

# LITERATURE AND PSYCHOANALYSIS



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a daigné le Message au Monde civilisé ou non*” (1959),  
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**ON**

**LITERATURE AND PSYCHOANALYSIS**

Edited by **FREDERICO PEREIRA**

**Arles | France**  
**June 30 > July 5 | 2004**

**Center for the Study of Psychoanalysis and Culture (SUNY-Buffalo, USA)**  
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# Contents

<b>New psychology after 1920 is pseudo-psychology only to pseudo-intellectuals .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Patrick Brady	
<b>Memory according to Proust and to Freud .....</b>	<b>9</b>
Henk Hillenaar	
<b>The re-emergence of the concept of hysteria in women in the late 19th and early 20th century literary and artistic imagination .....</b>	<b>15</b>
Constantin Makris	
<b>Jorge Luis Borges “Funes the Memorious”: Philosophical and psychoanalytical reflections .....</b>	<b>33</b>
Edmond Wright	
<b><i>La Vie Sexuelle de Catherine M</i>: Mid-life memoir or fabulative fantasy? .....</b>	<b>43</b>
Suzette Henke	
<b>“What Do Women Want?”: Pedro Almodovar’s <i>Talk to Her</i> .....</b>	<b>49</b>
Nancy Blake	
<b>Dark mirrors, blind projections and sister trouble: Psychoanalysis and gender in Robert Siodmak’s <i>The Dark Mirror</i> .....</b>	<b>55</b>
Claudia Liebrand	
<b>Gender trouble in Thomas Mann’s early novella <i>Der kleine Herr Friedemann</i> [<i>Little Herr Friedemann</i>] .....</b>	<b>63</b>
Astrid Lange-Kirchheim	
<b>Cinematic cross-dressing: Sexual disguise vs. gender transformations .....</b>	<b>71</b>
Emily Fox-Kales	
<b>Maternal legacy in <i>Frankenstein</i> .....</b>	<b>75</b>
Dianne Hunter	
<b>Religion, age, and identity after the Holocaust .....</b>	<b>83</b>
Anne M. Wyatt-Brown	
<b>The changeling child in the mirror: Siri Hustvedt’s fiction and the uncanny .....</b>	<b>93</b>
Georgiana M. M. Colvile	
<b>Ritual murder as literary fiction: The inversion of logic or the logic of inversion? ....</b>	<b>103</b>
Marie-France Rouart	

<b>Anatomy of hatred: John Wilkes Booth, Shakespeare's Brutus, and Lincoln's murder</b> Bertram Wyatt-Brown	<b>113</b>
<b>The psychology of the terrorist based on Joseph Conrad's vision .....</b> László Halász	<b>125</b>
<b>Albert Camus' <i>The Stranger</i>: Indifference or the love of life .....</b> Rainer J. Kaus	<b>131</b>
<b>Excessive suspension of disbelief: Raymond Jean's <i>La Lectrice</i> .....</b> Sherry Lutz Zivley	<b>141</b>
<b>IN HIS OWN NAME: Jack Kerouac's <i>Satori in Paris</i> and my travels to Paris and Provence</b> Donald Vanouse	<b>145</b>
<b>Clear liquid thought: The photographs of Jim Dine .....</b> Anca Cristofovici	<b>153</b>

# P A P E R S

# New psychology after 1920 is pseudo-psychology only to pseudo-intellectuals

PATRICK BRADY (\*)

Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont revealed, in *Fashionable Nonsense* (1998), that much of what passes for brilliant among postmodern intellectuals is meaningless. However, one abuse denounced by them also infects their own work and the work of certain critics and book-reviewers in the field of psycho-criticism. This is the habit of dismissing valuable research as worthless without bothering to present any supporting arguments. Sometimes it is simply because it is ground-breaking and therefore unfamiliar. They do not even bother to face the fact that, in the case of transactional analysis and group behaviour theory, valuable new discoveries have been produced concerning certain literary texts that had not been brought to light by the use of other perspectives. Animated by an irrational fear of the new, they call it pseudo-psychology. They forget that what is now Freudian orthodoxy was once shockingly new.

Sokal and Bricmont accuse Kate Hayles of failing to provide arguments in support of her assertions (pp. 111-136), but they are blind to this defect in the work of writers they agree with, such as Carl Matheson and Evan Kirchhoff. The latter claim, for example, that my work applying chaos theory to literature is “bizarre” and “tortured” but do not say how or why or provide any argument in support of this claim. My guess is that what they dislike about my article is its literary and imaginative character, which is unfamiliar to them. People with such narrow minds should stay away from interdisciplinary research, which requires imagination, intuition and insight, expressed in breadth of vision and a spirit of intellectual adventure, going beyond the metonymic to the metaphorical.

I propose this principle: “no condemnation without argumentation”.

In this paper I shall illustrate three modes of the new psychology: transactional analysis, group behaviour theory, and control theory.

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## 1. TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS APPLIED TO ZOLA

Following the movement towards ego psychology led by Freud, Anna Freud, and Erik Erikson after 1920, Eric Berne developed structural analysis in the early 1950s and transactional analysis in the late 1950s, and set out his approach systematically in 1961. Structural analysis segregates traumatically fixated ego states: Parent, Adult, Child. The Parent may be nurturing (sympathetic) or prejudicial (prohibitive); its function is to conserve energy and diminish anxiety. The Adult is organized, adaptable, objective. The Child may be adapted (compliant, withdrawing) or natural (rebellious, self-indulgent); its function is to motivate the Adult to obtain gratification. Transactional analysis studies social manoeuvres, from the most elementary to the most complex, i.e. from transactions through pastimes and games to scripts. A pastime is an engagement in which the transactions are simple and direct: when at least one of the parties has a hidden agenda, the pastime becomes a game. A script is a complex set of transactions that constitutes an attempt to repeat in derivative form a whole transference drama. Berne acknowledges his debt to Freud, but avoids his obsession with sex and castration.

One of the first uses of transactional analysis in literary criticism was Anthony West's excellent *Mortal Wounds* (1973), devoted to Madame de Stael, Madame de Charriere, and George Sand. Unfortunately, the approach adopted is purely biographical, which undermines the validity of the whole. In 1974, a student of mine, Scott Plummer, wrote a dissertation entitled *The Theatre of Molière: A Partial Transactional Analysis*. Unlike West, he used mostly the ego states of Parent, Adult and Child emphasized in the first phase of T. A., which Eric Berne called "structural analysis". In two articles published in 1985 I applied to *L'Oeuvre*, Zola's novel on the world of painters and painting in the Impressionist period, the notions of script, counterscript and incest taboo from transactional analysis and also that of undifferentiated group ego mass drawn from group behaviour theory. In 1996, another of my students, Jean-Michel Lanskin, published through the French publisher Minard his doctoral dissertation entitled *Le "scénario sans amour" d'une fille de joie: Analyse transactionnelle de Nana*. The contribution of transactional analysis to psychocriticism is as follows.

In Zola's novel *L'Oeuvre* (1886), the painter Claude Lantier commits suicide as a result of two scripts: a "deep" script derived from childhood perceptions of "how life is", based on experience of the relations with and between the child's parents, and a later psycho-social script imposed by an unresolved Oedipus conflict – exacerbated by an undifferentiated group ego mass – that subverts his artistic objectivity and integrity and dictates obsession and overwork that prove fatal to the artist.

Claude has a negative life-script based on a deprived childhood in which he was made to feel a burden and unwanted by his mother. Moreover, his mother's life and work were ruined by aberrant, uncontrollable sex, represented by the return of her first husband: Claude, by reaction, adopts a belief in sublimation and celibacy that becomes his counterscript.

Because of the inadequacy of Gervaise's fulfilment of his expectations of her as a mother, Claude imposes compensatory scripts on Christine. Gervaise had not been able to surround him with the maternal support he needed, so he eventually assigns to Christine, his lover, the role of Nurturing Parent. Gervaise, torn between two men, had also not been able to play the role of the "virginal" mother who is above sexuality, so Claude assigns this role also to Christine, a role facilitated by her verbal modesty. This role of substitute mother makes her subject to the incest-taboo, bringing loss of intimacy. However, in spite of Claude's explicit return to his counterscript of celibacy, he finds even the sublimated mode provided by painting slowly invaded by the deep, ineluctable drives of the sex-and-destruction script acquired in childhood by observing his mother's life.

The effect of this negative scripting is reinforced by the support and also the pressure coming from the undifferentiated group ego mass of his young friends, who want to break all the rules of

bourgeois art but at the same time to be accepted by the representatives of the bourgeois aesthetic. These incompatible goals lead to certain frustration.

Both negative scripting and the role of the undifferentiated group ego mass subvert creativity by provoking pathological excess of ambition and of work. This combination leads to his suicide in front of his last and most erotic painting.

## 2. GROUP BEHAVIOUR THEORY APPLIED TO PROUST

Modern family behaviour theory has established that difficulties in achieving psychological and emotional autonomy are often caused by excessive symbiosis with parents, family, or other groups, a situation commonly productive of schizophrenia. Clinical research into family relationships has shown that the greater the degree of emotional fusion with the mother, the greater the difficulty for the child to “differentiate a self” – that is, to achieve healthy autonomy, whether emotional, psychological or mental. The level of basic self (autonomous position stances, not negotiable in the relationship system) remains low, while the pseudo-self, acquired through the relationship and negotiable within it, tends to dominate. This pseudoself trades beliefs and principles in order to enhance its position within the relationship and thus earn love and security, and it is this pseudoself which fuses with others in an intense emotional field.

People whose level of basic self is low have no choice but continued pursuit of a close relationship for gratification of emotional needs. Fusion may take place not only with one other person (for example, the mother) but also with a group of people – typically, the family. Through such emotional fusion, great pressure may be exerted upon the self to abandon (or at least suspend) objectivity and accept the values and attitudes of what has been termed the “undifferentiated family ego mass”.

Modern family psychotherapy has also established that binary or two-person relationships are always basically unstable, and that the “molecule” or smallest building-block of any emotional system is the three-person grouping. This triangle is characterized by constant interaction between its elements. Now if we apply this knowledge to the study of literature we may postulate that the intersubjective triangle may be represented by any triad of objects, and that its internal motion may be represented by internal movement within the symbolic triad. Happiness experienced whenever a triad of objects is seen, especially when these are explicitly taken to suggest a triad of human beings (through anthropomorphosis), suggests the relief provided by “triangling-in” a third party characteristic of a person involved in a two-person relationship.

In describing his relationship when young with his mother, the Proustian narrator provides a uniquely detailed evocation of a classic case of symbiotic schizophrenia. He also suggests that the triad of belltowers at Martinville and Vieuxvicq contains mysterious laws and ideas, and he never reveals to us what they are. In the text on the belltowers, the latter are compared to birds, pivots, flowers, and maidens, in that order. It is when he finally achieves the anthropomorphosis of the three belltowers (as maidens) that he feels fulfilled and relieved, happy. In his later evocation of the triad of trees at Hudimesnil, we find that he omits the intermediate images and moves directly to the anthropomorphosis (witches, childhood friends). The continually changing relations within the triad may be seen in the movement from the symbiotic relationship between mother and child to the triad in which the child moves temporarily to the “outsider” position.

Proust’s fictional narrator is a schizophrenic who does not want to give up the pleasures of symbiosis which produce and perpetuate his condition. When, as protagonist, he is faced with triads, especially of vertical objects such as belltowers and trees, his manner of relating to reality leads him naturally to anthropomorphize them. This gives him pleasure in various ways: it reminds him of his pleasure-giving relationship with his mother, and it enables him to see in them an image of the “triangling-in” of a third party which can provide relief, if temporarily desired, from the

intense, symbiotic two-person relationship, which is necessarily unstable. A third source of pleasure is provided by the literary transposition of the triads: this enables him to trade a partial avowal of the truth (through anthropomorphous comparisons) for the right to claim that all the truth has been disclosed. “Writing-up” thus becomes a sort of alibi for the schizophrenic, who does not want to face the unpalatable truth that he really ought to free himself from the symbiosis which maintains him in his schizophrenic state.

Symbiotic schizophrenia is also manifested at the level of groups, and a brilliant example of undifferentiated group ego mass is provided by the clan Verdurin, which seeks actively to inhibit any independence of thought or action on the part of its members. It would be hard to imagine a more telling illustration of this principle.

### 3. CONTROL THEORY APPLIED TO THE ROCOCO

Control theory is based on the drive to tame the threatening Otherness of one’s surroundings. The determining effect of the birth trauma stems from the violent rejection of the infant by the mother’s body, which thrusts it out from the warm, dark, silent, liquid passivity of the nurturing womb through a passage of life-threatening compression and out into the cold, blinding, noisy, dry air and the necessity to breathe – such is the child’s first experience of rejection, of Otherness and of the environment outside the womb, which is alien, incomprehensible, and unpredictable. The result: a disorder neurosis and a drive to control.

Whereas Freud, who was obsessed with castration and paid little attention to female subjects, claimed that the infant views its faeces as a detachable part of his own body that he can give as a gift in a kind of surrogate autocastration, control theory views the faeces as symbolizing not the penis (females have feces but no penis) but an Other (representing a controlled environment): excretion, by showing the child that he can create an Other, has a twofold therapeutic function, since it involves both control of Self (through a mastery of the bodily function that helps to diminish the threatening unpredictability of life) and control of Otherness (through the production or “creation” of a visible, concrete Other). *This latter becomes part of the child’s environment, but is non-threatening because created by the child him/herself.* In fact, the experience of congestion/expulsion/relief makes excretion an analogue of the birth that the infant has experienced, only now he/she is in control; and the faeces, as a product of the activity, represent the new-born infant.

There are two categories of function in which the process of expulsion is preceded by congestion of the organism involved and followed by relief and satisfaction. These may be termed the category of the potential and ephemeral (ejaculation, menstruation, *parole*) and the category of the actual and permanent (excretion, childbirth, *écriture*). Only this second category is therapeutic. Contrary to the opinion of Rousseau, Lévi-Strauss and Derrida, *écriture* is superior to *parole* because it produces an externalized object that is concrete and visible and yet non-threatening because created by the Self. Of course, utilitarian writing is not therapeutic, only creative writing is.

I shall illustrate control theory by application to the rococo ethos of the early 18th century. In the rococo, the out-of-control narcissism of Louis XIV (the self-styled “Sun King”) and grandiloquence of the baroque were replaced by an aristocratic affectation of self-control that resulted in a blasé indifference, exemplified in Fontenelle and Chesterfield.

A *bel esprit* like Fontenelle sought to avoid the accusation of pedantry by the urbane elegance and nonchalance of his manner of expression, even a treatise on astronomy such as the *Entretien sur la pluralité des mondes habités* must purport to be introduced in the course of a desultory conversation with a beautiful marquise in the perfumed garden of a country château, her initiation into the endless mysteries of the universe must be represented as an elegant conversation-piece.

