde heritage of Imaginationism. He states that "[j]ust as Surrealism came out of Dada – so Imaginationism was born of Surrealism" (Ford "Notes," n.p.). Furthermore, in his reckoning, "[t]he Imaginationist is the son of the Surrealist – with an Oedipus complex" (Ford "Notes," n.p.). Ford reasons that "Imaginationism [is] more revolutionary than Surrealism because [it is] less passive, more active" (Ford "Notes," n.p.). The distinction he makes here between the active and the passive helps us better understand the difference between Imaginationism and Surrealism. Elsewhere in his notes, Ford alludes to Breton's description of Surrealist automatism as a fundamentally passive activity, which is dependent on placing oneself in a receptive state²⁶. In Ford's conception of Imaginationism, he wholly rejects the notion of unconscious passivity: instead the conscious mind also needs to be actively engaged. The following analogy succinctly demonstrates this distinction:

The surrealist is the somnambule who walks in the depths of the unconscious.

The imaginationist is also the somnambule – but he has awakened while in the unconscious, and keeps on waking. (Ford "Notes," n.p.)

- 31 Ford here contrasts the figure of the passive, sleepwalking Surrealist with the more proactive, conscious Imaginationist. Ford is effectively suggesting that a sort of somnambulistic blindness has marred the conceptual and aesthetic merits of Bretonian Surrealism. Whilst too harsh an assessment, the point that Ford is trying to make here is that orthodox Surrealism often seems overly reliant on the insights afforded by constant and, in his estimation, *passive* recourse to the unconscious.²⁷ Where the orthodox approach sees the Surrealist practitioner firmly located in, and constrained by, the unconscious, for Ford, the lessons of the unconscious are there to be consciously and artfully applied.²⁸
- 32 There are a number of important and potentially revealing things that need to be said regarding Ford's critique of Bretonian Surrealism. To begin with, it should be noted that Ford's proposed critique is not as ground-breaking as it purports to be. For one thing, the language in which Ford couches his critique is evidently indebted to Breton's seminal *Communicating Vessels* (1932). This much becomes evident when we read Ford's remarks about somnambulism in relation the vision of Surrealism articulated in a well-known passage featured in Breton's treatise, where the self-styled Magus of Surrealism characterises the ideal communicating vessel as

a *capillary tissue*, without which it would be useless to try to imagine mental circulation. The role of this tissue is, we have seen, to guarantee the constant exchange which must occur in thought between the exterior and the interior worlds, an exchange that requires the continuous interpenetration of the activity of waking and that of sleeping. My entire ambition has been to give here a glimpse of its structure. (Breton *Vessels*, 139)

- 33 In this particular extract, Breton seeks to foreground the dialectical nature of the relationship that exists between notions of interiority and exteriority. In her useful critical account of *Communicating Vessels*, Mary Ann Caws suggests that it is precisely this dialectical relationship between the interior arena of subjective experience and the exterior world of facts and figures – realms personified by the respective figures of sleep and wakefulness – that resides at the heart of Breton’s study. In her adroit summation, “[t]his passing back and forth between two modes is shown [in Breton’s reading] to be the basis of surrealist thought, of surreality itself” (Caws *Reflections*, 91).
- 34 Accepting this, what can we make of Ford’s critique of Surrealism, and his consequent theory of Imaginationism? Upon re-reading both his “Notes on Neo-Modernism” and “Imaginationist Manifesto,” it now seems as if Ford was either unfamiliar with, or wilfully misinterpreted, Breton’s dynamic conception of Surrealism outlined in *Communicating Vessels*. The former is impossible. Archival research has shown that Ford was well aware of Breton’s *Communicating Vessels* before he sat down to compose his thoughts on the future of Surrealism. Indeed, he singled it out for significant praise on more than one occasion. This comes to the fore in a letter Ford sent to Tyler on 5 April 1939: “Breton I find very sympathetic, I gave him my Garden of Disorder with dedication to Andre Breton, Lenine de la Revolution Surrealiste and just finished reading his Les Vases Communicants, and have bought other of his books. I find I have been underestimating him all along, (though not the accomplishments of the surrealist painters), through not having read his works. I’m lunching Friday with him and will take photos” (Ford “5 April 1939,” n.p.).²⁹
- 35 Did Ford chose to misread, deliberately or otherwise, the Surrealist message contained in the pages of Breton’s text? The possibility certainly exists. Were this the case, such a glaring oversight would surely and severely dent Ford’s standing as a dedicated follower, let alone consistent critical thinker, of Surrealism. Still, in his defence, it is worth remembering that the document we are dealing with here is fragmentary, provisional, and *unfinished*.³⁰ In the end, we can only speculate about the way in which Ford might have chosen to develop the critique of “Pure” Surrealism that he had begun to fashion in his “Notes on Neo-Modernism” and the complementary “Imaginationist Manifesto”.³¹ Nevertheless, what *does* remain clear is Ford’s burning desire to strike out on his own, and to use Surrealist techniques and precepts as he sees fit. He makes this clear at the very end of his fragmentary notes on the future of modernism and Surrealism. In this concluding section, which is entitled “Light of the Imagination: De Imaginationis,” Ford suggests, revealingly, that “[i]nstead of automatism I would propose autonomy” (Ford, “Notes” n.p.).³²
- 36 Yet Ford also insists that “Imaginationism does not reject anything in Surrealism – it merely transforms everything” (Ford “Notes,” n.p.). This is where critical notions pertaining to the concept of “Camp” begin to come to the fore. Mark Silverberg’s critical account of the so-called New York School of poetry is useful in this regard. Silverberg postulates that the alternative (and subversive) set of aesthetic standards underpinning Camp cultural production appealed to post-war New York School poets

such as Frank O'Hara and John Ashbery because it "put emphasis not on breaking with the past but on remaking it through stylization, exaggeration, and theatricality" (Silverberg 142). Silverberg observes that the New York School poets, a number of whom Ford championed and published in the early 1950s, were interested "in working with American culture as they found it-exposing, playing up, and camping up its quirks, absurdities, and odd (queer) mannerisms" (Silverberg 135).³³ Silverberg's assertion concerning the New York School's desire to work with culture as they found it also resonates in relation to Ford's theorization of Imaginationism, which claims not to reject, but to *reconstitute*, Surrealism. Somewhat more modestly, we might say that Ford, in a manner which prefigures the New York School's desire to remake the American culture which surrounded them, sought not to reject, but rather to rework, or, more specifically, to *camp*, Surrealism.

Camp, View, Growing Up Surreal

- 37 Ford makes his feelings about the value of Camp known in the following piece of poetry, which was published posthumously in an obscure collection of loosely defined haiku and collages entitled *Operation Minotaur* (2006) :

A truly candid
Novella is tonic. One
Without camp
Falls flat. (FORD *Minotaur*, n.p.)³⁴

- 38 Ford's late poem, whilst brief, serves a number of different functions.³⁵ To begin with, it operates in what we might describe as a self-conscious and characteristically self-referential fashion. Ford is referring here to the novel he co-wrote with Parker Tyler in the early 1930s, *The Young and Evil*. Ford's aforementioned early novel is important for a number of different reasons. As previously mentioned, it is a primary instance of what is known as queer modernism. The literary critic Juan A. Suárez argues that "[a] recurring yet understudied trait in queer modernism is its receptiveness towards "low culture," manifest in the frequent attempt to fuse experimental modernism with popular energies" (Suárez 185).³⁶ This is precisely what we get in *The Young and Evil*. In it, Ford and Tyler self-consciously foreground their awareness of trends in contemporaneous avant-garde writing:

Theodosia was reading. Julian was lying on his back and heard her voice: Wyndham Lewis says that a page of a servant-girl novel smashed up equals a page of Gertrude Stein. What Julian said Mr. Lewis means is that he thinks Miss Stein is purely negative, but he has no better word for the behavior of the organism than negative; Miss Stein is writing or walking. In one way these are the same. In neither case is she smashing the pages of a servant-girl novel. Theodosia was pleased. Suppose we go dancing tonight at the Tavern (Ford and Tyler 98).

- 39 This passage is typical of *The Young and Evil*. Throughout the novel, explorations of avant-gardism are interspersed with regular forays into the popular sites of low culture: dive bars, dance clubs, and drag balls "too large to be rushed at without being swallowed" (Ford and Tyler 152). Standing in for the authors, Karel and Julian offer a running commentary on the various scenes they witness:

The negro orchestra on the stage at one end was heard at the other end with the aid of a reproducer. On both sides of the wall a balcony spread laden with people in boxes at tables. Underneath were more tables and more people. The dance-floor

was a scene whose celestial flavor and cerulean coloring no angelic painter or nectarish poet has ever conceived. (Ford and Tyler 152)

- 40 Admittedly, there is a self-consciously “poetic” dimension to this co-authored depiction of the “celestial” dance-floor. However, Karel and Julian’s attention soon wanders elsewhere:

They found Tony and Vincent at a table with K-Y and Woodward. Vincent spoke with the most wonderful whisky voice Frederick! Julian! Tony was South American. He had on a black satin that Vincent had made him, fitted to the knee and then flaring, long pearls and pearl drops. (Ford and Tyler 153)

- 41 The penny now drops: our narrators are less interested in aesthetic representations of the “angelic painter” or the stereotypical gauche, “nectarish poet” than in meeting interesting people. Specifically, they are interested in meeting figures like the “black satin” clad Tony and Vincent:

Vincent had on a white satin blouse and black breeches. Dear I’m master of ceremonies tonight and you should have come in drag and you’d have gotten a prize. He had large eyes with a sex-life all their own and claimed to be the hardest boiled queen on Broadway. Frederick he said you look like something Lindbergh dropped on the way across. (Ford and Tyler 153)

- 42 Much like their fictional counterparts, the co-creators of *The Young and Evil* were evidently enchanted with the figure of this wide-eyed drag queen. In this respect, we might say that Ford and Tyler epitomize what Justus Nieland describes as “the joyous hum of public being, physically undone by collective scenes of sympathy, and ever-attentive to intimate potential of public spaces, finding new homes for feeling in uncanny places” (Nieland 2). When read in such a fashion, it soon becomes clear that the authors of *The Young and Evil* seek to depict to suitable public “spaces” (in this instance an underground drag ball) that are capable of producing new, intimately charged, non-normative regimes of feeling.

- 43 The non-normative regimes of feeling which Ford and Tyler privilege are of a distinctly Camp persuasion. Camp is quite literally foregrounded in *The Young and Evil*, which George Chauncey describes as “perhaps the campiest novel of them all” (Chauncey 17):

baggage grand cocksucker
fascinated by fairies of the Better
Class chronic
liar fairy
herself sexual
estimate crooning I’M A CAMP fire girl. (Ford and Tyler 164)³⁷

- 44 Given over to innumerable such depictions of characters dolled-up in drag and “camp[ing] like mad” (Ford and Tyler 167), *The Young and Evil* utilizes textual tactics such as parody, whilst simultaneously eschewing fixed conceptions of character. In this manner, the various non-normative figures populating the textual fringes of *The Young and Evil* anticipate Moe Meyer’s subsequent proposition that “identity is self-reflexively constituted” (Meyer 4) by visual acts of gendered performativity.

- 45 Meyer’s suggestion comes in a critical volume given over entirely to the discussion of the politics and poetics of Camp. Meyer’s complex theoretical account of Camp is particularly useful for those interested in getting to grips with this most elusive, protean, and contested of critical terms. Meyer defines Camp as “the total body of performative practices and strategies used to exact a queer identity, with enactment defined as the production of social visibility” (Meyer 4)³⁸. In his estimation, it logically

follows “that *all* queer identity performative expressions are circulated within the signifying system that is Camp” (Meyer 4). In short, for Meyer at least, “queer identity is inseparable and indistinguishable from its processual enactment, or Camp” (Meyer 4). Thus, according to Meyer, “Camp is political; Camp is solely a queer (and/or sometimes gay and lesbian) discourse; and Camp embodies a specifically queer cultural critique” (Meyer 1). Admittedly, Meyer concedes that this rather forthright take on matters might come as something of a surprise to those critics who are unfamiliar with Camp. In his own words, such an “expanded definition of Camp, one based on identity performance and not solely in some kind of unspecified cognitive identification of an ironic moment, may come as a bit of a jolt to many readers” (Meyer 4), especially readers of the aforementioned Susan Sontag.

46 Meyer is highly critical of Sontag, whom he holds largely responsible for having unhelpfully “complicated the interpretations [of Camp] by detaching the signifying codes from their queer signified” (Meyer 4). Fabio Cleto’s account of Sontag’s famous 1964 essay “Notes on Camp” helps us to understand what Meyer is getting at here. As Cleto reminds us, “Sontag’s essay disseminated camp as the cipher for contemporary culture, as a refined – and, most infamously, apolitical – aesthetic taste for the vulgar and the appreciation of kitschy middle-class pretensions” (Cleto 10). Because of this, various critics, include Meyer, have tended to accuse Sontag of “turning a basically homosexual mode of self-performance into a degayified taste, a simple matter of ironically relishing an indulgence in what is ‘so-bad-it’s good’” (Cleto 10).

47 For Meyer, such a “degayified” account of Camp is unforgivable: all the more so given that historical analysis confirms the specifically homosexual origins and politicized connotations pertaining to the term³⁹. This leads him to assert that literary critics such as Sontag have effectively, if unwittingly, “killed off the binding referent of Camp—the Homosexual” (Meyer 6). As a result, in Meyer’s reading, the discourse of Camp has become increasingly “confused and conflated with rhetorical and performative strategies such as irony, satire, burlesque, and travesty; and with cultural movements such as Pop” (Meyer 6). This, in Meyer’s eyes, simply will not do. For him, there was, is, and will always be only one kind of Camp:

And it is queer. It can be engaged directly by the queer to produce social visibility in the praxis of everyday life, or it can be manifested as the camp trace by the un-queer in order [...] to provide queer access to the apparatus of representation.⁴⁰
(Meyer 4)

48 Bearing this in mind, it behoves us to consider what Meyer would make of a marginalized literary and aesthetic figure such as Charles Henri Ford. As a queer writer and artist who came of artistic age in what was a closeted period of history, Ford, who, as *The Young and Evil* clearly demonstrates, was well aware of the value of Camp as a non-normative signifying system and practice, would probably be of great interest to a critic such as Meyer. But can the same be said of Ford’s interest in some the very same “rhetorical” strategies that Meyer decries whilst discussing Sontag and Camp? One gets the impression that Meyer would not approve. In a sense, though, that is wholly beside the point. We are, after all, concerned with the life and work of a man who intuitively grasped the aesthetic advantages of Camp long before Meyer, and, for that matter, Sontag, arrived on the scene. We are, that is to say, dealing with a man who lived through and engaged with all that which Meyer and Sontag came to theorize retrospectively. Turning our attention to Ford’s literary output of the late 1930s and the early 1940s, it appears that, at least when it came to his own work, he proposed to

camp Surrealism via processes of self-conscious exaggeration and theatrical poetic stylization⁴¹. This becomes clear when considering the closing lines of the following poem, which was included in *The Overturned Lake* :

this is a jingle for your jaw,
pearl-planted, a rant for the blest hee-haw

of the pink bee storing in your brain's
veins a gee-gaw honey for the golden skillet

set to heat on my heart's rubies

BABY WITH REVOLVER HOLDS HURRICANE AT BAY (Ford *Lake*, 38)

- 49 Notice how Ford's quirky "Song," featuring as it does playful instances of alliteration and child-like rhyming, mimics the infectious and infuriating advertising ditties of American commercial radio, concludes with a playful nod in the direction of André Breton's collection *The White-Haired Revolver* (1932). Another thing that strikes us here is just how different in both form and content Ford's stylized "Song" is from that of his aforementioned "Comedy of Belief," which, we recall, also featured in *The Overturned Lake*. Where Ford's lyrical "Comedy" is formally decorous, measured, and fairly easy to understand, his exuberant and exaggerated "Song" flirts, self-consciously, with notions of metaphorical incongruity and outright nonsensicality. Still, there is a discernible Surrealist element present in this particular poem. We can see this in the final line of Ford's "jingle for your jaw." Having been carried along by campy and almost nonsensical babble in the preceding lines, the theatrical mock newspaper headline that confronts the reader in the final line of the poem creates a palpable rupture through which overtly surreal imagery rushes.
- 50 What are we to make of such poetry? Edward B. Germain's introduction to Ford's *Flag of Ecstasy: Selected Poems* (1972) is useful in this respect. Germain makes the basic but important point that Ford's Surrealist poems do not "read like translations from the French" (Germain 9). In his estimation, Ford's Surrealism is wholly "American in its hilarity and ingenuousness and its fascination with sex and slang and the lyrics of popular songs" (Germain 9). Of particular interest here is the reference that Germain makes to the strain of seemingly irreverent humor, or hilarity, coursing through Ford's poetry. This observation underpins our understanding of Ford. Reading poems such as the irreverent, over-the-top, and perhaps even flippant, "Song", we are left with the impression that Ford just wants to have *fun*. However, there is more to it than that, and this pertains to yet another definition of Camp.
- 51 I have in mind here the well-known notion of "High Camp" put forward by Ford's queer contemporary Christopher Isherwood in *The World in the Evening* (1954). In this novel, Isherwood makes the following claim: "High Camp always has an underlying seriousness. You can't camp about something you don't take seriously. You're not making fun of it; you're making fun out of it. You're expressing what's basically serious to you in terms of fun and artifice and elegance" (Isherwood 110). Isherwood's comments should be borne in mind when considering Ford's output of the 1940s. When Isherwood's comments on Camp are read in relation to poems such as Ford's "Song" and his aforementioned "Imaginationist Manifesto" we begin more fully to appreciate that Charles Henri has no interest in rejecting – or simply making fun of – Surrealism; rather, he is interested in making fun out of it. Serious about Breton's avant-garde

movement from the very beginning of his career, the more mature Ford seeks now to rework Surrealism by exaggerating its underling absurdities and latently queer quirks.

- 52 Camp also comes to the fore in Ford's main editorial project of the 1940s. Ford put his first-hand knowledge of European avant-gardism to good use in the pages of his influential New York-based periodical *View*, which served as a vital conduit for the dissemination of Surrealism on the shores of the United States. Simultaneously serious and irreverent, the cosmopolitan *View* is also a prime example of Isherwood's High Camp. In this regard, *View* serves as a counterweight to Ford's earlier *The Young and Evil*, which engages with what Isherwood would later call "Low Camp".⁴² Ford's long-running art journal, which was commercially inflected, elegantly presented, and replete with discussions of avant-gardism, represented a concerted attempt to make alternative forms of fun out of pre-existing models provided by orthodox Surrealism. Functioning both as a textual home away from home for the displaced Europe intelligentsia and as a showcase for local American talent, Ford's *View*, in the words of Catrina Neiman, "set the stage for what was to come : it succeeded in popularizing the avant-garde" (Neiman xvi).⁴³ Stamatina Dimakopoulou corroborates this assertion in her recent critical account of *View*. Furthering Neiman's claim, Dimakopoulou argues that Ford's periodical, which championed aesthetic movements of a predominantly figurative persuasion (most visibly Surrealism and Neo-Romanticism), "constitutes an important backdrop to the emergence of America's first international avant-garde, not despite, but because of its resistance to the emergence of Abstract Expression" (Dimakopoulou 739). Significantly, in Dimakopoulou's estimation, "[a]s the consonance between aesthetic and political radicalism could no longer be sustained, Surrealism in *View* encouraged an opening out to mainstream and popular cultures that were elided from the early experiments of the Abstract Expressionists" (Dimakopoulou 739).
- 53 Ford's desire to facilitate an encounter between the avant-garde and the mainstream in the various issues of his periodical did not sit comfortably with the displaced Breton. Exiled in New York during the 1940s, Breton soon came to regard Ford, whom he had already marked out as something as an awkward character, as a potential aesthetic competitor when it came to the matter of Surrealism⁴⁴. Breton's decision to found the Surrealist magazine *VVV* (1942-44) whilst based in New York can be read as an implicit response, or perhaps even a rebuke, to Ford's decision to establish *View* in 1940. At the same time, realizing that Ford was better placed when it came to the promotion of Surrealism in America, Breton tried, somewhat belatedly, to bring Charles Henri into the official Surrealist fold, via the offer of a position on the editorial board of *VVV*. It is highly feasible that the authoritarian Breton did this in order to nullify the threat that Ford posed to his aesthetic authority. However, Ford evidently had no desire to toe the official party line.⁴⁵ He declined, having swiftly grasped the none-too-subtle implications of Breton's ostensibly altruistic offer. Having turned his back on Breton in a decisive assertion of intellectual and aesthetic independence, Ford continued on his own way, and in so doing, he forged the path for a host of younger (Camp) American poets and artists who could claim to have consciously grown up with Surrealism without feeling any obligation to subscribe to any sort of orthodox party-line.⁴⁶
- 54 The recollections of a number of prominent younger American poets such as Kenneth Koch and Ted Berrigan corroborate Edward B. Germain's previously cited assertion that Ford did, in fact, foster the conditions for the emergence of Surrealism in the United States. Indeed, Koch went as far as to attribute his understanding of Surrealism to

Ford's *View*: "I think I started writing poems I liked more when I was seventeen or eighteen. I wrote a poem when I was just eighteen, maybe on my birthday, called "For My Eighteenth Birthday" or "Poem for My Birthday" and it was influenced by French surrealism in so far as I understood it. I understood it mainly from a surrealist magazine called *View*" (Kennedy n.p.). Similarly, the second-generation New York School poet Ted Berrigan was particularly effusive in his praise for Ford: "About reading at Le Metro, how about the first Wednesday in June? It's free admission, and contributions, you wouldn't make more than maybe twenty-five dollars (or less), but there are a lot of us who sure would like to hear you read. Your poetry and your old magazine, *VIEW*, paved the way for so much of what many younger poets feel is really happening now, when so many other poets were being so boring and so ordinary" (Berrigan n.p.). I want now to bring this discussion to a close by suggesting that curious readers keep Berrigan's remarks about Ford having "paved the way for so much of what so many younger poets feel is really happening now" at the forefront of their minds when they next encounter this vital, yet hitherto neglected figure. If they do, they will soon find themselves face-to-face with an artist, writer, and curator whose work has not only stood the test of time and critical judgment, but also who forces us to reconsider some of our assumptions concerning the nature of avant-garde praxis.

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NOTES

1. Edward B. Germain comments on Charles Henri Ford's status as America's first Surrealist poet in his introduction to Ford's mid-career retrospective, *Flag of Ecstasy: Selected Poems* (1972): "When he began publishing in 1929, Ford was unique: America's surrealist poet. In retrospect, he is seminal. What he accomplished in 1930, most American poets hadn't even imagined. In the pages of his magazines, *Blues* and *View*, he introduced and encouraged surrealism while it passed into the spirit of hundreds of American writers. In his own work he creates the wonder, the wit, and the erotic beauty that have made surrealism the most significant of all modern influences upon poetry" (Germain 9).
2. Juan A. Suárez also considers *The Young and Evil*, which Ford co-wrote with the queer poet and critic Parker Tyler, in the sixth chapter of *Pop Modernism: Noise and the Reinvention of Everyday Life*. Urbana and Chicago: Illinois University Press, 2007.

3. In part building on critical advances made by Tashjian in *A Boatload of Madmen*, Joanna Pawlik also considers Ford's involvement with certain Surrealist émigrés in New York during the Second World War. See Joanna Pawlik, *Negotiating Surrealism: Postwar American Avant - Gardes After Breton* (DPhil, University of Sussex, 2008).

4. Tashjian is not the only critic to have damned Ford with faint praise. Many reductive criticisms have been levelled at Ford's aesthetic and literary practice over the years. Too obscure, too strange, too surreal: these are some of the familiar refrains that follow Ford. Consider Michael's Kimmelman's review of Ford's posthumous retrospective at the Mitchell Alpus Gallery (New York City) in 2003. In it, he argues that Ford was a dilettante, a character, peripatetic. The fashion for him now seems partly tied to his longevity – Ford as a relic of New York gay life in the 1930s – and to admiration for his being publicly out of the closet when few other men dared to be. Also to his multimedia, venturesome sensibility. His life was more interesting than his work, though. The art is ephemeral. Creatively installed, the show does the best it can to evoke Ford's lively spirit. But absent the man himself, it may leave you wondering what the fuss is about. (Kimmelman n.p.)

Kimmelman's reference to Ford's "multimedia, venturesome sensibility" is of especial interest. I would suggest that it is precisely Ford's "venturesome" literary and aesthetic "sensibility" that provokes such a strong reaction in Kimmelman. Stretched as it is across numerous decades and many different aesthetic disciplines, Ford's "multimedia" sensibility poses problems for those critics who might want simply to pigeonhole his work. Ford's formal diffuseness thus becomes an easily reached proverbial branch with which to beat him. In part, this might explain why Ford has been overlooked in accounts of cultural production during the 20th century.

5. In the earliest stages of his career Ford looked to the American modernist poet Ezra Pound for advice regarding issues of (self-) promotion.

6. This is certainly true of Tashjian's reading of *Blues*. As we will soon see, Ford conceived of his modernist little magazine as a sort of textual forum conducive to the articulation of queer poetics and aesthetics. However, Tashjian chooses not to address this aspect of Ford's first editorial venture in *A Boatload of Madmen*.

7. Tashjian raises the issue of Ford's capacity for analytical thought whilst discussing the poet's interest in Marxist political theory, which came to the fore in the 1930s. Tashjian suggests, somewhat disparagingly, that it is virtually impossible "to imagine that Ford had succumbed to abstract ideas. He was hardly a theorist of aesthetics, let alone politics, and rarely engaged in any critical writing, which he mostly left to [his confidante and collaborator Parker] Tyler" (Tashjian 165). One of the aims of this article is to refute suggestions such as those proposed by Tashjian.

8. Where Ford once saw uniformity, the academy now sees multiplicity. "There are Native Souths," Michael P. Bibler writes, "queer Souths, black Souths, Latin Souths, global Souths, immigrant Souths, revolutionary Souths, experimental Souths, apocalyptic Souths, undead Souths, divine Souths, visceral Souths, traumatic Souths, gratuitous Souths, boring Souths, imagined Souths, remembered Souths, forgotten Souths, no Souths, celluloid Souths, graphic Souths, aural Souths, pop Souths, swamp Souths, eco-Souths, branded Souths, red Souths, blue Souths, folk Souths, rural Souths, urban Souths, sick Souths, weird Souths, punk Souths, hippy Souths, hipster Souths, hip-hop Souths, dirty Souths, western Souths, coastal Souths, island Souths, mountain Souths, and on and on" (Bibler 153).

9. We need, of course, to take Ford's overwrought comments about his regional isolation with a small pinch of salt. We need also to acknowledge the fact that this melodramatic adolescent had most likely already begun mentally to codify, to borrow from the important work of Scott Herring, "the metropolitan as the terminus of queer world making as many have come to know it" (Herring 4).

10. Ford first met Kathleen Tankersley Young at the Carnegie Library of San Antonio, Texas, on 22 February 1928. For a more detailed account of Ford's relationship with Young, see my *Charles*

Henri Ford: Between Modernism and Postmodernism (2017). For a critical account of Young's involvement in Ford's *Blues* venture, see Chapter 6 of Eric B. White's *Transatlantic Avant-Gardes: Little Magazines and Localist Modernism* (2013).

11. For instance, in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933), Gertrude Stein argued that “[o]f all the little magazines which as Gertrude Stein loves to quote, have died to make verse free, perhaps the youngest and freshest was the *Blues*” (Stein 260). On a related critical note, Ford's modernist little magazine was once singled out by Frederick J. Hoffman in his canonical account of *The Little Magazine: a History and Bibliography* (1947), who celebrated *Blues* as “self-conscious, enthusiastic, and daring” (Hoffman 290).

12. I have preserved the original typography and punctuation of this piece.

13. Jolas did indeed accept Ford's offer of a place on the editorial board of *Blues*.

14. Discussing the issue of Surrealism and influence with Asako Kitaori in 2000, Ford argued that his introductory encounter with the work of the Surrealists “electrified [his] output” (Kitaori, “Catalyst”).

15. For a detailed critical treatment of Parker Tyler's early poetics and his dialogue with Poundian Imagism (as developed in *Blues*), see David Arnold's *Poetry and Language Writing: Objective and Surreal*.

16. At the same time, Ford's “belated renovation” of modernism also had much to do with his desire to differentiate his second-generation *Blues* from Jolas's more overtly radical *transition*. For a detailed account of Ford's proposed modification of Anglo-American modernism, see my article *Charles Henri Ford's Blues: A Magazine of New Rhythms and the Belated Renovation of Modernism* (Howard 2014, 161-95).

17. Ford's isolation should be borne in mind when considering the sixth issue of *Blues*. Appearing in July 1929, the so-called “expatriate issue” of *Blues* represented something of an editorial coup for Ford. The sixth *Blues* features a remarkable array of contributors, all of whom the precocious Ford had contacted through the post. This issue opens with Stein's portrait of the French avant-gardist Georges Hugnet and closes with Harry Crosby's mystical, stream-of-consciousness “House of Ra”. Sandwiched between Stein and Crosby's pieces are the contributions of numerous first- and second-generation modernist expatriate writers including Hilda Doolittle (H.D.), Walter Lowenfels, Eugene Jolas, Kay Boyle, Leigh Hoffman, Harold J. Salemson, George Linze (translated by Salemson), and Laurence Vail.

18. See Joseph Allen Boone's *Libidinal Currents* and Sam See's “Making Modernism New: Queer Mythology in *The Young and Evil*”, *English Literary History* 76 (2009).

19. One also thinks here of Daniela Caselli's recent account of *The Young and Evil*. “And yet,” Caselli cautions, “this is not a book that encourages a tour of the Village and a discovery of its sites; rather it is one that creates a queer underworld as a mythological place” (Caselli 113). One might also think of Margaret Gillespie's critical treatment of Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* (1936). “Be it at poetic or diegetic levels, as gender or genre,” Gillespie writes, “*Nightwood* can only unsuccessfully pass as decent, legitimate, or “straight.” “Form” and “content” in this novel collude in the services of the deviant and inauthentic to perform a travesty of signification that flouts dominant culture's hermeneutics of depth, and de-robes as chimera the illusion of stable, gendered selfhood” (Gillespie 10).

20. Tashjian points out that upon reaching Paris, Ford “did not immediately infiltrate the Surrealist group. Although he met individual Surrealists like Man Ray and Jacques Baron, he was perhaps too distracted by the gay life that Paris offered. Then, too, he was understandably drawn to Jean Cocteau, who was anathema to the homophobic Breton” (Tashjian 157).

21. Prior to publication in Laughlin's *New Directions*, Ford's “Chainpoem” venture had been announced in the April 1939 issue of *Poetry*.

22. I have in mind Scott Herring's account of the relationship between the avant-garde and the urban cityscape: “It is hard to disagree with [the] intimacies between modernism and the

metropolis, yet it is also not too difficult to see that the urbanized orientations of modernist studies can take a graceful swan dive into metronormativity. In its tried-and-true formulae, a hallmark of a modernist text – new or old – is a breakaway from the region in terms of migration and affect. Its keyword is deracination, and it likes to think that it has uprooted itself from provincialism as a way of life and the provincial as a geographic entity when it leaves any pretty how town behind” (Herring “Regional,” 2-3).

23. “International Chainpoem” in order of appearance (and geographical location): Takesi Fuji (Tokyo), Katue Kitasono (Tokyo), Charles Henri Ford (Paris), Dorian Cooke (London), Norman McCaig (Edinburgh), Gordon Sylander (Madison), George Marion O’ Donnell (Belzoni), Parker Tyler (New York), Saburoh Kuroda, Nagao Hirao, Syuiti Nagayasu, and Tuneo Osada (all Tokyo).

24. In equal measure, however, it should also be pointed out that a few well-placed (and certainly well intended) poetic allusions to certain Surrealist precepts do not a critical intervention make. Bearing this in mind, we need to proceed with a certain degree of caution when discussing a relatively short text such as Ford’s “Comedy of Belief” alongside Breton’s extended theoretical treatise. As is well known, *Communicating Vessels* represents one of Breton’s most detailed, painstaking, and often contradictory attempts at reconciling Marxist notions of historical materialism and Freudian theories of the unconscious. In Margaret Cohen’s estimation, *Communicating Vessels* “constitutes a linchpin in [Breton’s] defense of surrealist praxis against the French Communist Party” (Cohen 124). In it, “Breton turns the psychoanalytic notion of the dream against the version of the material/ideal opposition underwriting the French Communist Party’s refusal to admit that surrealist imaginative activity might have practical social consequence” (Cohen 124). As Cohen notes, Breton is, in this particular instance, reacting against “the separation that vulgar Marxism draws between material praxis, teleological activities focusing on the realm of facts and the politico-economic sphere, and surrealism’s “ideal” dwelling in the land of aesthetics, subjectivity, desire, [and] dream” (Cohen 124). Suffice to say, there is nothing in Ford’s playful “Comedy of Belief” that even comes close to matching, or approximating, the sheer intellectual scope and complexity of Breton’s exacting *Communicating Vessels*.

25. On a related note, we might well argue that Ford also seeks to deviate away from the various political strictures associated with Bretonian Surrealism. It seems that art always came first for Charles Henri Ford. This is something that Tashjian discusses in his account of Surrealism in the United States. According to Tashjian, Breton’s insistence that Surrealism and Marxism could function productively in a dialectical relationship would have meant relatively little to Ford. Indeed, despite occasionally expressing a vague interest in revolutionary politics and historical materialism during the 1930s, it seems that “any avant-garde position on the left that did not elevate Marxism above art would have [had] some appeal to Ford” (Tashjian 165). NB. Ford rarely troubled himself with overtly political matters – revolutionary or otherwise – in his poetry. Sometimes, as in his early poem “A Curse on the War Machine,” Ford might obliquely express his displeasure at the prospect of (political) violence. Very occasionally, as in his early long poem “The Garden Disorder,” Ford will refer fleetingly to famous political figures, such as the architect of the 1917 October Revolution: “Lenin has withdrawn to a dialectic paradise and counts with sociological eyes / the biffs of the nightsticks, the devil’s police” (Ford *Labyrinth*, 5). However, it should be noted that such instances are few and far between in Ford’s oeuvre.

26. In his foundational instructional account of literary automatism, Breton implores the aspiring Surrealist artist to “[p]ut yourself in as passive or as receptive, a state of mind as you can. Forget about your genius, your talent, and the talents of everyone else. Keep reminding yourself that literature is one of the saddest roads that leads to everything” (Breton *Manifestos*, 28).

27. Of course, Ford was by no means the only person to take issue with the perceived passivity of Surrealist automatism. The prominent Surrealist renegade Salvador Dalí was, like the dissenting

Ford, unsatisfied with automatism. Indeed, as Mary Ann Caws has shown, his eventual theorization of a paranoid critical method “was to undermine the concept of Surrealist automatism, which seemed to Dalí far too passive” (Caws *Dalí*, 74).

28. In this respect, Ford desire to rework Surrealism anticipates John Ashbery’s assertion that “[r]eal freedom would be to use this method [literary automatism] where it could be of service and to correct it with the conscious mind where indicated” (Ashbery 5-6).

29. Ford makes a similar point in yet another letter addressed to Tyler: “Les Vases Communicants is one B’s most brilliant works of prose; I’m reading it 2nd time as first time I read I didn’t have the eye on the translation. Other books of his I’ve read recently: Position Politique du Surrealisme; L’Amour Fou; Second Manifeste du Surrealisme. It’s easy, as I said, to underestimate the surrealist movement if one judges it only by the painting products.... However, Breton is an orthodox surrealist in his art-judgments, in spite of the “independent” line taken in the manifesto. His group meets at 2 Magots on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays & Sundays. My lunch with him lasted from one until night during which time we had a lot to say: I told him I was shocked at his puritanism in the Sex Conference in Variétés wherein he protested against discussing pederasty, so I bluntly said it must have been because of an inhibition and he agreed” (Ford “Undated Letter,” n.p.).

30. Ford’s tendency towards the fragmentary and the unfinished is characteristic. The American writer and composer Paul Bowles recognized as much. We get a sense of this in a letter that Bowles sent to Ford on 18 March 1964. In it, Bowles suggests that “Blues Ten sounds good, but I feel sure that by now it’s a project of the past, since you do change your mind with the wind, don’t you?” (Bowles n.p.). N.B. Ford did eventually publish a tenth issue of *Blues* in 1989. Edited by Ford, *Blues 10* appeared as a guest issue of Michael Andre’s New York-based periodical *Unmuzzled OX* (26).

31. Judging by Ford’s handwritten notes, it seems that he is mostly concerned with the (pure?) versions of Surrealism articulated by Breton in the first and second *Manifestos*.

32. Once again, Ford can be said to have anticipated John Ashbery’s subsequent comments about the application of Surrealist literary methods and personal autonomy.

33. Ford played editorial host to a number of New York School poets in his *Little Anthology of the Poem in Prose* (1953). Appearing in Laughlin’s yearly *New Directions*, Ford’s *Prose Poem* anthology was initially conceived as a collection of “texts sacred and secular, ancient and modern” and “a dynamic alliance of the spiritual and aesthetic” (Ford “Poem,” n.p.). In this historically diverse anthology, not only do the writings of William Shakespeare and Franz Schubert sit side-by-side; they do so alongside the “Two Meditations” of the first-generation New York School poet James Schuyler. In a similar fashion, Allen Ginsberg’s “Psalm” sits in close proximity to the “Proverbs” of Paul Goodman, with “The Folding Up” of the prophet Mohammed sandwiched in-between. Including emerging younger American writers such as Ginsberg, Schuyler, Ashbery, and the bona-fide American Surrealist Philip Lamantia, Ford’s collection of modern poets reads as a roll call of those that would ultimately come to define *The New American Poetry* (as collated by Donald Allen in 1960).

34. *Operation Minotaur* also features a number of photographs taken by Ford’s travelling companion and artistic collaborator, Indra B. Tamang.

35. Haiku came to be Ford’s preferred poetic method in his later life. He was particularly interested in the juxtapositional logic underpinning the haiku form. As he suggested to Asako Kitaori, “[t]he thing about the haiku is it’s very flexible as to content and the form is fascinating because of its brevity and it can be a very concentrated content. It’s the most flexible form of poetry, much more so than the sonnet. I think [that’s] the first thing that attracted me to the haiku, but it’s not what attracts me now particularly, but it ends up being surrealist because of the superimposition – two unrelated things that make a whole which seems to be a collage” (Kitaori “Catalyst”).

36. Other critics also consider the peculiar formal mixture of *The Young and Evil*. In his analysis of queer modernist mythology, Sam See suggests that “Ford and Tyler’s text shuttles between two collective, and to them, similar, experiences – those of the queer community and literary modernist culture at large – to blur the line between the strange and common, the queer and the mainstream, in American modernism” (See 1076).

37. Ford and Tyler are referring to Beatrice Lillie’s rendition of the song “I’m a Campfire Girl,” which was popular in the gay (urban) world of the 1920s and 1930s.

38. Perhaps these remarks about the “production of social visibility” might also be said chime with Ford’s aforementioned desire to bring Surrealism out of the shadows.

39. Chauncey suggests that in the first half of the 20th century “Camp represented a critical perspective on the world – or, more accurately, a stance in relation to the world—that derived from gay men’s own experience as deviants” (Chauncey 290). In this fashion, “Camp was at once a cultural *style* and a cultural *strategy*, for it helped gay men make sense of, respond to, and undermine the social categories of gender and sexuality that served to marginalize them” (Chauncey 290).

40. Staunchly queer, Meyer’s attempt to reclaim the discourse of Camp is often compelling. In equal measure, however, it is not completely foolproof. In assuming such an uncompromising position, Meyer in fact leaves himself open to potential criticism. Cleto is again helpful here. He suggests that Meyer’s theorization of queerness is both contradictory and problematic. For Cleto, a properly queer stance, one that breaks away from ideological interpellations of binarism, “enacts confrontationist tactics, in which the subordinate, the deviant, voids the categories of the dominant, replacing them with their opposites (multiplicity, diversity, instability, change, and surface)” (Cleto 14). In this way, “queer thinking” is capable of promoting a “sabotage of the manifold binarisms (masculine/feminine, original/copy, identity/difference, natural/artifice, private/public, etc.) on which bourgeois epistemic and ontological order arranges and perpetuates itself” (Cleto 15). Significantly, if such a queer deconstruction, or confrontational “sabotage,” is to be achieved, one needs at all times to resist overtures pertaining to totalisation and unification, fullness and permanence. This is where, according to Cleto, Meyer becomes unstuck. Cleto posits that Meyer’s overly rigid definition of queer subjectivity leaves no room for strategic manoeuvre, and also discloses “a will to ascertain a unified definitional ground [that] would thus devoid that very subjectivity of a specific positioning within culture” (Cleto 18). In turn, this impacts negatively on Meyer’s theorisation of Camp, which, lest we forget, is dependent upon precisely such a fixed conception of (historically effaced) queer subjectivity. Following Cleto, we might well assert that Meyer’s “all too specific” (Cleto 18) account of queer subjectivity forecloses certain avenues of potentially productive inquiry when it comes to the question of Camp. For instance, Meyer’s insistence that there can be only one (queer) kind of Camp effectively forces him to ignore that which Cleto describes as “the complex relation of camp to the phenomenology of pop and Kitsch, for that relation partakes of the Sontagian expropriation of a specifically gay formation” (Cleto 19).

41. In Jack Babuscio’s estimation, “camp emphasizes style as a means of self-projection, a conveyor of meaning, and an expression of emotional tone” (Babuscio 23). Tellingly, such issues of stylization and self-projection also come to the fore in Ford’s unpublished “From a Record of Myself” (1948). In this critical and campy text, Ford insists that “[f]orm will merely be the construction – very near to style but not identical. Style is the manner in which the poetry is put: much closer to the poet’s personality than the mere accidental and impersonal thing called form” (Ford “Record,” 140).

42. As described by a reserved and oddly prudish Isherwood, Low Camp is “a swishy little boy with peroxidized hair, dressed in a picture hat and a feather boa, pretending to be Marlene Dietrich” (Isherwood 110). Unlike Isherwood, Ford has no reservations about Low Camp. He revels in vulgarity in his pioneering Camp novel.

43. Ford's desire to popularize Surrealism also led to an implicit alignment with the Surrealist agenda of Breton's aesthetic *bête noire*: Dalí. For better or worse, it was Dalí who was largely responsible for the increased visibility of Surrealism in the United States during the late 1930s. An indefatigable self-promoter, Dalí's many American commercial commissions resulted in him being variously described as a profiteer, a popularizer, and a dilutor of orthodox Surrealism.

44. Ford's sexuality was an awkward point of contention for the notoriously homophobic "Pope" of Surrealism. Breton's homophobia has been well documented. Consider the following comment from the first session of the Surrealist "Recherches" (27 January 1928), in which Breton "accuse[s] homosexuals of confronting human tolerance with a mental and moral deficiency which tends to turn itself into a system and to paralyze every enterprise I respect" (Pierre 5).

45. According to Tashjian, "Ford was apparently asked to be editor of *VVV*, but declined the position for the same reasons that he refused to hew strictly to the Surrealist line in *View*. "I knew [Breton] would be looking over my shoulder," he later said, preferring a catholic stance for *View*" (Tashjian 211).

46. Indeed, no less an artist than Andy Warhol went as far to name his *inter/View* magazine in homage to Ford's *View*.

ABSTRACTS

This paper focuses on the queer American modernist poet, novelist, and editor Charles Henri Ford (1908-2002). Beginning with his first modernist periodical *Blues: a Magazine of New Rhythms* (1929-30), I consider Ford's engagement with and commitment to Surrealism. I argue that *Blues* left a profound and lasting impression on Ford's (surreal) conception of cultural production and editorial praxis. *Blues* also signals the emergence of an important queer—or more specifically, *camp*—turn in Ford's nascent praxis, which comes to exert a significant pressure on his understanding of and approach to Surrealism in the 1930s and 1940s. During this time, Ford took it upon himself to bring André Breton's movement "out from [the] underground," and more fully into the view of the American public. At the same time, Ford proposed a reworking of Surrealism. This is where Ford's *camp* approach comes to the fore. Serious about Breton's avant-garde movement, Ford sought to transform Surrealism by exaggerating its underlying absurdities and latently queer quirks. We get a clear sense of this when considering Ford's main editorial project of the 1940s. Accordingly, I describe how, in the pages of his periodical *View* (1940-47), Ford oversaw the dissemination—and *camp* transformation—of Surrealism in the United States. When read in relation to the rest of Ford's varied and vibrant creative output, it is clear that this unfairly overlooked figure can be said to have fostered the conditions for the subsequent emergence of decidedly surreal—and demonstrably *camp*—sensitivity in postwar American culture.

Cet article porte sur le poète, romancier et éditeur américain homosexuel Charles Henri Ford (1908-2002). Il s'intéresse d'abord à son premier magazine, *Blues: a Magazine of New Rhythms* (1929-30), pour retracer le lien et l'apport de Ford au surréalisme et souligner l'influence de *Blues* sur la façon (surréelle) dont Ford associe production culturelle et praxis éditoriale. C'est également dans les pages de *Blues* que Ford commence à expérimenter une poétique *queer*, et plus précisément *camp*, qui va considérablement influencer sur sa conception du surréalisme dans les années trente et quarante. A cette période, Ford se donne pour mission de « mettre au jour » le

surréalisme de Breton pour le porter à la connaissance du public américain. Dans le même temps, il propose de transformer le surréalisme selon sa propre vision du *camp* : sans rien ôter au sérieux de la démarche surréaliste, il cherche à en exagérer les absurdités et les excentricités (au fort potentiel *queer*), comme le montre sa grande aventure éditoriale, *View*, dans les années quarante. A travers cette revue (1940-47), Ford poursuit son projet de diffuser et transformer (via l'esthétique *camp*) le surréalisme aux Etats-Unis. A la lumière de la production poétique à la fois variée et éminemment originale de Ford, il apparaît que ce passeur trop longtemps négligé a activement contribué à l'émergence d'une sensibilité résolument surréaliste (et que l'on peut qualifier de *camp*) au sein de la culture américaine de l'après-guerre.

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Mots-clés: avant-garde, camp, petits magazines, modernisme, queer theory, surréalisme

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From a “Garden of Disorder” to a “Nest of Flames”: Charles Henri Ford’s Surrealist Inflections

Stamatina Dimakopoulou

- 1 Primarily known as the editor of the New York-based *View* magazine (1940-1947), the main platform for the European Surrealists during the Second World War, and its more short-lived precedent *Blues* (1929-1930) where Ford tentatively brought together new American voices alongside the expatriate generation,¹ Charles Henri Ford’s poetry has received scant critical attention. While the affiliations within Ford’s early poetry are still largely unexplored, *The Young and Evil* (1933) that he co-authored in Paris with Parker Tyler has been revisited as a seminal text in the queer genealogies of American modernism.
- 2 In his study of modernism’s *Libidinal Currents*, Joseph Allen Boone established a parallel between the “subversively avant-garde style and form, as well as its sexually explicit content” that “place it at the margins of official modernist practice,” and “the outcast queer fringe it brazenly presents” (Boone 264). Albeit acknowledging the innovative experimentalism of *The Young and Evil*, Boone saw its radicalism as part and parcel of the authors’ marginality. In Boone’s wake, Juan Antonio Suárez stressed that “emblematic of [...] [the] articulation of queerness are the vexing, unstable relations between modernist textuality and popular practice, between experimentalism and street culture [...] instabilities [that] characterize a queer modernism” (Suárez 181). Drawing a parallel between “Ford’s and Tyler’s position within the American avant-garde” and Jean Cocteau’s (one of Breton’s favourite peeves), “Ford’s and Tyler’s marginality within official modernism,” Suárez goes on, “does not seem to have been particularly traumatic.” As a most telling instance Suárez notes Ford’s “report[ing]” from Paris in a tongue-in-cheek manner that the International Federation of Independent Artists acronym “was FIARI not fairy” (Suárez 194).
- 3 Yet, just as the virtual omission of *The Young and Evil* from literary modernist cultures may have had to do with a “queerness” that jarred with high modernist “mythopoeic” paradigms (See 1075), the fact that Ford’s poetic work has been overlooked may have to

do less with its marked Surrealist influences and/or derivative aspects than with the somewhat unclassifiable and composite texture of his poems. In what follows, Ford's early poetry will be revisited as a space where distinct paradigms become reciprocally defamiliarizing: his queer sensibility assimilates concurrently Surrealist poetics and Djuna Barnes's equally unclassifiable queer modernism with and against Williams's Americanist modernism. From *The Garden of Disorder and Other Poems* of 1938 that William Carlos Williams heralded for being a "dream-like [...] foil" to "the practice of the art [that] tends to be seduced by politics" (Williams, *Tortuous Straightness* 10) to the 1949 *Sleep in A Nest of Flames* that brought together work written during the years of his editorship of *View*, Ford reconfigured Surrealist poetics through his own idiosyncratic affinities.

- 4 In "The Tortuous Straightness of Charles Henri Ford" which introduced the 1938 New Directions volume *The Garden of Disorder and Other Poems*, Williams implicitly acknowledged Ford's Surrealist inflections and hailed Ford for "retaining a firmness of extraordinary word juxtapositions while dealing wholly with a world to which the usual mind is unfamiliar, a counterfoil to the vague and excessively stupid juxtapositions commonly known as 'reality'" (Williams, *Tortuous Straightness* 9). Williams's praise, however, was both appropriative and responsive to Ford's singularity. In words reminiscent of the apostrophe about his own relation to European avant-gardism in *The Great American Novel*,² Williams went on to state that the "effect is to revive the senses and force them to re-see, re-hear, re-taste, re-smell, and generally re-value all that it was believed had been seen, heard, smelled, and generally valued" (Williams, *Tortuous Straightness* 9). Incisive and somewhat affectionate as this foreword might have been, Williams foregrounded the "straightness" rather than the "tortuousness" of Ford's poetry: he omitted the question of sexuality and did not explicitly address Ford's marked affinity for Surrealism and Barnes. Instead, he implicitly aligned Ford to his own Americanist grain and concluded by redeeming Ford's uneven poetry for returning "to something he had begun to forget — a fantastic drive out of —, while in the very process of entering the banal" (Williams *Tortuous Straightness*, 11).
- 5 Ford selectively voiced his affinities in the "Pamphlet of Sonnets" which, despite their "small excellences of tenuous but concretely imagined word appositions," Williams dismissed as "thoroughly banal because [the sonnet] is a word in itself whose meaning is definitely fascistic" (Williams, *Tortuous Straightness* 10). The "Pamphlet of Sonnets" was included in the 1938 volume after the long poem which gave the title to the collection. Virtually divested of cultural markers that Williams would identify as "banal" and/or American, the "sonnets" constitute primarily affiliative gestures, while their allegorical and experiential registers mark off a distance from Hemingway's pared down prose and Stein's verbal play that went into the writing of *The Young and Evil*. Certainly dissonant in the poetic climate of the 1930s, Ford's dedications and diction bring together the push and pulls of a yet-unnamed queer modernism, and the rear-guard of neo-romanticism that Stein dwelled on towards the end of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. While Stein famously hailed Ford for being "as young and fresh as his Blues" (Stein 241), Surrealism is conspicuously absent from the *Autobiography* with the sole exception of René Crevel who is mentioned together with Duchamp as "the most complete examples of this French charm" (Stein 237), and as "the friend of all these painters," that is, Christian Bérard and Pavel Tchelitchew.³ As Ford later on attempted

to create bridges between Surrealism, neo-romanticism, and American vernaculars in *View*, his early poetry, albeit in a more coded manner, also comes across as an attempt to express himself through divergent and related modernist idioms.

- 6 Ford's ex-centric poetic idiom emerges in dialogue and in dissonance with Surrealism. The wilful anachronistic diction of the "Sonnets" seems to be gesturing towards Barnes's ironic use of the early modern almanac in *Ladies Almanack* in order to construct, as Carolyn Burke puts it, a "literally ex-centric moral universe" (Burke 73). Dedicated to the Vicomtesse de Noailles, Parker Tyler, Djuna Barnes, and Pavel Tchelitchew,⁴ the "sonnets" construct a personal poetic idiom that is more akin to Barnes's aestheticist early overtones, certainly distanced from the explicitness of *The Young and Evil*. Still, Ford pursues the queering of the "surrealist fusion of desire and death" through covert and explicit evocations of homoeroticism (See 1084). Violence and homoerotic desire intersect in the poems, and these themes are introduced in the opening poem "To Christopher Marlowe." Ford's "assassinated poet" is doubly a tribute to Apollinaire and to the queer poet of the English Renaissance who "identified the cruelty of dreams" (*Garden* 23). Here, and in several instances, Ford echoes — or rather incipiently queers — André Breton's notion of poetry as a subversive and transgressive act. Ford's tribute to Marlowe also involves Barnes's penchant for allegory, as the poem is performing a slippage from personal fantasies to writing as a space of dissidence: Marlowe's death, Ford seems to imply, was the realisation of the risk that Ford affectedly projects on the allegory of "Doom" who "combs her hair or hears the door close on a poet's prison / and makes him one of those grave thieves / who go / to pick the lock of Christopher Marlowe" (*Garden* 23).
- 7 In Ford's early poetry, the lessons of Surrealism can be detected in the interest in dreams, incongruous juxtapositions and the abandonment of formal logic, while the figuration of sexuality complicates the treatment of a heteronormative sexuality in Surrealism. Albeit recently revisited, challenged, and nuanced, Rudolf Kuenzli's most unambiguous critique of Surrealism's politics of eroticism still retains some of its validity: "The Surrealists lived in their own masculine world, with their eyes closed, the better to construct the fantasies of the feminine" (Kuenzli 18).⁵ Tangential to Surrealism, Ford's early poetry does complicate the question of gender and the extent to which Breton's writings may have offered a valuable critique of the "institutionalized taxonomic discourses [...] centering on homo/heterosexual definition" while sustaining the definition altogether that, as Sedgwick had stressed, "proliferated and crystallized with exceptional rapidity in the decades around the turn of the century" (Sedgwick 2). The "Dreams" for the Vicomtesse de Noailles is a case in point; reminiscent of the fantasy of the "shock-abbreviated" body of a corpse that "lay out listlessly like some small mug / Of beer gone flat" in Barnes's "Suicide" in *The Book of Repulsive Women* (Barnes 49), Ford's "dreams" are quite removed from the accounts of dreams of the Surrealists, yet embrace a dream of liberation. The images of fragmented bodies and/or death are figurations of sexual desire, while the somewhat contrived critique of a repressive "actuality" may also be read as a cry against repressive paradigms of sexuality:

If you could be impersonal as dreams
which walk away enfolded in the strife
to bring irresolution's foes to life,
or dreams that grant a malady the crimes
committed by the craven of your sleep; [...]

instead of counting on the banal hearse
of actuality to pass you bed,
showing the maddest of your dreams as dead,
you wake confronting habit's agile curse :
your heart's asylum fuller than before
and love a lunatic athwart the door. (*Garden* 24)

- 8 Ford's poetry explicitly and covertly reminds us that, as Sedgwick claimed, "the now chronic modern crisis of homo/heterosexual definition has affected our culture through its ineffaceable marking" (Sedgwick 11). Confronted by and confronting this marking, the young poet desists from naming, and voices his feelings through the "impersonality of dreams." Not only voicing homoerotic desire, Ford's "dreams" also involve a generalised uncertainty in the wake of the "'rhythms' of malaise, barrenness, and cultural exhaustion that were gripping American modernists during the build-up to the stock market crash of 1929," as Eric White puts it in his reading of *Blues* (White 188). The early poems, albeit certainly "aesthetically awkward,"⁶ may be read as expressions of Ford's being caught not only in-between the disrupted lines of transcontinental modernism and avant-gardism, but also in the midst of a fraught historical and political juncture. The "sonnets" are both a flight away from "actuality" and an expression of frustration before a certain inadequacy to record the "banal" that Williams was persisting in. "The Mist of Sickness," also dedicated to the Vicomtesse de Noailles, is a metaphor that works in a similar manner : "[rising] like a soul [...] in the wake of history negotiates the ruin / begun by building on the rotten bank / your body's delicate tormented mountain." At the end of the poem, this image of decay is transformed into "the deformation grasping at your throat / repeats the rain with which your feet are fraught" (*Garden* 25). A tension between a persistent malaise and expectancy recurs in the sequence of poems for Parker Tyler, where fantasies of sickness, death, disease, and muted violence work as personal and cultural metaphors, as guilt and the anxiety of death are entwined with the emancipatory potential of eroticism. In "The Young Boy," for instance, Ford subverts the vexing associations of homoeroticism with disease and links the "many-seeded bud" of an adolescent homoerotic sexuality to "a shock like danger that is realized" at the moment when the "diseased mouth" is kissed. The poem states a refusal or rather an unlearning of oppression : "refuse to learn / that potency of being equals doom" (*Garden* 26).
- 9 Overall, the metaphorical and allegorical registers of the "sonnets" are certainly more cryptic, although not necessarily more tame, in relation to *The Young and Evil*. The contrived unevenness that displeased Williams in Ford's early poetry is redeemed by the lyrical and allegorical evocations of sexuality that seem to contain echoes of the unsettling images of the female modernists of the New York avant-garde, namely, the distorting perspectives on the body that was recovered in and for its abjection in Barnes's 1914 *Book of Repulsive Women* and in Loy's 1915 *Love Songs*. Ford in this way performs a *détournement* of Surrealism and at the same time responds, as it were, to Williams who had commended "the unusual and more radical work [...] especially poems by Mina Lloyd, [*sic*] the shorter works of Djuna Barnes, something of Robert McAlmon's, the first of Hemingway's short stories" in his note for *Blues* (Williams "For a New Magazine," 31, 32). The sequence for Barnes, for instance, bears more affinities with Barnes's treatment of suffering, trauma, and decay than Williams was inclined to acknowledge. In "The Jeweled Bat," the anxiety of death is mediated through the allegory of a trapped and subsequently liberated body : Ford's vision is reminiscent of

Barnes's "Seen from the "L" where a female "nude" is "chain-stitched [...] to her soul for time / Raveling grandly into vice" (Barnes 49). The metaphor of the "bat", on the other hand, and the blurred line between the human and the animal are akin to Leonora Carrington's dreamscapes where as Natalya Lusty has noted "the operation of desire and fantasy unfolds through a series of lexical, mythological, and narrative substitutions and transformations" (Lusty 50). In Ford's imagery Carrington's "substitutions and transformations" are anticipated in the interchangeability and juxtaposition of abstract and concrete images, of life, death, and animality :

entan- / gled in a sun it cannot see, escape
 it finds to be the love promised to man
 by angels : madness ; heaven overripe.
 So glory, automatic, probable,
 reveals the hidden corpse of the mammal,
 thus adding to death's momentary glut,
 yet harboring the acrid obdurate salt
 the lovely black bat used to fly across
 not knowing then the solitude that was. (*Garden* 31)

- 10 Ford here experiments with an important trope of early Surrealism, namely, seeing and obstructed vision: the trapped, "entangled" animal which is either unable to see or ensnared as it were by a sun is a metaphor that speaks both of a fantasy of castration, debilitation and blindness, just as it speaks of a liberation. Freed from the imperative to see what it cannot see, the "body" surrenders to transgressive and ominous fantasies of corrosion – "the acrid obdurate salt." Here too, the push-and-pull, as it were, between fulfilment and a destructive fantasy is at play. This poem potently welds Barnes's covert allusions to homoerotic desire with the shifts between irrationalism and an intimate tonality, concrete images, and imagined symbols in the free associations of the early poetry of Benjamin Péret in the 1928 *Grand Jeu* or in Robert Desnos's 1927 *La Liberté ou l'amour*. Moreover, the semantic slippage between "man" as a universalizing term, and the particularized, gendered subject becomes "paradigmatic" and "short-circuits ideas of normalcy and abnormality," to remember Ross Chambers's return to Sedgwick. Ford's early poems are related to Surrealism at the level of an "ethics of inversion," "[an] ethical move" that "consists of taking what is regarded [...] as minor, secondary, marginal, accidental, or abject [...] and showing it, instead, to be paradigmatic, [...] both an "identity" and a model of the human" (Chambers 171). This shift does not involve homoerotic desire alone but the gendered subject altogether : "The Unhappy Train," unsettles the Surrealist fetishization of the female body in the image of a mother and an infant bearing signs of aging and pain. Beyond the intertextual reference to Max Ernst's 1926 *The Blessed Virgin Chastising the Infant Jesus Before Three Witnesses*, Ford's inflections of pain and deterioration divert Ernst's ironic iconoclasm towards an image of reciprocity that is mediated through "unholy prayers or pious slang / the Magdalenes and Marys make for me" (*Garden* 32). In "Seis Hermanos," the poem that concludes the sequence for Barnes, Ford synthesises Barnes's use of allegory, the Surrealist's dreams of liberation, and homoerotic desire with a playful – even camp – irony :

Oh brothers, is it your boat's ghoul that
 seems
 to sail the Milky Way with painted eyes
 which drop six stars before the pink sunrise
 arouses fishermen to fish for dreams ?
 Then you are drowned and I must tell your

mother
 how Fear, Desire, Destruction and Disease,
 as well as Gratitude, youngest of these,
 and lastly, Genius, that strange eldest brother,
 though scattered far apart in their first blood,
 are now one will, one engine and one blood. (*Garden* 33)

- 11 What is striking here is the playful incongruity between the campy evocation of the “brothers”’s “painted eyes,” an intertextual resonance of the “fairies” of *The Young and Evil*, and the fantasy of the “arousal” of fishermen who “fish,” should we say, cruise for dreams, and the evocation of allegories in the second stanza. Is it yet again the transgressive fantasies that he shares with the “brothers,” which merit the “drowning” before meriting to become “one will, one engine and one blood.” ?
- 12 The fantasies of death are followed by allegories of awakening through a dialectic between anxiety and fulfilment in the poems for Pavel Tchelitchev. The limits of a “fabulous fatigue” that in the third sonnet for Parker Tyler “Man Turning Into Ape,” are related to sexual emancipation — “your face against the glass cannot forego / the metamorphosis that cancels woe [...] imagine nothing as corrupt as pleasure” (*Garden* 28), are refracted in the fourth sonnet, entitled “No Tree is Charmed,” by “the marvellous, amazed with hopelessness / tree like the one that clamours in your breast, / with tongues waving in the wind of poetry, / had better had a guardian than not” (29). Here again, eroticism and desire are posited as catalysts for individual emancipation, just as they seem to be more intimately intended to connote a more personalised range of affects.
- 13 Ford’s poetic voice comes into its own in the four poems of *The Garden of Disorder* that was dedicated to Tchelitchev. The title points to the directions that defined Ford’s sensibility : Ford acknowledges Williams’s “seminal response to French surrealism” in “The Simplicity of Disorder” where, as Céline Mansanti has argued, Williams counters Surrealism’s allegorical poetics with his own hands-on “spontaneity” (Mansanti 2009). Williams also pays a tribute to the Surrealist appropriation of Rimbaud’s injunction to systematically derange the senses, and, in a more implicit manner, connects his coded poetics to the “garden of ecstasy” in Barnes’s *Ladies Almanack*, possibly also drawing a self-ironic parallel between his involvement in the expatriate community of Paris and his homecoming. These three distinct strands converge in the poems in the wake of the disbanding of the communities that Barnes had playfully allegorized. In these four poems, the historical, medical, and psychoanalytic implications of “disorder” also come into play as Ford envisions “disorder” as a demystifying and liberating principle. Taken together, these four poems build an iconography that blends Williams’s inflections of American speech and juxtapositions of incongruous images in the manner of the Surrealists with Barnes’s shifts between the lyrical and the bathetic. Overall, the first poem reads as an affirmation of the uncompromising, defamiliarizing, and transformative value of the Surrealist use of language. The poem opens with a series of injunctions in which Ford experiments with the potentiality of the Surrealist image as the meeting ground of distant, rationally unrelated elements :

To lodge your harvest in the lion’s
 mouth,
 to telescope the bugs that feed flowers
 to place your aspiration under the microscope,
 and send no disease to graze in the meadow
 of hours ;

to bisect the raindrop, quarrel with snow [...]

pin the two-horned butterfly to the school-

book,

fertilize the crook, the thief,

and others who till grief ;

catalogue the good postmaster

and those who hobble after

the plough of Christianity, or vanity ;

to gauge the flight of reason

according the fuel of unreason ;

experiment with the chemicals, music and

love,

and not leave the weather to the weather-man ; (*Garden* 13)

- 14 We cannot fail to miss the dialogue with Barnes's *Ladies Almanack* in the opening line, "Thus begins this Almanack, which all Ladies should carry about with them, as the Priest his Breviary, as the Cook his Recipes, as the Doctor his Physic, as the Bride her Fears, and as the Lion his Roar !" (Barnes *Ladies Almanack*, 9). Ford begins in an equally playful manner in lines that reiterate the Surrealist interest in visual distortion, with a certain resonance of Williams's attentiveness to the thingness of words, and the ingenuity and muted violence of Joseph Cornell's early collages that Ford will later on publish in *View* in the special issue on Max Ernst. Ford "lodges," as it were, the "harvest" of Surrealism in his idiosyncratic *Garden of Disorder*, which, later on in the poem, generates a reality off its hinges through a parody of fears of deviance to which Ford offsets Surrealist-derived irrationalism :

to return the stare of houses

and of the beast that browses

this side of delirium,

among the meek displeased cattle

of Newark of Seattle ;

to despise, despise nothing

but the mote of shame in your eye ; ...

freaks are not mothers, even to freaks :

the vine that shrieks is normality's :

banality's blister may be pricked after twi-

light ;

to curtail the snail were not heroic,

to become a stoic were to risk the season,

and so you may launch like five fishes

your five sense in aquatic region

of the mind ; though the octopus grow un-

acrobatic,

hearts will curl in competition (*Garden* 14-15)

- 15 The second poem follows on along Surrealist lines : the dialectic between "reason and "unreason" is taken up by the duality between "the impersonal, and / personal" (15) and the visible and the "unseen," in a series of images staging elements in a state of conflict and/or suspension that are sometimes coupled with a certain moralizing tonality — "is it Peace lashed against War ?" (16). In Ford's "garden," "hail beats, loudest of grain," "the earth yawns" (16), "clouds stammer," and "the trees ride bicycles" (17), as the poet mobilizes both the verbal and the visual inflections of the Surrealist image to simulate the flow of automatic writing. As was the case with the sonnets, the lines rhetorically work against an anxiety that is overcome towards the

end of the poem by “Beowulf bellow[ing] across the centuries to bravery’s bedfellows” (17).

- 16 The contrived rhetoric of the second poem is followed by a more successful welding of Williams’s diction with Surrealism’s irrationalism. In the third poem, Ford yet again revolves the labor of poetry, as he starts integrating more American cultural markers and speaks of words as the raw material of poetry in a way that brings to mind in a tongue-in-cheek manner both Williams’s seeing words as part of our sensorium and André Breton’s notion of words making love in “Les Mots sans rides” (Breton 171). In the excerpt below, Ford is blending animate and inanimate, natural and man-made objects, and personifications :

Perfume the clock, and the cricket will take
 Care of Aunt Bess,
 But the poet forgot to put on his odor-proof
 vest :
 How staunch the scent of words ?
 Dilute the sadistic monopoly’s
 whirlpool that twisted
 the artist out of all recognition :
 he will trail the secret brook
 that rush with the fragrance of perdition. (Garden 17-8)

- 17 The last poem begins with what reads as a playful evocation of Dalí’s “Six Apparitions of Lenin on a Grand Piano” (1931) and possibly the tense relationship between Breton and Dalí whom Breton subsequently dubbed AVIDA DOLLARS. Expressing a dissidence of a different kind, Ford’s intimate and cryptic tonality jarred both with Breton’s attempt to link the dream of political revolution with individual emancipation in the 1930s and possibly with Dalí’s stock-in-trade images, just as it largely circumvented the social content and the more public idioms of the poetics and the iconography of the Depression.⁷ Ford’s playful aside about the difficult alliance between Surrealism and Marxist politics in the 1930s is followed by a stream of free associations and semantic play :

Lenin has withdrawn to a dialectic
 paradise and counts with sociological eyes
 the biffs of the nightsticks, the devil’s police
 No witch flies out of the window
 in witchless New England;
 oh the goblins sleep [...]
 But how many roofs besides my own
 leak with remorse
 at liberty’s affliction
 be the rain fine or coarse? [...]
 Mutable the oracle [...]
 of creation who loves those who create,
 and death who dotes on masturbation;
 of her lover in the asylum,
 and your love on the lookout for a maniac;
 of his morality on the right track,
 and their abnormality on the wrong island;
 and of any other wizard reason
 to convict you of subjective treason,
 a traitor to the snow-gardens and the equator,
 to the zodiac masses, the classless solution
 in May’s revolving botany: bouquets of

terror

from the garden of revolution. (*Gardens* 19, 20)

18 Ford here seems to attempt to express his own idiosyncrasy with a critical eye on both Surrealism and American cultural myths: the playful defamiliarization of a “witchless American past” is reprised in the implied farewell to an “afflicted liberty”⁸ that also contains a tribute to Desnos’s *La Liberté ou l’amour*. The “affliction” of liberty, Ford seems to suggest, may be overcome by unexpected games and chance, and this may be why for Ford, “the oracle” too is liable to change. The poem’s irony unfolds in dream-like images that alter proportions and associations between the objects of perception. Ford’s playful irrationalism points both to the incongruity or impossible reconciliation of Surrealist politics and “the classless solution,”⁹ and maybe to Ford’s own eccentricity — “convict[ed] of subjective treason.” The poem nonetheless concludes affirmatively with a gesture towards the “garden of revolution” (20) where, certainly for Ford, as Joanne Winning has put it about H.D., the “figure of writing” also “becomes a coterminous destination” with a gay “identity” (Winning 58): Ford too, like Barnes and H.D. constructs and substantiates difference and divergence in his early poetic work.

19 In Ford’s “Late Lyrics” that were also included in the 1938 volume, there is a noticeable shift away from the lyricism and the allegorical registers of the “Sonnets” towards a more explicit inscription of homoeroticism in poems that intermittently integrate cultural content and scenes that are more reminiscent of the American vernacular and the iconography of the Depression. In “Dissatisfaction with Life” such scenes gets entwined with private metaphors:

YOUR son is paralyzed:
 look both ways through his eyes;
 your daughter is silent:
 Go and live on another island
 where waterfalls harden and slowly explode
 like the lovers I connote,
 Inhabitants of a movie-theatre,
 Deep-sea water animals without water (*Garden* 55)

20 The “paralysed son” seems to be in the vein of Williams’s “Proletarian Portrait”; the injunction to look at this distressing scene is reminiscent of Depression photography, while the “movie-theatres” bring to mind Edward Hopper’s desolate spaces. Here too, the succession of images is mediated through a more personalised inflection of eroticism — “like the lovers I connote.”

21 In the late lyrics, Ford also included a most powerful and unsettling poem where he gives his own twist to the vein of social realism: in “Plaint Before A Mob of 10,000 at Owensboro, KY.,” Ford lyrically constructs a dramatic monologue for the black young man, Rainey Betha, addressing the lynch mob poignantly “from the top-branch of race-hatred” (*Garden* 60). As Cary Nelson has noted, “here surrealism is articulated to political outrage and to subtle transformations of the tree image” (Nelson 116). Williams, too, had singled out the poem in his foreword: he praised Ford’s indictment of racism for maintaining its cultural and historical specificity, drawing our attention to the “differences of handling of the to-day conventional theme — as one looks at the handling of the Crucifixion — by Bellini, Raphael, and El Greco.” For Williams, this was “hard material to handle,” since it “tests every resource of a poet to do it well.” (Williams, *Tortuous Straightness* 11). The “Late Lyrics” that Williams said he “liked best”

(10) combine American vernaculars with the gratuitousness of the Surrealist image, while homoerotic desire yet again diverts the Surrealist eroticization of the gendered female other. In “Commission” Ford invites the addressee to “gather up the eyelashes that have fallen” (*Garden* 42). In “Color Cold on Your Lips,” he speaks of desire through the bracketed image of “(your shirt being / tight across you back),” (43) with a diction that anticipates Frank O’Hara’s camp irony in “Personism” and his most markedly occasional poems rather than the more Surrealist-inflected “Easter” or “Second Avenue.” The figuring of desire in these poems is at a considerable distance from the disembodied qualities of the desired other in Breton’s *Nadja* (1928) or the fetishization of the *objet trouvé* in *L’Amour Fou* (1937). Ford’s erotic poems play out a movement between affective investment and a self-aware detachment that not only distances Ford from Surrealism but also queers Surrealism against the grain. In fact, as Ford moves away from allegory to metaphors that become more particularized, his poems seem to return to an irrationalism that is anchored in an intractable thingness that would have pleased Williams. In “The Undersea Disturbance on Times Square,” “one” of the “schoolboys fishing in the furtive air of reason [...] had dared put desire on his hook,” to end his life however in a “mass suicide” (*Garden* 72). “Dicty Glide in Central Park Menagerie” opens with Ford asking in a tongue-in-cheek manner :

Cowboy, where’s you class-con-
scious horse ? That’s what everybody asks.
Say the child Jesus pulled a toy pistol,
How far off could you stand
And your whip’s tip mate the muzzle ? (*Garden* 77)

- 22 Possibly an irony on the tail end of the Depression and the exhaustion of a “class-conscious” American iconography, the poem reads like a prescient anticipation of Harold Rosenberg’s hailing the new generation of abstract painters in the postwar period as consciously and intently “estranged” from the “American objects” that preoccupied the artists of the previous decade (75).
- 23 During the years of *View*’s run, Ford’s poems remained aligned with Surrealism: less attuned to the esoteric turn that he mapped in *View*, Ford remained loyal to the Surrealist image as a space of congruence of disparate elements. Like *The Garden of Disorder*, *The Overturned Lake* seems intended as a metaphor for the unconscious mind at work. Appearing shortly after the launching of *View* with a “title-page” drawing by Matta, the collection opens with “The Comedy of Belief” where, at a remove from the distant apocalypse of WWII, Ford discreetly pursues the current of eroticism that informed his earlier work. In what could read like a love poem — “I believe in the day hung between your hands” — Ford playfully and ironically punctures doubt and belief with echoes of the irrationalism of Surrealism’s early days :

I believe in the day hung between your hands :
Shall I bridle the eggs of the evening,
or break them on the backs of boys,
or strengthen my night with a thong of shells ? [...]

To tone down language is to tongue-tie the pulse,
meter of mood, tape-line of longing,
and so we are boosted by the measureless dream
and awake to an algebra whose symbols cry havoc. [...]

While eggs bulge, music burns, stars say hello,
apples stagger, pulses rip, the dream pops open,

curtains harden, moons dissolve, love lasts often,
leaves unlock, age clowns, death and the lunatic listen (*Lake* 10, 11, 15)

- 24 The anxiety of death and violence persists in the collection most notably in “The Living Corpse” where an “I” impels a “You, bare as the sky,” to “refuse my heart’s food, / yet refuse to die” (25-6). In “Winter Solstice,” “the season’s tongue continues to stop and start, / thawed and frozen, like the cold and hot heart” (29). In “Night Spent,” “sleep” is “like blood on rooster feathers” (35). *The Overturned Lake* is populated by bodies and fetishized body parts that are at times transmuted into uncanny and disturbing dream images and objects. Like the title of the third part of the collection, “A Broom Made of Flesh and Hair,” Ford’s images bring to mind the psychoanalytic inflections of the women Surrealists that Ford presented in *View*, notably the haunting imagery of Leonora Carrington, Leonor Fini, and Dorothea Tanning. “Somebody’s Gone” and “Song” are certainly among the most powerful poems in this section and constitute a precedent for the uses of Surrealism in O’Hara. Ford’s camp attitude conforms certainly to the iconoclastic spirit, if not the letter, of Surrealism and complicates the boundary that, as Suárez argues, separates camp as “a language of communal identification, usually practiced in public spaces” from “experimental modernism” which is predominantly “associated with private spaces, introspection and the portrayal of individual identity” (Suárez 195). Ford’s poetry queers both the collective spirit of Surrealism and the subjectivism of modernism: “Somebody’s Gone” is one such an instance, as Ford makes eroticism singular, intractably personal, pedestrian, and urgent:

I must say your deportment took a hunk
out of my peach of a heart
I ain’t insured against torpedoes!
My turpentine tears would fill a drugstore. [...]
I’m just a blotter crisscrossed with the ink
of words that remind me of you. (*Lake* 36)

- 25 Interweaving disparate discourses and cultural registers, Ford’s eclecticism is affiliative throughout. The “Song” begins with “eyes obsessed with blues,” possibly an ironic and/or nostalgic reminiscence of Ford’s own trajectory; “Somebody’s Gone” concludes with “grief [...] leaving the body desolate as a staircase,” a most explicit looking back on the inaugural moment of the American dialogue with the European avant-garde in the Armory Show, while the image of a “BABY WITH REVOLVER HOLDS HURRICANE AT BAY” (38) is a playful variation of Breton’s *Le Revolver à cheveux blancs*, just as it is reminiscent of Williams’s use of found language in *Spring and All*. The collection also contains a tongue-in-cheek tribute to Whitman’s “hitchhiking inspiration” in “He cut his finger on Eternity” (44), where Ford revisits Whitman’s transcendentalist mystical flights over the American continent. By attaching himself as a “libertine” to Whitman, Ford playfully appropriates the “national poet” within his own idiosyncratic queer mythology:

Like libertines we’ll plunge frontiers
romantic as journey, unromantic as a slum,
wrap up with a river for a spy’s disguise,
and wig you with time, the waterfall. (*Lake* 44)

- 26 The poems for the Surrealist painters and poets are equally affiliative and involve varying degrees of intimacy. The “Serenade to Leonor” (48) is an ekphrastic response of Fini’s “Maison de la rue Payenne” of 1933, Ford experiments with the Medusa-like gaze in Fini’s painting which unsettles the anthropomorphic paradigms of self-portraiture.

“Pastoral for Pavlik” (62-63) is ekphrastically connected to the anatomical anthropomorphism of Tchelitchev’s paintings and to the distortions of the figure in Neo-Romanticism. The “Matin pour Matta,” an ekphrastic variation on the biomorphism of Matta’s imagery, lyrically and affectionately acknowledges the legacy of the Surrealist work on language and the image: “This is what I write / on a page torn from the scalp of night” (53).

- 27 In “An Afternoon with André Breton” that was included in the fourth part of *The Overtaken Lake*, Ford returns to Surrealism affectionately but also in a manner that implies that his gesture was somehow unreciprocated. The opening line may, in fact, contain an in-the-know irony towards Breton, as Dalí’s *Rainy Taxi* was the exhibit that visitor encountered on entering the 1938 the International Exhibition of Surrealism in Paris (it was also reproduced in the 1939 World’s Fair in New York):

Let us get in a taxi as if we were going somewhere:
 The chocolate eggs of Easter hatch no peace-pigeons;
 schoolgirls grow up, breed objects for war-ribbons.
 Let us get out of the taxi as if we were there [...]
 So I showed you the city of a hundred freaks,
 but you looked around in vain for your friends:
 they were not disguised enough for you to recognize them,
 as Hamlet would not have recognized Jocasta. (*Lake* 61)

- 28 In the wake of *View*, Edith Sitwell, in her “Foreword” for the 1949 collection *Sleep in a Nest of Flames*, begins reading Ford from where Williams seems to have left off: she stresses the Surrealist influence in the “beauty” that stems from “the loneliness of a wanderer in the world seeking for something he will not find” (Sitwell 9). Sitwell may be also projecting here, Ford’s increasing marginalization in the immediate New York scene, as with the demise of *View*, Ford, who did not embrace the rise of Abstract Expressionism, had no platform for his own affinities. Tellingly, she underscores the singular and unclassifiable texture of poems, that do not “bear a family likeness” to any “poems, past and present” (Sitwell 9). In retrospect, we might say, that Ford’s early poetry bears no “family likeness” precisely because it disconcertingly bears too many “likenesses” to remember Frank O’Hara in “In Memory of my Feelings”.¹⁰
- 29 The uneven reception of Ford’s work in the immediate postwar period also points to Ford’s singularity. Among the poet-critics of the postwar generation, Robert Duncan dismissed Ford’s aesthetics and politics altogether in “Reviewing *View*, An Attack” because “in a world of carnage, of horror and insanity, *VIEW* preached the aesthetic of the insane and the sadistic” as “if all the drama of the real political world was played in charade to give excitement to the boredom of the rentiers” (quoted in Faas 327, 326). In the following decade, Kenneth Rexroth bypassed what Duncan saw as Ford’s objectionable cultural politics and acknowledged Ford’s place in a Surrealist-derived lineage : in his 1958 essay “The Influence of French Poetry on American,” he mentions Ford, Parker Tyler, and Lamantia as “the most important” among “a whole new crop of American poets” who started out as disciples of Breton’s brand of Surrealism” (Rexroth 167)¹¹. Although not mentioning the poets who formed the nucleus of the New York School, in his introduction to *The Young and Evil*, Steven Watson speaks of Ford’s book in a manner that brings to mind Frank O’Hara’s casualness in “Personism :” “Imagine then,” Watson writes, “being confronted with a book whose characters take a lover as casually as they take a smoke” (Watson in Ford, *Young and Evil* np]¹².

30 In his return to *Epistemology of the Closet*, Ross Chambers reminds us the interdependence of terms that may mistakenly appear as mutually exclusive: “no straightness without gayness and no gayness without straightness” (Chambers 168). Ford’s early poetry operates in a similar manner and complicates the distinctions and divides between dominant and/or minor modernisms, heterosexual, homosexual, and queer. Retrospectively, to remember Williams and to paraphrase Sedgwick’s “axiom 6” in *Epistemology*, Ford’s relation to Surrealism was and “had best be, tortuous” (Sedgwick 48). Ford sought to find his own voice with and beyond the homegrown vernaculars that he attempted to map in *Blues* and resume the transcontinental lines of modernism that somehow seemed to have been broken with the demise of *transition*, through an idiosyncratic, if not un/timely, appropriation of Surrealism that Kay Boyle had declared “part of what has already happened” in *Blues* (Boyle 32). An “accompaniment to a life altogether (un)real,” to remember Williams, or as Sitwell affectionately wrote, “a case of living without kinship” (Sitwell 9), Ford’s poetry is a permeable space that intermittently contains and abstracts itself from the contexts of its elaboration and anticipates the uses of Surrealism in much postwar American poetry.

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NOTES

1. On *Blues*, see Alexander Howard (Brooker and Thacker 353-361); on Ford's trajectory in *View*, see Catrina Neiman (Ford, 1991 xi-xvi); on *View*, see "View and the Surrealist Exiles in New York" (Tashjian 176-201) and Stamatina Dimakopoulou (Brooker and Thacker 737-758). Alexander Howard's PhD thesis (2011) maps Ford's development and active life-long involvement in the American avant-gardes; this impressively documented work corrects an omission that was, as the author argues, the result of the difficulty to accommodate Ford in established narratives of American modernism.
2. "But can you not see, can you not taste, can you not smell, can you not hear, can you not touch - words? It is words that must progress" (Williams 1923, 7-8).
3. In the last chapter of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, "After the War 1919-1923," Stein refers to "a show of pictures at the Gall rie Bonjean" where the work of the Neo-Romantics was exhibited in the late 1920s. She also mention Eugene Berman's visit in Bilignin, to conclude, rather anticlimactically that "though he was a very good painter he was too bad a painter to have been the creator of an idea. So once more the search began" (Stein 229).

4. Pavel Tchelitchew's frontispiece states their affinity: an ink drawing represents Ford seen from the back at a three-quarter angle, his back turned to the viewer, looking into his portrait in an open book; on the wall hangs a drawn painting 'signed' P. Tchelitchew, a variation on Caspar David Friedrich's iconic "Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog."
5. A notable recent instance is Amy Lyford's study of the Surrealists' critique of paradigms of masculinity "by creating works that dwelled upon male emasculation or confused ideas about sexual difference, the Surrealists challenged the tenets of national reconstruction that reinforced the differences between the sexes" (Lyford 6); "in their works, they regularly exploited stereotypes of femininity to undermine commonly held beliefs about the links between rationality, progress, and male creativity" (Lyford 17).
6. Alexander Howard considers "Ford's relationship with Surrealism" as an instance of "Ford's awkwardness during the 1940s and 50s" (Howard 134). A "perpetual aesthetic awkwardness," Howard argues, informed Ford's relationship to Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism. This may indeed have been the case, yet, as this reading attempts to suggest it was not only "Ford's inquisitive, questioning attitude that condemned him to the margins of Surrealism" (Howard 134) and American modernist poetry, we must add, but also maybe his untimely or irreconcilable affinities.
7. On how Dalí came to represent Surrealism to the American public, see Tashjian (34-65). Ford's relationship with Dalí was bound to remain ambiguous, as Ford later hosted Nicolas Calas's attack on Dalí in the first number of *View*. In a tangentially divergent vein, Alexander Howard notes that "Ford's desire to popularize Surrealism leads to an implicit alignment with the Surrealist agenda of Breton's aesthetic *bête noire*" (Howard, 2011 140n).
8. In retrospect, this reads as an unintended anticipation of the cover that Duchamp designed for the 1946 volume of Breton's translated poems, *Young Cherry Trees Secured Against Hares* where Breton's face is collaged in the place of the head of the Statue of Liberty.
9. Raymond Spiteri aptly states what Ford had also lucidly, albeit in an untheorized manner, realized: "Although cultural endeavour could have political repercussions under certain conditions, in Surrealism's case those repercussions were not an actuality, and then consequently assumed to form of a series of missed or failed encounters. Surrealism remained stranded beyond art, yet before politics" (Spiteri and Lacoss 72). Ford may have identified with the Surrealists' failed attempt to attach themselves to Party politics, given his own awkward distance from the socially-minded idioms of the Depression. As M. Stone Richards put it: "For many, the example of Surrealism, and not its theory, is what is commendable. What, after all, could a group of intellectuals possibly hope to achieve amidst such political and moral disaster?" (Spiteri and Lacoss 327).
10. My quietness has a man in it, he is transparent / and he carries me quietly, like a gondola, through the streets. / He has several likenesses, like stars and years, like numerals (Allen 252).
11. Ford has been included in Jim Elledge's *Masquerade* a book intended, in Elledge's words, "to show for the first time in U.S. literary history the continuum of queer literature that exists in this country."
12. O'Hara playfully quipped that a poem has to be as sexy as a pair of pants "tight enough so that everyone will want to go to bed with you" (Allen 498).

ABSTRACTS

Virtually omitted from established narratives of American modernism, yet central in the histories of the reception of European Surrealism in the US, Charles Henri Ford's life and work have been recovered in important queer genealogies within Anglo-American modernism. Yet within this process or recovery, Ford's poetic work is still largely overlooked, and this may have to do less with its marked Surrealist influences and/or derivative aspects than with the somewhat unclassifiable and composite texture of Ford's poems. This article revisits Ford's early poetry as a space of convergence and dialogue between distinct yet interrelated poetics: from the 1938 *A Garden of Disorder* to the 1949, *Sleep in a Nest of Flames*, a queer subjectivity assimilates concurrently Surrealist poetics and Djuna Barnes's equally unclassifiable queer modernism with and against American poetic modernisms.

Quasiment ignoré par la critique institutionnelle du modernisme américain, Charles Henri Ford, qui joua pourtant un rôle de premier plan dans la réception et la diffusion du surréalisme européen aux Etats-Unis, a été sauvé de l'oubli par les spécialistes anglo-saxons de la théorie *queer*. Malgré cela, son œuvre poétique est à ce jour encore largement méconnue. Ceci tient probablement moins à son goût marqué pour le surréalisme ou à son penchant pour l'humour et le grotesque qu'à la texture composite, quelque peu déroutante, des poèmes de Ford. Cet article examine la façon dont les premiers recueils de poèmes de Ford dessinent un espace où des modes d'écriture distincts (et pourtant indissociables) convergent et entrent en résonance. Ainsi, entre 1938 (*A Garden of Disorder*) et 1949 (*Sleep in a Nest of Flames*), on assiste à la naissance d'une subjectivité poétique *queer* inspirée de la rencontre et de la confrontation des jeux surréalistes, de l'imaginaire (proprement inclassable) de Djuna Barnes et des expérimentations poétiques du modernisme américain.

INDEX

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Surrealism Gone West : from *The Dream Life of Balso Snell* (1931) to *Miss Lonelyhearts* (1933)

Frank Conesa

Nathanael West: a “surrealist” writer?

- ¹ In 1950, ten years after Nathanael West died in a car accident, American publishing company New Directions reissued *The Day of the Locust*, West’s eye-catching novel about Hollywood. His literary legacy had gone relatively unnoticed since his death, but this sudden revival made him gain a fairly large body of readers who had much more curiosity and relish for his various kinds of social grotesquerie, black comedy and hysteric pessimism than their predecessors during the Depression years. Upon this growing craze for West’s resuscitated materials, American book company Farrar, Straus and Cudahy Inc. published *The Complete Works of Nathanael West* in 1957, making all four novels written by West — *The Dream Life of Balso Snell* (1931), *Miss Lonelyhearts* (1933), *A Cool Million* (1934) and *The Day of the Locust* (1939) — available to a new generation of readers, commentators and scholars. Richard B. Gehman was one of them, and in the introduction he wrote to the New Directions edition of *The Day of the Locust*, he suggested that a fairly legitimate route may be established into West’s hallucinatory lands and “convulsive” imagery by means of the Surrealists’ compass.¹ He contended that even if West never identified with the French Surrealists,

The paintings and writings of their ‘official’ school affected him profoundly when he first came across them in Paris, and his feeling for their destructive derision, their preoccupation with decay and degeneracy and disintegration was indisputably empathic. (Gehman *Locust*, x)

- ² West’s scarce paratextual elements are not helpful in that respect.² In two radically different contexts and on two specific occasions distant in time he actually used the term “surrealist” to refer to himself and his work. First, in the back-cover blurb of his first novel, *The Dream Life of Balso Snell*, published in 1931.³ This editorial piece of

disguised self-promotion written in third person presented the author of the book as a “vicious, mean, ugly, obscene and insane” comic writer whose “use of the violently dissociated, the dehumanized marvellous, the deliberately criminal and imbecilic” was comparable to that of “certain of the Surrealists” (397).⁴ This swaggering advertisement was meant to both appeal to and shock reviewers and readers alike in the true manner of both Dada and the Surrealists. For West, *Balso Snell* represented “a protest against writing books” (Liebling 11), even though he was less paying lip service to Dada⁵ than trying to join the American 1930s’ avant-garde bandwagon.

- 3 The second time West reportedly used the term “surrealist” was when he denied being one, in reaction to 1939 *New Yorker* review of *The Day of the Locust* written by Clifton Fadiman, which presented the novelist as “the ablest of our surrealist authors” (Fadiman 9). For Jay Martin—West’s often-quoted biographer—Surrealism “was popularly imagined to be the equivalent to incomprehensibility and West felt that the epithet had sunk the book” (Martin 338), all the more so because he was writing in the American social context of the Depression, when “Surrealism was disturbing [...] because its explorations of the unconscious sent reverberations throughout the social realm” (Tashjian 130).⁶
- 4 *Balso Snell* was the last book to be published by The Contact Editions, a publishing company originally based in Paris and specialized in avant-garde literature. However, it doesn’t follow that all that is Westian is *ipso facto* surrealist, all the more since West’s own position shifted over time from enthusiastic acknowledgment to adamant denial of the epithet *surrealist*, thereby contributing to cast a rather thick veil of skepticism over his real intentions towards André Breton’s movement.⁷
- 5 The alleged surrealist materials of West’s first novel combined with the absence of a readership after the relative success of his second novel, *Miss Lonelyhearts*, published in 1933, were a source of concern all along his short literary career. He was in search of an audience that didn’t exist, as he confided in a letter to Malcolm Cowley in 1939: “Lately, I have been feeling even more discouraged than usual [...]. Why make the continuous sacrifice necessary to produce novels for a non-existent market?” (794)
- 6 Though contemporary literary commentators have found it a challenging task to put West’s work into a satisfactory pigeonhole, they acknowledge a parallel between French Surrealism and West’s incongruities, thus tending towards the critical consensus that, despite some deviations, his pictorial style has affinities with surrealist writing and art at large.⁸
- 7 Surrealism was originally a method for unveiling hidden aspects of reality and challenging the usual ways of thinking the world by questioning sensorial perception. By the time *Balso Snell* was published, the term had entered the American art lexicon, but it had then been drained of its germinal Bretonian spirit and had been integrated into commodity culture as its most eye-catching motif, meant to startle, shock and amuse.⁹ West looked at European Surrealism “for a way to write the times” (Bradbury 153) and combined the visual powerfulness of surrealist imagery with “the tradition of American comic grotesquerie” (153) to translate the grotesqueness of American social mores.¹⁰ West’s “grotesque surrealism” (127), through its parody of European influences, also gained a photographic and camera-seeing dimension, as shows his initial project to write *Miss Lonelyhearts* “in the form of a comic strip”:

The chapters to be squares in which many things happen through one action. The speeches contained in the conventional balloons. I abandoned this idea, but

retained some of the comic strip technique: Each chapter instead of going forward in time, also goes backward, forward, up and down in space like a picture. (401)

- 8 In the early 1930s, when West and William Carlos Williams initiated a co-editing partnership to revive *Contact*, a magazine which had disappeared in 1923, they predicted the need for American authors to create their own art, an art that would conform to their own social and cultural experiences. The magazine requested literary contributions moving away from influential European art standards, past and present, and re-establishing “contact” with the American ingrained experience. West contributed to the magazine with early drafts of *Miss Lonelyhearts*, which illustrated the author’s shift in focus from parody to social criticism.¹¹
- 9 Our intention is therefore to make sense of West’s artistic transition from *Balso Snell* to *Miss Lonelyhearts*, as being the expression of his desire to act as a provocative outsider—a misfit American artist—, whilst seeking literary recognition. Indeed, he uses surrealism-influenced motifs based on pessimism and black humor to infuse a particular form of critical consciousness in the story-telling.¹² West shifts from mock-surrealism, etched in the phantasmagoric partitions of *Balso Snell*’s subconscious, to the uncanny world of *Miss Lonelyhearts*’s agony column. In *Balso Snell*, he writes a parody of the movement’s original assault on the pretensions of art, setting aside the initial Surrealists’ creed of self-discovery through dreams and hallucinatory trances, the surrealistic imagery of which he recycles in *Miss Lonelyhearts* to dramatize the cynical indictment of individual delusion and collective neuroses in Depression-era America.

***Balso Snell* and the mock-initiation into surrealism**

- 10 The publication of West’s *Complete Works* in 1957 enabled critics to have access again to *Balso Snell*, which had been out of print since the *Contact* edition of 1931. Retrospectively, the book stood out in the 1930s’ American literary production as a sort of “late” avant-garde oddity, saturated with intertextual references to various classic art forms and texts pertaining to European culture.¹³
- 11 *Balso Snell* tells the story of a dream in which an American poet embarks on a scatological, surreal journey into the Trojan horse’s bowels—an allegory of *Balso Snell*’s own unconscious. The place seems to be what we might call a *vocation* resort or an art laboratory for aspiring authors, every single one of whom *Balso* is forced to listen to. Himself a trained poet full of prejudiced opinions, *Balso Snell* is confronted with a hotchpotch of nonsensical theories about art and non-conformist literary productions discharged out loud and tried on him. *Balso* eventually disappears further into the bowels of the horse to escape their stories, a convoluted march which climaxes with the description of his sexual intercourse with his former lover, Miss McGeeney. The framework of the novel proceeds from the dream flow of *Balso*’s encounters and experiences. By displacing the question of authorship onto the unreal territory of dreams and challenging *Balso Snell*’s authorial powers, West writes “an anti-Künstlerroman” (Cerasulo 59).
- 12 West’s late contribution to the American literary avant-garde is not *Balso Snell* as such, but *Balso Snell* understood as a mock-surrealist epic. The Trojan horse allegorically stands for the poet’s own deceptive subconscious peopled by authorial personas in search for an audience to whom they might submit their tentative prose. West was not

so much paying tribute to Dada's irreverent approach to art and to the Surrealists' liberatory exploration of the irrational, as he was trying to parody the avant-garde movement and its limitless journeys into the absurd, for which the cavernous rooms of the Trojan Horse are a gruesome metaphor.

13 To some extent, Balso Snell's mock-Homeric encounters with fragments of experimental literature in the Trojan horse are the offspring of West's short, initiatory trip to Paris in 1926. The incongruous authors that people Balso Snell's dream serve as milestones and trials on his artistic way to total lack of control, after the Bretonian surrealist manner. After all, Balso may well be considered the unfiltered voice granting access to "what is transpiring unbeknownst to man in the depths of his mind."¹⁴ The authors who compose this animate repository all have subconscious overflowing with extreme images loaded with scatology and blasphemy. Like the real West, Balso Snell appears a fake expatriate, a foreign author visiting exotic, far-away (in)lands.¹⁵ But unlike West, Balso's discovery of surrealism-inspired fiction within the Trojan horse is fraught with dissatisfaction and prejudiced opinions.

14 Balso is locked up in the labyrinth of his own mind, and his grotesque initiation through matter underscores the mock-esoteric dimension of West's narrative. Balso Snell's itinerary begins with the anal trespassing and ends in "the little death". This spatial structure points to the character's mock-symbolic progression through a series of gross exoteric thresholds marked by the different characters he meets and which originates in the encounter with the Jewish guide who greets him as if he had entered a secret fraternity.¹⁶ The scene, though very brief, has ritualistic overtones:

A man with "Tours" embroidered on his cap stalked out of the shadow. In order to prove a poet's right to trespass, Balso quoted from his own works:

"If you desire to have two parallel lines meet at once or even in the near future," he said, "it is important to make all the necessary arrangements beforehand, preferably by wireless."

The man ignored his little speech. (6)

15 This absurd dialogue inaugurates Balso Snell's gastric apprenticeship through chance encounters with aspiring authors who mean to put his artistic tolerance to the test. The most significant meeting is that with 12-year-old John Gilson, a young author who has written a diary in which he has invented a fictive double, John Raskolnikov Gilson — a Dostoevski-influenced murderer who discusses the subconscious in his 'Crime Journal' and compares his imagination to a "wild beast that cries always for freedom" (20). In the ensuing discussion, he dismisses the young boy's fiction as worthless literature: "Interesting psychologically, but is it art?" Balso said timidly. "I'd give you B minus and a good spanking" (22).¹⁷ West's art of self-parody cuts both ways since his disguised criticism of the schoolboy's literary pretensions is doubled by that of the critical assumptions uttered by Balso Snell whose rhetorical question "is it art?" may well mean he is truly dumbfounded by the boy's production, somehow feeling out of place and trying to get back into his intellectual comfort zone.

Manufacturing the surrealist dream

16 The more Balso Snell descends into the bowels, the more the dissolution of his self-assertiveness as a poet and enlightened reader is complete, as if resulting from an intimate contact with subconscious *faeces*. The love scene with Miss McGeeney—"his old sweetheart" (50)—marks the final teaching moment of his mock-journey down the

Trojan horse's hole, during which Balso Snell sets to showcase his oratory skills. Prior to the scene, he goes through a rejuvenating process and instantly recovers buried memories of his youth. But those flashes—retrieved from his subconscious twice removed—are accompanied by an unexpected scatological metaphor:

“Oh!” Balso exclaimed, carried away by these memories of his youth. “Oh!” His mouth formed an O with lips torn angry in laying duck's eggs from a chicken's rectum. (50)

- 17 The analogy West uses to depict Balso Snell's exclamation is a visual reminder of the on-going mock-surrealist experience to which the character has been subjected by his own wild imagination so far. In the next phase of the love scene, Balso Snell's first two speeches are verbal acrobatics advocating the new language of freedom acquired through sexual activity. But, as regards the pure spirit of surrealism, they remain unconvincing because dictated by logic and rationality, and not by his subconscious. At the end of his third speech—laden with lyrical conceits about the brevity of time—, he finally throws himself on his lover. This spontaneous act triggers a chain reaction which carries both lovers away from social conventions:

No. No! Innocent, confused. Oh Balso! Oh Balso! with pictures of the old farm house, old pump, old folks at home, and the old oaken bucket—ivy over all.

Sir! Stamping her tiny foot—imperative, irate. Sir, how dare you, sir! Do you presume? Down, Rover, I say down! The prying thumbs of insolent chauffeurs. The queen chooses. Elizabeth of England, Catherine of Russia, Faustina of Rome. (53)

- 18 The audacity of his moves is conveyed through his partner's irrational flow of verbless sentences inspired by collage and automatic writing techniques, but which West endows with a comic effect:

Allowing hot breath to escape from between moist, open lips: eyes upset, murmurs love. Tiger skin on divan. Spanish shawl on grand piano. Altar of Love. Church and Brothel. Odors of Ind and Afric. There's Egypt in your eyes. Rich, opulent love; beautiful, tapestried love; oriental, perfumed love.

Hard-bitten. Casual. Smart. Been there before. I've had policemen. No trace of a feminine whimper. Decidedly revisiting well-known, well-plowed ground. No new trees, wells, or even fences. (53)

Contrary to Balso Snell's elaborate conceits, Miss McGeeney's chaotic and incongruous analogies transform the physical reaction into “convulsive” verbal production. In this movement of the love scene, Balso Snell is forced to surrender his literary pretensions and language:

His body broke free of the bard. It took on a life of its own; a life that knew nothing of the poet Balso. Only to death can this release be likened—to the mechanics of decay. [...]

In this activity, Home and Duty, Love and Art, were forgotten. (54)

- 19 By losing his self-control, he catapults his partner into a state of trance conducive to mental flashes similar to the effect produced by automatic writing as defined by Breton:

In this dizzying race the images appear like the only guideposts of the mind. [...] The mind becomes aware of the limitless expanses wherein its desires are made manifest, where the pros and cons are constantly consumed, where its obscurity does not betray it. It goes forward, borne by these images which enrapture it, which scarcely leave it any time to blow upon the fire in its fingers. This is the most

beautiful night of all, the lightning-filled night: day, compared to it, is night.
(Breton 37-38)

- 20 There lies West's counterfeit surrealist aesthetics: dreaming of having an orgasm within a dream might constitute the height of all surrealist dream activities, as suggested by the terms used by West to describe both Miss McGeeney's dizziness and Balso's military glorification of frenetic pleasure, and which are similar to those used by Breton himself to define the surrealist activity—in addition to the humoristic effect of the sophisticated concatenation in the conclusive images of *Balso Snell*:

An army moved in his body, an eager army of hurrying sensations. These sensations marched at first methodically and then hysterically, but always with precision. The army of his body commenced a long intricate drill, a long involved ceremony. A ceremony whose ritual unwound and manoeuvred itself with the confidence and training of chemicals acting under the stimulus of a catalytic agent.

His body screamed and shouted as it marched and uncoiled; then, with one heaving shout of triumph, it fell back quiet.

The army that a moment before had been thundering in his body retreated slowly—victorious, relieved. (61-62)

- 21 The orgasm is the unexpected, climactic event in the novel that aggregates then dissolves at once all the fragments of the dream gleaned so far. West has thus written a novel about a fake surrealist experience manufactured within the subconscious of a fictitious author. By putting together images of sexual intercourse, military victory, chaos and death, the ending of *Balso Snell* strangely echoes the closing paragraph of Breton's "Second Manifesto of Surrealism":

Man, who would wrongly allow himself to be intimidated by a few monstrous historical failures, is still free to believe in his freedom. He is his own master, in spite of the old clouds which pass and his blind forces which encounter obstacles. Doesn't he have any inkling of the brief beauty concealed and of the long and accessible beauty that can be revealed? Let him also look carefully for the key to love, which the poet claimed to have found: he has it. It is up to him and him alone to rise above the fleeting sentiment of living dangerously and of dying. Let him, in spite of any restrictions, use the avenging arm of the idea against the bestiality of all beings and of all things, and let him one day, vanquished-but vanquished only if the world is the world welcome the discharge of his sad rifles like a salvo fired in salute. (187)

- 22 Balso Snell's bestial desire for Miss McGeeney, followed by the literal, overwhelming discharge of body fluids, points therefore to the opposite of what Breton calls "the Surrealist endeavor" (187).
- 23 Ultimately, West's first novel remains a jigsaw puzzle for any critic who ventures beyond its dubious threshold, as is the case for Balso Snell himself when he gets submerged by the tidal waves of his own subconscious. After all, he may well be the author of his dream or just the imaginary hero in an anonymous dreamer's dream. There is no "real" dreamer, no first-hand material, and therefore no dream whatsoever; *Balso Snell* might thus be a parody of surrealist art in the form of a hocus-pocus. Forging a dream or faking one would have been a capital crime under the surrealist law, unless it was perpetrated in someone else's name. However, many Surrealists were repudiated along the way by Breton for less than that. West's choice of the Trojan Horse is symbolic of the author's intention to question literary norms and

trends, to mock and to crack their codes, and eventually to hack into their system of representation of reality to implant his own.

***Miss Lonelyhearts* as transitional novel**

- 24 Though West never rejected his stylistic kinship with the Surrealists, his adamant denial following Fadiman's literary review of *The Day of the Locust* showed that—as a true American artist—he had taken his independence not only from both the European avant-garde and the American avant-garde, but also from social realism, to grow a critical style of his own. In the words of Jay Martin,

West was an exile in America. For his slightly older contemporaries, Dadaism was a form of protest, but West needed neither Dada manifestoes nor economic crises to know that irrationality prevailed in America and that he hated its commercial life. All aspects of American life, as he saw it, touched on the grotesque and the absurd. (Martin 45)

- 25 *Balso Snell* had been West's test-tube experiment; *Miss Lonelyhearts* would become his life-size test: "Whereas in his earlier novel he used the surrealist concept of warring psychic states to probe the antinomies of Western consciousness, in *Miss Lonelyhearts* he strives to reveal the divisions and fractures of the American experience" (Briggs 133).

- 26 In the "Introduction" to the French edition of *Miss Lonelyhearts*, Philippe Soupault wrote that he had met West on some occasions in New York, and that he considered West as a witness of his time, a seer—"un voyant" (Soupault 12)—, who like no other writer of his generation dived into the dark waters of America's reality and dreams to warn his contemporaries about the delusional appearances masking a profound despair.

- 27 *Miss Lonelyhearts*, West's second novel, tells the story of an anonymous journalist's shaken faith in his job as writer of an agony column in a New York newspaper. The numerous letters he receives on a daily basis have finally brought him to question his values, and what had started as a joke has now turned into serious matter as he confesses to Betty, his former lover:

[...] after several months at it, the joke begins to escape him. He sees that the majority of the letters are profoundly humble pleas for moral and spiritual advice, that they are inarticulate expressions of genuine suffering. He also discovers that his correspondents take him seriously. For the first time in his life, he is forced to examine the values by which he lives. This examination shows him that he is the victim of the joke and not its perpetrator. (94)

- 28 In the novel, the real world becomes irrational, filtered and transfigured by *Miss Lonelyhearts* who finds himself in a recurrent state of either hallucination or paranoid delusion, for example fantasizing about the statuary of the little park he is particular fond of, and which functions as a passageway to an irrational, graphic dimension of reality:

When he reached the little park, he slumped down on a bench opposite the Mexican War obelisk. The stone shaft cast a long, rigid shadow on the walk in front of him. He sat staring at it without knowing why until he noticed that it was lengthening in rapid jerks, not as shadows usually lengthen. He grew frightened and looked up quickly at the monument. It seemed red and swollen in the dying sun, as though it were about to spout a load of granite seed. (79)

- 29 Miss Lonelyhearts's distorted visions of urban despair underscore West's expressionist representation of a violent social reality in America—and even his expressionist critical method—as this other excerpt illustrates:

Crowds of people moved through the street with a dream-like violence. As he looked at their broken hands and torn mouths he was overwhelmed by the desire to help them [...].

He saw a man who appeared to be on the verge of death stagger into a movie theater that was showing a picture called *Blonde Beauty*. He saw a ragged woman with an enormous goiter pick a love story magazine out of a garbage can and seem very excited by her find.

Prodded by his conscience, he began to generalize. Men have always fought their misery with dreams. Although dreams were once powerful, they have been made puerile by the movies, radio and newspapers. Among many betrayals, this one is the worst. (103)

- 30 In West's literary production, *Miss Lonelyhearts* serves as a transitional novel. The shift in critical tone from *Balso Snell* to *Miss Lonelyhearts* accounts for West's darkened and more sardonic grasp of 1930s' social reality translated into the dysfunctional features of his characters and his recurrent "dream beds" sessions similar to ancient Egyptians' practices of incubation and dream therapy. *Miss Lonelyhearts*'s modern version of incubation only leads him to further delusion and estrangement, and this seems to be West's critical bottom-line as regards the totalitarian and inescapable solicitations that the average American receives from the outside media world.
- 31 Earlier drafts of *Miss Lonelyhearts* were published in the first issues of the magazine *Contact*, and when it definitively disappeared, in October 1932, Williams wrote in the literary page of *Il Mare*, edited by Ezra Pound, that *Contact* had produced Nathanael West, and that now it could die. Williams considered West a new type of American writer. In "Some Notes On Violence," published in the last issue of *Contact*, West precisely argued that both naturalism and social realism were unfit to represent the "idiomatic" violence of American society. According to him, the American novelist needed to adapt his art of writing and invent more appropriate ways to "handle" the ever-increasing, violent pace of reality. West's asynchronous response to reality has made him a true "contemporary" in Giorgio Agamben's sense of the term. For the Italian philosopher,
- [Those] (who are truly contemporary, who truly belong to their time, are those who neither perfectly coincide with it nor adjust themselves to its demands. [...] But precisely because of this condition, precisely through this disconnection and this anachronism, they are more capable than others of perceiving and grasping their own time. (Agamben 45)

West's explosive art of writing

- 32 West's radicalized depiction of American society highlighted underlying tensions within familiar dreams. Reality had become a schizophrenic, staged dystopia shaken by masochistic drives and mass hysteria tremors; West needed a character as delusional as reality itself to register and express a world that seemed on the verge of breaking up or down—the Westian time being both that of despair and euphoria, an interval of time that disrupts the linearity of the narrative, identified by Frank Kermode as "the *kairos* of farce" that he opposes to "the *chronos* of reality" (Kermode 51): "*kairos* is the season, a point in time filled with significance, charged with meaning derived from its relation

to the end” (47). West’s novelistic aphorism “you only have time to explode”¹⁸ has been the hallmark of his entire work, from Balso Snell’s anal orgasm to Tod Hackett’s feverish painting—“The Burning of Los Angeles”— in *The Day of the Locust*. Though West’s work shared the explosiveness of art that the Surrealists aimed at, little was revealed by the explosion, apart from the void that it left, and which marked West’s pessimistic take on social mores:

In the street again, Miss Lonelyhearts wondered what to do next. He was too excited to eat and afraid to go home. He felt as though his heart were a bomb, a complicated bomb that would result in a simple explosion, wrecking the world without rocking it. (74)

- 33 Explosion is experienced as both effective and illusory, thereby exposing an utterly incoherent reality within reality, which contradicts the Surrealists’ attempt at expanding man’s knowledge of the universe and deeper self-understanding. Surrealism was devised as an all-in-one magical key to unlock all doors to alternate interpretations of reality; but for West, reality emerged from the friction between irrational forces of the mind and rational perception of real events. He set out to reproduce his character’s subconscious in sensory terms—the semantic field of the five senses is pervasive throughout his entire work. West makes that which was not graspable to the senses real through art, thereby putting his reader in a position to see rather than understand the irrational. Balso Snell’s fascination for the “convulsive beauty” produced by his subconscious has given way to Miss Lonelyhearts’s nightmarish hallucinations and overwhelmingly obsessive patterns:

Miss Lonelyhearts found himself developing an almost insane sensitiveness to order. Everything had to form a pattern: the shoes under the bed, the ties in the holder, the pencils on the table. When he looked out of a window, he composed the skyline by balancing one building against another. If a bird flew across this arrangement, he closed his eyes angrily until it had gone. (70)

- 34 As much as West’s iconoclasm has to do with the subversion of literary trodden paths and conventional avenues—as suggested in *Balso Snell*—, Miss Lonelyhearts’s desire to transgress the editorial code and supply his readers with something new is based on the rising tension between the joke and the serious matter which he has identified. This marks the starting point of the whole transformation undergone by the character, a turning point West decided to focus on rather than write a lengthy biographical account. It is because his readers take him seriously that something breaks down within Miss Lonelyhearts.
- 35 The thriving business of suffering entices Miss Lonelyhearts’s ethical failure, which in turn induces his nervous breakdown and schizophrenia. The increasing business demand puts pressure on Miss Lonelyhearts, whose dysfunctional language of growing Christian atonement and hope is accompanied by unexpected outbursts of violence, as in the episode where he pays a visit to the Doyles to whom he tries to deliver his phony message of love, but ends up beating up Mrs Doyle—whom he has had an affair with—as she is making further sexual advances to him.
- 36 By getting closer to his readers, Miss Lonelyhearts hopes to make contact with what he thinks is the real mission hidden underneath the veneer of his hypocritical column; but he gradually loses critical hindsight as he constantly indulges in irrational translations of reality.

Enhanced representation of delusional reality

- 37 West's images are cosmetically surrealistic, yet drained of the original surrealist intent. They only aim at underpinning Miss Lonelyhearts's enhanced representation of reality, as in this extract from the chapter "Miss Lonelyhearts and the cripple" in which Miss Lonelyhearts meets Peter Doyle for the first time :

He used a cane and dragged one of his feet behind him in a box-shaped shoe with a four-inch sole. As he hobbled along, he made many waste motions, like those of a partially destroyed insect. (109)

- 38 The more Miss Lonelyhearts exposes himself directly to the people who write the letters, the more his overflowing subconscious merges with his sensorial perception of reality. The physical description that follows is an illustration of Miss Lonelyhearts's hallucinatory state:

The cripple had a very strange face. His eyes failed to balance; his mouth was not under his nose; his forehead was square and bony; and his round chin was like a forehead in miniature. He looked like one of those composite photographs used by screen magazines in guessing contests. (110)

- 39 West's pictorialization of reality gives volume to Miss Lonelyhearts's disordered emotions and distorted perception of external reality. In a sense, West's pictorial project for *Miss Lonelyhearts* pointed to a synthetic path resolving the duality of perception and representation similar to that which the Surrealists hoped to generate.¹⁹ While surrealism seeks to break into limitations of reality by encouraging a liberating art form of self-knowledge through dreams, West uses images to unearth fractures hidden in the American psyche, projecting them outwards and using them to imprison his character in a transfigured reality:

Suddenly tired, he sat down on a bench. If he could only throw the stone. He searched the sky for a target. But the gray sky looked as if it had been rubbed with a soiled eraser. It held no angels, flaming crosses, olive-bearing doves, wheels within wheels. Only a newspaper struggled in the air like a kite with a broken spine. He got up and started again for the speakeasy. (64)

- 40 West's images show all signs of nature to be infected and invested by deadness and cultural wasteland; this sinister imagery does not respond to the surrealist exigency to transcend and redeem the material and social world. Miss Lonelyhearts's decision to stop answering the letters has led him to further delusion and frustration, and eventually to improvised predication sessions by which he hopes to save the victims of both the Depression and mass media sedative entertainment culture. His inner crisis appears in transitional states of hypnagogic hallucination, in which he experiences bizarre and vivid sensory perceptions. But, contrary to the Surrealists, West doesn't consider presomnal states as a possible way to free oneself from logic and give voice to a new reality; they provide no satisfactory explanation to a crushing reality once the character is awake, as this extract suggests:

He went back to his desk and finished his column, then started for the park. He sat down on a bench near the obelisk to wait for Mrs. Doyle. Still thinking of tents, he examined the sky and saw that it was canvas-colored and ill-stretched. He examined it like a stupid detective who is searching for a clue to his own exhaustion. (88)

- 41 The Surrealists further argued that exhaustion followed by derangement led to discover strange inner regions of the mind where the marvelous lay. Aragon declared that

[I]n the grip of a tremendous momentum, we spent more and more time on the practices which led us into our strange inner lands. We delighted in observing the curve of our own exhaustion, and the derangement which followed. For then the marvellous would appear. [...] It was as if the mind, having reached a turning point in the subconscious, lost all control over where it was drifting. Images which existed in the mind took physical forms, became tangible reality. Once we were in touch with them they expressed themselves in a perceptible form, taking on the characteristics of visual, auditory and tactile hallucinations. (Aragon 4)

- 42 By contrast, Miss Lonelyhearts's cenesthetic hallucinations do not reveal the marvelous, but the morbid and the mundane. His exhaustion and growing madness is not conducive to any surrealist experience—but to a mock-religious experience: "Christ! Christ!" This shout echoed through the innermost cells of his body (125).
- 43 Both Breton and West point to the necessity to rethink the way reality is represented in literary works. Breton's criticism of the literary context of his time shares common threads with West's two short essays, "Some Notes on Violence" and "Some Notes on *Miss L.*".²⁰ Breton, for his part, shows sheer disgust at any literature that "feeds on and derives strength from the newspapers and stultifies both science and art assiduously flattering the lowest of tastes; clarity bordering on stupidity, a dog's life" (6). Breton continues and denounces what he has identified as the shortcomings of the novel form, that is, the use of pointless descriptions:

They are nothing but so many superimposed images taken from some stock catalogue, which the author utilizes more and more whenever he chooses; he seizes the opportunity to slip me his postcards, he tries to make me agree with him about the clichés [...]. (7)

West and the Bretonian ethics of writing

- 44 In the light of Breton's loathing for journalism, Miss Lonelyhearts's late awakening to the true reality of his job is consistent with his efforts to quit.²¹ West's character is not a surrealist revolutionary, but his rejection of journalism is nonetheless concomitant with a surge of repressed violence, symbolic dreams and disturbing hallucinations and delusions, making him the perpetrator then the victim of what Breton designated as "the petty system of debasement and cretinization" (125). In the wake of Breton's uncompromising assessment of the novelistic form and of his harsh condemnation of journalism, West expressed a somewhat similar *caveat* which rounds off his essay: "A novelist can afford to be everything but dull."²² By avoiding what Breton calls "the incurable mania of wanting to make the unknown known, classifiable" (9), West's cartoonish characterization and unconventional images resembled those of the Surrealists. West used Surrealism as a springboard for his own ethics of writing; he retained the non-conformist and rebellious stance of the Surrealists—in particular their rebellion against the "grand tradition" of literature and press media brainwashing—, while adapting it to American mores.
- 45 Far from reconciling dream and reality, in the Surrealists' manner, West's art of writing intensifies the rupture between these two realms.²³ He has identified violence as the idiom of the American society, fuelled by inarticulate feelings of betrayal and

frustration.²⁴ What is more, West's presentation of dream states are not to be read as actual representation of an individual's real-life dreams, but rather as abstract figurations of collectivized phony dreams generated by consumer culture and fostered by the mass media.

- 46 In a sense, West's emphasis on collective neuroses illustrates the shift operated by some American avant-garde artists who substituted Carl G. Jung's notions of collective unconscious and the production of modern myths to the Freudian discourse tapped by French Surrealism: "Jung described the artist as a 'collective man,' who plumbs 'the primal experience, the dark nature of which requires mythological figures.' The result is 'a creative act which concerns the entire contemporaneous epoch'" (Tashjian 33). By the time West wrote his two essays, Jung had been introduced to American avant-garde artists by literary columnist Eugene Jolas in the magazine *transition* in 1930.²⁵ West may have been interested in Jung's analysis of the collective unconscious, as shown by the novelist's advocacy of a reshaping of psychology and a departure from Freud:

Psychology has nothing to do with reality nor should it be used as motivation. The novelist is no longer a psychologist. Psychology can become something much more important. The great body of case histories can be used in the way the ancient writers used their myths. Freud is your Bullfinch; you cannot learn from him²⁶.

- 47 A debate for or against a Freudian reading of West's work has been going on for many decades, and even contemporary literary critics hardly agree on how to interpret his cryptic remarks.²⁷ West felt the need to make the novelistic form evolve, in the wake of both Jung's nascent influential writings and of Salvador Dalí's outstanding surrealist paintings. For West, Freud's case histories played the same role as Greek myths and could prevent the novelist from devoting too much time on any detailed analysis of a particular character's psychology. As West had fittingly reminded his readership, "you only have time to explode" (401).
- 48 West and Breton shared the same desire "to avoid psychoanalyzing their characters" (Briggs 73):
- The desire for analysis wins out over the sentiments. The result is statements of undue length whose persuasive power is attributable solely to their strangeness and which impress the reader only by the abstract quality of their vocabulary, which, moreover is ill-defined. (Breton 9)
- 49 His iconoclastic imagery made of grotesque metaphors aesthetically influenced by French symbolism and surrealism, matured in defiance of psychological portraits, and suggesting a pictorialized and cinematic representation of social issues: "*Miss Lonelyhearts* is a surrealist work that proceeds at breakneck speed, flashing cinematically, from one scene to the next" (Scheurich 572).
- 50 West's interest in myths and archetypes urged him to find "literary ways of presenting the secret life of the crowds who 'moved through the streets with a dreamlike violence'; and, thereby, he pushed close to the archetypal experiences (as Jung put it) of 'modern man in search of a soul'" (Martin 185). Although West never considered himself as a myth-maker, his fiction nonetheless accounts for a "mythmaking mission" (Tashjian 33), pointing to the dark shadows of "a new mythological reality" (35).

Conclusion

- 51 West's surrealistic art of writing was developed into a deceptive art of make-believe, as shows the reference to the Trojan Horse in *Balso Snell*, and was then transplanted in the more familiar American urban scene of *Miss Lonelyhearts* in which he alerted his contemporaries to the potentially apocalyptic violence of the American reality he considered to be fraught with misleading illusions and distorted dreams. Instead of searching for a lost unity—as many American modernist authors (Ernest Hemingway and John Dos Passos for example) had endeavored to do in their own way in the 1920s —, West adopted a strictly detached attitude while dramatizing the perverted masquerade of America's culture of dreams and pictorializing the explosive mixture of suffering and frustration he witnessed throughout the Depression years. His unpalatable but lucid observations of the mass neurosis of the 1930s were to shape his work.²⁸
- 52 In his later fiction—*A Cool Million* in 1934 and *The Day of the Locust* in 1939—, West moved further away from both the “dream life” of *Balso Snell*'s subconscious and from *Miss Lonelyhearts*'s hallucinatory world. He viewed American reality as a non-stop staged act selling cheap, manufactured dreams to a desperate audience. Through his fiction, he prophesied that men would soon substitute the physical for the imagined, and external actions for internal thoughts. In *The Day of the Locust*, his last novel, West sustained his politics of revelation and his critique of the American dream in the form of an apocalyptic wasteland of movie-goers whose sole craving is for something “violent enough to make taut their slack minds and bodies” (381). He also showed to what extent Hollywood could produce its own celluloid surreal compositions.
- 53 For West, chaos was the actual reality and not a posture to question logical realism, as the Surrealists contended. He never imagined that Breton's didactic criticism of reality could ever work out the same in America where reality was already shattered by dreams and illusions.
- 54 In his fiction, West seems to have been in search of a character that could grasp the big picture and perform a magical act to transform a “truly monstrous” (West 243) American reality into a pure form of “convulsive beauty.” Neither *Balso Snell* nor *Miss Lonelyhearts* manage to redeem the convoluted monstrosity of illusions which directs both the individual and the masses. In *The Day of the Locust*, the dumping ground that painter Tod Hackett discovers by chance in the hills symbolizes the resting place of Hollywood studio junk.²⁹ Before getting to this “dream dump,” Tod literally walks through a maze of cinema sets—the ultimate form of macabre ready-made ecosystem. The surreality of his vision of the American cultural landscape comes full circle when, among the sets, he is faced with the Trojan horse, as in an act of authorial self-parody, like the final mock-surrealist image and ready-made object encapsulating the reader's as well as the character's journey inside West's dramatized subconscious. West's Trojan (hobby-)horse rests like a life-size metatextual bookmark across the page—yet another hoax of his own design.

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NOTES

1. The adjective "convulsive" appears in André Breton's novel *Nadja* (1928) combined with the term "beauty."
2. Angel Flores was the first to draw a parallel between surrealism and West's early work in a short essay published in *Contempo* (1933) and reprinted in Siegel (1994, 58-9).
3. Subsequent references to the book will appear under the form "*Balso Snell*."
4. All references to West's novels, letters and essays are taken from *Novels and Other Writings*. Ed. Sacvan Bercovitch. New York: The Library of America, 1997.
5. In *Exile's Return*, Malcolm Cowley quotes the Dada Manifesto which declared: "[t]he new artist protests" (149). West's choice of the Trojan horse as setting for his narrative may be an allusion to the literal meaning of *dada* or 'hobby-horse.'
6. Tashjian explains the difference between European Surrealism—deemed as deviant and chaotic—and America's Post-Surrealism movement of the 1930s led by California painters such as Helen Lundberg and Lorser Feitelson, which aimed at more aesthetic order on the canvas, corresponding to America's "desire for normalcy" (130) in a period of social and economic chaos.
7. West always had a taste for double-play, posturing and masks, as when he "conned his way into Brown University" (Kingsley 6) in 1922.
8. West had been under the influence of surrealist painters such as Max Ernst since his trip to Paris in 1926. According to Westian early critic Josephine Herbst, "West's deviations from the surrealists are significant. He was with them in pursuing the reality which lies beyond what we call real. He shared—with limitations—the revolutionary element in surrealism which was twofold: it was a revolt of the psyche, against the authority of reason; it was also an appeal to reason to liberate man from his oppressors—family, church, fatherland, and boss" (Herbst 620).
9. For a discussion on the impact of Surrealism on American culture, see for instance Tashjian (11-36) and (36-65).
10. West was influenced by Sherwood Anderson. For a comparative study of West and Anderson, see Taylor (154-199) and Berkovitz (129-200).
11. For an insightful analysis of this point, see Veitch. West was already dubbed "a kind of superrealist" in Gehman 1950, 69.
12. For J. Eburne, West implemented a new form of pessimism by means of discouraging unfunny jokes and "gruesome slapstick" (Eburne 527).

13. For an overview of West's literary influences, see Reid 1967.
 14. "Second Manifesto of Surrealism" (Breton 159).
 15. West's stay in Paris only lasted two months, though early critics took for granted rumours of his spending two years there.
 16. "Fraternity" is a term that Breton uses in his *Manifestoes* to refer to the society formed by Surrealists.
 17. For insight into West's use of parody, see Reid (1967, 12-40).
 18. "Some Notes on *Miss L.*" (401).
 19. For further development, see Krauss (1986, 107-18).
 20. "Some Notes on Violence" was published in the October issue of the magazine *Contact* in 1932 and "Some Notes on *Miss Lonelyhearts*" was published in *Contempo* on 15 May 1933.
 21. In his "Second Manifesto of Surrealism", Breton contends that journalism is "one of the most dangerous activities that exists" (Breton 165).
 22. "Some Notes on *Miss Lonelyhearts*" (West 402).
 23. Veitch underlines West's interest for "'excessive realism' that aspires to turn its particular kind of joking into a distinct mode of social criticism" (Veitch 15).
 24. In "Some Notes on Violence" West writes that "[in] America violence is idiomatic. Read our newspapers. To make the front page a murderer has to use his imagination, he also has to use a particularly hideous instrument" (West 399).
 25. See Tashjian 33.
 26. "Some Notes on *Miss L.*" (West 401).
 27. For instance, whereas Stanley Edgar Hyman and Victor Comerchero were two early defenders of Freudian readings of West's work, Randall Reid and Irving Malin firmly defended the opposite view.
 28. The time spent by West as hotel manager in the Depression-era New York allowed him to collect raw materials to build most of his memorable characters.
 29. Tod Hackett followed an academic training in painting on the East coast, but agrees to be hired as a set designer by a Hollywood studio.
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ABSTRACTS

American modernist Nathanael West's relationship to surrealism has been a classic topic of discussion among literary scholars. Though West is not considered to be a Surrealist, the term "surrealist" is often used to describe his writing. In order to overcome this critical double bind, this paper argues that West's hallmark lies precisely in his departure from surrealism as well as in his ability to recombine it to produce his own aesthetics of reality, as illustrated by the transition from his first novel, *The Dream Life of Balso Snell* (1931), in which West parodies the surrealist tenets, to his second one, *Miss Lonelyhearts* (1933), in which André Breton's call to rethink reality has been changed into a cynical criticism of self-delusion in the American context of the Depression.

La relation qui lie l'écrivain américain Nathanael West et le surréalisme a longtemps constitué un objet d'étude chez les spécialistes de la littérature moderniste. Bien que West ne soit pas considéré comme un Surréaliste, on qualifie souvent son écriture de « surréaliste ». Afin de sortir de cette impasse critique, cet article défend l'idée que la marque de fabrique de West réside à la

fois dans sa mise à distance du surréalisme et dans sa capacité à le reconfigurer pour l'amalgamer à sa propre esthétique de la réalité, ce que montre la transition entre son premier roman, *The Dream Life of Balso Snell* (1931), dans lequel West fait une parodie du surréalisme, et son second roman, *Miss Lonelyhearts* (1933), où l'appel à repenser la réalité qu'avait lancé André Breton est définitivement évacué au profit d'une critique cynique de l'illusion dans le contexte américain de la Dépression.

INDEX

Mots-clés: surréalisme, parodie, modernisme, représentation, rêve, illusion

Keywords: surrealism, parody, modernism, representation, dream, delusion

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Surrealist networks: Post Surrealism and Helen Lundeberg

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- 1 Surrealism was a concept and organization that existed as a professional and social network. One of its most famous proponents, Max Ernst, noted, “Art is not produced by one artist, but by several. It is to a great degree the product of their exchange of ideas with one another” (Ernst 17). In the United States, the Post Surrealists were an early development of this exchange and as a group they expanded the network further. Despite their importance, the Post Surrealists and one of its leaders, Helen Lundeberg, have been under-investigated in surrealist literature. This paper hopes to rectify the situation somewhat by focusing on the group’s ideology as demonstrated by Lundeberg’s art and writings.

Social Network Theory

- 2 The term networking has become almost ubiquitous today due to the Internet. The terms network and networking in one of the search engines brings forth definitions, the majority of which refer to the field of telecommunications. However, the concept of a network, that is, a structure similar to a web in which an aggregate of physical or conceptual cords, wires, or other such threads connect different elements at regular intervals as a means of communication, is actually quite old. Up until the modern age, most networks were restricted by geographical boundaries and political powers. Around 1839 the term expanded to include the idea of an interlocking system as that used to transport by rivers, canals and railways. The invention of movable type, which led to the production of large supplies of inexpensive books, has long influenced the transfer of ideas. But it was the appearance of the camera and the subsequent ease of reproducing accurate images in newspapers and magazines during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that further increased the expansion of pictorial knowledge. The technological development of electrical apparatus such as the telephone and radio in the early twentieth century expanded the concept of the network to multiple broadcasting and transformed the speed and ease of transmission.

- 3 Social networks had originally been limited to nuclear and extended families, neighborhood friends as well as occupational colleagues. A theoretical construct, social networking as a field of study is slightly more than a century old. But major developments in the field emerged in the 1930s among several disciplines, namely psychology, anthropology, and mathematics. The ethnographic studies and theoretical treatises of Bronislaw Malinowski, Alfred Radcliffe-Brown, and Claude Levi-Strauss laid the groundwork for social network theory. During the war, Levi-Strauss was one of the exiled European intellectuals. After arriving in New York City in 1941, he interacted with Andre Breton, Max Ernst and other Surrealists, their discussions later contributing to his formation of Structural Anthropology. Both his ideas and social network theory emphasized relationships rather than individuals and consequently the underlying patterns of the group or society. In the United States, Levi-Strauss participated in surrealist activities, contributing articles to the journal *VVV*, and joining in their games during evenings of socializing. He realized that the Surrealists' use of exquisite corpse, *le jeu de la vérité*, and other playful activities was a type of initiation ritual, a form of group rite (Sawin 124).

Surrealist Networks

- 4 During the period when the foundation of social network theory developed, Surrealism as an avant-garde concept was branching phenomenally beyond the borders of France, across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas and even to Asia. Martica Sawin explained, "Surrealism left no one that came in contact with it unaffected" (Sawin xv). Actually, as early as 1959, Surrealist Marcel Jean discussed its geographic diffusion in his survey book on the movement. Jean focused on two main means of transmission beyond France: international surrealist exhibitions and publications (Jean 312-20). The travels of surrealist members, followers, and promoters were also essential to the dissemination of the aesthetic and further complicated the network emerging.
- 5 European Surrealism, the related earlier metaphysical paintings of Giorgio de Chirico, and the work of Neo-Romantics such as Charles Rain and Eugene Berman were officially introduced to the United States during the late 1920s and 1930s. The first large-scale exhibition devoted to surrealist painting outside of France occurred in 1931 in the United States, at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut. It was preceded in the same institution the year before by an equally substantial survey devoted to Neo-Romanticism. In 1932, the art dealer Julien Levy installed a smaller version of the 1931 Wadsworth Atheneum exhibition at his New York gallery. Small exhibitions, often solo displays at commercial galleries, further offered outsiders more examples of actual works for study: Levy in New York City, Katharine Kuh in Chicago, Howard Putzel and Paul Elder in San Francisco, and Lorser Feitelson, Putzel, and Stanley Rose in Los Angeles all managed commercial art galleries that catered to the avant-garde during the 1930s. At first they displayed only the work of Europeans, but later they were crucial in also promoting American exponents of Surrealism and thereby establishing new American branches of the surrealist network.
- 6 The movement in the United States spread rapidly and was a great deal more complicated than in France. Multiple cities became centers of activity: in addition to New York and nearby suburban Connecticut, far off San Francisco and Los Angeles and to a lesser degree, Chicago with its fantasy strain, were home to surrealist painters,

sculptors, photographers and printmakers. Northwest Canada and the United States and later the Southwest, both Arizona and New Mexico, also attracted visitors in search of the marvelous in indigenous American culture.

- 7 Initially, women had been deemed by the surrealist founders as supportive personalities, existing primarily to satisfy the needs of the men, for artistic inspiration and sexual pleasure, rather than as independent creative agents. For women born in the United States as well as those that fled there during the war, the New World offered different cultures and situations for the second sex. In the United States, the lack of century-old traditions, the existence of more fluid social mores and the franchise – which women did not receive in France until 1944 – encouraged their greater sense of independence and self-worth and their exploration of identity issues. That many émigré women did not flourish as Surrealists until their move to the United States demonstrates how liberating American culture was for them. Various networks of transferring intellectual concepts were therefore especially crucial conduits of information for female proponents, who had not been members of the official surrealist circle and who often never even visited Paris.

Helen Lundeberg

- 8 One such example was Helen Lundeberg. Little known today outside her native California, she played arguably a more significant role than Kay Sage and Dorothea Tanning in the history of Surrealism in the United States. In 1934, she and Lorser Feitelson issued the manifesto *New Classicism*.

The mechanisms of *New Classicism* are based upon the normal functioning of the **mind**: its meandering, logical in sequence though not in ensemble, its perceptions of analogy and idea-content in forms and groups of forms unrelated in size, time, or space. The new aesthetic form is subjective [...] an arrangement of [...] **ideas**. (Lundeberg, n.p.)

- 9 Critics soon dubbed it “Post Surrealism” because of the pictorial similarities. *New Classicism* would not only be the only surrealist manifesto issued by American artists in the United States, but its existence serves as a prime example of how quickly the aesthetic became integral to the nation’s avant-garde.

Anonymous photographer. Helen Lundeberg.



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- 10 Lundeberg lived in Pasadena, near Los Angeles but half a world from Paris. When the manifesto appeared, she had not traveled abroad, nor even to New York City. But she was well versed in the principles of the European aesthetic. Barely out of art school, she had studied and worked with Feitelson, a teacher at the Stickney Memorial School of Art in Pasadena and one of the most knowledgeable and radical painters in Southern California. Before his move to Los Angeles in 1927, he had traveled several times to France and Italy during that decade and worked in New York City, exhibiting at the modernist-oriented Daniel Gallery. It was Feitelson who early on introduced Lundeberg to the concepts of Surrealism and encouraged her to write the manifesto.
- 11 The Post Surrealists would eventually include other California-based painters, such as Dorr Bothwell, Grace Clements, Philip Guston (still known as Philip Goldstein), Reuben Kadish, and Knud Merrild. As a group, they would exhibit in 1935 at the San Francisco Museum of Art (now San Francisco Museum of Modern Art) and in 1936 at the Brooklyn Museum of Art. The latter showing introduced their art to New Yorkers and led to Lundeberg, Feitelson and Merrild receiving an invitation to participate in what would become a landmark exhibition of Surrealism, *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*, which opened a few months later at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City. The MoMA exhibition is usually discussed only in terms of New York art circles, but a touring version, *Fantastic Art: Past and Present*, traveled throughout the East and Midwest United States, visiting Binghamton, New York; Middlebury, Vermont; Atlanta, Georgia; Grand Rapids, Michigan; and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, extending the network of Surrealism (fig. 2).

Tour of *Fantastic Art: Past and Present*



- 12 It established a precedent adopted later when two other institutions organized traveling surrealist exhibitions (San Francisco Museum of Art, 1944, and Art Institute of Chicago, 1947; the AIC show toured the country under the auspices of the American Federation of Arts).

The Painting Plant and Animal Analogies

- 13 A single painting was illustrated in the *New Classicism* broadside, Lundeberg's *Plant and Animal Analogies*.

Helen Lundeberg (1908-1999). *Plant and Animal Analogies*



1934-35, oil on Celotex, 24 x 30 in. (61 x 76.2 cm), University of California, Irvine, Gerald Buck Collection

PHOTO: © FEITELSON LUNDEBERG FOUNDATION.

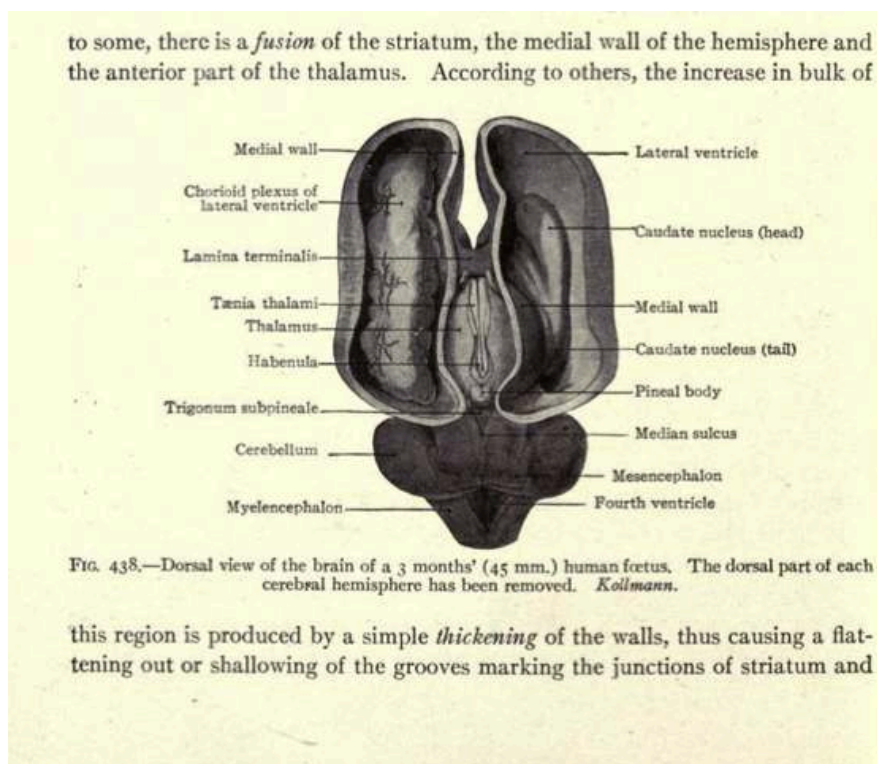
- 14 In many ways it echoes the appearance, process, and function of a network structure. A sculpted torso, knife, green pepper, and red cherries sit on a window ledge as several black-and-white diagrams float mysteriously above, and a child and mother walk in a distant landscape near a tree (the figures were added later). In *Plant and Animal Analogies*, and in other paintings by Lundeberg, the collage of diverse forms often concerns concepts of creation and life, from the seeds of a piece of fruit to the reproductive cells of a human being. White dashes and red and blue arrows connect the diagrams with the realistically delineated objects. They constitute the framework of the painting, assisting the viewer in understanding the meaning of the scene. Functioning as dendrites between the objects in this mysterious still life, they transmit ideas and, along with the synaptic objects, function as a whole to establish new meanings. The lines not only lead the viewer's eye through the painting but also connect the seemingly diverse and disparate objects to form a conceptual network of items that together constitute what Lundeberg defined as an "intellectual-entity."
- 15 At the time of the Post Surrealists' Brooklyn showing, Lundeberg's colleague Clements wrote about the movement in the American Marxist art journal *Art Front*, thereby spreading the theory of the West Coast version of Surrealism to a national audience and to one of a political character. Although believing that European Surrealism answered the need for a revolutionary art through the concept of association and the process of montage, she insisted that only Post Surrealism remedied what the Post Surrealists considered the European's lack of aesthetic unity. She went on to explain that the new art would solve this need by "cerebrally parallel[ing] the scientific and psychological contributions of our time" (*Art Front* 8).

- 16 Lundeberg held a life-long interest in science and thus brought to her art an appreciation of and belief in the need for reason, order, and theory. As she explained in the manifesto,

In formulating the principles of *New Classicism* we [Feitelson and Lundeberg] have developed a veritably new and unprecedented aesthetic order. Balance, rhythm, unity, are not abandoned, but are attained through entirely new means. The “unity experience” becomes wholly introspective; rhythm is experienced through contemplation of the relations and sequences of forms and groups of forms. (*New Classicism* n.p.)

- 17 Working similar to the pathways of the brain, Post Surrealist compositions strove to underscore the concepts of structure and order.
- 18 While in college, Lundeberg studied various scientific disciplines. It was probably during this time that she became aware of textbooks with detailed black-and-white line drawings. Created by artists with special knowledge of the natural sciences and medicine, these illustrations served in the place of photographs and were intended to be accurate. Lundeberg presented four objects in *Plant and Animal Analogies* as such black-and-white diagrams, copying three of them almost exactly from Adam M. Miller’s line illustrations in Frederick R. Bailey’s *Textbook of Embryology* (1921). For instance, the black-and-white object above the sliced green pepper is the dorsal view of the brain of a three-month fetus.

Adam M. Miller, Dorsal view of the brain of a three-month-old human fetus.



1921. In Frederick R. Bailey's *Textbook of Embryology*

- 19 In her canvas, she turned the drawing upside down to echo the basic outline shape of the pepper below. As she explained, “The conceptive or diagrammatic forms conditioned introspectively by the visually perceived forms are related to each other

intellectually in their logical sequence by diagrammatic arrows and dotted line” (*New Classicism*, n.p.). The individual objects at first do not seem to relate to one another. Although they are clearly delineated they are not easily understood as an ensemble. The objects constitute an enigma, the element of mystery so important to Surrealism. After serious contemplation the viewer may discern the similarity of shapes, especially their outlines, such as the open red cherry with a single pit, the black-and-white diagram with a similar seed-like center and another line drawing of a uterus with a five-week-old embryo.

Helen Lundeberg (1908-1999). *Plant and Animal Analogies* (detail)



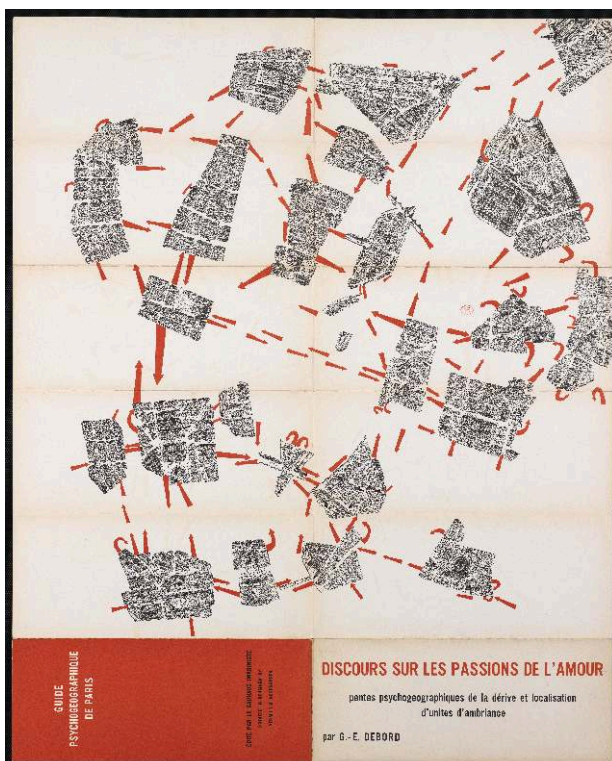
- 20 *Plant and Animal Analogies* is the only painting in which Lundeberg added dash lines and arrows to lead the viewer’s eye around the composition. We may assume she did so because of the didactic nature of the painting. Also the only painting reproduced in the brochure of the manifesto, it serves as a model of how to read post-surrealist imagery. The still life is a narrative, but as often with Surrealism, it is not presented in a linear fashion. There is no beginning, nor end. Its format is opposite to how a viewer reads the sequential structure of frames of a film negative or panels of a mural, which usually (in Western culture) are read from left to right in a consecutive manner. (Interestingly, soon after creating this painting, Lundeberg would go on to work for the Federal Art Project / Works Progress Administration as a muralist.) The lines and arrows serve as a multivalent framework for reading the painting. There is no single system for understanding the imagery, as the dashed lines often have multiple trajectories and result in multiple permutations for understanding the entire ensemble. Lundeberg’s pictorial structure accords with Roland Barthes’ concept of narrative, more as a “constellation” of “contiguous fragments” (Felluga, “Introduction to Narratology”). This plurality of codes invites the viewer to delve into its alternate meanings and connotations.
- 21 The message of what the viewer understands is modified by the performance of reading the objects and the order of such a reading, as he or she brings to the process his/her own personal and cultural experiences. Thus every viewer of the painting interprets the imagery differently. In this respect Lundeberg’s framework of her images and the process of relating one to another accords completely with Barthes’ analysis of the process of interpretation: “In this ideal text, the networks are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of signifiers; not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by

several entrances, none of which can authoritatively declared to be the main one” (Barthes *S/Z*, 5).

Relationship to Situationists maps

- 22 The overall structure of the arrangement of objects and connective lines in *Plant and Animal Analogies* also has a remarkable pictorial similarity to the navigational systems in the urban maps of Situationism.

Guy Debord (1931-1994) and Asger Jorn (1914-1973). Guide psychogéographique de Paris : discours sur les passions de l'amour



1956

- 23 In 1956 and 1957, French theorist Guy Debord and Danish painter Asger Jorn pursued mapping cities based on the psychogeographic concept of “drift” (*dérive*), wandering around, seemingly at random, to determine which neighborhoods had been spoiled by contemporary bureaucracy. Rather than detailing streets based on rational Cartesian philosophy, the two artists focused on neighborhoods reflecting social considerations, and then created their maps from scraps of old and contemporary maps and books, arranging them haphazardly on a sheet of paper, then adding dotted/dashed lines and arrows to connect the districts. Their cluster maps were intended to underscore patterns of associations and identity, and ultimately demonstrate how modernity had fragmented city life. Through the subtitle of one of their maps, “a discourse on the passions of love,” Debord and Jorn suggested that their ultimate source was André Breton’s excursions through Paris, as he described his love affair in the novel *Nadja* (Sadler 86). The maps were originally collages (later reproduced as prints), constructed in a manner similar to Lundeberg’s process of placing the objects in her still life

painting, part accidental and part intentional, both subjective and objective. Ultimately, Lundeberg undermined traditional still life in a manner analogous to the Situationists' concept of *détournement*, diverting the conventional way of reading imagery.

- 24 Lundeberg and Feitelson functioned in a manner analogous to the diagrammatic lines of her painting, for they became major links to and within the United States in the large network that extended the aesthetic of Surrealism: Feitelson beginning in New York, to Paris, back to New York, and then to Los Angeles during the 1920s; Lundeberg in the early 1930s adopted the network in Pasadena, then along with others from California introduced Post Surrealism to Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York City. The Post Surrealist strand of the American Surrealist network was one of the earliest links to the French aesthetic. Most historians date the flourishing of Surrealism in North America to the 1940s and attribute its cause to the world war and the physical displacement of European intellectuals. However, the activities and art of the Post Surrealists demonstrate that the basic concepts of Surrealism had in the preceding decade already reached the Pacific Coast, been modified, and begun to impact the course of art throughout the United States.
- 25 I would like to thank Dr. Patricia Allmer of Edinburgh University and Dr. Terri Geis of Pomona College for reading earlier versions of this text and for their suggestions.

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ABSTRACTS

This paper demonstrates how surrealist aesthetics spread to the United States from Europe through a system of cultural and social networking, and hence emerged in southern California in the mid-1930s, years before the usual dating of the aesthetic in the Americas to the early 1940s when European Surrealists fleeing the war emigrated to New York City. In Los Angeles in the early 1930s, Helen Lundeberg along with Lorser Feitelson organized a movement first called “New Classicism,” but dubbed by the critics “Post Surrealism.” The manifesto which Lundeberg wrote was illustrated by her painting *Plant and Animal Analogies*, and together text and image demonstrated her belief in the need to infuse Surrealism with structure. The seemingly haphazard arrangement of still life elements in the painting along with its collage effect demonstrate Guy Debord’s and the Situationists’ principles of mapping known as drift (*dérive*) and diversion (*détournement*). *Plant and Animal Analogies* should be considered an icon in the history of Surrealism.

Cet article étudie le rôle des réseaux culturels et sociaux dans la diffusion de l’esthétique surréaliste aux Etats-Unis. On s’intéressera plus précisément à son émergence dans le sud de la Californie dès le milieu des années trente, soit plusieurs années avant l’arrivée des exilés surréalistes européens à New York, au début des années quarante. A Los Angeles, quelque dix ans plus tôt, un mouvement s’organise sous l’impulsion d’Helen Lundeberg et Lorster Feitelson : le « New Clacissism » qui devient sous la plume de la critique le « Post-surréalisme ». Le manifeste rédigé par Lundeberg et illustré par *Plant and Animal Analogies* (1934-35) souligne la nécessité d’ordonner et de structurer la représentation picturale surréaliste. La composition, apparemment anarchique, d’éléments inanimés, s’associe à des effets de collage dans une représentation préfigurant la carte psychographique de Guy Debord (1957) et les principes situationnistes de la dérive et du détournement. De ce point de vue, *Plant and Animal Analogies* peut être considéré comme une véritable icône de l’histoire du Surréalisme.

INDEX

Keywords: post surrealism, surrealism, new classicism, social network theory, women artists, American surrealism, *Plant and Animal Analogies*, Situationist International

Mots-clés: post-surréalisme, surréalisme, nouveau classicisme, théorie des réseaux sociaux, femmes artistes, surréalisme américain, *Plant and Animal Analogies*, situationnisme

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Great Impulses and New Paths: VVV, Surrealism, and the Black Atlantic

Terri Geis

- 1 Exiled in New York during the Second World War from 1941-1946, a demoralized André Breton faced limited resources—both financially and emotionally—for rallying the surrealist group. He complained to Benjamin Péret that the years in the United States appeared to be shaping up as “a resounding failure,” for the movement, a time of division and scattering with “the wind of dispersal” (Polizzotti 522). Back in France years later, Breton would state that he considered his work on the journal VVV as an important aspect of an otherwise dark time (Polizzotti 534). Initiated by Breton with the help of fellow exile Max Ernst, the first issue of VVV was published in New York in June of 1942.
- 2 The inspiration for the title of VVV indicates a greater optimism within the surrealist movement during these years. The starting reference point was Winston Churchill’s famous “V for Victory,” slogan, but it likely had multiple significances. For example, Julia Pine notes that, “V.v.v., of course, is also the acronym for Julius Caesar’s famous maxim, “Veni, vidi, vici”: “I came, I saw, I conquered,” and perhaps intimates Breton’s own aspirations to “conquer” America for Surrealism” (Pine 15). While the journal represented an effort to create a mouthpiece not only for the exiled European surrealists but also new surrealist affiliates from the Americas, an editorial statement on the back cover of the first issue made clear a certain hierarchy:

The exigencies of war have brought to America some of the most creative minds most qualified to [...] protect, to develop, to insist on the values of the free and imaginative self; and they, in collaboration with those Americans who are in sympathy with their means and ends, propose to found the review. (VVV n.p.)
- 3 Breton clearly viewed surrealism as a means of enlightening artists in the United States, yet exile status instead inevitably led to a shift in the movement’s focus and scope.
- 4 As Susan Rubin Suleiman has suggested, exile can serve as “a focal point for theoretical reflections about individual and cultural identity, which in turn are intimately bound up with problems of nationalism, racism and war” (Suleiman 2). The surrealist exile in

the Americas led to significant encounters with a wider network of intellectuals, artists and writers. These interactions expanded surrealism, providing the movement with new perspectives on cultural and national identity, and the pervasive concerns at the heart of these issues, namely colonialism and racism. Within this context, the journal *VVV* serves as an important marker of Breton and his colleagues' struggle to find their way in the cultural and political landscape of the Americas of the 1940s, including early manifestations of the African-American civil rights movement and the ongoing anti-colonial and anti-fascist critiques by artists from the Caribbean.

VVV and the Widening Surrealist Scope

- 5 As a foreign national with tenuous residency status in the United States, Breton could not serve as *VVV*'s editor, and he struggled to find an American for the role. Charles Henri Ford and Lionel Abel both declined the editorial position. The artist Robert Motherwell was also considered, but according to Martica Sawin, "Breton found him too obtuse over the translation of the term 'social consciousness'" (Sawin 214). Breton eventually gave the job to David Hare, a sculptor and photographer from an affluent, socially prominent family.
- 6 Three issues of *VVV* were published between 1942 and 1944 (including a double issue) and some of Breton's surrealist constituents regularly criticized the journal as failing to assert the movement's position with any coherence, instead being too broadly eclectic. For example, Roberto Matta, who was also instrumental in the journal's initial publication, found it too inclusive, while Wolfgang Paalen described it as "fine bits of odds and ends" (Sawin 239; Breit 443). Contemporary analysis of surrealism in exile has often come to similar conclusions. Sawin's 1995 study describes *VVV* as "lacking direction," while Dickran Tashjian's book from the same year asserts that the journal is primarily of interest "as a sign of the persistence of resilience of Surrealism under the most trying circumstances" (Sawin 347; Tashjian 214). Stamatina Dimakopoulou has aptly noted the journal's "uneasy alliance between Trotskyism, opposition to U.S. involvement in the Second World War, and the surrealist turn to esoteric thought" (Dimakopoulou 743).
- 7 However, the eclecticism of *VVV* has also been described as representing a "growing diversification" of the movement (Sawin 346). The journal regularly featured artists and writers from Latin America. For example, Matta made regular contributions, including an image of a *vagina dentata* that he created for the cover of the fourth (and final) issue. Such imagery of the treacherous, violent female was common within the surrealist visual lexicon, but it took on a new dimension of cultural specificity when utilized by a Chilean artist. Matta was likely familiar with an old Mapuche (indigenous group of Chile) saying: "A woman of striking appearance has a biting vagina" (Schipper 63).
- 8 Yet within *VVV*, representations of women did not remain static, either. As Penelope Rosemont has noted, more women artists and writers contributed to *VVV* than to any other surrealist journal, in fact, more than in all other surrealist journals put together (Rosemont 120). The most significant inclusion was undoubtedly in the final issue, which devoted extensive space to *Down Below*, Leonora Carrington's compelling account of her experience in a sanitarium in Spain. As Alice Gambrell has pointed out:

In a journal whose red cover displays Matta's startling visual interpretation of a *vagina dentata*, one might infer that the editors have finally decided to allow the women to talk back, even to the extent of giving them the last word. (Gambrell 87-88)

- 9 It can be asserted that *VVV* was the space within which surrealism's longstanding theoretical, political, and symbolic interests, including cultures outside of Europe, colonialism, and the dual trope of madness and female sexuality, intersected with voices that more directly represented these groups. Subsequently, *VVV* has been heavily referenced within recent scholarship on surrealism, women artists and/or Latin America that seeks to highlight the movement's wider networks and lesser-known participants.¹ The work of Black writers and artists from the Caribbean, specifically Aimé Césaire and Wifredo Lam, were also included in the final issue of the journal, as will be examined in the latter half of this essay.

Surrealism and Early Civil Rights Campaigns in the United States

- 10 A further inspiration for the title of *VVV* indicates the need to examine another aspect of surrealism's diverse focus in the U.S., namely the movement's possible desire to engage with the political efforts of African-Americans. Franklin Rosemont has suggested that the title directly referenced the Double-V campaign, which was launched in Pittsburgh in January of 1942 by James G. Thompson in a letter to an African-American newspaper, *The Pittsburgh Courier*. The campaign, which soon spread across the country, condemned the double standards that saw African-Americans fighting abroad while still subject to segregationist Jim Crow laws throughout the United States. Thompson urged African-Americans to fight Axis forces abroad and discrimination at home:

The V for victory sign is being displayed prominently in all so-called democratic countries which are fighting for victory over aggression, slavery, and tyranny. If this V sign means that to those now engaged in this great conflict, then let we colored Americans adopt the double V V for a double victory. The first V for victory over our enemies from without, the second V for victory over our enemies from within. For surely those who perpetrate these ugly prejudices here are seeking to destroy our democratic form of government just as surely as the Axis forces. (Rosemont 202)

- 11 *The Pittsburgh Courier* created a logo for the movement, consisting of stacked V's and a blue sphere upon which an eagle of liberty perches with spread wings.
- 12 While no documentation has emerged to indicate that the exiled surrealists were in direct contact with Thompson or the editors at *The Pittsburgh Courier*, they were likely aware of the Double-V campaign's goals. The first page of the first issue of *VVV* explained the meaning of each "V" within the title. The significance of the first "V" was in close alignment with the aims of Double-V movement, victory over fascism and over racial oppression:

Victory over the forces of regression and of death unloosed at present on the earth, but also V beyond this first Victory, for this world can no more, and ought no more, be the same, V over that which tends to perpetuate the enslavement of man by man. (*VVV* n.p.)

- 13 Marcel Duchamp's design for the cover of the second VVV (a double issue published in 1943) offers a visual counterpart to the journal's statement and stands in interesting connection to the Double-V logo. The cover features an allegorical etching by an unknown artist that depicts death (not liberty) riding over the globe on a horse ("death unloosed at present on the earth") with three superimposed green V's.
- 14 However grim the tone of Duchamp's image, the mission of VVV was clearly in part to stand in solidarity with the international and multifaceted anti-racist struggles for human rights, such as African-American activists' civil rights agenda. In the U.S., prominent artists and writers long-associated with the Harlem Renaissance and New Negro Movement were highly vocal on these wartime issues raised by the Double-V campaign. For example, Langston Hughes, initially opposed to Black involvement in the war, addressed these concerns through poems including "Jim Crow's Last Stand" (1943) and "Will V-Day Be Me-Day, Too?" (1944).
- 15 It is thus surprising to note that VVV included no contributions from intellectuals and artists of color in the United States. Furthermore, the pages of the journal did not include a direct statement on racial oppression like that of "Murderous Humanitarianism," which the surrealists published in Nancy Cunard's *Negro* anthology in 1934. Within this piece, the surrealists vehemently asserted the outrage against colonialism that had marked their activities since the 1920s:
- In the Antilles, as in America, the fun began with the total extermination of the natives, in spite of their having extended a most cordial reception to the Christopher Columbian invaders. Were they now, in the hour of triumph, and having come so far, to set out empty-handed for home? Never! So they sailed on to Africa and stole men. These were in due course promoted by our humanists to the ranks of slavery, but were more or less exempted from the sadism of their masters by virtue of the fact that they represented a capital which had to be safeguarded like any other capital. Their descendants, long since reduced to destitution [...] constitute a black proletariat whose conditions of life are even more wretched than those of its European equivalent [...] (The Surrealist Group in Paris 352).²
- 16 "Murderous Humanitarianism" was attributed to "The Surrealist Group in Paris," and signed by, among others, Breton and two Afro-Caribbean writers from Martinique, Jules Monnerot and Pierre Yoyotte (*Negro* also included pieces by Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and W.E.B. Du Bois, among many others).³
- 17 In contrast, interactions in New York in the 1940s between Black Americans and the surrealist refugees are poorly documented, as Franklin Rosemont has noted (Rosemont 199). This lack of evident connection is especially surprising given the important mutual interest and inspiration in Afro-Caribbean cultural and political developments. In 1945, Breton reflected on the central importance of the African diaspora to the surrealist movement, expressing the key role of Afro-Caribbean artists:
- "Colored" men have always enjoyed exceptional favor and prestige in surrealism [...] It is therefore no accident but a sign of the times, that the greatest impulses towards new paths for surrealism have been furnished during the war just ended, by my greatest "colored" friends — Aimé Césaire in poetry, Wifredo Lam in painting. (qtd. in Rosemont and Keeley 203)
- 18 Breton made these comments upon his arrival in Haiti at the end of 1945, and the country — the first independent Black republic in the world — clearly figured large in his revolutionary ideals. Just prior to arriving in the United States in June of 1941, Breton had recorded an "unusually ambitious" dream that he was the Mexican

revolutionary Emiliano Zapata, “making ready with my army to receive [Haitian freedom fighter] Toussaint Louverture the following day and to render him the honors to which he was entitled” (Polizzotti 498).

- 19 In the meantime, as Krista A. Thompson has noted of African-American artists in the first half of the twentieth century, “allusions to the Haitian Revolution in art came to signify the revolutionary potential of all African diasporic populations” (Thompson 79). African-American writers including Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes wrote well-known texts about their experiences in Haiti (while maintaining very different political stances). And to close this potential circle of mutual influence, it is clear that in these years, Afro-Caribbean poets affiliated with surrealism admired the work of African-American writers. In interview with Charles H. Rowell, Aimé Césaire noted:

In spite of our imperfect knowledge of English, we had read people like Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, later Sterling Brown and other people of the Black Renaissance collected in Alain Locke’s anthology [*The New Negro*]. [...] They [the Black Americans] were the first to teach us the rudiments of what we called “Négritude”. They were the first to say “Black is beautiful”. This does not seem to be much, but it was tremendous. It was the beginning of a cultural revolution, a kind of revolution of values. It was in no way a refusal of the outside world, it was bringing things into focus. (Rowell 789-797)

- 20 An extensive network of ideologies within and related to the Black diaspora was clearly an essential aspect of the development of modernism in New York, although this generally has been overlooked in discussions of surrealism in exile. For example, Tashjian has suggested that, “For avant-garde artists in New York, modernism in its various guises claimed priority, not ethnicity” (Tashjian 264). This was clearly not the case with wartime surrealism’s aspirations in New York, given the inspiration for the title of *VVV*, and Breton’s close alignment with the work of Césaire and Lam.
- 21 In some specific instances, the lack of connection between the surrealists and African-American artists may have stemmed from other ideological differences. For example, it is possible that Breton was slighted by Langston Hughes’s 1933 translation of Louis Aragon’s poem “Magnitogorsk,” which was published in *Littérature internationale* after Hughes met Aragon in Moscow. Anita Patterson has noted, “Aragon’s connections with Surrealism were politically fraught by the time he wrote “Magnitogorsk.” It is telling and apt that Hughes selects for translation a poem published after Aragon’s break with the Surrealist movement” (Patterson 408). Breton was, of course, infamous in his close distinctions between those he viewed as standing with surrealism and those against it.⁴

Breton, Political Freedom, and the Depths of the Unconscious

- 22 Beyond possible political differences, Breton surely was concerned about his tenuous status in the United States, and it would be tempting to speculate that the surrealist lack of strong ties with African-American artists and activists was due to caution. The FBI closely scrutinized the work of Black writers, leading some to go so far as creating code names.⁵ The U.S. government also viewed the leaders of the Double-V campaign and other Black journalists as a serious threat. The military allegedly burned African-American newspapers to keep them away from Black soldiers, while J. Edgar Hoover

attempted to indict the publishers responsible for the Double-V campaign on charges of treason.⁶

- 23 It has been suggested, but not firmly established, that Breton was also under FBI surveillance during his years in New York. Through the Freedom of Information Act, it has been discovered that the FBI documents on Breton were at some point destroyed (Sullivan 456). In contrast, as reporter John Cook has explored, the FBI's seventy-page file on Breton's colleague Claude Lévi-Strauss demonstrates that the organization carefully investigated the anthropologist. Cook notes that the most "damning information" in the file is:
- a report from the Secretary of Labor that Lévi-Strauss and [...] Breton were "closely connected with a group in Mexico which is very bad, having something on their minds different from 'what the rest of us have on our minds.'" (Cook, "FBI")
- 24 It is important and intriguing that the author of this report, Francis Perkins, Secretary of Labor from 1933 to 1945, was also the former mother-in-law of VVV editor David Hare.
- 25 However, while it is clear that members of Breton's circle were being monitored in the U.S., Breton's prior behaviour under surveillance in Martinique just before to his arrival in New York does not demonstrate a reluctance on his part to engage with other political dissidents. As Breton carefully recounts in his 1948 collection of essays *Martinique: Snake Charmer*, during his time on the island, he was followed by two men who readily admitted to being members of the secret police working for the Vichy government. And yet it was in Martinique that Breton became acquainted with Aimé and Suzanne Césaire, themselves under threat by the Vichy governor for the content of their journal *Tropiques*. In 1943, the governor would enact a ban on the journal, calling the group, "Racists, sectarians, revolutionaries, ingrates, and traitors to the fatherland, poisoners of minds" (Maximen xxix). In response, the *Tropiques* editors submitted a vicious letter denouncing the Vichy government and claiming allegiance with international efforts for Black freedom: "Racists,' yes. Racism like that of Toussaint Louverture, Claude McKay and Langston Hughes—against the racism like that of Drumont and Hitler" (Maximen xxix).
- 26 On a more pragmatic note, Breton's refusal to learn English while in New York would have also inhibited his ability to connect with any African-American writers who did not have a command of French, much as his refusal to attempt to speak Haitian Creole hindered his ability to engage in a deeper discussion with the painter Hector Hyppolite while visiting Haiti⁷. Within the pages of VVV, Breton instead engaged with artists who could, as Dawn Ades has put it, "speak from within and without" (Ades 46). Lam and Césaire had both lived in Paris, had both closely bonded with Breton during his journey into exile, and both brought a decidedly surrealist influence to their depictions of African diaspora histories, cultures and religious practices. Their work well-represented the aims outlined on the first page of VVV, where "V" could also signify a move beyond the "external world, the conscious surface," to "the View inside us, the eye turned toward the interior world and the depths of the unconscious".
- 27 A spread of pages in the fourth issue of VVV reveal much about the artistic activities that Breton viewed as best representing surrealism as it evolved in the Americas and sought to address regional issues of race and racism. The sequence begins with a full-page photograph of Césaire, smiling broadly while standing in what appears to be Fort Saint-Louis in Fort-de-France, Martinique. Césaire's poem, "Batouque" is published

over the next five pages. The title of the poem refers to Afro-Brazilian religious practices that involve dancing, percussion and trance states; “Batouque” is another, possibly older, name for “Candomblé”. It is interesting to note that the editors of VVV did not assume their readership would be familiar with these concepts, so a note explains that “Batouque” signifies the “rhythm of the Brazilian tam-tam”.

- 28 Césaire’s “Batouque” is full of references to the transatlantic slave trade and slavery in the Americas:

cravatted by the jetsam of my nameless slave galley ... a sargasso of melted screams

batouque of the river swollen with crocodile tears and drifting whips. (Césaire 151)

- 29 The poem is illustrated by an image of a sculpture by the Brazilian artist Maria Martins, entitled “Macumba”. The sculpture depicts a scene of the Afro-Brazilian ritual referenced in its title (the term “Macumba” is at times used interchangeably with “Candomblé”). Two female figures stand on either side of a male who induces the initiates into a trance state through dancing and drumming so that they can communicate with the spirits.⁸
- 30 The sequence in VVV concludes with a photograph of the Cuban artist Wifredo Lam painting in his studio against the backdrop of his large canvas from 1943, *The Jungle*. The painting has been described as depicting Cuban Santería *orishas* (deities) moving amongst sugarcane, thus drawing links between the crop most associated with slavery and “the secret survival of African beliefs in the context of the New World” (Lucie-Smith 65).
- 31 Gerardo Mosquera has asserted that the African presence in modern art of Latin America at times reflects “a reality where magic and myth play a very active role within contemporary problems” (Mosquera 34). The sequence in VVV attempts just such a connection. It strongly establishes the dual mission of the “Vs” within VVV’s title, exploring the struggle for victory over a world that “tends to perpetuate the enslavement of man by man,” and the importance of non-European religious practices to the development of “the eye turned toward the interior world”. It is important to note, however, that neither Lam nor Césaire were known to have been initiates into Afro-Caribbean religious practices and their use of the rich imagery of these practices was simply one aspect of their eclectic, surrealist-inspired artistic practices. As Judith Bettleheim has noted, “Lam used Santería-inspired imagery, but he was never Santería-centric and continually combined signifiers from many traditions, some African-based, some not” (Bettleheim 14).
- 32 Breton and surrealists in the Americas were specifically interested in the connections between historic slave uprisings and religions including Candomblé, Vodou, and Santería, as well as contemporary repression of associated rituals by governments in connection with the Catholic Church. Alluding to this history within the pages of VVV allowed the exiled surrealists to assert their racial politics without entering into a direct confrontation with the U.S. authorities. In the journal, Césaire’s poem and its themes around the slave trade are juxtaposed with an image of the author, soon to be Communist mayor of Fort-de-France, standing in the very fort that historically served as the central point of defence for the French colony. And as Lam’s interview with Max-Pol Fouchet reveals, he envisioned his art as a “Trojan horse” that could infiltrate the centers of power and “spew forth hallucinating figures with the power to surprise, to disturb the dreams of the exploiters” (Fouchet 188-189). Manthia Diawara has reflected

on the similar strategies of covert rebellion within Césaire’s journal *Tropiques*, as promoted by co-editor René Ménénil, who was, “aware of Surrealism’s usefulness in introducing Marxist and revolutionary praxis in the everyday lives of colonized people under the watchful eyes of the authorities in Martinique” (Diawara n.p.).

- 33 The spread of writing and images in VVV issue 4 – from Césaire’s poem and Martins’ sculpture to Lam’s painting – invoke a rebellion drawn from the “great impulses and new paths” that Breton advocated. The spread also evokes an imaginative, at times sexualized violence that is reflected by Matta’s *vagina dentata* on the cover of the issue, and informs each artists’ larger body of work. Césaire had gained the admiration of Breton partially through his *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* (1939), which reclaimed colonial stereotypes of the “primitive” Black subject through the trope of cannibalism, exclaiming, “Because we hate you and your reason/ we claim kinship/ with dementia praecox with the flaming madness/ of persistent cannibalism” (Césaire 49). Breton especially admired Martins’ sculptures of female water and snake deities that she poetically described as mating with and then consuming their male counterparts. Like Matta’s *vagina dentata*, Lam’s painting *The Jungle* alludes to castration anxiety and dismemberment, with a hand emerging from the thick foliage, bearing a pair of scissors. Some of the other juxtapositions within issue 4 of VVV underscore tensions between these subversively violent explorations and the ethnographic interests of the European surrealists. For example, the U.S. writer Robert Allerton Parker contributed an article entitled “Cannibal Designs,” offering imaginative interpretations of New Hebrides line drawings based upon a study by A.B. Deacon.
- 34 In another sequence of pages within issue four of VVV, the journal’s editorial team made their own offer of a Trojan horse through the iconic image of George Washington. What on first glance appears to be a simple cut-out image of Washington’s profile in red, white, and blue – a show of gratitude or even patriotism by the surrealists to their host country – quickly reveals itself to be comprised of an image of a rag covered in red stains. The layout is spread over four pages and includes raised gold stars, clearly a complicated and expensive design decision. The image is based upon Duchamp’s provocative assemblage created for (and rejected by) *Vogue* magazine in 1943, entitled *Allégorie de genre*. Duchamp’s piece, constructed with surgical gauze and iodine, resembles Washington’s profile when viewed from one perspective, and a map of the United States when turned the other way. Thirteen gold stars and the red stripes created by the iodine were meant to evoke an American flag, but are actually “redolent of bloodstained bandages or a used sanitary towel” (Taylor, “Flag”). As Michael Taylor has suggested of the image in VVV:
- [Duchamp] perhaps wanted to remind the magazine’s readers that the first President of the United States was a slave-owning war-monger, with not just blood on his hands, but saturated over his entire profile. (Taylor, “Flag”)
- 35 As if to reinforce their message, directly opposite from the cut-out of Washington, the editors of VVV chose to place a reproduction of a painting by Matta, with a caption listing its title as *Prince of Blood*. This title draws from the French term *Prince de sang*, the highest rank at court that was given to blood relatives of the king (outside of his immediate family), a distinguisher of the perceived ancestral purity required for power and privilege. Of course, strict laws related to blood purity and the prevention of “racial pollution” had become an important aspect of the Third Reich’s efforts to ensure the dominance of the Aryan race. Through this juxtaposition in VVV, Washington is indicted as the “Prince of blood,” a revolutionary leader, whose legacy

involves the complicated contamination of a violent racist past, furthermore a President whose actions included sending military aid to Haiti to aid white slaveholders during the Haitian revolution. The notion of Washington as the hero-liberator is strongly questioned here. Perhaps, the surrealists suggest, the common comparisons of Washington and the other liberator in the Americas, Toussaint Louverture, cannot stand.