Madame Geoffrin writes of Fontenelle as follows: «Il n'avait jamais pleuré, il ne s'était jamais mis en colère, il n'avait jamais couru. Je lui disais un jour: Monsieur de Fontenelle, vous n'avez jamais ri? – Non, je n'ai jamais fait ah! ah!” Voilà l'idée qu'il se faisait du rire.» Laughter was also thought undesirable by Lord Chesterfield, who went so far as to write to his son in the following terms: «Having mentioned laughing, I must particularly warn you against it: and I could heartily wish that you may often be seen to smile, but never heard to laugh while you live. [...] I am sure that, since I had the full use of reason, nobody has ever heard me laugh.»

This denigration of any expression of emotion results in the suppression of laughter and tears, passion and lyricism, and both the lyric and the epic withered on the vine. An extreme cult of self-control, whether individual or social (and in the rococo it was both), reflects an extreme and spiritually costly attempt to assuage the disorder neurosis resulting from the birth trauma and the concomitant conviction that the world that surrounds us is alien.

In this respect, the rococo is different both from the baroque and from Romanticism, and represents an extreme case of the triumph of metonymy in what I call symptomatic psychohistory, in which at any point in time the arts are viewed as symptoms of the condition of a society. The disorder neurosis is so extreme in the rococo that we have a society in serious crisis.

## CONCLUSION

Transactional analysis, group behaviour theory and control theory have provided us with the concepts of script, symbiotic schizophrenia, triangling in, undifferentiated group ego mass, and disorder neurosis, and a new respect for écriture.

Group behaviour theory, for example, enables us to discover the nature of the mysterious laws and ideas mentioned by the Proustian narrator, to relate them to the psychological condition of the narrator, and to understand why the meanings had not been revealed to the reader. No other theory or system has explained both of these features of the text and the relationship between them. To reject such perspectives, which are based on clinical research, as pseudo-psychology is ignorant and irresponsible.

The same is true of the defense of the immorality of Proust's characters. The venal character of the love between Swann and Odette and between the narrator and Albertine is undeniable. To criticize such immorality is standard literary criticism, and to be upset by such criticism of immorality is possible only if one confuses the Proustian narrator with Proust himself. This despite the trouble Proust has taken to distinguish the narrator from himself, by changing the career of the father and the religion of the mother and by eliminating his brother. This is what is known as the biographical fallacy, denounced by Proust himself in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*.

Fear of the new may explain such errors, but it cannot justify them. And they are related to a more general problem. Closed minds are the bane of the literary community: we must remain open to the new, if the intellectual life is to remain an intellectual adventure.

# Memory according to Proust and to Freud

HENK HILLENAAR (\*)

For a long time I believed that literature and psychoanalysis were two very different disciplines. Now I know that these two ways of telling a story: literature – language in freedom – and psychoanalysis – language in search of freedom – are interrelated, and can learn much from each other.

Today I would like to ascertain the parallelism between literature and psychoanalysis, by showing how Freud on one side and Proust, the most significant French novelist of the last century, on the other, speak about memory. Memory is the origin and the core of the human mind, of language. It is difficult to overestimate that primordial mental function, which conditions all the others: memory, the beginning of all imagination, and of all thinking. Therefore Proust – I now start with him – discovers memory as the secret and the aim of literature. Most of us know his story regarding the Madeleine-biscuit from which, as he tells us, his whole novel *Remembrance of Things Past* ‘springs into being’. Here is a less known example of such a special memory-experience, from the last part of Proust’s novel, the ‘Matinée of the Princess de Guermantes’:

«A butler [...] brought to me in the library a small plate of petits fours and a glass of orangeade. I wiped my mouth with the napkin he had given me; but immediately [...] a fresh vision of azure blue passed before my eyes [...]. The impression was so vivid that [...] I thought the servant had just opened the window toward the beach and everything called me to go down and stroll along the embankment at high tide; the napkin which I had taken to wipe my mouth had precisely the same sort of starchy stiffness as the towel with which I had had so much trouble drying myself before the window the first day of my stay in Balbec. And now, in this library of the Guermantes mansion, it spread out in its various folds and creases, like a peacock’s tail, the plumage of a green and blue ocean. [It] filled me with joy.»<sup>1</sup>

For Proust, memory can become an event, something that happens to us, unexpectedly, when an innocuous experience of one of the senses – seeing a colour, touching a napkin, making a wrong

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<sup>1</sup> *Remembrance of Things Past*, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff, New York: Random House, 1934, II, 993.

step on a pavement, tasting a cup of tea – suddenly wakens in our mind an analogous experience of long ago, often from our youth. Such a memory opens a door, stirs up a past, a ‘building of recollection’ of which it turns out to be a keystone. Two aspects of such ‘involuntary memory’ – as Proust calls it – seem essential: firstly, that we are dealing here with a bodily, ‘material’ experience, memory and imagination surging from memory forming the crossroads where bodily and mental functions meet and are in fact undistinguishable. There, mental activity involves a rehabilitation, and a ‘lifting’, a ‘sublimation’ of sensory perceptions. Secondly, this experience which simultaneously takes place, both now and in the past, puts us above time, out of time, is something like an encounter with eternity, there where, according to Proust, we experience the essence of things, and no longer only their appearances. Hence the feeling of total joy, for being beyond the reach of time means being beyond the reach of death. Proust considers these privileged moments of memory as the beginning of art. Each work of art has something timeless, and as such is also a sublime gift from the gods. He describes his discoveries about memory in that library as an epiphany on the ‘most beautiful day of my life [...] when a great light suddenly shone, not only on the old gropings of my thoughts, but even on the purpose of my life and, perhaps, of art itself.’<sup>2</sup>

I would like to maintain that this eminently positive Proustian experience of ‘involuntary memory’ finds its counterpart in another ‘involuntary memory’ which Freud was discovering at nearly the same moment in another part of Europe, ‘transference’, that mainly negative intrusion of the past in our daily life. In Freud’s view, the involuntary mechanisms of memory work in an opposite direction than those of Proust. Proust’s memory projects, in an illumination, the present on the past, and his victory over time provides him with a feeling of exaltation. Conversely, the Freudian transference projects the past on the present, while the subject has to deal with feelings of malaise or even unhappiness, the Proustian illumination being replaced by the inner darkness and uneasiness of the unconscious. According to Freud ‘the patient does not remember anything of the forgotten or repressed material, but he acts it out. He does not reproduce it as a memory, but as an activity, he repeats it, without knowing of course that he is repeating’<sup>3</sup>.

The contrast – positive versus negative – between these two forms of ‘involuntary memory’ is indeed striking, but also their complementary character, two faces – diurnal and nocturnal, healing and disturbing – of memory, and therefore of desire. For memory is the vehicle of desire, and as such, a necessary condition of human life. [Proust and Freud both make their main discoveries in the foundations of the human mind: focusing on memory, on our capacity to repeat images and words, and to build an imaginary inner world of desire and future achievement. But the two writers operate from a different point of view, and have different temperaments: Proust believes that in spite of everything he is in this world to build a work of art, and in doing so, to experience moments of happiness. Freud would not disagree but nevertheless sees the positive achievements of the human mind as the result of a long process of renouncement and denial of the animal that we

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<sup>2</sup> *Remembrance of Things Past*, II, 1007.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Wir dürfen sagen, der Analytisierte erinnere überhaupt nichts von dem Vergessenen und Verdrängten, sondern er agiere es. Er reproduziert es nicht als Erinnerung, sondern als Tat, er wiederholt es, ohne natürlich zu wissen, dass er wiederholt’, *Erinnern, Wiederholen und Durcharbeiten* (1914), S. E. XII, 145-146; Studienausg., Ergänzungsband, 209. And he continues: ‘Zum Beispiel: [...] Er erinnert nicht, dass er in seiner infantilen Sexualforschung rat – und hilflos stecken geblieben ist, sondern er bringt einen Haufen verworrener Träume und Einfälle vor, jammert, dass ihm nichts gelinge, und stellt es als sein Schicksal hin, niemals eine Unternehmung zu Ende zu führen. Er erinnert nicht, dass er sich gewisser Sexualbetätigungen intensiv geschämt und ihre Entdeckung gefürchtet hat, sondern er zeigt, dass er sich der Behandlung schämt, der er sich jetzt unterzogen hat, und sucht diese vor allen geheimzuhaltten usw.’

remain in essence. Proust's spiritual values may be precious. According to Freud, they are also a source of deficiency or even an illusion.]

This does not mean that these two explorers of the human mind ignore the other face of memory: Freud the diurnal one, and Proust the nocturnal. Proust's famous involuntary memory, though one of the summits of his novel, is only referred to a few times, at the beginning of the book, and at the end. It is not only an ideal but might also appear as an incongruity, a kind of Mont Blanc in the Low Countries. In the rest of the book the reader feels in fact much more the presence of that other memory, of Freud's transference, the repetition of painful scenarios of frustrated and jealous love from the author's youth. For instance, in the part of the novel entitled *The Guermantes Way*, we read the story of the narrator visiting his friend Robert de Saint-Loup in his military barracks:

The door opened and Saint-Loup, dropping his eyeglass, dashed in.

'Ah, my dear Robert, you make yourself very comfortable here', I said to him, 'how jolly it would be if one were allowed to dine and sleep here'. [...]

'So you'd rather stay with me and sleep here, would you, than to go to the hotel by yourself?' Saint-Loup asked me, smiling.

'Oh, Robert, it is cruel of you to be sarcastic about it', I pleaded; 'you know it's not possible, and you know how wretched I shall be over there'.

'Good! You flatter me!', he replied. 'It occurred to me just now that you would rather stay here tonight. And that is precisely what I stopped to ask the Captain'.

'And he has given you leave?' I cried.

'He hadn't the slightest objection'.

'Oh! I adore him!'

'No; that would be going too far. But now, let me just get hold of my batman and tell him to see about dinner,' he went on, while I turned away to hide my tears.<sup>4</sup>

In this scene we are not, as one might think, dealing with homosexual seduction. Proust, as we know, has different ideas, of that kind of scene. Besides the narrator has informed us that these two young men are very much interested in mistresses or at least in 'young girls in blossom'. Of course the homosexual connotation cannot be totally lacking, but – all the commentators of the text<sup>5</sup> agree on this point – what the narrator is doing here, perhaps even without knowing it, is to remember and repeat: to transfer the famous scene of his childhood where the little boy, who could not do without the presence of his mother, very unexpectedly got his father's permission for the mother to stay with him overnight in his room. According to the narrator himself, this scene has been decisive for the rest of his existence. Once more, he is reviving it here.

In operating this transference, he makes the necessary changes: the mother is replaced by a friend. Saint-Loup turns out to be a maternal figure providing his friend not only with his presence, but also with a table and a bed. Rather unexpectedly, the captain of the barracks, as an indulgent father, grants his subordinate an unusual permission. The story ends up in tears which complete the process of regression, of negative memory, we are witnessing. Elsewhere in his novel, Proust has this beautiful comment on such a Freudian process: 'So many of our memories, our humours, our

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<sup>4</sup> *Remembrance of Things Past*, vol. I, 769 (*Le côté de Guermantes I*, Pléiade, II, 377-378).

<sup>5</sup> For instance, Luc Fraïsse, *Proust au miroir de sa correspondance*, 52.

<sup>6</sup> *Remembrance of Things Past*, II, 725. 'Tant de nos souvenirs, de nos humeurs, de nos idées partent faire des voyages loin de nous-même, où nous les perdons de vue! [...] Mais ils ont des chemins secrets pour rentrer en nous', *Albertine disparue*, IV, 70.

ideas set out to travel far away from us, until they are lost to sight! [...] But they know of secret paths by which to return to us!<sup>6</sup> Like all important novels, Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* originates to a great extent in that negative, mostly unconscious material of the beginning, more than in the happy involuntary memories we just witnessed.

Thus Proust knows and practises involuntary memory in both ways. As for Freud, the same thing must be true, but, to my knowledge, he never evoked such a Proustian 'happy' memory, so near to the 'oceanic' religious experience he would also not acknowledge. We sense his uneasiness every time he has to justify such a process of sublimation – for that is what it is – in the human mind. We recall one of the most known and most quoted interpretations of Freud, that of the game 'Fort – Da', played by the rather happy little boy who is imitating his mother's departure and her return<sup>7</sup>. Here, as in most of his studies, memory becomes a conquest: as such it represents the origin of art and culture. Cultural achievement is everywhere, and is in fact highly appreciated by Freud, but his positivistic background does not allow him to give these cultural conquests of nature a genuine place in his theoretical ideas. For Freud memory will always remain affected by the negative connotation of repression, and culture – sublimation – by a feeling of 'Unbehagen': malaise, uneasiness. For human beings remain, first of all, animals, and the fact that they are speaking animals does not change that perspective:

To many of us, it may be hard to give up our belief that the instinct to bring life to perfection is living exists human being, that this instinct has brought him to his present height of spiritual achievement and ethical sublimation, and that thanks to this same instinct we may expect him to develop into a Superman [Übermensch]. However I cannot believe in such an instinct and I do not see the way to save this beneficial illusion. To me the present development of mankind does not seem to need any other explanation than the one we have for animals. That which we observe in a minority of individuals as a restless drive to more perfection can be easily understood as a consequence of the repression of instincts which brought along the construction of the most valuable in human culture.<sup>8</sup> (my translation)

The effect of happy memories, the 'sublimation' – escaping time and space – they produce in us, are not relevant for Freud. The human capacity to interpret memory, which Proust marvels – 'to think, that is to say, bring out of the obscurity what [we feel] and convert it into a spiritual equivalent'<sup>9</sup> – is seen by Freud as nature going astray. Wanting to keep our animal nature intact he cannot consider that cultural needs are also a specific and integral part of that same nature. That's why the idea of sublimation is on the one hand necessary but on the other contradictory. It cannot exist without repression and lack. Freud wants to preserve our natural instincts as the only positive value. He does not consider that 'sublimation' and culture can also result from other sources, especially from human imagination and emotion, which often function without a direct link with our instincts of self-preservation and procreation.

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<sup>7</sup> *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*, Studienausgabe VI, 224-226.