- 36 Clearly, one of the strong ironies of surrealism in exile in the United States during World War II was that exposure to new currents of protest had to be embraced with caution and subterfuge. VVV represented an attempt, at times veiled, at struggle against racism and the continued manifestations of a grim world history. As Breton would reflect in 1943 in his essay on Césaire: “If the slave traders themselves have vanished from the world’s stage, one may be certain that in return they rage on in the mind, where their ‘black ivory’ is our dreams” (Breton 2008, 196).

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NOTES

1. For example, see Ilene Fort, Tere Arcq, and Terri Geis (eds.). *In Wonderland: The Surrealist Adventures of Women Artists in Mexico and the United States*. Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Prestel Verlag, 2012 and Dawn Ades, Rita Eder, and Graciela Speranza (eds.). *Debates on Surrealism in Latin America: Vivísimo Muerto*. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2012.
2. For an excellent analysis of surrealism's engagement in the 1930s with issues of racism and colonialism, see Amanda Stansell (Spiteri and Lacoss 111-126).
3. "Murderous Humanitarianism" was written in 1932, and translated into English by Samuel Beckett for inclusion in Cunard's *Negro: An Anthology* (1934). The original French document is lost.
4. Affiliates of Breton in the United States recall his strong reaction to the mere mention of Aragon's name (Polizzotti 500). Even Breton's close allegiance with Césaire had conditions, as can be seen from Breton's comments in his "Prolegomena to a Third Manifesto of Surrealism Or Else," published in the first issue of VVV, "Aimé Césaire, magnetic and black, who having broken all old tags, Eluardian and others, writes the poems we need today, in Martinique."
5. See, for example, Holcomb (2009).
6. These events have been examined in Stanley Nelson's 1999 documentary film, "The Black Press: Soldiers Without Swords." See the website: <http://www.pbs.org/blackpress/index.html>
7. In his 1948 essay on Hyppolite (later included in *Surrealism and Painting*, 1965), Breton stated that Hyppolite's "extreme reserve, coupled with the great difficulty he had in expressing himself in French, unfortunately made a coherent conversation almost impossible".
8. For a close investigation of Maria Martins's involvement with surrealism and her inclusion in VVV, see Terri Geis, "'My Goddesses and My Monsters': Maria Martins and Surrealism in the 1940s" (Ades et al. 145-159).

ABSTRACTS

The 1940s exile in the United States of many European surrealists, including André Breton, is viewed as a moment in which the movement widened to encompass a broader range of artistic voices and visions. This expansion of the surrealist group is reflected in the short-lived but significant journal VVV, which included many contributions from artists of the Americas, and

specifically from the Caribbean. It has been suggested that the editors of VVV were also in part inspired by the political efforts of African-Americans, yet the actual connections between the exiled surrealists and the artists, writers, and political activists of Harlem remained limited. This essay examines a moment of missed opportunity due to political repression during the Second World War, and also explores the strong creative alliances formed with writers and artists of Martinique and Cuba, as demonstrated in the pages of VVV.

L'exil des surréalistes européens, notamment d'André Breton, aux Etats-Unis, au début des années quarante, marque l'ouverture du mouvement à un plus grand nombre d'approches et de pratiques artistiques. Cette expansion du groupe surréaliste est relayée par VVV, une revue importante malgré sa courte durée de vie, qui accueille dans ses pages de nombreuses contributions d'artistes américains. Si les éditeurs de VVV déclarent vouloir s'engager politiquement aux côtés des Africains-Américains, les liens entre les surréalistes émigrés et les écrivains, artistes et militants politique d'Harlem restent de fait limités. En le resituant dans le contexte de la répression politique qui fait suite à la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, cet article examine les raisons d'un rendez-vous manqué.

INDEX

Mots-clés: surréalisme, VVV, droits civiques, diaspora africaine, exil

Keywords: surrealism, VVV, civil rights, African diaspora, exile

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Sands of desire : the Creative Restlessness of Lee Miller's Egyptian Period

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- 1 “As a spectator, I wanted to explore photography not as a question (a theme) but as a wound,” Roland Barthes writes in *Camera Lucida* (Barthes 17). Similarly, in the famous first lines of his surrealist book *Nadja*, André Breton concluded that the question he should ask himself should be “not who I am, but whom I haunt” (Breton 7). Could either of these quotes apply to Lee Miller's aesthetic as well? While her photographs during her period of *soi-disant* “apprenticeship”¹ with Man Ray focused on the female body, and the ones in her studio in New York on elegant portraiture, it is during her period in Egypt when she was married to the wealthy, older Egyptian businessman Aziz Eloui Bey that her photography truly blossomed into her own aesthetic which “married” the humor and the ludic notions of space found in certain Magritte paintings with the curious gaze of the ‘other’ that she would develop as a photo-journalist during the war. Her photos during her Egyptian period are filled with a restlessness and a thirst for adrenaline that would stoke her wartime experiences and push her to cry out “Shit, that's blown my first paragraph!” (Penrose 144) at the news of the German surrender ending World War II, and her role in it. As Aziz himself observed, Lee put on weight during her time in Cairo and developed an “Egyptian complex, which means being a spectator” (Burke 157). In terms of her photography, one might also consider that she gained a “metaphoric weight” in the sense that her own unsettled spectatorship could be transposed onto the curious rocks, sands, shapes and winds of the desert.

Wandering Among the Sepulchers of the World

- 2 After Lee left him for Aziz, it has been widely documented that Man Ray projected his anger and the feelings of betrayal he felt towards her in such works as *Object of Destruction* (1928), the metronome with Lee's eye at the tip of the needle or others such as the famous *Lee Miller* (1929) where Lee's neck and head are violently thrust into

motion as if to suggest that she had just been struck. If for Man Ray, *thanatos* and *eros* were inexorably welded together as his art became somewhat violent when the erotic image that he sought to possess became unreachable, Lee Miller sought out the *thanatos* and infused it not only with surrealist wit, as in *Remington Silent* (1940), the photograph of a crushed typewriter after a German bombing raid on London, or the naked statue of Venus under the rubble in *The Revenge on Culture* (1940) from *Grim Glory*, her book chronicling the London Blitz, but with a melancholy worthy of Breton's notion of "haunting."

- 3 Although she chose to take pictures on the front lines, like such Great War photographers as Robert Capa, and put herself in danger rather than sit in the press room with the other journalists, she did so because she was fascinated by the beauty she often saw in the overwhelming sadness before her. As such, if under Man Ray's painting of the Marquis de Sade watching soldiers lay siege to a castle in flames, the inscription reads "ma mémoire s'effacera de l'esprit de l'homme" ("my memory will erase itself from Man's spirit", *D.A.F. de Sade*, 1938), Miller's attraction to ruined and empty battle spaces such as her picture of the Saint-Etienne cathedral in Vienna 1945 showing an exhausted soldier being dwarfed by the sunlit reflection of a spire, or the soprano Irmgard Seefried joyously singing in the ruins of the Vienna opera house, aims to make sure that *her* memory will not disappear once the war is over and Europe is reconstructed. Along similar lines, her photo of the Queen Mother Helen of Romania alone in a balcony of an empty theater underlines her fascination not with populated spaces but with abandoned and ruined ones which emerged in full during her Egyptian period.
- 4 While in Egypt, she felt compelled to seek out the desert as a reaction to her boredom with Egyptian upper-class society. She desperately wanted to get back into the thick of things in Paris where great art was being created.² It was perhaps the anticipation of the boring, calm domestic life that was waiting for her after the war in England with her husband, Roland Penrose, that might have pushed her towards the frontlines where she was indeed once again in the middle of the action. Yet, her seemingly thanatosian *Wanderlust* as a correspondent might also suggest an inner haunting — whether on a personal level due to her continued need for sexual and emotional freedom — or on an artistic one, where daily human destruction created a *beauté convulsive* and an *explosante fixe* that the surrealists could only create artificially in their studios before the war. Perhaps, it is within this prism that Lee most resembles Man Ray's aesthetic. Far from his tutelage and domination, she was able to grasp what Janus, writing about Man Ray, describes in the following terms: "The photographer artist is the only one who attempts to bring [the cadaver] back to life, so he can pass it on to the future. [He] is the exorcist wandering among the sepulchers of the world, evoking what life never ceases losing" (Man Ray 14). Wandering through the sepulchers of her own world, Miller's photographic art becomes an existentialist quest as she never felt more alive than when she was surrounded by death. Sadly, her mournful images of war-torn Europe reflect her own melancholy in relation to the ephemeral and fleeting moments of the world history she was able to participate in, as she no doubt anticipated the end of her career once the action had stopped, and life became "normal" once again.
- 5 Certainly, flight and spontaneity were integral parts of Miller's life and work. She was introduced to the world of fashion-photography at *Vogue Magazine* in 1926 as a result of a certain stranger in a crowd of bystanders who grabbed her right when a car was

about to run her over. The fact that that stranger happened to be Condé-Nast suddenly changed her life from a budding art student taking classes at New York's Art Student League to a famous cover girl. In 1929, with her best friend Tanja Ramm, she sailed to Paris, sought out Man Ray and became, despite his initial reluctance, his mistress and artistic partner. In 1931, as Man Ray became alarmingly attached to her, Miller instinctively felt the need to regain her own "space" both artistically and personally, and started an affair with Aziz whose inner calm and outward exoticism must have been incredibly appealing to her at that time. As Aziz and Miller became more and more romantically involved, utter chaos and destruction erupted around her as Man Ray became engulfed in a jealous frenzy and threatened to kill himself, and, tragically, Nimet, Aziz's beautiful and often photographed wife, in fact, did commit suicide. According to her son, Anthony Penrose, Miller had felt incredible guilt regarding the suicide and "took a great deal of trouble to obscure that part of her life" (Roumette). As these impassioned flames encircled her, she discreetly escaped back to New York at the end of 1932 to start her own photographic studio on East 48th Street with her brother Erik. Framing famous actors and artists through relatively conventional portraiture may have given her a sense of control that stabilized her after her Parisian experiences went emotionally haywire. As Anthony Penrose explains :

Lee could not be controlled [...] Lee thought she was considered an 'appendage to Man Ray' and she wasn't going to be an appendage to anyone. She was afraid that her own creativity was being overshadowed by Man Ray, and that there was a danger that people were not seeing her as an individual [...], Lee decided that the only thing she could do was break away from this every tightening circle of admiring men trying to possess her and nail her down. (Roumette)

Leaving the Disciplined Darkroom

- 6 Yet, as she would soon find out, the pressures of a highly visible and fashionable studio of her own led to major shifts in her photography as well. For Jane Livingston, "New York was the true training ground for the rest of her life as a photographer — and was in itself the closest she came in a sustained way to being a fully disciplined darkroom craftsman in her medium, an artist who worked in a conventionally disciplined and formularized manner" (Livingston 43). Could Miller have conceived of her "disciplined darkroom" as another confining environment parallel to her relationships with controlling Parisian men? Perhaps, since in 1934, when Aziz showed up in New York, she decided once again to close shop that summer, abruptly marry him and move to Cairo. For Livingston, it is Miller's abandoning of the contained technological environment of the studio which favored her carefully arranged portraits of famous people in favor of more spontaneous, haphazard subjects that she found in the deserts of Egypt or later, magnified to its fullest, on the battlegrounds of Europe during World War II, that would produce her greatest photographs :

Oddly, and even inexplicably, Lee Miller would soon leave behind many of the stylistic characteristics she so laboriously honed in these early years. From 1935 on, her work shifted dramatically when the circumstances of her life took her away permanently, as it would turn out, from the luxury (or the discipline, or encumbrance) of an elaborately equipped studio and darkroom. (Livingston 46).

- 7 As Livingston sees it, the shift in technologies from a stationary darkroom to more portable equipment liberated her and allowed her to roam the world in search of more adventurous shots, on the one hand, and, on a personal level, made her more in tune

with her deep-seated desires : “But there is a deeper need,” Livingston explains, “one senses in her development as a photographer from now on - a desire increasingly to engage the world on its own terms, to clear away her own powerfully if subtly mediating taste, to allow her subjects to present themselves as their nature made them” (Livingston 46). Moreover, Burke notes that the portability of her Rolleiflex camera or the Leica miniature (favored by such contemporaneous photographers as Cartier-Bresson) that she carried around with her in Egypt facilitated the artistic flexibility she needed to explore the desert : “In time, her camera became a means of transport, a way to escape elite Cairo” (Burke160).

- 8 In a letter to her brother, however, shortly after having abruptly left him unemployed, she wrote of a lull in her photographic creativity that was rekindled only after a certain period of utter boredom and monotony caused by the tedious British High Society expatriates whose company she grew quickly weary of :

I sit around reading rotten detective stories, also playing a great deal of poker and bridge. I'm lousy at housekeeping. I just don't bother and when everything goes wrong, as it is sure to, I can get as good a laugh as anyone. I don't know if you're still interested in photography or got the same loathing for it I had had until Xmas time this year, I hadn't taken even a roll of film — all but three exposures I didn't even bother to develop. (Penrose 64-65)

- 9 Although she gave the marriage to Aziz a fighting chance for a year, learning to play golf and holding parties in their villa, she ultimately had to flee Egypt as well, eventually running off with the man who would be her future husband, Roland Penrose. Yet, through her photography, she was able to escape through her haunting images of flight mixed with confinement that would be emblematic of her life in Cairo. As Livingston concludes, “It was almost as though, in the mid 1930's, she began again to learn to be a photographer” (Livingston 45).

Blockages

- 10 As such, many of the images of her Egyptian period would be characterized by a combination of vast romantic spaces and often sexualized geometric images penetrating negative spaces such as her famous picture of the Great Pyramid's shadow over the plains of the Nile (1938) or the Monasteries of Dier (1936). In each photograph, a sense of emptiness is somehow governed by geometric forms which encourage a feeling of spectral “presence of absence.” In the pyramid picture, the pyramid's shadow seems to truly rule over the landscape with its darkness and sharp edges, while the white rectangular monastery underlines a sense of desertion, or perhaps a ghostly flight leading one to wonder if there are or were monks inhabiting the deserted space. In such photographs as *Street in Cairo*, however, which at first lends itself to a typical representation of a lively street scene, the frame seems in fact to be sliced up by the “fluttering banners strung in zigzag patterns” (Livingston 481). The banners carve the shot as though it were a shattered mirror. It is as though the banners were able to exercise a visual control over what could have been a chaotic urban view. Similarly, in another street scene, a shadowy ghost of a figure, with a short turban and carrying unidentified merchandise, cuts through the picture frame in a furtive diagonal. If the pyramid seemed to exercise a ghostly grip over the plains which metaphorically could be positioned in a kneeling relation to it, as though they were vassals, Miller focuses on the merchant's motion, as he runs away from the viewer, while a figure, whose face is

hidden behind a mask-like veil, looks on beneath a prison-like window. Indeed, the figure and the bars of the window are perpendicular in their axis to the fleeing merchant who will dissolve into the shadows in contrast to the ray of sunlight that dashes across the frame.

- 11 The theme of “windows” in Millers’ work is particularly interesting in light of the role they play in the later *Grim Glory* and her war photography in which the scenes they frame are invariably centered around crumbling edifices or explosions. In *Dolphin Court: London During the Blitz*, for example, the wind seems to draw the window’s curtain, as though for a puppet’s theater, onto a building with a recently destroyed upper floor (1940). Similarly, in the famous *Revenge on Culture* (1940), a naked and sensual Grecian statue is lying diagonally across the frame with a brick on her breast as she clutches onto a fallen doorway. Sadly, she seems to have been struck by fallen rubble. During the Egyptian period, however, windows and diagonals are often associated with blockages or immobility. In *Stairway, Cairo* (1936), a diagonal old stairway splits the negative space in two as if to suggest that it is going nowhere, neither up nor down (rather than both up and down). The wall behind it is rather decrepit and has an ameba-shaped patch of black at its center as if to bring attention to the fact that there is some murky and ominous force at the foot of the staircase. The picture’s emptiness in relation to Miller’s Parisian period, for example, underscores the loneliness and feelings of stagnation that Miller felt within the rather superficial upper-class Egyptian and British society. Unlike the vibrant social and cultural network she had thrived in when she was a part of “Surrealist Paris” and New York, Cairo must have seemed like an intellectual prison to her despite Aziz’s loving and patient care. Lee considered marriage to Aziz a type of confinement, despite her well-intentioned belief that she could make it work. She thought of herself as one of those “flagellant saints or hysterically repressed nuns who make a mystic marriage [...] I’m like a condemned person in a cell, full of self-pity, misery, and sexual excitement” (Burke177). Moreover, in a letter to Roland, she asserts: “I’m so bored here ! I think that I’m slowly going mad.” (Burke 179). As Aziz wrote in a letter to his children regarding Lee’s adjustment to Cairo life: “Naturally, it is not easy to settle down smoothly considering her much troubled soul. Certain reactions are bound to happen. Only small things like being bored suddenly. You see, she does not work anymore and her brain must work to occupy Lee’s time” (Penrose 61).
- 12 In a photo titled *Cotton Struggling to Escape from Sacks to Become Clouds* (1936), the frame is once again diagonally split in two with the sky on one side and fluffy cotton patches pushing their way out of rock-like sacs on the other. Again, one can read into their “struggle” a metaphor for Lee’s own creativity fighting to break out of the mercantile sacks and into the freedom of the sky. In an untitled picture of snail shells in a tree, the canvas is also diagonally ripped in half by a thrusting branch. The background is of a completely blank sky and the rest of the branches fill the frame as though they were cobwebs. Nonetheless, the snail shells (about ten bleached circles) manage to climb undaunted up the branch. One snail crowns the tip of the branch at the tallest point of the picture as if to express Lee’s underlying push towards her own conceptions of freedom — sexual, spatial, social — despite her feelings of emptiness within a framework of Egyptian domestic life. Indeed, the absence of humans in many of her Egyptian photographs reflect her vision of Egypt as “just tombs, ruins, and embalmed bodies” (Burke 183). As she puts it, the incessant routinization of her life there seemed

utterly deathlike to her : “Generations of people, dead people doing exactly the same thing in the same way,” she continues, “[...] The only thing that seems alive is the hope that I can get out of it” (Burke 183).

- 13 In fact, her dire images of social claustrophobia in Cairo are particularly graphic in such photos as the geometrically precise *Monastery of Wadi Natrum : Doorway* (1936) in which the cross above the door is framed by a wooden right angle resembling a hang-man’s gallows. As with many of her Egyptian pictures, there is a complete lack of humanity : only a *mise-en-abyme* of squares within squares (beginning with a tiny window then a door and then the hang-man-like wooden plank bracketed by rectangles and edges). In *Blocked Doorway, Syria* (1938), the blocked entrance is even more graphic, as large rocks fill the doorway so that no one can enter or leave the paralyzed structure. It is in stark contrast to her later *Non- Conformist Chapel* shot in London during the blitz in 1940 which conveys all the humor Lee could express even during the most extreme war-time conditions. The chapel she photographs is “non-conformist” because its doorway seems to be spewing hundreds of blocks of rubble. That doorway, unlike the Egyptian monastery or the blocked Syrian doorway, is alive with action and movement, despite, ironically, its context of destruction and bombardments. While *Blocked Doorway* and *Non- Conformist Chapel* both have doorways filled with large rocks, the fact that the London one is defined by a cascading motion, fresh from a violent aerial attack, highlights the opposing contexts of the two pictures and underlines the striking differences in Lee’s conflicting “frames of mind.” War-torn Europe represented an unbridled adventure for her, a “non-conformist” thrill, while Cairo life was its antithesis : Lee’s free-spirited *modus vivendi* had been blocked by a Cairo upper-crust and bored society dictated by conformism and decorum.

Purgatories

- 14 The sensation of being locked-in by conformity is further evident in an unusual picture taken at the Red Sea titled *Procession* (1937). Unlike her photos in which emptiness seems to either share or dominate the background, *Procession* is as spatially blocked as the stairway wedged into a dark wall and leading nowhere, even though it presumably represents endless and sweeping waves of sand. By her title, Lee suggests that the hundreds of lines in the sand that are punctuated by circular, bullet-hole-like perforations, are in fact only following themselves, one after the other in a procession, like endless troops of soldiers. There are no spaces for escape, only, and predominantly, vertical lines of sand that, when the picture is looked at in its entirety, in fact form a series of prison bars. Whereas in a typical prison cell, the bars are spaced out with air and glimpses of freedom, the sand bars prevent any gasps of open spaces. There are only lines of sand in a continual procession with neither a break in sight nor a specific destination in mind ; there is only an overwhelming purgatory sensation. This purgatory, of course, is also a manifestation of Lee’s own ambivalence in addition to the oppression she felt in a gossip-obsessed milieu which, as opposed to Paris, monitored and observed every bit of quotidian minutia in Lee’s life. As Burke writes :

Despite the sultriness of life in Cairo, sex outside of marriage was unthinkable for Muslim women though some of their husbands visited the brothels of the rue Clot By. Few risked their positions by having an affair while they indulged themselves in other ways (eating sweets, playing cards, gossiping), a shared

sexual timidity kept women from venturing outside of the *haramlek*. This fear along with the mentality of bourgeois Cairo—where neighbors noted whose car was pushed outside whose abode—created an atmosphere almost as claustrophobic as Poughkeepsie. (Burke169)

- 15 Noticing the absence of native people in much of her Egyptian work “whether as portrait subjects or anonymous figures,” Livingston describes Lee’s Egyptian period in terms of a type of abstraction for abstraction’s sake :

The cotton bursting through the rounded burlap shapes becomes a kind of analog to the white clouds behind: the composition perfectly divides foreground and background into two realms, with a strong diagonal. The strange characters of textual lushness here become the very subject, or *raison d’être*, of the image, signaling a renewed attention to *abstract* visual content as an end in itself.” (Livingston 48)

- 16 Lee’s Egyptian period also seemed like an “abstract end in itself” as she was neither in New York, nor Paris, the two centers of her social and artistic universe. Egypt represented an “other” that was neither here nor there - a type of insipid British colony on the one hand in terms of social life ; a land of adventure and mystery in terms of landscape and geography on the other. As a non-Muslim American wife in a social and cultural milieu she had no connection with, the abstractions offered by the desert could either be seen as a desire for hope and reverie or, in the case of the solid wall and stairway, a type of petrified prison, and complete lack, paradoxically, of “lightness of being.” This type of spiritual lethargy is mirrored in her pictures of empty hotel bars, such as *The Estate House of Abboud Pasha* or *Restaurant Table* (1936) where immaculately ordered spaces meant for gregarious activity are populated only by inanimate objects such as bottles or puppets while stools and chairs seem to wait, wistfully, for someone to sit on them.
- 17 The emptiness in many of these scenes reflects a haunting and haunted aspect that reflected Lee’s inner turmoil in Egypt. Since she felt trapped by the confines of the Egyptian high society she was forced to interact with, the desert and the excitement of a bustling Cairo provided for an artistic space of freedom and testing ground for her photographic expressions. While she searched for her own sense of identity during her Egyptian period, she was also searching for her artistic voice that would reach new heights during the war. Just like ghosts who supposedly haunt a space until they are at peace with themselves, Lee may have haunted her own Egyptian spaces until she was artistically and emotionally ready to plunge into the war-torn realities of Europe. As Katherine Conley affirms: “In their assured stillness, Miller’s Egyptian landscapes announce the beginning of her mature work. They represent the stylistic synthesis of her earlier photographs, taken as a surrealist working with Ray in Paris and of those taken as the director of her own studio in New York,” (Conley 98).

Towards Freedom

- 18 In perhaps Miller’s most famous photograph, however, *Portrait of Space* (1937), the lack of any human or animate subject is underlined by a vast opening through what appears to be the aperture of a long mosquito net *cum* window onto a sandy desert landscape. Taken towards the later part of the Egyptian period, it is one of the only ones to be overtly surrealist in nature (and is considered to have inspired Magritte’s painting *Le Baiser* when he saw *Portrait of Space* in a London gallery in 1938). It is one of the most

airy of Miller's paintings, and while it is looking out onto a lunar-like landscape, the wind pushing the aperture sets a somewhat optimistic, dashing tone. As Lee might have felt her Egyptian period was soon coming to an end, one might read *Portrait of Space* as a type of "light at the end of the tunnel" for her Cairo Purgatory, if not a giant wish fulfillment for space and liberty. The blankness of the white desert can also be interpreted as a "Zen-like" purge of the populated but stressful life she led at the heart of the surrealist movement in Paris. The fact that the freedom implied by the desert scene is so vague also reinforces the notion that for Lee, the excitement of true freedom was inexorably linked to the unknown and to spontaneous impulses in general. The square, blank frame which gratuitously hangs at the top center of the picture adds an element of certainty, or even a faith in the target she is trying to capture. It also establishes a contrast between the restricted but blank world of the frame and the wild, unfathomable but ultimately promising world offered by the anonymity of the desert, a space that appears to be within reach of the viewer. This sensation is similarly apparent in her picture of Robin Fedden (1937), who appears gloriously in command of the desert's vastness, as though he were Lawrence of Arabia. His view is one of excitement and opportunity faced with a "blank slate" of possibility. Similar to the giant shadow cast by the pyramid, however, or the Cairo street scene, Miller slices the negative space up in edgy pieces of sunlight and darkness the isosceles position of the skis seem ready to pierce. In a reversal of the violent images Man Ray used to exact artistic revenge on Lee's perceived infidelities (such as his famous figure of the metronome with Lee's eyeball on the pointer, *Object to be Destroyed*, 1932), the V-shape of the skis are inviting and point to the shared adventures Fedden and Lee would enjoy during their escapades in the desert.

- 19 Slowly, the desert seems to have opened Lee to the possibilities of liberation. As Mark Haworth-Booth understands it: "In the desert her photography reconnected with her imagination and the visual sense she had cultivated in Paris (Haworth-Booth 124). In an untitled picture of dunes (plate #100, Haworth-Booth 120), the frame is once again diagonally slit in half; yet, unlike such somber pictures as the snail shells surrounded by anxious branches or *The Native*, also known as *Cock Rock* (Western Desert, 1939) in which a jagged rock violently cuts through the frame like a dagger, the split is much more gentle in the photograph of the dunes. A romantic, ocean-like mass of sand appears ready to invade a more pristine, whitened expanse. The invasion is blocked by a horizontal, thick band of blackness, however — a shadowy strip that reminds the viewer that there is an obstacle to the freedom even though the potential for adventure and expansion is visibly apparent. The horizon, often represented in Romantic poetry as a symbol for a lack of limitations, is, in Lee's Egyptian iconography, a barrier for imagination and movement.
- 20 The gradual freeing of Lee's aperture reflected her own possibilities for flight that were progressively presenting themselves to her. As Burke recounts, her trips with Fedden and friends such as Mary Anita Loos (Anita Loos's niece) with whom she felt free to frolic in the powdery desert (often on skis), were an "antidote to boredom" in Burke's eyes. "My current ambition," Lee confirms to Roland in a letter, "is to have my own racing camel — do it up very fine in my own colors and ride it around wearing a galaby" (Burke 185). A part of her clearly yearned for the exotic travels undertaken by such free spirits as Freya Stark or Emily Hahn for whom nothing could be more antithetical than the vapid high society Lee felt chained to. "For Lee," Burke concludes, "the desert

became a place where she could see more clearly. Who she was — and see herself seeing” (187). In this way, the spectatorship Aziz included as an integral part of her “Egyptian complex” could also be reversed onto the artist herself who, while never appearing in any of the pictures she took, was always present in their *état d’âme*.

- 21 If, in the beginning of her Egyptian period, people were absent and replaced by geometric shapes, angles, frames and an eerie immobility, her later ones seem to move towards a more serene period characterized by an increase in open spaces. Indeed, she must have considered her love for Penrose an appealing one-way ticket out of Egypt as she clearly states in one of her letters to him : “I’m never returning to Egypt unless the ultimate of disasters or dejection overcome me. I’m glad that I’m finally coming back to you” (Burke 193). It is not surprising that one of the most elegant and romantic photos of her Egyptian period is in fact of Roland himself in 1939, on the eve of another European war (plate # 117, Haworth-Booth 132). As usual, the frame is diagonally split, although not in the middle like most of her shots of inanimate objects or plants, but on the far left of the frame. Penrose is seen gazing past the set of white stairs that bracket him (the stairs and their diagonal shadow). As opposed to the vertical stairway going nowhere and encased in a gray morass surrounding the caged window in *Stairway, Cairo*, Penrose looks out at layers of vegetation and a sun-drenched desert. The sky, which takes up three quarters of the picture as a whole, is a somewhat cheerful element rather than a bleak one. It is as though Penrose were looking out upon a future of expectation and promise instead of the existential dread implied by the drab empty backgrounds of the earlier pictures. Moreover, his humanity, similar to Fedden’s, brings an additional warmth and excitement to the photograph as a whole that the stillness and silence of the earlier rocks and branches seemed to stifle.
- 22 It is not surprising, as such, that the foremost theme that is overdetermined by these images is that of the frame, the bracketing that puts all her desert or urban Egyptian images within an orderly box as though she were collecting sea shells at the beach. As her un-spiritual and uncreative Cairo social life became more and more limiting, the *tabula rasa* of the desert and the petrification of the inanimate objects offered the perfect transition from the turmoil of her prior love-life to the *thanatos* of World War II. Egypt, although boring, could also provide a sense of contemplation and peace that would recharge her enough to confront the combat she would face in Europe. She was able to “frame” her creativity to a certain extent, as she regrouped in terms of her personal, unique artistic production that broke from both her earlier work within her French surrealist circles in Paris as well as the stylish metropolitan portraiture she conceived in her New York studio. As Patricia Allmer puts it : “Miller’s surrealism is focused less on [...] bringing together contradictory realities, but is instead located, or rather dislocated, in nomadic moments of in-betweenness, flux, displacement and dispersion — moments which can be traced along folds, tears, and creases, disruptions and flaws” (Allmer 4). In *Oasis* (date unknown), for example, the promise of water and rejuvenation is reduced to a tiny frame that is multiplied as though it were another *mise-en-abyme* through a series of eight horizontally extended frames that get bigger and bigger as though they were part of a Russian doll. Not knowing when or how she would reach her internal oasis, the purgatory she experienced in Egypt can easily be understood in this series of gates to her personal and experiential quests for fulfillment. Similarly, in the famous *Excursion to Siwa*, the eye of the camera watches from a detached angle surrounded not only by negative space but by utter darkness, shaped as an eye, through which one can also read “I”, the subject. She captures only

the legs of the four desert visitors as if to say that faces and expressions are no longer important: in the faceless desert, only the feet — as means of locomotion and exploration, can provide the tools necessary for flight, growth, and ultimately redemption — either for Nemet's death, for example, or for the stormy apprenticeship phase she experienced with Man Ray.

- 23 As *Bombardement de la Citadelle*, which depicts bombs bursting over the Fortress of St.-Malo as seen through a window frame, demonstrates so clearly, once she was in the war, the same frames that had harnessed the vast and timeless expanses of the desert or the emptiness of Miller's Egyptian quotidian, would be filled in, literally, with the *explosante fixe* that pumped her veins with adrenaline and became a type of *raison d'être* for her. While she may not have been frenetically active in Egypt and missed being at the heart of the action, her artistic production during her briefly married life with Aziz in Cairo yielded a purifying art that provided her with the foundation and stability to go out into the danger-filled unknown of war-torn Europe armed not only with her very own photographic technique and style but also a newfound focus and confidence. Indeed, her low-keyed Egyptian existence allowed her to crystalize the artistic goals within her as though she were a future butterfly in a cocoon waiting to fly away when the timing was once again right.

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NOTES

1. That was the term suggested by Man Ray, but Lee was far too independent for such a role even though she learned a lot from him.
 2. As Carolyn Burke understands it, Lee felt increasingly frustrated by the lack of interest in avant-garde art: "After two years of marriage, Lee flouted as many conventions as she could manage. Surrealism was a guaranteed shocker in Cairo. Some friends had gone so far as to read the books she lent them about the movement, but 'They still don't believe it's true'" (Burke 181).
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ABSTRACTS

"As a spectator, I wanted to explore photography not as a question (a theme) but as a wound," Roland Barthes writes in *Camera Lucida*. Similarly, in the famous first lines of his surrealist book *Nadja*, André Breton concluded that the question he should ask himself should be "not who I am, but whom I haunt." Could either of these quotes apply to Lee Miller's aesthetic as well? While her photographs during her period of "apprenticeship" with Man Ray focused on the female body, and the ones in her studio in New York on elegant portraiture, it is during her period in Egypt when she was married to the wealthy Egyptian businessman Aziz that her photography truly blossomed into her own aesthetic which "married" the humor and the ludic notions of space found in certain Magritte paintings with the curious gaze of the 'other' that she would develop as a photo-journalist during the war. Her photos during her Egyptian period are filled with a restlessness and a thirst for adrenaline that would stoke her wartime experiences.

« Comme *Spectator*, je ne m'intéressais à la Photographie que par "sentiment"; je voulais l'approfondir, non comme une question (un thème), mais une blessure : je vois, je sens, donc je remarque, je regarde et je pense », écrit Roland Barthes dans *La chambre claire*. De même, dans la célèbre ouverture de *Nadja*, André Breton affirme que ce qui importe n'est pas tant de se demander « qui je suis », mais « qui je hante ». En quoi ces deux citations peuvent-elles s'appliquer à l'esthétique de Lee Miller? Après les nus féminins réalisés au cours de la période « d'apprentissage » auprès de Man Ray et les élégants portraits de sa période new-yorkaise, c'est en Egypte, après son mariage avec le riche homme d'affaires Aziz, que Lee Miller met véritablement au point sa propre esthétique, où humour et appréhension ludique de l'espace (qui ne sont pas sans rappeler Magritte) se « marient » au regard curieux de « l'autre », une dimension que Miller allait explorer plus avant dans son travail de photjournaliste. Ainsi, les photographies de la période égyptienne laissent filtrer une impatience et une soif d'émotion forte qui allaient alimenter le travail de photjournalisme de Miller, quelques années plus tard.

INDEX

Mots-clés: surréalisme américain, photographie, Lee Miller, Man Ray, Egypte, Paris, New York, explosante fixe

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Gilles Couderc (dir.)

Parable Art

L'art de la parabole

Introduction

Gilles Couderc

- 1 In the 1960s, the British composer Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) momentarily abandoned opera for the more intimate genre of what he called his *Parables for Church performance*. The first one, his 1964 *Curlew River*, was inspired by a Japanese Noh play to which he gave a Christian slant, as it illustrates the wonders of performing Faith. The following two, *The Burning Fiery Furnace* and *The Prodigal Son*, were directly inspired by Scripture, from which the parable as a literary genre derives. According to Fowler's *Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, parables, from the Greek *parabole* meaning comparison, illustration or analogy, are "fictitious narratives in which the realities of everyday life are used to reveal and illustrate a doctrine or spiritual or moral matters or to enlighten the hearer by submitting to him a case with which he is not directly concerned so as to elicit a disinterested judgment from him (Fowler 558)". Generally associated with the teaching of Christ, parables make use of concrete narratives in order to allow people to more easily discuss and understand difficult or complex ideas, abstract arguments or the mysteries of religion. The Hebrew word for "parable" is "machal", which also means "enigma" and "proverb" and this use of parable is confirmed by Matthew 13, 13-15: "This is why I speak to them in parables: though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand".
- 2 Contrary to fables or allegories, parables involve human beings and often include characters who face moral dilemmas or make wrong decisions only to suffer the unforeseen consequences. Such use of characters makes it possible to dramatize stories on canvass, like Rembrandt's *Prodigal Son*, one among a great many others. Parables target the listener's imagination rather than the hearer's powers of theoretical reasoning, hence their development on stage as Mystery plays, for instance. In pre-Protestant England and medieval times elsewhere, they used to represent a vivid theatrical tradition which was revived in Britain in the 1920's with the Canterbury Festival for which T.S. Eliot was commissioned to write his 1935 *Murder in the Cathedral*, a tradition to which Britten deliberately attached himself, as Gilles Couderc points out. Hence, great numbers of cantatas, oratorios or even ballets were inspired by the popular parables from the Gospels, like Debussy's or Prokofiev's *Retour de L'Enfant Prodigue* or André Gide's own version of the Lost or Prodigal Son story.

- 3 Although the meaning of a parable is often not explicitly stated, it is not normally intended to be hidden or secret but, on the contrary, to be quite straightforward and obvious, even if it is rather bleak and not immediately transparent, as in the case of Britten's *Curlw River*. Most parables in the Gospels deal with the same and unique theme: how to reach the nebulous, abstract, mysterious Kingdom of God or to create Heaven on earth. All parables introduce the same comparative device: "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom" says Matthew 25:1. However, for each narrative the evangelists resort to many different images and metaphors drawn from everyday life which are all the more striking as they are not directly linked to the topic broached and consequently unveil new meanings, so that one parable may lead to several interpretations and teachings. A story that conveys a lesson, a parable has at least two meanings, the literary meaning and the figurative, that of the story told and that of its lesson, meant "to effect a change in the hearer, to lead to a decision or action; and the lesson always is religious or moral (Gowler 93)." Thus, a parable may provide embedded and unexpected meanings, far removed from the ones originally intended.
- 4 Providing guidance and suggestions for conducting one's life properly according to precise moral standards, parables were used in sacred books, religious teaching or initiation rituals. They frequently refer to a prescriptive subtext suggesting how a person should behave, or what people should believe. It is to such subtext that a person invested with moral authority will refer to justify norms and rules. But parables exist outside the Christian tradition as well, and they are present in all religions, frequently involving the teachings of masters to their disciples. Originally, parables belonged to an oral tradition which became fixed when written down. Masters crafted the stories which they tailored to the background or personality of their disciples to illustrate the teachings to be transmitted. The pedagogical element of parables in the Gospels accounts for their rhetorical aspect, with the triadic structure of most of Jesus' parables, which characterises Olive Schreiner's narratives, as discussed by Nathalie Saudo-Welby, or Britten's *Curlw River*. Most parables are both singular and universal, but the parables in the Gospels are part of a specific and greater story framework, that of Christ's life and ministry, his incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection, part and parcel of the new covenant of salvation or *kerygma*, the apostolic proclamation of salvation through faith in Christ.
- 5 The writers discussed here — Schreiner and C.S. Lewis — and Britten himself, with his Low Church mother, were raised in the tradition of intense Bible reading, and so was their public, which led them to use Scriptures as a basis for their writings. As Daniel Warzecha shows when dealing with C.S. Lewis's Bible-inspired parables, Lewis appropriated and reactivated foundational biblical episodes in his parables in order to metaphorize his apologetic purpose through the process of re-effectuation, the retelling of parables in one's own words, coloured by personal experience. Moreover, Scripture as prescriptive text, representing the Law, can be appropriated and subverted as the free interpretation of Scripture is one of the tennets of Protestantism. The meaning of Scripture was never written in stone and can be freely interpreted by successive generations of readers, however different and foreign to the original they may appear, provided they interpret it in good faith. Schreiner's rewriting of parables aims at denouncing the arbitrariness of man's domination over woman, while the

ambivalence of the narrator's gender in those parables opens up new paths for new meanings.

- 6 Britten belonged to the 'Auden Generation' who believed, along with many others before and after them, that literature and poetry were forms of action, as Samuel Hynes points out in his eponymous analysis of 1976. In *'Psychology and Art To-day'* (1935), Auden defined parable-art as "that art which shall teach man to unlearn hatred and learn love", thus recalling the Gospel and the Book of Common Prayer he knew by heart as an Anglican. He was to turn back to Anglicanism after 1939, and such conversion affected both T.S. Eliot, as he attempted to find a way out of his personal waste land, and C.S. Lewis, as Warzecha recalls. Auden later was to qualify the prescriptive Covenant-like "shall" of his statement by eliminating any parallel with propaganda and the Marxist and Brechtian tenets of class struggle in favour of a revolution whose main agents would be art and artists: "Poetry is not concerned with telling people what to do but with extending our knowledge of good and evil, perhaps making the necessity of action more urgent and its nature more clear, but only leading us to the point where it is possible for us to make a rational and moral choice." (Preface to *The Poet's Tongue*, 1935) While eschewing the genre's didacticism, Auden, like Britten, followed in the long tradition of allegory and that of the fable which run from *Pier Plowman*, *Everyman*, and *The Pilgrim's Progress* to Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. That tradition is also present in Schreiner's parables discussed by Saudo-Welby. The dream sequences in those parables were probably inspired by Bunyan's narrative strategies.
- 7 What is striking is the constancy and stability of the genre of the parable in spite of its multifarious metamorphoses in literature, drama, poetry, music and painting. Even though ideologies have collapsed and western societies have become secular, the tradition of the parable has persisted well into the late XXth and early XXIst centuries and it has remained relevant when parables still contribute to evangelising. How is that specificity dealt with in transpositions and adaptations involving several artistic forms? Is parable a valid definition of drama, mirror of the world, microcosm of the macrocosm? Is parable part of our mental structures? Those are just a few of the questions that beg to be addressed and which find some answers in the articles here.

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Visiting the Highest Heaven: Gender-Free Narration and Gender- Inclusive Reading in Olive Schreiner's *Dreams* (1890)

Nathalie Saudo-Welby

- 1 Olive Schreiner (1855-1920) was a South-African essayist, short story writer and novelist committed to the cause of female emancipation and pacifism.¹ Her first and best-known novel, *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), set in her native South Africa, was the first of a sub-genre of feminist novels exploring the thoughts and life of the “New Woman”². The heroine, named after Schreiner’s mother’s last name, Lyndall, is a great speaker. In her long feminist speeches, addressed to her meek friend Waldo, she expresses her contempt for female schooling and traditional marriage arrangements. Having refused to marry her child’s father, she dies in near-solitude in an inn in the South African countryside. The novel contains a great variety of discursive forms, including two parables. “Times and Seasons” (Part II, Chapter 1) tells the story of a soul from infancy to death. The second allegory, told by a character called “Waldo’s Stranger” (Part II, Chapter II) and incorporated into Schreiner’s *Dreams* seven years later as “The Hunter”, recounts a quest for Truth involving disillusionment, renunciation and asceticism, which are recurrent features of her tales of human improvement.
- 2 Throughout her writing career, Olive Schreiner manifested a constant interest in allegory.³ In a letter to the writer and editor Ernest Rhys, she wrote that “by throwing a thing into the form of an allegory [she could] condense five or six pages into one, with no loss, but a great gain to clearness” (*Letters* 136). At the time, in the early 1890s, Schreiner was working on her two major collections of allegorical short stories, *Dreams* (1890) and *Dream Life and Real Life* (1893).⁴ They were the outcome of her research and reflection on the “sex question”, which she felt it her duty to examine for, she wrote, “[t]here is no side of the sex question, woman’s intellectual equality (or as I hold, inequality with man), marriage, prostitution, in which one has not to speak” (*Letters*

136).⁵ In her partly autobiographical novel *From Man to Man*, on which she worked throughout her life and which was published posthumously in 1926, one finds a description of the process and advantages of writing allegories. Rebekah, the character with the writing capacities and taste, is a pregnant mother of three who is constantly interrupted by daily chores, and her writing is described as a disjointed and rambling process. Rebekah writes down her allegories after a long period of theoretical reflection⁶ which crystalizes into a vision that eventually develops into a draft-version of the work to come. Her creative process unfolds in three stages: first thinking out loud, then walking around her desk and finally writing. Her “scribbling”⁷ results in an accumulation of unpublished material consisting of short stories, “little allegories told in rhyme” and “one very long allegory in blank verse, which was never quite finished” (*From Man* 176). The narrative voice offers the comment that Rebekah is unlikely to return to this last piece in the future because “it takes time to write things for other people” (225). Schreiner thus seemed to conceive of allegories as a painstaking, selfless enterprise of didactic intent.

- 3 Olive Schreiner’s feminist allegories constitute a rich source for a narratological inquiry into the ways in which perceptions and constructions of gender can be challenged. As Maureen Quilligan has shown, allegory works by narrativizing and projecting horizontally a situation, thus problematizing the vertical categories on which it relies: its underlying ideological assumptions.

Allegory tames a reader’s impatience by insisting on its own paratactic leisure to unfold, manipulating the reader’s responses by continually tempting him, but never allowing him to make final vertically arranged statements about the significance of what he has read. (Quilligan 236)

- 4 The use of the generic masculine (as here) to designate a single, universal reader is one such assumption. As Elizabeth Jay notes in her introduction to *Dreams*, Schreiner’s use of an androgynous voice can be perceived as an attempt “to ward off the dangers of her visions being read as specifically female” (Schreiner, *Dreams* xx) but Schreiner’s gender-indeterminate allegories also demonstrate the ways in which feminist writing can question and challenge our usual manner of interpreting stories about women. I will not be considering whether Schreiner’s writing can be described as feminine, nor will I try to evaluate whether the narrative voice is feminine. I mean to contribute to feminist narratology by showing how feminist allegorical thinking impacts on gender markers and on the construction of the narrative voice. In his defense of intercultural narratology, Ray Somner has pointed out the cultural and human agenda behind narratology:

(...) narratology has a didactic purpose and even a utopian dimension: It proceeds from the assumption that fictions allow readers to develop a sensitivity for intercultural conflicts and misunderstandings, and it remains dedicated to [the goal of] fostering and promoting intercultural understanding. (Somner 77)

- 5 This intercultural understanding works by testing narratological models against existing gendered, class or racial representations, so as to create a culturally-conscious form of poetics.⁸ Schreiner’s engagement with issues of race and gender in the allegorical form calls for a contextualized narratology that might cast light on her minute departures from common and expected textual practices and patriarchal standards. Gender is represented literally in the allegories, and gender-difference is a powerful argument in them, but a close analysis of the collection’s narrative structure shows that, as we move from stories told in the third-person to stories told by first-

person agents of ambivalent or oscillating gender, we progress perceptibly from gender-assertiveness to gender inclusiveness. I will first examine how *Dreams* obeys a three-part structure which brings the reader ever closer to gender undifferentiation. I will then use the literature on Schreiner's *Dreams* as a kind of survey of how readers negotiate the neutrality or ambivalence of first-person narrators. Finally I will make a case for a gender-inclusive reading of *Dreams*, based on an awareness of what constitutes gendering and an alternation of gender positions.

The narrative structure of *Dreams*

- 6 Being the daughter of a Lutheran missionary, Schreiner knew the Bible well, and wrote her allegories in simple Biblical language.⁹ The stories in *Dreams* consist in dream visions, half of which are structured as follows: in a frame narrative, a first-person narrator falls asleep, has a dream, wakes up, falls back to sleep and has another dream... In the embedded dreams, the narrator-questor meets a guide-interpreter, in the form of God himself, an angel or more vaguely "one beside me" (16), who helps him/her interpret the vision, or takes him/her on a tour of Heaven and Hell.¹⁰ The interpreter occasionally comments orally on the scene for the dreamer's benefit. Each story achieves some kind of transformation in a character or closes with a revelation, but no clear moral is ever formulated at the end, and despite the presence of an interpreter, the reader is often left to wonder what point the author was trying to make.
- 7 Schreiner's initial subversion of the form of the allegorical quest is to substitute a narrator of undecidable gender for the traditional male hero-questor.¹¹ In the sparse, impersonal form of the allegory, Schreiner, who published her first works under the pseudonym Ralph Iron and included a scene of cross-dressing in the chapter entitled "Gregory's Womanhood" in *The Story of an African Farm*, found new ground for experimenting with gender trouble. Her allegories combine three gender-nonspecific strategies: narration in the first-person singular, the first-person plural and the second person.¹² Occasionally, the narrator's gender is only specified unobtrusively in the course of the narrative.
- 8 Research on *Dreams* has shown that race, age and gender are interchangeable and often inseparable in Schreiner's writing (Chrisman).¹³ Yet, in *Dreams*, gender is generally represented literally: even when the characters in the allegories are left nameless, and are clothed in unisex "mantles" or "robes", they are nearly always clearly identified as a man or a woman. There is no attempt to substitute, in allegorical fashion, something "other" for gender difference. The guide-interpreter frequently answers questions about the characters' sexual identity and gender is sometimes the allegory's main theme (in "Three Dreams in a Desert", for instance). Since even some values and inanimate elements are gendered, gender binaries are reinforced but the constructed and cultural nature of gender attribution is also foregrounded: Reflection is called a "strange old woman" (4); Life and Truth are female; Love and Duty are male; Joy and Sympathy are initially neutral (it), and occasionally male (he). In the final words of "Three Dreams in a Desert", the sun is male: "Then the sun passed down behind the hills; but I knew that the next day he would arise again." (21)
- 9 In spite of this explicitness, some of Schreiner's allegories also build up a rarefied space where gender barriers are effaced. The angel in "In a Ruined Chapel" can "unclothe a

human soul”, “take from it all those outward attributes of form, and colour, and age, and sex, whereby one man is known from among his fellows and is marked off from the rest” (27). The last story in *Dreams* presents the “highest” Heaven as a sex-free place where God’s creatures, having shed their accidental earthly attributes, become androgynous. Their souls become one great whole, unmarked by sex, color or age. This state of sexual and intellectual undifferentiation is shared by the observed and the observer since in the “highest” Heaven, people no longer “see things separately” (45).

Then we came out upon a lonely mountain-top.

No living being moved there; but far off on a solitary peak I saw a lonely figure standing. Whether it were man or woman I could not tell; for partly it seemed the figure of a woman, but its limbs were the mighty limbs of a man. I asked God whether it was man or woman.

God said, “In the least Heaven sex reigns supreme; in the higher it is not noticed; but in the highest it does not exist.” (44)

- 10 While in this state of enlightenment, the narrator has glimpses of a world in which distinctions of sex, race and class no longer exist; however, of the three, it is the distinction of sex that seems to be the most important. By holding up the utopian vision of heavenly androgyny in this final allegory, Schreiner is making a statement about the accidental quality of sex, the equal value of human lives and their spiritual nature; she is also bringing to an end the discords between man and woman which are dramatized in other dreams: domination, jealousy, self-sacrifice, accusation and indifference. At that point, the narrator of uncertain gender is both the subject of the utopian vision – a visionary – and the object of the utopian vision. The use of a first-person narration – which, in English, allows the gender of the narrator to remain unidentified – places undifferentiation right at the heart of the text, and of the universe it promises.
- 11 The transformative power of *Dreams* can be felt developing throughout the volume. As one reads through the succession of stories, the narrators undergo a significant, albeit unsystematic, evolution from neutrality to gender-inclusiveness. In narrative terms, *Dreams* falls into three parts (which I will separate for the sake of clarity). The first four stories are told in the third person and present clearly gendered characters and gendered values (section I). The following stories (section II) are almost all told in the first person, a narrative technique which allows the writer great gender latitude, since grammatical gender is not marked in English. In Part II, five stories are told by a first-person narrator who remains neutral throughout, thus creating a major mode of gender neutrality; two stories, written in the third person, stand as exceptions. The last two stories in the collection (section III) are told by a first-person narrator who becomes gendered in the course of the narrative. In the last but one story, “I Thought I Stood”, the narrator proves to be female, while in “The Sunlight Lay Across my Bed”, the dreamer turns out to be male. In section I, gender is specified and unproblematic. In section II, gender is problematic and unspecified. In section III, gender is problematic and ambivalent.
- 12 Love and sex relations are important themes in the stories. The personified, gendered values in the first story, “The Lost Joy”, an allegory of love, convey the sense of unproblematic heterosexual love, thus setting it as the default mode of the stories. The second and third stories are symmetrical in so far as their main characters (a man in the first of them, a woman in the second) are both confronted to gendered values (he to the female bird of Truth, she to male Duty). The fourth story, “In a Far-Off World”

opposes “a woman” and the man she loves. While there is no doubt in these first stories about the gender identity of the characters and their values, the same is not true of the narrators in the following stories (sections II and III). Since the earlier stories have imposed a binary frame within which to think about the narrator’s gender, it seems to be more appropriate to call the narrator “gender free” or “gender-unmarked” than “gender-neutral”, for the reader is made to envisage each of the two possibilities in turn rather than dismiss the issue by calling the narrator “neutral”. When the narrator’s gender is specified in the course of the narrative, I will call it “ambivalent”, because the use of a single marker cannot invalidate the interpretative work that has been accomplished earlier. The initial ambiguities of the text are not entirely redeemed or resolved by the signs that follow. *Dreams* thus appears to be a fine illustration of Umberto Eco’s conception of the “open work”, whose appreciation is predetermined but not limited by the author’s intentions.

[T]he form of the work of art gains its aesthetic validity precisely in proportion to the number of different perspectives from which it can be viewed and understood. (...) A work of art, therefore, is a complete and *closed* form in its uniqueness as a balanced organic whole, while at the same time constituting an *open* product on account of its susceptibility to countless different interpretations which do not impinge on its unadulterable specificity. Hence, every interpretation is both an interpretation and a performance of it, because in every reception, the work takes on a fresh reception for itself. (Eco 3, 4)

- 13 The idea that any interpretation is a performance partly originates from the exemplary openness of musical compositions, which require both an interpreter and a listener, and in particular of modernist “works in movement”. It remains singularly relevant in our case, if we accept Judith Butler’s contention that gender is a kind of performance. Reading a first-person narrative is one of the many different modalities in which one enacts gender, understood as a form of subjectivation and identification in response to a set of constraints.

The gendering of the narrator

- 14 When the stories are told in the first person, the readers are left to replace the narrator’s gender with their own, or to infer the narrator’s gender, using the context or subjective reasons. However, the knowledge that the author is a woman is bound to influence the attribution of gender to the narrator. In her *Introduction to Narratology* (2009), Monika Fludernik writes:

Nowadays most narratologists would acknowledge the fact that readers regularly perceive narrators, especially first-person narrators, but also authorial narrators, as being gendered either male or female, even if they are not explicitly labeled as men or women. In this implicit attribution of gender, which is historically and culturally conditioned, the biological sex of the novel’s author is highly significant; so are the narrator’s style and the level of politeness of her/his verbal interaction with the narratee or implied reader. (Fludernik 69)

- 15 In an earlier article, “The Genderization of Narrative”, Fludernik drew on the results of a survey of readers of stories told by first-person narrators of unspecified gender to elaborate a typology of unambiguous and ambiguous textual clues. Her “ironic” conclusion is that the texts which ambiguate gender attributions depend on the readers to test their hypotheses against “the worst (and most naïve) kinds of cultural clichés” (169), thereby reinforcing them. In her essay “Queering Narratology”, which focuses on

Written on the Body, Jeanette Winterson's novel-size experiment with a sexually unmarked first-person narrator, Susan Lanser writes:

Not all autodiegetic narratives mark the narrator's sex explicitly; names, clothing, and physical attributes – characteristics of gender – do indeed (...) allow or encourage readers to construct assumptions about a narrator's sex. (Mezei 253)

16 However, the lack of realism and sparseness of Schreiner's allegories hinders the construction of such assumptions. The ambivalence of sex markers and the elusiveness of gender clues bring her collection of stories close to Winterson's queered narrative.

17 It is not certain to what extent Schreiner essentialized the gender specificity of values by gendering them. The list of examples given above can also be taken to question traditional associations rather than confirm them. Readers assign gender by trying to infer the character/narrator's sex, depending on how they respond to the characters and narrators ideologically, but also according to their own desires.¹⁴ In what follows, I have reviewed the work of writers on Schreiner's *Dreams* in search of their gender-conscious responses to her gender-elusive narratives.

18 How do individual readers negotiate the attribution of gender and how do their choices impact on the overall interpretation of the allegory? Earlier scholarship on *Dreams* yields conflicting results.¹⁵ Laura Chrisman writes of the narrator of *Dreams* in general terms as having "a mediatory position in relation to the action *she* perceives." (Chrisman 127; emphasis mine) Her essay however points to the way Schreiner "slides into grammatical ambiguity" when describing the subjectivity of the African woman.

It stands as a revelation of the degree to which Schreiner's own unconscious is colonized and colonial: her very conceptualization of (or inability to conceptualize) the origins of her own psyche inevitably takes the route of African otherness. (...) The force of repression and the force of emancipation are difficult to distinguish, and this is where Schreiner's theory stops, with an impasse produced by a fear of the unconscious that is equal to Schreiner's fear of rationality. (Chrisman 139)

19 Schreiner's interrogations lead to an ambivalent representation of the boundaries of identity. Having drawn a distinction between Bertolt Brecht's and Judith Butler's concepts of performance, Scott McCracken chooses to read two of the stories as performances of New Woman subjectivity. Commenting on the indeterminate gender of the narrator in "Three Dreams in a Desert", he notes that "[t]he plurality of male figures and the undecidability of the narrator's gender mark a refusal to essentialise gender positions." (236) In her detailed analysis of the same story, Ann Heilmann accounts for her own process of gendering:

Though never clearly defined, the narrator's gender can be presumed to be female: her passionate empathy with the protagonist of the dreams suggests that this woman represents aspects of her own experience, and both women, by virtue of being juxtaposed with a male authority figure, are aligned with Emotion (the Heart) in a binary opposition which ascribes Reason (the Head) to an old man. (Heilmann 127)¹⁶

20 Ann Heilmann considers that an interpretation of the story involves the conscious process of attributing a sex to a fictional persona, and she traces her own process of weighing the different categories which construct our perceptions of gender, and which the allegorical form sets out to question.

21 The last and longest story in the collection, "The Sunlight Lay Across my Bed", is framed by a narrative in which the narrator, who is lying alone in bed at night, can hear the sounds of what must be the night life of London's East End, falls asleep and

dreams that God shows him/her around Hell. At the end of the tour, the dreamer expresses his/her desire to go back to earth, wakes up, falls back to sleep and is shown around Heaven. In the morning, the narrator wakes up, immediately falls back to sleep, before waking up for good with relief: “the long day was before me” (46). In *The Healing Imagination of Olive Schreiner*, Berkman perceives the narrator as male, without making any particular comment about how she reached that conclusion (Berkman 1989, 214). She notes the “transformative” power of the dream since the narrator awakens to a radiant London, in a more hopeful mood. About a few lines in the same story¹⁷, McCracken writes:

[It] seems to start where “Three Dreams” leaves off, but the title directs the African Sun into the heart of the metropolis. The bedroom constructs a feminine position by context rather than through an identifying pronoun, evoking what Schreiner called in *Woman and Labour*, “sex parasitism”: middle-class women’s dependence on men for support and their reduction to a purely sexual function. The narrator is placed in relation to the discipline of the city: “the policeman’s beat on the pavement”; structures of class and gender, “the wheels of the carriages roll home from houses of entertainment”; and, with the “woman’s laugh below my window”, against the other women who work in those houses. (McCracken 237)

- 22 For cultural and subjective reasons, McCracken considers that the dreamer is female. However, at this particular moment in the narrative, I cannot help perceiving the narrator as male, perhaps because I am reluctant to associate the voice of Schreiner, who later wrote on prostitution in *From Man to Man*, with a woman coldly listening to the laughter of a fallen fellow-woman. My own reading of the same lines is that the narrator’s situation and sensations constitute a *vignette* of London’s East-End night-life, familiar to readers of late-nineteenth-century Gothic fiction. The narrator’s impressions are reminiscent of those of several *fin-de-siècle* male degenerates. I am reminded of Dorian Gray overhearing the “[w]omen with hoarse voices and harsh laughter”, or the “woman in a ragged shawl (...) stumbl[ing] away, laughing” and “the slow heavy tread of the policeman” in the London streets at night (Wilde 215, 263, 264) in the same year.¹⁸
- 23 At the start of the dream, the narrator contemplates joining a group of “women” who bite into the fruit from the tree of knowledge, then joining some “men” who are working among the trees (34). The inevitable hesitations and disagreement about the narrator’s sex prove how finely Schreiner’s style has maintained the ambiguity. Ten pages later however, the narrator’s neutrality is brought to an end:

And one from among the people came running towards me [neutral]; and when he came near it seemed to me that he and I had played together when we were little children, and that we had been born on the same day. And I told God what I felt; God said, “All men feel so in Heaven when another comes towards them.”

And he who ran towards me held my hand, and led me through the bright lights. And when we came among the trees he sang aloud, and his companion answered, and it was a woman, and he showed me to her. She said, “*He* must have water”; and she took some in her hands, and fed me [male] (I had been afraid to drink of the water in Hell), and they gathered fruit for me, and gave it me to eat. They said, “We shone long to make it ripen,” and they laughed together as they saw me eat it.

The man said, “*He* is very weary; *he* must sleep” (for I had not dared to sleep in Hell), and he laid my head on his companion’s knee and spread her hair out over me. I slept, and all the while in my sleep I thought I heard the birds calling across me. And when I woke it was like early morning, with the dew on everything. (41-42; emphasis and commentaries mine)

- 24 Schreiner having provided one unambiguous – albeit discrete – clue, the debate between readers is null and void. Or is it? Nobody can read these pages without wondering about the narrator’s sex and making inferences in order to solve the riddle. Doing so is likely to commit the reader to ideological choices and the reenactment of heterosexual logic, which may then be questioned when s/he learns that the narrator is male. In the quotation above, the holding hands with a man seems to indicate that the narrator is a woman, while the laying his head on the woman’s knee may be taken to confirm that the narrator is male. Those who have assumed that the dreamer was female will be unsettled by this revelation. It is interesting to note that the urban scene or *vignette* mentioned above is taken up again at the end of the story somewhat differently,¹⁹ so that readers are made to reconsider their previous reading from a slightly modified angle.
- 25 Schreiner has purposefully maintained a high degree of gender undifferentiation which she chooses not to resolve in the second section of the book but only in the third. Speaking of novels, Fludernik writes that “trying to insist on the non-gendered reading of the narrator position actually obscures the dynamics and generation of gender construction which is rooted in readers’ empirical reactions to texts” (Fludernik 1996, 361). However, in the generalizing mode of the allegory, a gender neutral style confers on the reader greater interpretative leeway in opting for one sex or another. It also challenges established stereotypes by holding up the promise of some more fundamental discourse of truth that will not use generic masculine forms. As a fervent reader of Ralph Emerson’s *Essays*, Schreiner must have felt the inadequacy of writing about human experience in masculine terms only. Her first-person gender-free narrator can become the source of truly comprehensive thinking, exploiting the resources of English to give the right expression to Emerson’s intuition that
- We live in succession, in division, in parts, in particles. Meantime within *man* is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE. (...) We see the world piece by piece, as the sun, the moon, the animal, the tree; but the whole, of which these are the shining parts, is the soul.” (386; emphasis mine)
- 26 Emerson’s initial emphasis on division and separation is followed by a yearning for wholeness and oneness, which implies a disdain for categories, but his use of the generic masculine ironically confirms the human tendency to think the whole divisively and selectively.
- 27 There will always be differences between readers’ attitudes to texts even before they reach the stage of interpretation. Response to the text will thus vary according to the type of reader. The casual reader might overlook some of the linguistic signs of the narrator’s gender or the absence of markings, and experience, unaware, a form of gender fluidity. The gender-conscious reader will make his/her own informed contextualized choices and avoid re-injecting elements of essentialism. The careful reader will refuse to assign one sex or the other unless grammatically forced to do so. In such a case, his/her interpretative task will consist in performing both identities in turn, the openness of the work resulting in a plurality of interpretations. “To the extent that sex and gender matter for interpretation, the nonmarking of sex yields, in some sense, two narrative texts”, Susan Lanser writes. “Moreover, the narrative opens questions about the relationship between sex and gender in ways which allow the reader to test his or her own assumptions repeatedly.” (Mezei 255) I will now follow

Judith Butler's invitation to "perform" gender and play the part of such a reader in a three-phase gender-inclusive approach.

A gender-inclusive reading

- 28 The dramatized structure of the stories results in the dreamer becoming the spectator and interpreter of his/her own dream. This figure is also a *mise-en-abyme* of the reader. When identifying with this every/wo/man, the reader of either sex shares the dreamer's need to interpret the dream. The genderless narrator and the gender-indeterminate creatures contribute to the construction of the highest Heaven and to establishing an ideal which Schreiner took to heart: the sister-brotherhood between men and women. This happens when couples are formed, but it also occurs when the narrator – and hence the reader – need to decide which side to take in quarrels between men and women. The English language and the abstraction of the allegorical form allow Schreiner to create a space free of gender bias, a space which only has a virtual existence in the interpretative act. The reader is then free to share in the narrator's gender indeterminacy and confirm God's saying that those who have caught sight of heaven should go back to the earth for "that which [they] seek is there" (46). The loop comes full circle. The dreamer's state and the reader's function are the closest one can get to heaven. In this process, Schreiner plays the part of the angel who is able to "unclothe a human soul" (27) by taking off what forms its accidental identity, such as gender.
- 29 In "Three Dreams in a Desert", a story Schreiner wanted "every woman in England to read" (*Letters* 138), the narrator witnesses how man has maintained woman in a state of subjection: "The oldest, oldest, oldest man living has never seen her move" (16). S/He then learns how woman can rise. As the only noticeable difference between the two creatures is that they happen to be called "man", "woman", "he", or "she", the injustice of the scene becomes glaringly evident. Although the dreamer does not express any feelings, one can guess by his/her questions that s/he disapproves. There can be no hesitation about which "side" to take when witnessing such arbitrary oppression. Yet, s/he is likely to adopt the female and male gender in turn through a sort of mental conversion. *She* will experience solidarity with her sister woman; *he* may do so. *He* may experience shock or guilt when realizing the extent of woman's sacrifice; *she* might be fueled by the spirit of revolt which Schreiner tried to arouse in women. The dreamer's indeterminate sex maximizes the emotional impact of the scene. By accepting gender leeway and taking on alternative gender identities, the reader multiplies rather than narrows the possible interpretations.
- 30 A gender-free narrator is also less accusatory. In the story entitled "I thought I stood", God condemns the idea that women should come to him to "arraign" men (31), and encourages women to go back to man and talk it out. The allegories are indeed interdependent, one shedding light and relativizing the meaning of the other. Taken separately, they illustrate Susan Suleiman's proposal that "there is no such thing as a story that 'expressly entails a meaning'" (Suleiman 43). They indeed constitute their own intertext, where gender is alternatively essentialized or problematized.

Dreams as intertext

- 31 For argumentative purposes, if for no other, it was necessary for Schreiner to introduce gender distinctions. Neutral narration or total androgyny would have deprived some of Schreiner's allegories of their meanings. Just as heaven is said to be "one" only to be described as having several levels and several doors (40), one cannot make sense of a great blended totality and there needs to be sexual difference in order for Schreiner to drive her arguments home. Before we learn that the dreamer of "The Sunlight Lay Across my Bed" is male, God shows him creatures who are shining on plants so that they may grow. "Shining", which can be taken as nurture, breeding, education, or creation, is presented as a male and female joint activity.

And when we came nearer I saw [the people] walking, and they shone as they walked. I asked God how it was they wore no covering.

God said, "Because all their body gives the light; they dare not cover any part."

And I asked God what they were doing.

God said, "Shining on the plants that they may grow."

And I saw that some were working in companies, and some alone, but most were in twos, sometimes two men and sometimes two women; but generally there was one man and one woman; and I asked God how it was.

God said, "When one man and one woman shine together, it makes the most perfect light. Many plants need that for their growing. Nevertheless, there are more kinds of plants in Heaven than one, and they need many kinds of light." (41)

- 32 This passage is typical of Schreiner's oscillations. The allegory goes through three argumentative stages: God's creatures first shine either separately or in pairs, either in same-sex couples or in mixed couples. When the unprejudiced narrator expresses his/her surprise at the prevalence of mixed couples, God answers that each sex sheds a different light, and Schreiner introduces the idea of a complementarity between the male and female sexes, thus suggesting the perfection of heterosexual creation and production. When God goes on to say that plants may grow under different conditions because "there are more kinds of plants in Heaven than one, and they need many kinds of light," Schreiner seems to be stepping back and taking the edge of what she has just asserted, shifting the emphasis away from the quality of the light to the nature of the plant. Schreiner's rhetorical maneuvering proves that differentiation is necessary to logical and allegorical thinking. Having shifted from the difference of sex to the product of a relationship between the sexes ("perfect light"), she moves from what is given – the light – to what receives it: the plant. She decides not to be more specific about the nature of the plant, but she could have done so had she chosen to. Maureen Quilligan's insistence that the apparent verticality of allegories is transcended by the reader's need to "become aware (...) of the way he reads the text" (Quilligan 28) is corroborated by this case of potentially sprawling distinctions.
- 33 The sexual essentialism which pervades nineteenth-century feminist writing and has infuriated twentieth-century feminists often serves argumentative purposes rather than thematic ones. Arguing in favor of equality produces allegories of undifferentiation whereas arguing in favor of female productivity and sex complementarity produces allegories of differentiation. The vision of same-sex creatures doing fruitful creative work together tends to prove that Schreiner established a clear distinction between biological sex and gender, and that her thinking of female identity is detached from that of procreative sexuality.

- 34 Recent readings of New Woman fiction have emphasized the instability of writers' strategies, usually attributing it to their multiple, inconsistent agendas (Heilmann). In Schreiner's case, too, it may have been her choice not to remain fully in control of the dreamer's gender but to surrender part of her authority over the text. According to this interpretation, Schreiner's control over the creative process extends to the act of surrendering control over the dreamer's gender. In other words, genderlessness is a stylistic accomplishment, a semantic gain and a mark of gender-awareness. Schreiner's *Dreams* allegorizes her own critical thinking about gender: one should consider that sex reigns supreme in this world, change things so that it does not limit people's possibilities, while trying to envision a utopian world where it does not exist. "[S]ee[ing] things separately" (45) is a rhetorical and political necessity; thinking in terms of oneness is a philosophical necessity.

Does God make slips of the tongue?

- 35 In *The Story of an African Farm*, a novel which mixes a vast range of different textual practices, the allegory contained in the chapter entitled "Times and Seasons" follows the growth of a soul and its tumultuous relationship with God. The narration in the first person plural blurs the origin of the voice.²⁰ Is the omniscient narrator speaking? Is this voice relaying Waldo's reflections? Some expressions like "emasculated" (108) and "wicked boy" (112) inflect the meaning towards the masculine fate. The story being full of references to the Karoo, it must also be partly autobiographical.²¹ Hence, the collective "we" fulfills different functions: establishing a general truth, erasing gender difference, transcending personal experience and allowing for greater reader identification. In this context, it is less surprising that, in a passing reference to the *Arabian Nights*, "Alladeen"²² is gendered female (117). This slippage adds an element of gender-inclusiveness to this abstract tale of the soul's progress.
- 36 Schreiner described her creative practice and particularly the writing of *Dreams* as a long unfruitful process interspersed with outbursts of writing.²³ So it is not clear how far these details and nuances are premeditated, how far simply slips. The gender latitude they exhibit may be evidence that Schreiner was voluntarily abandoning full control of her writing.
- 37 In "The Sunlight Lay Across my Bed", the androgynous creature met by the narrator in the "highest" Heaven is initially designated by the pronoun "it". But, as God takes the narrator back within sight of Heaven and Hell, God calls the creature a "he".
- I said, "What has *it* for all *its* labour? I see nothing return to *it*."
Then God touched my eyes, and I saw stretched out beneath us the plains of Heaven and Hell, and all that was within them.
God said, "From that lone height on which *he* stands, all things are open. To *him* is clear the shining in the garden, *he* sees the flower break forth and the streams sparkle; no shout is raised upon the mountain-side but *his* ear may hear it. *He* sees the crown grow and the light shoot from it. All Hell is open to *him*. *He* sees the paths mount upwards. To *him*, Hell is the seed ground from which Heaven springs. *He* sees the sap ascending." (45; emphasis mine)
- 38 Either God is guilty of androcentricity in an act of gendering which repeats his biased creation of Adam, or Schreiner failed to produce the heaven she promised by unwittingly falling back on a masculine form to describe something that is neutrally gendered. This conclusion concurs with the closing stage of Laura Chrisman's

chronological analysis of Schreiner's *Dreams*, in which, analyzing the images of the crown and diamonds, she shows that the last allegory culminates in "the most extreme example of domination and exploitation extant" and "[t]he allegories are not the less important for the impasse they enact" (Chrisman 148).

- 39 The glimpse which the narrator is able to get of the androgynous creature is not the climax of his visit however, for, a few lines later, God's light grows so intense that the narrator becomes unable to tell things apart. The capacity to overcome binary oppositions is presented as an ideal state, orchestrated by heavenly music.

And the face turned from its work, and the light fell upon me. *Then it grew so bright I could not see things separately*; and which were God, or the man, or I, I could not tell; we were all blended. I cried to God, "Where are you?" but there was no answer, only music and light.

Afterwards, *when it had grown so dark again that I could see things separately*, I found that I was standing there wrapped tight in my little old, brown, earthly cloak, and God and the man were separated from each other, and from me. (45; emphasis mine)

- 40 The counterintuitive association between darkness and discrimination in "when it had grown so dark again that I could see things separately" preserves the age-old positive connotations of allegorical light and provides further justification for Berkman's regret that "despite her penchant for undermining polarities, [Schreiner] never suggested that some blend of the two elements, such as dusk, might serve as a more reflective setting than full light or that dark might hold incomparable truths and beauty." (Berkman 1989, 222) This is all the more surprising as light can be freely graded along a continuous scale. By opposition, grading gender (using words like effeminacy, emasculation, unsexedness, etc.) carried heavily negative connotations in a context marked by ideas of decadence, degenerationist discourse, and New Woman bashing.²⁴ In theoretical and allegorical texts, light is associated with the ability to see things clearly and distinguish between similar items. It carries the positive connotations of progress, knowledge and clear-sightedness, and became a classic trope of colonial discourse. Schreiner preserved the positive values of light, but also extended them: intense light blinds you so that you can only perceive one great indistinct whole and thus reach the higher state of undifferentiation. The dreamer is able to close his eyes to what is evident, and look inward. The weak eyes are those that shine the most outward (42). Schreiner also preserves the negative values of darkness to the point of generating a paradoxical situation: darkness is conducive to differentiation whereas light generates blindness to separations. This excursion into the issue of colors and light proves that Schreiner was not so eager to blur binary oppositions. By contrast, her approach to gender appears as progressive and stylistically innovative.
- 41 Issues of gender identity widen the meanings of the allegories instead of narrowing them. The reproach of essentialism which has often been directed at late-nineteenth-century New Woman and feminist writers ignores the essential point that gender carries different argumentative values according to the context in which it is used. While Schreiner sometimes finds it convenient to emphasize elements of gender identity, she also envisions an ideal state of genderlessness, where gender no longer matters. In other words, gender needs to be understood in context, and this precludes the possibility of quoting from fictional works as though they were essays in order to assess the degree of feminist consciousness of the author. The degree of essentialism one finds in a text is also related to the gender-inclusiveness of one's interpretation.

42 The allocation of gender to the narrator in *Dreams* seems to be significantly independent of cultural gender stereotypes and hetero/homosexual structures. By evaluating the reader's level of sympathy with each sex in turn, gender-inclusive narration results in an expanded form of cross-gender solidarity rather than sexual preference or identity. In the late-twentieth-century romances analyzed by Fludernik (1999) and Lanser (Mezei), ambiguous gender attribution creates a textual space where sexual identity is problematized and the heterosexual model destabilized. *Dreams* offers a less obvious break with traditional writing practices, but Schreiner's use of gender indeterminacy leads the reader to change interlocutory positions, thus raising his/her gender-awareness. Gender allocation is presented as an external process: the narrator gives no clue to his/her sex, carries no significant attribute and appears to be naively unaware of gender relations. Gender is allocated sometimes by the narrator, sometimes by God or some other third-person character, but their motivations are not revealed. Gender allocation becomes a game, the rules of which are partly linguistic, which forces the reader to reconsider his/her own position. The distinctions and categorizations on which Schreiner relies make the reader sensitive to the verbal implications of issues of gender. Schreiner's literary practice does not include wordplay but rather puts the reader in a position to gain an increased awareness of the way language habits insidiously enforce gender assumptions, thus forcing the reader to "interpret one's interpretation" (Quilligan 252). As the reader observes his/her failure to interpret the text without performing conscious gender adjustments, s/he has to learn how to read and re-read the text, and realize the political implications of these moves. Quilligan's timid suggestion in *The Language of Allegory* that "the end of the narrative is not merely to invite interpretation, but to excite belief and action" (Quilligan 220) is given a particularly vivid illustration in Schreiner's *Dreams*.

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NOTES

1. Scholarship on Schreiner includes Berkman; Bjørhovde; Brandon (1-94); First and Scott; Hackett; Heilmann; Horton; Kucich; Roth-Pierpont; Stanley.
2. The term was coined by Sarah Grand in an essay entitled “The New Aspect of the Woman Question” published in the *North American Review* in March 1894 (Nelson 141-46). Recent scholarship on New Woman Fiction includes Ardis; Heilmann; Kranidis; Ledger; Mangum; Marks; Murphy; Pykett; Richardson (2002); Thompson. Short anthologies include Nelson; Richardson (2002).
3. For this specific question in Schreiner’s works, see Heilmann 119-38; Chrisman 1990; McCracken. Critics have been divided over the merits of Schreiner’s allegories. While Elaine Showalter called them “sentimental allegories in the most nauseating *fin-de-siècle* style” (197), Patricia Stubbs wrote that “Schreiner’s favourite and most successful vehicle is not realist fiction at all. She works best in parables, allegories and dream visions, in fact in all narrative methods of religious teaching. Her style, her turn of phrase is often close to the rhythm and cadence of the King James Bible, and she seems to draw on Bunyan – in her use of symbol and allegory, and in the texture and sound of her prose.” (115)
4. Besides these, Schreiner also included allegories in her fragmentary introduction to Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (First and Scott 288), and wrote a political allegory entitled *Trooper Peter of Mashonaland* (1897). Laura Chrisman writes that “[t]he only way Schreiner can recuperate Wollstonecraft’s feminism is by allegorizing it, in a sense.” (133)
5. In 1912, she resigned as Vice-President of the Women’s Enfranchisement League because, while granting suffrage to women, it still excluded black women from the vote (First & Scott 261-263). See Olive Schreiner: Ruth Alexander MSC 26/2.1.29. *The Olive Schreiner Letters* on line.
6. Schreiner’s theoretical works include her “papers on woman” which she later collected into what she called her “sex book” (*Letters* 205), *Woman and Labour* (1911).
7. This unflattering verb is used six times (*From Man* 182, 184, 185, 186).
8. “What began as a focus on the impact of culturally constructed gender upon the form and reception of narrative texts has broadened to feminist narratologies that recognize race, sexuality, nationality, class, and ethnicity as well as gender in formulating their theoretical and analytical projects.” (Warhol and Lanser 6)
9. Schreiner broke with the Christian faith following the death of her sister Ellie when she was nine but, as Ruth First and Ann Scott argue in their biography, Schreiner rejected the Church rather than Christian values and, when she revisited the New Testament to bend it to her own philosophical and political uses, she remained true to the traditional message of Christian love (54-55).
10. Citations from *Dreams* refer to Elizabeth Jay’s 2003 edition.
11. “In more realistic literature, there have been spurts of interest in the female hero (...). Literature that moves away from realism and toward myth, however, literature that approaches the schematization and stylization of myth or archetype, tends to be dominated by a male hero.” (Little 17)
12. The opening of “In a Ruined Chapel” is told impersonally with a second-person point of view.

13. “[Olive Schreiner’s] most notable contribution to first-wave feminism was her conceptualization of the essential correlation between the imposition of gender, race and class hegemonies, an insight which resulted in her firm commitment to universal human rights.” (Heilmann 123)

14. Susan Lanser drew the following distinction between her use of the words “sex” and “gender”: “I will use the term ‘sex’ to designate the formal identification of a represented human entity as male or female. I will use ‘gender’ to designate characteristics constructed in and by texts that implicate – but do not prove – a male or female identity by drawing on cultural codes that conventionally signify masculinity and femininity” (Mezei 251-52).

15. The translation of *Dreams* into French (1912) gives us some insight into the question of readers’ attitudes to the narrator’s gender. Translating the stories into French sometimes requires deciding on the narrator’s gender within the story’s first few lines (60, 101, 109). Henriette Mirabaud Thorens assumed the narrator was female throughout, and used neutral forms to translate incidental masculine markers. However, Carlos Schwabe’s illustrations worked towards re-establishing the balance since he seems to have assumed that the narrator was male. Marie Diémer prefaced the collection by contextualizing it in the male English literary tradition.

16. In a note, Heilmann added: “Like myself, Laura Chrisman infers the narrator to be female, while McCracken reads her/his lack of an unambiguously defined gender as an indication of the ‘undecided nature of identity in culture in contrast with the overdetermined conditions that weigh down woman as actor’ inside the frame.” (263)

17. “In the dark one night I lay upon my bed. I heard the policeman’s feet beat on the pavement; I heard the wheels of carriages roll home from houses of entertainment; I heard a woman’s laugh below my window—and then I fell asleep. And in the dark I dreamt a dream. I dreamt God took my soul to Hell.” (33)

18. These quotations are taken from the first version published in *Lippincott’s Monthly Magazine* in July 1890.

19. “In the streets below, men and women streamed past by hundreds; I heard the beat of their feet on the pavement. Men on their way to business; servants on errands; boys hurrying to school; weary professors pacing slowly the old street; prostitutes, men and women, dragging their feet wearily after last night’s debauch; artists with quick, impatient footsteps; tradesmen for orders; children to seek for bread. I heard the stream beat by. And at the alley’s mouth, at the street corner, a broken barrel-organ was playing; sometimes it quavered and almost stopped, then went on again, like a broken human voice.” (46)

20. “One day we sit there and look up at the blue sky, and down at our fat little knees; and suddenly it strikes us, Who are we? This I, what is it? We try to look in upon ourself, and ourself bears back upon ourself. Then we get up in great fear and run home as hard as we can. (...) we are twisting, twirling, trying to make an allegory. (...) Do not ask us how we make our dream tally with facts; the glory of a dream is this – that it despises facts, and makes its own. Our dream saves us from being mad; that is enough.” (Schreiner *The Story* 103, 107, 109)

21. Gerd Bjørhovde notes that besides using a male pseudonym when publishing *The Story of an African Farm*, Schreiner also refers to herself as “he” in the preface to the second edition (87).

22. Since Alladeen is said to “bur[y] her wonderful stone”, Joseph Bristow calls it “a confused reference to ‘Aladdin, or The Wonderful Lamp’ from *The Arabian Nights*” (Schreiner 1998, 275).

23. “My great fault as a writer is that I cannot bear to re-touch, even to reread anything when once I have written it. I have three novels, two other books, a whole box of dreams, all dashed off and then never looked at again.” (*Letters* 148)

24. See “Manly Women”; “Modern Mannish Maidens”; Linton. See also Sarah Grand, “The New Aspect of the Woman Question” (Nelson 141-46). For a discussion of the evolutionary turn taken by discourses of masculinization and effeminacy in the late nineteenth century, see Hamilton; Marks (176-78).

ABSTRACTS

The South-African essayist and novelist Olive Schreiner wrote allegories which were treasured by early twentieth-century feminists, who turned to them for inspiration and comfort. In *Dreams* (1890), Schreiner denounced the arbitrariness of man's domination over woman, invited women to try to achieve both Freedom and Love, and looked forward to a state of gender equality. Schreiner's allegories are a good place to start an inquiry into the ways in which narratological practices can challenge stereotyped perceptions of gender. The first-person narrator, who is our substitute in many of her stories, is the source of the hermeneutic process at the core of the allegory. The reader's conjectures are rendered more complex by the ambivalence of this narrator's gender. Schreiner's prophet/ess delivers a pragmatic truth, depending on the sexual identity which the reader attributes to him/her in context. Gender neutral first-person narration allowed Schreiner to tell certain stories from a gender-free perspective, or created gender leeway which allowed meaning to proliferate.

La romancière et essayiste Olive Schreiner est l'auteure d'allégories qui ont inspiré et soutenu de nombreuses penseuses et militantes féministes au début du XX^e siècle. Dans *Rêves* (1890), elle dénonce la domination injustifiée de l'homme sur la femme, encourage les femmes à conquérir la Liberté et l'Amour et pense l'état d'égalité des sexes. Les allégories de Schreiner constituent un corpus de choix pour étudier comment les pratiques narratives peuvent influencer sur la représentation du genre. Le narrateur à la première personne, qui est notre mise-en-abyme dans le texte, est à l'origine du processus herméneutique à l'œuvre dans l'allégorie. Notre interprétation du texte est compliquée par l'identité sexuelle incertaine de ce narrateur. La Vérité dont il est question dans les allégories est une vérité pragmatique, qui varie selon le sexe que le lecteur attribue au narrateur en contexte. La narration à la première personne, où le genre n'est pas marqué en anglais, permet à Schreiner de parler depuis une perspective « neutre », à moins qu'il ne s'agisse de jeter le trouble dans le genre de façon à élargir les lectures possibles du texte.

INDEX

Keywords: allegory, feminism, gender, narratology

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C.S. Lewis's parables as revisited and reactivated biblical stories

Daniel Warzecha

- 1 C.S. Lewis (1898-1963), a scholar, writer and Anglican apologist in the first half of the twentieth century went through an experience of (re)conversion to Christianity in the early nineteen thirties. That experience deeply impacted his thought and sensitivity as a writer with the result that he was soon driven by an evangelizing spirit as shown by his first book.¹ Throughout his life, as a prolific writer authoring varied work (conferences, radio programmes, children's stories, novels, scholarly studies), he tried to bear witness directly or indirectly to his faith. One of his favorite means was to tell stories copied from the Aristotelian *muthoi*-pattern with its mythopoetic content, its allegorical and parabolic dimension he kept on revisiting and reactivating. According to Jean Ladrière,

every speech-act is "self-implicating" [...] in so far as in every speech-act the speaking subject brings into play his own being according to various procedures that specify his/her as a being subject (knowledge, will, imagination, affectivity, sensitivity etc.) [...] This means, on the one hand, that the speaker necessarily conveys the very frame of his/her existence through his/her words, and in that way, his or her words really express who he or she is. But it also means, on the other hand, that language, as far as he or she takes responsibility for it, resonates on the very movement of existence and gives a shape to it. If the word expresses somebody's existence, on the contrary there is an inductive effect of speech upon existence. This is why one cannot use language in a neutral way. There is an irreducible gravity in somebody's speech and an indeclinable responsibility towards what it accomplishes (Ladrière 32).²

- 2 Lewis was very much a self-implicated writer. He used to get involved personally in his scholarly thoughts; he staged his life directly through two autobiographies and even indirectly in his fiction. One could apply to Lewis what Paul Ricoeur wrote about imagination as "something that shapes human experience [...] It is through fiction that one provides individual or common experience with narrative form" (Ricoeur 340-1).³ So Lewis's speech "really expresses who he is" (Ladrière 32). On the contrary, his friends' words, the words read from Latin, Greek, Biblical or Medieval authors impregnated Lewis's thought, determined his writing and impacted his life. That is why

there is an irreducible gravity in Lewis's word, because it is part of a cultural, literary and spiritual tradition which is a several thousand years old.