<sup>8</sup> 'Vielen von uns mag es auch schwer werden, auf den Glauben zu verzichten, dass im Menschen selbst ein Trieb zur Vervollkommnung wohnt, der ihn auf seine gegenwärtige Höhe geistiger Leistung und ethischer Sublimierung gebracht hat und von dem man erwarten darf, dass er seine Entwicklung zum Übermenschen besorgen wird. Allein ich glaube nicht an einen solchen inneren Trieb und sehe keinen Weg, diese wohlthuende Illusion zu schonen. Die bisherige Entwicklung des Menschen scheint mir keiner anderen Erklärung zu bedürfen als die der Tiere, und was man an einer Minderzahl von menschlichen Individuen als rastlosen Drang zu weiterer Vervollkommnung beobachtet, lässt sich ungezwungen als Folge der Triebverdrängung verstehen, auf welche das Wertvollste an der menschlichen Kultur aufgebaut ist' (*Jenseits des Lustprinzips*, Studienausgabe, III, 251).

<sup>9</sup> *Albertine disparue*, II, 457; *Remembrance of Things Past*, II, 1000-1001.

My final point is this: In 2005, we realize that, a century ago, Freud could not sufficiently acknowledge the role of language in our functioning as human beings – and in the functioning of memory. Human memory, be it positive or negative, is only possible due to language. We are animals who speak, and this fact changes everything, because language, the most mysterious product of the human body, made of sounds and rhythms, establishes distance between us and the world it represents. It memorizes that world in a very special way, and on many different levels, of which the self-reflecting level is the most intriguing and the most revolutionary. Freud did not see that language takes over from the body, from ‘nature’, and that as such it is already in itself ‘sublimation’. That’s also why he did not believe in an instinct for ‘spiritual achievement and ethical sublimation’. It evolves that such an instinct does exist in us, from the very beginning, in our capacity to formulate words, to speak a language, and – above all – to reflect upon it. Psychoanalysts often tend to forget that the mystery of our minds is not found in the obscure spaces of the unconscious but in the mere existence of human consciousness, that is: in language. In self-reflecting language we are dealing with the most sublime and the most mysterious manifestation of memory, and even of life. Whereas nature and history are amoral, language makes moral beings out of us, people who acknowledge that they are sharing the same nature and making history – collective memory – together. These typically 20th century insights are something of a blind spot in Freud’s 19th century mind. It explains the lack of a coherent theory about sublimation and culture. Lacan, acknowledging the essential part of the other in the making of our mind would go much further in this field. As a writer and novelist, Proust’s ideas about memory and his views on culture, ultimately seem more complete and less contradictory than those of Freud. In this field psychoanalysis can indeed learn much from literature.

# The re-emergence of the concept of hysteria in women in the late 19th and early 20th century literary and artistic imagination

CONSTANTIN MAKKRIS (\*)

## 1. HOW TO DEFINE HYSTERIA?

«Woman bears within her body an organ prone to frightful spasms, which take charge of her, while haunting her imagination with all sorts of ghosts.» It is with these words by Diderot that the surrealists's *Lexique succinct de l'érotisme* (concise lexicon of eroticism) concludes its definition of "spasm", after calling it an «involuntary and convulsive contraction»<sup>1</sup>. Let us note that in Diderot's statement, chosen by the surrealists, feminine hysteria is referred to in a traditional light. The organ «prone to frightful spasms», borne by woman «within her body» obviously means the womb ("hystera" in Greek) which, from Hippocrates or even the Ancient Egyptians until the XIVth Century, was considered to be the very centre of hysteria.

Indeed, according to Hippocrates, hysteria was perceived as an organic disease, originating in the womb, thus of a specifically feminine nature, with the particularity of affecting the whole body through «suffocations of the womb» In *Timaios*, Plato reiterates Hippocrates's theories by defining the uterus as a living being desiring to give birth.<sup>2</sup>

The ancestral connection established between hysteria and a woman's uterus is the basis of its being considered as an exclusively feminine pathology. Such a concept is erroneous and has little to do with reality<sup>3</sup>, even if the number of female subjects presenting symptoms of hysteria exceeds

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<sup>1</sup> *Lexique succinct de l'érotisme*, Paris: Editions Eric Losfeld, Collection Le Désordre, 1970, p. 21. Ref.: "Lexique". All translations in this essay are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *Timaios*, Ch. XLIV, \*C, Athens: I. Zacharopoulos Editions, no date, p. 252.

<sup>3</sup> Jean-Martin Charcot contributes energetically to the "defeminisation" of hysteria. See for example, J. M. Charcot, "Masculine Hysteria", in *Hystérie*, texts collected and introduced by E. Trillat, Toulouse: Editions Privat, pp. 123-190. Concerning more recent psychoanalytic research on hysteria, even if it shows that most cases of hysteria are feminine, it does report cases of hysterical men: «Approximately 9 cases of hysteria out of 10 have.

that of male subjects. In more recent specialized works, definitions of hysteria invariably emphasize that point. For example: «Neurotic disorder characterized by a wide range of somatic and psychological symptoms consecutive to a dissociated state and which typically begins during adolescence or young adulthood and which occurs more frequently in women than in men»<sup>4</sup> or «since the concept of hysteria emerged over 2000 years ago, its limits as a pathological entity have been rendered imprecise by too many definitions» (*ibid*).

In order to illustrate my topic, I have chosen two complementary definitions of hysteria, which synthetically express the most important aspects of more recent attitudes to hysteria. First of all, the viewpoint provided by a popularized medical handbook, which stresses the sexual origins of hysterical fits, limiting feminine eroticism to its pathological aspects:

«A pathological personality more often occurring in women, carried to theatrical extremes of dramatisation and sometimes even mythomania. Seductive behaviour and enticing coquetry conceal a very deep sexual inhibition, sometimes actual frigidity. Affective dependency comes with the inability to tolerate frustration and the spectacular venting of emotions. Feelings prove to be versatile and artificial».<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, the second definition from Jean Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis's *Vocabulaire de la Psychanalyse*, equally centred on the libidinal origins of hysterical fits, opens up the range of its manifestations by classifying them in the category of neuroses and by referring to them as rooted in infantile sexuality, which approach is obviously modeled on Freud's theory:

«A class of neuroses presenting a wide variety of clinical scenes. The best determined symptomatic forms are conversion hysteria, in which the psychic conflict becomes symbolized through a wide variety of bodily symptoms, whether climactically (for example: an emotional fit with theatrics) or more lastingly (for example anaesthesia, hysterical paralysis, the sensation of a pharyngeal "lump" etc...), and anxiety hysteria in which the anxiety fastens onto such and such an outside object in a more or less stable fashion (...) The specifics of hysteria are to be found in the prevalence of a certain type of identification, of various mechanisms (N.B. repression, often manifest), in the surfacing of the Oedipal conflict which operates mainly on the phallic and oral levels of the libido».<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, remaining on the edge of the medicalized and psychoanalytic perceptions of hysteria, the hysterical fit managed to preserve the magic of the poetic aura and the seductive enigma of dissociation from reality, which had characterized it until the end of the 19th Century, at least until the surrealist period.

But who were those hysterics, who at all times have been so impressive, seductive, terrifying or fascinating and who, since the 19th Century, have been the subject of so much writing, aimed at earning them the attention of science, intellectual pursuits and the arts, at discovering new scientific facts or at pinpointing the workings of fantasy?

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been observed in women», see P. Delaporte, "L'Hystérie 1985 vue par un neurologue", in *L'Hystérie en 1985*, Cahier no. 35, Paris: Editions de l'Université de Paris Nord, 1986-1987, p. 52. Since then, in the 1980s and 1990s, women psychoanalysts and critics, have shown those proportions to be exaggerated. See Martha Noel Evans, *Fits and Starts/A Genealogy of Hysteria in Modern France*, Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1991 and Julia Borossa, *Hysteria*, London: Cox & Wyman, Icon Books, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Manuel MERCK de *Diagnostic et Thérapeutique*, Paris: Editions SIDEM – T.M., 1988. 1st French edition, translation of the XVth American Edition: Rahway, N.J.: Merck, Sharp & Donne Laboratories.

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Dayan, "Hystérie", in Georges and Pierre Bélicha (Eds.), *Grand Dictionnaire Médical*, Paris: Bordas, 1987, p. 228.

<sup>6</sup> Jean Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis, *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse*, Paris: Editions Presses Universitaires de France, 1984, pp. 177-178.

It would seem that those workings of fantasy were what generated in the young surrealists such a tide of enthusiasm, and motivated them to do justice (in their own way) to those beautiful, romantic-looking hysterics, as victims of religious fanaticism, superstitions or even medical experiments.

If the points which could have interested the surrealists and prompted the young poets to write the declaration entitled “The Fiftieth Anniversary of Hysteria” (paying homage to Charcot and celebrating the anniversary of his first great classical description of hysteria), can be detected in any of the afore-mentioned psychoanalytical definitions, it will surely be in Jacqueline Carroy’s proposed approach to hysteria:

«... From time immemorial, in Western history and probably elsewhere too, various individuals, usually women, changed and displayed strange, frightening or wondrous illnesses and/or talents. But paradoxically, such protean physiological manifestations all tend to be cultural and cultivated.»<sup>7</sup>

André Breton and Louis Aragon, who signed the text titled “The Fiftieth Anniversary of Hysteria”, dated March 15th, 1928 and published in No.11 of *La Révolution surréaliste*, appear to have set apart and highlighted the “marvelous” aspect, glorified in the hysterical fit; the aspect which, according to the surrealist imagination, turns the fit into a «supreme means of expression». Besides, the photographs of young hysterics, taken from the photographic iconography of the “Salpêtrière” clinic, in a way demonstrate the relevance of that “expression” through the poetic style, strange attitudes and astonishing theatrical postures of the young women.

I will examine the text in point by trying to locate and examine, using the historical and cultural references that figure there, the surrealists’s rediscovery of hysteria as «the greatest poetic discovery of the late 19th Century» and their revolutionary ways of revealing «the lyricism attached to the erotic implications of hysteria», by liberating the hysterical fit of any pathological connotations and of any «medicinal smell»<sup>8</sup>.

## 2. REFERENCES TO THE LITERARY ORIGINS OF THE SURREALIST FASCINATION WITH HYSTERICS

«hysterics are also the Devil’s fiancées. The end-of-the-century decadent literary trend makes an attempt at updating the themes of witchcraft and possession.»

(Jacqueline Carroy, *op. cit.*, p. 453)

«hysterics indulging in sensations.»

(Maurice Barrès)<sup>9</sup>

From the opening lines of the text, which are used as an introduction on account of their position, the authors provide the reason for the celebration in an epigraph and, while emphasizing the

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<sup>7</sup> Jacqueline Carroy, “L’Hystérique, l’artiste et le savant”, in *Les Personnalités doubles et multiples, entre science et fiction*, Paris: PUF, 1993, p. 446.

<sup>8</sup> Gérard Legrand, “Hystérie”, in *Dictionnaire du surréalisme et de ses environs*, p. 212.

<sup>9</sup> Maurice Barrès, *Le roman de l’énergie nationale: L’appel au soldat*, Paris: Editions Fasquelle, 1897, p. 130, quoted in Carroy, *op. cit.*, p. 454.

importance of hysteria at the end of the 19th Century, they map out the limits of its glory at the beginning of the 20th Century: «We surrealists are intent on celebrating here the fiftieth anniversary of hysteria, as the greatest poetic discovery of the late 19th Century and we are doing so at the very moment when the dismemberment of the concept of hysteria seems to have been consummated...»<sup>10</sup>

By the “consummation” of hysteria, the two surrealist poets, being former medical students, were most likely referring to the appropriation of hysteria by psychoanalysis. «From 1914 on, nobody dared mention hysteria any more, the word having been so completely identified with psychoanalysis itself»<sup>11</sup>. But before broaching the subject of the contribution of psychoanalysis to the field of hysteria, or of the important part played by hysteria in the development of the Freudian doctrine, by trying to interpret first the theoretical references in Breton and Aragon’s text and then their practical application in texts by various other writers and artists on hysterical fits, I feel it is important to allude briefly to the fascination created in French intellectual circles by the thematics of hysteria during the second half of the 19th Century, which the surrealist celebration was all about. It is indeed during that period that we can trace the elaboration of a literary history of hysteria in France. In this way we can begin to detect the outline of a kind of “pre-history” of the surrealist interest in hysteria.

«It seems that the word “hysteria” became popularized some ten years before Charcot made it fashionable. Indeed, in 1863, in a study analyzing the literary and fashionable use of various words, the critic Francisque Sarcey pointed out the newcomer’s recent fortune. From then on, instead of talking about “lewdness”, an archaic term such as a priest might use, or about “temperament”, a slightly outmoded social euphemism, one will borrow a technical term from medical science» (Carroy, *op. cit.*, p. 446).

The entry of feminine hysteria into the 19th Century literary trend, finds itself perfectly represented in Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*<sup>12</sup>, whose “medical” style did not escape the notice of his contemporaries. Ch.A. de Sainte-Beuve, for example, formulated the famous remark that «Being the son and brother of eminent doctors, Monsieur Gustave Flaubert handles a pen the way others handle a scalpel»<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, through the medicalization of the author’s gaze, the character of Emma Bovary, made up of contradictions and feminine elations belonging to a whole period, would present the ideal romantic type of the hysterical woman, such as it was perceived during the last decades of the 19th Century. Jacqueline Carroy sums it up in the following character sketch portraying the Flaubertian heroine as a hysteric:

«... the adolescent girl in love with the Sacred-Heart of the Divine Spouse, the dissatisfied young bride dragging her boredom, whims and nervousness behind her, the adulterous wife longing to be in an unattainable other place, crystallize into a new pattern, that of “Bovarysm”, a modern version of the power once detained by the possessed» (Carroy, *ibid.*).

The hypothesis of an encounter between Bovarysm and the experiments Charcot performed on young patients at the Salpêtrière – aside from the “medicalized” aspect of Flaubert’s writing would reside in the confused mingling of religious and erotic expressions of feminine sensuality and sexuality:

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<sup>10</sup> Louis Aragon and André Breton, “Le Cinquantenaire de l’hystérie”, in *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 11, March 1928, p. 20.

<sup>11</sup> Elisabeth Roudinesco and Michel Plon, *Dictionnaire de la Psychanalyse*, Paris: Fayard, 1997, p. 473.

<sup>12</sup> «Of all the hysterics whose stories have been told by novelists, the most vivid, the truest, the lost passionate, was Madame Bovary», from Charles Richet, “Démoniaques d’aujourd’hui”, in *Revue des deux mondes*, January 15, 1880, p. 348, quoted in Carroy, *op. cit.*, p. 449.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Augustin de Sainte-Beuve, *Le Moniteur*, 4 May, 1857, quoted in Carroy, *op. cit.*, p. 448.

«rapturous first communions, whisperings in the confessional, holy pictures, the fragrance of incense and lilies, indistinct desires, diffuse forms of sensuality, ecstasies and ambiguous pain constitute the erotically religious climate in which Madame Bovary's love affairs evolve (...) like those of Charcot's ecstatic patients (...); in those lovely forms of hysteria (...) divine and human passions blend; they inspire fascinated, indulgent, sometimes ribald descriptions» (Carroy, pp. 449-453).

The erotically religious atmosphere emanating from the attitudes of Charcot's ecstatic patients, although the master does not emphasize it in his studies, is nonetheless quite perceptible in the photographic representations kept in the archives of the Salpêtrière, some of which were reproduced in the eleventh issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* as illustrations for the surrealist celebration. It seems likely that a present-day spectator would experience some difficulty in believing that those beautiful girls, photographed in theatrical positions, were mere hospital patients and not actresses of the period interpreting roles of delirious passion. Those representations played a decisive part in the arousing of the surrealists's interest in hysteria and in making them aware of the sensual poetic potential of the young inmates at the Salpêtrière, notably as far as their ideal representative was concerned, in the person of the beautiful young adolescent Augustine:

«We who loved nothing so much as those young hysterics, the perfect example of which we have been provided with through the observation of the delicious X. L. (Augustine), who arrived at the Sapêtrière in Dr. Charcot's department on October 21st 1875, at the age of 15 and a half, how could we be moved by the laborious refutation of organic disorders, which will only ever be put down to hysteria by doctors? What a lamentable state of affairs!» (Aragon & Breton, *op. cit.*, p. 20).

The “delicious” Augustine was indeed «one of the most famous examples of hysteria in late 19th Century France (...) photographed many times in passionate attitudes» (Roudinesco & Plon, p. 75). The four shots of Augustine seem to illustrate the definition of delirium in the *Lexique succinct de l'érotisme*: «*Delirium*. – Liberation from common sense, due to an extreme agitation of the passions.» (*Lexique*, p. 21).

Augustine was the perfect specimen of the “female population”, living within the protective enclosure of the Salpêtrière's walls, which caused Jean-Martin Charcot to be called «a breeder of hysterics» by various intellectuals of the period, such as Guy de Maupassant who had, besides, taken the master of the Salpêtrière's classes:

«We are all hysterics, ever since Charcot, that home-breeder of hysterics, has been keeping at great expense in his model institution of la Salpêtrière, a whole population of nervous women, whom he has been inoculating with madness and whom he has been rapidly turning into fiends.»<sup>14</sup>

While on that subject, it seems to me of interest to point out an astonishing resemblance between the above-quoted text by Maupassant and the following fragment of a poem by Breton from the 1923 collection *Clair de terre*, in which he expresses an interest in hysteria, foreshadowing the 1928 celebration:

«The women whose flock is led by fabulous beasts  
Rigorously accuse the spectral plants  
Love with five branches and hysteria that apartment snow-flake  
To death petite mort heliotropism»<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Guy de Maupassant, “Une femme”, in *Chroniques*, Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1950, pp. 111-112, quoted in Carroy, p. 456.

<sup>15</sup> André Breton, “Dans la Vallée du monde”, in *Clair de terre, Oeuvres complètes*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Tome I, pp. 181-182.

Through Breton's particular use of metaphors often bordering on hermeticism, we can perceive behind the "fabulous beasts" the desires and erotic passions leading the "flock" of hysterical women. The last line seems indicative of such a content with its reference to "petite mort", which points to the close link between sexuality and hysterical fits.

Besides, we can read between the lines, whether in Maupassant's commentary or in Breton's metaphorical discourse, a critical, even pejorative predisposition towards the living conditions and treatment of the young hysterics at the Salpêtrière. The therapeutic methods put into practice there by Charcot were later to meet with strong opposition:

«As a theoretician of neuroses, Charcot made use of hypnosis not in order to cure or nurse his patients, but to prove the validity of his hypotheses. By hypnotising the "madwomen" at the Salpêtrière, he would experimentally create hysterical symptoms and then immediately remove them in order to demonstrate the neurotic nature of the illness. He was consequently accused by Hippolyte Bernheim, a pupil of Ambroise Liébault and the Head of the Nancy School, of inducing hysterical symptoms by suggestion and violating the dignity of the patients, who, instead of being cared for, were being used as guinea-pigs for the demonstrations of a master whose sole preoccupation was with classifying them.» (Roudinesco & Plon, p. 471)

In our attempt at mapping out the landmarks of the literary history of hysteria likely to have contributed to the surrealists being made aware of the question of hysterical fits, it is impossible for us to ignore the emblematic figure of 19th Century poetry, and according to Breton "a surrealist in morals", Charles Baudelaire, who «considered hysteria as a more literary than medical mystery»<sup>16</sup>

And yet, if the founder of surrealism agreed completely with the poet of *Les Fleurs du mal* as far as the literary aspect of hysteria was concerned, it is all the more to establish his difference from him by limiting the hysterical subjects to the field of femininity («those young hysterical women»...), when in fact Baudelaire, feeling that he himself was involved, never really considered hysteria to be a specifically "feminine quality": «hysteria is the "uterus" of the being which takes us by the throat and suffocates us» (Gasarian, *op. cit.*, p. 181).

If, as certain critics maintain, the surrealist interest in hysteria constituted their answer to Baudelaire<sup>17</sup>, it would only have been to differentiate the "hysterical poet's" evaluations from those of the surrealists, who were captivated by hysteria's lovely victims and by the therapeutic attempts of their doctors, in so far as, in the text of the surrealist celebration, it was the "re-feminisation" of the hysterical fit which penetrated their literary imagination by creating a new myth of the feminine. The latter was to be achieved, let us say, by making the inaccessible aspect of women as mediums into something sacred; here they would be endowed with a deliriously erotic appearance, completely divorced from reality and would express themselves by another aesthetic means, that of the supreme, uncontrollable hysterical fit:

«By rehabilitating, against Babinski, the greatness of hysteria and its heroines in a "procession of young naked women sliding along the roofs", and by defining hysteria as "a supreme means of expression", Aragon and Breton prolonged and amplified certain erotics and aesthetics which had already been elaborated before the Salpêtrière and its surroundings. No doubt they also simplified, through unconditional and provocative praise, what had been described as the conflict between a form of hysteria experienced as an obstacle and

<sup>16</sup> Gérard Gasarian, "La Figure du poète hystérique ou l'allégorie chez Baudelaire".

<sup>17</sup> «To Baudelaire's questions concerning the hysterical poet, the surrealists answered», in Carroy, *op. cit.*, p. 456.

another hysteria which was accepted and overcome through artistic expression, the role of the other which one can recognize as another self. This brings us back to Gaultier's definition of Bovaryism» (Carroy, *ibid.*).

In those remarks, two points seem to stand out: first of all Joseph Babinski's influence on the surrealists concerning the subject of hysteria and then the possible introduction of "Bovaryism", as Jules de Gaultier saw it, into the surrealist notion of hysteria. The presence of some kind of "Bovaryism" is indeed quite likely, since the surrealists, while denying all pathological aspects of hysteria, clearly disagreed with the designation «narcissistic neurosis with melancholy connotations», used by Gaultier for the term "Bovaryism", which he himself had invented. In the surrealist imagination, the melancholy connotations had been replaced by the influence of convulsive beauty, so as to restore hysteria's emblematic role as an art revealing the new aesthetics of eroticism set free by the hysterical fit.

On the other hand, the reference to the psychiatrist Babinski leads us to insist on his contribution to making the founder of surrealism aware of hysterical behaviour. André Breton, who was first strongly drawn to neuro-psychiatry and then enthusiastic about psychoanalysis – especially since in 1914, the year he entered medical school, he had been given the opportunity to put his passion into "therapeutic" practice. His first post being at the neuro-psychiatric centre at St. Dizier, as he confided in one of his interviews, he was able to «try out the investigation methods of psychoanalysis on his patients, especially the recording of dreams and uncontrolled associations of ideas, for interpretation purposes».<sup>18</sup>

It was following his medical experiments, during his military training, that Breton met Babinski, whom he considered to be one of the major figures in the field of psychoanalysis. In Breton's photograph album, Babinski's photograph naturally found its place under Charcot's and next to Freud's.<sup>19</sup>

In early January 1917, André Breton was posted in Paris, in the twenty-second military nursing section. At the end of that same month, after taking classes at Val-de-Grâce in order to complete the training as a medical-auxiliary, he was sent as a non-resident student to the neurological centre at La Pitié, in the department then directed by the most famous psychiatrist of the period Joseph Babinski, who had been «Jean-Martin Charcot's favourite student» (Roudinesco & Plon, p. 89). According to Gérard Legrand, Babinski appreciated Breton's devoted qualities in matters of psychiatry and «predicted a "great medical future for him"!»<sup>20</sup> It seems to have been during that period that the future founder of surrealism studied the works of the great psychiatrist to whom he pays homage in the text celebrating the "Fiftieth Anniversary of Hysteria":

«Mr. Babinski, the most intelligent man to have tackled this question dared to publish the following words in 1913: "When an emotion is sincere and deep enough to shake the human soul, then there is no room for hysteria." And that is the best thing we were ever taught» (Aragon & Breton, p. 20).

However much the two surrealists praised Babinski's intelligence, thereby showing him the esteem or admiration they had felt for him from their days as medical students, in their celebration

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<sup>18</sup> «one can already notice in passing that those dreams and categories of associations will constitute, from the beginning, almost all the surrealist materials», André Breton, *Entretiens*, (1952), Paris: Gallimard, 1969, pp. 36-37.

<sup>19</sup> Page reproduced in the exhibition catalogue, *André Breton La Beauté convulsive*, Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1991, p. 89.

<sup>20</sup> Gérard Legrand, *Breton*, Paris: Editions Belfond, 1977, p. 38.

text they still emphasized the inadequacies of that same psychiatrist, who had previously been an authority figure in matters of hysteria. After quoting Babinski's 1906 definition of hysteria, according to which «classical hysteria (...) is losing its characteristics: "Hysteria is a pathological state, which shows itself through suggestion in certain subjects, perfectly predictably and with a tendency to disappear under the influence of persuasion (or counter-suggestion) alone (...)"» (*ibid.*, p. 22), Breton and Aragon began severely criticizing the concept of "pithianism", discovered and exposed by Babinski who thus proposed an important stage in the process of medicalizing hysteria in the wake of J. M. Charcot. The term "pithianism", from the Greek "peitho" (to persuade) and "iasis" (cure or curable) means: «the dismembering theory which notably evacuated the sexual etiology constructed by Freud and revived the debate on simulation» (Roudinesco & Plon, p. 89). That is the way Elisabeth Roudinesco and Michel Plon sum it up, while specifying that it «was in fact the consequence of Babinski's decision to embark upon the founding of modern neurology» (*ibid.*)

The fact that "pithianism", after causing a considerable stir for a while, should have been rejected by the surrealists, is mainly due to the «implanting of Freud's theses» (*ibid.*) within the surrealist concept of hysteria, in which sexual etiology is fundamental. Their refusal is similarly rooted in the negation of any pathological aspect of the hysterical fit and in the surrealists' "anti-psychiatric" struggle, of which the publication of Breton's *Nadja*, the same year as the text celebrating fifty years of hysteria, was to be the unquestionable catalyst. «Ten years later, in spite of the deplorable disguise of pithianism, hysteria was tending to reclaim its rights. The doctor expresses his astonishment. He wishes to deny what does not belong to him» (Aragon & Breton, p. 22).

Nevertheless, we should admit that the reference to the father of psychoanalysis in the surrealist celebration text hardly does him justice. The name of Freud is only mentioned once, mainly to highlight Freud's debt to the master of the Salpêtrière, but also to accentuate the sexual content of hysterical fits, which was recognized and unambiguously demonstrated by the Freudian doctrine. The two surrealists alluded indirectly to Freudian theory concerning the libidinal nature of hysterical manifestations, but very clearly, by evoking the erotic activity of the young patients at the Salpêtrière and the unlimited devotion of the young interns, in whose care they were:

«Does Freud, who owes so much to Charcot, remember the time when, according to the survivors's testimony, the Salpêtrière interns confused their professional duties with their taste for love, when, at night fall, their patients would meet them outside or would invite them to their beds? They would then patiently enumerate, for the needs of an undefendable medical cause, the so-called pathological passionate attitudes that were so precious to them and still are, only humanly, to us» (*ibid.*, p. 20).

It seems of interest to note, since the text refers to the young girl inmates of the Salpêtrière and to the odd mixture of their living conditions with their frequently photographed sensuality<sup>21</sup>, that the surrealist interest in those young hysterics was to recur two years after the "Fiftieth anniversary of hysteria" in the text "Attempt at simulating delirium of interpretation", in *L'Immaculée conception*, a work co-authored by André Breton and Paul Eluard. The extract in point was written, as the literary editors of the Pléiade edition, Marguerite Bonnet and Etienne-Alain Hubert<sup>22</sup> have confirmed,

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<sup>21</sup> Six photographs of young Augustine were reproduced in no. 11 of *La Révolution surréaliste*, as illustrations for the Fiftieth Anniversary of Hysteria celebration text.

<sup>22</sup> Marguerite Bonnet & Etienne-Alain Hubert, *L'Immaculée Conception*, notes and variations in André Breton, *Oeuvres Complètes*, Pléiade I, p. 1663.

by the founder of surrealism in person. In spite of the hermetic quality of the text, readers could easily detect the poet's sensitivity to such a theme, a sensitivity common to the "Fifty years of Hysteria" text and to the following extract from *L'Immaculée conception*. Breton seems to be directly and personally addressing the young women hysterics, who were patients at the Salpêtrière during Charcot's reign.

«You must admit that your folding cots, your twisted bars, your chewed up floor boards, your disappearing tricks, your fashionable scarecrows, your telegraph wires, your journeys in pigeon compartments, the lamb pedestals of your statues of prey, your bay (or berry) races at the dusk of robin redbreasts flying away and the hours and the minutes and the seconds in your woodpeckers' heads and your glorious conquests, your glorious cuckoo conquests nevertheless! (...) Don't count on me any more to help you forget that your ghosts look like birds of paradise...»<sup>23</sup>

Their «folding cots» (in French "lits-cages") are the box-beds in their prison-hospital. The text describes their dramatic situation with their «statues of prey» and «bay races»; the link between «telegraph wires» and «journeys in pigeon compartments», constitutes the metaphor for those young adolescent girls, victims of medical experiments, like carrier pigeons locked in their cages, while their silent but eloquent message remained without a destinee. Their «glorious conquests» referred to at the end, not without sarcasm on the author's part, referred to their fleeting nocturnal sexual encounters with their medical aids, mentioned by Aragon and Breton in the "Fiftieth anniversary" text (while wondering whether Freud had remembered those girls). It was Breton's way of expressing a message full of poetry and protest, against the way those young and sensual patients's eroticism was dealt with, an eroticism which was to remain misunderstood in medical circles even if the master of the Salpêtrière had suspected its existence.