- 3 Thus Lewis wrote parable-like stories influenced by other stories he had "decontextualized and recontextualized in his *Sitz im Leben*" (Ricœur 340). He also retold his life story in a sublimated or fictionalized way. But let's study the Lewisian story in the light of the parable, its traits and its performativity.
- 4 What is a parable? My study will be inspired of the parable in the Gospels. It is a kind of snapshot story built on a comparison "The kingdom of heaven is *like* a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field [...] The kingdom of heaven is *like* a treasure hidden in a field [...] Again, the kingdom of heaven is *like* a merchant looking for fine pearls"(Mt. 13 : 31, 44-5). The parable conveys an allegorical dimension and induces a moral or spiritual teaching. It is "enshrined" in a bigger story, the one that depicts Jesus' peculiar itinerary. According to Ladrière,

the evangelical story is altogether organized around a unique event which is the accomplishment of the promises, the new covenant replacing the former law, the proclamation and the accomplishment of the Word of God, of "the mystery which has been kept from all times and generations, but [which] has now been made clear to his saints" (Colossians 1:26), that "mystery of Christ". Yet that event is not immediately obvious (Ladrière 34).⁴
- 5 As that unique event is not "obvious" it needs to be mediated and metaphorized through parables and stories. And it is worth noticing that Jesus not only tells the parables but he is also often the main protagonist in them. He tells about himself in a story. Moreover part of the parable is enigmatic and that hidden content requires to be interpreted even though the parable cannot be reduced to a definitive interpretation. For Ricœur, "the parable-story offers an itinerary of meanings, which is an open invitation to a work of interpretation" (Ricœur 340).⁵ Furthermore, the parable possesses a timeless and universal quality and it can be transposed in any human situation. Finally the parable produces and reveals something in the listener's mind.
- 6 What are the characteristics and the theoretical premises of the Lewisian story? The first one is its intense intertextuality, claimed by Lewis. As a neo-Platonist, he was convinced that the writer neither invents nor creates anything. Like Augustine, he thought that only God creates. Man only copies or imitates what he sees or perceives, and that is his mission and his glory. As a result, any individual or collective story derives from an original story which serves as a pattern or a matrix. So all human stories repeat, reveal and re-effectuate a primordial story in which "the same human experience is at stake" (Ricœur 340).
- 7 How does Lewis proceed when he revisits a founding text? I will take the temptation episode in Genesis 3 that Lewis revisited in three fictional works, *The Pilgrim's Regress* (1933), *Perelandra* (1943), the second book of the Cosmic Trilogy and *The Magician's Nephew* (1955), the first tale of the seven *Chronicles of Narnia*.
- 8 Even if the biblical story of the temptation is not strictly speaking a parable, it contains nonetheless all the ingredients of the parable. This timeless story stages a primordial and a tragic event: how evil was introduced into mankind through allegorical characters (Adam & Eve). It contains allegorical elements: two trees, one standing for life and the other one for the knowledge of good and evil, and a snake personifying the tempter. The story carries a spiritual dimension, *i.e.* man being separated from his divine source, plus a metaphysical and moral dimension, *i.e.* the finiteness and

mortality of the human condition. Last but not least, the biblical story offers an itinerary of meanings that requires theological interpretation.

- 9 Lewis rewrote the same biblical story pattern which he decontextualized and recontextualized in his fiction. In *The Pilgrim's Regress*, his first allegorical autobiography, the pilgrim John makes a full-circle journey in time and space and arrives in front of an unbridgeable canyon. Mother Kirk, an allegorical figure standing for the Church in its generic sense, provides him with an explanation by using a parabolic story. In *Perelandra*, the Green Lady, a kind of Venusian Eve, is tempted by Weston, a venal, unscrupulous scientist who landed on the planet Venus to colonize and exploit it. He is countered and stopped in his seducing attempt by Ransom, a Christ-like figure, and the hero of the three cosmic stories. In *The Magician's Nephew*, the child Digory must atone for the fault he committed by letting the Witch Jadis into Narnia, which she will invade later in the second book. Digory is then appointed by the lion Aslan to go and fetch a magic apple in a garden on a hilltop where he will be tempted. In the three stories, the temptation scene occurs at a critical moment and a turning point in the plot. Without the explanation about the Great Canyon (an allegory of Adam's sin or *Peccatum Adae*) John cannot continue his journey. If the Green Lady yields to the temptation, she will not marry the King (who is the eponym of Adam) and the planet will become corrupt and be destroyed. If Digory disobeys and yields to the temptation by eating the magic apple, he will become as dissatisfied and desperate as the Witch who has eaten some fraudulently.
- 10 Lewis did not reproduce the basic story slavishly. In *Perelandra* and *The Magician*, both temptations fail and both tempters (Weston and the Witch) are vanquished. In *The Pilgrim's Regress*, the temptation episode is illustrated by another parable which sheds light on the story plot: a landowner living in the mountains also owned a valley which he and his children managed. In his goodness and generosity, he wanted to share his valley with tenants, with whom he contracted a perpetual lease, allowing them to leave whenever they wanted. On his land, fruit trees grew and bore fruits that only mountaineers could stand. The landowner warned his tenants about the danger of the fruit. Everything went well until one day one of the landowner's rebellious sons, called the "land grabber", went down into the valley and convinced the tenant's wife to taste the fruit. She ate it, and gave some to her husband. It brought about an earthquake that provoked a huge abyss, which was then called the Great Canyon.
- 11 In Lewis's stories metaphors and characters undergo a shift. The forbidden fruit is turned into a magic apple in *The Magician* and a refreshing fruit in *The Pilgrim's Regress*. In the allegory, the tempter is the landowner's rebellious son (a reminder of Lucifer, the fallen angel). In *Perelandra* the tempter is personified as a disincarnated man whereas in *The Magician*, the temptress is embodied in a witch, as a hypostasis of evil. Lewis conforms to Christian theology that considers evil to be originally external to man who then becomes the receptacle of evil after disobeying God. As Ricoeur put it, "man is not the absolute villain but wicked secondly" (Ricoeur 1960, 398-9).⁶ In the Lewisian parables, underlying theological concepts such as the reasons for divine prohibition, the origin of evil or the consequences of disobedience call for clarification and interpretation. In *The Magician*, the witch repeats the snake's fallacious allusions to Genesis: Aslan, like God in the Bible, does not want the forbidden fruit to be eaten because he wants to keep them all for himself and leave man frustrated forever. Jadis's promise of eternity ("Eat it boy, eat it; and you and I will both live forever and be king

and queen of this entire world”, 150) echoes back the snake’s deceptive promise (“God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil” (Genesis 3: 5).

- 12 In *Perelandra* the planet Venus is inhabited only by a man and a woman, living in harmony with their environment and with the god Maleldil, who is a metaphor for God. The Green Lady enjoys prelapsarian innocence and youth, unaware of good and evil. In order to tempt her, Weston reverses the categories of good and evil by hinting that being young is but frustrating whereas getting old and dying is what is most desirable. Becoming oneself, autonomous from Maleldil is what Maleldil himself wishes and being separated from him, disobeying him in fact means obeying him. Ransom thwarts Weston’s sophism by asserting that obeying Maleldil’s voice and will is to do what is good.
- 13 By reinterpreting and reparableizing the original story, Lewis followed a triple purpose. He aimed at reinforcing the plot, increasing the mythopoetic intensity of the story and inserting in it apologetic elements. *The Magician* is a good example. By resisting the temptation of the forbidden fruit, Digory does what is morally good. He behaves bravely, saves Narnia and his mother. After his mother eats the magic apple, the apple core is then buried in the family garden. Later on an apple-tree grows out of it but one day a lightening flash uproots it. From its trunk wood a wardrobe will be made and put in Professor Digory’s house. That magic wardrobe will allow the magic to go on by enabling the Pevensies children to enter Narnia in the second book of the *Chronicles*.
- 14 Lewis’s stories are not just reinterpreted repetitions of metaphoric variants but, like in the parables, they aim at producing and revealing *something*, both in the author’s and the reader’s mind. The ‘something’ produced in literary imagination is what Ladrière calls ‘reeffectuation’ (Ladrière 51). Firstly, that process starts with interpreting the picture or the story so as to unveil its meaning(s). One could paraphrase Ricœur and assert that the biblical parable, as well as the myth or the symbol, “gives rise to thought”. The second step implies appropriating the same story and retelling it in one’s own words. The next stage of ‘reeffectuation’ is to revisit the initial story by introducing personal elements in it because ‘reeffectuation’ “entails a testimony dimension based on experience” (Ladrière 68). One must bear in mind that Lewis went through a fundamental and founding experience of (re)conversion to Christianity in the early years of his literary career. So spiritual concepts such as ‘evil’, ‘sin’, ‘temptation’, ‘repentance’, resonated first with his inner experience before becoming literary material. Lewis’s self-implication in his fiction was first and foremost existential. Then his handling of these religious notions depended on the author’s stance: at times Lewis could be a mythopoet or a scholar and a teacher but he could also be a formidable apologist or a vulnerable autobiographer. The temptation scene provides us with a case in point.
- 15 In *The Pilgrim*, Mother Kirk explains to John that the Great Canyon is an inescapable prerequisite in his intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic journey. In *Perelandra*, Lewis got involved indirectly through Ransom (a scholar fond of ancient languages like him) who witnesses the temptation scene and, like an apologist, counters the tempter Weston philosophically and theologically. In *The Magician*, Lewis incorporated a tragic event from his youth: his mother’s disease and death. But in the tale, the event has been sublimated. Contrary to Lewis’s reality, the young boy managed to save his mother’s

life. The fourth reeffectuation level operates in the reader's reception of the story. It is supposed to function as a reminder of the initial event (told in the Bible) that reverberates in the reader's personal story (temptation as a personal issue). How did Lewis intend to make something new happen in an old revisited story? By "irrigating the deserts" of the reader's imagination (Lewis 1947, 27). In the same way as the biblical parable-story echoes in the listener's imagination and memory, the Lewisian story is supposed to reverberate in each and everyone's personal story. That is why it is ultimately performative.

- 16 In his analysis of literary imagination Adolphe Gesché's underlined that "Literature acts; it does not merely show or entertain. It has a power of revelation [...] it is where epiphanies occur.":

There is an analogy between fiction discovery and what theologians call revelation: a visitation, an encounter with something unexpected, sudden, "revealed", out of the daily routine and yet inscribed in it. In revelation, there lies a part of an enigma (Moses and the burning bush), plot (Jacob's struggle with the angel). Exactly like in literature. A plot evolves from an enigma, which is part and parcel of it (Ricoeur, Lévinas). From that, free to move, I try to build and understand myself and start to reveal myself to me." (Gesché 151,154)⁷

- 17 So it appears that literary imagination has a revealing effect on the reader let alone theology, *i.e.* the discourse on God. It is all the more so when a story combines imagination and spirituality, which is the case with Lewis. In order to be accessible, theology produces revelation through imagination by means of metaphors that saturate the entire Bible (e.g. Jesus is the good shepherd, the bread of life, etc.). Theology makes sense because it is embodied in pictures, metaphors and analogies.

From the mythic stories which it resorts to in the Old Testament to the lively metaphors that crisscross all the New Testament, the Judeo-Christian *kerygma* does nothing but appeal to our imagination like a groundswell and a tight back drop. The stupendous story of the creation does nothing but tune (like a cord instrument) the story of faith to the mythic tales of Adam's shaping, Eve's arrival out of a dream, a wonderful and dangerous garden in which man trains himself to be free, in which cosmic tragedies like the Tower of Babel or the Flood unfold the splendor of their immemorial pictures (Ladrière 156-7).⁸

- 18 Man's revelation of God and of man occurs through the prism of imagination. It happens from a triple enigma stemming from, firstly, the "*Deus absconditus*, the hidden God dear to Pascal and Isaiah" (Gesché 162) but also from man as an enigma to himself and to God. So revelation, in order to be more efficient, requires to be mediated by another story. To highlight that triple enigma (even quadruple if one considers the enigma of God Incarnate for God the Father), "a story told by someone else and surrounded by the magic of a story is necessary" (Gesché 164). And here comes the parable as an intermediate story that links theology and imagination, recalling both a universal and intimate experience. To finish, Gesché marvels at Saint Bernard's statement that "God descended into our very imagination". "What is remarkable is that Saint Bernard uses the vocabulary of the incarnation, 'descended'. God descended into our imagination, when he came down into flesh" (Gesché 182).⁹
- 19 The biblical parable is one expression of that embodiment of the Word in human imagination. To a lesser extent, for the novelist Lewis, his parable-stories were bound to overlap *the* initial story which they reflected and reactivated. For the apologist Lewis, irrigating his theology and philosophy by the streams of imagination and poetry appeared to be the best way for his testimony to satisfy reason, faith, and affectivity.

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NOTES

1. *The Pilgrim's Regress* (1933), a palimpsest of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) is a spiritual autobiography written as an allegory in which Lewis justified his Christian faith rationally.
2. Traduction de l'auteur. « Tout acte de parole est auto-implicatif [...] De telle sorte que, dans sa parole, le sujet parlant met en jeu son être même, selon les différentes modalités qui le spécifient comme être-sujet (modalités de la connaissance, du vouloir, de l'imaginaire, de l'affectivité, de la sensibilité, de la communication, etc.), et selon des degrés d'intensité qui varient avec la nature des actes illocutionnaires qu'il accomplit. Cela signifie d'une part qu'il fait nécessairement passer dans ce qu'il dit ce qui constitue la trame même de son existence, que, en ce sens, sa parole est vraiment l'« expression » de lui-même. Mais cela signifie aussi, d'autre part, que le langage, dans la mesure où il l'assume, retentit sur le mouvement même de son existence et donne à celle-ci sa forme. S'il y a passage expressif de l'existence dans la parole, il y a aussi, en sens inverse, effet inducteur de la parole sur l'existence. C'est pourquoi on ne peut user du langage de façon neutre; il y a une irréductible gravité de la parole, et une responsabilité indéclinable à l'égard de ce qu'elle accomplit.»
3. Il faut considérer l'imagination « comme pouvoir de donner forme à l'expérience humaine [...] c'est par ces fictions que nous donnons une forme narrative à notre expérience individuelle ou commune.»
4. Traduction de l'auteur. « Le récit évangélique tout entier s'organise autour d'une péripétie unique qui est l'accomplissement des promesses, la substitution d'une nouvelle alliance à celle de l'ancienne Loi, la proclamation-réalisation de la Parole de Dieu, du « mystère caché aux siècles et aux générations passées, mais manifesté maintenant » aux saints de Dieu (Col. 2 : 27), de « ce mystère qui est le Christ. Or cette péripétie n'est pas présente dans une évidence immédiate. »
5. Traduction de l'auteur. « Le récit-parabole est un itinéraire de sens, ouverts sur un travail d'interprétation. »
6. Traduction de l'auteur. « [...] l'homme n'est pas le méchant absolu ; il n'est que le méchant en second, le méchant par séduction ; il n'est pas le Mauvais, le Malin, substantivement si l'on peut dire, mais mauvais, méchant par épithète ; il se rend méchant par une sorte de contre-participation, de contre-imitation, par consentement à une source de mal que le naïf auteur du récit biblique dépeint comme ruse animale. Pécher c'est céder. »

7. Traduction de l'auteur. «La littérature agit, elle n'est pas simple spectacle ou divertissement. Elle a un pouvoir de révélation. [...] Elle est le lieu des épiphanies. [...] Il y a dans la découverte romanesque une analogie avec ce que le théologien appelle Révélation : une visitation, la rencontre de quelque chose d'inattendu, de soudain, de « révélé », hors du réel quotidien et cependant inscrit en lui. Il y a dans la révélation une part d'énigme (Moïse devant le Buisson), d'intrigue (combat de Jacob avec l'ange). Comme dans la littérature, très exactement. C'est à partir de l'énigme, qui est tout son contenu et toute sa raison, que se développe une intrigue (Ricœur, Levinas), à partir de laquelle, libre de mes mouvements, je cherche à me construire et à me comprendre et commence à me révéler à moi-même »

8. Traduction de l'auteur. « Depuis les récits mythiques auxquels il recourt dans son Ancien Testament, jusqu'aux métaphores vives qui sillonnent tout son Nouveau Testament, le kérygme (judéo)chrétien ne fait pas autre chose que de solliciter, comme une vague de fond et un décor toujours tendu, notre imaginaire. L'immense récit de la Création dans la Genèse ne fait pas autre chose que d'accorder, comme on dit d'un instrument à cordes, le récit de sa foi en Dieu aux récits mythiques du modelage d'Adam, de la venue d'Eve au cœur d'un rêve, d'un jardin merveilleux et dangereux où l'homme s'exerce aux premiers pas de la liberté, où des drames cosmiques comme Babel et le Déluge déploient le faste de leurs images immémoriales. »

9. « Dieu est descendu jusque dans notre imagination. » Et ce qui est remarquable, c'est que Bernard emploie le vocabulaire même de l'Incarnation : descendit, il est descendu jusque dans notre imagination, quand il est descendu parmi nous dans la chair. »

ABSTRACTS

Based on Paul Ricœur's conceptual analysis of the Gospels' parables, this paper will aim at showing how C.S. Lewis (1898-1963) resorted to parable telling as a way of metaphorizing his apologetic discourse. By revisiting foundational texts (cosmogonic stories, temptation scenes in a garden, repetition of lapsarian stories, experiences of inner conversion) inserted in his fiction (*The Pilgrim's Regress*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Perelandra*), Lewis appropriated that aesthetic and religious heritage which he reactivated by introducing his personal experience and his aesthetic, philosophical and religious quest in it. That experience echoed universal experience and Saint Paul's and Saint Augustine's conversion stories. Owing to its exemplarity, the performativity of the Lewisian parable can be inscribed within a network of similar human experiences (Ladrière). Therefore it is overdetermined by its intertextuality and the different subjective layers it refers to: the original experience, the author's own experience and the reader is invited to experiment the same experience. The evangelical parable describes a two-fold movement: the kingdom of God is staged through Jesus' story which itself is inscribed within men's history then becoming the history of salvation (both seen as universal and a tell-tale story). To a lesser extent, Lewisian stories describe that oscillation: various protagonists are staged both in a singular and universal story.

Partant de l'analyse conceptuelle de Paul Ricœur sur les paraboles de l'Évangile, le propos de cet article vise à montrer comment C.S. Lewis (1898-1963) a recours à la parabolisation pour métaphoriser son discours apologétique. Par sa réécriture de textes fondateurs (récits cosmogoniques, scènes de tentation dans un jardin, répétition de la chute, expériences de conversion intérieure) qu'il insère dans sa fiction (*Pilgrim's Regress*, *Chroniques de Narnia*,

Perelandra), Lewis se réapproprie ce patrimoine esthétique et religieux qu'il réactive en y introduisant son expérience personnelle singulière (sa quête/conversion esthétique, philosophique et religieuse), qui, elle-même entre en résonance avec l'expérience universelle (celle de Saint Paul ou de Saint Augustin). Par son exemplarité, cette performativité de la parabole lewisienne, s'inscrit comme un maillon de plus dans la chaîne des expériences humaines (Ladrière). Ainsi la parabole lewisienne est-elle surdéterminée par son intertextualité et par les différentes strates subjectives auxquelles elle fait allusion : expérience originelle, expérience personnelle (de l'auteur), invitation au lecteur à vivre la même chose. La parabole évangélique rend compte d'un double mouvement : le royaume de Dieu se met en scène au travers de l'histoire (« *story* ») de Jésus qui s'inscrit elle-même dans l'histoire (« *history* ») des hommes et devient ainsi l'histoire du salut (à la fois « *story* » car racontée comme un conte/récit et « *history* » par sa dimension universelle). A un moindre degré, la parabole lewisienne décrit et décline cette même oscillation : mise en scène des différents acteurs dans une histoire singulière et universelle.

INDEX

Keywords: (re)effectuation, imagination, parable, performativity, Jean Ladrière, C.S. Lewis, Paul Ricœur

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Ritual and parable in Britten's *Curlew River*

Gilles Couderc

- 1 Opera, as the recreation of Greek tragedy combining singing, chanting and dancing, is linked to rites of death and fertility. The genre provides the staging of rituals like celebrations, processions, parades, oath-taking, church services, prayers or death as theatrical elements inserted in its dramaturgy. It has generated its own musical conventions and ritual musical forms, which obey strict aesthetic codes and practices. Britten was well aware of the ritual of musical forms in opera, and most of his twelve operas carefully stage a ritual of death including those forms. His self-definition as “a musician for an occasion” in his Aspen Award Speech of 1964 (Kildea 2003, 267) reflects his practice of, and participation to rituals like his 1939 *Ballad of Heroes* composed in memoriam the British volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, his *Ceremony of Carols* of 1942, the *Cantata Academica* of 1960 for the 500th anniversary of Basle University or the *Cantata Misericordium* of 1963 for the Red Cross Centenary. His Aspen Award Speech spells out his belief that listeners should be prepared for music and make “some effort, a journey to a special place” beforehand (Kildea 2003, 261). His “holy triangle of composer, performer and listener” (Kildea 2003, 261), —when the listener is at one with the composer, “either as a performer himself, or as a listener in active sympathy” (Kildea 2003, 260) — led him to physically involve the audience in his works, as with the original “audience songs” of *The Little Sweep* of 1949 or with the traditional church hymns incorporated to *Saint Nicolas* of 1948 or to *Noye's Fludde* of 1958. They transform the audience “from silent witnesses to inhabitants of the symbolic world visible before them” as they coordinate a group “into one performing body” (Rupprecht 28). Though Britten's 1962 *War Requiem* does not include hymns for the audience, it is based on the ritual and liturgy of the Mass of the Dead. The force of suggestion of its ritual was increased as it was first performed in the newly dedicated Coventry Cathedral, rebuilt after the blitz of November 1940, as part of the dedication ceremonies, thus building a ritual-within-ritual pattern.
- 2 Britten composed many pieces related to church ritual, like his two *Te Deum* or his 1959 *Missa Brevis*. He enjoyed a long relationship with Walter Hussey, who commissioned

Britten's *Rejoice the Lamb* of 1943 and who, as Dean of Chichester, remained a staunch believer in the Anglican Church as patron of the arts. Raised by a Low Church mother, Britten was first exposed to plainsong and High Church Anglican ritual at Gresham's School (Mitchell and Reed 93-95) and subsequently developed a keen interest in plainsong (Elliot 44-73). Appreciating church architecture was part of his artistic education with his master Frank Bridge and his letters from his beloved Venice abound in descriptions of its churches, their riches and ceremonies. For very practical reasons, the local Suffolk churches of neighbouring villages provided venues for his Aldeburgh Festival concerts, especially the Norman and Gothic churches of Orford and Blythburgh. The former was first used for the 1958 *Noye's Fludde* performances. The latter, dedicated to the Holy Trinity, is known as the "Cathedral of the Marshes" and famous for the great coloured angels with outstretched wings embossed in the nave's roof. The churches became favourite concert venues closely associated to Britten's "holy triangle", to his conception of listeners as pilgrims and to his love of their generous resonant acoustic, the "Gothic sound", rewarding for both performers and listeners, when the reverberation of a single note "produces a string of notes together, its own form of harmony" (Kildea 2003, 294), itself a form of heterophony.

- 3 In that context, his letter of April 2, 1964, to his librettist, the poet and novelist William Plomer (1903-1973) comes only as a mild shock as, barely three months before the first performance of their new operatic adventure, their adaptation of the fifteenth-century Japanese Noh play, *Sumidagawa* or *Sumida River*, by Jūrō Motomasa (1395-1431), Britten tells Plomer that it will be called *Curlew River*, a parable for church performance, a title fraught with meaning (Reed and Cooke 580). *Sumida River* stages the story of a demented woman in search of her abducted son who finally discovers his grave and mourns after a ferryman agrees to take her across the river. The new title made it clear that the new piece was not an opera in the accepted sense and that it must be done in a church, a venue that would bring performers and listeners in close contact: it would provide the equivalent of the Noh auditorium, where the stage and its roof project into the audience, embracing actors and audience alike. Plomer wholeheartedly supported the parable idea and provided Britten with definitions of the genre as "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning" or a "fictitious narrative used to typify moral or spiritual relations", which all tallied with their new work (Reed and Cooke 579). Plomer had worked on its libretto since 1958, two years after the composer had seen the Noh play in Japan, on the advice of Plomer himself, during a Far East trip. Plomer had long lived in Japan in the 1920s and was enthralled by its culture and Britten had been interested in Noh and Japanese theatrical arts, purchasing a copy of Ezra Pound's Noh translations published by Faber in 1953 (Cooke 24-25, 141). Britten was so impressed by the simplicity of the story and the strangeness of the performance that he saw the play twice:

The whole occasion made a tremendous impression upon me: the simple touching story, the economy of style, the intense slowness of the action, the marvellous skill and control of the performers, the beautiful costumes, the mixture of chanting, speech, singing which, with the three instruments, made up the strange music - it all offered a totally new "operatic" experience (Britten, *A Note by the Composer*, Decca Recording SET 301, London: Decca, 1965).

- 4 In a broadcast message to Japan of 1958 Britten further commented on the profound impact of the Noh play: "The deep solemnity and *selflessness* of the acting, the perfect shaping of the drama (like a great Greek tragedy) coupled with the strength and the

universality of the stories are something which every Western artist can learn from” (Cooke 120). Britten then asked Plomer to adapt the play’s official translation into a libretto.¹ But in April 1959, much to Plomer’s surprise and relief, Britten asked him to christianize the secular story as its “little bits of Zen-Buddhism” (Reed and Cooke 130) did not mean much to him and might not mean anything to its audiences to whom he feared the work might appear as a pastiche or some sort of “*Japoniaiserie*” (Reed and Cooke 580), as if he was wary of any associations with Gilbert & Sullivan’s 1885 comic opera *The Mikado*, a satire of British politics and institutions². Britten later spelt out why: the wonderful experience “visually, dramatically and acoustically” of performing Noye’s *Fludde* in Orford Church, and his wish to turn the story into a “monastic drama” performed by men and boys (Reed and Cooke 151). Britten had immersed himself in medieval religious drama and mystery plays in England since his setting to music two Chester Miracle Plays, *Abraham and Isaac* in 1952 and *Noye’s Fludde* in 1958.³ His interest in medieval drama reflected the British revival of mystery and miracle plays initiated in the 1920’s and reaching its peak in the 1950’s with the triennial York Festival, founded in 1951⁴. He had looked for a Medieval Latin poem that dramatised the parable of the Good Samaritan for his 1963 *Cantata Misericordium* before he asked the Cambridge Latin scholar Patrick Wilkinson to dramatize it in Latin (Reed and Cooke 397). Relocating the Noh play in a Fenland church, possibly in pre-Conquest times, acted out by a community of monks, made it possible for his companion Peter Pears to sing the role of the Madwoman. In this version, departing from the Japanese original yet in keeping with the intrusion of the supernatural common to Noh plays (Murray 60), the twelve-year old boy, having now become some local saint after his premature death, finally appears spirit-like to his mother and grants her the peace she has been seeking as a sign of God’s grace.

- 5 Plomer had known Britten for many years and the parable idea must have been no surprise as many of Britten’s operas, from the Brecht-influenced *Paul Bunyan* of 1941 to his recent *Midsummer Night’s Dream* of 1960, set out to deliver a message, in a more or less explicit fashion (Couderc 2004). Thus the Male and Female Chorus of the 1946 *Rape of Lucretia* harness a Christian interpretation to the age-old Roman story. Captain Vere in his Prologue to Britten’s 1951 *Billy Budd* clearly underlines in quasi-Goethean fashion the opera’s metaphysical stakes, the ubiquity of evil in the divine creation while his epilogue celebrates love, forgiveness and redemption. The *Offertorium* of Britten’s 1962 *War Requiem* set to music Wilfrid Owen’s biting ironic reworking of the story of Abraham and Isaac in the “Parable of the Old man and the Young”, allowing Britten the pacifist to parody his own 1952 setting of the Chester Miracle Play in his denunciation of war-mongering, while *Cantata Misericordium*, a dramatisation of Luke’s Good Samaritan parable, focused on the practice of compassion. Moreover, thanks to his close collaboration with the poet on GPO Films in 1935-1936 as musical director and on his Group Theatre plays, Britten belonged to the “Auden Generation” who believed that literature and poetry were forms of action. In ‘*Psychology and Art To-day*’ (1935) Auden defined parable-art as “that art which shall teach man to unlearn hatred and learn love” (Hynes 169), the ferment of change whose main agents would be art and artists, a concept to which Britten adhered all his life.⁵ In his operas Britten also made his own the words of Auden in his Preface to *The Poet’s Tongue* of 1935 which also provided another definition of parable-art, well removed from propaganda:

Poetry is not concerned with telling people what to do but with extending our knowledge of good and evil, perhaps making the necessity of action more urgent

and its nature more clear, but only leading us to the point where it is possible for us to make a rational and moral choice (Hynes 14).

- 6 The “Auden Generation” featured the poet Louis MacNeice, an associate of Britten’s in the thirties and forties and of Auden’s in the thirties.⁶ He had given his Cambridge Clark Lectures of 1963 published under the title of *Varieties of Parables*. While they outline the poet’s own poetics a few months before his death, they also define and illustrate the significance of “parable” for the times in which he lived, in a discussion that makes use of the literary criticism of the time and ranges widely from Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* and Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* to writers to whom MacNeice felt very close, Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter and William Golding. Nothing says that Britten was aware of MacNeice’s lectures, or of the contemporary writers quoted, yet we find the coincidence of the poet’s summing up and the musician’s start on a new aesthetic venture intriguing.⁷ We shall examine Britten’s first church parable with the tools that MacNeice provides in his analysis of ‘parable’ and concentrate on the interconnection of parable and ritual, in the libretto and the music, for the creation of a ritual of despair and redemption.

Projecting a private world

- 7 MacNeice suggests that “any parable writer [...] is concerned with the projection of a special world” which may be a private world especially when the author is dealing with man the solitary animal, “the better to regain communion with his fellows” (MacNeice 28). This chimes with Britten’s concept of the local as a way to reach the universal:
- And in my own small experience I have learned that if one concentrates on the local, the particular, if one writes for particular singers, instrumentalists, local occasions, the works can have an actuality, a realistic quality, which can make the result useful to the outside world. (Kildea 209)
- 8 The venue for the first *Curlew River*, Orford’s Norman Church, was itself part of Britten’s private world, his beloved Suffolk, only a few miles down the river Alde. Rising at the top of the village street and set amid a wide space, the church dominates the former medieval town tucked away across the wide river near the North Sea, a double symbol of isolation.
- 9 The parable opens and closes with the prologue and epilogue of the Abbot’s company of monks and instrumentalists walking in a procession to, and later leaving the acting area, singing the plainsong hymn *Te lucis ante terminum*. The procedure, borrowed from Britten’s 1942 *Ceremony of Carols* and used in the recent *Cantata Misericordium*, also recalls the unfolding and folding of the stage backcloth by the musicians at the beginning and end of Noh plays (Coldiron 133). While it provides a framework that removes the audience from their mundane daily concerns and suspends disbelief, the prologue asserts the Abbot’s moral authority, all the more so as, after a flourish of drums and of the chamber organ whose sound evokes ritual, he appeals to them as members of a congregation, “good souls” or “beloved”. Moreover, the audience are constantly reminded of their being the witnesses of a rite either by the monks, as “souls akin to you”, or by the Ferryman, “Mark this well all of you”. This framework sets the parable in the “allegorical tradition of the medieval pulpit” continued by the tradition of the sermon in the village church illustrated among others by Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* (MacNeice 43) while it sets up the audience as potential apostles.

- 10 The play-within-the play structure of the work, with the Abbot calling the story of the Madwoman “our mystery”, which links it with medieval drama, is emphasized by the quadruple frame of the prologue including successively the Gregorian hymn, the Abbot’s address with the triple response “A sign of God’s grace”, the monks’ ensemble “O pray for the souls of all that fall”, and the robing and disrobing ceremonies, inspired by a celebration of Mass at Venice’s San Giorgio Maggiore (Reed and Cooke 563), the latter to a heterophonic instrumental fantasy based on the opening hymn, with the whole sequence in inverse order in the epilogue. That quadruple frame creates a distance and establishes a convention of performance, far removed from traditional opera and closer to liturgy. The sense of a ritual, inspired by the Noh’s coded gestures and stylized dancing, was developed and minutely described in the Production Notes written up by Colin Graham, the director of the original production and included in the Rehearsal Score published by Faber.⁸ Limiting what Graham calls the “miming” to spare, economical gestures, drew attention to each of them, loaded with meaning: “Every movement of the hand or tilt of the head should assume intense meaning and, although formalised, must be designed and executed with the utmost intensity” (CRRS). Britten was involved in every facet of the staging and fine-tuned the music to the acting; Graham notes that “final details of the music were worked out simultaneously with the dramatic ideas (Cooke 154)”. Thus the spare musical material echoed the spare miming.
- 11 Just as Noye presented the action on a rostrum, and not a stage removed from the congregation, with the instrumentalists clearly on view, the first performers of *Curlew River* accessed the main circular stage by a ramp that gradually rose from the audience level. A special raised smaller circular acting area, off-centre, was reserved to the main protagonists of the mystery, the Ferryman, the Traveller and the Madwoman, while the instrumental soloists sat facing the audience on the other side. The parable’s chamber orchestra of flute, horn, double bass, viola, percussion, harp and chamber organ clearly evoked Noh sounds (CRRS). All three principals wore half-masks indicating their character and status⁹, which further removed them from theatrical realism and emphasized their being the denizens of a private world. Their costumes exposed the hems of their monk’s habits, never letting the audience forget they were watching the performers of a ritual included in the ritual of a work of art.
- 12 Ritual includes physical deeds or gestures as well as words. Even though Plomer amply borrowed from the Noh original, Britten insisted on using words that would resonate in European minds, like “land” and “kingdom” as well as that of “river folk” instead of “village” to emphasize the historical remove to his unspecified pre-conquest times or place: “(We might even set it “no-where”, with the “river”, “the village”, etc.)” (Reed and Cooke 131, 558). Contrary to Noh tradition (Cooke 150), the Abbot and the monks as Pilgrims sketchily but suggestively map out the private world of the mystery, a landscape very familiar to Britten, that of the reedy Fenland, whose dyke-intersected marshes, “dyke, marsh and mere, the land of the Eastern Fens”, extend well into Suffolk. Moreover, the horn flourishes that introduce and characterize the Ferryman suggest the wilderness of desolate places traditionally associated with curlews in Celtic lore. Referred to as the “Holy Land of the English” on account of its numerous monastic foundations and the great cathedrals of Ely and Peterborough, the Fens provided many of the shrines or chapels near which the abducted boy dies, like the shrine of our Lady of Walsingham in nearby Norfolk established in 1061: “But we might get a very strong

atmosphere (which I personally love) if we set in in pre-conquest East Anglia where there were shrines galore.”(Reed and Cooke 131). The Traveller and the Madwoman both conjure a mist-covered landscape of heaths, pastures, woods and moorland where danger lurks, in the shape of drovers and foreign pagan slave drivers, which gives the mystery a *Pilgrim’s Progress* (and *Lord of the Rings*) feel which recalls *Viator*, the Traveller in *Cantata Misericordium*, expressing his fears: “*Ah quam longa est haec via*”.

“Divided asunder”: separation’s many faces

- 13 The “glassy” Curlew River, whose still waters run deep, establishes a clear-cut division between the flat marshy Fens of the East and the kingdom of the West and the Black Mountains from which both Madwoman and Traveller originate. The Black Mountains in the Western Marches that the Ferryman mentions may obliquely refer to the hills of Southern Wales, intersected by Offa’s Dyke, which separated the Anglian Kingdom of Mercia from that of Welsh Powys, thus expanding further the theme of separation present in many guises in the mystery. Both chorus and Ferryman, a Charon-like figure, establish the river as agent or symbol of separation as central to the parable.¹⁰ Supported by the organ and evoking the ripples of the lapping waters, the monks’ chorus first introduces the motif of the river separating the two kingdoms after the Ferryman’s entrance and the motif is taken up six times in all, four times in its original guise (Figs. 9, 18, 38 and 79), thus establishing the materiality of the river. The Ferryman insists on its width, its strong currents beneath its glassy surface and the reeds that make it difficult to navigate, invoking God’s help for their crossing. Later on, his long prose narration of the Boy’s story transmutes in time the width of the river as obstacle, echoing Wagner’s Gurnemanz’s “Here space and time are one” to Parsifal at the end of Act I, scene 1¹¹. The emphasis on the river as a boundary also prepares the intrusion of the supernatural as MacNeice recalls: “boundaries between territories, like boundaries between years and between seasons, are lines along which the supernatural intrudes through the surface of existence.” (MacNeice 99) The river then also proves to be a symbol of union as the chorus indicates before Fig. 57 : “Ah Ferryman, Row your ferryboat, Bring nearer, nearer, Person to person, by chance or misfortune, Time, death or misfortune, Divided asunder!” The crossing of the river, with all the mystery’s characters huddling in the small boat, is signalled as being out of time and nowhere, as it opens and closes with the repeat of the monk’s Curlew River chorus. It is the first step towards the final redemption: the three principals are now brought together as the Ferryman narrates the death of the Boy saint, and the Madwoman reveals herself as a noble woman with a noble purpose, “she knows what she seeks”, thus indicating there might be some reason in her madness, a first step towards understanding and acceptance.
- 14 The river image mutates into the motif of yearning, longing and physical separation, introduced by the Madwoman as she steps on stage and asks “Where is my darling now?” The chorus expands the theme with “A thousand league may sunder a mother and her son” at the end of the Madwoman’s first narrative “Near the Black mountains There I dwelt”. It is later varied and expanded, along with the river motif in the Curlew River ensemble at Fig. 56 before the Ferryman’s narration and then again at Fig. 69, when the Traveller, Abbot and Pilgrims leave the boat. The theme is given a further twist with the mysterious Riddle of the Famous Traveller quoted by the Madwoman

(“Tell me, does the one I love In this world still live?”) after she renames “curlews” the birds flying over her head, thinking her son has flown away with them. The riddle is taken up by the Traveller and this develops as the great “Tell me, does the one I love” ensemble, where the voices are dominated by the yearning motif of the flute associated, Lucia-like¹², to the Madwoman. She takes up the riddle a last time, accompanied by the flute, just before the voice of the Spirit is heard as an answer to her frantic questions. The Boy slowly and silently circles round his mother accompanied by a piccolo that indicates their kinship, before giving his mother his blessing.

- 15 The Madwoman introduces a further variation on the separation motif, that of madness as divided self, with her second riddle at Fig. 24 before she finally appears on stage: “Why the point of an arrow Divideth the day? Why to live is to warm An image of clay Dark as the day?” This is set to the same descending musical phrase as “Where the nest of the curlew Is not filled with snow, Here the eyes of the lamb Are untorn by the crow”. Accompanied by the viola’s repeated major seventh chords, it paints the image of her fractured self and disharmony with the world around her, itself a riddle for her confused mind. Hence the three riddles mentioned, akin to the three enigmas of traditional tales, two of which here remain unsolved. The Madwoman takes up the “nest of the curlew” motif, now in a retrograde fashion which indicates her being walled in by grief, as she realises her long-lost child is dead, in the renewed outburst of frenzy in her “O Curlew River, cruel Curlew” monologue at Fig. 76. These very simple examples of madrigalism, inherited from Monteverdi or Bach, abound in Britten’s music. They also belong to the “parable ethos”, where simple, everyday elements provide the basics of its narratives and simple images illustrate meaning.
- 16 Another image of fractured self is the “You mock me, You ask me” motif at Fig. 20 when she is first heard, then the more transparent “Let me in, Let me out” at Fig. 21, which later on becomes the cry of the curlew at Fig. 89. While it adopts the sliding vocal gestures of Noh, the motif is all the more arresting as the Ferryman and the Traveller introduce themselves in the assertive fashion, “I am the Ferryman” or “I come from the Westland”, that recalls the directness of morality plays. Though nothing more than an addition of unequal fourths as Peter Evans indicates (Evans 474), the Madwoman’s motif springs at you from the score’s printed page as the image of the Madwoman literally pulled apart in opposite directions and it generates a series of fourth-based melodic fragments that recall the dilemmas of the Governess in Britten’s *Turn of the Screw* and Britten’s almost ritualistic use of that particular musical interval, foreign to the perfect triads of the tonal system (Couderc 251)¹³. Here those medieval-sounding fourths, and their ambiguous harmonic, *organum*-like, implications, simply illustrate the woman’s alien status.¹⁴ One last image of fragmented self in the “Near the Black Mountains” monologue is the oxymoronic simile “With silence ev’ry room was full, Full of his absence, Roaring like the sea” before Fig. 35, taken up later by the chorus before Fig. 87 as “Deafened by his silence, Roaring like the sea”, in the same monotone as for its first appearance, thus expressing utter despair.
- 17 As MacNeice recalls “the concord of unlikes” belongs to the allegorical tradition (MacNeice 50) and “the presentation of Man’s soul as a lady in distress was as familiar in the Middle Ages as the fact that grass is green (MacNeice 31)”. The Madwoman stands for “the fallen, the lost and the least” described in the monks’ exhortation of the Prologue. Her anguish over the disappearance of her darling and her clawing helplessly at the tomb, and eventual sinking down in tears, recalls that of a figure given much

prominence in Medieval times and early Baroque painting, poetry and music, Mary Magdalene who, according to the Gospel of John (20, 11-16) stoops down, and looks into the empty sepulchre on Easter morning before being comforted by Christ just risen from his grave, the “*Noli me tangere*” scene so prominent in painting. Nothing says that Plomer or Britten were actually aware of the connection but Britten’s many stays in Venice confronted him with many of those *Maddalena a piè della Croce* paintings, the Magdalene at the foot of the Cross that Colin Graham’s Production notes depict (CRRS Fig198), with the Boy’s tomb as a miniature Golgotha. The Magdalene/Easter story may provide listeners with a prescriptive subtext, easy to follow, and lead them to associate the parable with the rituals of Passiontide, very familiar to Peter Pears who collaborated to the writing of the parable, as he often sang the role of the Evangelist in Bach’s *St John’s Passion*, which Britten often conducted (Reed, Cooke and Mitchell 514).

Repetition, despair and redemption

- 18 What is striking so far is the number of repetitions we have underlined. As MacNeice recalls (MacNeice 4), in a long work, to make any impact, an image or a number of poetic images of the same type must recur. Ritual is founded on repetition and *Curlw River* uses repetition to build up its own ritual. Plomer’s use of short lines, often repeated, and of short forms, haiku-like as in “Dew on the grass Sparkles like hope And then is gone”, contributes to the building up of a dream-like atmosphere, akin to that of allegory. Britten’s widespread use of heterophony, when the notes of a melodic fragment provides its harmonies, results in a harmonic halo—hence the prominent use of the organ and harp here—, and also contributes to that dream-like atmosphere. Heterophony is given a further twist in *Curlw River* as singers sometimes repeat the same fragment out of sync with others or instrumentalists are sometimes requested to repeat parts that are not metrically synchronised until one performer has completed a given passage before proceeding, hence the invention of the curlew pause sign, ^^ so as to create what Britten calls “controlled floating” (Reed and Cooke 552).
- 19 Repetition is necessary as musical motifs only make sense to listeners if they are repeated. Repetition also allows for the cohesion of otherwise disparate fragments: in *Curlw River* Britten forgoes the traditional operatic forms that listeners might identify and Plomer and Britten often proceed through textual and musical recapitulations, as indicated above, foreign to Noh conventions, but the better to achieve a sense of completion and of structural balance more comprehensible to Western audiences (Cooke 152). For example the story of the Boy Saint is first sketchily told by the Ferryman when he first appears; “Today is an important day” and completed by the Mother during her “Near the Black Mountains” monologue. It is extensively told during his prose narration, which he opens with the same prologue, while he navigates across the river and soberly reveals the full horror of the child who died like a man. The Ferryman repeats the story a third time to the Madwoman as he urges her to disembark, allowing the pilgrims to connect the Boy and his demented mother, plunging her deeper in despair: “He was the child Sought by *this* madwoman”. The Boy’s story thus provides the mystery with the architecture of a triptych. While this follows the ternary pattern common to Noh plays and to Jesus’ parables (Miller 195-6), the Ferryman’s narration acts as an axis of symmetry around which Britten organises the different monologues in which the Madwoman voices her despair, thus creating

mirror images, as she moves from a figure of fun to an object of pity, and to acceptance. This provides unity to a linear narrative but also depicts the Madwoman's solitary confinement in her grief through those repetitions.

- 20 The Madwoman does indeed often repeat herself. She either repeats long musical sequences, as shown before, or she repeats simple words, as when she is first heard at Fig. 20 "Whither I, whither I go" or "How should I, how should I, how should I know?" or at Fig. 22 "Tell me the, tell me the way" or at Fig. 23 "How can you, how can you, how can you say?", or at Fig. 25 "I turn me, I turn me, I turn me away", a disjointed mode of utterance that conveys her losing her sense of direction and explains her rambling. But it is perilously close to *opera buffa* and Offenbach's "*Bu qui s'avance*" and, inevitably, it provokes the derisive laughter of the Pilgrims and leads them to command the Madwoman to sing for her to be allowed into the boat. On the other hand, repetitions build up the hopeless monotone of the "Next the Black Mountains There I dwelt". Here the reiterated sextuplets of quavers of the instruments are echoed by the Madwoman's voice, then progressively augmented to quintuplets of crochets in a slower tempo to emphasize the stasis of hopeless longing and utter despair from which there seems to be no escape, if we believe her "Hoping I wandered on" monologue at Fig 81, the diffracted mirror image of the "Near the Black Mountain" monologue. At this point the tenor's voice plunges to its lowest register, as if into a pit of darkness. It is as if the Mother had been cast in the dark dungeon of Doubting Castle, the lair of Giant Despair and his wife Diffidence in *Pilgrim's Progress* and, as Bunyan reminds us, despair is a sin against God. It is also the sin that the two enemy soldiers are caused to commit by the warmongers in Britten's *War Requiem*.
- 21 As Cooke remarks, the Mother makes no reference whatsoever to God and finds herself totally unable to pray until she joins in the final verse of the *Custodes hominum* hymn and is freed from her madness by the apparition of her son (Cooke 152). Her utter despair is first contrasted with the Ferryman's attitude and above all, the Traveller's behaviour. Her kinship with the latter is established from the start as he too comes from the Westland on a compelling, mysterious, dangerous and exhausting journey North, suggested by the trudging double bass and harp accompaniment when he first appears. He also seems on a quest, looking for a lost lady love perhaps, as he indicates in the "Tell me, does the one I love?" ensemble, which says he's known the taste of tears. But he acts as a foil to the Mother as he invokes God's help on his journey, decides to remain at the Boy Saint's tomb for worship and, with the Ferryman, he urges her to pray "Lady, remember, All of us here May pray for your child: But *your* prayer is best To rejoice his young soul." As fellow travellers they are the Horatios to the Mother's Hamlet or the Hopeful and Faithful to Bunyan's Christian.
- 22 The Traveller and the Ferryman are thus linked to the parable's ritual of prayer and redemption. It borrows from established liturgies, couched in the age-old language of the Church, thus establishing, like the Abbot's preliminary address, the authority of prescriptive texts, embedding prayer within the mystery. The *Te lucis* hymn, a prayer to be spared the terrors of the night and to obtain spiritual peace, sets up, with the triple repetition of the Gregorian tune, a ternary pattern common to Christian liturgy, which often associates the figure 3 with God. The *Te lucis* melody itself insists on thirds rather than on fourths and, as Peter Evans indicates, "its influence can be detected in almost every section of the work and is always strongest when Christian overtones are touched on" (Evans 472). The hymn *Custodes hominum*, which provides a parallel to the opening

Te lucis and further stitches together the Prologue framework and the mystery, invokes the Holy Trinity, “*Sanctae sit Triadi*”. The three stanzas of the Abbot’s address in the Prologue include the three responses “A sign of God’s grace”. The prayer of the dying Boy “*Kyrie Eleison*”, which belongs to the liturgy of forgiveness of the Mass, also implies a ternary pattern, and that sequence is completed by the Ferryman’s and Traveller’s “Christ have mercy upon us” as they pray before the Boy’s tomb. The Litany that completes their joint prayer “All angels pray for us, All martyrs pray for us, All saints pray for us” also adopts that ternary pattern, and so does the Madwoman’s final “Amen”. Three, as the symbol of divine unity is thus constantly opposed to the unequal fourths associated with the Mother’s fractured self. Here, one is reminded of Britten’s playing with symbolic intervals, like his opposing Tarquinius’s tetrachord to Lucretia’s third-based motif in his *Rape of Lucretia* or Claggart’s fourths to Vere’s fifths and Billy’s thirds in *Billy Budd*, probably one of his most powerful parable operas.

- 23 The steps of the ritual of redemption through prayer and the final “miracle” are clearly indicated and follow that same ternary pattern. It is initiated by an Acolyte tolling the big bell at Fig. 86, a manifest call to prayer and the sound of the bell punctuates the Ferryman and the Traveller’s urging the Mother to pray. Next, the tintinnabulations of the small bells at Fig. 87 imply that some heavenly visitation or some epiphany is at hand, like in the Catholic ritual of consecration when the bread wafer and the wine on the altar become Christ’s flesh and blood. This is confirmed by the chorus’s quatrain “The moon has risen The river breeze is blowing The Curlew River Is flowing to the sea Now it is night And time to pray”. It implies that the light of the Spirit is shining through the darkness and that the energy of the Holy Spirit, the Great Comforter, under the guise of the breeze and the now freely flowing water, is at play, an echo of the Gregorian chant ‘*Veni creator spiritus*’.¹⁵ This is echoed by the Mother’s “I pray with the others Under the light of the cloudless moon” as she joins in with the Ferryman and the Traveller before Fig. 88. All instruments and singers then combine for the “*Custodes hominum*” ensemble at Fig. 88. The return to Gregorian and Latin, from which Ferryman and Traveller and the Mother are first excluded, signals the shift from drama to liturgy, while the intrusion of English, with Owen’s first poem, signalled the move from liturgy to drama in the *War Requiem*’s Introit. As the Mother joins in the hymn for the climax of the ensemble at Fig. 90, the voice of the Spirit, a solo treble, is heard in the tomb as he repeats his mother’s “*Sanctae sit Triadi*” in an echo. The effect, with the soprano range of the boy contrasting with the mostly lower ranges of the chorus is as miraculous as the treble’s soaring above the monotone of the men’s voices in Allegri’s *Miserere*. When the Mother and the chorus realise they have heard her son’s voice between Fig. 91 and 93, the audience’s relation to the action suddenly change: they listen and see with the protagonists the Spirit appear in full view above the tomb, placing them on the same plane as the protagonists (Rupprecht 240). The Spirit circles round his mother, whom he blesses with the pilgrims to the same monotone as his Mother’s with its characteristic end-of-line fall, another sign of their kinship. She bows her head, disappears behind the Pilgrims and a shortened reprise of the robing music brings the parable to its epilogue.

Epilogue

- 24 Colin Graham's Notes indicate that "no lights should be turned on in the church at the end of the piece until an appreciable pause", thus giving time for the audience to meditate and ponder the mystery in the semi-darkness, in keeping with Britten's almost constant inclusion of epilogues in his operas (Couderc 2004). What is striking is how successfully the Christianisation of the Noh play works despite Plomer's ample borrowings from the original translation and how the "Zen-Buddhist bits" were given a Western flavour, more familiar to Britten and his audiences, including the change from the Japanese pine tree as a symbol of grief to the more familiar yew tree of Western poetry. This is Britten's way of joining East and West and of aiming at universality, as the special stage set devised for the parable indicates, with its circular stage akin to the *Orbis Terrarum* or *Mappa Mundi* of Medieval times. If Graham's Notes today sound pedantic and self-important to some (Kildea 2013, 467) and modern producers ignore Britten's masks, such stylised gestures have become the trademark of producer Bob Wilson in his attempt to emphasize the role of ritual through language and movement in his opera productions. Can we connect Britten's interest in religious drama with contemporary playwrights like Beckett and Pinter, whose work for MacNeice was a "return to the original, religious function of the theatre" as "these playwrights use the theatre in the way the Church used ritual" (MacNeice 15)? Britten's reference to "the deep solemnity and selflessness of the acting, the perfect shaping of the drama (like a great Greek tragedy)" when describing his reactions to Noh may point this way and so does Plomer's and Britten's awareness of Yeats' and Ezra Pound's interest in Noh and their wish to renew the language of the stage.
- 25 *Curlew River* certainly points back to the parable tradition of *Pilgrim's Progress* with the double quest of the Traveller and the Mother, and to the great English tradition of sacred music and oratorio to which the *War Requiem* gave a bitter twist. But it also points back to some of Britten's previous parables and the various meanings each may offer. Contrary to Peter Grimes, considered as a madman whose gradual exclusion from the community of the village is shown through a series of emblematic scenes of social ritual,—the "Good morning" ceremonies, the round in the pub and the yearly dance at the Moot Hall—, the Madwoman is finally integrated in the community of the boat, a likely symbol for society and the Church, through the intercession of the Traveller and the Pilgrims, since "she knows what she seeks". Similarly, she is integrated in the community of the believers through personal prayer and a process of mutual understanding, she learning of her son's whereabouts from the Ferryman who eventually comes to accept her in his boat once he has understood her quest. As Wiebe indicates, the process of learning from an encounter with the unknown or the Other is part and parcel of the parable genre (Wiebe 2013, 169), and it recalls the *déclassé* Samaritan's encounter with the Traveller of strict Jewish observance in Britten's *Cantata Misericordium*. Yet the Madwoman's boarding the boat is only procured through her singing, amid the derisive laughter of the Pilgrims, which may be read as a means for Britten to voice his anguish, already sounded in *Paul Bunyan* or in *Peter Grimes*, about the place of the artist in modern society or, for that matter, about his place (and Pears's) as a homosexual in the community.¹⁶ The viola was Britten's instrument when playing in a string quartet and its major sevenths underpinning the Madwoman's riddles then afford a very personal meaning.¹⁷ The issue of the place of the artist, and of

the musician in society, Britten took up again in his Aspen Award speech of July 1964, barely a month after the first performance of *Curlew River*. He quotes an anecdote of his youth, where his career plans as a composer were met by a scathing “Yes, but what else?” and then articulates the mild view that the artist shall be accepted as an essential part of human activity and of value to the community (Kildea 2003, 258-9). As a figure of exclusion, finally accepted into the mainstream, the Mother rapidly disappears behind the Pilgrims, with no clear indication of her fate, in an ambiguous ending. Her plight also reflects Britten’s own struggles for humanitarian and pacifist ideals as they are expressed in his occasional works as well as in his operas.

- 26 Contrary to Britten’s operas where children’s innocence is abused, *Peter Grimes*, *The Little Sweep* or the *Turn of the Screw*, the child here is an agent of redemption and the mother redeemed, an exception in Britten’s gallery of rogue parents, further extended in his 1965 *Songs and Proverbs of William Blake*, which incorporate some of the poet’s most violent denunciation of the Church and of dogma-manacled parenthood, *London* and *The Chimney Sweeper*. Yet, as Wiebe remarks, if Noye was joyfully eclectic, humorous and boisterously communal, a romp for children performers that insisted in the full presence of the divine, *Curlew River* uses ritual and the medieval as exotic and remote (*pace* the pre-Conquest times) and involves a brief glimpse of the very abstract Holy Spirit “to offer a very different vision of redemption, as purity and austerity, as distantly abstract, as fundamentally individual” (Wiebe 190). With the pruning of Shakespeare’s first act, Britten’s 1960 *Midsummer Night’s Dream* hardly leaves Oberon’s wood, isolating the play’s characters in the Fairy King’s demesne. Between the completion of *Noye* and *Curlew River* Britten composed his *War Requiem* which grants eternal peace to the two soldiers isolated in the tiny world of the chamber orchestra and then only very reluctantly to the Latin-singing choir standing for the anonymous crowd of mourners. *Cantata Misericordium* also delivers a message of one-to-one redemption through compassion. Can we see there the expression of Britten’s growing pessimism in the face of contemporary events, the Cold War and its dire consequences, despite his holding on to his parable-art principles? After the *River*, Britten was to write two other Church parables, thus removing himself further from the world of opera until the 1970’s. *Curlew River* is also the story of Britten’s gradual self-imposed isolation from the world of large cities and his entrenchment in the microcosm of Aldeburgh, its festival and the newly opened Snape Maltings, as a respite from a busy international career. The worldwide success of his *War Requiem* also unsettled him, caused him to doubt his powers of musical invention as well as his status as a composer and sent him on a quest for new musical approaches and partnerships, as exemplified by his return to the highly private and rarefied world of chamber music with the three *Cello Suites* written for his great friend Slava Rostropovitch (Couderc 2006).¹⁸

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NOTES

1. As Plomer's libretto sometimes quotes verbatim from that translation, Faber included an acknowledgement of the play's 1955 authorised English translation published by the Japanese Classics Translation Committee in Tokyo in the Rehearsal Score (Reed and Cooke 580).
2. Once bitten, twice shy. Britten probably remembered the music critic Ernest Newman, then hostile to him, comparing Captain Vere's Act I muster in his 1951 *Billy Budd* with Captain Corcoran's in Gilbert & Sullivan's ever popular, zany *H.M.S. Pinafore*.
3. *Canticle II: Abraham and Isaac*, op. 51, and *Noye's Fludde*, op. 59, resulted from his reading of Alfred W. Pollard's 1927 edition of *English Miracle Plays, Moralities and Interludes: Specimens of the Pre-Elizabethan Drama* and Hermann Deimling's edition of *The Chester Plays*. He also studied intensively the two volumes of Karl Young's *The Drama of the Medieval Church* (Reed and Cooke 134). Following the success of *Noye* Britten planned another children's opera he called the "Xmas piece" and put together a libretto derived from Herbert Deimling's edition of the Chester Miracle Plays (1892) but the project was shelved with the composition of the second Church Parable (Reed and Cooke 2012, 621).
4. The 1955 Aldeburgh Festival included a performance of 'The Second Shepherd's Play' from the Wakefield (or Towneley) Mystery. In 1960 Britten saw the *Play of Daniel*, a 1958 revival of the thirteenth-century liturgical drama from Beauvais by American producer Noah Greenberg. The performance he profoundly hated: "an object lesson in how not to do a mediaeval play" (Reed and Cooke 250-2, Wiebe 151-190).
5. For Auden's paramount influence on Britten, see Donald Mitchell, *Britten & Auden in the Thirties*. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2000
6. Britten set to music the poet's "Cradle Song for Elinor" in 1942, collaborated with MacNeice for three programmes as part of BBC-CBS series, *Britain to America*, between 1942 and 1943, and provided incidental music for MacNeice's *Dark Tower*, a radio play of 1945. (Kildea 2013, 216). Auden and MacNeice had travelled together in Iceland hence their 1937 poems, *Letters from Iceland*.
7. In his Introduction, perhaps thinking on his past experiences with Britten, MacNeice indicates sound radio as the medium very well able "to achieve the necessary suspension of disbelief and tempting one to experiment in modern morality plays or parable plays (MacNeice 9)."
8. Colin Graham had directed the first performance of Britten's *Noye's Fludde* in 1958 as well as designed its setting and was Director of Productions of Britten's English Opera Group from 1961 to 1975. He later wrote the libretto for Britten's 1967 *Golden Vanity*.
9. "The Madwoman, an elderly noble woman, the Ferryman, a bluff but likeable character, the Traveller, an older, experienced and kindly man". (CRRS).
10. All Britten's alternative titles for the parable, "Across the river" or "Over the river" included the word "river".
11. « *Zum Raum wird hier die Zeit*», Richard Wagner. *Parsifal*. Paris, Aubier, Editions Montaigne, 1984, p.98.
12. Britten's Thisbe in his 1960 *Midsummer Night's Dream* is associated with the flute which accompanies mad Lucia in Act III of Donizetti's opera, *Lucia di Lammermoor*.
13. The 'Screw' Theme that piles up a series of perfect fourths and opens, like an overture, the Governess's narrative in Britten's 1954 *Turn of the Screw*, Act I, scene 1, is a perfect example of the disquieting sound of that opera's fourth-based melodies.
14. A primitive form of heterophony, where two parallel plainchant melodic lines span consonant intervals like a fourth or a fifth.
15. "Come, Holy Ghost, Creator blest, And in our hearts take up Thy rest; Come with Thy grace and heavenly aid, To fill the hearts which Thou hast made.
O Comforter, to Thee we cry, Thou heavenly gift of God most high, Thou Fount of life, and Fire of

love, And sweet anointing from above.

O Finger of the hand divine, The sevenfold gifts of grace are thine; True promise of the Father thou, Who dost the tongue with power endow.

Thy light to every sense impart, And shed thy love in every heart; Thine own unfailing might supply to strengthen our infirmity.

Drive far away our ghostly foe, And thine abiding peace bestow; If thou be our preventing Guide, No evil can our steps betide.

Praise we the Father and the Son And Holy Spirit with them One; And may the Son on us bestow The gifts that from the Spirit flow.

V. Send forth Thy Spirit, and they shall be created.

R. And Thou shalt renew the face of the earth.”

Britten first used the plainsong hymn for the prelude of his 1938 “religious cantata”, *The World of the Spirit*, broadcast on BBC on Whit Sunday, which concludes with an extended setting of four of its verses in the English translation of poet Robert Bridges.

16. The Madwoman’s costume never let the audience forget that it was being performed by a man and Pears was advised against performing the part lest he should be seen as a man in drag.

17. When Britten left for the US in May 1939, Franck Bridge, very much a father figure for Britten, presented him with his own viola.

18. The First Suite was first performed for the 1965 Aldeburgh Festival.

ABSTRACTS

Benjamin Britten defined himself as “a composer for an occasion” and some of his works are composed for commemorations and civic or religious ceremonies which conform to their own rituals. As an opera composer, a genre which stages rites and rituals and obeys to its own forms, Britten was very much aware of the necessity of ritual to which he wished to actively associate audience participation. The composer belonged to the Auden Generation and enjoyed a close relationship with the poet who believed in the concept of parable art. So it is no wonder that his *Curlew River*, his adaptation of the Noh play, *Sumidagawa*, should transfer the ritual of Japanese drama in a Fenland community of monks in pre-Conquest times and should be subtitled *A parable for church performance*. Partly based on the analysis of parable by his former associate, the poet Louis McNeice, this study will focus on Britten’s integration of the genre’s characteristics—its didactic intentions and references to prescriptive texts, the creation of a private world, the encounter with, and acceptance of the Other—to the rituals of operatic conventions and on the composer’s universalist message which barely hides Britten’s anxieties about the place of the artist and the alien in his time.

Benjamin Britten se définit comme un « musicien de circonstance » et certaines de ses œuvres sont composées pour des commémorations ou des cérémonies civiles ou religieuses qui obéissent à des rituels particuliers. Comme compositeur d’opéra, genre qui met en scène des rites et qui possède ses propres rites, Britten était sensible à la notion de rituel auquel il souhaite toujours associer la participation active du spectateur. Il appartient aussi à la « génération Auden », le poète, ami et mentor des années 1930, qui pratique l’art de la parabole. Aussi, il n’est guère surprenant qu’il donne à *Curlew River* (*La Rivière au coulis*), son adaptation de la pièce du théâtre No, *Sumidagawa*, qui transpose le rituel du drame japonais chez une communauté de moines des

Fens anglais avant la conquête normande, le sous-titre de *Parabole pour être jouée à l'église* (*Parable for church performance*). Se fondant en partie sur l'analyse de l'art de la parabole par son contemporain et ancien collaborateur, le poète Louis McNeice, autre membre de la Génération Auden, cette étude se concentrera sur l'intégration des caractéristiques de la parabole —souci de pédagogie, appel à des textes prescripteurs, création d'un monde particulier, connaissance et accueil de l'Autre— , aux rituels de l'opéra et sur le message œcuménique du compositeur qui laisse cependant transparaître les inquiétudes de Britten sur la place de l'artiste et du déviant dans la société de son temps.

INDEX

Keywords: parabole, ritual, Noh, narrative framework, plainsong, epilogue, madrigalism

Mots-clés: parabole, rituel, Nô, cadre diégétique, plain-chant, épilogue, madrigalismes

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AS - Aux sources des negro spirituals : l'expérience de Port Royal à travers *Slave Songs of the United States* (1867)

Franck Ferraty

- 1 L'étude raisonnée *Slave Songs of the United States* (1867) – conçue comme une enquête rigoureuse – fait date dans l'histoire de la musique afro-américaine, car elle constitue la première transcription de 136 negro spirituals réunis, choisis, présentés et annotés par un trio de musicologues nord-américains blancs, pionniers en la matière. Marchant sur leurs traces, nous avons voulu contextualiser et sonder cette source, en souligner les pleins mais aussi les creux.
- 2 Sur les chemins de Port Royal et des Sea Islands, se dessine une « partition » originale black and white, d'où affleure l'onde vertueuse de trois chercheurs en quête d'humanité sur fond de scientificité.¹
- 3 Le 7 novembre 1861, soit quelques mois seulement après le début de la guerre de Sécession, Port Royal, ville confédérée de Caroline du Sud située sur la côte est des États-Unis, tombait aux mains des troupes de l'Union. Dix mille esclaves furent ainsi libérés. Le Gideon's Band,² constitué de missionnaires et d'abolitionnistes, militait alors pour la création d'écoles gratuites – aidé en cela par l'American Missionary Society – et pour que le gouvernement fédéral offrît des terres aux nouveaux affranchis leur permettant d'accéder à un marché du travail libre. C'est dans ce contexte d'émancipation grandissante que trois auteurs américains, William Francis Allen (1830-1889),³ Charles Pickard Ware (1840-1921),⁴ Lucy McKim Garrison (1842-1877),⁵ entreprirent de réunir des negro spirituals dans un recueil intitulé *Slave Songs of the United States* (1867). Sur la route d'une ethnomusicologie naissante,⁶ ils allaient sillonner de féconds territoires chantés à la recherche d'une identité noire à la force libératrice.

- 4 Ces chants, transcrits, ont été méthodiquement collectés dans le voisinage de Port Royal (comté de Beaufort) et des Sea Islands⁷ (île de St. Helena notamment). Il fallait, à travers l'exégèse de productions vocales éminemment expressives, redonner une dignité à des hommes, des femmes et des enfants goûtant à la liberté après des années d'asservissement. Entre 1863 et 1864, William Francis Allen et son épouse Mary firent œuvre de militantisme en dirigeant dans les îles de Caroline du Sud une école pour les esclaves nouvellement affranchis, lesquels découvraient ainsi les vertus d'un enseignement émancipateur.⁸
- 5 Montrer et démontrer le génie afro-américain, tel fut le credo des trois musicologues qui s'employèrent à rendre audibles les mélodies noires dans leur contexte sociolinguistique. Fondatrice, cette mission musicale le fut dans le sens où pour la première fois on s'intéressait à un corpus original – et originel – jusque-là ignoré, car issu d'une population servile longtemps considérée comme non humaine. Le succès – auprès des Blancs – de certains spirituals particulièrement fervents assit la réussite de cette entreprise philanthropique qui s'était donnée pour but de ré-humaniser l'homme noir à travers sa voix, celle d'un peuple en marche, une voix collective forçant le respect et l'admiration.
- 6 Lucy McKim Garrison avait déjà amorcé le mouvement de revival en consacrant en 1862 un article au sujet et en publiant le 8 novembre de la même année dans le *Dwight's Journal of Music* deux negro spirituals, « Roll Jordan » [« Roule, Jourdain »] (n° 1) et « Poor Rosy » [« Pauvre Rosy »] (n° 8).⁹ Dans la même mouvance, un certain H.G. Spaulding, un an plus tard, offrit à un mensuel new yorkais quelques spécimens de chants afro-américains dont « O, Lord, remember me » [« O, Seigneur, souviens-toi de moi »] (n° 15) et « The Lonesome Valley » [« La vallée solitaire »] (n° 7).
- 7 Outre les publications mentionnées ci-dessus, les sources proviennent essentiellement d'une compilation due à Charles Pickard Ware qui, dans *Slave Songs of the United States*, rassembla des negro spirituals à Coffin's Point, sur l'île de St. Helena :
- Nous [W. F. Allen, C. P. Ware et L. McK. Garrison] avons jugé préférable de faire de ce recueil [celui de C. P. Ware] dans son intégralité la base de notre travail ; y sont inclus tous les hymnes jusqu'au n° 43. Ceux qui suivent [ceux de W. F. Allen], jusqu'au n° 55, ont été recueillis par mes soins dans les plantations du Capitaine John Fripp et les plantations avoisinantes, sur la même île (Allen, Ware et Garrison 3).
- 8 Il faut ajouter à ce corpus de nombreuses contributions (une vingtaine), dont celles, remarquées, de Mr Kane O'Donnel (n° 66 et 82), du lieutenant-colonel Charles Tyler Trowbridge (n° 26, 49, 58, 61, 63-65, 121), et surtout du colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson (1823-1911),¹⁰ lequel, par ses compétences musicales, son engagement jamais démenti pour la cause noire, sa collaboration bienveillante à l'égard de ce projet, a apporté sa pierre d'angle à l'édifice (n° 49, 58-65).¹¹
- 9 La difficulté à transcrire ces chants fut réelle, car ceux-ci posaient d'épineux problèmes d'écriture tant sur le plan mélodico-rythmique que linguistique. De par leur aspect improvisé et glissant, ils ne se laissaient apprivoiser que relativement, la recherche de l'exactitude en ce domaine constituant un horizon chimérique. S'en approcher restait toutefois possible, après avoir pris la précaution de rappeler la volatilité des paroles sujettes à de nombreuses variantes, le caractère interchangeable et enchâssé de certains refrains, l'inconfort à traduire en notes de musique des inflexions mélodiques insaisissables. Miss McKim Garrison écrit ainsi :

Il est difficile d'exprimer tout le caractère de ces ballades chantées par les noirs avec de simples notes de musique. Les étranges effets gutturaux, les curieux effets rythmiques produits par les voix de solistes qui font chorus à intervalles irréguliers, tout cela semble presque aussi impossible à transcrire sur une partition que le chant des oiseaux ou les sons d'une harpe éolienne (Allen, Ware et Garrison 6).

- 10 L'entreprise se révéla audacieuse car elle jetait les bases d'une expertise pionnière¹² qu'il serait – au regard des résultats engrangés – malvenu de frapper d'« impuissance » ou de « nullité ». ¹³ *Slave Songs of the United States* a le mérite d'exister, offrant par là-même à la communauté scientifique un corpus non négligeable de 136 spirituals contextualisés et transcrits susceptibles de faire avancer la recherche ;¹⁴ il est le premier ouvrage à transcrire sur papier un patrimoine jusque-là véhiculé par la seule tradition orale. [...] Ces faits marquants sont les prémices d'un effort collectif de propagation qui passera par la diffusion de partitions lors des tournées américaines, et parfois européennes, de la plupart des groupes universitaires impliqués dans la mouvance des Jubilee Songs (Balen 70, 73).
- 11 Concernant la méthode de transcription, les auteurs se sont imposés de ne négliger aucune variante, qu'il s'agisse des mélodies ou des paroles. Pour ce qui est de l'orthographe, ils ont adopté la démarche du colonel Higginson :
- Les mots seront transcrits ici, le plus fidèlement possible, dans leur dialecte d'origine ; et si l'orthographe semble parfois incohérente, ou les fautes d'orthographe insuffisantes, c'est parce que je [T.W. Higginson] n'ai pas pu coller davantage au message original (Allen, Ware et Garrison 21).
- 12 Dans leur volonté de réhabiliter ces chants et pour leur donner une plus grande audience, les trois musicologues – sur le modèle de ce que préconisait alors l'actrice et écrivaine anglaise Frances Anne Kemble – en appelèrent à un compositeur de talent capable de mettre en scène un opéra à succès intégrant quelques couplets et refrains noirs. En 1867, il était encore un peu tôt pour que se réalisât un tel projet. En revanche, plus tard, Antonín Dvořák,¹⁵ avec sa 9^e Symphonie dite du Nouveau Monde (1893), et George Gerschwin, avec son opéra *Porgy and Bess* (1935), concrétiseraient ce souhait.
- 13 Abolitionnistes et humanistes dans l'âme, les auteurs insistent sur l'aspect métissé de ces productions vocales originales mêlant inextricablement cultures noire et blanche : les termes utilisés – en dépit des précautions prises – témoignent néanmoins de la persistance de catégories et de réflexes sémantiques marqués par deux siècles et demi d'esclavage et donc de suprématie raciale (elle-même sous-tendue par une culture dominante d'obédience anglo-saxonne). Le paradoxe d'une telle attitude tient en ces quelques mots : une musique « civilisée » conçue par des « barbares » ou « demi-barbares ».
- 14 L'imbrication du profane et du sacré, consubstantielle au genre spiritual, conduit William Francis Allen à s'interroger sur les transferts possibles de mélodies « purement noires » vers une pratique religieuse. En l'absence d'étude approfondie – tout au moins à l'époque – sur les spécificités propres aux musiques ethniques d'Afrique, l'auteur avance l'hypothèse d'une authenticité du répertoire fondée sur un processus d'africanisation de la pensée religieuse européenne : ainsi, les exemples de negro spirituals les mieux « révélés », c'est-à-dire les plus enracinés dans leur africanité, seraient à rechercher dans des chants non religieux :

- 15 Il nous faut chercher parmi les chansons non religieuses les spécimens les plus purs des negro spirituals. On remarquera que les noirs ont eux-mêmes transféré les meilleurs de ces spécimens vers un usage religieux – je suppose que selon le principe de Mr Wesley « il n'est pas juste que le Diable possède tous les bons airs de musique ». Les leaders et prédicateurs n'ont pas trouvé ce changement difficile à négocier ; ou du moins ils ont pris si peu de peine à le faire qu'on détecte très souvent l'affleurement du profane, révélant ainsi l'origine des cantiques les plus solennels, en dépit des meilleures intentions du poète et de l'artiste (Allen, Ware et Garrison 21).
- 16 L'appropriation de l'hymnodie et des cantiques traditionnels protestants s'est faite par acculturation : les Noirs se sont convertis progressivement – avec plus ou moins de réticence de la part des planteurs exploitants – à la religion des Blancs et en se convertissant, ils ont adopté la langue des maîtres, c'est-à-dire l'anglais, qu'ils ont arrangé en « patois » : ils ont, de ce fait, créolisé le chanté européen en lui insufflant un « esprit » noir (goût pour le « shout », l'improvisation, la transe). Les paroles faisaient l'objet très fréquemment de modifications liées aux aléas de l'improvisation collective, les Afro-américains prenant un malin plaisir à se réapproprier la langue des maîtres en arrangeant le texte à leur convenance, soit par analogie phonétique, soit pour faire coller coûte que coûte les mots à la mélodie, soit par incompréhension du sens, soit pour toutes ces raisons à la fois.
- 17 Il y a une spécificité du parler noir des îles de Port Royal liée à l'isolement de cette région. Forts de ce constat, les trois auteurs se livrent à une analyse sociolinguistique des idiomes afro-américains concernés apparus par acculturation, processus qu'ils qualifient de « décadence phonétique » et dont les termes trahissent curieusement un complexe de supériorité amoindri par l'usage des guillemets : une étymologie et une syntaxe réduites à leur plus simple expression, tels sont les corollaires de cette langue « indigène ». Il est coutume d'entendre les sons anglais th, v ou f atténués en d et b : « Chez ce peuple, le processus de « décadence phonétique » semble être allé probablement le plus loin qu'il puisse aller, et avec lui une extrême simplification de l'étymologie et de la syntaxe. Il y a, bien sûr, le traditionnel adoucissement des sons th, v ou f en d et b ; de même existe-t-il une fréquente permutation entre v et w comme dans veeds et vell pour weeds [mauvaises herbes] et well, woices et punkin wine pour voices et pumpkin vine [plantation de citrouilles]. « De wile (vilest) sinner may return » [« Le pécheur le plus vil peut revenir »] (n° 48). Ce dernier exemple illustre aussi cette habitude récurrente consistant à avaler les mots et les syllabes, comme lee'bro pour little brother, plânt'shun pour plantation » (Allen, Ware et Garrison 25).
- 18 Pour relativiser la portée « universelle » de ces productions vocales, les auteurs insistent sur le fait que les chants collectés l'ont été sur un périmètre étroit, les 43 premiers negro spirituals du recueil ayant été entendus sur une seule et même plantation, dont toutes les ressources musicales de surcroît n'avaient pas été épuisées. À cette réserve, il faut ajouter un autre obstacle potentiel, la réticence fort probable des Noirs nouvellement affranchis à chanter des airs qui leur rappelaient les temps sombres et douloureux de l'esclavage.
- 19 Les chants se déplaçant lentement, il n'était pas rare de trouver de multiples variantes d'une même mélodie cantonnées à un secteur restreint, tel Coffin's Point, plantation de coton située dans le voisinage de Port Royal, où convergèrent certains spirituals.¹⁶ Ainsi, à un mille de distance, on ne s'exprimait déjà plus tout à fait pareil (un « patois » par plantation) : pour preuve, l'identification de l'origine géographique de certains

habitants établie grâce à leur parler. Celui-ci, dans sa structure interne, laissait transparaître les traces de la langue maternelle (dialecte africain) et de la langue dominante (anglais), le mélange et le métissage des deux aboutissant à un résultat curieusement étranger, c'est-à-dire non anglais :¹⁷

Les mots étranges, les curieuses manières de prononcer, les fréquentes abréviations, travestissent les traits familiers d'une langue maternelle, pendant que les modulations rythmiques, si caractéristiques de certaines langues européennes, lui donnent une sonorité entièrement non-anglaise. Après avoir passé six mois parmi eux, je [W. F. Allen] ne comprenais toujours pas certains élèves de mon école, pourtant parmi les plus assidus, sauf si par hasard ils parlaient très lentement (Allen, Ware et Garrison 24).

20 Lucy McKim Garrison fut la première à identifier la « langue Gullah parlée par les ex-esclaves des Sea Islands, qui étaient venus d'Afrique tous en même temps et avaient conservé en partie leur dialecte d'origine, qu'ils mélangeaient avec l'anglais » (Hope Bacon 6). Il arrivait aussi que certains chants et leurs variantes fussent entendus dans des États limitrophes : le commerce d'esclaves entre plantations voisines facilitait les échanges permettant aux spirituals de circuler et de franchir aisément les frontières.

21 Pour se soustraire à la surveillance des maîtres, les esclaves se retrouvaient clandestinement la nuit dans les hush harbors (havres de paix ou abris silencieux) ou brush arbors (tonnelles de broussailles). Lors de ces réunions de grande ferveur religieuse, remontant à la surface, le corps possédé par l'esprit laissait affleurer les racines africaines via la danse, la transe et les cris qui en sont caractéristiques (Rouget 215-217). William Francis Allen nous donne une excellente description de ces « scènes de la forêt », dont le but était de faire descendre l'Esprit afin que l'écu « trouve une chose », la foi en l'occurrence :

Une de leurs coutumes, à laquelle il est souvent fait allusion dans les chansons (comme dans le n° 19), est de déambuler à travers bois et marécages sous l'effet de l'exaltation religieuse, comme les bacchantes dans l'antiquité. Le sentiment religieux consiste pour eux à « trouver une chose (Allen, Ware et Garrison 12).

22 Le cri, résurgence de l'Afrique ancestrale – mais aussi imitation du pow-wow amérindien –,¹⁸ a frappé les esprits car il est l'incarnation fulgurante d'une expression vocale communautaire pulsionnelle (un exutoire aux traumatismes vécus). Il a élu domicile, entre autres, en Caroline du Sud (notamment à Port Royal) et dans les états situés au sud de celui-ci (en Floride en particulier). Il fut l'apanage des églises baptistes fort répandues dans les Sea Islands, où sa pratique se révéla féconde.

23 Les cris et les chansons de rameurs se partageaient les mêmes airs. La dimension spiritual s'invite tout particulièrement dans un chant de bateliers « Michael row the boat ashore » [« Michel rame vers la rive »] (n° 31), où le narrateur invoque directement l'archange Michel. Charles Pickard Ware a transcrit toute une série d'airs « marins » en respectant le tempo et le timing imposés par la succession régulière des coups de rame dans l'eau. Ces chants, profanes pour la plupart, entendus à Philadelphie et Baltimore, sur le Mississippi, ou encore à Port Royal, révèlent leur lien de parenté parfois étroit avec le continent africain : « Mr E.S. Philbrick a été frappé par la ressemblance entre certains airs chantés par les rameurs à Port Royal et les chansons des bateliers qu'il avait entendues sur le Nil » (Allen, Ware et Garrison 8).

24 La récurrence de certaines chansons « à succès » associées à des travaux ou à des états d'âme distincts obligeait les interprètes à varier les tempi en fonction des tâches qui

leur étaient assignées : un même chant, comme par exemple « Poor Rosy », interprété par des bateliers en train de ramer, par des enfants faisant tourner une meule, ou encore par une mère endeuillée, ne possédait pas le même tempo ni le même ethos.

- 25 Le colonel T.W. Higginson relate la manière dont un rameur lui expliqua comment il avait inventé une chanson (Higginson 692) : quelques mots mis bout à bout narrent une histoire, laquelle, vocalisée sur un air improvisé doté d'un refrain facilement mémorisable, est reprise en chœur par les autres rameurs :

Je [Higginson] me suis toujours demandé si elles [les chansons] avaient une origine consciemment définie, mentalement structurée, ou si elles se formaient par couches successives, par un processus quasi inconscient. Sur ce point, je ne pus recueillir aucun renseignement, bien que je posasse maintes questions, jusqu'à ce qu'enfin, un jour où je faisais la traversée en bateau de Beaufort à Ladies' Island, je me trouvai pour mon plus grand bonheur véritablement sur le chemin d'une chanson. [...] Mon rêve se réalisait, j'avais dépité non seulement le poème mais aussi le poète. [...] Il se mit alors à chanter et les autres hommes, après l'avoir écouté un instant, reprirent en chœur le refrain comme s'ils le connaissaient depuis longtemps alors que de toute évidence ils ne l'avaient jamais entendu. Je vis avec quelle facilité une nouvelle « chanson » pouvait naître chez eux (Allen, Ware et Garrison 17-18).

- 26 Chose curieuse, W. F. Allen, C. P. Ware et L. McK. Garrison semblent convaincus que « les noirs n'ont pas de chants à plusieurs voix » (21-22) : ce constat ne colle pas à la réalité puisque les spirituals étaient chantés en polyphonie – certes réduite –, mais polyphonie tout de même. Peut-être faut-il voir dans cette erreur d'appréciation une difficulté à percevoir des lignes distinctes à l'intérieur de superpositions vocales relativement complexes,¹⁹ où la mélodie pouvait néanmoins primer sur l'harmonie en certains endroits (comme les refrains par exemple). Les auteurs d'ailleurs se contredisent un peu plus loin lorsqu'ils observent l'habitude des Noirs à ne pas « chanter la même chose » (5) ou à chanter de manière décalée – c'est-à-dire à plusieurs voix : « On chante en décalage, comme nous l'avons déjà mentionné, à tel point qu'à aucun moment il n'y a de pause complète. C'est dans « A House in Paradise » (n° 40) que ce décalage est le plus marqué » (23). Cette distorsion – involontaire – relevée dans le discours trahit néanmoins une non infaillibilité à l'égard du travail d'investigation entrepris, non infaillibilité d'ailleurs pleinement revendiquée et assumée par les trois musicologues qui, avec une modestie touchante, admettent une certaine marge d'« imperfection » dans leur action :

Conscients que celui-ci [le présent volume] comporte de nombreuses imperfections, qu'il est le résultat d'un travail de coopération considérable pendant près d'un an, les Auteurs le soumettent cependant au jugement du public, avec la conviction qu'il sera considéré comme digne d'être définitivement préservé (Allen, Ware et Garrison 38).

- 27 Le titre *Slave Songs of the United States* – ambitieux – s'avère néanmoins abusif, car il semble sous-entendre que les auteurs ont pu arpenter la totalité des États-Unis. Une telle attitude a pu servir, plus ou moins consciemment, la propagande gouvernementale qui voyait là un moyen de diffuser l'image d'un grand pays réunifié à travers une étude ethnomusicologique de tout premier plan.
- 28 En réalité, l'ouvrage concernait, plus modestement, un nombre limité de chants collectés pour la plupart dans la région de Port Royal, ce dont étaient parfaitement conscients les auteurs qui reconnaissaient que les particularités rencontrées sur le

terrain – élargies aux États esclavagistes du Sud-Est – ne pouvaient être érigées en règle générale.

- 29 Publiée en 1867, soit au lendemain d'une guerre fratricide, où les belligérants s'étaient féroce­ment affrontés durant quatre longues années sur une ligne de fracture béante (celle de la Sécession), cette étude – engagée – se voulait d'abord et avant tout un manifeste en faveur de la politique d'émancipation menée par les troupes de l'Union sorties victorieuses du conflit et soucieuses de réconcilier le pays au sein de ce que l'on appelait alors le gouvernement fédéral. Il fallait affirmer énergiquement la cohésion politique d'un tel projet. Le recueil *Slave Songs of the United States* y contribue par sa volonté militante de traduire en musique les thèses abolitionnistes défendues par la nouvelle Union : les esclaves affranchis furent – pour un temps – élevés au rang d'humains regagnant ainsi une dignité perdue autrefois. Leurs spirituals participent à la révélation du génie musical noir, lequel clame haut et fort les couleurs de l'âme afro-américaine.