It was indeed Freud who put sexuality forward as the substantial main factor in the triggering of hysterical fits. As he himself points out in the previous psychiatric studies, sexuality represented hysteria's unexplored territory:

«the development of the sexual factor in the etiology of hysteria does not stem from any preconceived opinion, at least not as far as I am concerned. The two researchers under whom I first began my work on hysteria as a student, were far from reaching such a hypothesis, as was Charcot as well as Breuer.»<sup>24</sup>

At the age of twenty-nine, after having been appointed "Privatdozent" in neurology and having obtained a grant to study in Paris, Sigmund Freud arrived in October 1885 at the Salpêtrière, in Charcot's department. According to the historians of psychoanalysis, Freud «was dying to meet Jean-Martin Charcot whose experiments with hysteria fascinated him» (Roudinesco & Plon, p. 353). He stayed in Paris for about nineteen weeks. That period turned out to be crucial not only for the elaboration of a revolutionary approach to hysteria, but also for laying the foundations for the launching of psychoanalysis: «That first stay in France marks the beginning of the great scientific adventure which was to lead him to the invention of psychoanalysis» (*ibid.*).

It was from his apprenticeship with Charcot that Freud drew the inspiration for the birth and development of his theses on hysteria. And yet the appropriation of medical interest in hysteria and its theorisation in the psychoanalytic field was not exclusively motivated by Charcot, for although

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<sup>23</sup> André Breton and Paul Eluard, "Essai de simulation du délire d'interprétation", in *L'Immaculée Conception*, in André Breton, *Oeuvres complètes*, Tome I, p. 858.

<sup>24</sup> Sigmund Freud, "L'Étiologie de l'hystérie", (1896), in *Névrose, psychose et perversion*, Paris: PUF, 1992, p. 91.

the head of the Salpêtrière had an almost total monopoly over the treatment of hysterics in Paris, at that time the same was not true of the rest of France. Hippolyte Bernheim, who had studied under Ambroise Liébault, then the leader of the field in Nancy, after severely criticizing Charcot's methods, had imposed his own method based on «... a therapeutic tradition in which the patients's well-being was given priority» (*ibid.*, p. 471) over theoretical research, which remained at the centre of the Salpêtrière School's preoccupations. Freud, in spite of his attachment to and admiration for Charcot, was to draw parallel and complementary inspiration from both schools. It was indeed from the combination of Charcot's and Bernheim's hypotheses that the founder of psychoanalysis elaborated a psychoanalytic definition of hysteria.

The revolutionary aspect of the Freudian perspective on psychoanalysis resides, as already mentioned, in revealing the important part played by sexuality in the triggering of sexual fits. Even if his predecessors had not explored that dimension in depth, the hypothesis of a sexual etiology of hysteria was not unknown to them. Apparently some of them had even encouraged the future founder of psychoanalysis to pursue his research in that direction:

«Three men had suggested to Freud the idea of a traumatic sexual origin: Charcot, Breuer and the Viennese gynaecologist Rudolf Chrobak (...). The first had whispered in his ear one day: "In that case, it's always about the genital question, always..." The second had told him about "alcove secrets". As for the third, concerning a woman patient who was still a virgin after eighteen years of marriage, he had stated in front of him and in Latin the following prescription: "Penis normalis, dosim repetatur"» (Roudinesco & Plon, p. 472).

If Sigmund Freud was able to theorize and systematize the importance of the sexual factor in the genesis of hysteria, which several scientists had already recognized but without backing it up scientifically as he did, it was thanks to the elaboration of his theory on the traumatic origins of sexuality. «... Freud picked up the idea of traumatic origins from Charcot. But through his theory of seduction, he confirmed that the trauma had sexual causes and emphasized that hysteria was the result of sexual abuse actually experienced by the subject during childhood» (*ibid.*, p. 471).

That particular thesis was already developed and adopted in the very first works Freud devoted to hysteria (1888-1893)<sup>25</sup>; it was also confirmed in his 1896 study devoted to "The Etiology of Hysteria":

«... finally we shall consider the sexual question and a few experiences which mostly occur at that same time of life, during puberty. It is from examining those experiences that we can reach the etiology of hysteria and through them that we shall be able to find out the origins of hysterical symptoms.»<sup>26</sup>

And in a note added by Freud to that same text in 1924, the same affirmations were authoritatively expressed:

«I therefore wish to assert that behind each case of hysteria, one or two events of a premature sexual experience are to be found and those events pertain to the early years of childhood and can be reenacted thanks to the work of analysis in spite of their having happened several decades before» (*ibid.*, p. 95).

In 1905, through the practical experiment constituted by the analysis of Dora<sup>27</sup>, Freud checked most of his hypotheses, while at the same time being confronted with other possibilities concerning

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<sup>25</sup> The first was "Hysteria" (1888) and the early texts in collaboration with Breuer are now found under the title *Studies in Hysteria* (1895), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, London: Hogarth Press, 1953-74, Vol. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Sigmund Freud, "L'Étiologie de l'Hystérie", *op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>27</sup> "Fragment of an Analysis of Hysteria", (1905), in *Standard Edition*, Vol. 7.

the treatment of hysterical fits. That particular analysis seems to have conditioned his point of view on hysteria in all his later works.

Finally, in the 1909 study “General considerations on the hysterical fit”, Freud showed an interest in dreams as analogous to hysterical fits, independently of the firm conviction he expressed regarding the link between the hysterical fit and its sexual etiology. The dream aspect seems of particular interest here, considering its connection with the “literization” of hysteria and all the more so, since the influence of dreams constitutes one of the fundamental axes of surrealism. The link between dreamwork and the hysterical fit is explained as follows by Freud:

«So the hysterical fit requires the same elaboration process as the one we use for nocturnal dreams. Not only the strength which generates the deformation and the intentions of that deformation but also its technique are the same as those with which we are familiar thanks to the interpretation of dreams.»<sup>28</sup>

But according to Freud, what differentiates hysterical fits from dreams, while at the same time making them incomprehensible, is that they give several simultaneous shapes to several fantasies, within the same material, in other words they go through “condensation” (...) (*ibid.*).

Freud, when establishing the interactive link between «fantasmatic condensation» and the dynamic role of desire in the hysterical fit makes the following remark:

«fantasies that are covered up in this way are often of different sorts, for example a recent desire and the revival of an impression from infancy; the same nervous activity can be used for both intentions, often in a very clever manner. Hysterics who make extensive use of condensation, will thus achieve their end with a single type of fit; others express a plurality of pathogenic fantasies by also multiplying the types of fits» (*ibid.*, p. 162).

The Greek poet, novelist and psychoanalyst Andreas Embiricos, who was the first to bring both surrealism and psychoanalysis to Greece, would surely have expressed some reservation concerning the above statement. As a self-proclaimed revolutionary and liberator of eros, he would have objected to the “pathogenic” aspect of fantasy, which he did not believe in. From Embiricos’s point of view, the hysterical fit would simply be triggered by the fantasy’s not being satisfied or fulfilled.<sup>29</sup>

### 3. TOWARDS A SURREALIST DEFINITION OF HYSTERIA

After referring to the Freudian doctrine, in order to finally reach a new definition of hysteria through the elaboration of the surrealist celebration – which was meant to be revolutionary, in accordance with the movement’s principles –, a definition which, by poeticizing and eroticizing the hysterical fit, would constitute its main structure, Breton and Aragon referred to the «inborn poetic nature» pertaining to the premedical perceptions of hysteria. Those perceptions were conditioned by an alternation of a variety of successive beliefs and obscure obsessions, whose only aim was to treat woman as an object of curiosity, if not of desire. In those mythical patterns and ancient

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<sup>28</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Considérations générales sur l’attaque hystérique”, (1909), in *Névrose, psychose et perversion*, Paris: PUF, 1992, p. 161.

<sup>29</sup> See Constantin Makris, “La Crise hystérique en tant que manifestation de l’erotisme féminin dans l’oeuvre d’Andreas Embiricos”, Proceedings of the November 22-23, 2001 International Congress of Neo-Hellenic Studies: *Alexandros Papadiamantis, Narratore – Andreas Embiricos, Surrealista*, College of Arts and Humanities, Naples: University of Naples, Italy, 2004.

perceptions of hysteria, like in the religious fanaticism of the Middle Ages, which privileged superstition and witchcraft, one can always detect the persistence of the male gaze with its sexist microscope, which has always sought to examine, mystify, exorcize, punish or cure a certain «animal-like» (Roudinesco & Plon, p. 469) manifestations of femininity and indeed «such was woman's destiny for centuries and all the more so if she was a hysteric» (*ibid.*).

At this point, it seems appropriate to examine various stages of the perception of hysteria, which the surrealists chose to include in their own inventory.

«It is far too easy to contrast that “complex and protean disease named hysteria, which eludes all definition” (according to Bernheim), with the various definitions of hysteria that have been devised to date, from Antiquity's divine hysteria – to become infernal in the Middle Ages, with the possessed women of Loudun<sup>30</sup>, the flagellators of “Notre-Dame des pleurs – Our Lady of Tears” – (Long live Madame Chantelouve!), with mythical, erotic, simply lyrical social definitions or scientific definitions. Those who have seen that very fine film “La Sorcellerie à travers les âges”/“Witchcraft Throughout the Ages”, will surely remember having gained more information from watching the screen or in amphitheatres where it was being taught, than in books by Hippocrates or Plato, in which the womb leaps like a goat, by Galien who makes the goat hold still or by Fernel who gets her going again in the 16th Century and feels her with his hand as she moves up into the patient's stomach; They saw the Beast's horns grow and grow until they turned into the Devil's. The Devil in turn ended up missing too. The various positivist hypotheses were to share his inheritance»<sup>31</sup>

The reference to the «possessed women of Loudun» concerns the famous witchcraft scandal instigated by Urbain Grandier, a «socialite and libertine» priest, who had inspired some sort of hysterical passion in Mère Jeanne des Anges and in several ursuline nuns from her convent, around 1630. Having been declared guilty of witchcraft by the church authorities of the period, Urbain Grandier was burnt at the stake in 1634.<sup>32</sup>

Our attention is especially arrested by the reference to Madame Chantelouve, the heroine of Joris-Karl Huysmans's novel *Là-bas*, who is a good example of the young surrealists's fascination with Sphinx-like women (Femmes-Sphinx) and reveals Breton's strong affinities with various unusual figures appearing in 19th Century literature. The reference is also significant because the attitude linking female hysteria with outrageous, even devilish eroticism, reappears in Huysmans's novel: «A whole visible society lady side, with a prudent approach to “salon” life, concealed another as yet unknown side, that of a passionate madwoman and wild romantic, with the body of a hysteric and the soul of a nymphomaniac»<sup>33</sup>

“Witchcraft Throughout the Ages”, such was the title of the famous film directed by Benjamin Christensen in the early 1920s.<sup>34</sup> The expression «les cornes de la Bête» (the Beast's horns) which

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<sup>30</sup> In the original French text, the verbal noun for ‘possessed’ was misspelled, being written in the masculine form ‘possédés’ instead of the feminine ‘possédées’. See José Pierre comments on the “Fiftieth anniversary of Hysteria 1878-1928” text, in *Tracts surréalistes et Déclarations collectives*, Tome I, 1922-1939, Paris: Editions Eric Losfeld – La Terrain Vague, 1980, p. 417.

<sup>31</sup> Aragon and Breton, “The Fiftieth Anniversary of Hysteria”, pp. 20-22.

<sup>32</sup> That story, as José Pierre notes, «is well known, thanks to two films in particular, one Polish, *Mère Jeanne des Anges*, (1960), directed by Kerzy Kawalerowicz and the other British, *The Devils*, (1971), by Ken Russell», in *Tracts surréalistes et déclarations collectives 1922-1939*, Tome I, Paris: Editions La Terrain Vague, 1980, p. 417.

<sup>33</sup> J. K. Huysmans, *Là-Bas* (19894), Paris: Garnier, 1978, p. 117.

<sup>34</sup> Benjamin Christensen, “La Sorcellerie à travers les âges”, Haxen, Sweden, 1921.

become the Devil's sums up the triumph of religious superstition during the Middle Ages, at a time when «under the influence of Augustinian theories, every medical approach to hysteria was dropped and the word itself was hardly used any more» (Roudinesco & Plon, p. 469). Sensual body theatrics during hysterical fits were interpreted as manifestations of lasciviousness and undeniable sexual pleasure which, according to the rigorous criteria of the Church at the period, meant in a state of mortal sin. The first explanation offered was obviously based on the intervention of the Devil to abuse women going through convulsions: «a deceitful devil, capable of simulating illnesses and of entering women's bodies, in order to “possess” them. Hysterics then turned into witches, whom Jules Michelet rediscovered in a positive light in the 19th Century» (*ibid.*).

In André Breton's works before the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of hysteria, the theme of feminine hysteria can already be found and seems to have been a deep source of inspiration for him, as were its interpretations as possession by the Devil. For example, in the following extract from his book of poems *Révolver à cheveux blancs*, the echo of satanic intervention within a hysterical fit can be detected in a highly poeticized description:

«Ne sera dans la ville abstraite qu'un appel de démon  
Vers l'inassermentable règne de la crépitante  
Femme sans nom  
Qui brise en mille éclats le bijou du jour».<sup>35</sup>

(«The solitary sound of a demon calling rises in the anonymous town  
towards the unwitnessed reign of the sizzling  
nameless woman  
who smashes her daily jewel into a thousand pieces»).

The image of the «daily jewel smashed into a thousand pieces» could, by association, refer to the «involuntary and spasmodic» muscle movements which characterize convulsions, particularly during hysterical fits. However, beyond the hysterical fit, convulsions represent on-going movement: the surrealist attitude par excellence. In fact, it functions as the sine qua non condition which shapes the definition of surreality in André Breton's imagination. The famous concise formula so typical of Breton's axiomatics which constitutes the final sentence of *Nadja*: «La beauté sera convulsive ou ne sera pas»<sup>36</sup> (Beauty shall be convulsive or shall not be), in a way sums up both the beauty of the book and that of its heroine's enigmatic nature – beyond every possible definition or norm –. In *L'Amour fou*, that strange relationship between the beauty of convulsions and the convulsions of beauty reappears, in what seems to be a semi-automatic reflex on the part of the founder of surrealism, in the manner of the triggering of a hysterical fit and hardly connected with the context: «La beauté convulsive sera érotique – voilée, explosante-fixe, magique-circonstancielle ou ne sera pas»<sup>37</sup> (Convulsive beauty shall be erotic and veiled, explosive and still, magical and circumstantial or shall not be).