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NOTES

1. Je remercie chaleureusement Francis Daubas, professeur d'anglais retraité, de m'avoir fait l'amitié de traduire avec beaucoup d'à-propos l'ouvrage dont il est question ici, corpus de première main dont il faut souligner la qualité et la valeur historiographiques. Il a également traduit, pour les besoins de la présente étude, certains articles en américain figurant en bibliographie pour lesquels il n'existait pas de traduction préalable, ainsi que les jaquettes des CD mentionnés dans la discographie.
2. « Le Gideon's Band [...] développe un argumentaire marqué par un paternalisme bienveillant. Les Gideonites soutiennent que l'esclavage a infantilisé et durement affecté les esclaves sur le plan moral, de telle sorte qu'ils ne seront pas en mesure de faire face seuls aux lois du marché et à un environnement compétitif » (Stewart 487).
3. Né à Northborough dans le Massachusetts, il étudia à Gottingen, Berlin et Rome. Il rentra en Amérique en 1856 et devint directeur adjoint de l'English and Classical School à West Newton (Massachusetts). Après la guerre de Sécession, il fut professeur en langues orientales et en histoire à l'Université de Wisconsin-Madison.
4. Cousin de William Francis Allen, il était éducateur et transcritteur de musique. Abolitionniste, il servit comme administrateur civil dans l'armée de l'Union, où il s'occupa avec son épouse Harriet d'esclaves affranchis dans les plantations de Port Royal pendant la guerre de Sécession.
5. Son travail à Port Royal constitue la première tentative de décrire les caractéristiques des negro spirituals : « En 1862, une jeune femme de dix-neuf ans, Lucy McKim Garrison, enquête plus systématiquement dans les Sea Islands, ces îles qui bordent la côte de Caroline du Sud et ont permis aux esclaves de mener une vie plus autonome » (Chenu 168). Par son engagement personnel – grâce aussi à la pugnacité de son mari Wendell –, elle vit son nom figurer comme auteur : « Après un printemps et un été consacrés à recueillir des chants, Lucy et Charles Ware relurent le manuscrit à l'automne et le livre fut publié en novembre 1867. Wendell joua un rôle considérable dans la finalisation de l'ouvrage, mais en tant que mari amoureux et féministe de la première heure, il insista pour que le nom de l'auteur soit celui de Lucy, au même titre que William Francis Allen et Charles Pickard Ware » (Hope Bacon 12 ; traduction de Francis Daubas).
6. D'autres expériences similaires verraient le jour : Felipe Pedrell (1841-1922) parcourant l'Espagne pour recueillir des mélodies populaires ; Béla Bartók (1881-1945) et Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967) recueillant le folklore hongrois (*Structure strophique dans le chant traditionnel hongrois*, 1906).
7. Les Sea Islands sont une série d'îles qui bordent le littoral de la Caroline du Sud, de la Géorgie et du nord-est de la Floride. Miss McKim en visita quatre au printemps 1862 : Hilton Head, St. Helena, Ladies, Port Royal. « En arrivant à Hilton Head, elle entendit pour la première fois les « tristes chants sauvages des Noirs ». Elle commença à relever les paroles et la musique des « spirituals » (Hope Bacon 6 ; traduction de Francis Daubas).
8. « L'alphabétisation, à laquelle les affranchis furent les premiers à goûter, ne pouvait que donner des ailes et des armes à la volonté d'émancipation » (Langel 92).
9. En réalité, il ne s'agit pas du n° 8 mais du n° 9 si l'on s'en réfère à la nomenclature de l'édition originale.
10. Cet Américain fut un pasteur blanc unitarien et un fervent abolitionniste. En 1854, il mena l'assaut contre le palais de justice de Boston où était détenu Anthony Burns, un esclave fugitif devenu pasteur. Durant la guerre de Sécession, T.W. Higginson servit comme colonel du *First South Carolina Volunteers*, le premier régiment noir autorisé par le pouvoir fédéral mais dont les officiers étaient blancs. Ce régiment composé d'esclaves échappés de Caroline du Sud et de Floride fut actif du 31 janvier 1863 au 8 février 1864. En 1870, Higginson publia un ouvrage *Army*

Life in a Black Regiment, où il relatait ses années d'officier passées auprès de soldats noirs. Le chapitre 9 intitulé « Negro Spirituals » constitue une source de premier plan quant à la connaissance des chants d'esclaves : il fut publié en « avant-première » dans l'*Atlantic Monthly* 19, n° 116, daté de juin 1867. Sitôt paru, Higginson, en chercheur avisé et solidaire, mit généreusement son article à la disposition des trois musicologues, lesquels reconnaissaient avoir pu travailler sur les deux tiers du corpus, le tiers restant demeurant sans musique. « Fort lettré, amateur de poésie populaire européenne, ami d'Emily Dickinson, Thomas W. Higginson était particulièrement à même d'apprécier la puissance dramatique de leur patois barbare [celui de ses soldats noirs] et d'accepter certains illogismes typiques de la pensée primitive africaine, qui choquaient l'auditeur moyen du XIXe siècle beaucoup plus qu'ils ne nous choquent aujourd'hui » (Yourcenar 33).

11. « Ils [les auteurs] remercient plus particulièrement le colonel T.W. HIGGINSON pour ses encouragements amicaux et sa contribution directe ou indirecte à leur stock de chansons [...]. Il est peu de dire que sans sa coopération, cette *Lyra Africana* aurait perdu beaucoup de sa valeur. À travers lui nous avons profité de la chaleureuse assistance de Mrs. CHARLES J. BOWEN, Lieut.-Colonel C. T. TROWBRIDGE, Capt. JAMES S. ROGERS, Rev. HORACE JAMES, Capt. GEO. S. BARTON, Miss LUCY GIBBONS, Mr. WILLIAM A. BAKER, Mr. T. E. RUGGLES, and Mr. JAMES SCHOUER » (Allen, Ware et Garrison 37).

12. « Par ses commentaires sur les chants d'esclaves des Sea Islands pendant la guerre de Sécession, et plus tard par l'aide qu'elle [Lucy McKim Garrison] apporta à leur publication, elle réalisa un travail de pionnière pour la diffusion des negro spirituals dans le domaine public » (Hope Bacon 1 ; traduction de Francis Daubas).

13. « En l'absence de tout moyen d'enregistrement, les observateurs s'efforcèrent de mettre en écriture les chants et danses qu'ils surprirent. Pour avouer finalement leur impuissance à transcrire des mélismes, des ornements que l'écriture occidentale ignorait. Ce ne sont donc que des intervalles et leur succession en mélodie qui témoignent de cette musique. On sait de surcroît la difficulté à mémoriser et à transcrire ensuite une musique entendue pour la première et unique fois [...]. Autant d'obstacles qui frappent de nullité la seule recherche qui aurait pu nous éclairer sur la négritude américaine de la fin du XIXe siècle » (Langel 130).

14. « [...] il [l'ouvrage *Slave Songs of the United States*] reste important comme source d'information » (Chase 187, 190).

15. « À New York [en 1892], il se lia d'amitié avec le jeune chanteur et compositeur noir Harry T. Burleigh, lequel lui fit découvrir l'univers des Negro Spirituals, qui, pour le vieux compositeur, contenait en germe l'avenir de la musique américaine. Il se lança rapidement dans la composition d'une Symphonie du Nouveau Monde, dans laquelle il mettait à profit quantité de thèmes mélodiques issus des traditions noire ou amérindienne » (Ross 176).

16. « Pour illustrer la lenteur avec laquelle ces chansons se déplacent on peut remarquer que « The Graveyard » [“Le cimetière”] (n° 21) qui se chantait fréquemment dans la plantation du capitaine John Fripp pendant l'hiver 1863-64 n'atteignit pas Coffin's Point (distant de cinq milles) avant le printemps suivant. J'ai [W. F. Allen] entendu moi-même cette chanson à Pine Grove, deux milles plus loin, au mois de mars. Quelque part sur le trajet, cet air subit une forte transformation, comme on le verra d'après la variante donnée, qui est la forme sous laquelle j'avais l'habitude de l'entendre. Les numéros 38, 41, 42, 43, 118, 119, 122, 123 furent amenés à Coffin's Point après le départ de Mr Ware, par des réfugiés retournant à la plantation depuis la « ville » et le continent. De la même façon le n° 74, « Nobody knows the trouble I see », qui était célèbre à Charleston en 1865, a depuis été apporté à Coffin's Point, avec très peu de transformations » (Allen, Ware et Garrison 12).

17. Ce juste constat devait rencontrer beaucoup plus tard un écho assez direct – bien que tout à fait fortuit – auprès de Daniel Boorstine et René Langel : « [...] dans la région côtière de la Caroline du Sud et de la Géorgie, des Noirs parlent un dialecte dit gullah dont le vocabulaire est

composé de mots d'une vingtaine de langues africaines. Daniel Boorstine l'explique ainsi : « ... un nombre considérable d'esclaves était né en Afrique, et il en arrivait davantage chaque année. En 1858, soit un demi-siècle après que le commerce des esclaves africains eut été rendu illégal, un chargement de quatre cent vingt Noirs venus d'Afrique fut débarqué dans un port de Géorgie. La confusion des langues dut rappeler Babel ! Comme les maîtres ne voulaient pas apprendre la langue de leurs esclaves, ceux-ci, souvent incapables de communiquer entre eux dans leur langue maternelle, se virent contraints d'apprendre ou d'inventer un jargon afin de se faire comprendre » (Langel 98-99, citant Boorstine).

18. « [...] le pow-wow se présentait en modèle que Blancs et Noirs ne manquèrent pas d'intérioriser soit par imitation, soit par dérision : la secte des trembleurs notamment et le rituel des camps de réveil, qu'elle inspira par conséquent. Les shouts de la première Église noire invisible, faits de danses marchées en rond, à pieds traînés, trouve dans son environnement le plus proche, dans la contingence, ce qu'on croyait hérité de la lointaine Afrique » (Langel 233-234).

19. « Le vrai « spiritual » est une création complexe et infiniment variée qui n'existe authentiquement qu'au moment où il est chanté » (Chase 190).

RÉSUMÉS

Le recueil *Slave Songs of The United States* (1867) constitue la première véritable contribution ethnomusicologique à l'exégèse des negro spirituals. Les auteurs – trois Nord-Américains d'origine blanche dont une jeune femme – ont collecté un ensemble de 136 chants qu'ils ont transcrits et annotés. Enquête rigoureuse s'il en fut, publiée à New York, elle posait les bases d'un corpus pionnier susceptible de faire avancer la recherche. Le présent article tente d'étudier et d'analyser cette source. Sur les chemins de Port Royal et des Sea Islands, se dessine une « partition » originale en noir et blanc d'où affleure l'onde vertueuse d'un trio de chercheurs en quête d'humanité sur fond de scientificité.

The collection *Slave Songs Of The United States* (1867) constitutes the first true ethnomusicological contribution to the exegesis of negro-spirituals. The authors – three white North Americans, including a young woman – have collected 136 songs that they have transcribed and annotated. As an accurate enquiry, published in New York, it laid the foundations of an original corpus susceptible to make research progress. The present article attempts to examine and analyse that source. On the way to Port Royal and the Sea Islands, an original black and white « score » becomes apparent, to the surface of which rises the « virtuous wave » of three researchers in quest of humanity with a background of scientificity.

INDEX

Thèmes : Music

Mots-clés : émancipation, esclavage, ethnomusicologie, negro spiritual, transcription

Keywords : emancipation, ethnomusicology, negro spiritual, slavery, transcription

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AS - Le blues et le diable font bon ménage

Patrice Larroque

- 1 Les origines exactes de la musique que l'on appelle aujourd'hui le blues se perdent un peu dans le temps. Il est en réalité difficile de lui donner une date de naissance précise à cause justement de son évolution qui s'étale sur une assez longue période. Il existait bien avant qu'on lui donne un nom, depuis le début de l'esclavage en Amérique en 1619, dans les chansons que les esclaves noirs entonnaient au moment des travaux des champs et dans les réunions religieuses.
- 2 Ainsi, l'histoire du blues commence avec l'apparition des premiers esclaves noirs sur le sol américain, mais coupés dès leur arrivée de leurs racines et de leurs langues africaines, ils ont dû recréer de nouvelles attaches en s'appuyant sur une nouvelle langue, l'anglais, qu'ils ont adopté et modelé pour en faire la langue du blues. Enfin, le blues possède également une fonction sociale qui a permis à la population noire de survivre, de trouver sa place dans la société américaine, de dépasser les clivages raciaux et de s'émanciper.

Le contexte historique

1.1. Les origines

- 3 Le blues est donc une forme musicale traditionnelle, d'abord vocale et non écrite, dérivée des *work songs* et des *field hollers*, chants et plaintes qui rythmaient le travail et le rendaient moins pénible. Ils apportaient un peu de joie de vivre à la tristesse et à la dureté des conditions de vie des esclaves noirs importés aux Etats-Unis d'Amérique dès le XVIIe siècle pour travailler dans les plantations de coton ou de maïs. Ces chants ont donné naissance au blues rural vers la fin du XIXe siècle dans le sud des Etats-Unis et en particulier dans la région du delta du Mississippi.
- 4 A l'origine du blues on trouve aussi le *negro spiritual*. C'est une forme de chant religieux issu des *camp meetings*, sorte d'assemblées en plein air à vocation religieuse qui se sont

développées au début du XIXe siècle. Les rites ancestraux des esclaves noirs, interdits par les maîtres et souvent punis du fouet ou de mort, ont peu à peu laissé la place à la religion chrétienne que leur enseignaient les prêcheurs américains. Les hymnes et les cantiques chrétiens étaient adaptés au caractère musical hérité de l'Afrique. Ils étaient répétés et appris par cœur, sans vraiment comprendre, et faisait une place importante à l'improvisation. William Faulkner décrit une de ces messes à la fin de son roman *Soldier's Pay* :

The road dropped on again descending between reddish gashes, and across a level moon-lit space, broken by a clump of saplings, came a pure quivering chord of music wordless and far away.

'They're holding services. Negroes,' the rector explained.

They walked on in the dust, passing neat tidy houses, dark with slumber. An occasional group of negroes passed them, bearing lighted lanterns that jetted vain little flames futilely into the moonlight. 'No one knows why they do that,' the divine replied to Gillian's question. 'Perhaps it is to light their churches with.'

The singing drew nearer and nearer; at last, crouching among a clump of trees beside the road, they saw the shabby church with its canting travesty of a spire. Within it was a soft glow of kerosene serving only to make the darkness and the heat thicker, making thicker the imminence of sex after harsh labour along the mooned land; and from it welled the crooning submerged passion of the black race. It was nothing, it was everything; then it swelled to an ecstasy, taking the white man's words as readily as it took his remote God and made a personal Father of Him.

Feed Thy Sheep, O Jesus. All the longing of mankind for a Oneness with Something, somewhere. Feed Thy Sheep, O Jesus. ... the rector and Gillian stood side by side in the dusty road. The road went on under the moon, vaguely dissolving without perspective. Worn-out red-gutted fields were now alternate splashes of soft black and silver; trees had each a silver nimbus, save those moonward from them, which were sharp as bronze.

Feed Thy Sheep, O Jesus. The voices rose full and soft. There was no organ: no organ was needed as above the harmonic passion of bass and baritone soared a clear soprano of women's voices like a flight of gold and heavenly birds. They stood together in the dust, the rector in his shapeless black, and Gillian in his new hard serge, listening, seeing the shabby church become beautiful with mellow longing, passionate and sad. Then the singing died, fading away along the mooned land inevitable with tomorrow and sweat, with sex and death and damnation; and they turned townward under the moon, feeling dust in their shoes. (265-266)¹

- 5 Souvent, les airs et les paroles étaient créés ou modifiés à la mode de la musique populaire traditionnelle des pays de langue anglaise (Angleterre, Canada, Ecosse, Etats-Unis, Irlande), une musique venue d'Europe.
- 6 Le contact entre les Blancs et les Noirs a sans doute aussi contribué à accélérer la conversion de la population noire au christianisme. La culture religieuse spécifique aux Africains a facilité le passage d'une croyance en plusieurs dieux à une foi religieuse monothéiste occidentale. Cette influence blanche se retrouve également dans la musique du blues.
- 7 Enfin, les *negro spirituals* qui exprimaient les sentiments de misère et d'abandon de la population noire ont sans doute influencé les *work songs* collectifs. Le blues, mélange de profane et de sacré, est dans la tristesse de ces chants. Il décrit une certaine forme de

mélancolie et de découragement. Aujourd'hui, quand on a du vague à l'âme, qu'on est déprimé, on dit qu'on a le blues ; du blues des infirmières à celui des jeunes désœuvrés ou des chômeurs, l'expression a fait son chemin, mais quelle est son origine ?

1.2. Le mot blues

- 8 Il semble que l'origine du terme *blues* soit l'abréviation de l'expression anglaise « *the blue devils* » qui signifie idées noires, dépression et tristesse. On retrouve une référence au blues ou aux *blue devils* dans une formule : « ... *for having a fit of the blue devils* », tirée d'une pièce de théâtre de George Colman le jeune (1762-1836), *Blue Devils, a Farce in One Act*, publiée en 1798. L'expression était également employée pour désigner le delirium tremens.
- 9 Aux Etats-Unis, le mot *blues* est employé pour la première fois dans le journal de Charlotte Forten, une institutrice noire née libre dans le nord et qui a choisi d'alphabétiser des esclaves de Caroline du Sud. Entre 1862 et 1865, elle a tenu un journal² dans lequel elle relate la misère et le malheur qui régnaient dans les quartiers d'esclaves (Herzhaft 2008 : 12). Dans la musique noire américaine, le terme apparaît à Memphis vers 1912, date du premier enregistrement de la chanson *Memphis Blues* par le compositeur W. C. Handy, aujourd'hui considéré comme le père du blues.
- 10 Les formes de blues les plus primitives provenaient, répétons-le, du sud des Etats-Unis où étaient employés des esclaves essentiellement originaires d'Afrique occidentale.

1.3. Les influences africaines

- 11 De nombreux traits spécifiques au blues viennent de la musique africaine. On en citera deux en particulier : les mélismes qui sont des phrases ornementales de plusieurs notes chantées sur une seule syllabe du texte et l'intonation ondulante, roulante et nasale.
- 12 Parmi les instruments qui rappellent l'Afrique, il y a bien sûr l'omniprésente guitare et le banjo qui remplacent sans doute la kora, instrument à cordes utilisé par certains peuples d'Afrique occidentale, en Gambie par exemple, le banjo étant lui aussi dérivé d'un ou plusieurs instruments de musique africains. Dans son autobiographie, W. C. Handy (1941) fait allusion à un guitariste noir qui, pendant qu'il jouait, appuyait un couteau sur les cordes de sa guitare. Cette technique du couteau n'est pas sans évoquer l'utilisation actuelle du *bottle neck* (cylindre de verre ou de métal que l'on fait glisser sur les cordes de la guitare) et à la *steel guitar* (technique qui consiste à tenir l'instrument horizontalement sur ses genoux, les cordes vers le haut, et à faire glisser une barrette d'acier sur les cordes le long du manche). Cette technique du couteau se retrouve, semble-t-il, dans les cultures d'Afrique centrale et occidentale.
- 13 Les Africains de l'ouest ne chantaient probablement pas de blues, mais on sait que les premiers esclaves chantaient ou criaient en travaillant et que ces chants ressemblaient beaucoup à ceux de l'Afrique occidentale (Jones 1968 : 14). Ces chants ou ces cris se chantaient *a capella*, sans accompagnement : le rythme et la mesure étaient donc libres. Peut-être les *work songs* et les *negro spirituals* collectifs étaient-ils plus contraints du point de vue de la cadence, mais on peut déjà voir apparaître un style vocal dans lequel la langue occupe une place privilégiée en tant que support rythmique et mélodique.

2. La langue du blues

2.1. La forme

- 14 Dans la préface du livre de Jean-Paul Levet (1992 :1), *Talkin' that Talk. Le langage du blues et du jazz*, Michel Fabre insiste sur les relations étroites qu'entretiennent langue et musique dans l'expression des Noirs aux Etats-Unis. La langue est celle de la vieille ballade anglaise dont la structure en huit, dix ou seize mesures a servi de base aux chansons de type blues. En réalité, le blues traditionnel est en douze mesures, quatre mesures qui se répètent trois fois, ce qui nous donne seize battements par groupe pour une mesure à quatre temps. Ceci est à rapprocher de l'assertion de Ker (1928 : 208) qui soutient que le rythme naturel pour la race humaine roule par périodes de quatre, huit ou seize battements ou groupes de battements, le groupe de quatre battements étant, semble-t-il, le plus courant en poésie populaire anglaise (Attridge 1982 : 80-82), ce qui équivaut à quatre temps en musique. Mais c'est essentiellement le cri et les chants africains en appels et réponses (*call and response shouts*) qui ont dicté au blues la forme qu'il a aujourd'hui. Il en a adopté la structure (Jones 1968 : 102).
- 15 Parmi les caractéristiques du blues, un certain nombre comme l'emploi de stéréotypes, les répétitions, les reprises, le rythme syncopé et surtout l'absence d'acte de composition qui laisse une large place à l'improvisation, assurent la primauté de la parole, donc du texte et de la langue sur la musique. Le chanteur de blues s'exprime dans l'idiome du blues et s'inscrit dans la tradition orale afro-américaine (Levet 1992 : 31-36). Il délivre un message souvent spirituel sous une forme quasi-rituelle (Springer 1999 : 19).
- 16 La forme des premiers blues était probablement constituée d'un seul vers répété quatre fois :
- (1) Oh, Lawd, I'm tired, uuh Oh Seigneu', j'en ai maah, aah
 Oh, Lawd, I'm tired, uuh Oh, Seigneu', j'enai maah, aah
 Oh, Lawd, I'm tired, uuh Oh seigneu', j'en ai maah, aah
 Oh, Lawd, I'm tired, Oh, Seigneu', j'en ai maah,
 a dis mess. d'cette mé'asse. (cité dans Jones 1968 : 100)
- 17 Et ce n'est que bien plus tard que la structure actuelle, composée d'un vers repris une fois et suivi d'un vers de conclusion, est devenue la norme :
- (2) I followed her to the station with a suitcase in my hand,
 And I followed her to the station with my suitcase in my hand.
 Well it's hard to tell, it's hard to tell when my love's in vain,
 My love's in vain.
 (R. Johnson, *Love in Vain*)
- 18 Ces vers étaient chantés dans un style souvent plus proche d'un récitatif rythmé que d'une véritable mélodie.
- 19 Il n'est certes pas étonnant que la musique vocale reproduise la prosodie d'un discours qu'elle adapte aux traits dominants, rythmique et mélodique, du texte. Deux vers célèbres (et repris maintes fois) de Robert Charles Guidry, un musicien cajun de Louisiane, illustrent bien ce jeu verbal et musical :
- (3) See you later, alligator,
 After 'while, crocodile.

- 20 On peut entendre les pieds métriques trochaïques qui, associés aux rimes internes, contribuent à rendre la musique de l'anglais. Il est à noter que le déterminant *a* normalement placé devant le nom *while* est muet (remplacé dans la graphie par une apostrophe). Le vide accentuel (deux syllabes inaccentuées adjacentes) est ainsi modifié pour obtenir une structure plus eurythmique parallèle au premier vers.
- 21 Le blues est un art folklorique (Springer 1999 : 17), et l'influence linguistique sur le rythme de la musique est d'une manière ou d'une autre guidée par le texte. En revanche, l'idée que les schémas discursifs se reflètent dans la musique instrumentale est beaucoup plus controversée (Patel et al. 2006 : 3034). Cependant, si l'on considère que la musique instrumentale d'une culture peut refléter la prosodie de sa langue maternelle, on peut concevoir l'idée qu'une partie du rythme si spécifique à l'anglais tient à l'alternance des voyelles pleines et des voyelles réduites (Bolinger 1985, Carr 1999). Et il semble que cette tendance se retrouve dans la musique. Ceci peut paraître contradictoire avec le caractère partiellement syllabé de l'anglais afro-américain. Mais comme nous l'avons dit, il ne s'agit que d'une tendance, le rythme globalement accentuel de l'anglais américain prédominant.

2.2. Le poids linguistique

- 22 L'hypothèse souvent avancée est que les airs portent la marque de la prosodie de la langue parce qu'ils sont d'abord créés à partir de mots. Ce sont les mots et, par conséquent, le discours qui donnent le rythme à la musique. Il est possible d'étayer cette proposition de deux manières différentes.
- 23 La première est de relier la musique directement au discours. Ceci est particulièrement vrai en Afrique où le lien entre langue et musique est naturel. Au Ghana par exemple, les rythmes *ewe*³ commencent avec des gestes, marqués par le rythme d'un discours libre et se terminent par des gestes stylisés caractérisés par le rythme d'un discours stylisé (Agawu 1995 : 29-30). Klaus Wachsmann (1971: 187) affirme ainsi: « there is hardly any music in Africa that is in some way rooted in speech »⁴. Chernoff (1979 : 75) souligne que la musique africaine est dérivée de la langue. Le blues dont certains traits sont hérités de l'Afrique s'inscrit dans ce rapport étroit : on se souvient que des similitudes existent avec la musique africaine. Ce qui a changé, c'est la langue.
- 24 Patel (2007 : 165) propose une autre hypothèse, celle de la voie directe (*the direct route hypothesis*) basée sur l'idée que les schémas prosodiques de la langue maternelle sont acquis dès la petite enfance. En effet, il semble établi que les jeunes enfants sont très sensibles aux schémas prosodiques de leur langue (voir également Nazzi et al. 1998, Ramus 2002). Ils enregistrent de manière statistique, probablement inconsciente, les schémas prosodiques de la langue. C'est ce qu'on appelle « l'apprentissage statistique » (« *statistical learning* », Patel et al. 2006 : 3043, Patel 2007 : 224-225). Ce type d'acquisition des schémas intonatifs ne se limite pas à la seule tendre enfance. On peut supposer que les adultes sont eux aussi sensibles à la musique de la langue et en acquièrent les intonations et le rythme. Ainsi, les esclaves noirs, dont la langue natale n'était certainement pas l'anglais, ont pu s'appuyer sur les schémas rythmiques de la nouvelle langue qu'ils entendaient tous les jours, même sans comprendre. Ils se fiaient à l'image sonore de la langue, au signifiant, pour ensuite inférer les sens des mots et des énoncés. Springer (1999 : 54) note ainsi que le « répertoire de morceaux héroïques (selon lui le plus fourni) a été fortement marqué par les ballades du folklore blanc américain, lui-

même influencé par le fond considérable des ballades anglaises ». Certaines de ces ballades, interprétées par des chanteurs noirs sont d'ailleurs devenues des blues.

- 25 Il semble donc plausible que les airs de blues et surtout leur rythme reflètent la prosodie de la langue anglaise telle qu'elle se manifestait à « l'époque dite 'pré-blues' » (Springer 1999 : 54). A cette époque, les esclaves noirs, qui parlaient divers dialectes africains, avaient tendance à calquer le rythme et la syntaxe de l'anglais, leur nouvelle langue, sur leur langue maternelle. « Ce qu'on appelle aujourd'hui l'accent du sud ou le 'parler noir' (*jive talk*) n'était autrefois que l'accent d'un étranger essayant de parler une langue qu'il ne connaissait pas ». (Jones 1968 : 45). Il n'est pas inutile non plus d'insister sur le caractère oral du blues, parfaitement apte à rendre la musique de l'anglais qui en est le véhicule.
- 26 Il peut cependant y avoir un conflit entre les exigences musicales et les règles phonologiques de la langue, et lorsque cela se produit ce sont généralement les premières qui l'emportent. C'est pourquoi l'hypothèse de la voie directe qui pose que la prosodie du discours influence nécessairement la structure musicale ne peut être appliquée de manière déterministe (Patel 2007 : 165). Cela veut simplement dire que les chanteurs de blues peuvent ou ont pu être influencés par les schémas rythmiques de l'anglais qu'ils ont engrammés et qu'ils réactivent mentalement. Ces schémas trouvent un reflet dans les textes des chansons, souvent formés de mots usuels, de tous les jours, mono ou dissyllabiques pour la plupart, et énoncés en termes parfois ambigus.

2.3. L'énoncé dans le blues

- 27 Nous avons vu que le texte dans la tradition africaine était aussi important, sinon plus, que la musique. C'est lui qui, en quelque sorte, dicte le rythme et l'intonation. Les qualités tonales et le timbre de voix d'un chanteur africain ou noir américain en font ressortir les accents et les nuances. Les cris et les *hollers*, par exemple, n'étaient en définitive que des paroles très rythmées (Jones 1968 : 55).
- 28 Dans le blues, comme dans le discours africain, ce n'est pas toujours la régularité qui prime. Le chanteur préfère exprimer sa pensée de manière indirecte, par circonlocution. La simplicité de l'énoncé dénote en effet un manque d'imagination, voire d'intelligence. La même tendance se reflète dans la musique : les notes ne sont pas attaquées franchement, les durées et les accents sont imprécis (cf. Jones 1968 : 59), il est fréquent que le musicien sorte de la tonalité pour faire des digressions ; les notes – comme les phonèmes – sont tendues, c'est-à-dire qu'elles se caractérisent par une déformation plus grande que leur valeur initiale. On retrouve les longues phrases roulantes et languissantes héritées des *field hollers* et qui résonnent toujours comme des sanglots, des cris de colère ou de découragement dans le discours. Par exemple, le fameux bluesman Chester Arthur Burnett, alias Howlin' Wolf (1910-1976), définissait le blues dans sa voix forte et grave en ces termes :

(4) I wanna tell you what the blues is. If you ain't got no money, you got the blues. If you ain't got no money you can't buy you a house with, you still got the blues. If you ain't got no money and you can't buy you no food, you got the blues. When you ain't got no money, you got the blues, 'cause you thinkin' evil, you thinkin' 'bout the blues. When you're down, you got the blues. Any time you thinkin' evil, you thinkin' 'bout the blues. (prononcé lors d'un concert en 1966)⁵

- 29 Ce commentaire ressemble fort à une revendication et pourrait très bien, par sa structure et le rythme de ses phrases, faire l'objet d'un air de blues. Tous les ingrédients y sont : la répétition (reprise de la même phrase *if you got no money, you got the blues*), la syncope (effacement de l'auxiliaire, ex. *you got the blues, you thinkin' evil*, des syllabes inaccentués, ex. *'bout*, certaines consonnes finales, ex. *thinkin'*) le rythme (l'alternance des syllabes accentuées et des syllabes inaccentuées, ex. *you 'got the 'blues*), les stéréotypes (l'argent qui permet tout et en particulier de vivre, de se loger et de manger : *buy you a house, buy you food*, les idées noires : *you thinkin' evil*). Ce sont les préoccupations de tous les jours qui motivent les thèmes abordés.

2.4. Les thèmes dans le blues

- 30 Le blues est au départ une ballade, une ballade noire élaborée, on l'a vu, sur le modèle des ballades populaires anglaises et un mode de communication (cf. Herzhaft 2008 : 25). Ce sont des chansons qui racontent les événements de la vie quotidienne. Les journées commencent comme à l'ordinaire : *I woke up this morning, feel 'round for my shoes, I woke up this morning I believe I'll dust my broom* (En me réveillant ce matin je cherchais mes chaussures, en me réveillant ce matin je croyais que j'allais dépoussiérer mon balai) ; de nombreux blues s'ouvrent sur ce type de phrase. Ensuite, les choses se compliquent un peu avec les problèmes de la vie amoureuse et conjugale : *Before you accuse me, take a look at yourself* (Avant de m'accuser, regarde-toi bien), l'abandon : *One summer day she went away, she gone and left me* (Un jour d'été, elle est partie et m'a laissé), la rupture : *I'll pack up my trunk, and make my get away* (Je vais faire ma valise et partir) et l'alcool, très présent : *You're a whiskey-headed woman, you stay drunk all the time* (Tu es une femme qui ne pense qu'au whiskey, tu es ivre tout le temps). Le thème du train que les Noirs empruntaient pour se déplacer apparaît souvent : *Gonna leave on the Sunshine Special, gonna leave on the Santa Fe* (Je vais partir avec le Sunshine Special, je vais partir avec le Santa Fe). Pour finir, on oublie ses ennuis, on se sent libéré : *I can't worry, 'cause I'm sitting on the top of the world* (Je ne m'en fais pas, parce que je suis aux anges).
- 31 Sorte de ménestrels de la population noire, les chanteurs de blues relataient souvent les événements locaux comme la crue du Mississippi (*Rising High Water Blues*) ou la réparation des digues rompues (*Broken Levee Blues*). On parle des villes alentour, Cairo (Géorgie), Helena (Alabama), Memphis (Tennessee), la Nouvelle Orléans (Louisiane), Saint-Louis (Missouri), et des lieux plus lointains qui représentent l'émancipation et la prospérité, le voyage comme Chicago ou la Californie. Mais le blues a aussi une dimension poétique, ce qui signifie que la langue vise à suggérer, à créer des images, des sens cachés, signe d'une liberté d'expression réprimée.

2.5. Le second degré

- 32 Quand on lit ou qu'on écoute un texte de blues, la méfiance est de mise. L'énoncé n'est pas univoque, le message étant bien souvent codé. Le biais des allusions sexuelles, les grivoiseries, les expressions argotiques, les sous-entendus, les mots à double sens sont légion, d'où les multiples interprétations possibles (y compris les contresens) d'un énoncé. Ceci est à rapprocher du caractère indirect de l'énoncé africain, le chanteur de blues jouant avec les mots, le rythme et la musique de la langue. Dans l'Amérique puritaine de l'époque, il aurait été malvenu de chanter des chansons grivoises, ou de

parler de sexe. Les chanteurs utilisaient donc souvent la technique du double sens pour faire passer ce type de message. Ainsi, l'expression *I got my mojo working* peut se lire de deux façons différentes. Au premier degré, l'énoncé signifie : j'ai mon *mojo* qui marche, le *mojo* étant une sorte de petit sac, une amulette aux vertus magiques utilisée en vaudou, et par conséquent lié aux superstitions des esclaves noirs. Prise au second degré, l'expression renvoie à la puissance sexuelle. Un autre exemple de double sens à connotation sexuelle se cache derrière l'énoncé *I believe I'll dust my broom*. Au premier degré, on peut naïvement lire : « je crois que je vais dépoussiérer mon balai », mais avec un peu d'imagination on entrevoit sans grande difficulté l'allusion sexuelle, et le symbole phallique du balai. Ce type d'allusion se glisse jusque dans l'expression *rock and roll* qui fait évidemment référence à être bercé et par extension à une danse, mais dont le sens second renvoie à l'acte sexuel (cf. *Rock me baby, rock me all night long ... Roll me baby, like you roll a wagon wheel*, B.B. King).

- 33 Le symbolisme n'est pas seulement sexuel bien sûr. Dans la chanson *Sweet Home Chicago*, le chanteur (Robert Johnson) évoque son rêve d'aller vers la Californie (*back to the land of California to my sweet home Chicago*). A première vue, il y a une contradiction, une erreur géographique, mais ici il ne s'agit pas de la Californie en tant qu'état, mais de ce qu'elle représente métaphoriquement, le pays de la richesse et de la liberté, c'est-à-dire la ville de Chicago pour un chanteur de blues pauvre et misérable du Mississippi.
- 34 Enfin, au-delà des doubles sens et des contraires, il y a la religion, plus précisément la place réservée à Dieu et au diable. On se souvient que le blues et les *negro spirituals* sont deux aspects d'une même tradition, l'un est profane, l'autre sacré. Si les *negro spirituals* parlent de Dieu, le blues ne l'évoque guère. Souvent qualifié de diabolique, sûrement à cause des débordements vocaux (cris, hurlements de désespoir, plaintes, etc.) qui le caractérisent, de ses racines africaines, des thèmes qu'il développe et surtout des allusions grivoises déguisées, mais aussi parfois clairement et grossièrement exprimées (notamment dans le fameux *Shave 'em Dry* chanté par Lucille Bogan qui décrit crûment les choses du sexe), le blues est ce qu'on pourrait appeler la contrepartie profane du *negro spiritual*. On a pourtant l'impression que le diable et le blues font bon ménage. Ils représentent tous les deux ce qui ne va pas, ce qui est mal (cf. Howlin' Wolf : *When you thinkin' evil, you thinkin' 'bout the blues*, « quand tu penses au mal, tu penses au blues »). Symboliquement, le diable renvoie au méchant, à l'obscurité et à la nuit (et en cela, il s'oppose à Dieu, centre de lumière [Dianteill 2004 : 428]), aux problèmes, aux choses négatives, aux forces qui troublent et affaiblissent la conscience (Chevalier et Gheerbrant 1969 : 352), comme la femme, par exemple (*Devil Got my Woman*, Skip James, *She Belongs to the Devil*, Washboard Sam). Dans certains airs, le chanteur semble avoir passé un pacte avec le diable : *Me and the devil were walkin' side by side* (Robert Johnson), *Early this morning, when you knocked upon my door/And I say hello Satan, I believe it's time to go* (Gil Scott Heron). Parfois, c'est le diable lui-même qui est déprimé et triste (*Devil's got the blues*, Lonnie Johnson), quand les *blue devils* deviennent le *devil's blues* (le blues du diable). La boucle est ainsi bouclée.
- 35 Le blues est pour ainsi dire une réaction cathartique, en ce sens qu'en même temps qu'il permet de soulager les peines et les blessures de la vie, il représente une libération à la fois individuelle et collective d'émotions socialement inacceptables. Il s'agit de dire tout haut, par des formulations certes déviantes par rapport à la langue courante (ce qui contribue, on l'a vu, à classer les locuteurs dans une catégorie sociale inférieure), d'extérioriser ce qu'on a longtemps refoulé, de dénoncer des conditions d'existence

déplorables et parfois inhumaines, de montrer à la société américaine sa face cachée, honteuse, sombre et cruelle, pour ne pas dire infernale. Ce contexte met en évidence le rôle social de la langue, cette dernière étant un moyen de communication entre les individus fondé sur le même système conceptuel. Ceci suppose la création d'un certain nombre de préceptes auxquels les utilisateurs de la langue doivent se conformer. Ces règles définissent une pratique normative des rapports sociaux d'ordre hiérarchique. Dans ce sens, l'acceptabilité d'un énoncé se rapporte directement à un modèle de référence unique (en l'occurrence celui des maîtres) qui mène tout naturellement à l'adoption et à la reconnaissance de la langue dominante.

- 36 Cependant, les jugements que l'on porte sur la langue sont en grande partie liés au rapport qui existe entre le social et l'utilisation de la langue et ne concerne pas toujours le message.

3. Le rôle social du blues

- 37 Outre le rôle culturel, informationnel et poétique du blues, il est clair que ce genre musical a aussi une fonction, ou plutôt des fonctions, sociales celles-là (Springer 1999), qui ont permis au groupe d'exister et de grandir malgré les difficultés, les contraintes, les humiliations et les interdits de toutes sortes, que ce soit dans le travail, au niveau religieux ou dans l'expression corporelle.

3.1. Le travail

- 38 Les esclaves noirs importés d'Afrique étaient considérés comme de véritables bêtes de somme. Pour survivre, ils devaient être capables et performants et servir le maître du mieux possible. Les chants en appels et réponses qui accompagnaient et rythmaient le travail des champs et plus tard le travail des *chaingangs*⁶, venaient tout droit des traditions d'Afrique de l'ouest (Herzhaft 2008 : 15). Ce faisant, ces chants traditionnels venus d'Afrique ont subi une évolution, un transfert linguistique et rythmique (Jones 1968 : 45). Peut-être ici dirons-nous que le chant africain a influencé l'anglais dans sa syntaxe et dans son rythme.
- 39 Chanter pendant le travail remplissait deux fonctions essentielles. La première est de rythmer l'effort de travail pour encourager le travailleur à avancer dans sa tâche, à l'aider à supporter sa condition. Un esclave noir qui travaille mal risque d'être sanctionné sévèrement ou vendu. De plus, cela donnait aux maîtres une impression de joie de vivre et de bonheur (Herzhaft 2008 : 14). La seconde fonction est la prise de conscience du groupe : chanter ensemble avec un soliste et un chœur qui répond facilite la cohésion, et la musique en est un des ciments (Patel 2007 : 370). Rappelons qu'il s'agit d'une langue nouvelle, donc d'une musique nouvelle, qu'il faut apprendre coûte que coûte. En outre, le fait de faire de la musique en groupe, non seulement améliore l'humeur, mais aussi resserre les liens entre les membres du groupe. La musique, comme la langue, est un facteur de cohésion sociale.
- 40 D'autre part, les mères qui travaillaient aux champs pouvaient ainsi garder un lien rassurant avec leurs bébés sans pour autant les toucher (Balter 2004), le chant constituant ce moyen de contact (Patel 2007 : 370, Balter 2004, Falk 2004). Les enfants pouvaient ainsi être sensibilisés à la musique de la langue, à sa mélodie et à son rythme, comme nous le montrerons plus loin. Les mères possédaient toutefois d'autres moyens

pour reconforter leurs jeunes enfants, le chant n'étant qu'un moyen parmi d'autres. En revanche, celui-ci était bel et bien l'instrument privilégié de l'expression sacrée.

3.2. La fonction religieuse

- 41 Selon Chevalier et Gheerbrant, « Le chant est le symbole de la parole qui relie la puissance créatrice à sa création en tant que celle-ci reconnaît sa dépendance de créature et l'exprime dans la joie, l'adoration ou l'imploration. C'est le souffle de la créature répondant au souffle créateur » (1969 : 206). Pour parler à Dieu, l'homme doit chanter, et ce faisant il se met sous sa domination, sa protection, il accepte sa supériorité. Une autre forme de rapport hiérarchique s'instaure ainsi pour l'homme noir : l'esclave est soumis d'une part au maître qui l'opprime, et d'autre part à Dieu qui lui donne la joie.
- 42 La société des planteurs esclavagistes était résolument chrétienne et pratiquante. Après avoir considéré les esclaves comme des bêtes, on se mit à les évangéliser en masse (Herzhaft 2008 : 15) : d'une part, pour tenter d'effacer complètement la religion de l'homme africain ; d'autre part, afin de leur consentir un minimum d'instruction religieuse leur permettant de passer du statut de païens ou de sauvages au statut d'être humain civilisé à part entière. Ce processus constituait une manière d'intégration : même s'ils restaient des esclaves, ils devenaient américains (cf. Jones 1968 : 66-67). Qui plus est, on leur apportait une compensation et le bonheur de la foi en un Christ blanc tout puissant dont l'influence était supérieure aux dieux protecteurs des religions d'origine africaine.
- 43 En Afrique, la pratique religieuse ne se faisait pas sans chant (Jones 1968 : 73) et cette tradition s'est étendue à la culture noire américaine. Par conséquent, le chant religieux chrétien est devenu un autre moyen d'expression privilégié. On se souvient que les esclaves noirs adaptaient et modelaient les hymnes et les cantiques baptistes et méthodistes en chants rythmés, mêlant les origines africaines et européennes que l'on connaît sous le nom de *negro spirituals* ou *gospel*. On notera au passage le parallèle établi entre les souffrances du peuple juif opprimé de l'Ancien Testament et celles des esclaves noirs qui vont pour ainsi dire s'identifier au peuple de Moïse fuyant l'Égypte vers la liberté, et pour les Noirs la Terre Promise de l'émancipation (Jones 1968 : 82, Herzhaft 2008 : 16). « Traverser le Jourdain », par exemple, signifiait à la fois aller au paradis et rejoindre le Christ, et d'une certaine façon se libérer de ses souffrances terrestres et devenir des citoyens libres et égaux dans la société américaine.
- 44 Contrairement aux *work songs*, les chants religieux n'étaient pas des cris ou des plaintes. La musique était plus douce, plus mélodique, même si le cri apparaît encore de temps en temps comme une survivance africaine. Mais elle prend aussi la forme d'une expression corporelle quand l'émotion devient trop forte et conduit quelquefois à des trances extatiques, au sens de danse frénétique qui se termine souvent par une perte de connaissance (Dianteill 2004 : 437). On commence par frapper ses mains l'une contre l'autre pour marquer la cadence, puis on se balance à mesure que l'intensité monte, enfin on se laisse gagner par le mouvement de la musique. Dans ce cas, c'est le rythme qui prend le dessus, le rythme des chants, le rythme des paroles, le rythme de la langue.

3.3. La danse

- 45 Ainsi donc, la musique liée à la parole devient mélodie, puis danse en faisant naître le mouvement du corps. La danse, normalement sur le rythme d'une musique, est utilisée comme une forme d'expression et d'interaction entre les individus, et possède donc un rôle social évident. Les mouvements de la danse ne possèdent habituellement pas de signification précise, mais ils peuvent aussi faire partie d'un système symbolique. Les danses dans les sociétés primitives sont susceptibles d'exprimer des idées, des émotions ou même de raconter des histoires ou des mythes. Par exemple, avant l'apparition des langues, la danse était un moyen de transmettre ces histoires et ces mythes de génération en génération. Elle pouvait et peut encore avoir des utilisations dans le cadre de rituels religieux ou superstitieux. On pense notamment aux danses vaudou, guerrières ou de fécondité.
- 46 Les danses afro-américaines se sont développées dans les communautés noires dans les lieux de la vie de tous les jours. Dans les familles qui vivaient sur les plantations, le samedi soir était souvent consacré aux chants et aux danses. Les danses étaient un mélange de figures diverses d'origine africaine et européenne qui allait donner la « *plantation dance* », la danse des plantations (Herzhaft 2008 : 18). Par cette danse, les esclaves exprimaient leurs émotions, leurs ressentis. Ils tapaient du pied, tournaient à contresens des aiguilles d'une montre, se frappaient les bras, les jambes, la poitrine et les joues. La danse des plantations, aussi appelée *juba dance*, était pratiquée sans instrument rythmique : les maîtres craignaient en effet que les tambours pussent être utilisés pour transmettre des codes et des messages secrets et les interdisaient, et ce n'est qu'au milieu du XIXe siècle que de la musique et des paroles furent ajoutées. Parmi les danses issues de la *plantation dance*, on retiendra le *jump Jim Crow*, danse préférée des fameux *minstrel shows*⁷, qui fait allusion au système « Jim Crow » dans les états du sud. Jim Crow⁸ était synonyme de racisme et de ségrégation⁹. Ce type de danse a sans doute aussi influencé la danse à claquettes (*tap dance*), d'origine africaine et européenne (irlandaise), dont le rythme syncopé fait alterner des temps forts et des temps moins marqués.

Conclusion

- 47 Il est important de retracer l'histoire du blues, ses origines à la fois africaines et européennes (américaines), sa langue qui a évolué au cours des derniers siècles et qui s'est imposée comme une variété de l'anglais américain. Certains Blancs du sud des Etats-Unis ont d'ailleurs adopté, du moins dans son accent et parfois dans son accentuation, cette langue qui a été un facteur important de cohésion et d'intégration du peuple noir.
- 48 Comme on l'a vu, le blues possède deux facettes, l'une sacrée, l'autre profane, l'une est celle du bon Dieu avec ses prières et ses espérances, l'autre celle du diable avec ses cris, ses plaintes et ses références au sexe. C'est dans la langue que se manifestent ces deux aspects. Rappelons que la langue est constituée par les mots et le discours mais aussi par l'intonation et le rythme, et ce poids linguistique a certainement marqué la musique des Afro-Américains.
- 49 La musique africaine est directement dérivée de la langue et l'on peut légitimement dire que certains traits musicaux du blues présentent de nombreux points communs

avec la langue anglaise. Mais il y a aussi l'hypothèse de l'apprentissage statistique, à savoir la recherche de schémas prosodiques dans l'environnement et l'acquisition des connaissances implicites sans rétroaction directe. C'est d'abord l'image sonore de la langue qui guide les locuteurs potentiels dans leur appropriation de la langue (qu'ils soient enfants ou adultes), image qui se retrouve dans les chants repris en chœur dans les *work songs*, *field hollers* et *negro spirituals*.

- 50 Ainsi, l'énoncé dans le blues, comme dans la tradition africaine, conditionne en quelque sorte le rythme et l'intonation. En principe, le chanteur de blues primitif ou rural n'a pas étudié la musique, c'est un musicien autodidacte et pour ainsi dire routinier. C'est un chemineau démuné et analphabète, parfois aveugle – on songe ici à Blind Lemon Jefferson, Blind Blake, Blind Boy Fuller, Blind John Davis – qui ressemble au personnage évoqué dans le roman *Sartoris* de William Faulkner :

Against the wall, squatting, a blind Negro beggar, with a guitar and a wire frame holding a mouth-organ to his lips, patterned the background of smells and sounds with a plaintive reiteration of rich, monotonous chords, rhythmic as a mathematical formula, but without music. He was a man of at least forty and his was that patient resignation of many sightless years... (108-109)¹⁰

- 51 On retrouve dans cet extrait l'idée de régularité et de conformité à un modèle, un usage, une tradition. La monotonie de la musique traduit la résignation du personnage à sa condition.

- 52 Sur les plantations, la musique et les chants sont fréquemment accompagnés de danse. La danse est largement utilisée, bien sûr, comme mode de divertissement, mais aussi comme vecteur d'information et de perpétuation des cultures et des traditions. Nous venons de voir que certaines danses, notamment le *juba dance*, comportaient des gestes signifiants aptes à traduire la joie, la peine, la colère, la peur, la surprise, la révolte, bref à véhiculer un message. Selon Dianteill (2004 : 437), « en observant la façon de danser d'une personne, on pouvait déceler quel était l'esprit qui l'inspirait ». On songe évidemment au diable ou au bon Dieu, ou encore à des esprits païens qu'on invoque par superstition.

- 53 Le blues propose un message volontairement et fréquemment ambigu (doubles sens, allusions grivoises de toutes sortes, métaphores, sous-entendus, etc., souvent associés au diable). En principe, ce n'est pas véritablement une musique de danse. Le rythme des blues primitifs est trop lent et les instruments qui l'accompagnent sont en nombre restreint. C'est la voix du chanteur et son timbre qui sont mis en évidence. Il s'agit, en effet, de faire passer un message, de faire comprendre ce que l'on chante. En réalité, « le blues est un discours autant qu'une musique » (Dianteill 2004 : 423), un discours qui n'oublie jamais de rappeler l'enfer vécu par la population afro-américaine.

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Annexe

Traduction du passage tiré de *Soldier's Pay* de W. Faulkner :¹¹

... Le chemin replongeait entre les balafres rougeâtres de la terre et, d'un espace éclairé de lune, interrompu par un bouquet d'arbustes, leur parvenait une musique, pure, vibrante, sans paroles et lointaine.

« Ils célèbrent leur messe. Les Noirs », a expliqué le recteur. Ils poursuivirent leur route dans la poussière, dépassant de petites maisons nettes, bien rangées, assombries par le sommeil. Un groupe de Noirs les dépassa, ils portaient des lanternes allumées qui projetaient de vaines petites flammes, futilement, dans le clair de lune. « Personne ne sait pourquoi ils font ça, répondit le recteur à la question de Gillian. Peut-être pour éclairer leur église. »

Le chant se rapprochait toujours plus. Finalement, en s'accroupissant au milieu d'un bouquet d'arbres sur le bord de la route, ils aperçurent l'église miteuse. A l'intérieur, il y avait une douce lueur de pétrole qui ne faisait que rendre l'obscurité et la chaleur plus épaisses. Plus épaisse aussi était l'imminence du sexe après une rude journée de labeur sur la terre baignée de lune, de laquelle le chant immergé de passion de la race noire montait. Ce n'était rien et c'était tout. Puis il a enflé jusqu'à l'extase, empruntant les paroles de l'homme blanc aussi allègrement qu'il s'était approprié son Dieu lointain.

Nourris ce troupeau, Ô Jésus. Tout ce désir qu'a l'humanité de s'unir à quelque chose, quelque part. Nourris ce troupeau, Ô Jésus...

Le recteur et Gillian se tenaient côte à côte sur le chemin de terre. Celui-ci s'éloignait sous la lune. Se dissolvait vaguement à perte de vue. Les champs usés et creusés de sillons rouges n'étaient désormais que des taches alternées de noir léger et d'argent ; les arbres avaient chacun un halo argenté, sauf ceux qui, protégés de la lune, semblaient coulés dans le bronze.

Nourris ce troupeau, Ô Jésus. Les voix s'élevaient pleines et douces. Il n'y avait pas d'orgue ; aucun orgue n'était nécessaire. Au-dessus des harmonies passionnées des basses et des barytons s'élevait le soprano clair des voix de femmes comme une envolée d'oiseaux célestes et dorés. Ils restèrent plantés là, dans la poussière, le recteur dans sa tenue noire informe, et Gillian dans la sienne en serge toute neuve et amidonnée, écoutant et voyant l'église minable transfigurée par son aspiration tranquille, triste et enflammée. Puis les chants cessèrent, s'estompant sur la terre baignée de lune, avant que ne viennent le lendemain, la sueur, le sexe, la mort et la damnation inévitables. Puis ils prirent la direction de la ville sous la lune en sentant la terre dans leurs souliers.

NOTES

1. Voir traduction en annexe.
2. *A Free Negro in the Slave Era* (1961).
3. Peuple du Togo et du Ghana en Afrique occidentale.
4. « Il n'y a pratiquement aucune musique en Afrique qui d'une manière ou d'une autre ne vienne du discours. »
5. « Je vais te dire ce qu'est le blues. Si t'as pas d'argent, t'as le blues. Si t'as pas d'argent pour te payer une maison, t'as encore le blues. Si t'as pas d'argent et que tu peux pas t'payer de quoi manger, t'as le blues. Quand t'as pas d'argent, t'as le blues, pa'ce que tu penses au mal, tu penses au blues. Quand t'as l'cafard, t'as le blues. Chaque fois que tu penses au mal, tu penses au blues ». Notre traduction.
6. Groupes de forçats enchaînés ensemble, en particulier pendant le travail en extérieur.
7. Créés au début et au milieu du XIXe siècle aux USA, les *minstrel shows* étaient des spectacles populaires composés de dialogues comiques, de chansons et de danses, interprétés d'abord par des troupes d'acteurs blancs qui se noircissaient le visage, puis, surtout après la guerre de sécession, par des comédiens noirs. Ces spectacles visaient à caricaturer les noirs, à imiter leur apparence et leur façon de chanter.
8. Du nom d'une chanson interprétée par Thomas D. Rice (1808-1860), premier comédien blanc à se noircir le visage, dans un *minstrel show*.
9. On pense aux lois Jim Crow qui institutionnalisèrent la ségrégation raciale dans les états du sud des Etats-Unis.
10. « Contre le mur, accroupi, un mendiant noir aveugle, avec une guitare et une monture en fil de fer qui lui maintenait aux lèvres un harmonica, plaquait sur cet arrière-plan d'odeurs et de

bruits la plainte réitérée d'accords chauds et monotones, aussi rythmés qu'une formule mathématique, mais sans musique. C'était un homme d'au moins quarante ans et il avait cette patience résignée que l'on a après de nombreuses années de cécité. » Notre traduction.

11. Notre traduction.

RÉSUMÉS

Le blues est une forme musicale traditionnelle dérivée des chants de travail des anciens esclaves. Il semble que le terme « blues » provienne de l'expression anglaise « *the blue devils* » qui signifie idées noires, dépression et tristesse. On en retrouve une référence dans une pièce de théâtre en un acte de Georges Coleman le Jeune, *Blue Devils, a Farce in One Act* (1736).

Le blues est, au début, une ballade narrative inspirée de la musique folklorique venue d'Europe et un mode de communication. Ce sont des airs qui racontent les malheurs personnels vécus par les Afro-Américains. Ces chants ont une dimension poétique, l'énoncé n'est pas univoque : bien souvent, le message est codé et abonde en mots à double sens, allusions sexuelles, grivoiseries, expressions argotiques, sous-entendus, métaphores, etc. A l'origine du blues, on trouve aussi les *negro spirituals* qui laissent une large place à Dieu (la lumière céleste) et au diable (le mal et les ténèbres) qui semblent faire bon ménage. Dans certains airs, le chanteur a conclu un pacte avec le diable ; c'est parfois le diable lui-même qui est déprimé et triste. Quand les *blue devils* deviennent le *devil's blues* (le blues du diable), la boucle est bouclée.

Outre le rôle culturel et poétique du blues, ce genre musical a des fonctions sociales qui ont permis à la communauté de survivre et de grandir malgré les difficultés et les contraintes.

Blues is a traditional musical form originated by former slaves, and which developed from work songs and field hollers. The term “blues” may have come from the *blue devils*, describing a depressed mood; an early use of the phrase in this sense occurs in George Colman the Younger's one-act play *Blue Devils, a Farce in One Act* (1736).

At the beginning, blues is simple narrative ballads inspired by folk music from Europe, and a mode of communication. The songs usually relate troubles and personal woes experienced by African American people. There is a poetic dimension that is present in these songs, the verse is not univocal and the message is often expressed in an indirect way, rife with wordplay and double meanings: for example, sexual allusions, saucy expressions, slang, innuendoes, metaphors, etc.

Blues also includes spirituals, saving an important place for God (the holy light) and the devil (evil and darkness), who seem to get along quite well. In some songs, the singer has made a pact with the devil; sometimes, the devil himself has got the blues. When the *blue devils* become the *devil's blues*, things come full circle.

Besides the cultural and poetic role of blues, this musical genre has social functions which have enabled the community to survive and grow up despite difficulties and constraints, at work, in their faith, and in their self-expression.

INDEX

Thèmes : Music

Keywords : blues, song, danse, negro spiritual, prosody, rhythm, work songs

Mots-clés : blues, chant, danse, negro spiritual, prosodie, rythme, work songs

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New ways ever free : compte-rendu du spectacle de Nathalie Vincent-Arnaud en hommage à David Bowie (2/12/16 – Scène de la Fabrique)

Paul-Emile Bouyssié

- 1 Lieu : Scène de La Fabrique (UT2J)
- 2 Date : 2 décembre 2016
- 3 Conceptrice du spectacle : Nathalie Vincent-Arnaud
- 4 Régie son et lumière : Natty Boucher, José Castaño, Bernard Delpech
- 5 Montage son : Bernard Delpech
- 6 Images vidéo : Yvan Croquette, Pierre Esteves, Sonia Schott, Nathalie Vincent-Arnaud
- 7 Regard extérieur et conseil artistique : Muriel Plana
- 8 Participants : Yvan Croquette, Caroline Gey, Julia Mouchan, Floriane Rascle, Alice Roger, Sonia Schott, Frédéric Sounac, Nathalie Vincent-Arnaud
New ways ever free, spectacle poético-chorégraphique d'une demi-heure, fondé sur des musiques de David Bowie, se veut une manière d'évocation et de conjugaison des multiples facettes incarnées par l'artiste entre fêlure et quête identitaire, appel de l'étrange, transgénérique, transfrontalier. Engageant danseurs et récitants, il fait suite à la journée d'étude « Paysages et héritages de David Bowie » organisée ce même jour à la Maison de la Recherche.
- 9 Telle est la note d'intention de Nathalie Vincent-Arnaud, professeur à l'UT2J, pour un spectacle-hommage à David Bowie en conclusion d'une journée d'étude pluridisciplinaire qu'elle a organisée avec David Roche (professeur à l'UT2J) et Emeline Jouve (maître de conférences à l'Institut National Universitaire Champollion d'Albi) au sein de son équipe de recherche CAS (Cultures Anglo-Saxonnes) afin de recenser les divers héritages de l'artiste. Pour monter ce spectacle, point d'orgue décalé de cette journée universitaire, Nathalie Vincent-Arnaud a fait appel à des personnes d'horizons

variés, amis, collègues et étudiants : Yvan Croquette, danseur contemporain, Frédéric Sounac, maître de conférences en littérature comparée, Floriane Rascle et Sonia Schott, doctorantes en arts du spectacle et en allemand, ainsi que trois étudiantes de licence en arts du spectacle et en anglais, Alice Roger, Julia Mouchan et Caroline Gey. Muriel Plana, professeur en arts du spectacle, est également venue lui prêter main forte.

- 10 À partir de diverses propositions, les huit participants vont croiser leurs visions de Bowie au sein de ce spectacle : le poème « O Nacht » du poète expressionniste allemand Gottfried Benn, récité par Sonia Schott, côtoie la danse contemporaine d'Yvan Croquette sur « Rock'n'Roll Suicide » ; le jazz nourri d'improvisations d'Alice Roger, Julia Mouchan et Caroline Gey sur « Under Pressure » – titre qui réunit David Bowie et Freddie Mercury – précède le solo d'inspiration néo-classique de Nathalie Vincent-Arnaud sur « Lady Grinning Soul ». Faisant suite au duo bondissant de Julia et Caroline sur « Dancing in the street » (David Bowie et Mick Jagger) auquel viennent se mêler d'autres danseurs, le dialogue théâtral de Frédéric Sounac et Floriane Rascle, sur une scène emblématique du film *Furyo*,¹ se mue en chant lyrique nous faisant redécouvrir la chanson « Moon of Alabama » de Kurt Weill à laquelle succède, en fondu enchaîné, la version live de Bowie lui-même. L'ensemble des danseurs évoluent alors dans une déambulation entrecoupée de ralentis et de postures figées qui n'est pas sans rappeler certaines œuvres de Pina Bausch.² Nathalie Vincent-Arnaud trouve en effet son inspiration dans la succession de tableaux figurant les étapes – les « stations » – d'une quête existentielle et la superposition de multiples *parades* artistiques dont elle assure la cohérence rhapsodique : photo de street art berlinois, séquence audio de la pièce *Elephant Man* interprétée par Bowie sur laquelle quatre des danseurs multiplient les postures d'instabilité, cinéma avec une reprise du thème musical de *Furyo* (composé par Ryūichi Sakamoto), archives radios annonçant la mort du chanteur en superposant voix et idiomes à la fin du premier tableau où les trajectoires de Nathalie Vincent-Arnaud et d'Yvan Croquette convergent d'abord lentement, au son de « Warszawa » (David Bowie et Brian Eno), vers la guitare électrique temporairement placée au premier plan. Structuré par une logique d'échos, le spectacle est un caméléon de correspondances revenant au gré des variations de lumière – des pleins feux à la pénombre en passant par des jeux de clair-obscur – et des déambulations. Nathalie Vincent-Arnaud nous dévoile quelques-unes de ces correspondances.

Paul-Émile Bouyssié : Pourquoi le poème « O Nacht » ? Le poème non traduit et *a priori* déconnecté de Bowie était obscur pour la majorité du public. Néanmoins, son intensité, son message global ont été reçus : une étudiante a d'ailleurs dit qu'elle n'avait rien compris mais tout saisi...

Nathalie Vincent-Arnaud : On peut difficilement évoquer Bowie, ainsi que plusieurs des personnages qu'il a créés (notamment dans les années 1970), sans évoquer les paradis artificiels et la noirceur extrême qui ont accompagné à certains moments sa création artistique. Sonia a ainsi spontanément pensé au poème de Benn qui évoque la cocaïne en mettant en scène un questionnement identitaire, une errance qui avaient tout à fait leur place ici et en donnant voix à la langue allemande (clin d'œil notamment à la période berlinoise de Bowie, forme de chaos créateur déterminant pour lui). Qui plus est, le « You're not alone » répété tel un mantra à la fin de « Rock'n'roll Suicide » (morceau choisi par Yvan pour son solo) vient faire écho au *einsam*, puis son équivalent anglais *alone*, répété par Sonia dans un fondu enchaîné permettant d'articuler l'ensemble.

Paul-Émile Bouyssié : À ce propos, comment se sont déroulés le « montage » et les répétitions ?

Nathalie Vincent-Arnaud : J'avais déjà, depuis longtemps, une trame assez précise en tête sous la forme d'une succession d'images, de tableaux, de couleurs musicales, d'atmosphères. Certains morceaux étaient fixés d'emblée dans mon esprit (comme pour l'ouverture, duo processionnel sur « Warszawa », mais aussi le final avec « Moon of Alabama » sur lequel j'imaginai une ambiance mêlant cabaret, cirque, tragique et comique dans une veine assez représentative des modes d'inspiration de Bowie) ; pour d'autres moments, j'hésitais, et les choix des uns et des autres ont été déterminants. Après plusieurs réunions dans les salles de danse de l'UFR des Langues et de la Fabrique pour tester les différents éléments de ce canevas, un précieux regard extérieur, celui de Muriel Plana, professeur d'études théâtrales et metteuse en scène, nous a permis de mieux composer avec l'espace. Tout a fonctionné de manière très harmonieuse, avec des discussions, des idées (parfois contradictoires) qui ont surgi à partir de cette trame générale.

Paul-Émile Bouyssié : Comment as-tu conçu ta propre chorégraphie ? Y avait-il une volonté particulière ? Quelle est ta part de recherche ?

Nathalie Vincent-Arnaud : Pour mon solo, mon choix s'est porté d'emblée sur « Lady Grinning Soul ». J'ai toujours adoré le titre même du morceau et tout ce qu'il évoque, son lyrisme (cette intro magnifique au piano, suivie d'un silence que la chorégraphie me semblait devoir habiter sans pour autant le détruire), l'image de la femme qu'il véhicule (fatale mais tendre, sublimée mais charnelle), forme d'alter ego en quelque sorte, de *Doppelgänger* de celui qui la rêve ainsi. Cela dit, je n'ai pas cherché délibérément à représenter quelque chose de précis dans la construction de ma chorégraphie. Il s'agit plutôt d'un élan gestuel, d'une dynamique que musique et voix ont fait naître et m'ont permis d'élaborer avec le vocabulaire et la grammaire que je possède et nourris sans cesse par ma pratique de la danse, classique et contemporaine. Il me manquait des éléments de liaison, de fluidité, un ancrage dans le sol plus prononcé, mais j'ai bénéficié des conseils de Michèle Broda, chorégraphe talentueuse (qui a d'ailleurs également conseillé Yvan). C'est donc à la fois de l'intuition et de la recherche. Mais dans tous les domaines je crois vraiment qu'on ne peut séparer les deux.

Paul-Émile Bouyssié : Qu'est ce que ce spectacle t'a apporté personnellement ?

Nathalie Vincent-Arnaud : Il m'a d'abord apporté la satisfaction immense de la construction de quelque chose qui a pour moi des allures de démonstration : *David Bowie is*, David Bowie est... tout cela (et plus encore bien sûr). Il y a aussi le bonheur de voir s'articuler travail universitaire, amours musicales qui n'ont fait que s'affirmer (depuis ma découverte de Bowie en hypokhâgne grâce à une amie très chère passionnée par son œuvre), amour de la danse, de la forme théâtrale que prend tout cela ; et enfin le bonheur de ce décloisonnement qui a fait dialoguer des personnes d'horizons divers, mêlant et échangeant des compétences sur le mode de la passion pour Bowie, de l'humour, de la créativité, de la franchise et de l'attention portée aux autres, sans que rien de tout cela ne soit forcé ou artificiel. Quant à Bowie, le fait qu'il inspire ce type de création à la croisée des arts et des langages en dit suffisamment long, je pense, sur les potentialités expressives de son œuvre.

- 11 À en croire la *standing ovation* finale, la petite flamme a fait des étincelles. Figure récurrente du spectacle, d'abord droite puis vacillante, elle finit par disparaître de

l'arrière-scène et laisse place à une foule de visages au crayon, esquissant avec les corps des interprètes qui s'entremêlent, autant de visions et de tensions, unies dans une ultime célébration.

- 12 Errances dansées, quêtes transversales, *New ways ever free* ouvre des perspectives où se répondent virtuosité du danseur et solitude du poète, chaos et osmose lyrique, recherche et création. En ce 2 décembre, universitaires, étudiants, artistes ont *interprété* le mythe dans une fusion d'images fulgurantes ressuscitant Bowie – le temps d'un éclair.
- 13 N.B. Les images du spectacle ci-jointes sont extraites du montage vidéo réalisé par Michèle Broda et Gérard Tisserand à partir des enregistrements respectifs de Bernard Delpech et Gérard Tisserand.

NOTES

1. Film de Nagisa Ōshima (1983).

2. En particulier *Masurca Fogo* (1998) qui, outre de continuelles déambulations liant les tableaux, est animé par de multiples interactions intermédiaires (notamment bruitages hors-scène et fleurs projetées à l'arrière-plan).

INDEX

Thèmes : Dance

Mots-clés : Bowie, danse, musique, poésie

Keywords : Bowie, dance, music, poetry

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Ariel's Corner

David Roche (dir.)

Film, TV, Video

Conference Report: Women Who Kill in English-Speaking Cinema and TV Series of the Postfeminist Era

13–14 October 2016. University of Toulouse Jean Jaurès. Symposium organized by Zachary Baqué, Cristelle Maury and David Roche

Sarah Campion and Lénora Lardy

- 1 The topic of this conference does not, on the face of it, present anything new. Indeed, the last forty years have been overflowed with research on the figure of the murderous woman and the various types of characters associated with it (the jealous girlfriend, the monstrous woman). This conference, however, focused on the Postfeminist era and considered women who kill in the light of the recent shift in the queer position that has, for the last twenty-five or so years, encouraged a more flexible understanding of questions of gender and sexuality. Over the course of this two-day symposium, eight speakers divided into three panels of two or three speakers explored this shift, evidencing the gendered distinctions between male and female violence: the second has often been associated with a motive to be violent and to kill. A woman who kills does so for a reason: she wants revenge, has been a victim, wants to protect her children, and so on. Female violence is rarely presented as purely sadistic and is often grounded in traditional views of victimhood and motherhood associated with femaleness. In his opening speech, David Roche announced the new questions raised by this follow-up of the Femmes Meurtrières symposium on 19th and 20th century literature, organized by Aurélie Guillain, Emeline Jouve, Laurence Talairach-Vielmas and Héliane Ventura, held in Winter 2015. Redirecting the focus from a film studies perspective, Roche evoked the 1980s and 1990s groundbreaking studies of scholars since Mulvey, such as Mary Ann Doane, Annette Kuhn, Janey Place, Carol Clover and Barbara Creed regarding the various representations of women in relation to film genre. Walking in the footsteps of feminist film theory, Roche reckoned that this symposium would expose the dialogue between audience and film - through the analysis of narrative structures and aesthetics - fueled by contemporary debates on feminism, including post-feminism. This exposure suggested many valuable

perspectives, he explained, such as the link between filmmakers and feminist film theory, the oddity and displacement of female violence or the question of the blurring of genders.

- 2 In the first panel dedicated to “Action Women,” Elizabeth Mullen, from the University of Bretagne Occidentale in Brest, presented a comparison between female protagonists from two very different films. The box-office-success comedy *Spy* (Paul Feig, 2015), a parody of James Bond films, and the Academy Award Nominated Sci-Fi action blockbuster *Mad Max: Fury Road* (George Miller, 2015). Mullen focused more precisely on the reactions of spectators online, which turned out to be very different for these two films. Both films have in common that they present a female protagonist taking up the main role previously occupied by a man (*Mad Max* or *Bond*). On the one hand, the release of the trailer of *Mad Max* before the film’s release triggered extreme reactions from the “manosphere,” that is websites made by and for men that are openly misogynistic. They expressed a clear discontent at the female heroine in what was expected to be a classic “male action film.” For them, the very existence of a woman who kills in such a blockbuster disrupts the order of the entire film industry and testifies to an overt intent to assimilate feminist views. On the contrary, the release of *Spy* did not trigger any reaction from the male sphere online and garnered some approval from feminists. The question remains: why was there no backlash when a woman took James Bond’s role?
- 3 Isabelle Schmitt-Pitiot, Associate Professor of English at the University of Bourgogne, then studied the ambiguity of the series *Hit & Miss* (Sky Atlantic, 2012), in which Chloë Sevigny embodies the male-to-female transgender contract-killer Myra. This two-sided character articulates the issues of gender, sexuality and violence, offering contradictory views on them. Here, the character’s male and female body (the viewer is constantly reminded of the fact that she has a penis) reflects this combination. The series both depicts and questions a binary view of the world by forcing the transgender body into a realistic setting, thus focusing more on the unusual act of killing for no apparent reason (or for money) than on the queer body that does it. Schmitt-Pitiot finally suggested a solution to the contradictions raised by this character by underlining the creation of a hybrid discourse through doubles and mirrors, but also in the intertextuality developed by the series, a parallel discourse that encourages us to accept the blurring of boundaries.
- 4 Shannon Wells-Lassagne, Professor of film studies at the University of Bourgogne (Dijon) presented a comparison between Arya Stark and Brienne of Tarth, two characters from the TV show *Game of Thrones* (HBO, 2011-). She explored how the two characters are clearly identified as both women who kill and sympathetic characters by studying their first appearance in the show. Arya and Brienne show physical similarities in terms of costumes and behavior. The two characters are typical of a show that establishes unreliable gender norms. For instance, Brienne’s first appearance takes place during a fight for her King. Her face is hidden, and she wins over a male knight. When she reveals her face and thus her sex, she asserts her superiority over a male counterpart before a King who is having sexual relationships with his wife’s brother. Arya, on the other hand, becomes a trained assassin and displays androgynous physical traits. Through this study, Wells-Lassagne accounted for a new type of woman who kills in a genre, fantasy, where female warriors are traditionally sexually fetishized.

- 5 The second panel dealt with a staple figure of film noir: the *femme fatale*. Cristelle Maury, Associate Professor at the University of Toulouse 2 Jean Jaurès, who recently wrote an article on Todd Haynes’s readaptation of *Mildred Pierce* (HBO, 2011), examined how film noir interacts with feminist film theory. Her talk drew attention to the evolution of the *femme fatale* from noir to neo-noir and to the post-feminist era, through the analysis of *Gone Girl* (David Fincher, 2014). She emphasized the contradictory characterization of Amy, navigating between the sexual and mysterious *femme fatale* and the still child-like nurturing woman. This very convincing analysis was grounded in a comparison of Fincher’s film’s aesthetics with recent neo-noir, including *Body Heat* (Lawrence Kasdan, 1981), *Fatal Attraction* (Adrian Lyne, 1987), *Basic Instinct* (Paul Verhoeven, 1992) and *Taking Lives* (D.J. Caruso, 2004). Maury also evoked 1940s and 1950s film noir, such as *Possessed* (Curtis Bernhardt, 1947), *Sunset Boulevard* (Billy Wilder, 1950) and *Angel Face* (Otto Preminger, 1953), with a special focus on their female characters embodied respectively by Joan Crawford, Gloria Swanson and Jean Simmons. Her comparative analysis emphasized the deconstruction and transformation of the *femme fatale* due to aesthetic de-eroticization, making Amy either a nurturing woman gone wild or a *femme fatale* gone nurturing. Moreover, as a victim of the media, Amy is only what she represents, so that her only identity is nothing more than the one she performs. Maury’s analysis of this complex character in a movie blending film noir and neo-noir characteristics highlighted paradoxes inherent to postfeminism.
- 6 Adrienne Boutang, Associate Professor of film studies at the University of Franche Comté, Besançon, focused on the relationship between young teenage girls and female villains in the dystopian young adult fictions *The Hunger Games* (Gary Ross, 2012), *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* (Francis Lawrence, 2013), *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay* (Francis Lawrence, 2014 – 2015), *Divergent* (Neil Burger, 2014), *Insurgent* (Robert Schwentke, 2015) and *The 5th Wave* (J. Blakeson, 2016). Some of these films have been praised as feminist by the critics. Boutang’s analysis, which included both the actual women in these fictions—who have not been the focus of critics writing on feminism—and the teenage girls, demonstrated how this representation reflects current feminist debates. Boutang went from analyzing the warrior girls’ androgynous appearances and their ability to kill only when absolutely needed, highlighting their defiance of gender roles as they switch from feminine to tomboyish whenever they please, to commenting on the duplicity of the more mature women’s feminine looks but cyborg-like anti-feminine behavior induced by patriarchy. Boutang concluded that teenage girls seem to be more accepted and valued than empowered “bitchy” women, who are deprived of any potential contemporary feminist *de-evilizing* backstories. Boutang ultimately argued that, regarding the difference in portrayal of women and girls, these films reflect the ambiguity of post-feminism and girl culture: by killing empowered women, the young girls are metaphorically toppling their feminist mothers.
- 7 The last panel dealt with “Monstrous Women” in gothic and horror movies. Diane Deplante, a PhD Candidate at the University of Perpignan Via Domitia, demonstrated that the horror movies *Teeth* (Michel Linchtenstein, 2007) and *Jennifer’s Body* (Karyn Kusama, 2009) subtextually address the issue of rape culture. In doing so, both movies invert the usual status of gender in horror movies. Indeed, the fact that women are imbued with violence is already a displacement, since gruesome murders are generally depicted as male deeds. While women are usually victims, in Linchtensein’s and Kusama’s movies, they become murderous monsters who transgress the gendered

dichotomy of violence. Men, though they are still villains, become victims who need “pink ladies’ pepper spray.” By showing several gruesome scenes from both movies, Deplante pointed out the key element of this gender inversion: the figure of the *vagina dentata*, i.e., toothed female genitalia. The myth is used to invert and criticize the traditional narratives of horror movies, explicitly targeted through visual references such as movie posters, in both *Teeth* and *Jennifer’s Body*, where women are victims of men. Thanks to their lethal genitalia, the female characters evolve from the status of victim to avenging perpetrator as they acquire the ability to punish monstrous sexuality, usually by castrating the male characters who intend to assault them. Deplante went on to contend that, rather than just display a positive image of women in mainstream representations, mainstream cinema is a “fertile ground” to carry on the societal discussion of women’s control over their sexuality, leading to the rejection of feminine victimhood.

- 8 Finally, Carolina Abello Onofre, who has a Bachelor of Arts in Modern Languages, and Christophe Chambost, Associate Professor at Université Bordeaux Montaigne, discussed the presence of she-devils and furies in the movies *Byzantium* (Neil Jordan, 2012), *The Woman in Black* (James Watkins, 2012) and *Crimson Peak* (Guillermo del Toro, 2015). After showing key passages in the representation of she-devils from all three movies, Onofre and Chambost commented on the rebellious female figures and their inclusion in a Victorian setting, which induces a questioning of deeply seated patriarchal norms in each movie. They analyzed the inclusion of different forms of art in the narration of *Byzantium* and *Crimson Peak* as symbolizing an opposition to male superiority in the first and the decline of a criticized aristocracy in the second. They went on to question the lesser political content of Watkins’ readaptation *The Woman in Black*, compared to the original 1983 novel and the 1989 TV film, suggesting that it is typical of the search for the sensational in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries horror movies. Referring to the vampire novels and ghost stories of Victorian times, the two speakers showed that the female murderers and the feminists opposing patriarchy in these films were empowered female characters who do not abandon their goals, even though they are in conflict with the patriarchal society they live in.
- 9 Overall, this symposium exposed the complexity and panorama of characterizations of the female killer. A complexity often paired with a resistance to a patriarchal system from a post-feminist angle opposed to the feminist perspective preceding it. Indeed, the different talks foregrounded the response of post-feminist representations of women to gender differentiation and norms, which the feminist perspective often indulges in. This bold response deconstructs and points out what is left of patriarchy in our contemporary society, but mostly within the cinema industry itself, laying in the displacement of traditional characterizations.

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Keywords: English-speaking cinema, feminism, postfeminism, gender, action film, TV Series, film noir, young adult dystopia, horror film, gothic, film studies

Subjects: Film

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CMAS Latina/o Media Makers

Presented by the Center for Mexican American Studies, in collaboration with Radio-Television-Film, The University of Texas at Austin, Spring 2017

David Roche

- 1 The three screening events were held at UTA on February 28 (Rose Troche), March 7 (Jesús Salvador Treviño) and April 11, 2017 (Jim Mendiola) and were organized by Mary Beltrán¹ and Charles Ramírez Berg,² sponsored by CMAS in conjunction with RTF.

Rose Troche³

- 2 Mary Beltrán thanked Rose Troche for being here and summed up her career. Her background as a first generation Puerto Rican American is vital to her work. Her trajectory took her from showcasing independent filmmaking with *Go Fish* (USA, 1994), to receiving the Critics Award and an Acting Prize for Patricia Clarkson⁴ at the American Film Festival in Deauville for *The Safety of Objects* (UK/USA/Canada, 2001), to acting as director, screenwriter and executive producer on *The L Word* (Showtime, 2004-2009). She has recently turned her attention to the web and has been experimenting with virtual technology since 2014. She received a Time-Warner fellowship for a LGBTQ&A show. She is currently working on two feature films.
- 3 Rose Troche is a gifted speaker, one who can easily make an audience laugh and whose frankness about personal issues such as her identity or the death of a loved one is touching. Born in 1964, Troche studied at the University of Illinois. She fondly remembers her film teachers (Peter Hayles, Linda Williams) there; they were still studying Laura Mulvey, so the focus was on disrupting cinema, not doing narrative. Troche was staunch in her determination to make experimental art and loved to repurpose material found on campus. She took her Super-8 camera everywhere and shot out windows (she does the same today with her digital camera). Her first movie, a series of short films entitled *Gabriella* (1991-1993), made money, but never for Troche and fellow screenwriter Guinevere Turner.⁵ It was largely made with found footage, and

shot before *Go Fish*, but edited after promoting the feature film. Troche's early work was, she admitted, influenced by her friend, artist Tom Quirk.⁶

- 4 When Troche came out as a lesbian, she was very much involved in her community, comprised mainly of black men and white lesbians who had been activists before in Chicago. With *Go Fish*, she wanted to make a piece that was diverse, even if the film has a majority of white women. It was a film by, for and about women, one that would show at LGBTQ festivals. The movie was shot with friends in their apartments; they wanted to show how they were to each other's families. Troche wanted to open the movie with a hate crime, but Guinevere convinced her not to, arguing it would make the movie too narrative. A lot of this film came back in *The L Word*, but dressed in a different package. She was still in film school when she made it and never imagined the film, produced for \$125,000, would be so successful. It was shot on 16mm with a clunky war camera. Troche recut the movie after Sundance when she sold it to a distributor. It made about \$4.5 million. Troche remembered how strange it was to travel first class while promoting the film and coming home not being able to pay the rent. The film is now tied up with Warner Bros., so she makes very little off of it; Troche told the audience it was important not to be naïve selling the rights of your work.
- 5 Troche then moved to London, where she directed *Bedrooms and Hallways* (UK, 1998), a movie she started adapting with its author, Robert Farrar, before it had even been greenlit by the publisher. It was a very different experience: she had resources, an actual crew, got paid, and it was the first time she worked with real actors, notably Kevin McKidd who would later star in *Rome* (HBO/BBC, 2005-2007). The film marked a moment in Troche's life when she didn't know who she wanted to be and didn't want to be labeled. It raises the question: if I sleep with a man, does that make me not a lesbian? Troche insisted on how demarcating is the moment when you come out, and cited Kristen Stewart's coming out on *Saturday Night Live* as a poignant example.⁷ Troche's experience was that people always identified her as lesbian (except for her accountant!), but seldom realized she was Puerto Rican.
- 6 Her third feature film, *The Safety of Objects*, was another adaptation, based on a collection of short stories by A.M. Homes. It was flattering because this time someone had come to her to ask her to direct, though they still saw her as the director of *Go Fish*, *Bedrooms and Hallways* having not registered in the U.S. She was given a chance to work with a real budget (\$8 million), famous actors (Glenn Close,⁸ who loved the script) and a bigger crew. Troche had decided to stop looking into her own life and went full throttle with the film adaptation. This was a problematic moment in her life because she finally owned things after sleeping on the floor until she was thirty-five. It was a heartbreak, however, because the movie didn't break even and only made \$3 million worldwide. Troche said, as a woman director, it is much more difficult to fail and come back. But she is very proud of *The Safety of Objects* and thinks that you can tell that, in spite of its white upper class material, it was written from the perspective of someone who's not white, that there's a sense of disconnect in the adaptation.
- 7 After this movie, Troche looked back on her life and thought: I've made experimental shorts, a DIY movie, a foreign film, a feature film. She wanted to practice her craft more and wanted to move more quickly on her feet. That meant doing television, but she wanted to do hour-long television, which meant going to HBO. The "gay mafia," she joked, helped her get a job on *Six Feet Under* (HBO, 2001-2005), a show that was already

en cours and which she loved. She shot Episode 2.3, entitled “The Plan.” “Television is a well-oiled machine,” Troche said, “It works with you or without you.”

- 8 She was then offered to direct a pilot for a show called *The Ranch* or *The Star*, but she was worried she was going to be pigeonholed as a gay director. Finally, she decided to do the gay show after all and started working on *The L Word*, directing twelve episodes and writing five. Showtime had already done *Queer as Folk* (2000-2005) and *Soul Food* (2000-2004) at the time, and the producers were passionate. The series reminded her of *Go Fish*: what would it be like to be working on these themes with money this time? Pam Grier had agreed to star in the show, initially as an old school lesbian, but *The L Word* team (including Troche, who directed the pilot) was not buying her as a lesbian; her character then became the sister of mixed-race Bette Porter (Jennifer Beals). Working on the series was a special moment. They were fully aware it was soap opera, but they also knew that people all over the country would watch it and feel visible. So they really felt they were doing something for the better. It wasn’t just about lesbian visibility; the series depicts a world where women are empowered. *The L Word* was an event. People watched it in lesbian bars. It had a lot of sex scenes, and Troche directed many of them, even though prior to working on the Showtime series she felt uncomfortable doing so. Troche remembered one time in particular when Jennifer Beals asked her if she wanted her to have an orgasm. Troche loved working with Jennifer: they were the same age, were both women of color, and both from Chicago. Troche did three seasons of *The L Word*, but quit when she felt that she was not being used properly. She resigned for season 4, but returned for season 5 to direct an episode where everybody had sex, and for the “sad” season 6. One of the reasons she left was that none of the Latina characters were played by Latina actresses—Sarah Shahi, for instance, is Spanish-Lebanese. Troche regrets not having put her foot down. Troche is glad that there’s more brave casting today and that there’s a growing trend of women comedians.
- 9 Troche did a lot of directing for hire after that: the pilot of *South of Nowhere* (Nickelodeon, 2005-2008), and two episodes of *Law & Order* (NBC, 1990-2010). “Directing for hire is the pits, she said, “It’s good pay, but it’s not your show.” Now that she had money, though, Troche figured she had the freedom to make more daring decisions. She could use TV to make money and do the things she loved. She was interested in making web series. She did three episodes of *Blue* (WIGSCO, 2012-2014), then executive produced *Hunting Season* (Logo, 2012-2015). In 2009, she made a short film for the new museum in Chinatown, with the highly talented cinematographer Bradford Young, recently nominated for an Oscar for *Arrival* (USA, Denis Villeneuve, 2016). She wrote a story about parents coming to the U.S. and how the values of your country estrange you from those of your parents’ land. In 2014, curious about the immersive potential of VR 360°, she participated in the Perspective Series, directing “Chapter 1: The Party.” It was presented at Sundance in 2015 as an installation. It allowed you to experience a sexual assault at a college party from the points of view of the female victim and the male assailant. The following year, Troche directed “Chapter 2: The Misdemeanor.” This time, the focus was on a police shooting, from the perspective of two young men and two police officers. “The sad part,” Troche explained, “is that audiences usually only experienced one perspective,” and she has since wondered if it was difficult for audiences to relate to a police officer.