By the means of those words, the erotic content of the hysterical fit is made to appear obvious. Indeed, psychoanalytic criticism has not failed to point out the highly significant link between manifestations of hysteria and surrealist inspiration: «In France, the surrealist movement claimed the term “convulsive beauty, in order to make hysteria into the symbol of a new art form”.» (Roudinesco & Plon, p. 473).

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<sup>35</sup> André Breton, “Après le tamanoir”, in *Révolver à cheveux blancs*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, Pléiade I, p. 753.

<sup>36</sup> André Breton, *Nadja*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, Pléiade I, p. 753.

<sup>37</sup> André Breton, *L'Amour fou*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, Pléiade I, p. 753.

The “convulsive” aspect, which represented a determining factor for defining love or beauty in the mind of the founder of surrealism – indeed the essence of feminine eroticism for the poet, was to be completed with a reference to the “aura” of the hysterical fit. The latter referred to a kind of vapor seeming to emanate from the woman’s body, forming a halo around it before the invasion of the hysterical fit, and for the poets it represented a nucleus of poeticity and idealisation. Indeed, the surrealist “appropriation” of the hysterical fit was largely dependent on that aura: «The hysterical fit comes into being in spite of hysteria itself, with its superb aura and its four phases, the third of which captures our attention in the manner of the most expressive and purest of “tableaux vivants”, its simple counterpart in normal life»<sup>38</sup>

Besides its function as the hysterical woman’s halo, that “superb aura” represents sensuality or even the delirious erotics of a woman in convulsions, who exposes herself shamelessly to the spectator. In other words, the hysterical fit would represent the unfolding of the mysteries of female sexuality. «Whether neurotic or viral, the contagion of delirium stems from the aura of sexuality, (...) freed from religious censorship, or it will be expressed in the form of an incantatory equation restoring Life’s primacy», as Claude Maillard Chary notes.<sup>39</sup>

As far as the “four phases” of the hysterical fit are concerned, the third of which our two surrealists compared to «tableaux vivants of the purest and most expressive kind», they represent the four consecutive phases of the hysterical fit, which have been studied and described by specialists. Breton and Aragon must surely have studied those symptoms of codified hysteria in Laignel-Lavastine, Barbe and Delmas’s book *La Pratique psychiatrique à l’usage des étudiants et des praticiens*, which was published in 1919. In that volume, the four phases are described as follows:

«the first phase of the fit is “the epileptic phase”: loss of consciousness, disappearance of any general or particular sensitivity, convulsions going through a tonic and a clonic phase, finally ending in a phase of muscular resolution. The second period, the clownish period, divides into two phases: the phase of illogical attitudes (the arc of a circle), and the phase of “sweeping movements”, incoherent and excessive gesticulations, accompanied by strange inarticulate cries. The third period, that of “passionate attitudes”, in which the subject expresses the various hallucinations assailing her through mimicry. Finally the fourth period, the period of delirium, which can be combined with the previous one and is mainly conveyed by a flow of incomplete sentences» (Laignel-Lavastine et al., pp. 257-258, quoted by José Pierre, *op. cit.*, pp. 417-418, see note 40).

After completing their concise inventory of the various perceptions of the hysterical fit, as well as of the religious beliefs and medical experiments on the subject over the centuries, Breton and Aragon concluded their text by proposing their own surrealist definition of hysteria:

«We hereby propose, in 1928, a new definition of hysteria: Hysteria is a more or less irreducible mental state, characterized by a subversion of the relations established between the subject and the moral world, of which the subject believes itself to be practically relieved, outside all delirious systems. This mental state is founded on a need for a reciprocal seduction, which explains the hurriedly accepted miracles of medical suggestion (or countersuggestion). Hysteria is not a pathological phenomenon and can, in all respects, be considered to be a supreme mode of expression.»<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Aragon and Breton, “The Fiftieth Anniversary of Hysteria”, p. 22.

<sup>39</sup> See Claude Maillard-Chary, *Le Bestiaire des surréalistes*, Paris: Editions Presse de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, Collection des Thèses de Paris III, 1994, pp. 170-171.

<sup>40</sup> Louis Aragon and André Breton, “Le Cinquantenaire de l’hystérie”, p. 22. Translation by Elisabeth Bronfen, cited by Julia Borossa, in *Hysteria*, London: Icon Books, 2001, p. 68.

By accentuating the «need for mutual attraction», on which the hysteric's mental state is based, the surrealists confirm the important part played by eroticism in the triggering of the hysterical fit, whereas in the last sentence of their text, which sums up the surrealist innovative approach to hysteria, Breton and Aragon, while questioning the contemporary medical and psychoanalytic assessments of hysteria in general, also reject the current perception of it as a pathological phenomenon and insist on its being considered as a «supreme means of expression» – that is, obviously, mainly of female eroticism.

José Pierre insists on hysteria as an expression of female eroticism and in addition comments on the significant humorous dimension he detects in the two young poets's approach<sup>41</sup>. The psychiatrist and psychoanalyst René Held provides a more scientific formulation of the perception of hysteria as a mode of expression and/or communication:

«(Hysteria) can indeed be considered more as a state, a partly constitutional and partly acquired “aptitude” for expressing oneself, communicating with the world, as much that of subjects as of objects, not only by means of an articulate language, but also with what we like to call a language of the “guts”. And by “guts”, we do not just mean entrails, but also and especially (...) the system marked as relational, which precisely enables the individual to move and to form a certain type of relationship with his/her environment. That is the very definition of human and animal behaviour (...) which explains how Breuer and Freud were able to use hysteria as a starting point for their first works concerning the invention of psychoanalysis and, moreover, how hysteria kept and was privileged by the surrealists's attention.»<sup>42</sup>

But the surrealists's attention seems to have been caught by something else: the perceptible, hypothetical “kinship” – although it was never clearly displayed in the surrealist text and never confirmed, as far as I know, by the critics – between the “nature” of the hysterical fit and the principles defining surrealism itself as a “convulsive” manifestation of the mind. Such a comparison reveals an organic link between hysterical convulsions and those simulated by surrealist art.

The undeniable “automatism” of surrealist fits spontaneously reminds us of the definition of surrealism given by André Breton, in order to point out some astonishing connections between the state of a hysterical fit and the description of the surrealist process: «Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express – verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner – the actual functioning of thought»<sup>43</sup> The other manners include the expression of the hysteric's body language, which would thus reveal another aspect of «the actual functioning of thought», non consciously aiming to achieve artistic or poetic results – like surrealist creations – but as spontaneous as the movement's first theoretical texts wished it to be.

Consequently, the surrealist perception of hysteria «is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought» (*ibid.*). The climax of the “kinship” between surrealist creation and hysterical fit is obviously «the absence of any control exercised by reason» (*ibid.*) since both are «exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern» (*ibid.*).

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<sup>41</sup> José Pierre, “Le Problème de la femme dans le surréalisme”, in catalogue of the exhibition *La Femme et le surréalisme*, Lausanne: Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts (1987-1988), p. 55.

<sup>42</sup> René R. Held, “Du Surréalisme à l'hystérie”, in *L'Oeil du psychanalyste – surréalisme et surréalité*, Paris: Payot, 1973, p. 81.

<sup>43</sup> From André Breton, *Manifestes du surréalisme*, (1924), extract translated by Lucy Lippard, in L. Lippard (Ed.) *Surrealists on Art*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1970, p. 20.

#### 4. HYSTERIA AS A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION WITHIN THE SCOPE OF FRENCH SURREALISM

Apart from the surrealist text celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of hysteria and André Breton's literary production, a few other surrealist manifestations seem to show an interest in the subject. However, before referring to various surrealist works inspired by the theme of hysteria, it seems appropriate to mention the case of Robert Desnos. Several of the latter's surrealist "activities", attempts at integrating and investigating the magic of surreality, constitute a set of hysterical symptoms. Various specialists have diagnosed the poet's temperament as hysterical without hesitation. For example, according to René Held: «One can ascertain that the late lamented Robert Desnos, during his "trance states" or sleeps, whether induced or not, would then reveal an undeniably hysterical constitution» (Held, *op. cit.*, p. 81).

In the way of surrealist works inspired by the theme of hysteria, we can mention Paul Eluard's collage "L'Hystérie"<sup>44</sup>, Salvador Dali's sculpture "Nu féminin hystérique et aérodynamique"<sup>45</sup> or his drawing "L'Arc hystérique" (1934), a representation typical of Dali of a woman's body in one of the most theatrical positions of the hysterical fit, which, as we have seen, was what most fascinated the surrealists.

Moreover, I would like to distinguish a text by Dali inspired by hysteria, because it is so representative of the artist's relation to the surrealist text celebrating hysteria. From the perspective opened up by Breton and Aragon's 1928 document, we can perceive Dali's interest in "the phenomenon of ecstasy". In the short text under that title accompanying his eponymous photomontage<sup>46</sup>, the painter proposes the following definition of ecstasy, which is astonishingly evocative of the surrealist perception of hysteria: «Ecstasy is the critical mental state par excellence, which today's unlikely, hysterical, modern, surrealist and phenomenal mentality aspires to make "continuous"» (*ibid.*). Besides, the priority Dali grants to the role of desire within ecstasy reveals the "libidinal" content of the hysterical fit: «Ecstasy constitutes the "pure state" of demanding and hyperaesthetic vital lucidity, the blind lucidity of desire» (*ibid.*). But what especially strikes us in Dali's evocation of hysteria, through his "phenomenon of ecstasy" approach, is the connection he establishes between ecstasy and perversion: «Ecstasy is the climactic consequence of dreams, it is the consequence and the mortal confirmation of the images of our perversion» (*ibid.*).

If we compare Dali's formula with a remark Freud made in his correspondence with Fliess in which he declares that: «Hysteria does not consist of a rejection of *sexuality* but of a *rejection of perversion*»<sup>47</sup>, we could detect in Dali's "mortal confirmation" (vérification mortelle) the possible rejection of perversion, implied by the Freudian prescription.

On the other hand, in René Crevel's writing, we can find references to hysterics, which are not only devoid of sensuality and eroticism but furthermore, in the portraits the young poet sketches of those patients, they provoke feelings of disgust and repulsion in the reader. Indeed, the appearance of symptomatology referred to there, comes closer to that of syphilis than to hysteria: «You hysteric! You are ready for the Salpêtrière. Saltpetre is the syphilis of walls. You have already lost your hair. Your stony skin is breaking out into plaster sores. You are in pain under the Tarmac of your beloved skull. Your limbs are convulsed and contorted.»<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Paul Eluard, "L'Hystérie", in *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme*, p. 14.

<sup>45</sup> Reproduced in Robert Benayoun, *Erotique du surréalisme*, (1965), Paris: Editions Jean-Jacques Pauvert, p. 62.

<sup>46</sup> Salvador Dali, "Le Phénomène de l'extase", text and photomontage, in *Minotaure*, No 3-4, December 1933, p. 76.

<sup>47</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Birth of Psychoanalysis*, (1950), Letter to Fliess no. 52.

<sup>48</sup> René Crevel, *Etes-vous fous?*, (1929), Paris: Gallimard, 1975, p. 32.

It could be that the syphilitic symptomology applied by Crevel to a woman hysteric was really more meant to denounce her confinement-cum-incarceration at the Salpêtrière – the syphilis of walls – rather than to highlight the pathological sexual dimension, which was then believed to be an essential component of the hysterical fit.

Today, the surrealists's passionate defense of young women hysterics and their diatribes against the psychiatrists, whom they saw as the lovely patients's victimizers, seem outdated and far from innocent. Martha Noel Evans draws an interesting parallel between the young poets and the traditional psychiatrists:

«For the surrealists, as for their psychiatric predecessors, hysterics were carnal creatures, more subject to their passions than others; they were the embodiment of capricious, irrational, mysterious Woman. While the surrealists made innovative use of Freudian theory and promoted a radically new interpretation of mental illness, their defense of hysteria was paradoxically constructed on a foundation that echoed the reactionary views of women held by the targets of their attack.»<sup>49</sup>

Nevertheless, Breton and his group played a unique part in the development of psychoanalysis. Surrealism was the only literary and artistic movement to have influenced and promoted Freud's doctrine as well as having been influenced by it. Although Freud himself tended to dismiss the surrealists as unscientific eccentrics and refused to collaborate with Breton in 1937 on a book on dreams<sup>50</sup>, he took the young Dali, who visited him the same year, slightly more seriously (*ibid.*). Jacques Lacan, Freud's most eminent successor did collaborate briefly with the surrealists and was actually inspired by some of Dali's ideas on paranoia. All present-day books on hysteria or even on the history of psychoanalysis in France, refer extensively to the surrealists as champions of the cause of hysterics and as propagators of Freud's doctrine. Hysteria, however, even when its name changes, has lost little of its mystery, it continues to be predominantly a woman's disease, to express oppression and to inspire literary and artistic production. Martha Noel Evans sees it as a perpetual return of the repressed (*op. cit.*, p. 242).<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Martha Noel Evans, *Fits & Starts A Genealogy of Hysteria in Modern France*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991, p. 94.

<sup>50</sup> The book was *Trajectoire du rêve*. See Elisabeth Roudinesco, "Le surréalisme au service de la psychanalyse", in *Histoire de la psychanalyse en France II*, Paris: Seuil, 1986, p. 49.

<sup>51</sup> See Constantin Makris, "La aplicación a la doctrina freudiana, polo de divergencia entre el surrealismo francés y el surrealismo griego. André Breton, Andreas Embiricos y el psicoanálisis", in *Hommage au Professeur Alexis Eudald Solà*, published by the Centre for Byzantine, Neo-Hellenic and Cypriot Studies, University of Granada, Spain, 2004, pp. 293-318.

# Jorge Luis Borges “Funes the Memorious”: Philosophical and psychoanalytical reflections

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In his initial remarks on language in the *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, John Locke has this to say about the problem of choosing what to give a name to, for it is obvious that, if we were quite arbitrary about it, we could give a name to, not just *any-thing*, but to every instant of our sensory experience:

The multiplication of words would have perplexed their use, had every particular thing need of a distinct name to be signified by. (*Essay*, III, I, 3)

It reminds us of one of Bertrand Russell’s comments, that finally, to banish all sameness from the ‘common’ referent, one would have to have a word for every infinitesimal instant of every object, an *apax legomena*, a language of ‘once-only-names’.<sup>1</sup> If you entertain this odd thought for a moment you will readily see that it would involve an infinity of selections. For example, if I now pick out the present momentary co-existence of this part of this wood-grain in the table here with my finger under the precise conditions of light from the window at this instant of time, and call this chance concatenation ‘Jabberwocky’ or ‘Wakdjunkaga’ or ‘George W. Bush’, it is plain that I will have to multiply my ontological choice at the very next instant for that object has already ceased to be, since my finger has moved, the light has changed, and no doubt some of the dust that lay on the table has already been blown away by my breath. The inevitable result of this profligacy with entities will be that there will be no end to their number. There will be ‘an explosion of entities’ in the universe, as the philosopher Ernest Sosa would say.<sup>2</sup> What immediately strikes any sensible person is the utter uselessness of such a language. Not only would it be drowned in its own meticulousness, but it would have no link with human purposes, social or personal.

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<sup>1</sup> Bertrand Russell, ‘On Vagueness’, *Australasian Journal of Psychology and Philosophy*, 1, 85, 1923, (read before the Jowett Society, Oxford).

<sup>2</sup> Ernest Sosa, ‘Subjects among other things’, in *Philosophical Perspectives, I: Metaphysics*, 1987, James E. Tomberlin (Ed.), Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview Publishing Co., 1987, pp. 155-187.

One can reach a similar conclusion another way. You have heard of the monkey typing forever on a typewriter who would finally type out all of Shakespeare. One can add to that, for if it went on typing to eternity, it would inevitably type out all that could ever be said in all those languages that use the Roman alphabet, including not only all of Shakespeare and all books that have ever been written or could be, but all those books with one letter displaced, with two letters displaced, and all the nonsense that could ever be made up out of the Roman alphabet, and, of course, the process would be repeated chaotically *ad infinitum*. This, as you can equally readily see, is just as useless to us mortal human beings caught within the valuable limitations of space and time.

These two fantasies concerning language and that which it tries to apply to, the Real, provide the starting-points for two of the stories, if we may call them that, of the Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges, namely, 'Funes the Memorious' and 'The Library of Babel'. The word 'Babel' brings home the uselessness of both these curious impossibilities, the first the remembering, the conceptualizing and wording of the infinitesimal detail of our sensory experience, and second, the attempt to arrive at a language so complete in its writing down that it covers all that could ever be said. Perhaps you might see that in their extravagance these fantasies about human conceptualization of the Real, although they appear at different ends of the language spectrum, the former concerned with what is referred to and the latter with the means of referring, arrive at the same impossible point, a complete naming of all that is in the Real, one might even blasphemously say, a God's-eye view of the universe. «In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God» – John, Chapter I, verse i.

We can move to other philosophical modes of expressing the two poles we have here. In ancient philosophy we might talk, on the one hand, of the 'discordant and unordered motion' that was unintelligible matter (Plato, *Timaeus*, 30, a, 4-5) as against the perfection of the intelligible ideal Forms (see Book X of *The Republic*). God was, of course, the source and guarantor of these Forms. Later, there is the opposition between Spinoza's 'extension' and 'thought', that he actually spoke of as 'substances'; then there is that between Kant's 'intuition', his term for the chaos of sense experience, and the saving rationality of the concept, bestowed by noumenal reason within us upon the 'blindness' of that chaos. It is appropriate to quote here Kant's famous dictum, «Thoughts without concepts are empty: intuitions without concepts are blind» (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A51, B75), which means that, if concepts are not ultimately based on sensory experience of the Real, they would have no reference, and, therefore, no engagement with human concerns; contrariwise, if sensory experience, 'intuition', is not classified, that is, no selections are made from it, thus leaving it in its chaotic state, then we would be metaphorically blind. We would sense all right, like a baby opening its eyes for the first time, experiencing what William James's 'someone' called 'a big, blooming, buzzing confusion'<sup>3</sup>, but we would not be able to pick out anything, not even ourselves. Yet without access to that chaos, we would have nothing to talk about. So when Borges chose this pair of philosophical themes, indeed, what some would call today 'philosophemes', he was knowingly experimenting with them, bringing home to us their intimate connection with our being human by an imaginative exaggeration of them. One might call several of Borges' stories examples of allegorical hyperbole or hyperbolic allegory, based on paradoxes that inhabit our apparently non-paradoxical world. Indeed, Xenon's paradoxes, that of Achilles and the Tortoise, for example,

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<sup>3</sup> William James, 'Percept and Concept – The Import of Concepts', in *The Writings of William James: A Comprehensive Edition*, John J. McDermott (Ed.), Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1977, pp. 232-243, see p. 233.

are bound up with our attempt as human beings to divide up the world into numerable entities, and, for some of us, to question a deep conviction, with unconscious sources, that it can be so divided.

I mean to concentrate on the first story only, that of 'Funes the Memorious'. Let me begin by giving you a short outline of it. It begins with the narrator riding home in the evening with his cousin on the pampas near Fray Bentos. There comes a ragged boy running along a wall above them. The cousin, who is acquainted with the boy, calls out to him the question "What time is it, Ireneo?" The boy, without consulting a watch, cries out immediately in a mocking tone, «It's four minutes to eight, young Bernardo Juan Francisco».

Notice not only the oddity of the boy being able to give the time whenever he is asked, but the fact of his being able to pinpoint an instant of the continuum of time so securely, plus the fact that he knew the name of the person he was addressing. The boy's name was Ireneo Funes.

The narrator's life takes him away from Fray Bentos for a few years, but it chances that he returns and, when he does so, he inquires after the 'chronometrical Funes' as he terms him. He discovers that the young man had been thrown from a horse and become paralysed. He glimpses him twice at the window to which he had been brought by his mother at his request: on the first occasion he had his eyes closed; on the second he was lost in contemplation of «a fragrant sprig of *santonica*».

Ireneo, happening to hear that the narrator had with him some books in Latin (in particular, Pliny's *Naturalis historia*) asked for the loan of them, including a Latin dictionary. The narrator, aware that Ireneo knew no Latin, also sent him a Latin text-book, amusedly doubting whether it would be of any use.

The core of the story now begins, which has a plot, in Borges' words «no other than the dialogue» he has with Funes. The narrator gets an urgent message from Buenos Aires that he must return at once. Remembering that he has lent these books to Funes, he goes round to his house to get them back. As he arrives he hears Funes' mocking voice speaking in Latin, the first paragraph of the seventh book of the *Naturalis historia*, the subject of which is memory. He goes into the darkened room where Funes lives out his extraordinary life and begins the dialogue that makes plain the strange world in which Funes now lives. Though before the fall from the horse he could immediately tell the time and remember the names of anyone to whom he was introduced, after it he could remember every detail of every experience that he had, no matter how trivial or minute. Funes in fact begins by saying how feeble the examples of extraordinary memories given by Pliny in his book seemed to him. Whereas Cyrus, King of the Persians, could call every soldier in his army by name, Funes

knew by heart the forms of the southern clouds at dawn on 30 April 1882, and could compare them in his memory with the mottled streaks on a book in Spanish binding he had only seen once and with the outlines of the foam raised by an oar in the Rio Negro the night before the Quebracho uprising.<sup>4</sup>

The rest of the tale is taken up with detailing other miraculous results of this of this fantastic ability. The narrator notes that, whereas we have the ability to remember the simple mathematical forms of circle, triangle, lozenge, and tend to consider them in some way more significant than other shapes, Funes «can do the same with the stormy mane of a pony, with a herd of cattle of a hill, with the changing fire and its innumerable ashes, with the many faces of a dead man through a long wake».<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, 'Funes the Memorious', in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*, Donald A. Yates & James E. Irby (Eds.), Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970, pp. 87-95, see p. 92.

<sup>5</sup> Borges, p. 92.

Funes finds the remembering of such precise and infinitesimally detailed sensory experiences oppressive, which is why he has retreated to a darkened room and spends most of his time in bed. He has no difficulty in filling up that time, for he conducts strange experiments with his remarkable faculty. Here are two of them.

Realising that the use of the decimal system, our counting the numbers in groups of ten, was merely a mnemonic device to enable human beings with their limited powers of memory to recall the numbers more easily, he set out to give each number its own unique name. Instead of saying 'eleven', which actually is 'one-leave' (that is, 'ten and *one left over*'), he could say 'Luis Melián Lafinur'; instead of 'twelve', which is actually 'two-leave' (that is, 'ten and *two left over*'), he could say 'Olimar'; instead of 'thirteen' ('three-ten'), he could say 'sulphur'; instead of 365, he said 'meat blanket'. In a few days he had gone beyond the 24,000 mark. The narrator protests that this is a 'rhapsody of incoherent terms', which he believes is «the opposite of a series of numbers», but Funes did not understand him or «refused to understand him».<sup>6</sup>

The other strange pastime was to take a day of his and reconstruct it in its entirety. «Two or three times he had reconstructed a whole day, but each reconstruction had required a whole day» to perform.<sup>7</sup>

Funes' own comment on the state of his memory was that it was «like a garbage heap»<sup>8</sup>. He attempted to bring some order into the chaos by trying to reduce each of past days to seventy thousand memories, which would then «be defined by means of ciphers», but, to quote the tale,

He was dissuaded from this by two considerations: his awareness that the task was interminable, his awareness that the task was useless. He thought that by the hour of his death he would not even have finished classifying all the memories of his childhood.<sup>9</sup>

He tries to counter the oppressiveness of his remembering, not only by seeking darkness and isolation, but by trying to concentrate on a minimal sensory intake. On hearing of some new houses that were being built in his street, he determinedly imagines them to be

black, compact, made of homogeneous darkness; in that direction he would turn his face to sleep.<sup>10</sup>

The last we hear of him is in the last sentence of the story, which is «Ireneo Funes died in 1889, of congestion of the lungs»<sup>11</sup>

The mention of the uselessness of these memories can give us a lead into our analysis. A comment that Funes makes himself can give us an opening:

He was, let us not forget, incapable of ideas of a general, Platonic sort. Not only was it difficult for him to comprehend that the generic symbol 'dog' embraces so many unlike individuals of diverse size and form: it bothered him that the dog at three fourteen (seen from the side) should have the same name as the dog at three fifteen (seen from the front).<sup>12</sup>

«It bothered him». It bothered him in a situation in which we would, it seem, naturally say that we were not so 'bothered'. What is it, to be 'bothered'?

If you are bothered about something it matters to you, that is, your fears and/or your desires are aroused; it is a question of what action you are to take with regard to the interpretation of the

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<sup>6</sup> Borges, p. 93.

<sup>7</sup> Borges, p. 92.

<sup>8</sup> Borges, p. 92.

<sup>9</sup> Borges, p. 93.

<sup>10</sup> Borges, p. 94.

<sup>11</sup> Borges, p. 95.

<sup>12</sup> Borges, pp. 93-94.

sensory experience you are having. The humblest of organisms do not have this problem: all is performed by instinct – perhaps even, if the artificial intelligence people would have it, for them it is all done digitally, without thought. The advanced animals, though, have evolved the learning process. In view of the time available, I shall be as brief as possible here: they have a pain/pleasure module that, when activated, places elements from sensory experience into memory and marks them with fear or desire respectively. A single experience does not suffice, of course, to hone an appropriate response, but repeated encounters with the relevant region of the real produce ever more successful responses in action, a matter of feedback, a ‘from-and-to process’, as the philosopher Roy Wood Sellars puts it, that refines the maintenance of life both for the individual and the species. Jean Piaget called it a continual oscillation between the ‘accommodations’ to the new input and the ‘assimilations’ that are the attempts to conserve what has been learned.<sup>13</sup> Human beings made the evolutionary leap of allowing an updating from individual to individual by means of language, which for the advanced animals extends only to limited responses to signs.

Now how does language work? Those who have heard my earlier presentations at this series of conferences may recall my placing the structure of the Story as central to language. At the core of language is the proposition: someone *proposes* an updating of our classification, a re-categorization of the Real. It is a dynamic act by the Speaker that may or may not be acceded to, for the Hearer may not agree that the new categorization serves his or her fears and desires. The word ‘update’ itself, used for informing someone, reveals that the transformation occurs through *time*.

How does a proposition, a simple statement that hopefully bears some new information, work? First, Speaker and Hearer begin by taking for granted that they have already singled out a portion of the Real. Notice the paradox: Speaker and Hearer behave as if no updating is required, that part of the Real is *timelessly* single without regard to any individual perspectives, that is, apart from human choice. «To take for granted» as a phrase gives this covert collusion away, for ‘to take for’ means *to accept something not fully determined as if it is so*. Consider its use in «It was so dark I *took* the cold tap *for* the hot». And ‘granted’ as a word immediately brings in our fears and desires, since ‘to grant’ means *to allow, to permit*, so to take the singularity of something for granted is to assume for the time being in an actually uncertain situation that nothing could disturb that singularity seriously for either of us. To get it clear, this blind collusion of ours works on an *assumption* that the Real is already categorized apart from human choice and that its singularity precedes that choice.

When Bertrand Russell considered this point he was content to believe that singularity was never impugned. He declared that in the Real «there can be no such thing as vagueness or imprecision; things are what they are, and there is an end of it». Of a corpse buried in the ground he said that it was obvious that there would come a time when everyone would agree that no one would say a corpse remained there. It never occurred to him that human decision (which might involve painful disagreements) could enter into the choice.<sup>14</sup> The current disputes in England about the re-use of cemeteries are a case in point. Nevertheless, a proposition is begun with both parties assuming that they have converged on something that exists in perfect singularity apart from both of them, whereas the case really is one of two overlapping selections from the Real being mutually treated as one.

That they are overlapping there is no doubt. In the *New Scientist* two months ago was an article that detailed the extent of the differences in sensory registration from one person to another.<sup>15</sup> For example, in this room now not a single person hears my voice in the same way as anyone else, and I myself am probably the one with the most extreme version. Not only that, because our learning histories have been different, we also have differing conceptualizations of what we call the

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<sup>13</sup> Jean Piaget, *The Child’s Construction of Reality*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955, pp. 352-353.

<sup>14</sup> Russell, *op. cit.*, note 1.

<sup>15</sup> R. Hollingham, In the realm of your senses. *New Scientist*, 181 (2432), pp. 40-43 (31st January, 2004).

same portions of the Real. After all, we would not talk to each other if we didn't. As Wilhelm Dilthey put it, if we understood everything entirely differently, we would not be able to speak, and if we understood everything in exactly the same way, we wouldn't need to speak.<sup>16</sup> So the truth is that there are no given boundaries in the Real: we each of us carve up the continuum differently according to our bodily natures and our learning histories.

Once Speaker and Hearer have projected this strictly false assumption that a common singularity is before them, the Speaker can then attempt to, update the Hearer, that is, contradict that assumption. To illustrate: I can say to you as Speaker «Here is the lens of my left eye». We have all agreed on a singularity, part of a living human body, with certain well-known criteria of classification. Now I update you about 'it': «It is not a human lens – it is plastic, artificial, a replacement, working much better than what it replaced.» Here we have an informative statement. A proposition, that began with our getting a rough coincidence of our understandings by our taking for granted that there was an existing singularity upon which we all were focussing, but we did that just so that I could tweak your focus nearer to what I believe is a more satisfactory one. What is interesting is that there need not be any singularity at all for the proposition to work, and this puts us well within the scope of Ockham's Razor, for which is ontologically the more frugal theory, this one with gets on with merely imagining entities, or that which extravagantly believes in that explosion of entities that Sosa spoke of? For all that matters – and the word 'matters' reminds us of the pressure of our fears and desires – is that the updating go through. The notion of a perfect singularity was like a catalyst in a chemical combination: it allows the process to take place but it remains untouched logically, timelessly, 'un-really' outside the process precisely because it was *imagined* by us all. Notice that this does not imply that the Real is not before us, just that the logical singularity of the 'entity' is not.