- 10 Troche continued to work for television, with *Sugar* in 2015, which she made with a Latino crew. Troche wanted to explore how she would represent her own people, and noticed similarities with *Go Fish*, especially her interest in mother-daughter relationships. Troche clearly sees writing and directing as therapeutic in this respect. Troche has also been working on a series entitled LGBTQ&A.
- 11 During Q&A, Troche responded to questions concerning artistic creation in the Trump era and her optimism concerning the entertainment industry today. Troche said she was happy she had released *If Not Love* (USA/Australia) in 2017. She would like to work with more people of color. She admitted that you promise yourself lots of things when you start making a TV show, but that in the end, the body count has to be high when people of color are involved; *The Wire* (HBO, 2002-2008) is a case in point. Troche has realized from teaching at a Latino school in Chicago that the gang situation has only gotten worse. Troche believes that things have gotten better for Latino artists, thanks to digital platforms, the increase in the number of women performers, but she concluded that the majority of people making money, including in VR, are still white men.

Jesús Salvador Treviño⁹

- 12 Charles Ramírez Berg presented today's director. Born in El Paso in 1946, Treviño grew up in Southern California. As a student, he documented the Mexican American Civil Rights movement in the 1960s. He has since had an amazing career, working with the most influential theater troupes. And he had a second career directing prime time TV shows, including *NYPD Blue* (Fox, 1993-2005), *Babylon 5* (PTEN, 1994-1998), *E.R.* (NBC, 1994-2009), *Third Watch* (NBC, 1999-2005), *Law & Order* (NBC, 2001-2011), *Prison Break* (Fox, 2005-2009). He also co-produced the series *Resurrection Blvd.* (Showtime, 2000-2002), which won The Alamo award. He is now a member of the Directors Guild Award.
- 13 Treviño proposed to focus on storytelling both as a filmmaker, an author and a radio show producer. He sees himself above all as a storyteller regardless of the medium and thinks that potentially everyone in the room is a storyteller. The important question has to do with the kind of stories we want to tell and which medium we are going to use for a given story.
- 14 Treviño screened a fifteen-minute compilation of some of his work, made by the Director's Guild as a tribute to his career. It included clips from his documentary *Yo soy chicano* (Mexico/USA, 1972), his feature film *Raíces de sangre* (Mexico/USA, 1978) and *American Playhouse: Seguin* (PBS, 1982), which presents a Mexican American view of the battle of the Alamo. The compilation also included excerpts from episode 1.17 of *NYPD Blue* "Black Men Can't Jump," *New York Undercover* (Fox, 1994-1999), *Third Watch*, and the pilot of *Resurrection Blvd.*, a series which focuses on a struggling Latino family.
- 15 For Treviño, every story has a beginning, a middle and an end. In 1972, it was a challenge making *Yo soy chicano*. There were no Chicano Studies departments, and El Paso and Northridge had just started such courses. So there was no sense as to who Mexican Americans were as a people. Treviño wanted to make a film about events going on at the time, so as to understand where his community came from: "Part of the story had to be our history." The problem was: there were very little visuals about

Mexican American history, apart from a few documents from the late 19th century and some from the 1930s-1960s. So the challenge was telling a story without the visuals. Treviño's solution was to make his own. Constraints can sometimes stimulate invention. He used actors in still images, for instance, of Mexican social reform activist Ricardo Flores Magón in prison writing about the unsuccessful invasion of Baja California.

- 16 His interest in *Seguin*, starring Edward James Olmos among others, had to do with the fact that most Americans knew The Alamo through John Wayne's 1960 film. Few people knew that Mexican Americans also fought at the Alamo. The movie was based on the memoirs of Seguin, who was sent to get recruitments but unfortunately returned too late, so it ended up being his job to bury the dead. The PBS production also aimed at debunking the myth that the soldiers had all died heroically, when many had, in fact, been executed. The film also reminded audiences that the Mexican Americans had been the ones to invite the Americans to settle in Texas in the 1820s. For this story, Treviño, who also wrote the script, opted for a flashback structure. Indeed, one of the important aspects of storytelling is deciding on the angle you are going to take so your story rings of truth.
- 17 As a science fiction nerd, he was very happy to get a chance to work on *Star Trek: Voyager* (CBS, 1995-2001). His first episode, 3.13 ("Fair Trade"), required a huge set that would feature 22 distinct alien races. Disappointed by the limited set the stage designers had built, he looked for a solution to create the illusion of a bigger space. He decided to resort to blue screen, having done so before while shooting *SeaQuest 2032* (NBC, 1993-1996). They used three blue screens to create a portal that would double the size of room. The producer backed him up, telling the stage designers that the director was in charge. So again, constraints can lead to interesting choices.
- 18 Treviño ended his talk by screening an excerpt from his more recent work, *Visions of Aztlán* (2010), a documentary about Chicano artists, featuring interviews in which they speak of how they reacted to the Civil Rights movement. The question asked in the clip—"Where do you want to be?"—is a question, the director reflected, you ask yourself as a storyteller:
- What is it you're going to do in life? What are the stories that are in me and the best way to tell them? The stories must arise from who you are. My whole career spans over forty years of making movies and TV shows. And for me, all those are media to be explored, but the stories all originate in me.
- 19 During Q&A, Treviño reacted to the representations of minority characters in TV crime drama, where the latter are often the subject of criminal investigation. Treviño has sometimes declined offers to direct because the story resorted to the stereotypical character of the Mexican American villain. He mentioned one occasion where Puerto Rican American actor Luis Guzmán¹⁰ had been asked to play a child pornographer and Treviño had argued with the producer over it. In the end, Guzmán himself turned it down, saying he had six children, and the producers ended up making the villain a rich white European kid.
- 20 The second question was on his book, *Eyewitness: A Filmmaker's Memoir of the Chicano Movement* (2001), where he had detailed his relationship with his father and with director Luis Valdez,¹¹ famous for writing and directing *La Bamba* (USA, 1987). The book focuses mainly on the period 1966-1967, then fastforwards to the 2000s to assess where we stand today. Treviño said he hadn't wanted to be polemical and had stayed clear of

his relationships with women and anything that wasn't essential to the Chicano movement.

- 21 The third question concerned the industry and whether it has evolved. Treviño answered that the simple fact that he has directed all these episodes testifies to some change. At one point, he had practically given up on filmmaking. In the 1970s, he couldn't even find an agent who wanted to take him on. After a period of roughly ten years where Treviño mostly taught in a university, he ended up being offered a job to direct an episode of *CBS Schoolbreak Special* (1984-1996) entitled "Gangs." What with the awards that followed and the changing times, he now had the talent agencies calling him up. He soon became the television industry's Latino director.
- 22 Finally, a student asked the director if he felt his liberal arts background had informed his life and work at all. Treviño stated that it had definitely exposed him to lots of ideas he wouldn't have had at Columbia or a technical school. For instance, he called on his art background when he directed the episode from *NYPD Blue* by recycling the weird creatures invented by the painter Jérôme Bosch to evoke the drug dementia in a night club scene. He had replicated giant art photos of moments from Bosch and called it *The Garden of Earthly Delights*.

Jim Mendiola¹²

- 23 Mary Beltrán introduced the last speaker in the series of conferences. This series has been an opportunity to showcase directors who have endeavored to produce exciting work in spite of the industry's continuing reluctance to explore Latina/Latino topics. All three directors are, in this respect, models. Beltrán was particularly happy to present Jim Mendiola whose award-winning short film "Pretty Vacant" (1996) had an important role in her life, because it had found resonance with her own hybrid identity. Born in 1963, a native of San Antonio, Mendiola's work depicts a hip Latino culture and conveys the sense of excitement and joy in their everyday lives. His films have been screened at South by Southwest and the Guggenheim Museum. He has also produced *Ozzy Goes to the Alamo* (2001), the first Latino 3D movie, with artist Ruben Ortiz Torres, and has worked as a curator for the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco. He is currently working on a documentary about the making of *Viva Max* (USA, Jerry Paris, 1969), a film that presented the battle of the Alamo from the point of view of Mexicans, in which the Daughters of Texas are the villains. Like his other work, it raises the question: Who gets to tell history?
- 24 Jim Mendiola was glad Don Howard¹³ was in the audience because the latter is one of his inspirations in making the *Viva Max* documentary. Mendiola was impressed by how Howard, in the documentary *Letter from Waco* (USA, 1997), took up the challenge of telling a story about a city of which people knew very little. Mendiola promised he would screen an excerpt from the rough cut of his one-hour-long film; he is scheduled to deliver the film this summer. Today he mainly wanted to talk about where he started in terms of narrative, and especially about his use of historical fact and truth in narrative fiction films. His approach is very close to that described in the recent *Altermundos: Latin@ Speculative Literature, Film, and Popular Culture* (2017), edited by Cathryn Josefina Merla-Watson and B.V. Olguin. Mendiola is interested in trying to maintain facts, while integrating them within a work of fiction. Most of the clips he showed are from fiction films, but all rely on historical facts and all deliberately blur

the lines between fact and fiction, notably by taking the form of fake documentaries. Mendiola recalled that, at a screening at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, one viewer was very much upset at having been fooled into thinking that the movie was a fake.

- 25 The piece he is now working on started out as a traditional PBS-style documentary, with talking heads, interviews, archive footage and *vérité* footage of contemporary events he had witnessed. But the more he worked on it, the more he was tempted to abandon the pretense of an objective narrator. He finally decided to throw out the conventions of “being fair.” The documentary will still be narrated in the third person, but with a point of view. He also decided to integrate his own obsession with The Alamo into the film. The documentary will be composed of three layers. The first deals with *Viva Max*, the 1969 movie Mendiola’s film documents, made in San Antonio and based on the novel by Jim Lehrer. The author got the idea for the book when visiting San Antonio—he had been scolded by the Daughters of Texas for having the audacity to pee in The Alamo! He then got the idea of a fiction about a Mexican General who decides to conquer The Alamo today. A young producer, Mark Carliner, decided to make this political satire his first film. Although the city of San Antonio welcomed a movie shot on location, there was some unhappiness that The Alamo myth was to be treated with so little reverence. The Alamo myth and symbol are what Mendiola sees as the second layer of his documentary: it is to be an analytical exploration of what The Alamo means. Including to someone like singer/drummer Phil Collins, an Alamo fan who owns the largest private collection of Alamo paraphernalia and actually believes he is the reincarnation of one of the soldiers who died in the battle! The third layer is more personal: it has to do with why Jim Mendiola decided to tell the story from his point of view. Mendiola is a fourth generation Mexican American, whose mother was not allowed to swim in the white people’s swimming pool the year she was valedictorian of her High School. Mendiola has always wanted to tell specific Tejano stories to mainstream audiences. The challenge for him is to tell meaningful and nuanced stories based on facts without boring the audience.
- 26 “Pretty Vacant” is the story of Molly, a young Latina who defies her family by refusing to go to Mexico for the summer because she wants to work on her zines. The Sex Pistols, who play a central role in the narrative as the title indicates, actually did perform in San Antonio in 1978. Mendola was very much aware of class differences when he made this film, as he was working as a waiter on the Riverwalk in downtown San Antonio, where many tourists seemed to see Latin Americans as a homogeneous group. The short film was shot with a handheld 16mm camera. It was influenced by two films in particular: Luis Valdez’s first film, a short entitled *I Am Joaquin* (Mexico/USA, 1969), and by Robert Frank and Alfred Leslie’s *Pull My Daisy* (1959). “Pretty Vacant” led to other opportunities, including at Sundance.
- 27 His second movie, the feature *Come and Take It Day* (USA, 2001), is a mockumentary with a *Rashomon*-like structure, i.e., three different narrators, and a caper genre movie climax that doesn’t end well. At its core is the historical figure of folk hero Gregorio Cortez Lira. It was his time first time working with real actors, but the film was made with very little means (PBS contributed some money), and the equipment reflects that (it was made with Hi-8 digital and edited on Final Cut Pro 1). The film wasn’t broadcast on TV, notably because the script had too many bad words.

- 28 His second feature, *Speeder Kills* (2003), was made for \$50,000. It tells the story of an artist who decides to make a documentary about a local rock band. *Speeder Kills* served to document a specific moment in the history of San Antonio and captures a certain vibe of the music scene of then. In it, he mixed footage he had shot without the film in mind, as well as pictures taken by friends in bars; the heterogeneity of the visuals contributes to the film's crazy style. There is, of course, an Alamo sequence or reference, as in all of Mendiola's films.
- 29 Mendiola then worked on web-based material, and this ultimately led to the *Viva Max* documentary. The 1969 film was a good way to look at Mexican American identities. The Alamo has often been treated as a sort of holy place, and yet Mexican Americans from San Antonio habitually experience shame and anger when visiting a monument where you are told that Mexicans are cowards and that the heroes were all white.
- 30 The Q&A brought to the fore the challenges and advantages of dealing with regionally specific material. The discussion also addressed the problem of funding of, and support for, Latino media productions, notably in order to increase visibility and distribution. Members of the audience were also struck by how successfully Mendiola's films depict Latina protagonists, and by the various forms and genres Mendiola had worked in.
- 31 Mary Beltrán and Charles Ramírez Berg are planning on pursuing the series of screening events next year.
- 32 To be continued . . .
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NOTES

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Subjects: Film

Keywords: film, television, series, documentary, narrative, Mexican American, Latin American, LGBTQ, identity politics, race, industry

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Being Private in Public : Claudia Rankine and John Lucas's "Situation" Videos

A Presentation by Chad Bennett, A Faculty Words & Process Workshop,
University of Austin at Texas, Friday April 14, 2017

Jacob Carter

- 1 The talk was part of the faculty words Words & Process Workshop, organized by Minou Arjomand,¹ David Kornhaber,² Gretchen Murphy³ and Hannah C. Wojciehowski⁴. Chad Bennett,⁵ an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Texas at Austin, gave a fascinating presentation on John Lucas and Claudia Rankine's "Situation" videos as part of a series of workshops organized by the English department faculty. Bennett has published numerous articles on the intersections of poetry and queer theory, and authored a forthcoming book entitled *Word of Mouth: Gossip and American Poetry*. His presentation on Lucas and Rankine's experimental poetry videos relates to a planned book on what Bennett terms the "poetics of niceness." Contextualizing "niceness" as a traditionally dismissive term that connotes banality and quiet politeness, Bennett intends to reclaim the word as a potentially subversive concept and situate Lucas and Rankine's work within his proposed book project. As a starting point, Bennett framed the experimental videos within discourses of race and civility and examined how public displays of silent absorption function as acts of resistance.
- 2 Since 2010, Lucas and Rankine have collaborated on a series of videos that "exist around the public experiences in individual lives," particularly the lives of black Americans.⁶ In the videos, Rankine, a renowned author and poet, narrates selections from her 2014 book *Civilian: An American Lyric* over a combination of still and moving images shot by Lucas, a documentary photographer. Many of the videos depict people performing private everyday acts (sleeping, reading, etc.) in public spaces. Bennett presented a clip from "Situation 2" to illustrate the dominant formal characteristics of the video series.⁷ Centered exclusively on shots of sleeping airplane passengers, the video superimposes still photographs over moving images, most evocatively in a shot where clouds drift by in an otherwise motionless photo of a slumbering passenger's

window. According to Bennett, the intermingling of different visual media highlights the dichotomy between the private and public. Frames within frames and slow dissolves further divide the space of the airplane and illustrate the disruptiveness of private engagement. Although the figures represented in the videos engage in quiet and introspective behaviors, their absorption carries an element of theatricality that invites speculation into interiority. While Rankine's voiceover appears to articulate private thoughts, outsiders cannot access the subjective states of these figures. Bennett thus argued that acts of absorption function as forms of spectacle that allow people to withdraw from public spaces while still drawing attention to their actions.

- 3 After explaining the power of absorption and providing a brief formal analysis of the videos, Bennett situated them within discourses of race and civility. He discussed how the historical demand for black Americans to "act civil" implies a demand for silence and subjugation. In the context of Lucas and Rankine's videos, people of color separate themselves from the racist public spaces they inhabit through displays of private engagement, which function as a form of protest due to their disruptive theatricality. In "Situation 7," Claudia Rankine's narration describes an incident aboard a train, in which an unidentified individual notices that one woman would rather stand than sit next to a black man, who quietly stares out the train window.⁸ The anonymous bystander quickly fills the empty seat next to the man, but as Rankine's voiceover states: "the man doesn't acknowledge you as you sit down because the man knows more about the unoccupied seat than you do." He understands firsthand the experience of moving through public spaces as a person of color, and while the bystander attempts to imagine what the man is thinking, he can only manufacture a fantasy of the man's private experience of communal spaces. Through his silent repose, the man retains authority over his private thoughts while simultaneously drawing the bystander's attention to his experience within intimate public environments.
- 4 Bennett opened the room to questions at the end of his presentation and invited colleagues to speculate on how to broaden his scholarship on Lucas and Rankine's work and the "poetics of niceness." The scholars who were present lauded Bennett on his incisive argumentation and suggested ways to frame "niceness" in the context of gender and sexuality. They also proposed alternative definitions of "niceness," which in its antiquated usage means inane and ridiculous, and contemplated new ways to reclaim the term as a gentle form of resistance that could be deployed by marginalized groups. The workshop presented Bennett with new avenues for his research and gave sharp insight into how silence can function as a mode of protest.

NOTES

1. <http://liberalarts.utexas.edu/english/faculty/a4475>
2. <http://liberalarts.utexas.edu/english/faculty/dk8358>
3. <http://liberalarts.utexas.edu/english/faculty/gm7468>
4. <http://liberalarts.utexas.edu/english/faculty/dolora>
5. <http://liberalarts.utexas.edu/english/faculty/cjb2885>

6. <http://vimeo.com/channels/situations/page:2>.
 7. <http://vimeo.com/183560842>
 8. <http://vimeo.com/103738835>
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Notre Top 11 des films anglophones de 2016

David Roche et Vincent Souladié

- 1 2016 aura été une très grande année pour le cinéma anglophone, et ce dans toutes ses ramifications. Certains blockbusters n'ont pas été au rendez-vous – les tant attendus *Suicide Squad* (USA, David Ayer) et *Batman v. Superman : Dawn of Justice* (USA, Zack Snyder) –, d'autres ont surpris – *Captain America : Civil War* (USA, Anthony et Joe Russo) et son discours métafictionnel sur la dimension éthique du récit de superhéros, et surtout le provocateur et ultra-méta *Deadpool* (USA, Tim Miller). Des cinéastes confirmés ont déçu – les frères Coen avec *Hail, Caesar!* –, d'autres ne nous ont pas convaincu tout en accumulant les récompenses – *La La Land* (USA / Hong Kong, Damien Chazelle) dont les détracteurs sont allés jusqu'à dire que le talentueux cinéaste n'avait pas compris grand-chose au genre de la comédie musicale. Avec *Certain Women* (USA), Kelly Reichardt livre une adaptation subtile des nouvelles de Maile Meloy, son intérêt pour le quotidien de femmes ordinaires s'inscrivant dans la filiation de la regrettée Chantal Akerman. Le renouveau du film d'horreur américain, annoncé par l'envoutant *It Follows* (David Robert Mitchell, 2014), semble se confirmer avec *The Witch* (USA/UK/Canada/Brazil, Robbert Eggers), remarqué à Sundance, et *Green Room* (USA, Jeremy Saulnier), deux films qui combinent propos politiques – critique des origines puritaines des États-Unis dans la lignée des fictions de Nathaniel Hawthorne pour le premier, critique des mouvements *White Supremacist* actuels pour l'autre – et recherche plastique – gothique pictural pour le film d'Eggers, et travail sur la couleur justifié par le lieu principal dans le film de Saulnier. Après le très drôle *What We Do in the Shadows* (Nouvelle Zélande / USA, 2014), le cinéaste et acteur néo-zélandais Taika Waititi, qui est aussi un adepte du film de genre, livre avec *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* (Nouvelle Zélande) un récit de voyage et de filiation rafraichissant en forme de conte, sous-tendu lui aussi par une réflexion sur l'histoire ethnique de la Nouvelle Zélande. Avec *Captain Fantastic* (USA), le jeune cinéaste américain Matt Ross livre lui aussi un film rafraichissant, avec un rôle taillé sur mesure pour Viggo Mortensen et une fin qui parvient à déjouer les écueils idéologiques dans lesquels navigue le film. Whit Stillman transforme une longue nouvelle de Jane Austen, "Lady Susan" renommée *Love & Friendship* (Irlande/France/

Pays-Bas), en une satire incisive proche du *Vanity Fair* de W.P. Thackeray, et *Sing Street* (Irlande/UK/USA, John Carney) réalise la prouesse de raconter l'histoire touchante d'un groupe de rock dont chaque titre est une quasi-reprise du succès du moment sans condescendance aucune envers ces jeunes personnages. Quant au cinéaste britannique David Mackenzie, ses nominations aux Oscars témoignent de la réussite de son passage outre-Atlantique, avec *Hell or High Water* (USA), *heist movie* proposant lui aussi une critique du contexte social, économique et historique de l'état du Texas dans lequel il se déroule. Le cinéma d'animation grand public a aussi connu de beaux succès, avec les productions Disney récompensées aux Oscars – *Moana* (USA, Ron Clements, Don Hall, John Musker et Chris Williams) et *Zootopia* (USA, Byron Howard, Rich Moore et Jared Bush) –, mais aussi le grand oublié, *Kubo and the Two Strings* (USA, Travis Knight).

- 2 Les onze films qui suivent ne sont pas tous des films parfaits, mais tous nous ont séduit par leurs ambitions et leurs réussites respectives. Ils nous ont aussi séduit parce qu'en eux circule un souffle d'utopie, bienvenu après les récits apocalyptiques post-11 septembre. Tous ces films cherchent à déceler le « bon » dans l'humain, quand bien même reconnaissent-ils la noirceur du monde contemporain.

***American Honey* (UK/USA, Andrea Arnold)**

- 3 Avec son quatrième long métrage, la cinéaste britannique a du se dire que, quitte à faire un film américain, autant aller jusqu'au bout des choses en réalisant un *road movie* qui se déroule dans le *midwest*, et dont le titre est tiré d'une chanson country, écrite et interprétée par le groupe Lady Antebellum (2010). Le film se veut une exploration de la jeunesse américaine contemporaine et de son environnement à travers une exploration des codes du cinéma américain. Le récit multiplie ainsi les fausses pistes (s'agit-il d'un réseau de pornographie ou de prostitution ? les trahisons vont-elles conduire à une fin explosive ?) qu'il déjoue sans fanfare. Comme Lynne Ramsay, Arnold est à la fois une naturaliste et une esthète, la réalité étant toujours médiatisée par la subjectivité de ses héroïnes. Le contexte américain fait d'ailleurs ressortir l'influence d'un Gus van Sant et surtout d'un Larry Clark. *American Honey* s'affirme comme une adaptation avec variation du magnifique *Fish Tank* (UK/Pays-Bas, 2009) : comme Mia, Star est un personnage fort dont la vision et le corps sont néanmoins conditionnés par sa classe sociale, mais contrairement à Mia, elle trouve rapidement sa place au sein d'un groupe de jeunes, menés par la mystérieuse Krystal et son lieutenant Jake. Et si l'équipe de Krystal connaît, certes, quelques tensions, elle constitue néanmoins une famille de substitution pour ces jeunes marginaux, qui communient physiquement et musicalement (la bande son est d'ailleurs magnifique), les scènes de chant et de danse étant sans doute les moments les plus jubilatoires du film. Et c'est aussi là où *American Honey* se démarque du cinéma américain, cette fois-ci indépendant : parce que si l'absence de condescendance vis-à-vis des personnages rappelle le ton des films de Clark, Arnold met en avant l'utopie américaine qui gravite autour du personnage de Star. Non seulement ces jeunes n'ont-ils rien de menaçant, mais ils représentent un groupe hétérogène, aux goûts musicaux éclectiques et au parler influencé par la culture hiphop, et cela malgré le fait qu'ils soient tous blancs (ou presque car l'identité raciale de Star n'est jamais en question). Le point culminant de cette utopie, c'est la rencontre des *wannabes* avec des personnages afro-américains qui n'aboutit à rien d'autre qu'à une conversation sympathique. Si les premiers films américains de nombreux cinéastes

européens contemporains sont souvent des attaques en règle contre les Etats-Unis – *Bread & Roses* (UK/France/Allemand/Espagne/Italie/Suisse, Ken Loach, 2000), *Dancer in the Dark* (Danmark/Espagne/Allemagne/Pays-Bas/Italie/USA/UK/France/Suède/Finlande/Islande/Norvège, Lars Von Trier, 2000) –, *American Honey* crée la surprise en évitant la vision baudrillardienne et en chantant les louanges de l'utopie et de la liberté (le motif de l'oiseau) américaines, incarnées par Star, interprétée par l'étincelante Sasha Bianca Lane, native du Texas dont les parents sont justement afro-américain (le père) et néo-zélandais (la mère). Avec *American Honey*, récompensé par le Prix du Jury à Cannes et vainqueur du BIFA (British Independent Film Award), Arnold, l'une des cinéastes de sa génération les plus talentueuses, consolide une œuvre déjà impressionnante.

Arrival (USA, Denis Villeneuve)

- 4 Réalisateur stakhanoviste remarqué, le cinéaste canadien tourne rapidement et efficacement en passant régulièrement d'un genre à l'autre. Cette démarche de cinéaste de série B est contredite par l'ambition esthétique dont ses films font preuve et par la gravité de leur ton. Villeneuve est présent dans notre top pour la deuxième année consécutive. En 2015, *Sicario* nous avait marqué par sa noirceur politique, couronnant un regard dur et pessimiste entamée dès ses premiers films, notamment *Polytechnique* (Canada, 2009). Cette année *Arrival* parvient à s'ouvrir à l'optimisme tout en refusant la légèreté : l'humanité est sauvée par l'universalité du langage mais au prix d'un inéluctable sacrifice. Il était au départ très risqué de revisiter le sujet maintes fois rebattu de la première rencontre sur Terre avec la vie extraterrestre et de ses conséquences. En adaptant la nouvelle « *Story of Your Life* » (Ted Chiang, 1998), Villeneuve et son équipe parviennent pourtant à faire preuve d'originalité en faisant le pari de la science-fiction dure et en ramenant les questionnements universels de la science-fiction sur le terrain de l'intime. L'intrigue suit le point de vue d'une universitaire linguiste chargée de décrypter le langage abscons des *aliens* et amenée à faire le plus difficile des choix moraux alors qu'elle est au cœur d'un complexe nouage temporel. Face aux conflits géopolitiques que dramatisent habituellement le genre et qui servent de cadre au récit, le film célèbre au contraire la collectivité des chercheurs et insiste que les solutions s'inscrivent dans la durée et non dans les ultimatums. En cela, *Arrival* rejoint la démarche récente de *Interstellar* (USA/UK/Canada/Islande, Christopher Nolan, 2014), d'ailleurs présent dans notre top 2014. Mais le film de Denis Villeneuve s'avère plus réussi encore, principalement en raison de sa douceur et de sa modestie, transmises par le style de la mise en scène, de ses qualités plastiques et de sa bande son signée de Jóhann Jóhannsson, récompensé aux Oscars : la lenteur des mouvements de caméra, la pâleur monochrome de la photographie, le travail prononcé sur le flou, autant d'effets d'implication émotionnelle réussis. On repère par ailleurs un point commun entre *Interstellar* et *Arrival* quant à leur approche formelle, c'est la double influence de Terrence Malick et de Stanley Kubrick. On repérait l'influence des *Moissons du paradis / Days of Heaven* (USA, Malick, 1978) chez Nolan dans la manière qu'il avait de cadrer la solennité magistrale de la pastorale américaine, ses fermes et ses champs de maïs communicant avec le cosmos. C'est le Malick lui-même imprégné de l'identité américaine institué par le cinéma classique (Vidor, Kazan, Stevens) que convoquait *Interstellar*. Villeneuve est moins sensible à cette représentation de l'Amérique archétypale, mais retient en revanche de Malick son atmosphère et son

style impressionniste, la manière qu'a la caméra d'épingler les fragments fugaces et fragiles du présent, leur immanence poétique. Le visage cristallin d'Amy Adams, tout aussi remarquable ici que dans *Nocturnal Animals*, s'en fait l'emblème. L'influence de Kubrick se manifestait dans *Interstellar* à travers le modèle évident de *2001, A Space Odyssey* (1968) et son ampleur métaphysique. *Arrival* ne passe pas lui non plus à côté de cet héritage, et retient plutôt la mise en scène du silence anxiogène et de la solitude face au mystère sidéral. On attendra désormais de l'intention formaliste manifeste de Villeneuve qu'elle installe plus franchement sa singularité.

***Everybody Wants Some !!* (USA, Richard Linklater)**

- 5 *Boyhood* (USA, Richard Linklater, 2014) nous avait séduit il y a deux ans pour sa modestie et sa douceur, une forme de politesse par rapport à son sujet, au regard de l'audace inédite du projet. La fiction intimiste au long cours réussissait à se tenir dans les ornières du mélodrame et du *pensum*, évitant ainsi de totalement confondre la singularité du destin privé et la fresque existentielle. Les situations mises en scène par le film avançaient alors en équilibre sur une ligne ténue, entre insignifiance et universalité. Cet art de l'équilibre dramatique, Richard Linklater le démontre à nouveau dans *Everybody Wants Some*, dans un registre sensiblement différent. Dans *Boyhood*, la consistance fictionnelle du jeune personnage principal n'était jamais acquise, mais le travail temporel du film nous rendait sa présence familière et donc attachante. On a souvent présenté *Everybody Wants Some* comme une suite tardive de *Dazed and Confused* (USA, Richard Linklater, 1993) ; pourtant, les adolescents de ce dernier était mus par des quêtes identitaires d'un autre ordre. Au sein de la bande d'étudiants fraîchement installée sur un campus texan, dans *Everybody Wants Some !!*, tous affichent dès le départ leur vacuité et se comportent en caricature, à tel point que le spectateur peut se trouver facilement désarçonné par l'indécision assumée entre parodie de *teen movie* des années 80, dont le film reprend les principaux topoï et la chronique au premier degré. L'idiotie des personnages et les enjeux narratifs dérisoires qui les animent ne sont pas le facteur le plus original du film, en phase avec le genre précité. En revanche, c'est en s'efforçant de ne pas favoriser l'identification classique des spectateurs aux étudiants gouailleurs que le film constitue un défi qui l'installe là encore sur le fil du rasoir. Les figures habituelles du genre sont notamment désamorçées par la béance narrative : la scène de l'entraînement au baseball ne voit aucun personnage se distinguer des autres, aucune hiérarchisation des actions, aucune amorce de drame à résoudre. Dès lors, au plaisir de redécouvrir les archétypes du *teen movie* américain, s'ajoute une consternation parfois malaisante devant certaines de leurs actions. La dynamique de groupe de ce film choral est en fin de compte son seul vrai sujet affirmé, et son inscription dans le temps lui donne une portée métaphysique qui rapproche ainsi le film de *Boyhood*. En sous-texte de cette empathie à double tranchant peut se lire une réflexion plus subtile sur le racisme insidieux des *teen movies* 80s. En effet, on ne voyait aucun jeune afro-américain dans la série des *Porky's* (Canada/USA, Bob Clark, 1982), ni même dans les films de John Hughes, tandis que chez Linklater, en réponse, les étudiants blancs rappent eux-mêmes sur *Rapper's Delight* !

***Moi, Daniel Blake / I, Daniel Blake* (UK/France/Belgium, Ken Loach)**

- 6 En gagnant la Palme d'Or en 2016, Ken Loach a rejoint le cercle fermé des doubles vainqueurs du festival (la première était pour *Le vent se lève / The Wind that Shakes the Barley* en 2006). Et pourtant ce dernier film de Loach ne frappe pas d'emblée comme le plus grand film du prolifique cinéaste britannique, ni même peut-être l'un de ses meilleurs. Pour qui connaît bien l'œuvre du cinéaste britannique, on y retrouve tous les ingrédients habituels : un scénario signé Paul Laverty (scénariste de Loach depuis 1996), une mise en scène sobre qui laisse respirer un jeu d'acteur naturaliste servi par des acteurs professionnels peu connus (le comique et acteur de télévision Dave Johns, l'auteur de pièces de théâtre et actrice de télévision Hayley Squires, tous deux excellents), une photographie qui installe d'emblée une ambiance terne. On peut même reprocher au film une fin un brin mélodramatique, ainsi qu'une représentation utopique des classes défavorisées (les enfants de Katie sont bien là pour démontrer l'absence de racisme et de xénophobie dans cette classe), et en conclure que le film ne constitue rien d'autre que de la propagande de gauche. Ce récit de personnages courageux pris dans l'étau d'une administration à la logique kafkaesque et pourtant ancrée dans une réalité socio-historique contient des scènes d'une intensité émotionnelle incontestable dans lequel de simples objets (une conserve de Heinz Baked Beans, une boîte à lettres) prennent en charge le désarroi de l'injustice par métonymie. Et pourtant il nous a semblé que c'était la première fois qu'un film de Loach offrait une réflexion métafictionnelle sur ce que cela signifie de produire un cinéma politique à l'heure où le libéralisme capitaliste a réussi à s'imposer non pas comme une idéologie, mais comme un état de fait. Parce que l'acte politique et esthétique (car il s'agit d'un graffiti) qui donne son titre au film se révèle comme étant dérisoire : dérisoire parce que la révolte et la souffrance sont tournées en spectacle que l'on peut immédiatement photographier et poster sur les réseaux sociaux où la force vitale sera diluée parmi les autres informations ; et parce que le public qui reçoit le discours final de Daniel est composé de personnes déjà convaincues de sa validité. Bref, exactement comme le public qui se rend au cinéma pour voir les films de Loach. C'est en ce sens que *I, Daniel Blake* est un film politique au sens où l'entend Jacques Rancière : c'est-à-dire un film qui s'interroge sur son statut de film politique. Et à travers cet acte qu'est la production d'un film, et malgré cette conscience de ses propres limites, Loach et son équipe persistent, comme la sénatrice américaine Elizabeth Warren. Et ça même si ça fait mal, nous en avons encore besoin.

***Jackie* (Chile/France/USA/Hong Kong, Pablo Larraín)**

- 7 Ce portrait en mosaïque de Jackie Kennedy recèle une complexité à laquelle le genre en vogue du biopic nous a peu habitués, genre que le cinéaste a contribué à régénérer en signant coup sur coup *Jackie* et le tout autant réussi *Neruda* (Chile/Argentine/France/Espagne/USA, 2016). Cette complexité est d'abord d'ordre narratif et peut surprendre de la part du scénariste Noah Oppenheim, jusque-là crédité sur des franchises adolescentes comme *The Maze Runner* (USA/UK, Wes Ball, 2010). L'intelligence du récit vient d'abord du resserrement de son sujet biographique (depuis l'assassinat du président Kennedy jusqu'à ses funérailles), de sa résistance au didactisme (le portrait

impressionniste l'emporte sur la leçon d'histoire), et de sa désobéissance aux lois du sensationnalisme (tout voyeurisme est évité). La narration en flashbacks depuis le point de vue de l'héroïne interviewée pour le magazine *Life* offre une accroche immersive qui permet de percevoir depuis l'intérieur la collusion et la confusion entre la douleur intime et l'intensité de l'événement historique. *Jackie* n'est en aucun cas une hagiographie, plutôt la description ambiguë d'une personnalité ambiguë saisie sur le vif par une tragédie intime instantanément confisquée par les regards médiatiques, tout autant que par la marche en avant de l'histoire, contraignant chacun de ses gestes et chacun de ses mots à être lestés d'un poids symbolique impitoyable. Le deuxième gage de complexité du film vient alors du travail magistral de Nathalie Portman, toujours en quête de superposer dans sa composition des niveaux de sens contradictoires (modulation de la voix selon les contextes, micro inflexions des traits du visage, démarche tour à tour spectrale ou assurée), de façon à construire un personnage sans cesse opaque et fuyant. La perception de chaque scène est ainsi tendue entre l'image de la fragilité et la sensation du contrôle, sans que le spectateur puisse jamais déterminer si la Jackie Kennedy du film feint la maîtrise de soi pour masquer son effondrement intérieur ou si elle cherche délibérément à humaniser sa persona en mettant en scène sa vulnérabilité face au journaliste. Enfin, la complexité du film est portée par les choix formels, lesquels enrichissent la narration non chronologique d'un entrecroisement expressif d'identités stylistiques. Dans un tout autre registre que *Arrival*, Pablo Larraín se repaît à son tour du style de Terrence Malick, dont le style confirme son influence : la caméra portée serre le visage de Jackie Kennedy dans les trouées de lumière mélancoliques du soleil couchant, le temps de ses errances silencieuses et solitaires sur les jardins de sa propriété. Cette caméra « malickienne » devient là encore « kubrickienne » lorsque Jackie est suivie en *steadycam* dans de longs travellings anxiogènes à la *Shining* (UK/USA, 1980) dans les couloirs vides de la Maison Blanche. La composition picturale du cadre, impressionniste dans les scènes en extérieur ou rigoureusement géométrique dans les décors solennels de Washington, suggère toujours l'impossibilité pour le corps de trouver désormais résidence dans les lieux qui lui étaient hier familiers. Cette question de l'expropriation du personnage par l'hostilité de son environnement est au cœur même du film, et sert de contrepoint à une reconquête identitaire par l'image. La photographie de Stéphane Fontaine (*Under the Skin*, Jonathan Glazer, 2013) et le format de pellicule utilisé, comparable au travail de Todd Haynes et de son chef opérateur Edward Lachman sur *Carol* (2015), de même que la reconstitution minutieuse des documentaires d'archives 16 millimètres, exposent la figure de Jackie à un espace de mise en scène permanent dans lequel se définit son identité. Ce statut de l'image permet à Jackie d'interroger la construction de l'histoire à travers le statut des images. Pablo Larraín reprend alors en quelque sorte les ambitions introduites par Michael Mann dans le mésestimé *Ali* (USA, 2001), à savoir chercher à reconstituer la trajectoire d'un personnage médiatique lancé dans la quête de sa propre identité, c'est-à-dire en fin de compte dans la quête dérisoire de son image la plus juste.

***Manchester by the Sea* (USA, Kenneth Lonnergan)**

- 8 Avec ce troisième long-métrage après cinq ans d'inactivité, Kenneth Lonnergan ose la noirceur du mélodrame familial, sans jamais verser dans les excès du pathos mais en l'abondant par la douceur formelle du classicisme. Lonnergan affiche la confiance

tranquille du cinéaste qui croit en la puissance émotionnelle de son histoire et expose ses enjeux avec transparence. La construction en flashbacks progressifs ne cherche pas à prendre le spectateur à témoin de l'orfèvrerie du montage : à l'expressivité de la fresque il préfère la littéralité de la chronique, de même qu'à la subtilité d'une construction poétique, il préfère l'observation attentive des comédiens et de leur jeu. Lonergan ne craint pas la durée et laisse respirer chaque scène avant de couper à une autre. Il n'est alors pas étonnant que le jeu taciturne de Casey Affleck ait été récompensé d'un oscar, qu'aurait sans doute mérité également Michelle Williams pour un rôle plus réservé mais inoubliable, tout comme Lucas Hedges. Cette mise en retrait du réalisateur face au drame qu'il met en scène n'est pas un signe de fadeur de la part de Lonergan, mais témoigne au contraire d'une écriture à l'économie, respectueuse de son sujet et de son spectateur. En questionnant le deuil et la culpabilité, en condensant l'étendue de la complexité des rapports familiaux (paternité contrariée puis reconquise, fraternité conflictuelle puis endeuillée, renoncement amoureux), en tissant une histoire en forme de toile d'araignée temporelle, avec ses flashbacks, ses ellipses et ses révélations savamment retenues, *Manchester By The Sea* respecte certes avec rigueur le cahier des charges du cinéma dramatique indépendant estampillé *Sundance*. On pourrait d'ailleurs y reconnaître les décors balnéaires hivernaux et mélancoliques d'*Ordinary People* (USA, Robert Redford, 1980), jadis oscarisé. Or, la mise en scène de Kenneth Lonergan ne se prévaut pas d'autres prétentions que celle du travail bien fait, l'efficacité, la finesse et la rigueur de la retenue contre les artifices du lyrisme.

***Moonlight* (USA, Barry Jenkins)**

- 9 *Moonlight* a mené la reconquête des Oscars par les minorités, outrageusement laissées pour compte en 2016, jusqu'à être primé meilleur film de l'année. Cette victoire résonne forcément dans un contexte politique oppressant tout en étant bel et bien méritée. Adapté d'un récit autobiographique de Tarell Alvin McCraney, ce deuxième long métrage de Barry Jenkins est à la fois ambitieux, passionné et poétique. Il reprend les figures habituelles (le *gangsta*, la mère qui élève son enfant seule, le *pariah*) des *ghetto movies* du début des années 1990 – *Boyz n the Hood* (John Singleton, 1991), *Menace II Society* (Albert et Allen Hughes, 1993) – mais, à l'image du magnifique *Pariah* (Dee Rees, 2011), leur offre d'autres issues que l'échec ou la mort, démontrant ainsi qu'il s'agit là de conventions génériques trop souvent assimilées à du réalisme. La musique orchestrale du film, dont la sensualité n'est pas sans rappeler celle d'un Michael Nyman, joue là aussi délibérément contre les clichés du genre. La structure narrative en trois parties est certes démonstrative (on pense au tic buccal que Terrone adulte reprend à Juan son mentor) mais, comme *Boyhood* (Richard Linklater, 2014) qui lui a sans doute servi de modèle, elle tire sa force de son emploi intelligent de l'ellipse (à commencer par la mort de Juan). *Moonlight* s'appuie sur un ensemble d'acteurs qui sont tous à la hauteur : Mahershala Ali, qui confirme la finesse de son jeu dans *House of Cards* (Netflix, 2013-) tout en élargissant sa palette, la troublante actrice britannique Naomie Harris, connue pour *28 Jours plus Tard* (Danny Boyle, 2002), le jeune Ashton Sanders, révélé dans *Straight Outta Compton* (F. Gary Gray, 2015) et l'élégant André Holland dont le charisme crevait déjà l'écran dans *The Knick* (Cinemax, 2014-2016). Servie d'une photo superbe, son esthétique alliant naturalisme et effets subjectifs – regards caméra, emploi surréaliste des couleurs (le magnifique plan de la mère dans le cadre du couloir) – n'est pas sans rappeler les films de Gus van Sant ou le premier long métrage de Lynne

Ramsay, *Ratcatcher* (1999). Car *Moonlight* marque aussi la revanche du cinéma indépendant sur l'académisme, ce que l'erreur de remise prix commise en fin de cérémonie ne fait que confirmer : qui eut cru qu'un film, produit avec un budget de \$ 5 millions et dans lequel une fin heureuse est accordée à des homosexuels des quartiers défavorisés afro-américains pourrait ravir l'Oscar à *La La Land* ?

***The Neon Demon* (France/Danemark/USA, Nicolas Winding Refn)**

- 10 La fascination procurée par *The Neon Demon* tient à la franche affirmation stylistique que Refn délivre une fois encore, c'est-à-dire ici au penchant littéralement vampirique de l'image. Depuis qu'il est arrivé à Hollywood, l'œuvre de Refn gagne sans effort sa cohérence artistique de l'insistance ostensible de ses obsessions visuelles (cadres contemplatifs, hyperbole chromatique et lumineuse, retenue rythmique du montage), plus vraisemblablement employées à la séduction du regard qu'à l'expression d'un discours, comme si « faire auteur » était pour Refn l'enjeu à atteindre le plus urgent et le plus immédiat. Qu'offre alors Refn en gage contre cette apparente vanité formaliste ? Le parti pris esthétique est mis au service d'une réflexion sur l'articulation entre image, corps et identité : masculinité dans ses films depuis *Bronson* (UK, 2008) et *Valhalla Rising* (Danemark/UK, 2009), féminité dans *The Neon Demon*. Si ces influences avérées (Kenneth Anger, Stanley Kubrick) demeurent perceptibles, on pourrait reconnaître dans la représentation d'Hollywood l'influence du David Lynch de *Mulholland Dr.* (France/USA, 2001), et des échappées oniriques d'Alejandro Jodorowski, qu'il considère en quelque sorte comme son mentor, mais elles se trouvent toujours contrebalancées par l'ancrage générique du récit. Même la pure sensualité fétichiste de l'image, telle que magnifiée dans les années 80 par les frères Ridley et Tony Scott, et les autres réalisateurs de l'école de Londres (Alan Parker, Adrian Lyne), ne fournit pas à Refn un modèle à suivre pleinement satisfaisant, quand bien même s'inscrit-il à sa façon dans leur prolongement. Malgré leur signature stylistique très différente, c'est peut-être au cinéma de Brian de Palma que la démarche esthétique de Refn est la plus comparable, dans le sens où ils s'affirment tous deux comme des maniéristes immodérés, cherchent à imposer un équilibre entre format commercial et expérience arty, et revendiquent le mauvais goût dans lequel cet exercice les fait parfois verser. Si cette radicalité nous séduit chez Refn, c'est justement en raison de son refus du réel et de cette insistance du formalisme à vouloir épuiser à tout prix l'image dans toutes ses potentialités plastiques (ralenti, surexposition, très gros plan) pour en tirer comme un suc émotionnel pur et autonome. Dans *The Neon Demon*, Refn ne reprend les ingrédients horribles du *giallo* qu'en apparence pour se livrer au fond à une expérience plastique sur la physiologie froide et diaphane d'Elle Fanning. La longue séquence du shooting photo se présente en quelque sorte comme un manifeste, dans laquelle l'actrice devient l'égérie d'une conception plastique et formaliste du cinéma, corps désincarné livré aux modulations du cadre et de la lumière jusqu'à la grâce mais aussi jusqu'à l'ambiguïté de son exploitation scopique. Le milieu de la mode dans lequel se déroule l'intrigue joue comme argument en faveur d'un discours critique du cinéaste à l'égard de la vampirisation aliénante de l'image, de même que la féminité y est interrogée comme facteur de construction sociale, mais c'est encore ce troublant équilibre esthétique entre le sublime et le malaisant, déjà travaillé sur la figure masculine de Ryan Gosling

dans *Drive* (USA, 2012) et *Only God Forgives* (Danemark/France/USA/Suède, 2014), qui impose Refn comme l'un des cinéastes hollywoodiens les plus en phase avec son temps.

***Nocturnal Animals* (USA, Tom Ford)**

- 11 Ce deuxième long métrage du natif d'Austin confirme le potentiel que laissait déjà présager *A Single Man* (USA, 2009) – on y retrouve le thème de la mélancolie, une structure en flashback, des compositions soignées avec un goût pour le surcadre –, mais dans un projet autrement plus abouti. Le tour de force de cette adaptation du roman d'Austin Wright (1993) est de raconter une histoire de couples, de vie ratée, d'ennui, de déception et de petite vengeance, à travers un personnage statique et quasi-muet (Susan, finement interprété par Amy Adams) qui ne fait rien d'autre que lire un manuscrit. Son histoire enchâsse un récit néo-noir/détour à la fois horrible et somme toute assez banal, situé comme il se doit au Texas. Cette intrigue dégage une intensité mélodramatique en se donnant à voir comme une version idéalisée de l'intrigue par la lectrice, laquelle commet l'erreur basique de confondre l'auteur, son ancien amant (Edward Sheffield), et le personnage principal (Tony Hastings). À travers les yeux de Susan, le spectateur est alors happé par ce récit plus prenant, plus coloré, plus vibrant. Et pourtant les mises en relation entre la fiction et la vie privée ne sont que des effets de lecture pour Susan, donnant lieu pour le spectateur à des effets de compositions symétriques et de montage en parallèle qui construisent les couples Susan-Tony et Susan-Edward, tout mettant en relief la confusion opérée par la lectrice. Par ailleurs, étant donné que l'intensité dramatique du récit enchâssé prend le dessus sur le récit principal, le personnage secondaire du shériff Bobby Andes vole la vedette au rôle principal au sein même du récit secondaire, grâce à un Michael Shannon toujours aussi envoûtant. *Nocturnal Animals*, comme son titre l'indique, est un film d'une noirceur sans fond, mais les animaux du titre ne sont pas seulement les criminels : ce sont aussi les protagonistes caractérisés par des ambitions basses et une passivité digne des grands romans naturalistes (d'où le fait que la fin ait pu en décevoir certains). Dès lors, c'est paradoxalement le personnage mourant qui apporte une énergie vitale au film, un peu à l'image de George qui, dans *A Single Man*, parvenait à retrouver goût à la vie au bord du précipice.

***Paterson* (USA/Allemagne/France, Jim Jarmusch)**

- 12 Avec son douzième long métrage, le cinéaste new-yorkais traverse la Hudson River pour explorer la ville du poète américain William Carlos Williams. L'ambition de Jarmusch est de produire une poésie filmique minimaliste, à l'image des textes de Williams mais aussi de ces successeurs, dont le plus célèbre des auteurs minimalistes Raymond Carver (le poème de la boîte d'allumettes rappelle le souci du détail que Carver hérite de Williams). Le cinéaste poursuit l'esthétique de la répétition et du détail qui le caractérise, l'influence de Yasujirô Ozu étant plus évidente que jamais dans la poétique de l'espace et du temps développée. Cette filiation double – poésie américaine, cinéma japonais – est thématisée par la rencontre finale entre deux poètes, le protagoniste et son alter ego nippon ; le double est d'ailleurs une figure centrale du film, avec ce *running gag* des jumeaux que le poète ne cesse de croiser. Mais *Paterson* n'est pas qu'un exercice de style : le film a un discours, sur la création, sur le couple, sur

les États-Unis d'aujourd'hui. *Paterson*, le film comme le personnage éponyme, joue la fonction de témoin : de la ville, de son histoire, de ses personnalités, de ses communautés. Habitant une banlieue désertée par les classes moyennes blanches, *Paterson* fait figure de résistant au sein d'une petite communauté urbaine multiraciale et multiculturelle. Le fait qu'il aspire à rejoindre l'auteur de *In the American Grain* (1925) prend une signification politique particulière en 2016, quand les acquis des années 1960 dans lesquels Jarmusch a grandi semblent bien menacés : le « grain américain », nous dit Jarmusch, dont les films (*Mystery Train*, USA/Japon, 1989 ; *Dead Man*, USA/Allemagne/Japon, 1995 ; *Ghost Dog*, France/Allemagne/USA/Japon, 1999 ; *The Limits of Control*, USA/Japon, 2009) ont toujours donné une large place aux diversités raciales et ethniques, est bel et bien caractérisé par cette diversité. *Paterson* poursuit en outre l'exploration du couple aux prises avec le quotidien, un thème déjà étudié à travers l'idée de la rétrospection du héros dans *Broken Flowers* (USA/France, 2005) et de l'immortalité des vampires dans le sublime *Only Lovers Left Alive* (Allemagne/UK/France/Grèce/USA/Chypres, 2013). Car le comportement insolite de Laura, qui ne cesse de décorer son domicile en noir et blanc, interpelle quant à la qualité de la relation qu'elle entretient avec *Paterson*, qui, lui, sort tous les soirs boire un verre en solitaire. Le film propose alors une vision de l'artiste fort différente de celle du vampire reclus de *Only Lovers Left Alive* : *Paterson* est ici ancré dans l'expérience du quotidien, un quotidien dans lequel les autres semblent avoir des vies bien plus trépidantes que la sienne (par exemple le couple afro-américain qui rejoue la tragédie de Roméo et Juliet). Mais le statut d'artiste est toujours décrit comme un engagement créatif condamné à la répétition et à l'imperfection, en même temps qu'il profite de la jouissance de l'éternel recommencement.

***The Revenant* (USA/Hong Kong/Taiwan, Alejandro G. Iñárritu)**

- 13 *The Revenant* célèbre le résultat d'une double performance, chacune étant mise au service de l'autre. D'abord la performance d'un comédien surinvesti dans son rôle, comme pouvaient l'être dans les années 70 les élèves de l'Actor's Studio accédant au grand écran. Ensuite la performance formelle d'un cinéaste surinvesti dans la recherche de l'expérience esthétique la plus sensorielle, visant à retrouver là-aussi le geste des cinéastes américains des années 70 – le film d'Iñárritu est en quelque sorte le remake de *Man in the Wilderness* (USA, Richard C. Sarafian, 1971). *The Revenant* a suscité la suspicion, comme avant lui *Birdman* (USA, Iñárritu, 2014), en raison d'un argument que l'on est droit de trouver spécieux : celui de la trop grande maîtrise du cinéaste sur son matériau, en l'occurrence en raison de l'aspect jugé m'as-tu-vu à la fois de la mise en scène (avec ses très longs plans-séquences), et du jeu de Di Caprio, à la recherche de la composition la plus oscarisable, d'ailleurs enfin récompensée en 2016. Ce qui aurait manqué à ce western en fin de compte, ce serait sa sincérité, l'âpreté de sa rencontre avec la violente réalité de la nature, comme avaient pu le vivre avant lui William Friedkin, Werner Herzog ou bien sûr Francis Ford Coppola. Si la réussite de l'œuvre ne s'est pas payée au prix d'une épreuve humaine dont les cicatrices seraient perceptibles à l'image, si ses plans ne rendent pas compte des accidents et des succès rencontrés lors du tournage, alors tout à l'écran n'y serait que gratuité, artifice, vacuité et vanité. Une telle liquidation du formalisme, d'un tel désamour pour la complète maîtrise

formelle, ou au moins sa revendication, ne fait pourtant que ranimer les débats les plus séculaires sur la dimension ontologique du dispositif, et fait avant tout porter la culpabilité sur l'implication du spectateur devant la puissance d'attraction de la projection cinématographique. Il est à saluer pourtant qu'un réalisateur hollywoodien ait aujourd'hui à cœur d'employer toutes les ressources à sa disposition pour proposer des expériences proprement cinématographiques, c'est-à-dire ici une exploitation immersive du cadre dans le paysage sauvage et une hyperbolisation de la durée, soit un spectacle à vivre pleinement sur grand écran. Car comme les cinéastes du New Hollywood, c'est bien à une synthèse entre grand spectacle et cinéma d'art qu'aspire Iñárritu. *The Revenant* signale le renouveau du film d'action comme cinéma total, cette fois-ci à travers la mise en cadre plutôt que la mise en chaîne comme dans *Mad Max : Fury Road* (Australie/USA, George Miller, 2015). Le film affiche alors son désir de s'inscrire à sa façon dans une poétique de la nature, avec ces emprunts à Herzog mais aussi à Andreï Tarkovski, la narration mettant en avant la dimension (méta)physique de l'expérience. Que cette ambition soit parfois « voyante », affichée pour elle-même, que l'ours qui attaque le héros lors d'une éprouvante séquence soit en réalité une créature de synthèse, cela doit d'abord être vu comme la célébration d'une certaine conception du cinéma indifférente aux regards dogmatiques qui cherchent à porter méfiance et diffamation sur le pouvoir envoûtant de l'image.

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Mots-clés : cinéma, américain, britannique, canadien, néo-zélandais

Thèmes : Film

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Getting Personal with Tom Oppenheim : On the Stella Adler Studio of Acting, Community, embracing the fluidity of Identity and Nurturing Humanity.

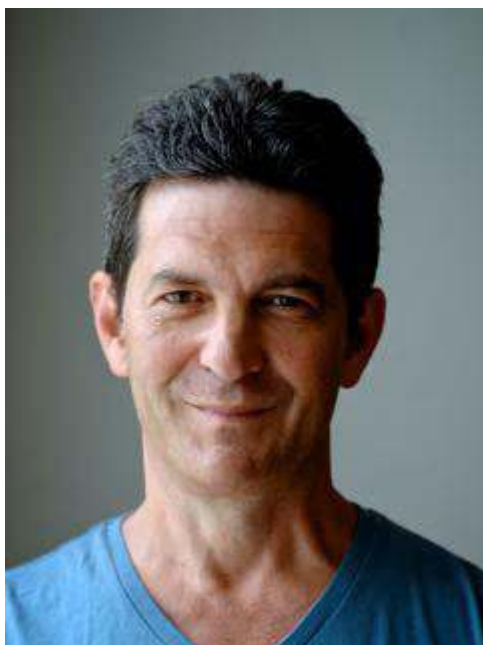
Interview with Tom Oppenheim

Céline Nogueira

The Stella Adler Studio of Acting : Website

- 1 [HYPERLINK "http://www.stellaadler.com/](http://www.stellaadler.com/)

Biography of the Interviewee:

[FIGURE 1]

Tom Oppenheim

- 2 Tom Oppenheim is the artistic director and president of the Stella Adler Studio of Acting. He studied acting at the National Shakespeare Conservatory and with his grandmother Stella Adler. Acting credits include the title role in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as well as Michael in Buzz McLaughlin's *Sister Calling My Name*, both with the Harold Clurman Laboratory Theater Company. Jambalaya's productions of *Othello* as Iago, and *Featuring Loretta*; *Henry IV, Part 1* and *Macbeth* at the New Jersey Shakespeare Festival, *Henry VI, Part I, II, III* at Theater for a New Audience, *Juana Queen of Spain* at EST, *Bound East for Cardiff* at The Provincetown Playhouse, *Romeo and Juliet* at the Mint Theater, *Comparing Books* at the Producer's Club. Film credits include Mike Nichols' *Wolf*, Art Jones' *Going Nomad* and *Dodgeball* and Deborah Kampmeier's *Virgin* and *Hound Dog*. TV credits include Sydney Lumet's TV series, *100 Center Street*. He is the recipient of the 2009 Laurette Taylor Award from Theatre East and a co-editor, with Herbert Kohl, of *The Muses Go to School: Inspiring Stories About the Importance of Arts in Education* (The New Press). He lives in New York City.

The Interview:

Céline Nogueira: Director of the Stella Adler Studio in New York and grandson of Stella Adler, Tom Oppenheim is a pillar and guardian of the internationally known legacy, techniques and philosophy of Stella Adler.

I have known and worked with Tom Oppenheim and the Studio for over 15 years and I have had the great privilege and honor to be named French Ambassador of the Studio. Together we have been developing artistic and pedagogical bridges between France and New York since 2008.

In his office midtown Manhattan, he generously gave us some time to pause and think together. Whether we are talking over existential matters or building projects, one quality always stems from a discussion with Tom: the complexity of the human being. As a fervent protector of Theatre and Art, Tom does not think within any trivial frame. He does not chit

chat and he does not take anything for granted. All matter is universal to him and he treats all my questions as such. As he pays close attention to each word, he allows them to dive into an infinite space - the web of his sensorial and intellectual corporal habitat - that needs a certain amount of time to travel in, and out. The time to think. Deeply think.

Tom lets the questions sink in as if he were receiving the sometimes so often heard questions for the first time. And, far from being blasé, he connects the words and issues at stake with his present preoccupations. At times, he lets the words linger inside his mind - does it meet a souvenir, a thought, or the meanders of intertwined experiences? - until he finds a thread, another word, that gives way to new stimulating perspectives, until it sometimes hit a more intimate chord.

While his main focus is to form the cultural dimension of the Studio or the outreach dimension, Tom Oppenheim appears to be the perfect embodiment of the complexity and yet down-to-earth missions of Stella Adler and the Studio.

C.N.: You have talked at length about the Stella Adler Studio of Acting and Stella Adler. So today, October 2016, is there anything that has not been said yet?

Tom Oppenheim: The Mission of the Studio extends from the insight that growth of as an actor and growth as a human being are synonymous and the mission is to create an environment that nurtures Theatre artists and audiences so that they value Humanity- their own and others' as their first priority while bringing Art and Education to the Community. To me, that is an ongoing and ever unfolding question or experiment in a number of different ways, but it has a number of consequences it seems to me for the Human race: can our Humanity be nurtured in such a way that makes us more peaceful or more considerate, more humane ? On a more institutional level, to what degree can WE, at the Studio, organize ourselves to do that better and better and more effectively to make more people the beneficiaries of it? While I have said a lot, there is much more that remains to be said and to be seen. For example I sometimes wonder whether we should change the word "environment" to "community" - create a community that nurtures Theatre artists and audiences so that they value Humanity- "their own and others". That little phrase has taken on for me much more vivid and focused relevancy in the Unites States with Donald Trump having reason to the heights of being the presumptive nominee of the Republican Party. Watching him behave as he does and say the things he has said - building walls and banning people based on their religions. "Their own and others", I always knew that it was important and it has saved the Mission from becoming the kind of inward looking, narcissistic preoccupation of an Artist to becoming a representative of an art form that focuses on the Other, on Otherness and the Difference. It's the evolution of oneself in relationship to other people. But you know it takes on more meaning: what can we - the Stella Adler Studio and we, Theatre Artists and we, Human beings do to counteract the kind of negativity and xenophobia and militarism. Then there are very real issues: the Studio needs to find a new Home, a new location. How do we balance our idealism and the energy we spend on that with capital campaign and how do we leverage one for the other?

C.N.: Let us go back to your great example with Trump. He represents the contrary of the spirit that we find here at the Stella Adler Studio which is based on a non-judgmental attitude, open-mindedness, the quest for understanding oneself and the others. Would you say that the technique provides a political posture towards the world?

Tom Oppenheim: Yes! I guess I would say that in the way that Theatre does invariably whether it is political theatre or whether it isn't, whether its primary intention is being an Art Theatre. The fact is that it is always offering protection for ambiguity.

Things are neither this nor that. Theatre itself is the domain of the embracing of Otherness, of differences. It seems to me that growing as human being inevitable means growing beyond, embracing the fluidity of Identity. When you begin to embrace the fluidity of Identity you have to embrace it all the way and so doing that drives you into positions that have profound political implications. You can't kill the name of it.

C.N.: Starting to embrace the fluidity or even the understanding, or the curiosity towards that fluidity of Identity is huge commitment because it demands a constant alertness of what we are doing and what the surroundings are doing...

Tom Oppenheim: Right.

C.N.: This, we get it at the Stella Adler Studio. How about an actor who is trained somewhere else? Do you feel that this question of Humanity and growth as a human being is a specificity at the Stella Adler Studio in comparison with other schools or methods or approaches?

Tom Oppenheim: I just don't know the answer. I know there are actors that I have met, and have studied with us, who are deeply in doubt with this understanding. There are also Institutions that claim, by virtue of their Mission Statement, to be primarily focused on producing or nurturing professional actors, that is the emphasis, which would mean careerism. There is no such reference in the Mission of the Stella Adler Studio. It doesn't say anything about being a professional actor or nurturing the next generation of working actors. It says « to create an environment that nurtures Theatre artists, and audience so that they value Humanity. » For me it is absolutely central to Stella's understanding. While we take real time to give our full-time students tools to convert their education into ways of making money, making a living, it would be unthinkable to make that the central focus because she didn't. She really was focusing on the primordial purpose of Theatre in Existence, in the world, and she took it for granted that if you did that you would be able to leverage that for work and to make a living but I think what she primarily expected her students to do was to create a fascinating important life. Not meaning life of international fame and fortune but a life where you brought highly cultivated focus to or everywhere - whether you're walking down the street or visiting a prison or the subway or at the museum ... you are compelled as a student of Stella's to understand yourself as an actor who is part of the family of all artists and therefore it was your business to go to museums, to read poems, novels, the paper.

Is it unique to us? I don't think it is but I do know there are institutions that focus on careerism « if you come here you are more likely to get a job » - that was not why Stella said « come here ». She said « come here because if you come here you will understand your life in the most profound way and the world in the most profound way and the institution of Theatre and the Art form of Theatre ». We honor that by having crafted a Mission that we feel demands that sense of focus.

[FIGURE 2]

Stella Adler

C.N.: And the mission is intimately linked with a strong emphasis on work. I will always remember how you would tell us « if you think you have talent, you are wrong. Talent is work ». So the Mission is very linked with very specific techniques and daily hard work.

Tom Oppenheim: Yes. Absolutely. That's right. Hard work and self transformation. In an interview, Stella talks about how if you look at photos of great artists when they were young and then when they are old, she says that the shape of their head changes. My father (Dave Oppenheim) was a great classical musician so I have his example: when you learn how to play an instrument, you develop calluses and your body changes in relationship, it really grows around the instrument the way a tree would grow around the fence and the fence and the tree become one. Same work for an actor. It's less clear because if it is a clarinet, you have a callus here and here, your fingers can do things that most people's fingers can't do, your ability to breathe and focus with the breath over the read in a specific way is highly developed, it is externally clear whereas for actors you just don't see it in the same way but it is absolutely the same. But the instrument would be like Hamlet, the character, and all the lines and all of the arranging of your inner self so that that energy can flow through you.

C.N.: You are talking about the physical effects on the musician's body, could the effects on actors be either the diction, their energy, the light in their eyes, their posture and groundedness, maybe a sense of a lightness...?

Tom Oppenheim: Yes, absolutely.

C.N.: With these physical effects in mind, what is your personal definition of an Artist?

Tom Oppenheim: I think of people I know ... it's a good question, I have to think about it ...

C.N.: You have just mentioned your father. Because of your background, because of the legacy, because of the Studio, because you have always been surrounded with great spirits, I believe you took a lot from it. What is it that you took the most? And was it at any point a kind of burden?

Tom Oppenheim : ... Was it a burden? ... Yes, I think it's a burden. I think it is.

C.N.: How so?

Tom Oppenheim: Because you want to live your life where you respect yourself. There are examples of people that live next to you and that you have enormous respect for, so it's hard not to measure yourself against that. That can be a burden sometimes.

C.N.: So how would you cope with that?

Tom Oppenheim: Well... I try my best. Try my best to hear the voices inside and allow them to move through me in a way that seems exciting and relevant. And they're not only family voices. Maybe the most impactful voice that got me going in life was the voice of Martin Luther King when I was 9 or 8 years old, he was assassinated and I went from being a kid that watched cartoons to suddenly being aware of who he was and said and what civil rights was about and what that whole movement was about and became deeply moved by it, raised money, asked friends of my family for money and gave the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. So that's another one. Feeling that a human being could do that and always wanting Art to be able to do something synonymous with that, something similar. And I realized it did when I would watch documentaries and see Marlon Brando marching along with King - there are several examples of that, be present at his funeral.

But also, I was a drug addict from the age of fifteen until the age twenty-nine when I ended up on heroin. This is not something I am trying to hide from the world. What was really threatening to me was living death, not living alive. So what I am more motivated by than living up to my ancestors is making sure that I make my life count for something and not wanting to destroy it and not wanting to live creatively and contribute against that background of years of disintegration in drugs.

I used drugs very destructively for a number of years. I studied acting prior to the worst of that. I had time with Stella and I had two years of training at the National Shakespeare Conservatory which was kind of Stella without Stella. Jimmy (James Tripp) was there and Mario Siletti, Alice Winston, Joannie Evans. So I had those two years of solid training and then I spiraled down and down. While I was using heroine I got arrested and I spent a night in jail then I got clean. But from the moment I got clean I began to gather myself and feel like I needed to utilize my training and the Studio presented itself as the place where I could start studying again which I did and eventually started teaching.

C.N.: Would you say that now the directing, the acting, the teaching are giving you the high that you were looking for at the time?

Tom Oppenheim: Yes, probably. It produces enormous energy and it makes you feel connected and alive.

C.N.: When you see young people coming in at the Studio, do you see a difference in their state of mind through the years?

Tom Oppenheim: I think there's a difference between young people now and young people twenty years ago and there are certainly differences in the world. Stella would be sued in the world that we live in right now. Much faster.

C.N.: Because she was... more ferocious?

Tom Oppenheim: Yes. there's something different in the world. I think we tried to uphold high standards but we have to deal also with the world such as it is. Maybe there are great advantages, positive aspects. People are more sensitive. I worry that people guard against vulnerability. For example in the United States, I don't know if this is happening in Europe, there is a mandate that we have to provide trigger-warnings. So if there is a play in which a rape, or any violence, takes place in the play, you have to announce that in case anybody would be upset by it. This is a new phenomenon. I worry that there are mechanisms that are protecting people against Theatre's capacity and inclination to open up vulnerability and address people in such a way where they will encounter their own wounds as a community and in a place that's safe but not sanitized. I worry about that. The President of a School in Chicago wrote a letter to the students announcing that school is a place of open discussion and discourse and they will not engage in trigger-warnings or any kind of censorship of speech. That's what School is about and I think that's true of the Theatre too.

C.N.: It also ruins the suspense of the play...

Tom Oppenheim: Yes. If they let you know that something very disturbing happens for the audience, so if you're sensitive you leave now or close your eyes... it just feels like that you may be subverting the purpose of Art and the purpose of Theatre.

C.N.: You have mentioned many times how you do not want the Studio to be dogmatic or create a myth of Stella Adler herself. Stella Adler had a huge impact on me, also because she was a woman. Do you see how Stella Adler can be considered as a role model for young women, a feminine figure they one can look up to?

Tom Oppenheim: I imagine yes. I think she is a great role model. That is something we should celebrate more. My sister (Sarah Oppenheim) is very aware of it. Stella is a great role model for any young actor, particularly for young women. I have heard people say that Stella's technique is more favorable to or has feminist qualities as opposed to Strasberg for example. What would be the powerful feminine quality...

C.N.: ... well as I grew up as an artist and as a woman, becoming a mother, I realized the difficulty of being a working artist as a woman when you see for example how opportunities in terms of responsibilities are more easily given to men. Stella Adler stands out as a pioneer.

Tom Oppenheim: Yes and at the time Stella Adler did what she did, it was worse then when she was doing it than it is now. You mentioned dogmatism, one of the great things about Stella Adler I think is that she had unending curiosity and capacity to absorb and to be a student, receive and open herself up. There is enormous emphasis in her work for the world outside of you and taking things from outside into yourself and then giving them back. Those maybe exemplary feminine strengths.

C.N.: The nurturing aspects...

Tom Oppenheim: Yes nurturing. Yes. Nurturing. There are very interesting things to unearth in that idea.

C.N.: I see an analogy in being a Mother and being a Teacher. There is an act of Transmission. The act of transmitting by caring about the Others. Listening. Trying and understanding from the other's perspective. I once heard Brando say that Stella Adler helped him find, recognize, his own process. Being able to help someone find their own

process is to me one of the major element in being a « good » teacher. Are there any other things, according to you that make a « good » teacher?

Tom Oppenheim: The greatness of Stella Adler's teaching resided in her ability to celebrate and to be excited by life, by ideas, and for that sense of excitement to manifest in her passing to inspire. She produced a logical sequence of exercises that stand up as a foundational technique as a way of working. She then produced a way of reading text that's related to these foundational exercises- the interpretation class. And then this other class - Character - that goes to big, historical and archetypal levels of History and the Human psyche. Those are three specific things that were always given by someone who was deeply and profoundly alive. There are more quiet teachers who are great teachers. For example, Michael Howard whom I know as a friend, is more quiet but I think he opens up space, I think he provides space where people come alive theatrically. My father, great classical clarinetist, once said that a conductor is a person before whom one has a musical response and I think Michael is that way, he is a person who gives permission and provides space for people to grow.

...

I have to think of a definition of an Artist... It must include Mastery of an art form but there is more to it than that.

C.N.: With the American Theatre Project in Toulouse, we focused on Realism in terms of artistic, social and political commitment or implications. What's left ? Does the word « Method » make any sense today?

Tom Oppenheim: I think so. It's a great question. There is a play right now in Broadway that's called « The Humans », directed by Joe Mantello. I highly recommend it, brilliantly acted I thought. Right out of this tradition. That play matters. It's very funny. And it would seem like light comedy and suddenly something very big, dark, happens but it keeps rolling along- it's like a Chekhov play- and then by the end of it you feel like it's suggesting perhaps that human civilization is finished. And you walk out, it seemed to me, wanting for it not to be. It's not a negative, but there is no effort in the play to offer any hope. And it may be true.

When you worked with Philip Seymour Hoffman at the Studio, he talked about actions and sense memory and those are the two things he used. Although he is not alive any more, he is very much alive and valid artistically. I saw him on stage and on film.

What's left? I am friends with Mark Rylance who studied at RADA but he really absorbed Brando and that whole scene through films. He has a whole, rich, full, very important artistic response to all that acting and all that acting in relationship to what he saw on the British stage. I consider him to be one of the few greatest actors of our time.

What's left ? I think a lot. It's still resounding and echoing.

C.N.: Do you see a difference between Realism, post-modernism, avant-garde and is there one that addresses issues that the other cannot ?

Tom Oppenheim: I wouldn't want to live in a world with no avant-garde Theatre. It seems to me it probably carves out areas of human existence different from Tennessee Williams or Arthur Miller... Recently we brought the Grotowski Group to Rikers Island. They did an hour-long piece that they created. A kind of creation myth elevating the women and describing creation, existence as its relationship to the

feminine. It was some of the most extraordinary acting I have ever seen and on so many levels. It was the first time they performed in public for 9 adult women in Rikers and 4-5 Arts administrators in a Gym with correction officers walking around. It's Grotowski receiving the last phase of Stanislavski and mainly his method of physical action. For example they take this ancient, folk song and then they will explore the song vocally and allow the exploration to become both vocal and physical but they will find through the form of the song which is external to them, they plummet into level of human existence that are deep, rich and profound. I think Stella intended actors to explore the playwrights world in the same way. They do it in an unbelievable way where suddenly different voices come up and out and they are totally committed. You sit in front of what would be seen as avant-garde theatre but it's deeply ancient. It's twenty-thousand years old.

I don't see that as separate from Stella and I think that we, at the Studio, ought to begin to allow ourselves to be in the conversation that the Grotowski folks are in. I think Stella would.

I remember when I was a little boy that my sister Sarah went to Stella in California when she was in her teen. My father and I picked Sarah and Ron (Burrus) at the airport and drove everyone out to the Long island and I remember Sarah saying Stella, who was probably eighty, was trying to get someone to act mad and that she got on the ground and started rolling around. This makes me feel that she lived very close to the Grotowski people.

I was reading Lorca's « The House of Bernarda Alba », and there is a wonderful essay which talks about how he, as a modernist, what was modern about him - and same as Picasso- was the plumbing the depths of the art of Andalusia, of Southern Spain, going back to the beginning and bringing that up and presenting it to the modern world so it's seen as avant-garde but it's actually ancient.

C.N.: I cannot but think about « The Rites of Duende » that I directed at Adler and how we worked on the roots because you are describing a very organic process of acting by identifying the inner movement, but you are also talking about truthfulness, the sending out of energy. And you identified this acting as overwhelming. Would that be the definition of a good actor?

Tom Oppenheim: Yes I think so.

C.N.: You mentioned Stanislavski. There is much confusion with the first phase and second phase of his work and also with the translations of his work. What's your take on that?

Tom Oppenheim: Stanislavski probably used sensory work in his latter years and explored improvisation much earlier. He's holistic, and the myth that we tell in America is that he discarded affective memory and sense memory in favor of the imagination. I think that is not true.

Sense memory is the evocation of senses - smells, tastes, - affective memory is using the technique of sense memory to bring yourself back to a traumatic place. In America we have relied on a heavily psychological idea. Benedetti's publishing of « An Actor Prepares » feels very holistic. In the diagram, there is a branch of sense memory.

C.N.: No matter the technique, as long as you find a strong and positive tool that helps you reach the organic, truthful acting, is it relevant?

Tom Oppenheim: I agree with that.

C.N.: In France the Actors Studio is often subject to negative a priori because of “guru” who were doing therapy instead.

Tom Oppenheim: There is odd legacy in relationship to Marilyn Monroe and some uncomfortable things. I think that what Stella contributed in a unique way is the uplifting of the human being and also of the idea that you raise yourself up to a material. That can be confusing. I was just listening to Oskar Eustis (Artistic Director of The Public Theatre) last night in a documentary on *Hamilton* he was saying - and I don't quite find myself in agreement with it - that *Hamilton* was the greatest example since Shakespeare - and to me, there is a difference in what actors do in *Hamilton* and in what they are able to do in Shakespeare - but what he said though that I do agree with is that both Shakespeare and Lin-Manuel Miranda (Author of *Hamilton*) listen to the language of the women and the men on the street and then elevated Humanity. I think that's what Stella was after and what her techniques - plural - offer, and that there is a purpose of Art in that. I think that some Theatre in America pulls in the opposite way, it deifies what is habitual in ourselves rather than elevate. You see it in young people and you see it in films. And we have deified in America to the point where the Kardashians are. You see it in television where the arrows are all posting down, that there is a degradation of Humanity.

C.N.: is there a particular philosopher who influenced you most?

Tom Oppenheim: James P. Carse with whom I studied Religion at the New York University years ago. One of his great books *Finite and Infinite Games* but also *The Religious Case Against Belief*. But through Carse I read many other philosophers. My favorites were Kierkegaard or Sartre.

C.N.: Why Sartre ?

Tom Oppenheim: What is most vivid to me, as I understood it, is the idea of “in itself” and “for itself”. He analyzed Human existence in relationship to consciousness, saying that Existence breaks up into those two categories. The “in itself” which are objects that you see, that you perceive, solid things, and then the “for itself” which would be consciousness. The “for itself” is always trying to turn itself into the “in itself” always trying to become an object and escape its own nothingness. He wrote “Being and Nothingness”. That's useful to me in relationship to « growth as an actor and growth as a human being” which sounds fun, sounds like a platitude but it is actually full of pain and difficulty. If you embrace your humanity, you embrace your own “nothingness”. But in that nothingness is freedom.

C.N.: This is Richard II's soliloquy “but whate'er I be, Nor I nor any man that but man is, With nothing shall be pleased, till he be eased with being nothing”!

Tom Oppenheim: Yes exactly! And it's rich. And you could read that basic insight in all the Existentialists. In Nietzsche and Heidegger. It's very rich in Kierkegaard who quotes Shakespeare a great deal.

C.N.: one of the tools we learn here is to do it all the time as if it were the first time. I believe that to be able to do that one needs to cultivate a sense of Innocence. You do have that. How do you cultivate that Innocence?

Tom Oppenheim: Oh Jeez... I don't know how to answer that...

Vulnerability and belief and love. If you do a play say *The House of Bernarda Alba*, you have to embrace the idea that this play is like medicine that the world desperately needs and the world would be anyone that comes to see it. And in a way the play is

like a prayer. I don't know what renews that. I just don't know the answer. It's a great question. You know when you go into jail, you work with a bunch of young people for example who have been told their whole life that they are worthless, that they have no voice, that society does not care about who they are at all, that they have nothing to say and then you say "ok here is the exercise, we are going to watch you" and everything they do begins to matter. You can see them waking up. To me that is an ancient technology of Theatre and it is intertwined with love. There is love of Humanity...

C.N.: ... Compassion?

Tom Oppenheim: Yes. I see you. You matter. You have value. That describes it for me.

C.N.: Would the worst wound in society be the lack of compassion?

Tom Oppenheim: Yes, the lack of compassion. Or willingness to make garbage out of people, to waste people, to see people as waste. If you walk out the door- and we are doing this at a rapid rate - you walk through, you are beautiful so some guy would look at you and you probably have to close down and then closing down he robbed you of your humanity and then you have to rob him of his humanity. We do that all the time. We do that at an alarming rate and if you do the opposite, this is it, this is my life, this is our life, it seems to me that is what Theatre is for. And that what Art is for. So I would say that Artists are people that allow themselves to do that, to see and be seen. And in seeing they give people permission to be seen. Carse measures Art by virtue of its ability not to impose a voice but to elicit a voice, get other people talking.

[FIGURE 3]



[Stella Adler Studio of Acting](#)

3

C.N.: Thank you Tom Oppenheim for such a rich discussion which contributed in unearthing pieces of the human complexity in Acting, Theatre and Art, and find the

definition - the substance? - of the Artist. I am for ever grateful and indebted to you for your trust and inspiration.

ABSTRACTS

Entretien avec Tom Oppenheim, Directeur du Stella Adler Studio Of Acting de New York. L'entretien, réalisé en Octobre 2016, a consisté en une libre discussion dans son bureau du Studio New Yorkais.

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Mots-clés: théâtre américain, Stella Adler, Tom Oppenheim, Ron Burrus, James Tripp, Arts, Artiste, technique, méthode Stanislavski, Grotowski, American Theatre Project, interprétation, direction d'acteur

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Celebrating Susan Glaspell and Trifles in Spain

A Review of the Exhibition “Susan Glaspell (1876-1948): pionera del teatro experimental. Trifles, los Provincetown Players y el teatro de vanguardia” (“Susan Glaspell (1876-1948): The Pioneer of Experimental Theatre. Trifles, the Provincetown Players and the Avant-garde Theatre”)

Quetzalina Lavallo Salvatori

The International Susan Glaspell Society: Website

- 1 <http://blogs.shu.edu/glaspellsociety/>

[Figure 1]



Poster design by Noelia Hernando Real; photography by Nicholas Murray.

Susan Glaspell, Trifles and the Hossack Case

- 2 Susan Glaspell was born in 1876 in Davenport, Iowa. Although growing in a rural environment, she became a young lady with strong and challenging ideas. She went to Drake University, where she graduated in Philosophy in 1899. After that she became a reporter for the Des Moines Daily News, where she covered the legislature and law section. Following her desire to be a writer, she started writing short stories and novels, becoming quite successful. Nevertheless, it was in the theatre where Susan Glaspell excelled herself. Soon after marrying George Cram Cook, they co-founded the Provincetown Players, a revolutionary theatre group that achieved an innovative and truly American theatre, far away from European models and the conventional Naturalism or Melodrama so popular back then on Broadway. Eugene O'Neill, known as the father of American theatre, or Robert Edmond Jones, the famous scenic designer, were some of the figures that belonged to the group; without forgetting Glaspell, who, if O'Neill is indeed known as the father, shall be considered the mother of the American theatre. She wrote eleven plays with the Provincetown Players, among which is *Trifles*, a play inspired by the Hossack murder case Glaspell had covered when she worked at the Des Moines Daily News. It was written and performed for the first time in 1916 and nowadays is considered one of her masterpieces.
- 3 The Hossack case was a cold blood murder that shocked the Iowa population at the end of 1900. John Hossack, a well-to-do farmer, was mysteriously killed around midnight on the 1st of December while sleeping. The murder weapon was an axe that was later found in the barn of the family property. After discarding the possibility of burglars, the main suspect became Margaret, John's wife. As her husband was tragically killed, she remained next to him, sleeping, without ever waking up. Finally, it was discovered that Margaret was severely abused by John and that the neighbours were well aware of

it. Mrs. Hossack was eventually detained and judged; she was sentenced to life imprisonment.

- 4 Glaspell followed the case from the very beginning, which marked her career as a writer and her fight as a feminist. As new evidence was discovered, her opinion changed: once she knew Margaret suffered from gender violence, she started questioning to what extent she was a murderer or a victim. Because of this, Glaspell also believed that, as anybody else, Mrs. Hossack deserved a jury of her peers; women who could understand her situation better than men. However, women were not allowed to sit on juries (until 1920 in Iowa). These thoughts led Glaspell to write *Trifles*, a play in one act in which Minnie Wright, accused of murdering her husband, received a fair trial by two of her neighbours, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peter, who by reading the “trifles” they find in Minnie’s kitchen, discover she was mistreated and abused. As a consequence, they comprehend the complexity of her situation and “judge” it accordingly, taking into account facts that their male counterparts would immediately discard.

The Review

- 5 In order to commemorate the centennial of this masterpiece, Professor Noelia Hernando Real, currently teaching at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (UAM, Spain) and president of the International Susan Glaspell Society, curated the exhibition “Susan Glaspell (1876-1948): pionera del teatro experimental. *Trifles*, los Provincetown Players y el teatro de vanguardia” (“Susan Glaspell (1876-1948): The Pioneer of Experimental Theatre. *Trifles*, the Provincetown Players and the Avant-garde Theatre”) in the Humanities library of the UAM, located in the Cantoblanco Campus in Madrid. The intention of the exhibition was to celebrate this eminent play, but also to introduce Glaspell and her work to students and the general public who were not familiar with the playwright, as well as to give further information about her life and career to those already acquainted with her art. The display opened on the 18th of October of 2016, coinciding with the seminar “The Politics of Theatre: Susan Glaspell, the Provincetown Players and the Creation of Modern US Drama,” also organized by Noelia Hernando Real, in which eminent academics of Glaspell, such as Linda Ben-Zvi, Emeline Jouve and Barbara Ozieblo, commented on the relevance of the playwright in the history of American literature and feminist writing. The place where the exhibition took place was a small space in the library, which was inconvenient if you happen to visit it with a group larger than twenty-five persons, but that normally allowed the visitor to move around rather freely and to take his time in every section. The fact that it was located in the library was a great opportunity to introduce the playwright to a much larger scale, for not only did students of English Studies visit the display (the degree in which, most probably, Glaspell was already mentioned), but also students from other branches of Humanities. On the other hand, the library is situated next to the train station of the campus, which makes the building a space frequently visited not only by other students from various faculties who prefer it as their place for study because of its proximity to the train, but also by persons external to the University who visit the campus, which translated in a possible larger variety of public.
- 6 The exhibition consisted of two parts. The first one dealt with the Hossack case. It presented a panoramic of Glaspell’s articles for the *Des Moines Daily News*, pictures and

some documents on the case. The second part was composed of seven glass displayers, each of which presented objects related with Glaspell's life and literary work, her role in the Provincetown Players and their importance in the sociohistorical and cultural context of the New York of the 20th century.

[Figure 2]



Partial view of the exhibition.

Photography by Quetzalina Lavallo Salvatori

- 7 The first part served as an introduction to Susan Glaspell and *Trifles*. It presented nine graphics showing pictures of the Hossack family and farm, a map of the house recreating the steps of the murderer, pictures of Glaspell, and some of her articles on the case. Because the murder was the origin of the play and because Glaspell started writing about it when she was a journalist, it was the ideal way to open the exhibition. On the other hand, the fact that a case of that nature was the inspiration for *Trifles* is a curious detail that may have called the attention of the visitors who were not familiarized with the theme of the display. The descriptions and commentaries were, comprehensibly, in Spanish. Nevertheless, the articles were in English and the public unable to comprehend the language were not able to read Glaspell's analysis of the case. On the other hand, one of the articles presented was blurry and the understanding of the words was difficult, because of the quality of the scan. A transcription of the texts in Spanish and English would have improved the section, but because of the limited space, it is comprehensible that variety was preferred.
- 8 The second section was the most relevant part. If the previous one introduced the murder that inspired *Trifles*, this part developed the information related with the play itself. The first glass cabinet showed pictures of its performance in 1917, and of the original publication of "A Jury of Her Peers" (1917), Glaspell's short story adapted from *Trifles* and therefore inspired by the Hossack case as well. It also presented publications, films, books, and T.V. series that were based on the play, such as Hitchcock's episode "A Jury of Her Peers" (1961), *Midnight Assassin*; by Patricia L. Bryan and Thomas Wolf, the

latest book on *Trifles*; Martha Carpentier and Emeline Jouve's *On Susan Glaspell's Trifles and "A Jury of Her Peers"*, and several short film adaptations. Together with the items mentioned, links and references to sources were provided when available, giving the public the opportunity to watch or read any of the videos or books if they wished. The description that accompanied the first display, entitled "De la realidad a la ficción: El caso Hossack en Glaspell y otros autores," ("From fact to fiction: The Hossack case in Glaspell and other authors") mentioned briefly but strongly the importance of the case as a feminist matter that Glaspell, thanks to her play, popularized, and echoed its political and social relevance; this was an indispensable information, for the importance of the playwright and the Provincetown Players' role in the American literature cannot be fully grasped if their introduction of politics into the theatrical scene is not sufficiently stressed. On the other hand, the selection of these particular objects as the opening of the second part seemed ideal: the public was introduced to a play that proved to be influential not only in the 1920s but throughout the entire 20th and the beginning of the 21st century.

- 9 The second glass cabinet "Susan Glaspell (1876-1948): un espíritu moderno," ("Susan Glaspell (1876-1948): a modern spirit") introduced the early life of the playwright and her beginnings as a writer. Photos of Glaspell as a child and as a young woman, her signature and documents of her time at Drake University were part of this section. Some of her publications as a novelist and as a short story writer were exhibited as well: her first novel *The Glory of the Conquered: The Story of a Great Love* (1909) and a copy of the magazine in which "The Resurrection and the Life" was published. A photograph of Jig Cook and two biographies of Glaspell were also added to the display. This part centred on her life in Davenport, and from this point onwards the exhibition would take a chronological order following the steps of Glaspell through her life. One of the key parts of this section was the acknowledgement of the popularity and success of Glaspell's short stories, which was illustrated by presenting her publication in *The Smart Set* magazine, which also printed D.H. Lawrence or Ezra Pound. In this way, the visitor could question why Glaspell is currently a rather unknown author compared to her male fellow writers and grasp the magnitude of her work. In addition, the documents of her time in Drake University and her choice of keeping her last name instead of taking her husband's, demonstrated that she was an example of the "New Woman" who fought for women's education, independence, and rights. The struggle of young Glaspell in a male dominated world is perfectly highlighted by the comment in the description of her signature, which mentioned the anecdote of the *New York Times* critic who believed that Glaspell's first novel, *The Glory of the Conquered*, was written by a man under a female pseudonym. The presence of a picture of her love, Jig Cook, introduced the theme of the next display, Glaspell's life in New York.
- 10 This third section, "Susan Glaspell en Nueva York: el *backstage* de los Provincetown Players" ("Susan Glaspell in New York: the backstage of the Provincetown Players"), was related with the sociohistorical and cultural context in New York at the beginning of the 20th century. As mentioned before, the relevance of the Provincetown Players and of Glaspell's work cannot be fully understood without being aware of their political commitment. In this case, the Patterson strike and the following Patterson strike pageant; the Armory show and the suffragist movement are the main events showed by means of pictures, posters and articles. Before their meeting in Provincetown, most of the members of the group had already met in New York, in part due to the events mentioned above. The Patterson strike denounced the poor conditions of workers in

the silk mill factories and demanded new legislations to control children labour and abusive working hours. After the brutal response of the police and in order to raise funds for the strike, John Reed (a picture of him is displayed) decided to organize a big pageant in which artists and workers would join forces. Most of the soon-to-be Provincetown Players participated in the event, among which was Robert Edmund Jones, who designed the official poster (also included in the glass cabinet). Eventually, the strike failed, but the pageant demonstrated that modern art was a strong ally of the labour forces. Further evidence of this was the radical socialist magazine *The Masses*, in which many artists and intellectuals collaborated: a copy of John Reed's article on the Patterson strike was part of this section of the display. Another event that was deeply influential for the New York artists was the Armory Show, which introduced European modernism in America. This was essential for the development of the Provincetown Players and their unique style, for their experimentation and reformulation of the American theatre had its roots in the principles of modernism. In this section, this is skilfully connected with the Abbey Theatre and its American tour. The Abbey Players, led by Lady Gregory and William Butler Yeats, convinced the young artists in New York that a new kind of American drama needed to be created. Finally, the picture of a demonstration for the female vote reminded the public of the relevance of the feminist movement in Glaspell's work. Indeed, this part of the exhibition is key to the visitor's realization of the significance of Glaspell and the Provincetown Players within the sociohistorical context.

- 11 The exhibition continued with the introduction to the group itself and their time in Provincetown (from 1915 to 1916). Although all the members of the group lived in New York, their starting point was this small, coastal village where artists went to escape from the suffocating heat of the New York summer. Several images composed this part of the exhibition, entitled "Los Provincetown Players" ("The Provincetown Players"): Glaspell and Cook's cottage, the Wharf theatre where they performed, produced and presented their first plays, and many scenes of the members working in their small and humble but significant theatre. Two books complement the pictures: *The Dramatic Imagination* (1941) by Edmund Jones and *Jig Cook and the Provincetown Players* (1982) by Robert K. Sarlós. If it was vital to acknowledge the political background of the Provincetown Players, it is equally necessary to be aware of their origins: far away from the fancy staging, the urgency for the critics' approval and the greed for money that characterised Broadway theatres, the group's sole motivation was the search for a more daring, experimental, American theatrical scene. For that reason, they decided to explore their possibilities in an environment in which they felt free and comfortable to express their artistic convictions. The objects of this section showed the independent and counter-cultural spirit of the group that gave America some of its finest artists, such as Eugene O'Neill, Robert Edmund Jones, and Susan Glaspell. The pictures of the wharf, the simple but powerful sceneries and of the role of the members as playwrights, actors and stagehands showed the commitment of these young intellectuals and the strength of their beliefs.
- 12 After the summer of 1916, the Provincetown Players decided to move their theatre to New York, where they could present plays the entire year and not only during summers. Their project evolved from a hobby to a serious artistic enterprise. It is during this period that Glaspell and O'Neill were discovered as masters of modernist theatre and were acclaimed by critics and the public. Apart from this, they gave the opportunity to several young artists to show their potential: until their dissolution in

1922 they were able to bring on stage 97 plays written by 46 different playwrights. “Los Provincetown Players conquistan Nueva York” (“The Provincetown Players conquer New York”) analysed their time in the big city, showing their official manifesto, a list of the participants of the group in 1916, one of the circulars sent to the subscribers written by Cook (the theatre survived thanks to the donation of the subscribers, so it was important to maintain them informed), several pictures of representations of Glaspell’s and O’Neill’s plays, such as *Women’s Honor*, *Bernice* and *The Emperor Jones*; and their little Playwrights’ Theatre on 133 MacDougal Street. In addition, there was a copy of the *New York Times* announcing the interim the group was taking in 1922, which was really the end of it. Two books about the relevance of the Provincetown Players were displayed: *The Provincetown Players and the Culture of Modernity* (2005) by Brenda Murphy and *Voces contra la mediocridad: la vanguardia teatral de los Provincetown Players, 1915-1922* (2014) by Noelia Hernando Real. With this section, the theme of the Provincetown Players came to an end in the exhibition. Consisting of three glass cabinets, the history of the most influential theatrical group that inevitably changed the scene of American theatre is explained in depth: the selection of the pictures and objects, together with the brief but precise descriptions reconstructed the timeline of the Provincetown Players without missing any of its key elements, every item and word created an unmissable panoramic of the group of young artists that led a revolution of the American art. By this point of the exhibition the public was fully aware of the principles and motivations of the Provincetown Players, their innovative and independent spirit and its undeniable role in the creation of a modern, experimental American drama.

- 13 “Susan Glaspell tras los Provincetown Players” (“Susan Glaspell after the Provincetown Players”) explored Glaspell’s life and career after her role in the experimental theatre group until her death in 1948. It contains pictures of her time with Cook in Greece, where he died in 1924; her flourishing work as a novelist and her further career as a renowned playwright, presenting copies of her novels *Brook Evans* (1928), *Fugitive’s Return* (which became a best seller) and of her children’s book *Cherished and Shared of Old* (1940). There were also two pictures showing Glaspell later in her life and her commemorative tombstone in the Snow Cemetery. The intention of this section was to demonstrate the relevance of the author outside the Provincetown circle and not only as a playwright, but also as a prose writer who easily competed with writers such as Hemmingway and who met the favour of the public and the critics.
- 14 Finally, the last glass cabinet, “Susan Glaspell tras Susan Glaspell” (“Susan Glaspell after Susan Glaspell”), explored the legacy and influence of the playwright after her death. For decades, Glaspell and her work were forgotten by the male-dominated canon, relegated to oblivion. Nevertheless, thanks to the second feminist wave her importance in the history of American literature was rediscovered and acknowledged again. The display exemplified this recovery through several publications, anthologies and studies that have focused on Glaspell’s persona and career in the last few years. In addition, some pictures of contemporary representations of her plays *Trifles*, *Chains of Dew* and *The Outside* by the Orange Tree Theatre (Richmond, England) in 2008 evidenced the relevance of the plays, her style and themes, to our 21st-century society. Among the publications, we could find *Susan Glaspell. Essays on Her Theatre and Fiction* (1995), edited by Linda Ben-Zvi, *Susan Glaspell and the Anxiety of Expression* (2006), by Kristina Hinz-Bode, and *Self and Space in the Theatre of Susan Glaspell* (2011), by Noelia Hernando Real. This final part of the exhibition confirmed the public the strong impact Glaspell still

has in current literary and feminist studies. Furthermore, it demonstrated that her plays convey powerful and solid ideas that our culture and society should reflect on. With this message, the exhibition finished the journey through Glaspell's life and career.

[Figure 3]



View of "Susan Glaspell tras los Provincetown Players" ("Susan Glaspell after the Provincetown Players").

Credits: photography by Quetzalina Lavalle Salvatori

- 15 The display as a whole was quite agreeable and informative, it provided a considerable amount of important facts and succeeded in presenting a remarkably complete portrayal of Glaspell in an impressive brevity of time and space. The organization of the themes and the selection of objects were evidently carefully studied and chosen, the descriptions accompanying them were short and concise. The importance given to research and academic writing is outstanding: all the glass displays were provided with publications related with the theme of each section, allowing the visitors the opportunity to expand their knowledge if they choose to and demonstrating the importance of the academics that brought back Glaspell from the abyss of the forgotten.
- 16 'Susan Glaspell (1876-1948): pionera del teatro experimental. *Trifles*, los Provincetown Players y el teatro de vanguardia' was an unmissable appointment for the lovers of theatre and literature, a homage to one of the biggest revolutionaries and builders of the American literary identity, who was lost for a time but that has come back, hopefully to never be missed again.

ABSTRACTS

Review of the Exhibition “Susan Glaspell (1876-1948): pionera del teatro experimental. Trifles, los Provincetown Players y el teatro de vanguardia” (“Susan Glaspell (1876-1948): The Pioneer of Experimental Theatre. Trifles, the Provincetown Players and the Avant-garde Theatre”) presented in Madrid, Spain, as a celebration of Trifles centennial. The exhibition took place in the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid from October 18th to December 16th 2016.

Critique de l'exposition “Susan Glaspell (1876-1948): pionera del teatro experimental. Trifles, los Provincetown Players y el teatro de vanguardia” (Susan Glaspell (1876-1948): Pionnière du theatre experimental: Trifles, les Provincetown Players et l'avant-garde théâtrale) présenter à Madrid (Espagne) à l'occasion du centenaire de Trifles. L'exposition s'est tenue à l'université Autónoma de Madrid du 18 octobre au 16 décembre 2016.

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Mots-clés: Susan Glaspell, littérature, théâtre, théâtre américain, théâtre expérimental, féminisme, auteur de théâtre, avant-garde, Trifles, femmes, Provincetown Players, modernisme, New York, Provincetown

Keywords: Susan Glaspell, literature, theatre, American theatre, experimental theatre, feminism, playwright, avant-garde, Trifles, women, the Provincetown Players, modernism, New York, Provincetown

Subjects: Theater

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A Decade of Performance and Cognition : Moving Towards the Integration of Cultural and Biological Studies.

Interview with Dr. Bruce McConachie.

Rovie Herrera Medalle

Biography of the Interviewee.

- 1 Professor McConachie had published widely in American theatre history and theatre historiography. His books include *Theatre for Working-Class Audiences in the U.S.* (1985), *Interpreting the Theatrical Past* (with Thomas Postlewait, 1989), and *Melodramatic Formations: Theatre and Society in the U.S. 1820-1870* (1992), for which he won the Barnard Hewitt Award from the American Society for Theatre Research (ASTR). *American Theater in the Culture of the Cold War: Producing and Contesting Containment, 1947-196* in 2003. Along with three other historians, McConachie publishes a world theatre history book in 2006, *Theatre Histories: An Introduction*. This innovative textbook is now (in 2016) in its third edition. From 2000 to 2003 he served as President of ASTR.
- 2 In 2006, McConachie also publishes *Performance and Cognition: Theatre Studies and the Cognitive Turn* (with F. Elizabeth Hart), the first of several books and essays investigating the evolutionary and cognitive basis of theatre and performance studies. Other books in this area of interdisciplinary scholarship are *Engaging Audiences: A Cognitive Approach to Spectating in the Theatre* (2008), *Theatre & Mind* (2013), and *Evolution, Cognition, and Performance* (2015). During this time, McConachie also put together a Cognitive Science and Theatre Conference at the University of Pittsburgh and joined with Professor Blakey Vermeule to co-edit the “Cognitive Studies in Literature and Performance” series for Palgrave Macmillan Press, which has published

a dozen monographs by 2015. In 2011, ASTR awards McConachie the Distinguished Scholar Award.

- 3 During his 18 years at the University of Pittsburgh, McConachie continued to perform theatrical roles and direct plays. He performed regionally with Unseem'd Shakespeare Company, Quantum Theatre, and Theatre by the Grove at IUP and appeared in several supporting roles with students at the University. McConachie directed Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* at Pitt, *American Humbug*, by Theatre Arts Professor Lynn Conner, for the Three Rivers Arts Festival, and *A Streetcar Named Desire* at Queens University in Belfast, UK.
- 4 Bruce McConachie retired as an Emeritus Professor at the end of December in 2015.

The Interview.

Rovie Herrera Medalle : Dr. McConachie, you have been in the forefront of theatre and cognitive studies for the past ten years. Can you tell us how the field has changed since the publication of your anthology of essays with Elizabeth Hart in 2006 ?

Bruce McConachie : Sure ; it has changed in some ways, but not in others. Those of us doing this work – and that includes theatre critics, acting teachers, performance historians, clinicians, advocates of theatre for social change, and others – continue to look to psychology, evolution, neuroscience, linguistics, anthropology, and other sciences for insights into how and why we perform and what performance can mean and do for spectators. Our reliance on experimentation and logic based in empirical evidence sets us apart from other performance scholars, most of who continue to rely on traditional or poststructuralist approaches that cannot be validated scientifically. This is not to say that we have experimental proof for all of our claims ; experiments with actors and audiences are still in their infancy, although that is starting to change. Because testing under conditions of live performance is very difficult, we have mostly applied scientific insights in related areas of human behavior to the specifics of our field. There is already quite a lot of good science on imagination, role-playing, empathy, emotions, meaning-making, and other areas of acting and spectating that is relevant to our interests and questions.

It's fair to say, though, that these questions have changed in the last ten years, both in response to new scientific discoveries and syntheses and to changes in the general field of theatre and performance studies. When Liz and I were gathering essays for *Performance and Cognition* in 2005, we primarily turned to writers who were influenced by the combination of linguistics, literary criticism, and cognitive science that had shaped the work of George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, and Mark Turner. Lakoff and Johnson were known for their 1980 classic, *Metaphors We Live By*, plus other individual work on categorization, embodiment, and philosophy, and Turner had recently published his book on conceptual blending with Gilles Fauconnier. (Among other things, blending explains how our minds can comprehend the synthesis of actor and role that goes into playing a character on stage and the compression that allows spectators to combine many small events into one complete performance.)

RHM : What about the substantial cognitive work that had already occurred in other humanistic disciplines by 2006 ? Did the cognitive paradigm shifts in philosophy,

musicology, and film studies, for example, influence the questions you and others were asking about theatre and performance in the early years ?

Bruce McConachie : Yes, but the influence was mostly indirect. The essays by me, John Lutterbie, Lisa Zunshine, Rhonda Blair, and others in *Performance and Cognition* were primarily trying to figure out how cognition and emotion worked in theatre events and what this new approach might mean for our usual ways of understanding performances. I did not venture very far into those other disciplines until my next book, *Engaging Audiences: A Cognitive Approach to Spectating in the Theatre*, published in 2008.

RHM : What were the primary humanistic fields and personal experiences that shaped your writing of *Engaging Audiences* ?

Bruce McConachie : In terms of life experiences, I decided I would use plays I had directed or performed in as my primary examples. I discussed historical and contemporary productions of five of them throughout the book – *Oedipus the King*, *Twelfth Night*, *Uncle Vanya*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and *Top Girls*. I'd been doing a lot of reading in theatre history, philosophy, and film studies when I wrote that book and these influences are evident in the writing. In addition to couching many of my scientific claims in theatrical-historical contexts, I wrote a lengthy Epilogue, "Writing Cognitive Audience Histories," to summarize my general approach to this historiographical problem. In the Epilogue and throughout the book, I argued that a cognitive approach was better than semiotics, the usual way in 2008 for theatre scholars to understand audience response. I also offered a philosophical defense of embodied cognitive science as superior to the poststructuralisms of Lacan, Derrida, Butler, and others. Regarding film studies, I borrowed some insights from film historian David Bordwell and theorist Noel Carroll and, following their lead, investigated audience emotions and the psychology of comedy much more thoroughly than I had before.

RHM : *Engaging Audiences* is a central title part of your series with Palgrave Macmillan Press, right ?

Bruce McConachie : Yes, it was one of the first books that Palgrave published in our series. Blakey Vermeule, an English professor at Stanford, and I started "Cognitive Studies in Literature and Performance" in 2007.

RHM : Have you been satisfied with the titles you and Blakey compiled in the series ?

Bruce McConachie : In general, yes ; there are some great monographs in our series. Over the past ten years, we've attracted many of the top scholars working in our field, including Joseph Carroll and Jonathan Gottschall, whose *Graphing Jane Austen* (2012) takes an empirical and evolutionary approach to the response of readers to classic novels. In the area of performance, Amy Cook published a book with us on conceptual blending, Kirsten Uszkalo investigated the centrality of rage in historical performances of witchcraft, Evelyn Tribble explained how Shakespeare's actors negotiated the Globe Theatre stage, and John Lutterbie drew on a range of cognitive science to advance a "general theory" of acting.

We were talking a minute ago about the ways in which cognitive studies in theatre and performance has changed in recent years. These books had a formative effect on our emerging field. All four of them helped to broaden and deepen the reach of cognitive science in studies of theatre and performance. Cook's *Shakespearean Neuroplay* demonstrated the inevitability of blending for spectator meaning-making

among a wide range of *Hamlet* productions and Uszkalo, in *Bewitched and Bedeviled*, showed that the contemporary science of emotions has surprising usefulness in historical investigations. In *Cognition in the Globe*, Tribble drew on “distributed cognition,” our ability to use our immediate environment to remind us of cognitive solutions to immediate tasks – think of the cockpit of an airplane – that gave the first historically credible explanation for how the actors at the Globe knew where to enter and what to say when they got on stage. Finally, Lutterbie deployed dynamic systems theory, long used to predict the action of many biological systems, in his *Toward a General Theory of Acting* to discuss the constraints and satisfactions that all actors work within when they perform. These four books brought recent scientific insights to bear on questions that have puzzled scholars for decades. They also demonstrate some of the several ways our field has broadened since its initial focus on linguistics, criticism, and cognitive science.

RHM : Yes, indeed. Would you include your 2013 book, *Theatre & Mind*, among those that have had a formative influence on extending the field ?

Bruce McConachie : It’s kind of you to ask that question, but I have to say that this little book – it’s only 82 pages long – was not an attempt at innovative scholarship. Palgrave’s “Theatre &” series is addressed primarily to undergraduates and its general goal is to introduce them to “connections between theatre and some aspect of the wider world,” as the Editors’ Introduction explains. I’m happy to admit that I took ideas from several of my colleagues in the field (including a book I have not mentioned, *Embodied Acting*, by Rick Kemp), boiled them down for undergrad consumption, and added some sexy examples. It’s still a pretty reliable read for anyone who wants a brief summary of the most of the main ideas in the field of theatre and cognition. I wouldn’t trust *Theatre & Mind* after about 2020, however ; the field is changing too fast.

RHM : What about *Evolution, Cognition, and Performance*, which you published in 2015 ? From my reading of the book you seem to have broken a lot of new ground.

Bruce McConachie : Yes, maybe too much. Unlike *Theatre & Mind*, I may have stretched to include some ideas that are out of the reach of the general reader. The task I set for myself was to find a general theory based primarily in evolution and cognition that could encompass all of performance studies. In the U.S., scholarship in performance studies includes all aspects of theatre, but also encompasses rituals, games, public speeches, music, film, and, more recently, interactive posts and videos in social media and related digital events. Performance studies seeks to explain the full implications of “performance ;” the field has been – and might become again – a significant platform for social and political critique and action. The field has a conflicted history populated by a variety of theories that draw from among anthropology, psychology, sociology, and linguistics. Although I borrow from some of these theories, especially the social scientific ones, I found that I had to challenge many of them because they were based in assumptions that no longer hold after the cognitive revolution.

RHM : Let’s talk about that. In your introductory chapter of *Evolution, Cognition, and Performance*, you rebut philosopher John Locke’s enlightenment-era belief that a child’s

mind is a “blank slate,” awaiting the “writing” that culture and society will inscribe on it. Can you please explain why challenging Locke’s notion is important to your project ?

Bruce McConachie : Locke was the first philosopher to put forward an idea that is still a dominant part of western thinking. Most older schools of sociology and anthropology, along with mainstream theories of performance studies, readily accept what is usually called “the social construction of reality.” This idea divides biology from culture to assert that human beings have inherited no natural qualities or predilections ; instead, society and culture alone shape how we “construct” the world. Evidence has been piling up for several decades, however, that *Homo sapiens*, like other mammals, do inherit many cognitive capabilities that predispose our bodies and minds to behave in some ways and not others. Society and language are still important, but evidence from around the world demonstrates that the gene pool of our species has structured the same basic stages of human development for all of us, regardless of differences in cultural learning. Our minds are not “blank slates” awaiting the imprint of culture.

RHM : As I recall, Evolution, Cognition, and Performance goes further than that. At one point you make the argument that “biology shaped culture, but culture also shaped some parts of biology.” This statement was particularly revealing to me, since I understand it as a groundbreaking view in terms of performance studies, can you please expand on it ?

Bruce McConachie : Sure, but I’ll need to go back into evolutionary time to do it. According to contemporary evolutionary biologists, several crucial aspects of our social evolution occurred during *Homo erectus* times, from about 2 million to 200 thousand years ago. During this period our ancestors became the most social animals on the planet in order to survive. Living in small bands of 30 to 50 individuals, *Homo erectus* hominins gradually learned how to cooperate in matters of sexual relations, child care, hunting, food sharing, and protection. But not all bands survived. Only those that learned these and other social skills could flourish in the dangerous and sometimes rapidly shifting environments of that time. Evolutionary scientists now believe that some *Homo erectus* bands began to pass on genes to their offspring that predisposed members of these bands to act with heightened levels of socialization. These predilections – which include the capacity for empathy, tribalism, pro-social emotions (such as shame and guilt), and altruism – continue in our own species today ; we inherited them from our *Homo erectus* ancestors. In fact, our heightened ability to behave in these ways is one of the things that set us apart from other mammals. In this sense, the culture of some *Homo erectus* bands gradually shaped their genetic evolution ; only those bands that cooperated could survive. In turn, these genetic predilections shaped the culture of *Homo erectus* offspring and continue to undergird our own cultures today.

RHM : You mentioned empathy as one of the social skills that helped our ancestors to survive. Some theatre theorists – notably Bertolt Brecht – have been critical of empathy. Do you agree with Brecht that empathy can get in the way of understanding ?

Bruce McConachie : Brecht was rejecting a nineteenth-century, romantic conception of empathy. No cognitive scientist today would agree that artists and others can lose themselves in the contemplation of another person or object, which is what the German romantics believed. So Brecht was right to reject that old fashioned notion of empathy. Most scientists today accept a version of empathy as the attempt of one person to put her/himself in the place of another in order to understand that person’s thoughts and feelings. This more modest version of empathy does not

involve the loss of self. And it obviously has survival value ; if several people in a *Homo erectus* band are hunting a dangerous animal, it helps if each person can understand the experience of the others so that they can all work more effectively together.

RHM : I can see that. So, do you think that this integration of cultural and biological studies should be an essential part of the teaching in theatre and performance studies programs ?

Bruce McConachie : Yes, I believe so. But it will take some textbooks advocating this biocultural approach before that can happen. My next project is a co-edited introductory anthology of essays that we hope will be accessible to undergraduate readers. Rick Kemp and I are editing *The Routledge Companion to Theatre, Performance, and Cognitive Science* ; it will be published in paperback in 2018.

RHM : That sounds fascinating, we will stay tuned. I understand that Cambridge University Press is also bringing out a paperback edition of your *Evolution, Cognition, and Performance* soon.

Bruce McConachie : Yes, that will be available later this year.

RHM : Thank you very much for this interview, Dr. McConachie. I appreciate your insights.

Bruce McConachie : Thank you, Rovie.

ABSTRACTS

Interview with Dr. Bruce McConachie. The interview was conducted by emails in December 2016.

Entretien avec Dr. Bruce McConachie. L'entretien, réalisé en décembre 2016, consistait en un échange de courriels.

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Mots-clés: antropologie, bioculturel, approche cognitive, emotions, empathie, evolution, esprits, performance, théâtre

Keywords: anthropology, biocultural, cognitive approach, emotions, empathy, evolution, mind, performance, theater

Subjects: Theater

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Towards a bilingual theatre aesthetic: an interview with the Deaf and Hearing Ensemble

Interview with the lead artists of The Deaf and Hearing Ensemble

Michael Richardson

The Deaf and Hearing Ensemble: Website

- 1 <http://www.thedeafandhearingensemble.com/about/>

[Figure 1]



An early R & D photograph of Sophie Stone and Erin Siobahn Hutching in *People of the Eye*. (Sophie Stone's role later played by Emily Howlett.)

Photograph by David Monteith-Hodge

The Interview

- 2 In the UK and elsewhere the current paradigm for encouraging D/deaf¹ people to participate in theatre is the sign language interpreted performance (SLIP), the presentation of a piece of spoken language theatre, simultaneously translated in to sign language by usually a single interpreter placed in the downstage corner of the stage. After twenty years or more of promoting this panacea for accessibility, however, theatre managers and academics alike report that attendance at such SLIPs by Deaf spectators is lower than anticipated, and my own (to date unpublished) research into SLIPs suggests that Deaf spectators do not find them as accessible as those who provide them had hoped.
- 3 The ubiquity of SLIPs belies the fact that theatre has been a central part of Deaf culture for over a century. Amateur performances in Deaf schools and clubs were commonplace and are recorded from the late 1800s. Professionally, national and/or regional Deaf theatre companies were established in the second half of the twentieth century in many European countries, as well as in the United States, Russia and beyond. Not all have survived. Miles and Fant (1976)² define Deaf theatre in its purest form as theatre that portrays characters and stories drawn from the Deaf cultural experience, performed in sign language by Deaf people. Clearly this is as inaccessible to hearing audiences as spoken language theatre is to Deaf people; but without hearing spectators, audience numbers have often been insufficient to sustain Deaf theatre companies or even individual productions of Deaf theatre.
- 4 My own particular interest is a middle way: theatre that is both bilingual (spoken and signed language) and bicultural (Deaf and hearing). How can performances be created

that are equally accessible to D/deaf and hearing audiences by drawing on the language choices and cultural experiences of both Deaf and hearing theatre makers?

- 5 Companies producing this kind of work in the UK are uncommon, but one that stands out in this regard is the Deaf and Hearing (DH) Ensemble. They self-define (on their website³) as

a group of D/deaf and hearing actors, directors, theatre makers, writers, artists, musicians, dancers and all round lovely people coming together to create theatre. We make live performance using a mix of British Sign Language, Spoken English, projection, movement, mime, music and soundscapes... We believe in breaking down barriers and pre-conceived perceptions. We aim to create innovative performance exploring genuine, truthful interaction. All our work is fully accessible for D/deaf and hearing audiences.

- 6 For this essay, I interviewed three of the lead artists within the DH Ensemble: Jennifer K. Bates, Sophie Stone and Erin Siobahn Hutching. Jen, hearing, is the co-founder and director of the ensemble. Sophie is a deaf actor who has also been with the company since 2013. Erin, a hearing writer and performer, joined the company in 2014 to create the autobiographical piece *People of the Eye*, about the reality of life growing up in a family with two sisters, one Deaf and one hearing: I will use this show throughout the essay as a practical example of the Ensemble's work. (The DH Ensemble's fourth lead artist, Deaf actor Stephen Collins, was unavailable to participate due to work on other freelance performance projects).

- 7 All three of my interviewees are clear that what lies at the heart of the work of the DH Ensemble is accessibility, for both performers and audiences. "It was always incredibly important for us to honour both cultures and languages in the room. All our work is made by D/deaf and hearing artists" (Jen); and "We aim to produce accessible work for both D/deaf and hearing audiences, where the actors work on an equal playing field; and to explore a language in theatre that is shared and free from barriers" (Sophie). This is not theatre in the 'community theatre' model however. The DH Ensemble occupies "quite a unique place on the theatrical landscape, creating high quality accessible experimental Off-West End theatre, rather than community theatre, theatre for young people or theatre geared more towards D/deaf audiences rather than both D/deaf and hearing." (Erin).

- 8 Since their foundation in 2013 the goal of accessibility has become supplemented by aims which support the artists and their working practices. All their work creates "room for exploration and discovery... all members have inter-changeable skills and we're open to supporting each other in individual desires to direct, write, produce etc within the company" (Sophie). Nurturing this environment of flexibility has become a central driver of the work: "The aims in regards to process are to continue exploring and playing for the duration of the process. This means even before we realise a seed of an idea had been planted - and even after you may think something has been put to bed - the traces of what we discovered will continue to grow and we aim to let it. [We] always allow an idea to come to the surface or as we say 'throw the egg,' meaning it could smash and be a bit messy or, it could become a bird and fly" (Jen). This spirit of discovery, a "looking outside of the box and into ourselves" is not without acknowledged risks; a "great deal of bonding and trust" is required in the creation of shows such as *People of the Eye*. "It's vital that we honour how vulnerable we ask our artists to be and therefore another sub-aim if you like would be the safety of our artists - providing the safe space for this creativity and honesty to emerge" (Jen).

A Concept of Performance

- 9 In my own research I look to Performance Studies to provide a theoretical framework which is equally applicable to theatre and to sign language interpreting (I referred earlier to sign language interpreted performances as the most common method adopted in the UK to encourage the participation of Deaf people in theatre.) I draw on the work of Fischer-Lichte (2014)⁴, and as her framework has guided this interview I will very briefly review her theoretical approach here.
- 10 For Fischer-Lichte performance is an event consisting of clearly circumscribed activities, taking place in one location at a given time. The participants are actors and spectators, and the performance is created live by the interaction between these participants when they are together in the same space. The performance is built by the actors from a number of material elements: the use of the actors' bodies, the use of space, and the use of sound. As Fischer-Lichte assumes that language is spoken she subsumes it within the broader category of sound; but in my work I am considering signed language and sometimes language represented in other forms, for example in captions or surtitles. Accordingly I add the use of language to Fischer-Lichte's original three material categories. Furthermore, because I acknowledge the potential use of language in spoken, signed and written modes, and the subsequent impact of these on Fischer-Lichte's pre-existing material categories, I prioritise language use above other material aspects of performance.
- 11 The role of the spectators at such a performance is to construct meaning from the different material phenomena presented to them. In theatre, being present at a performance is a particular experience which combines processes that are artistic, social and often political: it can open up liminal spaces that do not exist in the real world, in which spectators can undergo transformative experiences. Fischer-Lichte refers to this liminality in theatre as the aesthetics of performance.
- 12 The remainder of this essay will present the views of the lead artists of the DH Ensemble on their use of language, physicality, space and sound in the creation of their work. I will conclude by summarising the response of DH Ensemble audiences, demonstrating that the work does indeed seem capable of creating an effective bilingual theatre aesthetic.

On the use of language

- 13 "Theatre is communication. People are communication. It makes perfect sense for us to mix it all up and play with [language] in many different forms. We [want] a fun exploration for an audience of deciding how it wants to receive its information. And what happens when that communication breaks down? And there are gaps? And some people are getting information that you are not getting because it's foreign to you? Or the actors are keeping it to themselves?" (Jen)
- 14 To avoid such inequality, the DH Ensemble intends that "both hearing and D/deaf audiences alike will have a shared experience on an equal level, even if what they take from it may be different on a personal level" (Sophie). "We hope to make the piece accessible to both Deaf British Sign Language (BSL) users and hearing audiences. [Also] we hope to tell the audience more about... the reality of real-world communication

- through the mix of communication methods on stage.” (Erin). By playing with the use of language, the DH Ensemble invites audiences to focus on characters, relationships and stories “rather than working out which of us are D/deaf or hearing - the name of our company is almost to remind you to forget” (Sophie).
- 15 Interestingly, the focus on a shared experience is counter-balanced by a fascination with the liminal spaces that are created when communication breaks down. Moments of conflict for example create challenges relating to how information is shared with the audience. Sometimes “it's useful for us to obviously split our audience in two. For example, during *People of the Eye* we very deliberately had a scene where our Deaf character discovered her ‘voice’ in BSL and, in silence, proceeded to directly sign to the audience. We let this moment land. After a delay we then establish our hearing character discovering her voice in English, telling a similar story but from her view point. This was a very deliberate moment when our audience was divided and this, in turn mirrored the characters' journeys on the stage” (Jen).
 - 16 Artistically, language choice is usually related to character: “Each character decides what form of language it wants to use at that particular time...and this has probably come out of the devising process, or for *People of the Eye* it was in the script” (Jen). Decisions about “the mix of spoken English or BSL and when it is used” (Erin) also tend to emerge in the devising process. For example, in recent Research and Development work on *Macbeth* at the Barbican in London “we had two actors playing Macbeth and two playing Lady Macbeth, two Deaf and two hearing. In each pair, one used spoken English and the other used BSL, but we also explored swapping languages at points of high tension” (Erin). The intention here is not to produce a direct translation of Shakespeare into BSL. “That’s not as interesting as exploring how the spoken and visual languages support and contradict each other, and when the two actors playing each character work together and when they fracture, showing the indecision, fear or conflict within the character” (Erin).
 - 17 Despite this obvious drive for artistic innovation, however, the concomitant guiding principal is always accessibility. For example in *People of the Eye*, the (hearing) “mother’s monologue would not have made sense to be signed but we needed it to be accessible to the D/deaf audience” (Jen). Language choices may also go beyond the accessible and become political, being used as “a statement of how we communicate and what is missed, misunderstood, deliberately provocative or fractured, which can be shown with the use of voice, preventing voice, turning it off, using sign, preventing sign, captioning, blocking captioning, etc.” (Sophie).
 - 18 Sophie’s mention of captions brings us to a further language choice made in a distinctive way by the DH Ensemble: the use of written text within the performance space. “We find a connection within the space between actors first, then question at every stage whether it's accessible to an audience and how it can be supported by technical means” (Sophie). Captions were introduced by the DH Ensemble for the first time in *People of the Eye*, as a deliberate artistic and communicative choice “from the very beginning of the development process, the first 10 minute scratch performance we did” (Erin).
 - 19 As with other language choices this one was guided by accessibility requirements: “the characters of the parents in the piece did not know how to sign at the beginning of the story so the only way to make their dialogue accessible to a Deaf audience while being true to the reality of the characters was to caption it” (Erin). At the same time the use

of captions offered more choices artistically: “we were freed up to develop the relationship between the sisters in terms of their position on stage relative to each other and the audience, and the use of non-BSL ‘home signs’ which families sometimes use. By captioning this scene, it didn’t matter if Deaf BSL users couldn’t see or understand the signing clearly because the girls were huddled together, one with their back to the audience, signing in a mix of BSL and home sign. The audience could understand the content of the conversation from the captions, and learn about the relationship from the staging” (Erin).

- 20 Importantly for the DH Ensemble, captions offer not only accessibility but also a further opportunity for artistic creativity in and of themselves. For *People of the Eye* the DH Ensemble worked with visual graphic designers Sam Dore (Deaf) and Gerry Maguire (hearing) to integrate captions and other visual material into the performance. “The idea was to design these captions to convey the emotion and tone of what was being said, as well as the content” (Erin). “We aim to make sure that technical tools are used to enhance the experience, tell the same story, emotion and struggle as the character so they become a character themselves and belong to the story and are not seen as an ‘access’ tool.” (Sophie). To summarise: “The captions and visuals took on a character persona of their own” (Jen).

On the use of the actors’ bodies

- 21 As already outlined in the brief description of Fischer-Lichte’s concept of performance, I have here separated the use of a physical language from the physicality of the actors’ bodies used in a non-linguistic manner. “In some cases we don’t see or use sign language as a ‘physicality’. It can be so quiet, small and intimate, or even clinical, formal, that it is purely a language that is separate from physical connection or expression” (Sophie). That is not to say that the DH Ensemble has not “also explored the physicality inherent in sign language, which some people can perceive as over-the-top, melodramatic or too expressive if they are not familiar with Deaf culture or comfortable themselves in their own bodies” (Erin). “The beauty is when we do use it for its physical power, it has an impact that we can use to affect others and ourselves as part of the narrative/story” (Sophie).
- 22 Putting aside sign language, however, it emerges that for the DH Ensemble the actors’ physicality is understood as a fundamental form of communication in its own right. “We are a very physical company, and all our work stems from physical exercises” (Erin). It is also a tool to promote accessibility. “We are fascinated by visual storytelling and what can be ‘said’ without spoken words, captions or BSL. Physicality is always the first thing we explore and everything builds from this” (Jen). In physical warm-ups, exercises and devising “we find our strongest connections to our truths and are liberated by finding a ‘language’ that is shared by all” (Sophie).
- 23 The DH Ensemble’s approach to physicality is supported by a strong understanding of theory and engagement with practice: Anne Boghart’s technique of Viewpoints, Laban’s theory of space, weight and time, Butoh dance theatre, contact improvisation and the Suzuki acting method. “Our process of building character can often stem from finding a physicality for that character. We utilise a lot of games and play theory to release our creativity and build relationships and trust within the artists involved in a project” (Erin). Furthermore “we’ve had Brian Duffy, a deaf physical choreographer work with

us on *Nodus Tollens* for a recent festival, which helped to stretch ourselves physically to reaching the level we needed to be for outdoor theatre” (Sophie).

- 24 The actor’s body as a communicative tool is a well-mined resource for the DH Ensemble. “Physicality is used to communicate character, relationship, theme and action... [and can be] understood by anyone, regardless of language or culture” (Erin). “Everything demands physicality. Even doing nothing is a statement. So much happens in a space or a time, everything can be read and interpreted” (Sophie). Without a physical approach the risk is “stories being missed when we're too busy trying to find the words...[Physicality] “gives space for people to 'listen' in different ways” (Sophie).
- 25 This focus on physicality is used by the DH Ensemble to offer audiences “A theatrical experience. A story. Moments of people’s lives appearing on a stage – maybe realistic/naturalistic, maybe heightened, maybe surreal or abstract” (Jen). As with the language choices previously described “Our instincts as artists guide our choices” (Jen), but at the same time the careful exploration of those choices supports the principal of accessibility: physicality “tells the story better than words could” (Sophie).

On the use of space

- 26 The use of space by the DH Ensemble is less fundamental to their artistic approach to creating work than is the use of language and physicality, although politically it has been “manipulated to create a reaction/environment in the room as a statement. We've cut performance spaces in half, we've taped boxes for restrictive movement, we've played with breaking those rules, we've invited audiences into those spaces, we've used height and created sets with our bodies and costumes, corridors and grids to form a sense of space within a space” (Sophie).
- 27 The primary goal here, however, is accessibility. “It’s usually to do with sightlines and our actors’ relationship with the audience. Dependent on different spaces this has an impact on how intimate the communication can be between the audience and character” (Jen). This is particularly true when captions are being used. “It’s really important that the audience can see the performers and the captions, if there are any, because D/deaf audience members can’t experience the performance through sound alone (and it’s not ideal for hearing audience members to do this either with work as visual as ours)... Spaces without a stage, or without raked seating, or venues in traverse when we are using captions or video projection – all of these we have to think carefully about when it comes to accessibility and sight lines” (Erin).
- 28 The name of the game is pragmatism in pursuit of a strong connection with everybody in the audience. “We're nothing if not adaptable... We always keep in mind and have learnt along the way that the audience must be able to see what's going on. If they're cut off it has to be intentional otherwise we've lost the opportunity to tell that story when it matters” (Sophie). “Our work has been performed outdoors, in rehearsal spaces, halls, and fully equipped theatres of varying sizes,... but we do have to ask careful questions to make sure the integrity of the work won’t be compromised” (Erin).

On the use of sound

- 29 The use of sound is central to both the artistic and accessibility goals of the work of the DH Ensemble. “Again it’s about what information and what story we are telling. What

do we want the audience to 'get' at that particular moment in the play? What should they know? How do we want them to feel?" (Jen). "We hope to add another layer to the theatrical experience, and find ways in which sound, visuals and physical performances can work together to make a production accessible to all" (Erin).

- 30 The approach to sound is understandably different depending on whether they are thinking of the D/deaf or hearing members of the audience. For the former, "we are very interested in... very deep tones which vibrate a theatre when played through a subwoofer, or infrasonic tones which are outside of the range of human hearing but can be felt" (Erin). As with physicality, the approach is grounded in theoretical understanding: "I have published an academic paper on my theory regarding infrasonic tones and access for D/deaf audiences. The idea is that the tones that are 'beyond hearing' are felt through vibration of the skeleton" (Jen). As with the bass notes already mentioned the intention is to inform "the D/deaf audience that there is other information being given and to create a specific atmosphere" (Jen).
- 31 "We also deliberately used tones that were quite intense for a hearing audience. This was to make a choice as to how we wanted our hearing audience to feel at that particular time in the play" (Jen). "If the captions or actors create 'loud' images, we try to find a matching sound, (either alternative, abstract or equivalent) and vice-versa... we play with intensity or speed to create pressure" (Sophie). "Our choices are guided by the integrity of the piece, and the desire to create a space in which Deaf and hearing artists and audiences are equal – even if their experiences are different" (Erin).
- 32 The resulting complex soundscapes are created by working with sound designers. "We have worked a number of times with a fantastic sound artist called Emma Houston, who often works in collaboration with Deaf artists to find soundscapes that are both artistically integral and accessible" (Erin). The process is highly collaborative both in and outside of the rehearsal room, and it is clear that there is a requirement for sound and visual information to be tightly integrated. "We go with the idea that 'whatever is seen is heard, and whatever is heard is seen' as far as possible" (Sophie).

Building a strong actor-spectator relationship

- 33 For the DH Ensemble then, it is clear that consideration of the diverse needs represented in their audiences drives them to use the materials of performance as effectively as possible to communicate honestly with spectators, without sacrificing their artistic integrity. "Theatre is about an audience and an actor's relationship with an audience member or participant and as such it's a huge focus in our work" (Jen). Techniques for engaging spectators drawn from earlier periods in theatrical history are commonplace: "We sometimes use audience interaction, direct address, breaking character to address the audience as actors – all kinds of things!" (Erin). But at the same time "We play with when we choose to invite an audience in (and physically ON stage), and when they are to feel as pushed out and unable to access something, as the characters are, whatever their language or audiological [status]" (Sophie).
- 34 The specific experience of *People of the Eye* also demonstrates that they do not consider each material element of performance in isolation, to be perceived by only one of the senses. "We discussed how each scene could be explored differently... Sound was explored physically, visuals were explored audibly, and other people's 'voices' were explored digitally" (Sophie). The result is a performance that is approachable on

different levels, simultaneously available through different modes of perception and thus accessible to a wide audience demographic.

- 35 Achieving this strong actor-spectator interaction is also supported by the DH Ensemble building an ongoing relationship with its audiences that influences the development of the work. “Audiences have been great as a mass 'outside eye' in the work-in-progress process of *People of the Eye*'s early development. They've brought their perspectives as both D/deaf and hearing members with such varied personal experiences, which helped inform the questions of balance, access and reflection which was fed back into the work. People returned to see the changes and have been especially positive and encouraging in the tweaks made and new scenes so they feel listened to, valued and reflected on stage” (Sophie).

Towards an effective bilingual theatre aesthetic

- 36 The drive for artistry and accessibility at the DH Ensemble as described in this essay has produced positive responses from audiences. “Deaf audiences are often excited to see their language on a stage and they believe our work has held a mirror up to their lives – something they don't usually see” (Jen). “With *People of the Eye*, we had very strong, emotional reactions from Deaf audience members and people like interpreters, or family members of Deaf people” (Erin).
- 37 As for hearing audiences, those “who are more used to our experimental style have had an awakening with this form combining the different languages” (Jen). “The experience could be more engaging on an intellectual level as they were exposed to a whole lot of new information they never knew before... With *People of the Eye*, many hearing people told us it made them want to learn sign language and that was really heartening to me...Many people do find sign language fascinating and beautiful and they do enjoy watching it even if they don't understand it” (Erin).
- 38 Of course not everybody is appreciative. “We have also found that some people do not connect with the work, and I think that is absolutely to be expected – I would rather we provoke strong emotions at both ends of the spectrum, rather than a whole lot of people thinking it's very middle of the road, safe work” (Erin). The most important thing is that “people in the audience of our shows have walked away feeling like equal members, even when they've taken different things from the story because of their individual life experiences and backgrounds. Friendships and connections have even developed within the audience from a mutual respect and understanding of the journey they shared in the space” (Sophie).

Conclusion

- 39 The contributions to this essay made by the lead artists of the DH Ensemble demonstrate that they are committed to the maintenance of high artistic standards and to the promotion of accessibility in all their work. Furthermore they suggest that rather than being mutually exclusive, these twin goals of artistry and accessibility are intertwined and mutually supportive elements of their work. Additionally, their approach is underpinned by an understanding of theory, the rigorous application of tried and tested practice and a willingness to experiment with new methods when existing practice is found lacking. I would go further to suggest that their success

wouldn't be possible if it wasn't for the unapologetic confidence in and enthusiasm for the work demonstrated by the lead artists. "It's important to us to not try and adapt ourselves to 'fit' a social expectation, but more to celebrate our differences and use them to create rich, diverse work in ways that never apologise" (Sophie). "We make theatre that we want to see and we get excited about showing it off to other people. We love how excited other people have gotten about our process and productions. We love what we do!" (Jen).

NOTES

1. The term 'D/deaf' is used to denote both those who use a sign language and identify as culturally Deaf, and those who suffer from an audiological hearing loss (be they deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing). Where the simpler word Deaf is used, it refers only to the former.
 2. Miles, D. and Fant, L. J. (1976) *Sign-language theatre and deaf theatre: New definitions and directions*. Edited by Murphy, H. J. Northridge, CA: California State University.
 3. <http://www.thedeafandhearingensemble.com/about/> Accessed February 2017.
 4. Fischer-Lichte, E. (2014) 'The Concept of Performance', in Arjomand, M. and Masse, R. (eds.) *The Routledge Introduction to Theatre and Performance Studies*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, pp. 18 - 45. 3.
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ABSTRACTS

Interview with Jennifer K. Bates, Sophie Stone and Erin Siobahn Hutching, three of the four lead artists of the Deaf and Hearing Ensemble, a company that uses bilingualism (English and British Sign Language) and biculturalism (Deaf and hearing) to create theatre that combines artistry with accessibility. The interview was conducted by emails in January and February 2017.

Entretien avec Jennifer K. Bates, Sophie Stone and Erin Siobahn Hutching, trois des quatre artistes principaux du Deaf and Hearing Ensemble, une compagnie qui utilise le bilinguisme (anglais et langue des signes britannique) le biculturalisme (malentendants et entendants) pour créer une forme théâtrale à la fois artistique et accessible à tous. L'entretien a été mené par courriels entre janvier et février 2017.

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Subjects: Theater

Mots-clés: théâtre bilingue, théâtre des sourds, langue des signes, accessibilité, implication du public, Deaf and Hearing Ensemble, People of the Eye, performance, esthétique

Keywords: bilingual theatre, deaf theatre, sign language, captions, accessibility, audience engagement, Deaf and Hearing Ensemble, People of the Eye, performance, aesthetics.

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Mathilde Rogez (dir.)

Arts of the Commonwealth

An Interview with Oku Onuora

Eric Doumerc

The Context:

- 1 Oku Onuora is considered as one of the founders of the dub poetry movement and, together with Mutabaruka, the late Mikey Smith and Linton Kwesi Johnson, he has inspired many dub poets both in the Caribbean and in Europe.
- 2 The following interview was conducted on 15 August 2016 at the Jamaica School of Drama, the very place where Oku Onuora and other dub poets studied in the 1970s.

Biography of Oku Onuora:

- 3 Oku Onuora (Orlando Wong) was born in 1952 in Jamaica and grew up in Franklin Town, a working-class area in Eastern Kingston. After robbing a post office in 1970, he was given a 15-year jail sentence, but was eventually released in 1977, partly because of the success of his poetry. Onuora had started writing in prison and had gradually made his name as a poet. In 1974 the prison authorities allowed him to read his poems accompanied by Cedric Brooks's band, the Light of Saba. In 1977, his first collection of poems, *Echo* (Kingston: Sangster's, 1977) was published to great popular and critical acclaim, and his first recording, "Reflection in Red", soon followed. His first LP, *Pressure Drop*, was released on the French Blue Moon label in 1985, which led to extensive touring in Europe and in the Caribbean. Since then, he has released several recordings, like *Buss Out* (1993) and *A Movement* (2013).

The Interview

An interview with Oku Onuora

Eric Doumerc: I'm not going to ask you the usual questions about dub poetry or about yourself, because, quite frankly, your biography is well-known, like how you were jailed and then got out of jail thanks to the efforts of Professor Mervyn Morris and other academics...

Oku Onuora: Professor Mervyn Morris was the only UWI [University of the West Indies, author's note] academic. Barbara Gloudon, a journalist, and Leonie Forbes, an actress, you know, they were prominent. I'd be clear, you know, because I've been known to burn out academics because I believe they're a bunch of hypocrites. Mervyn Morris is a beautiful person. I don't fight against academia as such, because I coached my children to seek higher education and all of that stuff, but for the most part, I believe that academia are a bunch of sell-outs, you know. Most of them are not for the people. You are for the people or you are against the people.

ED: In Jamaica?

Oku Onuora: Yes, in Jamaica and globally. All over the world, it's like that. They tend to reflect, you know, the ideas of the ruling class. But they've always been powerful in the people's struggle, you know. When people from academia, when professional people become a part of the movement, then it adds to it.

ED: You were jailed for seven years and that's when you started writing poetry, or did you start before?

Oku Onuora: No, it was while in prison that I started to write seriously. Prior to that, I probably had written one or two poems, but I had never really like taken up writing.

ED: When you started writing in prison, were you aware of the work being done by reggae deejays like U-Roy, I-Roy and Big Youth?

Oku Onuora: I was aware of them, but I was *influenced* by people like Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Burning Spear. Even growing up, I was never seriously a deejay fan. I love deejay music, people like Big Youth, U-Roy. They are great. But for me Bob Marley is one of the greatest poets. People like Bob Marley, Peter Tosh and Burning Spear were the people who *influenced* me as a writer.

ED: So, when you were jailed, you had already come under the influence of these people.

Oku Onuora: Yes! Because I was a young adult when I went to prison, but I had attended a number a dances, so I had a musical taste and preference.

ED: Regarding Burning Spear, do you remember any particular song or album that you liked?

Oku Onuora: I love "Foggy Road"! It's simple, a repetition, I believe it's a masterpiece! And then "Marcus Garvey" is an excellent piece of work!

ED: So you have coined the phrase "dub poetry". There's so much confusion...

Oku Onuora: Yes, there's so much confusion! Let me say it and I've said it more than once! There's no need to coin the phrase "dub poetry" because, prior to me using the phrase "dub poetry", we had the phrase "overdub", "dubbing", "dubplate"; and then the words "dub poetry" came about while I was in prison and I would come out in the morning and this brother realised that I was writing poetry and all of that and he would say "Come on! Dub a t'ing! Dub a piece of poem!" And I wanted to distinguish myself from the normal poetry! I wanted to distinguish myself from all these people, Miss Lou [Louise Bennett, author's note], Chaucer, Shakespeare. There's nothing wrong with Miss Lou, but I was doing something different than Miss Lou, you know. Miss Lou, she was using a lot of humour, she was using a folk rhythm. You know, I see Miss Lou as a folk poet rather than as anything else. And when I looked at what I was

doing, I said to myself: "Wow, it's a process of dubbing". Because my aim and objective was, is to dub out some unconsciousness, and dub in some consciousness. I dub in the reggae rhythm into my poetry: the rhythm of my poetry is reggae. And other forms of music, jazz...

ED: So, it's not limited to reggae.

Oku Onuora: No, it's a dubbing process. It is what makes it unlimited. And then, after I described what I was doing, someone pointed out that Linton had used the phrase. But, after that, I read the article, because I did not read the article prior to describing myself as a dub poet. Because it's a common thing in Jamaica... Big Youth's *Reggae Give Them Dub...* For example, "dub your girl", like that slow wine on a woman, it's called "dubbing", "rub-a-dub style". So Linton had an article in *Race Today* where he was describing the deejays as dub poets and that's too much of a different thing! He had never used the phrase to describe poets as such. He was describing the deejays as dub poets. I didn't read that article until it was brought to my attention because we don't get *Race Today* here in Jamaica.

But I am a dub poet, I don't need to coin the phrase: I am the first Jamaican poet whether here or in Britain, to use that phrase to describe my poetry, not a deejay, 'cause I am not a deejay, [I am] a dub poet to be specific. In fact, Linton was introduced to I and I was introduced to Linton at the same time, by the same person, Mervyn Morris, and when he met Linton, he said to Linton, "Wow, there's a brother in Jamaica, and you remind me of him, you do some similar kind of work". And then Mervyn came back from the UK and said: "Wow, I've met a brother by the name of Linton Kwesi Johnson..." And I can categorically and safely say that I did not hear Linton talk about dub poetry when I used the phrase. Using the phrase "dub" as a prefix is something common in Jamaica, you know, like "dub the boy!", meaning "beat the boy!"; "dub a girl", meaning wine on her; "dubplate". So dub poetry falls into place! 'Cause in Jamaica, dubbing is a must: we've always talked about dub since the days when we had the A side and the B side, which we called the "dub side".

ED: How did you work with Mervyn Morris on your first collection, entitled *Echo*? Did you read the poems to him or give him a transcript?

Oku Onuora: I gave him a transcript and we selected from that. So Mervyn did not do any kind of editing, because if you know my Jamaican English, it's more akin to the phonetic spelling of the words.

ED: So, Mervyn Morris did not have any input in terms of the orthography.

Oku Onuora: No, he'd make some suggestions here and there, but, no, what Mervyn actually did was to assist me in putting my first collection of poems, *Echo*, together and having it published. I met Mervyn via Leonie Forbes, a beautiful Jamaican actress, radio journalist and TV personality. At first, my poems were exposed to Barbara Gloudon. Barbara Gloudon is an excellent woman. At the time, she had a column in the *Saturday Star* and I always looked out for her piece. It was called "Stella" and it was written in the Jamaican language. It dealt with socio-political issues and I was eager to read that column because she was addressing socio-economical issues. So I communicated with her while I was in prison and I sent her my poems. The first time one of my poems appeared in a public paper was because of the influence of Barbara Gloudon. She had my work published in *The Gleaner*. At one time she became the first female editor of a major paper here in Jamaica. She has written several pieces for the Jamaican Pantomime. So she passed on my work to Leonie Forbes who passed it on to

Mervyn Morris and when Mervyn got them Mervyn came to visit me and we talked about my work. What I love about Mervyn is that Mervyn did not try to alter or change my poems. He gave me some useful pointers, some suggestions, and he assisted me in selecting the poems for *Echo* and I took his suggestions. Mervyn did not come with any kind of academic air. He just came as a poet. In recent times, I'm realising why we are so similar, why Mervyn likes my work, because my work is concise. I write short poems. And Mervyn is like that: he writes very concise poems.

ED: What kind of reception did *Echo* get in Jamaica?

Oku Onuora: *Echo* spent five weeks number one on the best-sellers' list in the *Sunday Gleaner*. In less than a year, it went through about three or four reprints. The Tom Redcam Library complained because when my book was placed on the shelves, people would borrow it and not return it. There were reports of people downtown pushing handcarts with copies of my book in their back pocket. It was extremely popular because it resonated with the Jamaican people. In 1976 I entered three poems in the literary segment of the Jamaica Festival Competition and the three poems received awards. In 1977 I entered three poems and I won three awards in three different categories. The judges in the literary competition who were judging these poems could recognise the reggae rhythm coming out of the poems. Because, to be truthful, I am a frustrated singer. I love to sing, but I don't have a singing voice, so I use my speaking voice. When I do a piece, I hear music in my head. So for instance when I did a piece on my debut album like "Thinking" and "Thinking" is dub, it's jazz! I was invited to the Angoulême Jazz Festival.

ED: What about the experience of recording your first album, *Pressure Drop*? How did you hook up with all these musicians?

Oku Onuora: My first recording, "Reflection in Red", I did it with Steve Golding, excellent musician, *guitarist extraordinaire*. So I recruited Steve Golding and he actually selected the rest of the musicians. Cedric Im Brooks played percussion. Then I did "Dread Times", "What a Situashan" and "I a Tell".

By the time I did my debut album, I was well seasoned as a producer because I had already produced my work. I'm an independent producer, from my debut single to my debut album, because I'm talking about self-reliance, and if you're talking about self-reliance and certain things, then you should walk the walk and talk the talk! That's what I believe in: your work should be an example of your ideology, what you talk about. So by the time I was ready to do my debut album, I was well seasoned as a producer, so I selected young musicians, very young musicians. These people were not known at the time but I selected them because I knew them personally and I knew what they were doing. For example, my bass player, Courtney Panton, when I first met him, he was a known percussionist. When I met him, he was playing percussion over by the Jamaica School of Dance and then after a while he started to play the bass. So when I was recruiting musicians for AK7, I was looking for young musicians to interpret the work I was doing as opposed to musicians who were set in their ways, brilliant nonetheless, but that time I said: "I want to use some fresh talent". So I started to look around: Courtney Panton, and he had a friend by the name of Hewlitt, a drummer. One of the guitarists was named Simon. I met Simon when he had just graduated from JC [Jamaica College, author's note]. He was familiar with my work and my wife used to teach him when he was at school. He was with a group of young musicians and Chinna [Earl Chinna Smith, author's note], Chinna is

an awesome teacher, had all these musicians around him. So I knew Simon from that time and he'd always wanted to play with me. Hugh Pape is an awesome person and an awesome musician: he plays the saxophone, he plays the flute and I met him while I was attending the Jamaica School of Drama. He played the flute on "What a Situashan" and the saxophone and the flute on *Pressure Drop*. The only seasoned musician at the time was Ras Bonito, who played lead guitar. Carl, who played keyboard, was a young musician, but he was involved in theatre as an actor, but playing music also. These are seasoned musicians today. For example, Courtney Panton went on to play for Shaggy and he toured extensively. He has a band called New Kingston. Simon went on to play for a number of musicians. Carl isn't playing music anymore; he actually teaches drama. Musa isn't playing music anymore: he's more into producing for cable television.

ED: One question about "Dread Times", one of your most powerful pieces. When you wrote that poem, what was going on in your head?

Oku Onuora: All poems on *Pressure Drop* came from my debut collection, *Echo*. Generally, the poems from *Echo* reflect the conditions that lead the youth to prison, and "Dread Times" was written at that time when we were going through some serious economical problems in Jamaica. It's an echo from what I heard. It was like a daily occurrence in the life of the average Jamaican.

ED: The poem entitled "Decolonisation", with its djembe drumming, reminds me of what the Last Poets were doing in the early 1970s.

Oku Onuora: Actually, that piece was not slated for recording. While I was in the studio working on *Pressure Drop*, I was informed by the guard (I was doing this at Tuff Gong Studios) that there was someone there to see me. His name was Olumede and he was from America. When he came in, I realised he's a friend of someone I knew from New York who has an African drumming and dance group. So Olumede heard that I was recording an album and he actually came to Jamaica *on his own*, and he said to me: "Oku Onuora, I'd like to play on your album" and I said: "Wow! We are recording and everything's slated...", but then from this brethren travelling so far and his desire to be on my album, I said to him that we would record something on the next day. So he went away, and this poem came to me: "Decolonisation" and I thought: "Lemme read this poem on this riddim". So when he came in, I said: "There's a poem I'd like both of us to do". So he listened to the poem once and then he started to play. So that was the first poem we recorded that night. And this is what I believe in, to this very day: it's still relevant, even more relevant than before, especially at this time of the year, you know, it comes to mind. We talk about independence, but getting a flag and an anthem from the British colonialists doesn't make us really free.

ED: Your poem entitled "I Write About" came out of a confrontation with the prison authorities.

Oku Onuora: Yes, for the second time, my poetry was confiscated by the prison authorities and I was summoned to the Superintendent's office and he said to me: "Why you write so much poems about blood?" and I said: "Well, it's just inspiration..." So I went to my cell and that night the poem came.

ED: I understand you met Michael Smith at the Jamaica School of Drama.

Oku Onuora: The first time I met Michael Smith was at the Tom Redcam Library, when I did my first public reading and he approached me and said: "I write poetry" and I said to him: "You can visit me at the Fort Augustus prison", 'cause at the time I

was at the Fort Augustus prison and things were kinda relaxed: I could receive visitors. In fact, that's where I got my first typewriter from Judy Mowatt. Mervyn used to come there too. It was during a period when the prison authorities couldn't block me anymore; they had to work with me, because there were people on the outside rooting for me, people like Barbara Gloudon, Mervyn Morris... So Mikey visited me and he showed me a version of "Mi Cyaan Believe It". Then we met again at the Jamaica School of Drama.

ED: Was he already performing at the time?

Oku Onuora: He wasn't really performing at the time. He was writing. When I came from prison in 1977, I was in demand, because of what Mikey did, and the socialist movement, the democratic socialist movement was at its zenith. Michael Manley was in power and you had the Workers' Party of Jamaica, and culture was being used by the socialist movement, like the PNP [People's National Party, author's note] Youth Movement. So the socialist movement was at its height and this is where Mikey and I continued our friendship. But we first met at the Tom Redcam library. Likewise I first met Linton in my audience. The first time I became aware of Mutabaruka was in my audience. I did a reading once at the Creative Arts Centre at UWI and while I was reading there was this baby crying and people were like "Shhh!" This was Mutabaruka and his wife's baby, their first daughter, and she was crying. And I said: "No, let the child cry 'cause that's music to my ears!" And I said: "When I leave you to go back to hell it's gonna be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, so this baby crying is music to my ears!" So the first time I met Mutabaruka he was in my audience. Mikey was at my first reading. I had never seen Linton perform before I started to perform.

ED: There was a poet at the Drama School called Noel Walcott.

Oku Onuora: Yeah, man! Godfather Noel Walcott! We call him Godfather or Jahfather.

ED: Whatever happened to him?

Oku Onuora: He's around, you know, he's not doing poetry that much. You know, I hear people talk about the "dub poetry movement" at the Drama School as if a movement started at the Drama School. It was no Drama School movement. It was developed while I was here, but I was always different in terms of my recording, *totally*, totally, totally different, but Michael Smith was awesome! For me, it was a pleasure to see Mikey, to hear Mikey, to perform with Mikey and we had this *synergy*, Mikey and I. I haven't seen anyone like Mikey today, you know.

ED: Three years ago, you released a new album entitled *A Movement*, with Sly and Robbie, and Monty Alexander.

Oku Onuora: You know, *A Movement* for me was just an experimental album, because I revisited a number of my pieces, pieces that I had recorded before without music. I took poems that I had on my debut album and I put music to that. The album was only released on line, but a number of people are familiar with it in Jamaica. I didn't really promote it that much here in Jamaica for a number of reasons, 'cause it was signalling my re-emergency 'cause I had taken a hiatus from the music scene because I didn't like what was actually taking place here in Jamaica. The music had changed a lot. And I didn't want to get involved. And even before that, the musical world, the progressive musical world of uplifting, conscious music was subverted: there was a subversion that took place, you know, because we had Margaret Thatcher, we had

Ronald Reagan, and disco music became the trend. This is the era when Jamaican deejay music became prominent, during that time, because music plays an important role in influencing people's consciousness. Music is a powerful tool, is a powerful means of conveying sentiment, an ideology, telling a story. It transcends border, it transcends language. This is one of the reasons I decided to use music to reach out, because initially I saw myself as becoming an investigative journalist. When I was writing my poetry in hell, I did that to release energy, this pent-up anger, because I had escaped twice before, you know, and the second time I escaped, I was shot. Initially, I didn't see myself becoming a poet, a published poet or a recording poet. I saw myself becoming an investigative journalist. In fact, I started to do a course from ICS (International Correspondence School) in Creative Writing while I was in hell.

ED: On that album, *A Movement*, you worked with a new dub poet called Jawara Ellis.

Oku Onuora: Jawara is the son of Owen "Blacka" Ellis. The first time I actually met Blacka, we sat under that very same Tree of Life. Blacka at the time was a student at the Jamaica School of Drama. Blacka was one the original members of AK7: he played percussions, and he did vocals, harmony. On my debut tour with AK7, Blacka was there. So Jawara grew up on it. So I had put *A Movement* together, and his father visited me and he said he wanted me to listen to something. So I listened and I heard the intro to "Sketches" and the poem came up! It blew my mind! And I felt so honoured to have a young poet sample my work, to be inspired by my work. I had never done that before, and I decided to use it on my album. So when Owen brought "Utter Sketches" to me, I realised the reason I was waiting was for this thing, because the album is called *A Movement*, and it speaks about the movement continuing and it also speaks about the movement from one generation to the next generation, a continuation. And my daughter has a piece on it called "Atomic", a poem she read at her mother's sending-off.

ED: This leads us to the new generation of dub poets in Jamaica. What about the new dub poetry scene? Is it very strong?

Oku Onuora: Yeah, man! It's strong! People like Jawara, people like Maker (a female dub poet), people like Sage, it's very strong. We have people like Ras Takura. We have Neeto Mix. Other people may not notice, but for me, it's very vibrant. When Mikey Smith was about, it was just Mikey Smith and a few other people. Now, poetry is bubbling in Jamaica, not necessarily dub poetry, but poetry, spoken word. Spoken word in Jamaica is really up and running right now.

ED: Is Oku Onuora a happy man or an angry man?

Oku Onuora: Yeah man! I'm happy! I'm not angry. I get angry when I look around and I see the conditions that we're in, not just here in Jamaica, but internationally, I get very, very angry. But I don't stay angry. There's a lot of things for me to be happy about. I am blessed, I am thankful, grateful, because I am surrounded and loved by people from near and far. The world is a wonderful place; it's just the system and some people.

ABSTRACTS

Interview with Oku Onuora, who is considered as one of the founders of dub poetry. The interview was conducted on 15 August 2016 at the Jamaica School of Drama.

Entretien avec Oku Onuora, considéré comme l'un des fondateurs de la dub poetry. L'entretien a été réalisé le 15 août 2016 à la Jamaica School of Drama.

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Subjects: Arts of the Commonwealth

Keywords: dub poetry, orality, Caribbean poetry, reggae

Mots-clés: dub poetry, oralité, poésie des Caraïbes, reggae

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British painting

Vanessa Bell

Dulwich Picture Gallery, London, 8 February – 4 June 2017

Claudia Tobin

- 1 Vanessa Bell takes centre stage at the Dulwich Picture Gallery in London. Somewhat shockingly, this is Bell's first major monographic exhibition and it sets out to present her as a pioneer and progressive. We encounter her work at its most radical and exciting, predominantly in the period of intensified experimentation during the 1910s. She emerges at the vital centre of Bloomsbury's artistic network, her scope and range demonstrated across different genre and media.
- 2 Bell's experiment in pure abstraction in late 1914 and early 1915 is often overlooked or considered apart from her figurative work. However, she pushed the simplification of form and use of non-naturalistic colour to its limits in both painting and in decorative design, venturing further into pure abstraction than many of her European contemporaries at this time. In the wake of the 1910 and 1912 Post-Impressionist exhibitions, which featured modern European painters including Cézanne, Matisse and Van Gogh, Bell found new freedoms in form and colour. As she later recalled, she was impelled to 'destroy the solidity of objects' and revelled in their dissolution into colour.
¹ This exhibition is a rare opportunity to see works made at the peak of her experimental phase. In Room 2 we encounter *Abstract Composition* with its bold colour contrasts and authoritative central black square, alongside *Composition*, a textured geometric collage which reveals her affinity with the *papier collé* techniques employed by Picasso and Braque.
- 3 The exhibition aims, and rightly so, to show Bell alone and on her own terms. We should not forget however, that collaboration was central to her project. Bell worked closely with Duncan Grant creating innovative designs for the Omega workshops, the interior design company that she co-founded with the art historian Roger Fry in 1913. If the Omega designs and printed linens feel as fresh and contemporary as ever, England was not ready for them, and the workshops saw an untimely end to operations in 1919. They 'would have succeeded in any other European country', Fry lamented.² Bell's printed linens testify to her place alongside - even as a forerunner - to women designer contemporaries in Europe, such as Sonia Delaunay.

- 4 Bell's adeptness as an 'innovative home-maker' and 'bohemian mother' is emphasised throughout the exhibition narrative. Whether in Bloomsbury or Sussex she created an atmosphere in which creativity could flourish, and tolerance prevailed. This does not so much counter associations of Bell and the domestic, but it does offer a broader sense of what this might mean. Her portraits cast a light at once critical and celebratory on her artistic and literary circle. She is revealed as an acute observer of gesture and posture, perhaps most strikingly in the elliptical, blurred rendering of features in her portraits of her sister, Virginia Woolf. Her apparent resistance to hierarchical distinctions between the decorative and fine arts is also well demonstrated: we encounter printed linens, paintings, and book cover designs, alongside works from later decades, which testify to her integration of Omega products into the spaces of the home. The hallucinatory scale and heightened colour of *Tea Things* is reminiscent of Paul Nash's surreal depictions of objects, but it captures the spirit of Bell's domesticity – vibrant, daring, and irreverent in its transformation of the everyday.
- 5 The non-linear chronology of this exhibition feels appropriately modernist, but the thematic arrangement of works from disparate periods sometimes disrupts the possibility of tracing nuances in Bell's stylistic evolution. Nevertheless, the third room is persuasive in its organisation around her contribution to the genre of still life. We move from the quiet control and understated eloquence of *Iceland Poppies* (c. 1908-9) to the kaleidoscopic exuberance of *Oranges and Lemons* (1914). On the opposite wall, in the large and enigmatically titled *The Other Room*, the familiar background blocks of colour hollow out a striking central emptiness, which contributes to the sense of estrangement between three immobile figures who almost become still lifes in themselves. Matisse's presence is keenly felt here and elsewhere. Bell had visited his studio in the spring of 1914 and admired his work in the years leading up to this period – but this was no simple case of imitation. Her strongest works see her absorbing French modernism and making it her own.
- 6 The tension between intimacy and estrangement charge many of the works in this exhibition. In the final room, *A Conversation* captures a moment of rapt intimacy between three women. It was suggestive to Woolf, who imagined a version of the painting 'in prose'. On the opposite wall is Bell's celebrated *Studland Beach*. It is one of her most emotionally eloquent works with its stretch of empty beach and sky and the rigid isolation of the standing figure, back turned away from the viewer, as if on the threshold of a transformative encounter. Often heralded as the beginning of Bell's most experimental period, the painting is seen here alongside preparatory works, revealing her process of radical simplification. Placed at the very end of the exhibition, it made me want to retrace my steps.

NOTES

1. Vanessa Bell, letter to Roger Fry, 19 September 1923, in Regina Marler (ed.). *Selected Letters of Vanessa Bell*. London and New York: Bloomsbury, 1994, p.272.

2. Roger Fry, "The Present Situation," unpublished lecture, 1924, King's 1/111. Quoted by Christopher Reed in *Bloomsbury Rooms: Modernism, Subculture, and Domesticity*. New York: Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design, and Culture, 2004, p.111.

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Mots-clés: abstraction, couleur, Omega workshops, arts décoratifs, peinture

Keywords: abstraction, colour, Omega workshops, decorative arts, painting

Subjects: British painting

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Frozen Passers-By

Proustian Ghosts and Body Norms in The Sartorialist Fashion Blog

Laurent Jullier

Scott Schuman is a professional photographer whose work features in magazines like *GQ*, *Vogue* or *Interview*, and in ad campaigns of brands such as The Gap, Nespresso, Kiehl's or Burberry. In 2005 he founded a fashion blog called The Sartorialist¹, which quickly gained in popularity on the net and ended up getting a worldwide following. Two years later, it was picked by <time.com> as one of the 25 best blogs in the world² and by *Time Magazine* as one of the 100 top design influencers³. The exact amount of connections to The Sartorialist is not public, but it could be around half a million page views a day⁴, allowing Mr. Shuman to “theoretically earn over \$100,000 per month on advertising alone”⁵. At the same time, countless news articles and blog posts have taken it as a topic and parodies flourished on the web⁶, not to forget deadly serious “SLAB-Theory guaranteed” academic dissertations dedicated to the craze⁷. Last but not least, several books were published by Penguin, displaying anthologies of the pictures available on the site.

Since the internet offers thousands of fashion blogs, the amazing success of The Sartorialist needs some explaining. Its two more valuable characteristics are probably diversity and talent. Regarding diversity, The Sartorialist is a never-ending photography portfolio. About one third of the posting is dedicated to the “sanctified” professional field of fashion (the “*On the scene...*” series), while two-thirds are dedicated to the “secular” one (the “*On the street...*” series). The former is embodied by models, fashion designers and editors, *fashionistas* and international jetsetters; the latter is verbally and visually made by the rest of us. Verbally because any registered user of the blog is free to comment on the photograph of his or her choice; and visually because the site is famous for displaying pictures of elegant anonymous passers-by. Indeed, when he plays the *flâneur* around his home in Manhattan or when his professional trips give him a short respite—that is why so many photos are taken in Paris and Milano, where the fashion shows take place—Mr. Schuman keeps proving he has got an “eye for the sharp-dressed Everyman”⁸. It is where talent comes in—on both sides of the camera lens. Anybody just standing at the corner can apparently be selected; anybody, in a sense, who’s got it, since Mr. Schuman’s aim is not to record the everchanging spectacle

of the street, but to flush Beauty out of the downtown crowd: “I’m not reporting on people, he explained. What I am looking for is a certain grace.”⁹

The *motto* is clear, but it raises some questions this essay intends to answer. How are Mr. Schuman’s pictures composed? How are we supposed to react when watching them? Is fashion blogging a mere extension of fashion business? Or is *The Sartorialist* a postmodern way to solve aesthetic and existential problems about the ephemeral nature of the present moment and the sweet and sour taste of some instant epiphanies prompted by brief urban encounters? Unless, in a more mundane way, the “grace” it worships hides some ethical questions about gaze and norms.

Inspiration and fictionalization

Fashion blogs, as combinations of old and new media (the venerable art of photography matched with the newly born techniques of blogging), obviously seem to be tailor-made for Visual Culture Studies. Not only do they convey the usual mysteries of the photographic apparatus, but they make it possible to understand how the pictures they display are *used*, thanks to the users’ comments. Today’s photograph for instance, “*Wednesday, December 11, 2013. On The Scene... Aesop, Bleecker St., New York*”¹⁰, shows a pale young woman with sophisticated hair; she sells expensive Australian skincare products, and the atmosphere of the store she is standing in is warm and peaceful.

A simple contemplative gaze, for many users, is an appropriate way to react:

“I love her style... hair, clothes, accessories, minimal makeup – etc.” (<wendy>)

“oh my god she is the coolest!! love everything about her vibe and the way she styles herself :)” (<The Minx>)

More simply, close to the “likes” and “dislikes” of the social networks, one can read:

“like it” (<Mc>)

“LOVELOVELOVELOVELOVE” (<galsandan>)

But some users display more cultural comments:

“WoW! Frida Kahlo meets Gibson Girl! She’s Beautiful!!” (<Martha Miller>)

“Half-Victorian, half-90’s grunge. Cool.” (<LIZPR>)

Thanks to photographic mimesis, there are no major differences between seeing this young woman in the real world and seeing her on a computer screen, as long as the observer does not wish to interact with the model. That is why the two richest uses of *The Sartorialist*—i.e., the uses leading to the most personal and original comments—are inspiration and fictionalization. Inspiration is the process by which we build the passerby as a *model* who displays fashionable items, unexpected combinations of clothes or gestures that we categorize as graspable signs, whether it be for our own use (“I could wear this too”) or for a gift. One example is the “Gavroche-like” woman wearing a bomber and oversized tweed trousers of “*Monday, November 4, 2013. On the Street... Fourteenth St., New York*”¹¹. Some users found a confirmation of their own taste in her outfit:

“Love the jacket, I have one just like it from H&M :-)” (<CORY SCOTT>)

But real inspiration means an invitation to go shopping:

“The proportions are perfect and I’m going to hunt for a jacket like that now.”

(<Anna-bird>)

The problem is: *The Sartorialist* is not a commercial blog, and nobody will answer to:

“I want that jacket, where can I get it?” (<Te>)

Regular visitors know it, and yearn after the impossible-to-find items. And here is where inspiration joins fictionalization:

“I want to know everything about her outfit. Sigh.” (<sk>)

Fictionalization is the process by which we construct the passerby (either in real life or on the screen) as a *character* in a story waiting to be told. Let’s go back to the pale shopgirl. Sometimes fictionalization is reduced to folk psychology:

“I like how she looks at you Scott, full of strength with a hint of curiosity...”

(<Anne>)

“Rebel inside! love her” (<alessandra de leonardis>)

Other times it is a simple way to tell one’s own story, whether it be the past:

“Reminds me of my undergrad days...” (<sune chatte grise>)

or the future:

“I want to be him when I grow up” (<milex>¹²)

But The Sartorialist sometimes provides the same kind of support to these rewritings of daily life as some of Cindy Sherman’s series of photos of herself: both tend to be considered as *film stills* of a film that does not exist elsewhere than in the gaze of the observer:

“Her simple glance tells stories! :)” (<andreea>¹³)

See for instance “*Wednesday, November 20, 2013. On the Street... Lafayette St., New York*”¹⁴. This is the picture of another young and beautiful woman (some of the 80 comments compare her with a range of actresses going from Sophia Loren to Eva Mendes). Elicited fictions can be vague:

“I think I will dream this photo tonight!” (<Goran>)

Or more specific:

“I can imagine this beauty in a night dress.... Boys! Prepare the red carpet!” (<Maite Jiménez>)

Sometimes they are related to the user himself:

“I don’t care Scott – marry us!” (<jdit>)

“OMG, she is so beautiful! I would love to know her!” (<StreetLounge>)

It can even inspire wishful or magical thinking, as it is the case with the November 4 Gavroche girl:

“If Freaky Friday could really happen, I’d want to switch places with her.”

(<shani>¹⁵)

“Yes! I want to be that lady...” (<berenger>)

This kind of fictionalization has ancestors in the history of literature. More precisely, it refers to the writers who were bearing witness to the changes brought by “modern life”. Consequently, before going further in the analysis of The Sartorialist, and in order to understand what is at stake here, a short return to the past will be useful.

The gaze of the *flâneur*

To freeze attractive passers-by isn’t the prerogative of the photographic apparatus: in real life, it’s even a commonplace optical act. Anybody wandering downtown in a big city and passing evanescent silhouettes of pedestrians in a hurry can do it. And s/he is likely to feel the same as Marcel, the narrator of *In Search Of Lost Time*, when he glimpses girls from his moving carriage. From time to time, a silhouette moves us and

“shoots the arrows of Beauty at our heart, and makes us wonder at times whether Beauty in this world is ever anything other than the makeweight that our imagination, overwrought by regret, adds to a fragmentary and fleeting passerby.”¹⁶ Then as soon as the arrow is shot, the shooter vanishes, being taken by the flow of the crowd, as for Marcel: “Mme de Villeparisis's carriage went too quickly for me to do more than glimpse the girl coming up toward us”¹⁷.

The brevity of the encounter and its bitter taste of nevermore leave us with a feeling of incompleteness. As for Marcel, he takes it hard: “the loss of every girl glimpsed, aggravated the state of agitation in which I spent my days.”¹⁸ And the same goes for Gérard de Nerval in *An Alley in the Luxembourg Gardens* or Charles Baudelaire in *To a Woman Passing By*, two poems about this kind of brief-therefore-sad encounter. “A gleam. then night! O fleeting beauty, wrote Baudelaire. Your glance has given me sudden rebirth / Shall I see you again only in eternity? / Somewhere else, very far from here! Too late! Perhaps never!”¹⁹ It is no surprise that Walter Benjamin, when he was working on the invention of *flâneurs* in the mid-19th Century, devoted an entire essay to Baudelaire: only a *flâneur* masters “the art of enjoying a crowd”, which comes with “the love of masks and masquerade and the passion for roaming”²⁰; only a *flâneur* moves so aimlessly and so slowly s/he can be harmed by the arrows of Beauty. Unlike a courtly or an Elizabethan lover, “the delight of the urban poet is love—not at first sight, but at last sight”²¹, wrote Benjamin, since her or his imagination only starts to work because of the vanishing.

But some doubt remains: is the arrow shot by the passer-by or by ourselves, i.e., was the passerby really *the one* or is the encounter so brief it only allows our imagination to fill in the missing elements of an unfinished portrait? Is Beauty a fact or a personal projection? In *In Search of Lost Time*, where analyzing one’s daily experiences according to the imagination is one of the main topics, Marcel is attracted by the second explanation: “Had I thought her so lovely only because I had caught a mere glimpse of her? Perhaps.”²² Even if Proust is by no means a Romantic, this second explanation is more Romantic; indeed, being aware of the projective nature of Beauty allows one to feel blue in a somehow satisfying way—Victor Hugo used to define melancholia as “the pleasure taken into being sad”²³. Marcel, one evening, jumps out of the carriage to check the presence of the Beauty he once again located in a gorgeous passer-by; then to his utter astonishment the girl happens to be “the old Mme Verdurin”, one of his old acquaintances.... Anyway some doubt still remains; what if he or she was the one “I would have loved [and] who knew it”²⁴?

Would a photo be of any help? On the one hand, photography seems to make the Romantic wish to “suspend the flight of time” come true²⁵; but on the other hand, this suspension would tend to disenchant these brief encounters, and Baudelaire decried photography because it was threatening the skills of the *flâneur*. Photography “came into its own as an extension of the eye of the middle-class *flâneur*”, and “the photographer, an 'armed version of the solitary walker', could produce 'virtual' visual records of his *flânerie*”; but “the passion for roaming contradicted the 'fixing' of the visual image onto a photographic record” which was more filled with “history and memory”²⁶ than with imagined Beauty. Besides, this fixing does not help to answer the question of the localization of Beauty either... However, things have changed since Proust and Baudelaire; technical improvements and new uses of cameras, complete

with Internet 2.0, allow us to forever freeze innumerable passers-by all over the world, regardless of the speed at which the carriage is driving.

Incidentally, *real* passers-by are no longer required: nowadays, even when they walk downtown, postmodern flâneurs keep staring at the screens of their mobile phones, maybe because it is more comfortable to be shot by the arrow of Beauty through a “virtual visual record” than through the vividness of a walk among the crowd. But is it really the same thing? Proust wrote: “the impossibility of stopping and accosting a woman, the likelihood of not being able to find her again some other day, gives her the same sudden charm as is acquired by a place when illness or poverty prevents one from visiting it.”²⁷ But in a networking world, “love at last sight” is never certain, especially on a blog claiming half a million page views a day. The passer-by can even recognize herself on the picture and post her own comment. This is the case, for example, with the December 11 pale girl:

“Dear Sartorialist, thank you so much for including me, and thank you to all those who left such sweet comments, really heart warming. See you lovelies in the streets! With gratitude” (<PriceLes>)

Blurring the triangle of enunciation

Calling a photo a “virtual visual record” is somehow immanentist; it is like pretending the camera is a simple extension of the eye. Yet the camera is not. Not only is it a machine, but its use raises more ethical questions than the use of the eye, precisely because it records and stores the appearance of people.

Let’s begin from the start. From the point of view of the photographer, there are only two possible ways to deal with the subject when you are going to take a picture of somebody walking on the street: asking for the authorization before or, if you are looking for spontaneity, after the shot; or not asking for it, at the risk of provoking a direct confrontation with the model, or being sued once the picture is published. Now from the point of view of the passer-by, there are three ways to respond to the photographer’s request (when formulated): refusing the authorization, giving it for free, or selling it. The third solution changes the status of model into that of a professional performer, complete with the risk of eschewing found grace and spontaneity back once one knows a camera is here.

As far as one knows after the reading of the paratext surrounding The Sartorialist website, “Schuman asks permission, and sets his shots up carefully once he’s obtained it”²⁸. But of course some doubt remains here as well, even if it is a *fictional* doubt born from the stories we tell ourselves when thinking how the pictures have been taken. For example, what about the pictures shot from behind? Or the numerous pictures of somebody self-absorbed in their cellphone, seemingly oblivious of the presence of any observer, as if the photographer had been waiting for such a suspension of watchfulness to discreetly shoot? Right or wrong, whether permission has been granted or not, this kind of picture could put us into the position of the *voyeur*, the one who stares on the sly—note the French locution for “on the sly”, *à la dérobée*, suggests that the situation is akin to a robbery, since *dérober* means *to steal*. But we are currently living in the 21st century, and privacy is not what it used to be. Privacy is *out of fashion*, in the literal and in the figurative senses. “Such blogs exist for Tel Aviv, Stockholm, Moscow, Sydney, Seoul, Berlin, Dublin, London—you name it. Survey them one morning

over coffee, and you will feel like a *boulevardier* of the whole world, breezing past one stunning creature after another, free to cruelly assess or dumbly gaze—at supreme leisure and invulnerable to reciprocal scrutiny.”²⁹

And why do we benefit from such a comfortable invulnerability? Because on the computer screen, grace is *mediated*. It is so mediated that it even becomes hard to localize—we feel it but we do not exactly know which object causes it. If, as a *consequence*, a photographed person moves us, which one of the objects involved is the *cause*? Is it the pixels of which the picture is made, i.e., the plastic composition created by the photographer? Or is it rather the real counterpart of the pixels, i.e., the living person who served as a model? These questions remind us of Marcel sitting in his carriage: was Beauty in the passer-by or in his imagination? The fact that time is on our side—we can stare at the screen as long as we desire it—does not help us. *Who’s in charge* when grace and beauty are enunciated by a fashion blog?

Three instances share responsibility for this enunciation:

(1) *The Model*. The creative choice of clothes are hers; the bodily *hexis*, the *smile* and the *gesture* are hers. But her amount of responsibility is not easy to assess: on the one hand, maybe she did not do it on purpose. She leads her daily life heedlessly; she did not intend to be graceful. On the other hand, maybe she has acted as her own *metteur en scène*, carefully picking up items in her wardrobe and consciously striking a graceful pose knowing the photographer was there. In both cases anyway, the *Sartorialist* offers “an instant-gratification blend of artistry and reality, starring appealing amateurs who are their own stylists.”³⁰

(2) *The Observer*. Without my imagination, my beliefs and my desires, there would not be any grace in this cold conglomerate of pixels. But once again, I cannot escape the Proustian dilemma: maybe the model is really graceful, and her or his beauty is objective and not subjective.

(3) *The Artist*. Not only is he the mediator between (1) and (2), but he sets the scene in order to make the common uncommon. Numerous commentators think *The Sartorialist* offers “glimpses of street style made glamorous by Schuman's lens”³¹. Besides, Mr. Schuman claims he arranges reality each time he takes a picture, seeing himself as the *curator* of a life-scale exhibition: “it's definitely a curated context. It's my altered reality.”³² Some people say they would rather Schuman allow them to look at the *real* passers-by: “And maybe this is the weakness of his work (...): he portrays people in the most flattering possible light, literally and figuratively.”³³ But the majority of the users want to see him as an artist:

“What a beauty, I’m sure everything will look amazing on her!!!! You captured her elegance like nobody else can!” (<Elena>)³⁴.

But even “carefully set up” by Mr. Schuman, the photos use parts of the (imperfect) real world. And even if the model disguises himself or herself, like an actor in a comedy of his making, and if the observer limits herself to fantasies, losing touch with reality, it is impossible to escape from determinations, norms and connotations.

Can anybody be graceful for one hundredth of a second?

By the end of the 19th century, the Lumière brothers had already begun to send operators all over the (colonized) world in order to see how “others” were living. Suddenly, being in downtown Paris and thinking that thousands of kilometers away, at *this very moment*, some people were doing their usual activities, unaware of our own

existence, was becoming far less vivid and fascinating than to *watch* them going about them. Virginia Woolf underlined it in her 1926 essay on cinema: “We behold [people on the screen] as they are when we are not there. We see life as it is when we have no part in it. As we gaze we seem to be removed from the prettiness of actual existence”. Watching them, “we have time to open our minds wide to the beauty and register on top of it the queer sensation—this beauty will continue, and this beauty will flourish whether we behold it or not”³⁵.

Nowadays, this function of monitoring is less provided by cinema and TV than by the internet. In addition to the countless online surveillance cameras fastened on roofs, public places, satellites and drones, millions of blogs and personal pages give out an overwhelming daily ration of snapshots taken from the course of things. It comes in such great quantities that one is reminded of Jorge Luis Borges’s famous fantasy about a map so precise it is the exact same size as the territory it first intended to stand for³⁶. This continuous duplication of the streets produces a feeling that J. Baudrillard once called *hyperreality*—when “entertainment, information, and communication technologies provide experiences more intense and involving than the scenes of banal everyday life”³⁷.

But the case of fashion blogs like The Sartorialist go further than the experience of a feeling, since they require our *real* participation. The standard way to participate, as we have seen above, simply consists in adding a comment under a posted picture; a more active way consists in rushing to your wardrobe, picking up what you just learned to be fashionable items, and taking it to the streets to possibly embody one of these chic characters whose frozen silhouette will spellbind the internet users. Maybe you will be photographed by Mr. Schuman himself or by any other blogger able to “give viewers the sense that they are in the urban splendor too, or could be, or *should* be — strolling or sauntering, rather than linking and clicking.”³⁸ Indeed, it is true that The Sartorialist somehow makes us want to do it for real, i.e., to dress up in order to draw attention or to let the “real self” appear. It somewhat provides a cautious version of Andy Warhol’s over-used 1968 prophecy: instead of “In the future, everyone will be world-famous for fifteen minutes”, The Sartorialist claims that *in the present*, everyone can be graceful for one hundredth of a second—graceful hence famous, thanks to the blog.

Not all of the fashion blogs function in this manner, far from it. A lot of them do not give unknown people a chance to become “iconic”, often because they are devoted to their own single founder, as if Aphrodite had permanently blessed him or her³⁹. The Sartorialist spares us such narcissism. Unlike many of its imitators, such as The Wearist, which consists in pictures of her founder in different clothes⁴⁰ or Garance Doré’s famous fashion blog, which is overwhelmed by the personal advice and the commentaries of its owner⁴¹, Mr. Schuman takes no advantage of his position by systematically staging himself. Not to mention the risk of being mocked. There are so many merciless amateur photographs waiting for us to look ridiculous that one can feel grateful to Mr. Schuman for waiting, on the contrary, for our graceful moments.

How much time does he have to wait? Is anybody really likely to flaunt grace, lacing his shoes in the middle of the street or typing on her cellphone, even for one hundredth of a second? Sometimes it’s a question of national belonging. Being born Italian and living in Milan, for example, seems to be an irreplaceable advantage when you are a man—if one believes what users wrote under “Monday, November 4, 2013: *On the Street... Via Catena, Milan*”, showing an elegant *signore* on his bike:

“Italy... What more is there to say... :-) I sometimes have the feeling that the Italians simply absorb this great style from the very moment they are born! Being stylish is simply inevitable for them I guess” (<Welniany Rynek>)

“Only in Italy does gentleman have his bike toning with his suit!! Love it.” (<Lynne Reid>)

“Gentlemen take note: this man knows the right way to dress! The Italians do indeed have an innate sense of style that the rest of us can learn from.” (<Scott>)

“I wish all *older men in England dressed like this... and not in baggy tracksuit bottoms!!” (<Jessica Rose>)

But more obvious determinism seems to be at work when one faces body norms and what Pierre Bourdieu called *distinction*, suggesting we are not all equal in the enchanted world of grace The Sartorialist asks us day after day to join in.

Bodily hexis and distinction

At first glance, there is something refreshing in the photos published by The Sartorialist. The “profane” bodies easily win the confrontation with the “sacred” ones, whose owners are paid to show how well their clothes fit them. Compared to amateurs, professional models look skinny, weird, unnatural in their gestures and expressions, and the accumulation of their perpetually brand new clothes have overtones of meaningless artificiality. After all, to extend to clothes what Ferdinand de Saussure said of words, meaning is created through opposition, and there is often more opposition in a common wardrobe than into a fashion show: old clothes are opposed to new ones, and expensive clothes to cheap ones. The variety of styles is greater, too, since nobody wears clothes made by a single designer anymore. The “total look” is out of fashion, being nowadays replaced by eclecticism: wearing a Yohji Yamamoto jacket upon your old pair of jeans will make you look cool, while wearing it upon another Yohji Yamamoto item (or any other expensive-chic item of your wardrobe) will make you look like a pathetic victim of merchandization, mistaking style for buying power. That is also why “I can do it too!” is the current refreshing reaction of the newcomers to The Sartorialist, who are prompt to think: “It wouldn’t take much for me to become as graceful as she or he is”.

Maybe buying the same jacket would suffice to project all around myself, wherever I go, the same intimidating aura as that of the previously mentioned Manhattan Gavroche girl with her bomber:

“I want that jacket, where can I get it?” (<Anna-bird>).

“The proportions are perfect and I’m going to hunt for a jacket like that now” (<Te>).

But do <Anna-bird> and <Te> really believe that buying the same jacket is enough? The *gavroche* girl *has it*. And “it” is neither the jacket nor any piece of buyable merchandise. As professional dancers used to say, the girl on the picture “is up”. It means her antigravity muscles push her entire body upwards, giving her the silhouette of a Golden Age movie star—a feeling that did not escape the attention of the blog users:

“Makes me think of Kate Hepburn about to fly off with Howard Hughes” (<Monsieur Marcel>).

Thus, to *have it* means, first of all, to show a particular *bodily hexis*, to coin a term often used by Pierre Bourdieu, and bodily hexis is more or less impossible to acquire once you are a grown-up, even if you would be exhausting yourself in dance and yoga

courses. “Bodily hexis is political mythology realized, *em-bodied*, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable way of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking”⁴². It is not even a question of displaying grace or not; it is a question of displaying it owing to one’s “nature”. The *performance of grace* must be unthought, if not unconscious. In order to be picked up by Mr. Schuman, you have to be “effortlessly stylish; you don't try, you just are... [Because] he's a hunter of free-range sprezzatura”⁴³.

Then comes shape. If *The Sartorialist* seems to welcome all skin colors and ethnicities (and almost all ages), fat, sick and disabled bodies remain offscreen. Since obesity, disease and disability are modern scarecrows, such an absence can easily be explained by the current use of fashion blogs. These blogs intend to elicit pleasant daydreams, not nightmares. Everybody knows there are *feelgood movies*, whose bill of specifications preclude making the audience feel awkward; thus, there are *feelgood blogs* too. The economic pressure is even weaker for a fashion blog than for a fashion magazine: glamorous ads for ruinous items are far more frequent in the former than in the latter⁴⁴. But being bucked up does not prevent norms from being embodied. On the contrary, so-called normality and desirability are constructed through “a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms”, to quote Judith Butler. And “this iterability implies that 'performance' is not a singular 'act' or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death.”⁴⁵

This is particularly true with *The Sartorialist*, where no *queer space* is available. Girls look like (and therefore *are*, it is tempting so say) girls, and boys look like boys. The few moments of queerness do not seem to be much appreciated by the current users. For instance, an unusual picture of somebody whose biological sex is not obvious, “*Wednesday, November 6, 2013. On The Street... The Strand, London*”, causes normative remarks⁴⁶. It shows a young man with blond hair in a bun, wearing a kilt sitting on a coffee terrace:

“At first I thought he was woman! Great style anyway!” (<Laura>)

“Oh my! What hairy legs she has!” (<Erica>)

“chloe sevigny... shave your leg LOL”⁴⁷ (<CBC>)

But knowing that on the web there always are vigils, somebody tried to denounce this normativity:

“Sometimes I am surprised to see someone tagged in one of the Men or Women categories, and am reminded that making comments that poke fun at someone’s crossing of gender categories is a very dangerous thing to do.” (<Manon>)

A single comment on norms does not suffice to “deconstruct” norms, all the more so as gender norms are not the only norms fashion blogs convey. There are, first and foremost, economic norms: apparently, the message is “you can be graceful with inexpensive clothes if they are carefully chosen and mixed”, but everybody knows, as I mentioned earlier with the Yohji Yamamoto jacket (whose average cost is one month of minimum wage), that inexpensive clothes are at their best a setting for some luxurious items. That is why *The Sartorialist* is seen, by some of its parodists, as a partner of inegalitarian capitalism and ruling classes⁴⁸. There are also beauty norms, of course: fashion blogs display just as many beautiful faces as nice clothes; they contribute to construct what I have elsewhere called *aphrodisia*⁴⁹, i.e., the irrational tendency to give

preference to beautiful and handsome persons, whether it be for a position at work or a simple conversation.

To finish, one must not forget the pressure put on the perpetual invitation to be wearing something original and noteworthy—because wearing it is the indisputable sign you *are*, as an individual, original and noteworthy. “Don’t be shy, do it, show your real inner self”. Yet it is an illusion to believe that “Schuman photographs people on the street, where they are completely divorced from any social or economic context. They seem to have no background or job.”⁵⁰ On the contrary, *everything* serves as social signals, especially the clothes and the way you wear them. Surfing The Sartorialist you will see everyday fashion if and only if “you consider tall heels, wild prints, and bold colors ‘everyday.’”⁵¹ Astonishing outfits, daring combinations and infrequent colors go better with some ways of life, some jobs and a particular “cultural capital”⁵². If your life, your job and your cultural capital do not fit with what you wear, they will be categorized as “unnatural” and you will be seen as a “fashion victim”.

Repetition of these norms ultimately causes a feeling of exclusion. The user sees himself or herself as a spectator unable to become an actor of street fashion:

“Beautiful & elegant. I would love to be able to dress like that. It looks perfect on her” (<Kim>)⁵³.

It is still a feelgood blog, but it only feels good to *look at* grace. Thinking “I could do it too” is no longer conceivable.

Conclusion: *Don’t Try*

“Web surfing” is an antithetic phrase. The so-called *horizontal* surface of the sea of websites is, rather, a *vertical* forest of sign-posts and guidelines. It is less a matter of surfing or skating than a matter of weaving in and out of norms, models, requests and temptations. One of the ways to win this slalom race, or at least to finish it without too many wounds, is to maintain an aesthete’s gaze whatever happens. It is how Marcel and Swann, the heroes of *In Search Of Lost Time*, look at the women they fall in love with. “These glimpsed encounters made for greater beauty in a world which sows such flowers, rare though common, along every country roadside, a new spice being added to life by the *untried treasures* of each day, by every outing with its *unkept promises*.”⁵⁴

At the end of his life, Swann understands the beauty he was seeing on the face of Odette was in his own eyes—he thought she was a Botticelli, and only a connoisseur of the history of painting like him could have this kind of belief. In the same way, Marcel learns to stop suffering from the “unkept promises” of the beautiful passers-by he glimpses. The lesson of *In Search Of Lost Time* therefore is that the beauty of the interpretive gesture itself goes beyond the beauty of the work of art (whether it is a fine painting or a nice body). Perceiving the treasure, knowing how to appreciate it, already is a great reward, and it is better to leave this treasure “untried”. Odette, in *The Past Recaptured*, tells Marcel how she renounced the great love of her youth: that love was so pure and intense it reached an acme from which it would ineluctably begin to crumble; breaking up was, then, the only solution to treasure it as an everlasting souvenir. But Marcel decides to go one step further, believing it is safer not to try to jump out of the carriage. Even if he or she is “the one”, it will never be as durably pleasurable as the *idea* that she or he *could have been* the one.

In such a perspective, dear <Anna-bird> and <Te>, you can play, as long as you wish, with the idea of buying an adorable little brown bomber like the one you just saw on The Sartorialist website. But my advice would be to not do it for real, for sooner or later you are bound to be bitterly disappointed. As Proust writes, “the mere act of entertaining the possibility of artificially fostering it is an implicit acknowledgement that it is an illusion.”⁵⁵ By one of the strange coincidences literature is accustomed to, this Proustian advice appears as the epitaph American poet Charles Bukowski wanted to be engraved on his grave: “Don’t try”...⁵⁶

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23. Victor Hugo, *Les Travailleurs de la mer*, III (Paris: Librairie Internationale, 1866), 153, our trans.
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38. Heffernan, writing about Garance Doré's blog, "Pop Couture".
39. These "blogs about me" are more complex versions of the now very popular "selfie", i. e. a « photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and uploaded to a social media website." (*The New Yorker*, November 19, 2013. <<http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/culture/2013/11/selfie-word-of-the-year.html>> Web. 13th April.).
40. <<http://thewearist.blogspot.fr>> Web. 13th April. This website gives as a definition of a "wearist" : "One that believes that the act of wearing is the very thing keeping life stylish."

(Either this definition is tautological either it refers to the Nineteenth-Century *dandy* spirit, depending on the meaning one gives to “stylish” when associated to “life”).

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Subjects: Photography

Keywords: visual studies, photography, reception studies, fashion, blog, The Sartorialist

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Review of the exhibition *Life on Mars* *David Bowie_Shot by Mick Rock*

Le Multiple, Toulouse, 2 December 2016–15 January 2017

Daniel Huber

“It’s not who does it FIRST, it’s who does it BEST.” (David Bowie)

- 1 *Life on Mars David Bowie_Shot by Mick Rock_* was a hybrid exhibition presented at the collaborative and experimental multifunctional space Le Multiple¹ in Toulouse, France, between 2 December 2016 and 15 January 2017: it combined various media from exquisite prints of photographs taken by Mick Rock through the glass showcases along the central axis of the exhibition space, containing original, and sometimes rare, contemporary documents coming from a private collection, to a video installation and the four testimonial citations, running along the walls, which are used here as section headings. The private collector is associated with Le Multiple and this collection formed the background to the images while Le Multiple, an old boilerworks, provided the exhibition space. The concept of showing documents related to photographs in an exhibition space has become standard practice over the past few years. Moreover, the exhibition sits definitely well in the wake of *Total Records*, shown in 2015 at the Rencontres d’Arles.² It has been the first time for Rock’s collection of photographs to be shown in France and it has quite possibly been the best way to be presented in this hybrid manner in such a unique space.
- 2 Mick Rock’s photographs were a selection documenting David Bowie’s spectacular rise in 1972-1973, from the perspective of the insider photographer functioning as the official photographer of the emerging star.³ Forty iconic shots of Bowie were exhibited, part colour, part black and white, together with one portrait of Mick Rock taken by his daughter Nathalie Rock in 2014⁴ which was hanging next to his introductory text⁵ dated 24 September 2016 and specially written to accompany the photographs on display in Toulouse. The photographs essentially derive from Rock’s major and most recent book,

The Rise of David Bowie 1972-1973, which Bowie co-signed with the photographer, comprising 200 photographs, published by Taschen in September 2015 in a limited and numbered edition, and then a trade edition, after Bowie's passing, for the general public in early 2016. However, there were nine prints on view that do not figure in the Taschen edition, therefore adding considerably to the uniqueness of the exhibition.

“Mick sees me the way I see myself” (David Bowie)

- 3 The exhibition presented Bowie as the facilitator between the worlds of art and science and the general public. This role of facilitator could be experienced on multiple levels. The world of art was present both through his music, evoked by the original vinyl albums, and Rock's photographs. The world of science was represented by references to space sciences in particular, such as the title of the exhibition, the futuristic designer costumes Bowie wore on stage as well as the video footages. The general public was both the contemporary audience in the concert halls, captured in thrill in some images, as well as today's visitors to the exhibition. All these aspects came out neatly in Rock's shots and were strengthened by the documents on display, driving the message home that David Bowie was a unique personality straddling and juxtaposing multiple universes of discourse.
- 4 In addition, Bowie's role as a facilitator was also reflected in the partnerships that went into the essentially grassroots organization of the show. Since the exhibition draws heavily on Bowie's fascination with the human conquest of outer space, as made obvious by titles such as *Major Tom*, *Space Oddity*, and, of course, *Life on Mars?*, it is coherent (and a great feat of organization!) that partners for this Toulouse exhibition included the Cité de l'Espace (City of Space) theme park in Toulouse and the CNES (Centre national d'études spatiales, National Centre for Space Studies) agency in Paris that generously provided video footage of the ongoing Mars mission.⁶ The university world was represented by the research laboratory CAS Culture Anglo Saxonnnes of Toulouse 2 University that organized a one-day conference around David Bowie on 2 December 2016.⁷

“All these moments would be gone forever if it wasn't for [Mick Rock].” (Lou Reed)

- 5 Mick Rock was Bowie's friend for 44 years: his very first shot of Bowie, in Birmingham on 17 March 1972, was also on show as well as his last shot in New York in 2002. Mick Rock covered Bowie's rise to stardom performing as *Ziggy Stardust* (and later as *Aladdin Sane*), firmly established during his numerous gigs. The images were a balanced mix of concert photographs (Bowie alone or in interaction with fans), backstage and party snapshots and even private shots as well as stills from promotional material. The exhibition showed many images taken at concerts documenting his tour across the United Kingdom with *The Spiders from Mars*: on 17 March 1972 at Birmingham Town Hall, 12 May 1973 at Earls Court in London, 14-16 May 1973 at Aberdeen Music Hall, 15 June 1973 at the Taunton Odeon in London, 17 June 1973 at the Oxford Town Hall, 26 June 1973 at the Oxford New Theatre, 10 October 1973 in Liverpool and the *Ziggy Stardust Farewell* concert and after-party on 3 July 1973⁸. Rock also documented Bowie's first tour in the United States in images taken on 28 September 1972 in New

York, going on to Los Angeles, 16-23 October 1972, then to San Francisco, 27 October 1972, and back to New York in December 1972. The latest, black and white, shot of Bowie by Rock at the exhibition, which shows Bowie wearing a black jacket and looking down, was also taken in New York, at the Milk Studios in 2002. It is a curious fact about the selection that only eight images had to do with the US tour, and even then there is one single image at concert, the others document the studio work and the set of *The Jean Genie* video. The material taken in the UK is more balanced and varied between concert shots, on-set stills and private images.

- 6 The title of the exhibition, *Life on Mars*, takes its cue from Bowie's song of that name. It represents a personal connection for Mick Rock because the track is on *Hunky Dory* (released in December 1971), the album he first listened to from Bowie: Felix Dennis, manager of *Oz* magazine, had offered him the promo album and the song was an immediate click (Rock 2016: 29). In May 1973, he directed the video for *Life on Mars?*.⁹ It is possibly significant from this perspective that the Taschen edition of 2015/2016 does not carry the shot where Bowie is holding the *Hunky Dory* album during the photo session at his home Haddon Hall in late March 1972¹⁰, but it was shown in Toulouse. There were additional 7 contemporary shots as well as the 2002 portrait that do not appear in the Taschen edition. All in all then, nearly a fourth of the material on display in Toulouse is not published in the Taschen edition.
- 7 While the captions in the Taschen edition and the exhibition catalogue generally match, sometimes it is the Taschen edition that gives more information about the circumstances of an image, sometimes it is the catalogue. On the one hand, for instance, the succinct caption for the image showing Bowie "putting his makeup on in front of a round mirror" is supplemented by this comment in Taschen: "Bowie usually did his own makeup and now was using a special Noh theatre palette, which he had brought back from his nine-gig Japanese tour in April 1973" (Rock 2016: 290). Or, to the image showing Bowie in the train from Kansas City to Los Angeles, 16-17 October 1972, Rock (2016: 294) adds that "Bowie is wearing the pink cap he favoured on tour when he decided not to style his hair". On the other hand, it is the catalogue that makes multiple references to the Japanese designer Kansai Yamamoto who, curiously, passes completely unnamed in the Taschen captions (although Rock evokes him in his interview with Barney Hoskyns). Furthermore, while the prints on display agree with the corresponding image in Taschen, two images are different: in the image showing Bowie in concert at the Empire Theatre (Liverpool, 10 October 1973), he is looking left while in the Taschen edition he is looking right; the image showing Bowie with a gold spot on his forehead at Earls Court, London, is tinted more blue and the spot is coloured gold, while it is plain black and white in Taschen, quite likely, simply because it is facing the monochrome contents page. Nevertheless, two major divergences between the two works remain: the caption to "Bowie showing owl eyes in performance" is dated May 1973, England, in the catalogue, but Manchester Hardrock, 29 December 1972, in Taschen (Rock 2016: 292); the black and white shot "live at the Aberdeen Music Hall" of 16 May 1973 in the catalogue is identical to an image dated 12 May 1973 at Earls Court, London, in Taschen (Rock 2016: 191, 295). In neither case does Bowie's costume help to decide, although the second costume resembles the one Bowie seems to be wearing at Fairfield Halls, Croydon, 24 June 1973 (Rock 2016: 73, 292).
- 8 Rock has shown his photographs of Bowie's in various museums, galleries and cultural centres across Europe and even in Hong-Kong, Shanghai and Japan, but this is the first

time the images have been shown in France. However, Rock did not only photograph Bowie: indeed he created the most iconic images, not only of David Bowie, but of the pop scene of the 1970s. He shot over 100 album covers, including the iconic shots for Syd Barrett's *Madcap Laughs* (January 1970), Lou Reed's *Transformer* (November 1972), Iggy and The Stooges' *Raw Power* (February 1973), Queen's *Queen II* (March 1974) and *Sheer Heart Attack* (November 1974). He shot for Syd Barrett, Lou Reed, Iggy Pop, Queen, the Sex Pistols, Blondie among others in the 1970s and 1980s, and more recently Lenny Kravitz, Alicia Keys, Daft Punk, Lady Gaga or U2, for instance.¹¹ In the interview with Barney Hoskyns for the Taschen edition, Rock confided that he got to know Bowie while he was working for the counter-culture magazine *Oz* (Rock 2016: 29). As for their professional relation, Bowie never told him how to photograph him, and it was the same with the videos: Bowie trusted him. Rock reports (2016: 30) that he told his manager that "Mick sees me the way I see myself", after reviewing the Haddon Hall photo session. Similarly, Lou Reed remembered (citation on the wall at the exhibition): "I like Mick and I like what he photographs, so shooting with him was never a problem. All these moments would be gone forever if it wasn't for him." As for Rock's inspiration to photograph all these people, he answered (Rock 2016: 30): "When people ask me what inspired me, it was really the charisma of a lot of my early subjects. It certainly wasn't other photographers." Throughout his career, Rock published a number of lavishly illustrated books of his photographs, of Lou Reed, Debbie Harry, Syd Barrett and Queen, as well as collections of his photographs of the Glam Rock era and the faces of rock'n'roll.

- 9 The privileged perspective of the insider photographer was particularly evident in a series of photographs. The shooting of Bowie at his home Haddon Hall, in Beckenham just outside London, in March 1972 definitely stands out. This session, quite early on in their relationship, produced some truly iconic images: the mirror shot made its way to the back cover and inner sleeve of the *Pinups* album of July 1973 and another was used on the sleeve of *The US Space Oddity* album (the 1972 US edition of the 1969 album). Further examples for Rock's privileged perspective are the shots taken on the set in the recording studio for the video of *The Jean Genie* in San Francisco in October 1972 and the particularly intimate shot showing Bowie with a single guitar in glittering clothes at the RCA Recording Studios in New York in December of that same year. Besides *Life On Mars*¹² and *The Jean Genie*¹³, Rock was also behind the music videos for *John, I'm Only Dancing*¹⁴ and *Space Oddity*¹⁵. There were numerous shots taken backstage, such as Bowie doing his makeup, getting dressed, performing his gig simulating a wrist slash, taking off his mask after concert, or praying before a concert.
- 10 Most images on view concentrated on Bowie alone: in 27 shots he is photographed alone, while only six photographs included at least one other member of his band, in five he is with some others and there were three shots of Bowie interacting with his fans. Party scenes are typically shot from a frontal perspective, from the point of view of the participants. Moments preserved on film from this stance included shots from the Ziggy Stardust Farewell party at the Café Royal in London on 4 July 1973, or at the party Bowie threw after his concert at the Carnegie Hall in New York on 28 September 1972, as well as the famous shot of David Bowie, Iggy Pop and Lou Reed together at the Dorchester Hotel, London, on 16 July 1972. The onstage shots of Bowie are often from an ant's eye view, that is from the point of view of the spectators or, occasionally, are taken on the stage. For the photographs on show, Rock had opted for a very efficient way of using colour and black and white prints: colours drew attention to the

extravagant and daring palette of his makeup and dresses, while black and white emphasized the posture and the gestures. The photographs during concerts produced many iconic images, such as him making owl eyes or the famous guitar fellation with Mick Ronson at concert on 17 June 1972. The on-stage shots also made tribute to the costumes and stage-look Bowie meticulously chose for his stage presence and stage persona, Ziggy Stardust.

“Maybe [Bowie] just wants to be Greta Garbo of Rock’n’roll” (Mick Rock)

- 11 Bowie’s fascination with fashion and colourful makeup, dyed hair, and masks was very aesthetically brought out by Rock’s shots of him doing his makeup, or shots showing his stage costumes. For the video of *Life on Mars?*, shot on 12 May 1973, and the concert Bowie gave that night at Earls Court in London, Pierre Laroche created the makeup and Freddie Burretti¹⁶ the turquoise satin suit, all contributing to the glam rock look of the early 1970s. Burretti was behind the quilted jumpsuit Bowie wore on the UK TV show *Top of the Pops*¹⁷ on 14 April 1972. Laroche created the iconic Bowie stage-look of this period: the gold spot on his forehead, captured in a number of aesthetically balanced prints in the exhibition. Bowie changed clothes frequently during a concert and was thus wearing (and showing) numerous outfits also by the young Japanese designer Kansai Yamamoto on his tours, such as a Japanese cloak, various coats or his signature leotard and other pieces often inspired by kabuki theatre costumes. Rock’s photographs go thus well beyond documenting Bowie’s flamboyant stage presence, they also represent a valuable source for a Yamamoto lookbook: a designer collection shown while being actually worn. *The Fashion Book* (2014: 568) characterizes Yamamoto as the designer who “married traditional Japanese culture and Western influences, set them to a music beat and put them in the realm of the performing arts.” Who better could carry this message than David Bowie? Elements of Yamamoto’s style combined cartoon graphics and cotton netting or lush satin robes with large Japanese figures, as seen on many costumes worn by Bowie. It is by no means accidental in this context that Mick Rock later shot a whole series on kabuki costumes and theatre.¹⁸ Bowie’s costumes designed by Burretti and Yamamoto accompanied the personas of Ziggy Stardust and Aladdin Sane.¹⁹ Rock in his introductory text pointed out that, in knowingly managing his extravagant and flamboyant stage style, Bowie “made the androgynous hip” because “[h]e made it ok for men to reveal their softer side. Not just in their sexuality, but also in their sensory attitude.” The overall effect of these visual statements was that of a futuristic creature dropped in the world of the early 1970s from some spaceship: the look of a glamorous alien.

Further components of the exhibition

- 12 The exhibition space was knowingly converted to the purpose. It contained design elements of photo shoots such as backdrops and projectors, the walls were painted red, and in places it was decorated with black and white stripes which echoed the stripes of the suit, designed by Burretti, Bowie wore on the train to Aberdeen on 14 May 1973. Serge Friant, president of the David Bowie Fan Club Toulouse²⁰, confided to me that the whole of the exhibition space was created specifically for the show. The showcases

along the central axis of the exhibition space were devoted to a selection of documents related to Bowie's discography from a private collection: collectibles such as album sleeves, contemporary articles documenting the way to Ziggy Stardust and the subsequent rise of Bowie during 1972-73, and more recent ones such as an interview with Mick Rock in *Rolling Stone*²¹. Above the showcases were hanging three unique guitars: they were specially made by Pierre Gautier (the models could be ordered for purchase). The exhibition also featured four videos in a dedicated small structure resembling a summer shed within the exhibition space. It showcased some original and rare vinyls and four videos were screening in loop: one video was generously offered by the CNES and three others were mounted by the Fan Club.

- 13 The exhibition came with a catalogue, *Life on Mars David Bowie_Shot by Mick Rock_*, prefaced by Mick Rock and Philippe Delécluse. It includes a reproduction of all forty photographs and their caption compiled in an index. There were various events accompanying the exhibition, such as the opening reception in the presence of Mick Rock himself and the conference organized at the University of Toulouse 2 Jean Jaurès. Limited prints could also be purchased by correspondence.
- 14 The exhibition thus provided for a fertile connection among multiple strains of collections: Mick Rock's superb prints, the documents from the private collection, the video installation and the academic interest all combined to pay homage to the indefatigable and exceptional creative that was David Bowie. As Philippe Delécluse has reminded visitors in his preface: "[Bowie and others of his kind] have changed the world so that we, regular people, could live in peace... or close to it: the fight goes on. Against all extremists that would like to see the Aliens disappear."

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NOTES

1. <http://www.imaginationsfertiles.fr/multiple/>
2. <http://rencontres-arles-photo.tv/en/advanced-search/results#total-records>
3. In an interview Rock mentions that he was often the only photographer present at the concerts: <http://www.rollingstone.fr/david-bowie-par-mick-rock/>
4. On his website, what seems to be the original version of this photograph by his daughter is dated 2010: <http://www.mickrock.com/about/>

5. The text was displayed in French only, but the catalogue carries the English version too.
 6. Further partners included the City Council of Toulouse and Toulouse Métropole among others.
 7. I owe a debt of gratitude to my colleague Emeline Jouve for subtly drawing my attention to the exhibition in the first place. The one-day conference on 2 December 2016 was organized by Nathalie Vincent-Arnaud (Toulouse-Jean Jaurès, CAS), Emeline Jouve (Albi-Champollion, CAS), Philippe Birgy (Toulouse-Jean Jaurès, CAS) and David Roche (Toulouse-Jean Jaurès, CAS).
 8. The date of the Farewell concert, 3 July 1973 is, correctly given in the Taschen edition, the exhibition catalogue read 4 July 1973 since it probably refers to the afterparty.
 9. The video has recently been reedited by Rock on the request of Bowie's record label EMI.
 10. Rock, in an interview with Stella Aaron to *Rolling Stone* (Special Edition David Bowie, No 25: 22), in early 2016, on display at the exhibition, gives "two days after his first shot of Bowie" as the precise date, that is 19 March 1972.
 11. <https://www.mickrock.com/about/>
 12. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-IqqusnNQ>
 13. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CGQo6zpVzt8>
 14. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6VrqCBsbeuc>
 15. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cYMCLz5PQVw>
 16. <https://fashionunited.uk/news/fashion/fashion-s-unsung-designers-bowie-s-freddie-burretti/2016012719192>
 17. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4MrP83Sqt9E>
 18. <https://www.mickrock.com/kabuki/>
 19. For a well-documented article on the evolution of Bowie's style and his impact on the fashion world, see <http://www.lesinrocks.com/2016/01/11/musique/bowie-self-made-mode-11797101/> by Nelly Kaprièlian.
 20. <https://fr-fr.facebook.com/davidbowiefanclubtoulouse/>
 21. Read as well: <http://www.rollingstone.fr/david-bowie-par-mick-rock/>
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INDEX

Subjects: Photography

Mots-clés: David Bowie, Life on Mars, photographie, les années 1970, musique glam rock

Keywords: David Bowie, Life on Mars, photography, 1970s, glam rock music

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Recensions

François Laroque, *Dictionnaire amoureux de Shakespeare*

Raphaëlle Costa de Beaugard

RÉFÉRENCE

Laroque, François, *Dictionnaire amoureux de Shakespeare* (Paris : Plon, 2016), 918 p, ISBN 9 782259 227698

- 1 Le *Dictionnaire amoureux de Shakespeare* de François Laroque est l'œuvre d'un éminent spécialiste nous invitant à partager son érudition autant que les joies d'un savoir toujours renouvelé. L'entreprise est périlleuse car il s'agit d'utiliser le format du dictionnaire, peut-être dans la tradition des Encyclopédistes dont l'ambition était de faire partager le savoir par le plus grand nombre, mais dont aujourd'hui en 2016 la connotation est savante davantage que divertissante. Par ailleurs, on pourra objecter que le champ de l'amour relève de l'expérience subjective et chaque lecteur pourra ainsi aimer ou ne pas aimer certaines rubriques. Cependant c'est l'œuvre de Shakespeare qu'il s'agit d'aimer et de nous faire aimer grâce à cet ouvrage volumineux (918 pages) qui relève de l'anthologie, voire du morceau choisi (371 entrées). L'auteur use de l'art de la poésie, de l'humour, autant que de perspectives s'ouvrant sur les horizons illimités de l'érudition afin de rendre chaque rubrique aussi intéressante et variée que possible. D'amusantes vignettes que l'on doit à Alain Bouldouyre ponctuent ces variations sur le thème de la promenade littéraire de gravures évoquant les éditions populaires du 19^e siècle – c'est-à-dire sans cadre, et s'intégrant ainsi à la typographie de la mise en page. Cependant chaque nouvelle lettre de l'abécédaire fait l'objet d'une calligraphie dans un style ouvertement Renaissance : encadrement carré, fond grisé de hachures, lettre romaine blanche, et feuille d'acanthe parfois agrémentée d'un personnage, à la manière des livres d'emblèmes.
- 2 La promenade littéraire nous réserve les surprises du vagabondage, dont nous citerons pour exemple la lettre C. 'Cérémonies', 'chansons', 'chanson funèbre', 'charivari', en se succédant, nous font croire qu'il s'agit d'une sélection autour d'un thème qui serait

celui de la fête, d'ailleurs également abordé à la lettre 'F'. C'est donc grâce aux aléas de l'abécédaire que l'on doit de s'extirper de cette thématique pour recouvrer notre liberté de flâneur avec 'chaudron', ou encore 'cheval' après un détour par Patrice Chéreau et la mise en scène contemporaine. L'article 'cheval' comporte quatre longs extraits dont on doit la traduction française — ainsi que toutes les autres traductions de cet ouvrage — à l'auteur François Laroque. Grâce au 'cheval' nous chevauchons, si l'on nous permet ce jeu de mots, des textes variés tels que Richard II destitué et emprisonné s'affligeant du portrait de son cheval Barbarie soumis à Bolingbroke, Henry V et le Dauphin de France cherchant à se ridiculiser à la manière de chevaliers s'affrontant en lisse, ou encore *La Comédie des Erreurs* et autres scènes burlesques telles que celle du fou qui, pour amuser le Roi Lear, évoque celui qui par bonté pour son cheval, lui beurrerait son foin. Ainsi l'icône 'cheval', synecdoque de situations imaginaires faite d'un véritable cheval sur scène, nous fait voyager du burlesque à l'épique, comme autant de portraits de la variété de la nature humaine. Cette entrée du Dictionnaire amoureux donne en filigrane une image de la variété des styles utilisés par Shakespeare, tout comme de la variété de son public, le cheval faisant l'objet d'une sublimation héroïque dans le langage de la chevalerie tout en offrant pléthore de détournements de sens dans les vifs dialogues échangés par les personnages.

- 3 Il s'agit néanmoins bel et bien d'un dictionnaire où le lecteur comme la lectrice pourront acquérir de solides connaissances, tant en Histoire avec des entrées telles que 'chronologie', 'calendrier', 'carrière', ou encore 'géographie', 'cartes', 'lois' (14 pages), 'musique' (10 pages) qu'en 'lieux communs' de 'l'honnête homme' tels que 'cruauté', 'folie', 'corps', 'ivresse', 'rêve', 'femme' et enfin, 'amour'. C'est ainsi que l'on s'intéressera également à la collection de médaillons nous offrant des portraits de personnages qui ont traversé la culture occidentale au point d'entrer dans le langage courant par antonomase, tel que Shylock.
- 4 Il en va de même avec les entrées consacrées à des auteurs dont l'aura nous est parvenue intacte tout autant que celle de Shakespeare lui-même, et qui ont à leur manière cru nécessaire de se positionner par rapport au dramaturge comme au poète. C'est ainsi que ce dictionnaire comporte des noms de philosophes, essayistes ou dramaturges ayant eu recours à ce procédé tels que Ben Jonson, puis Dryden, et enfin Goethe, T.S. Eliot, et plus près de nous, Albert Camus. L'œuvre du dramaturge a également inspiré des transpositions dans les autres arts, comme nous le rappelle l'oxymore 'dictionnaire amoureux': on pense à des compositeurs d'opéra tels que Hector Berlioz et Giuseppe Verdi, ou encore à des cinéastes, français d'abord, parmi lesquels André Cayatte, Marcel Carné, voire Hollywoodiens, tels que Joseph Mankiewicz, et enfin à notre contemporain Kenneth Branagh. Les metteurs en scène ont bien entendu joué un rôle semblable en s'essayant à une interprétation du texte canonique où leur érudition autant que leur talent artistique pouvaient se révéler au grand public, tels que David Garrick, Jean-François Ducis, ou plus près de nous Laurence Olivier, Peter Brook, sans oublier les traducteurs en langue française : François Victor Hugo, et de nos jours Jean-Michel Déprats, sans qui ces représentations n'auraient pas été possibles en France.
- 5 Pour conclure, ce *Dictionnaire amoureux de Shakespeare* nous sera utile comme outil de connaissance tout en nous divertissant aux détours d'une promenade par monts et par vaux, au gré des aléas de ce qui constitue un 'jeu de lettres' autant qu'un jeu sur les lettres.

INDEX

Mots-clés : dictionnaire, William Shakespeare, théâtre, Elisabéthain, poésie, tragédie, comédie, romanesque, Histoire, critique moderne, lettres

Keywords : dictionary, William Shakespeare, drama, Early Modern England (Elizabethan), poetry, tragedy, comedy, romance, History, modern criticism, letters

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Henri Durel, *Francis Bacon et l'affirmation d'une science nouvelle en Angleterre*

Claire Guéron

RÉFÉRENCE

Durel, Henri, *Francis Bacon et l'affirmation d'une science nouvelle en Angleterre*, Clermont-Ferrand, Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2016, 267 pages, ISBN : 10 2-84516-722-9

- 1 Comme l'indique le terme d'« affirmation » contenu dans le titre, cet ouvrage s'intéresse à l'activité épistémologique plutôt qu'à l'activité scientifique de Francis Bacon. Avec cette distinction en tête, Henri Durel cherche dans ce traité à rendre compte d'un paradoxe et à dissiper un malentendu. Le paradoxe réside dans le fait que Francis Bacon, reconnu d'abord par la Royal Society puis par la communauté scientifique au sens large comme « le père de la science moderne », n'a jamais rien découvert, ni jamais rien inventé. Quant au malentendu, qui persiste en particulier en France à cause de l'influence de l'Encyclopédie des Lumières, c'est celui qui fait de Bacon le pourfendeur de l'obscurantisme religieux dans son élaboration d'une science moderne. Ces deux objectifs conduisent l'auteur à analyser l'œuvre de Bacon comme un dialogue permanent avec les Écritures et avec la logique aristotélicienne. Tout au long de cette étude, Durel s'évertuera à démontrer que Bacon a posé les jalons d'une science nouvelle en dissociant savoir profane et savoir religieux, tout en affirmant vigoureusement la primauté de la connaissance révélée sur la connaissance issue de l'activité humaine. Cette rupture épistémologique lui permettra d'affirmer que le champ de la connaissance humaine est infini sans s'exposer à l'accusation d'impiété. Mais si cette approche ouvre la voie à l'envol des sciences expérimentales, Bacon, faute d'outils méthodologiques et d'instruments de mesure adéquats, n'a pas lui-même été capable de percer les secrets de la nature, c'est à dire de mettre à jour les lois physiques qui s'y manifestent.

- 2 Henri Durel consacre les trois premiers chapitres de l'ouvrage aux études suivies par Bacon à l'université de Cambridge, et aux conséquences de cet apprentissage sur sa pensée. A l'époque où les écrits d'Aristote dominent le cursus universitaire et même les écrits des théologiens, Bacon expose les limites de la dialectique aristotélicienne, mode de raisonnement replié sur lui-même, sans prise avec la nature. Il rejette de la même manière les *Sommes* de la théologie médiévale visant à faire la synthèse du christianisme et de la logique aristotélicienne pour aboutir à une science unique et englobante. Dans *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), Bacon pose le principe de base de la « dichotomie absolue entre la philosophie divine (...) et la théologie révélée » (p.55). C'est ce principe émancipateur qui permettra à la science nouvelle de se déployer.
- 3 Dans le quatrième chapitre, intitulé « Bacon promoteur de la botanique en Angleterre », Durel nous montre un Bacon tournant le dos à l'abstraction aristotélicienne pour se confronter à l'expérience pratique du terrain. Les observations qu'il fait alors des techniques de greffe et de pollinisation artificielle l'amènent à constater la possibilité d'une symbiose entre technique et nature, et donc à rejeter l'opposition aristotélicienne entre le naturel et l'artificiel. Outre qu'il consacre la rupture entre science expérimentale et logique aristotélicienne, cet intérêt pour la botanique renforce chez Bacon l'idée d'une caution divine accordée à la curiosité humaine : « la posture du botaniste agenouillé devant le végétal [ne rappelle-t-elle pas] celle du chrétien devant le créateur »? (p.70).
- 4 C'est cette caution divine que Bacon va s'attacher à démontrer dans ses écrits, tout particulièrement dans *The Advancement of Learning* et sa version latine augmentée, *De Dignitate et Augmentis Scientiarum* (1623). Henri Durel consacre les chapitres 5 à 11 de son traité à la défense du savoir humain à laquelle se livre Bacon, Écritures à l'appui. L'auteur montre en effet que Bacon réussit le tour de force consistant à puiser dans la Bible, dont le livre de la Genèse semble pourtant établir clairement le caractère illicite de la curiosité humaine, les arguments de son plaidoyer en faveur de la recherche scientifique. En confrontant les différentes Bibles en circulation au début du dix-septième siècle, principalement la Vulgate, la Bible de Genève et la Bible des Évêques (pourtant hostile au savoir), et en retenant dans chacune d'elles les tournures qui abondent dans son sens, Bacon cherche à prouver que les Écritures n'interdisent en aucune façon, et même encouragent, la recherche de la connaissance. Tout en soulignant le caractère peu scientifique de la démarche consistant à ne retenir dans un échantillon que les résultats conformes à l'hypothèse de départ, Durel fait admirer l'exhaustivité et la minutie de ce travail philologique et herméneutique.
- 5 Les chapitres 12 à 14 reviennent sur l'idée de progrès. Durel montre que Bacon met la lacune au centre de son argumentation, le progrès étant avant tout conçu comme le fait de combler un vide. Ce progrès serait rendu possible, et même quasi-inévitable, par la structure de l'esprit humain, formaté par Dieu pour recevoir la connaissance du monde créé dont il est le miroir. A cet égard, Bacon anticipe la philosophie transcendantale de Kant, avec ses formes *a priori* de la sensibilité (perception). On retiendra de ces chapitres le formidable optimisme de Bacon pour qui la science permettra à l'homme de renouer avec la connaissance intuitive des choses que possédait Adam avant la chute.
- 6 Le dernier chapitre, intitulé « Bacon n'est pas le fondateur de la science moderne en Grande-Bretagne : pourquoi? » revient sur les limites de l'approche baconienne, dont il a brièvement été question au début de l'ouvrage. Durel identifie deux obstacles

principaux à l'évolution de la pensée baconienne vers une véritable méthode scientifique. En premier lieu, l'induction, processus permettant de remonter à la cause à partir de l'observation de ses effets, reste chez Bacon inféodée à la logique aristotélicienne, car elle est centrée sur la forme, c'est à dire les concepts, plutôt que sur la recherche des lois qui régissent les phénomènes naturels. Durel explique en partie cette faillite par un deuxième obstacle, à savoir la méconnaissance des mathématiques, que Bacon a très peu étudiées. Ainsi, Bacon, qui ignore tout du repère orthonormé et des équations, ne dispose pas des outils conceptuels qui lui permettraient par exemple d'établir une corrélation entre la dilatation d'un corps et sa température.

- 7 Dans ce traité méthodique et fouillé, Henri Durel développe une argumentation étayée et originale, où l'accent est mis sur les sources bibliques du plaidoyer de Bacon en faveur des sciences profanes. L'explication détaillée que donne Durel de la méthode exégétique du philosophe, avec de nombreux tableaux à l'appui, peut surprendre par son côté systématique, qui rappelle la méthodologie des sciences dures, mais cette rigueur s'avère indispensable à la compréhension d'une démarche où l'essentiel est dans les détails. L'exemple du verset de la Genèse où il est question de l'inimitié entre Ève et le Serpent (Gn.3.15) est probant. Durel commence par citer un passage de *The Advancement of Learning* où Bacon résume (pour ensuite mieux les réfuter) les arguments des théologiens hostiles au savoir : « le savoir a en lui quelque chose du Serpent, et donc [...] là où il entre dans un homme, il le fait enfler; *scientia inflat* » (p. 112). Durel fait remarquer que cette formulation n'est pas conforme à la Vulgate, où il n'est jamais question de la morsure du serpent, mais seulement du « piège » qu'il tend aux enfants d'Ève. Ce décalage peut sembler anodin au lecteur, et ne pas justifier les douze pages de commentaire qui suivent, où l'auteur rapporte sa longue quête de la source de la citation (une note marginale dans la Bible de Genève). Mais on comprendra plus loin l'importance de ce passage : le « gonflement » associé à la morsure du serpent permet en effet à Bacon de passer de l'idée d'arrogance humaine à celle de plénitude ou de croissance, et ainsi de justifier le progrès.
- 8 Henri Durel réussit donc son pari, en montrant que la foi chrétienne de Bacon sert de fondement à son engagement en faveur de la science profane, mais aussi que des lacunes en mathématiques empêchent le philosophe anglais d'être lui-même l'orfèvre de cette science. En lisant cet essai, le lecteur ne peut qu'apprécier l'effort de pédagogie déployé par l'auteur, qui, à l'aide de tableaux, de métaphores simples et de mises au point ponctuelles, parvient à rendre son exposé accessible, sans pour autant trahir la complexité de la pensée de Bacon. Si ce souci d'intelligibilité entraîne quelques redites, celles-ci ont l'avantage de faire apparaître clairement les idées-forces du propos. Dans ce traité érudit et rigoureux, Henri Durel fait découvrir au lecteur un Bacon audacieux et novateur mais, malgré son dégoût pour les « idoles » de la pensée reçue, respectueux des textes sacrés. Si ces qualités peuvent paraître contradictoires à notre époque, toute la force de cet ouvrage réside dans l'habileté de l'auteur à démontrer la grande cohérence de la pensée de cette figure fondatrice de la science moderne.

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INDEX

Mots-clés : science, épistémologie, botanique, nature, mathématiques, religion, foi, Bible, théologie, progrès

Keywords : science, epistemology, botany, nature, mathematics, religion, faith, Bible, theology, progress

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Guillemette Bolens, *L'Humour et le savoir des corps. Don Quichotte, Tristram Shandy et le rire du lecteur*

Hélène Dachez

RÉFÉRENCE

Bolens, Guillemette, *L'Humour et le savoir des corps. Don Quichotte, Tristram Shandy et le rire du lecteur* (Rennes : Presses Universitaires de Rennes, Collection « Interférences », 2016), 175 p, ISBN : 978-2-7535-4867-1

- 1 Cet ouvrage est intéressant et original dans la démarche qu'il adopte : étudier des scènes tirées de *Don Quichotte* et de *Tristram Shandy* à partir de deux pistes d'analyse, celles du tonus et du tempo, « intégrées à des perspectives narratologiques, cognitives et sociohistoriques » (11). Kinésique, kinesthésique et kinétique sont convoquées à bon escient. Le plan est limpide : après une longue introduction (9-46) viennent deux chapitres, le premier consacré à « *Don Quichotte* et le tonus corporel » (47-106), le second traitant de « *Tristram Shandy* et le tempo narratif » (107-52)—des comparaisons plus fréquentes et plus fouillées entre les deux œuvres auraient été bienvenues.
- 2 L'introduction, très théorique par endroits, pose la question de la perception de l'humour des gestes, que nous percevons grâce à notre intelligence kinésique (elle « relève d'un savoir qui concerne la sensorimotricité, soit notre capacité à percevoir, sentir, bouger et agir » [9]). L'auteur définit très clairement le but de son ouvrage : « développer une méthode d'analyse qui porte attention à la dimension hypertextuelle d'un humour ancré dans notre savoir sensorimoteur » (13). L'hypertextualité (entendue comme l'influence généalogique qui marque ces textes et qu'eux-mêmes exercent sur les textes suivants) accentue la perception que le lecteur a de l'humour, et l'auteur explique que, pour rendre compte des mécanismes qui provoquent le rire, elle a recours aussi bien aux microanalyses kinésiques qu'à une mise en contexte sociale et historique des deux œuvres sélectionnées, méthode claire et séduisante. L'humour

sollicite la compréhension de la part du lecteur ; il fait appel à son esprit critique et à son intelligence dynamique ; il favorise une pensée libérée de tout conformisme *a priori*. Le propos bénéficie des travaux de psychologues et de psychomotriciens qui aident le lecteur à bien cerner les notions de tonus (ou de variations toniques) et de tempo (ainsi que leur corrélation). Par la « simulation perceptive » (25) propre à chaque lecteur, celui-ci perçoit de manière dynamique l'humour des expressions et des textes, dans la mesure où l' « humour fonctionne par le travail de la langue en lien avec son impact cognitif et son contexte culturel » (26). L'ancrage dans les théories médicales des XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles est très appréciable, notamment lorsque G. Bolens exploite les liens tissés entre l'humour (doté d'un pouvoir thérapeutique) et les théories (fictionnelles) des humeurs et des esprits animaux, mises en lumière notamment par Burton et par Locke. Elle démontre en outre comment « à l'acte d'écriture répond [...] l'acte de lecture » (28). L'ouvrage propose une excellente microlecture de la scène de *Tristram Shandy* où Phutatorius reçoit une châtaigne chaude dans ses hauts-de-chausses (35-39). Est étudiée avec beaucoup de finesse l'accélération du tempo et du rythme dans le texte de Sterne, qui se démarque ainsi des discours de Burton et de Locke sur les esprits animaux et qui provoque le rire du lecteur. L'auteur examine ensuite comment l'humour shandéen repose sur l'exhibition de l'énonciation et de la fictionalité du texte, notamment par l'emploi de l'aposiopèse et du tiret (chez Cervantès, il s'agit de la métalepse et de la suspension narrative), figures rhétoriques qui, ainsi que la métaphore, « opèrent cognitivement en provoquant des simulations perceptives qui concernent une modification du tonus par un changement de tempo » (45).

- 3 Dans le premier chapitre (« *Don Quichotte* et le tonus corporel », 47-106), G. Bolens se penche sur l'humour kinésique contenu dans deux passages, celui de la rencontre entre l'hidalgo et le Biscaïen, et celui de la caverne de Montesinos. Elle exploite la notion de « dialogue tonique » (49) et montre que le tonus peut être « diégétique, c'est-à-dire qu'il relève de ce qui est narré » (49) et se joue entre les personnages, ou « narratif » lorsqu'il a trait à « l'élaboration narrative de la scène et de sa réception par le lecteur » (55). Les détours par *La Chanson de Roland* (hypotexte de *Don Quichotte* qui met en avant accélérations motrices et augmentations toniques lors de scènes de combat frontal qui nient tout sentiment de tragique ou d'épique) et par les ouvrages de Rabelais enrichissent le propos, qui mêle analyse kinétique (paramètres invariants) et kinésique (« *interaction perceptible* entre personnages » [54]), et où l'humour provient d'un hiatus entre le registre brutal du combat et le registre médical savant. Dans le texte de Cervantès, le lecteur rit de l'identification de Don Quichotte à une multiplicité de héros épiques et légendaires, ainsi que du traitement burlesque réservé à la lance du héros et au héros lui-même, aux antipodes des hypotextes épiques de chevalerie. L'analyse de la rencontre avec le Biscaïen souligne une augmentation maximale du tonus et illustre très clairement que l'humour dépend de la simulation sensorielle kinesthésique du lecteur, effectuée grâce à la description des « postures décalées » (62) des personnages. Le suspens de la narration, ainsi que l'insistance sur l'acte d'écriture (suspendu) participent de manière patente à l'exhibition de l'énonciation. De plus, dans *Don Quichotte*, « la littéralisation de concepts abstraits ou de formes figurales [est exploitée...] à des fins d'humour antidogmatique » (67). L'analyse de la portée de la métalepse et du rapport entre réel et fiction (dont la frontière est à la fois poreuse et visible), celle des jeux entre les différentes voix auctoriales et narratives, ainsi que celle de la dimension sociopolitique et idéologique de l'œuvre (70-73, 83-88, 101-104, notamment à travers les concepts de souillure, de pureté du sang et de propreté), de

l'instabilité créée pour le lecteur, amené à suspendre son jugement et à rejeter tout dogmatisme, est particulièrement éclairante. Est également très convaincante l'étude de la littéralisation des métaphores et de l'humour « ancré dans le kinésique » (79) dans l'épisode de la caverne de Montesinos, où l'auteur se joue de la censure de son époque. Grâce à l'analyse kinésique, le lecteur comprend combien l'auteur revendique le triomphe de la liberté.

- 4 Le second chapitre (« *Tristram Shandy* et le tempo narratif » 107-52), met quant à lui l'accent sur le tempo, tout en soulignant les liens qui unissent tempo et tonus. A partir du croisement entre kinésique et discursif dans deux scènes, G. Bolens montre comment les « manipulations oratoires [telles l'ellipse et l'aposiopèse] poussent l'interlocuteur à intervenir dans l'élaboration sémiotique du discours » (109). L'ellipse, qui donne lieu à l'humour et débouche sur le rire du lecteur, témoigne de l'engagement cognitif de celui-ci, engagement convoqué également par l'hypotypose, qui met en jeu vision, ouïe et toucher. Le tempo est examiné en lien avec les digressions, parfois hypertextuelles (Locke et Hume), qui le freinent, étirent le texte et fournissent une multitude d'informations parallèles. Les références à Rabelais, fort bienvenues, approfondissent l'analyse (123-25). L'étude de la scène du forceps, où la manière dont Sterne traite le tempo crée l'effet d'humour et invite le lecteur à faire travailler son imagination, est très réussie. G. Bolens met également bien en lumière le lien entre tempo et tonus dans son étude de la scène du désespoir de Walter Shandy, notamment grâce au jeu avec la notion d'ekphrasis, auquel participe le lecteur (139-41), dont l'activité cognitive augmente grâce aux silences textuels qu'il comble et aux références faites au jeu théâtral novateur de David Garrick, admiré par Sterne.
- 5 La conclusion (153-55) reprend les notions de dialogue tonique (aux variations multiples), d'hypertextualité et d'humour dans le contexte de la relation à autrui et de la compréhension d'autrui, questions sur lesquelles la littérature rejoint les autres formes artistiques. La bibliographie (157-70) est bien fournie et classée de manière claire ; l'index (171-75), qui mêle noms propres et notions, est utile.
- 6 On regrette que l'expression manque parfois d'élégance (« la question pour nous sera le comment de ces aléas référentiels » [111]) et que le texte soit émaillé d'expressions appartenant davantage au registre oral qu'au registre écrit (« ceci dit », « au final », « par contre », « au niveau du récit », etc.). Toutefois, cet ouvrage adopte une démarche et un angle d'approche originaux, qui mêlent de manière convaincante et novatrice les perspectives sociohistoriques, cognitives et narratologiques. La sélection des passages est pertinente et les analyses sont fouillées et convaincantes. Elles renouvellent, intensifient et complexifient la vision que le lecteur contemporain peut avoir de deux œuvres clés de la littérature européenne et constituent la force de cet ouvrage.

INDEX

Keywords : animal spirits, humor, hypotextuality, hypertextuality, kinesics, kinesthesia, kinetics, tempo, humorism, tonus, reader's laughter, sensations, suspense

Mots-clés : esprits animaux, humour, hypotextualité, hypertextualité, kinésique, kinesthésique, kinétique, tempo, théorie des humeurs, tonus, rire du lecteur, sensations, suspens

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Jean Viviès, *Revenir / Devenir. Gulliver ou l'autre voyage*

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RÉFÉRENCE

Viviès, Jean, *Revenir / Devenir. Gulliver ou l'autre voyage* (Paris : Éditions Rue d'Ulm / Presses de l'École Normale Supérieure, 2016), 142 p, ISBN : 978-2-7288-0555-6

- 1 L'ouvrage de Jean Viviès (*Revenir / Devenir. Gulliver ou l'autre voyage*) est une réussite à tous les égards : tout en replaçant le célèbre texte de Swift dans le contexte social, politique, scientifique et littéraire de son époque, l'auteur exploite la critique anglo-américaine et française, et convoque de manière très pertinente les œuvres inspirées des *Voyages de Gulliver* (notamment *Le rapport de Brodie* [1970], de Borges). Le lecteur bénéficie ainsi d'un ouvrage qui fait dialoguer substrats critique et littéraire très documentés, et qui constitue une étude fort stimulante fondée sur un angle de recherche précis et original, celui « des retours du voyageur, de son *retour comme problème* » (20).
- 2 Après une introduction qui fait le tour des questions que pose l'œuvre (le mensonge, l'affabulation, la fiction, la vraisemblance, la vérité, l'identité, le rapport à autrui, l'accès au sens, l'interprétation unique impossible) et qui définit parfaitement les enjeux de l'ouvrage, composé de six chapitres et assorti d'une belle « Bibliographie sélective » (123-33), d'une « Filmographie » (établie par Lydia Martin, 135-37), d'un « Index des noms » (139-40) et d'un « Index des lieux » (141-42), le premier chapitre (« Gulliver contre Robinson, question de genre » [21-36]), met en regard le texte de Swift et *Robinson Crusoé* de Defoe, autre figure mythique du récit de voyage, pour cerner les enjeux de leur différence et faire ressortir la spécificité des *Voyages*. Jean Viviès examine les paradoxes et les contradictions d'un paratexte fondé sur l'emboîtement des éléments qui le composent et qui n'est pas tant seuil que partie intégrante d'un récit défini comme « fiction fondée sur sa récusation » (26), qui s'apparente aux « *travel-liars* » (28). Swift crée un personnage fragmenté (tels ses quatre voyages), qui

finit par plonger dans une misanthropie extrême et dans la déraison, éloigné du personnage romanesque unifié, en train de se former au XVIIIe siècle, représenté par Robinson, dont la réadaptation ne pose aucun problème. Jean Viviès soutient de manière particulièrement intéressante que le texte de Swift n'est ni un récit de voyage, ni un anti-récit de voyage (31), mais un récit-creuset qui « se défamiliarise sans cesse et dénie à un genre unique d'être la clé de sa lecture » (31). Sont questionnées les normes littéraires et la notion même de classification. Jean Viviès analyse comment, grâce à la parodie de leurs caractéristiques naissantes, le lecteur est mis en garde contre les récits à la première personne (notamment le roman [« *novel* »], où le personnage, grâce à l'expérience qu'il acquiert, finit par atteindre la connaissance et la sagesse) et contre le monde (synonyme de dégénérescence ou de corruption, et que rejette Swift), tel que le roman a commencé à le raconter. « Gulliver ne se forme pas, il se déforme » (33), dit l'auteur, avant d'ajouter : « comme lecteurs, nous sommes confrontés en même temps au paradigme et à sa mise en pièces » (34). L'instabilité générique et littéraire renvoie à une instabilité ontologique.

- 3 Le Chapitre 2 (« Espaces de Gulliver » [37-46]) traite de la géographie dans *Les Voyages*, notamment par le biais de l'étude des marqueurs de vraisemblance (cartes qui se veulent véridiques et choix de lieux tempérés). Dans des mondes familiers aux lecteurs par certains aspects, l'auteur analyse comment Swift crée l'étrangeté par les habitants, par la langue, par les mesures, si bien que « l'altérité vient [...] s'installer dans le discours » (40) et que « l'énoncé [...] intègre [l'étrangeté] comme élément hétérogène. Il se rend dès lors lui-même étrange » (40). Gulliver se met en situation de « transmetteur » (40) et le lecteur se trouve alors dans une situation d'apprentissage linguistique. Les éléments connus par le lecteur servent à mesurer l'inconnu (Swift situe les endroits visités par Gulliver dans des zones inconnues et intègre des références invraisemblables à la latitude et à la longitude, pas encore établie avec certitude) et le variable, représenté par l'homme.
- 4 Dans le Chapitre 3 (« Détours, retours » [47-68]), Jean Viviès traite des retours de Gulliver de manière chronologique. Il étudie comment Swift exploite de manière comique la relativité des dimensions et propose une réflexion sur la représentation de la « dimension physique de la relation au monde » (49). La satire repose sur la dialectique du général et du particulier. Comparant les retours, Jean Viviès analyse la perte des repères conventionnels et le changement de situation de Gulliver dans le second voyage. Se pose la question de la survie du personnage, dont l'humanité est questionnée (la petitesse peut être aussi bien physique que morale), si bien que les lecteurs, à l'instar du personnage dont ils se distancient, se trouvent désorientés. Dans le troisième voyage, la satire devient « intellectuelle et épistémologique » (57). A la faveur de l'exploration de plusieurs îles, le récit fragmenté se fait itinérance et Gulliver revêt la fonction d'un « témoin ou d'un porte-parole satirique » (58) qui parodie le style des *Philosophical Transactions* de la Royal Society et dénonce les expériences absurdes et contre nature. Dans le dernier voyage, l'interprétation s'offre d'emblée métaphorique, et le sujet est placé au centre du propos. Jean Viviès étudie comment Swift, en réservant des retours de plus en plus sombres à un personnage caractérisé par l'aliénation de soi, par le refus de l'autre (dont sa propre épouse) et par la déraison, prend le roman (« *novel* ») à rebours.
- 5 Le chapitre 4 (« Voyage au bout de l'inouï » [69-83]) offre une lecture particulièrement originale du personnage de Don Pedro, personnage paradoxal dont la générosité, la

compassion et la véracité méritent d'être questionnées. Sa fonction d'« auditeur / lecteur » (75) est remarquablement analysée par l'auteur, pour qui le capitaine portugais est un « agent d'euphémisation du récit de Gulliver » (75). En faisant référence aux analyses de George Orwell, Jean Viviès montre en outre comment le texte de Swift anticipe l'idéologie nazie exterminatrice et le totalitarisme du XXe siècle, où l'ordre commande au libre arbitre de l'individu, où la pensée unique domine, et où civilisation et barbarie se mêlent.

- 6 Le chapitre 5 (85-100) est consacré à l'étude de « La figure de Gulliver », « plus narrateur que personnage, plus raconteur qu'acteur » (85). La notion de fragmentation générique mentionnée auparavant est reprise et complétée par l'étude de la dislocation psychologique de Gulliver, qui pose la question de la crédibilité du narrateur, être (humien ou pascalien) dépourvu « d'identité personnelle homogène ou cohérente » (91). Le personnage de Swift se différencie ainsi de manière radicale des narrateurs à la première personne du roman naissant, dans un discours qui « fonctionne moins comme information que comme symptôme » (92). Se pose alors la question de la folie de Gulliver (personnage inclassable qui perturbe les catégories définies par les Houyhnhnm), qui ne saurait donner lieu à une interprétation univoque et définitive.
- 7 Le chapitre 6, intitulé « Le cinquième voyage » (101-12), propose un détour par *L'Odyssée* de Homère : si les deux textes mêlent imaginaire et réalité, et personnages à la fois centripètes et centrifuges, les retours, placés sous le signe de la plénitude dans le cas d'Ulysse et sous celui de la déraison dans le cas de Gulliver, s'opposent, du moins en apparence, car la plénitude d'Ulysse sera malmenée par les commentateurs et les personnages inspirés du héros de Homère. Jean Viviès envisage alors de manière brillante l'hypothèse selon laquelle Gulliver aurait tout inventé, les territoires visités n'étant autres que son moi, « son *I-land* » (106). L'insularité de la structure de l'œuvre se retrouve à tous les niveaux (thématique, narratif, esthétique, identitaire) du texte de Swift qui postule aussi le voyage du lecteur.
- 8 Dans sa conclusion (« Une 'Histoire philosophique' » [113-21]), l'auteur montre comment *Les Voyages de Gulliver* mettent en jeu les divers sens de *history* (observation des faits, récit et Histoire), et proposent une « histoire philosophique », qui prend l'homme pour objet de réflexion, s'adresse à un lecteur philosophe, bouleverse les catégories traditionnelles, thématise l'écriture et nie toute idée de stabilité et de finitude.
- 9 Par l'originalité de la perspective adoptée, par les très nombreuses références qui l'enrichissent et par la force et la finesse de ses analyses, l'ensemble de ce magnifique ouvrage, dense et stimulant, offre une réponse brillante à la question posée au seuil de l'Introduction : « Comment parler de Gulliver après tant d'autres ? ».
- 10 Cet ouvrage a reçu en octobre 2016 le prix SELVA.

INDEX

Mots-clés : récit de voyage, roman, imaginaire, fiction et mensonge, vraisemblance et vérité, identité, altérité, retour, déraison, norme, classification, instabilité, satire, fragmentation

Keywords : travel narrative, novel, imagination, fiction and lie, verisimilitude and truth, identity, otherness, return, insanity, norm, classification, instability, satire, fragmentation

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John Gay, *Trivia et autres vues urbaines*

Xavier Cervantès

RÉFÉRENCE

Gay, John, *Trivia et autres vues urbaines*, trad. et éd. Jacques Carré, Paris, Classiques Garnier (collection « Littératures du monde »), 2016, 354 pages, ISBN : 978-2-8124-4576-7

- 1 Jacques Carré propose dans cet ouvrage une traduction (avec texte original en regard) de divers opuscules poétiques (ainsi que de la « farce tragi-comique » *The Mohocks*) écrits par John Gay dans sa première phase de création, entre 1712 et 1725, soit plus ou moins longtemps avant l'œuvre à laquelle il doit l'essentiel de sa gloire littéraire aujourd'hui, *The Beggar's Opera* (1728). Cette traduction, annotée et assortie d'une copieuse introduction de près de cinquante pages ainsi que d'une bibliographie et d'un index, est la toute première dans notre langue, ce qui permet d'approfondir notre connaissance d'un auteur dont la production est trop souvent réduite essentiellement à un unique chef-d'œuvre occultant ses autres opus. Elle ne hisse certes pas Gay au même rang que les deux grandes figures de la poésie du premier 18^{ème} siècle que sont Pope et Swift, mais rappelle utilement son importance au Parnasse de l'époque dite augustéenne.
- 2 Le fil rouge qui parcourt cette anthologie est, comme son titre le suggère, le portrait que brosse Gay de Londres, métropole tentaculaire et chaotique au sein de laquelle le brassage social est de rigueur, où le marquis côtoie le vide-gousset et la fille de joie, où la fange et les odeurs nauséabondes sont omniprésentes, tout autant que le risque d'une rencontre malheureuse à un carrefour (sous l'égide de la déesse romaine Trivia, qui donne son nom à la pièce maîtresse de l'anthologie). Cette thématique permet de réunir ces instantanés de la vie métropolitaine que sont *Trivia : or, The Art of Walking the Streets of London*, quatre « town eclogues », la farce mentionnée précédemment, deux épîtres et deux autres opuscules mineurs.

- 3 L'introduction, dense quoique d'une lecture toujours aisée, est un modèle du genre. Le traducteur y présente et contextualise chacune des pièces sélectionnées et, surtout, en s'appuyant sur des études récentes ou plus anciennes, propose plusieurs pistes exégétiques possibles et cumulables entre elles. Ces clefs de lecture variées mettent bien en exergue la richesse et la polyvalence des textes de Gay, aussi légers, anecdotiques voire ... triviaux qu'ils puissent paraître parfois. Au-delà de la simple et évidente satire de la société et des mœurs de son temps (principalement satire de la consommation effrénée, du luxe et de la décadence morale de la nation et en particulier de son élite sociale), il apparaît clairement que d'autres clefs de lecture peuvent être utilisées pour mettre au jour toutes les facettes des textes réunis. C'est ainsi que la piste biographique n'est pas négligée (les rapports ambivalents et parfois houleux de l'écrivain avec l'univers du mécénat littéraire et celui des imprimeurs et du marché de l'édition, en particulier), de même que sont proposés divers éléments de contextualisation sociale et économique très éclairants.
- 4 Est aussi proposée la piste génétique : les différents textes du recueil contiennent en effet de nombreux jeux référentiels avec la tradition latine (Horace, Ovide, Virgile ou Juvénal) ; est ainsi décliné tout un vaste éventail de possibilités, de l'emprunt ou de la citation à l'adaptation en vue de la création d'un genre poétique nouveau (les « town eclogues »), en passant par l'imitation ou encore le pastiche. Le dialogue avec le canon classique et ses grands genres poétiques (épître, épopée et surtout pastorale), via les modernes (Milton, Dryden, Swift ou Pope), s'avère particulièrement fécond et confère une épaisseur intertextuelle parfois inattendue aux textes sélectionnés.
- 5 Les possibilités interprétatives sont donc multiples et le traducteur a la modestie de les évoquer toutes sans en privilégier ni en imposer aucune en particulier (il en va de même en ce qui concerne les intentions et convictions de l'auteur, souvent ambivalentes, voire contradictoires). En replaçant l'écriture de Gay dans le contexte de l'esthétique rococo alors naissante et en rapprochant ses tableautins de la vie londonienne des peintures ou gravures de Hogarth ou de Marcellus Laroon, ce dernier instaure par ailleurs un dialogue intersémiotique très évocateur entre littérature et culture visuelle.
- 6 La traduction elle-même est satisfaisante et fluide. Loin des « belles infidèles » du 18^{ème} siècle, elle est précise et scrupuleuse, tout en restant alerte. Jacques Carré semble avoir apporté une attention particulière à bien rendre, au sein de chaque pièce, le mélange parfois surprenant de plusieurs tonalités disparates, du sérieux au burlesque en passant par l'héroï-comique. L'équilibre entre l'imitation du style d'époque et des touches résolument plus moderne est soigneusement maintenu.

INDEX

Keywords : 18th-century poetry, London, satire, neo-classicism, literary patronage

Mots-clés : poésie du 18ème siècle, Londres, satire, néo-classicisme, mécénat littéraire

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Pierre Morère, *Sens et sensibilité : pensée et poésie dans la Grande-Bretagne des Lumières*

Marc Porée

RÉFÉRENCE

Morère, Pierre, *Sens et sensibilité : pensée et poésie dans la Grande-Bretagne des Lumières* (Lyon : Presses universitaires de Lyon, coédition ELLUG-PUL, collection « Esthétique et représentation : monde anglophone, (1750-1900) », 2015), 340 p, ISBN-13 : 978-2-7297-0895-5

- 1 Il faut savoir gré à Pierre Morère, professeur émérite à l'Université Stendhal-Grenoble 3, de nous rappeler avec force quelques évidences oubliées. Non, le dix-huitième siècle britannique ne fut pas le seul siècle des romanciers. Il fut aussi le siècle des poètes, et des grands poètes, par dessus le marché : Pope, Cowper, Thomson, mais encore Smart, Rochester, Young, Blake, Beattie (dont Morère est un grand spécialiste), et bien sûr William Wordsworth, sur la fin de la période. Son ouvrage, sobrement intitulé *Sens et sensibilité*, entreprend une réhabilitation en bonne et due forme des conceptions et des réalisations poétiques d'un siècle présenté à tort comme hostile à la poésie. Il n'en fut bien sûr rien. De surcroît, et là encore notre gratitude envers lui est grande, Morère s'efforce de rétablir dans ses droits ce qui est ordinairement présenté, au mieux ou au pire, c'est selon, comme relevant d'un seul préfixe opportun : le *pré* de pré-romantisme. Ne voulant pas céder à la tentation téléologique qui préside souvent aux histoires de la littérature, laquelle gauchit la perspective en la subordonnant à un devenir perçu a posteriori comme inéluctable, Morère refuse d'escamoter tout le long amont du romantisme, au motif qu'il n'aurait existé que pour mieux (s') y préparer, pour en être le « Prélude ».
- 2 Rien de tel ici ; la poésie du dix-huitième siècle anglais ne fut ni une antichambre ni même un long vestibule, tout au plus un « sofa » sur lequel elle se sera étendue, et

encore, jamais mollement, mais plutôt ardemment et conceptuellement, le plus souvent. Venue de loin, nourrie de son fonds propre, elle n'aura pas été propédeutique ni même liminaire, sauf en toute fin de parcours, avec les *Ballades lyriques* de Wordsworth et de Coleridge. Non, elle fut pleinement elle-même, existant à part entière, sans rien d'ancillaire ni de subordonné, et c'est d'un regard dépouillé de toute perspective cavalière, et a fortiori fuyante ou dépravée, que Morère envisage les liens unissant la pensée des Lumières et la poésie, faisant de cette dernière la résultante d'une dialectique, autant bien tempérée que bien trempée, entre foi et ferveur, tempérance et excès, réalisme et imagination, réalité et rêve, réel et surréel. Non, encore, elle ne fut pas placide ou complaisamment ordonnée : Morère souligne, à l'occasion, les désordres, les sources d'aliénation ou d'angoisse, les questions sur le mystère de l'au-delà restées sans réponses.

- 3 Divisant son riche matériau en deux plans — le plan des « prolégomènes », conceptuels suivi du plan des « phénomènes » pour adopter le vocabulaire philosophique d'un Emmanuel Kant —, Morère en profite pour batailler contre le classicisme français, et les Lumières françaises (encore que leurs philosophes soient assez peu convoqués). Avisé autant que perspicace, il pointe la montée en puissance du sensualisme, tout en ne cachant rien de ses limites, ni des intuitions supra-sensorielles qui se firent jour chez les poètes, plus souvent qu'à leur tour, d'ailleurs.
- 4 Sans le dire ouvertement, encore, Morère ambitionne, après d'autres, de corriger le strabisme divergent d'un T.S. Eliot, quand ce dernier pointait la soi-disant funeste *dissociation of sensibility* survenue après Milton, à l'origine d'une impossibilité pour les poètes postérieurs de penser et de sentir *simultanément*. C'est au contraire une sensibilité unifiée, pleinement réconciliée, à l'unisson, qu'il nous présente, par le prisme de laquelle, assurément, les poètes surent penser et sentir *in the same breath*. Autre redressement ou correctif : le primat du sensible, dont Morère entreprend de remotiver les potentialités poétiques. Et s'il ne parle pas, *stricto sensu*, de « partage du sensible », pour reprendre les termes de Jacques Rancière, il n'en omet pas moins de relever toutes les implications, pour les lecteurs de poésie, d'une telle orientation. En définitive, c'est par un chiasme parfait qu'il cadre son propos : la poésie des Lumières sera passée d'un empirisme ouvert et d'un sensualisme étroit à un sensualisme ouvert prenant le pas sur un « empirisme restrictif » (p. 308). Soit les trois moments d'une dialectique ainsi résumée : « une première phase normative encore inspirée des classiques, une étape réceptive fondée sur les données du sensualisme, et une amorce de synthèse entre création et réception énoncée dans les préfaces des *Lyrical Ballads* » (p. 306).
- 5 On le voit, la démarche est celle d'un chercheur, qui s'emploie à placer sa démarche sous le signe, précisément, d'une « recherche » (bien plus que d'une quête). L'influence de la philosophie du temps, avec ses nombreuses *Enquiries*, y est pour beaucoup. « Une poétique de la recherche », nous est-il dit en quatrième de couverture : procédant avec méthode et détermination — *deliberately*, aurait dit Samuel Johnson, le « Great Cham » — Morère développe son programme, lequel suit très exactement l'ordre des mots avancés dans son titre et son sous-titre, à savoir « sens et sensibilité », d'une part, « pensée et poésie » de l'autre. Où l'on comprend que la pensée précède la poésie, tout en lui étant étroitement associée. C'est donc principalement en historien des idées que Morère analyse l'effervescence intellectuelle du temps, laquelle s'exprime en autant de « mécanismes mentaux », lesquels s'avèrent déterminants pour expliquer en quoi ils

« ouvrent aux poètes les voies du sensible » (p. 11) ; sont ainsi passés en revue les philosophes et les penseurs, de Locke à Hume, en passant par Berkeley, Shaftesbury, Adam Smith et Burke. Locke s’y taille la part du lion, à juste titre, mais le scepticisme de Hume n’est pas absent du propos, pas plus que son relativisme, qui revient à situer le goût dans la sphère du purement subjectif ; c’est même sa sociologie de l’esthétique qui permet de mettre en avant « le contexte dans lequel les arts peuvent s’épanouir, c’est-à-dire une dialectique du beau et de l’utile » (p. 287).

- 6 Tout en accordant la priorité aux systèmes de pensée, Morère n’en oublie pas de prendre en charge des objets plus transversaux, tels que la pensée du bonheur, thème central de la pensée des Lumières, la pensée de la nature, de l’élan vital (voir la confiance placée par Pope dans les instincts, dont Morère nous rappelle combien elle s’explique, malgré son caractère « inattendu »), la pensée de l’homme, dont *l’Essay on Man* du même Pope est un sommet auquel sont consacrées une bonne trentaine de pages denses et éclairantes. Aux côtés de la pensée du relatif, la question du théisme, tout aussi centrale, est traitée de la plus convaincante des manières. Reste la pensée de la poésie, ou à tout le moins du poétique, que Morère aborde sous ses angles essentiellement critique et théorique. « Le poème est-il déterminé par le paradigme du sens ou par la réalité empirique, écrasante, de la sensibilité ? » (p. 13) ; « en quoi l’œuvre versifiée est-elle de nature transcendante ? » (p. 13). Telles sont les deux interrogations majeures qui traversent le livre, et c’est à la lumière des réponses qui leur furent apportées que Morère se fait fort de recontextualiser ce qu’il nomme le « site du poétique » (p. 13).
- 7 Plus précisément, Pierre Morère se veut à la recherche de ce qui engage la réflexion sur des voies nouvelles, lesquelles avaient en partage la connaissance des mondes extérieurs et intérieurs, tout comme l’apparition de nouvelles sources d’inspiration dans le domaine de la poésie (p. 264). Au fil des décennies, celles-ci s’affirmeront. Rétrospectivement, on y aura perçu l’absolutisation croissante du poétique et du littéraire en tant que tel, la montée en puissance de la critique comme genre à part entière, l’assomption du moi, du Logos et de la subjectivité, les émois et les transports du corps, l’ébranlement provoqué par la Révolution française — de quoi faire céder les dernières digues retenant ce qui n’était pas, à dire vrai, le siècle de la raison, mais bien celui, la distinction est de taille, celui des « sens régulés par le jugement » (p. 62). C’est dire si, pour l’exprimer autrement, le glissement progressif et résolu vers l’imagination y était dès le début inscrit en germe...
- 8 Conduit de main de maître, l’ouvrage fait toucher du doigt à chaque instant la nature particulière de la réflexion qui animait penseurs et poètes, quasiment envisagée dans ce qui en constituait le grain, et en tout cas les moindres nuances. Solidement charpentée, rédigée avec une clarté exemplaire, l’enquête fera date par sa volonté de viser l’équilibre et d’aller au fond des choses, au cœur de ce qui est perçu comme l’interpénétration, finalement heureuse, du sensible, du pensif ou du spéculatif, et du poétique. Rien n’y est bousculé, et c’est de façon en tout point mesurée que Morère procède ; il suffit de se reporter aux nombreux index, et en particulier à celui des noms propres et des œuvres, pour mesurer sur pièces la place conséquente prise, respectivement, par chacun des protagonistes du temps : les dosages y sont effectués au trébuchet, confirmant ainsi l’intuition selon laquelle penser, c’est peser, et inversement. Certes, on pourra toujours discuter de certaines attributions ou proportions : les 5 pages dévolues à Blake pèsent sans doute peu au regard des 40

dévolues à Addison ou même des 15 affectées à Thomson. Mais ce que Morère écrit des flamboiements et autres ruptures assumées par le premier sont profondément justes, même s'il fut sans l'ombre d'un doute bien davantage qu'une « exception » qui confirme la règle, et il n'y a pas grand-chose à redire de sa compréhension de la place, relative, prise par chacune des œuvres selon une perspective qui se veut contemporaine à elles.

- 9 Doté d'un sens très sûr de la formule, dont il n'abuse cependant pas, l'auteur avance avec calme et méthode et c'est tout aussi posément qu'il conclut, en ouvrant sur le dépassement des sens (déjà mis en œuvre par Blake, fera-t-on tout au plus observer) et l'aspiration à la transcendance qui seront l'apanage du romantisme. Chemin faisant, Morère n'aura rien caché du caractère à la fois proliférant et « disparate », pour ne pas dire inégal, des œuvres poétiques dont il n'aura retenu que les plus saillantes. La partialité d'un Johnson, avec son anglo-centrisme et son néo-classicisme résolument tory, n'échappe pas non plus au regard justement critique de l'auteur, dont on connaît par ailleurs le fort tropisme calédonien (à cet égard, les sections consacrées aux penseurs écossais comptent parmi les plus stimulantes du livre). C'est du reste au même Samuel Johnson que Morère a dernièrement consacré un autre ouvrage, sous la forme d'une traduction de ses *Lives of English Poets*, en collaboration avec son collègue de Grenoble, le romantiste et poéticien Denis Bonnecase.¹ On voit et on salue la cohérence du propos, qui revient à faire rimer, en toutes circonstances, critique et vérité.
- 10 Deux motifs d'étonnement, pour finir, même s'il convient d'en relativiser la portée. Jane Austen, qui prête pourtant son titre à l'ouvrage dont il a été question, n'y est jamais nommée en tant que telle. Il est vrai qu'elle ne fut ni poète ni penseuse. Quant à la belle illustration de couverture, représentant une chouette effraie, non seulement on la doit à un Français, Robert Nicolas, peintre, dessinateur et graveur de son état, mais encore ce dernier exerçait-il ses talents au XVIII^e siècle. Il fallait donc que le choix d'un « hybou de campagne », selon la graphie du temps, s'imposât impérieusement.
- 11 Point n'est besoin d'aller chercher bien loin le pourquoi d'un tel choix: emblème de la sagesse, donc de la philosophie, la chouette prend son envol au crépuscule, quand retombe l'agitation de la journée. Oiseau de nuit, sa forte et éclatante présence suggère de manière assurément subliminale que les Lumières britanniques étaient travaillées, de loin en loin, par leur envers nocturne, obscurément intérieur et rapace. L'un des grands mérites de l'ouvrage de Pierre Morère consiste, de fait, dans sa très perspicace élucidation de ce qui fut tout à la fois un besoin de sens commun et une volonté de composer avec les sens, avec le corps sensible, en privilégiant pour ce faire les voies et les moyens propres à la poésie. Quitte à ce que cette dernière, effraie décidément plus singulière que commune, s'affranchisse, *in fine*, d'un tel programme, et achève de prendre son envol, non sans avoir troqué la sensibilité contre la sensation. Mais ceci est une autre histoire...

NOTES

1. *Samuel Johnson Vies des poètes anglais*. Choix de textes, traduction et présentation de Denis Bonnecase et Pierre Morère. Paris : Librairie du Sandre, 2016.

INDEX

Mots-clés : sens, sensibilité, sensualisme, poésie, imagination, philosophie, ferveur, connaissance, néoclassicisme, lumières, esthétique

Keywords : sense, sensibility, sensualism, poetry, imagination, philosophy, fervour, knowledge, neoclassicism, enlightenment, aesthetics

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