Counting is therefore an act of mutual imagination. It is exactly the same when we use money. We *take for granted* that the money has the same value for all of us – this is a single euro [holding up a euro] and it has the same value for everybody here – and this allows our commerce to go on, but everyone knows that those very bargains that are the basis of that commerce are altering the value of the money we use as we use it. Last week I saw a financial commentator on TV and behind him a Movitype screen was showing the changing value of the dollar, which was fluctuating as he spoke. So with the reference of our words as we speak and hear.

But this is the Symbolic we are speaking of. Just as with the dollar, the bargains of our statements, our propositions to each other, are altering the reference of our words as we speak. You can imagine a Movitype screen behind me showing the changing value of our words as I speak to you now. So the enumeration of singular entities involved in our words is a fiction. We have to imagine the singularity of 'a referent' in order to speak, which is precisely to change that singularity. This is why the word 'count' is ambiguous: it can mean *to enumerate*, but it can also mean *to matter*. As Aristotle said, what counts as six apples for the seller may not count as six apples for the buyer, for judgements of desire and aversion play their part. In pure mathematics, of course, what we must never do is refer. In Gödel's Proof of the inconsistency of mathematics the paradoxes are produced precisely because he does refer: he makes numbers refer to other numbers, which is not an act of numerate purity.

What about Funes then? First, let us look at his game with the numbers, the one in which he gave a unique name to each number. The narrator, you recall, thought considered his project a «rhapsody of incoherent terms», but, in fact, Funes' list of proper names for each number brings out the fact that the number system is indeed a mutual fiction of endless singularities. Remove the decimal, the binary (based on 2), the duodecimal (based on 12), the undevigintal (based on 19, which is perfectly possible), – if truth be told, remove a system of mnemonics based on any

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<sup>16</sup> Wilhelm Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Gottingen, 1913-1967), Vol. VII, p. 95.

number whatsoever, and we are left with the numbers in all their naked glory, each a singularity worthy of a proper name. So Funes' experiment merely returned the numbers to their original form. Take Goldbach's Conjecture, as yet mathematically unproved, that every even number is the sum of two prime numbers: take 8 – it is obviously the sum of 3 and 5. I claim that the solution lies in seeing the problem philosophically, not mathematically. An even number is one divisible by 2, that is, two singularities make it up, and what could be more singular than a prime number, one that defies division? To strengthen this claim, I have added Wright's Conjecture, that every odd number is the sum of three primes, Take 13 – it is the sum of 7, 5 and 3; 21 is the sum of 13, 5 and 3; 43 is the sum of 23, 13, and 7; and so on. Funes had tumbled to the fact that timeless, logical singularity, an utterly fictive freezing of the Real, is what actually characterizes the number system. It represents therefore a perfect narcissism, for it implies that whatever anyone has selected from the Real is, not only the same for everybody, but is unalterable, including the fiction of their own singularity, their own precious subjecthood. It represents the fiction that the Symbolic's selections are finally and timelessly one's own, instead of being a mutual collusion. Mathematics as a pure fiction can thus be said to be an allegory of pure narcissism.

Then consider Funes' bewilderment at a dog at 3.14 p.m. seen from the side could be identified with the dog at 3.15 p.m. seen from the front. This is to ignore the human purpose of selecting those parts of the Real we call dogs rather than these punctiform sights of his. It is clear that they most commonly serve no purpose, though one could imagine some extraordinary situation in which that distinction had some relation to a human concern. Funes was at odds with the Symbolic, unable, because of the detail of his experience, to align his selections with those of others. He stands like someone autistic, as one who cannot enter into the imaginary game of the proposition, who cannot project in concert with another the fiction of a perfect singularity of reference.

It seems likely that what Helen Keller unconsciously realized, as she ran her hands under the water from the tap, was, not that she had come «to understand what a name was», as Jean Aitchison puts it, which is virtually a dormitive explanation,<sup>17</sup> but that language began with the understanding that the other's attention, through the word 'water', was on the 'same' portion of the Real as herself, even *though she and her teacher had markedly different perceptions of 'it', her teacher having normal sensory access to the world, Helen being deaf and blind*. When Helen became versed in the proper use of the sign language after this key incident, she perhaps would be able to update her teacher about the Real in this case, namely, that the water had been *warm*. She ceased to behave in an autistic manner from that moment onwards.

What now emerges is that the original mutual collusion required initially in the proposition relies on a species of trust, for the Hearer has temporarily to accept that she and the Speaker have focussed on precisely the same region of the Real, and yet that she has to expect an alteration of it. This species of trust can hardly be said to deserve automatically the imputation of a moral quality, for the Hearer may enter into the collusion blindly, believing superstitiously in the given existence of 'the entity' beyond either of their selections. It is not a true faith in the other until the Hearer is prepared to find that the updating constitutes a risk, a risk which may be severe.

Look at the implications of the situation. Two persons in all good faith, as we say, are taking for granted, mutually assuming that a single entity, be it a thing or a person, is ontologically present in its singularity, and that through the proposition one has gained a putatively better grasp on it as a result of the other's alteration. The underlying assumption therefore is that Hearer can trust Speaker. Let us say that the two are even bound by affection even love. However, because of the ever-present differences at the sensory and conceptual levels, neither can be sure of the implications at a

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<sup>17</sup> Jean Aitchison, *The Seeds of Speech*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 96.

later time. Perhaps both included something in the taking-for-granted that was not so taken by the other. To put it another way, what Speaker deemed too negligible to mention was not even within the scope of the other's understanding. Furthermore, the brute Real itself conceals implications that may not emerge until later when unintended consequences show themselves. The 'brute Real', as this audience will be quick to acknowledge, contains, not only aspects of the external Real, but also unconscious elements within the agents themselves that they might even have disavowed at the moment of initial acceptance of the proposition. There is therefore a risk in every performance of language, for the proposition is its essential component.

We now come to the key point: that there is a risk in each one of these linguistic acts of trust. To imagine that a perfect truth has been agreed upon, a fixed promise made, an unconditional law enacted, an absolute rule imposed, is to turn a proper trust or, better, faith in the other, into a pseudo-trust, into – let me put it as frankly as possible – into a superstition.

Could one not say that Lacan's core message is that the Symbolic must be entered into in good faith, while knowing full well that it brings castration with it, that risk to our *jouissance* is in every utterance, every commitment that we make. After all, what is the worth of *commitment* to a promise, a rule, a law, that does not confront the possibility of sacrifice? To accept how language works, what our needful involvement in the Symbolic implies, means accepting that tragedy could be a real outcome. In a comic situation the one suffering the unexpected castration can laugh themselves into a new set of fears and desires, a new self, but in tragedy the sacrifice demanded may be the greatest, that of all fears and desires, namely, death.

Could we not say that, when Freud traces anxiety to the child's inability to cope with the flood of excitation that it encounters, it is struggling with the human language-game that bestows the singularity of an ego, of the other, and of ordinary things, a struggle which is necessarily attended with risk? The singularity of all these is never secure; hence, the difficulty of escaping from the womb of imaginary unity that apparently began our time in the world. No wonder an ordinary thing can turn uncanny on us, revealing a threat where reassurance of its singularity was 'taken for granted', a metaphor in that thing of the uncanniness of the self and of the other, of the subject and the other who are irredeemably split.

But there is Funes, overwhelmed by the excitation from the outer world to the point where he retreats into fantasy, into obsession. Is not his attempt to name all the numbers an extraordinary Freudian symptom, a fantasy in which he tries to impose singularity on the very singularity-system itself? Then his endeavours to classify a whole day and reduce a day to 70,000 memories – are not these obsessive attempts to impose the Symbolic with a final exact and successful completion upon the dangerous continuum of the ever-changing Real? No wonder he failed. He is an allegorical figure for all superstition, for those mad to impose boundaries in support of a falsely secure identity, whether they be misogynists, nationalists, anti-semites, fanatical haters of homosexuals or transsexuals or paedophiles or asylum-seekers, fundamentalists of any creed, who, fearful of the risk of identity, require fantasy limits as walls against uncertainty. Beyond those fantasy-walls they are, of course, in a Kleinian manner projecting those elements of their subjecthood which fail to correspond with the reassuring picture of a unified self that they unconsciously prefer. What is exceedingly ironic, as Lacan would be quick to point out, is that what they project is not necessarily an 'evil' aspect of themselves, but only that part of themselves of which they are unconsciously fearful: indeed, that very portion might tomorrow be the element that could have allowed an improvement of the Symbolic for all if it had been courageously adhered to and publicized. As psychoanalysts we are not Manicheans, believers in 'good' side and an 'evil' side to our natures, for that is what has continually to be negotiated. The Kleinian mother is only harmoniously unified in imagination.

As a philosopher, I also include among the frankly superstitious all positivists and direct realists who want to see the world as Russell did, as already furnished with recognizable things, or as P. F. Strawson does, with 'individuals' who are ontologically basic to a metaphysics. What is not

seen is that we have together to take for granted that there are persons and things in the world, that is, fictively to project a mutual Symbolic, an imaginary ontology, but only with the aim of forever updating it to its *impossible* match with the Real. The superstitious are unable to hope for the unrealisable – they are determined there will be jam tomorrow.

And does not Funes, as a result of this refusal of castration, suffer in his neurotic withdrawal from the world, becoming inert inside his darkened room? Is not his physical paralysis a metaphor for a neurotic one? Is not the refusal of castration powerfully imaged in his desperate reduction of his experience to imagined houses utterly and homogeneously black? Does he not psychosomatically die of ‘congestion of the lungs’, the very organs that provide the breath of word and life?

[See «“Perceiving socially and morally: a question of triangulation”, *Philosophy*, 80: 311 (January, 2005), 53-75; “Faith and narrative: a reading of Chaucer’s ‘The Franklin’s Tale’”, *Partial Answers*, 3: 1 (January, 2005), 19-42; *Narrative, Perception, Language, and Faith*, forthcoming Palgrave/Macmillan, Basingstoke, December, 2005.]

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## ***La Vie Sexuelle de Catherine M: Mid-life memoir or fabulative fantasy?***

SUZETTE HENKE (\*)

I have only three words for Catherine Millet's stunningly successful memoir, *The Sexual Life of Catherine M* – boring, boring, boring! Or perhaps I could add several more: disingenuous, exhibitionist, fabulative, and sociopathic. When the *Chicago Sun-Times* asked me to review this book several years ago, I initially demurred, since I was already coping with more bizarre emails than I could handle and, with a name like Suzette, didn't want to encourage homeless men in Chicago to get online and fire off suggestive emails to their fantasized version of a female author reviewing such a high-class, pornographic text. However, I felt sufficiently intrigued to read Millet's book last summer and now confess to being wildly disappointed. After the first thirty pages, I was beginning to find her lascivious confession tedious. After forty pages, I began to suspect that this tell-all autobiography might have been written by a man, in the tradition of John Cleland's *Fanny Hill*. A few minutes of cybersleuthing, however, confirmed Millet's reputation as a middle-aged art critic – the respected editor of the French periodical *Art Press*, as well as the bona fide author of numerous monographs.

With some training in poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theory, Millet begs her readers to eschew the temptation to psychoanalyze her, even as she casts tantalizing crumbs of information hinting at bourgeois adolescent trauma in a cramped, impoverished, father-absent household. While the lady “doth protest too much”, she seduces the psychoanalytic critic into struggling through this non-chronological, labyrinthine memoir in an effort to demystify the curiously impassive sexual experimentation, joyless adventures, and weirdly anonymous exploits of this contemporary *femme fatale*.

Emotionally deserted by Daddy at an early age, the rejected daughter seeks a panoply of male admirers to fill the gaping hole of her (unacknowledged) Oedipal anxieties. Or so the Freudian (or Rankian) therapist might conjecture. For this reader, at least, the nubile Catherine has judged

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herself emotionally responsible for paternal desertion and has unconsciously accused herself of an original sin of filial desire, a primordial transgression that alienated her father. According to Jessica Benjamin, «the failure of the idealized father of rapprochement to provide a recognizing response is often a pivotal issue in a girl's self formation». The child's failure to seduce or to please the idealized paternal figure can lead to narcissism, exhibitionism, and a compensatory reaction formation manifest in sadomasochistic patterns of repetition compulsion (119).

Freud explains in “The Economic Problem of Masochism” that the «wish, which so frequently appears in phantasies, to be beaten by the father stands very close to the other wish, to have a passive... sexual relation with him» (*SE*, 19:169). As Michelle Massé notes, Freud, in his essay on “The Uncanny”, marvels at the repetition of «a compulsion powerful enough to overrule the pleasure principle» (Massé, 13) and to condemn the subject to endless psychological reiterations of shock or injury. In “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes”, Freud goes on to explain that the «*turning round* of an instinct *upon the subject* is suggested to us by the reflection that masochism is actually sadism turned round upon the subject's own ego, and that exhibitionism includes the love of gazing at the subject's own body» (“Instincts” in *General Selection*, 77). In the guise of uninhibited sexual liberation, I would suggest, Millet is driven to obsessive-compulsive re-enactments of traumatic injury and a narcissistic appeal for sensual validation through sadomasochistic compulsion. Her memoir gives evidence of the intense narcissism of «a person who treats [her] own body in the same way as otherwise the body of a sexual object is treated; that is to say, [she] experiences sexual pleasure in gazing at, caressing, and fondling [her] body» for the sake of gratification (Freud, “Narcissism”, *GS*, 104). Seeking compensatory mastery of sexual vulnerability through orgiastic exhibitionism, Millet clearly revels in the thrill of self-immolation through sexual performances that focus on the scopophilic validation of multiple male admirers greedily devouring her seductive corporality both with their eyes and with their engorged genital equipment.

A critic as perspicacious as Philippe Sollers has praised Millet for intellectual and philosophical interrogation of existential questions imbricated in human sexuality. Yet Millet herself insists in an interview that the whole point of her outrageous endeavor is to expose the pointlessness of human sexuality, beyond its obvious evolutionary *telos*. «I don't think there's any point to sex at all», she provocatively declares. «People think there's some secret they'll discover in that black box of sex, which will help them to live better or make them happy. And in fact there's nothing, nothing, nothing there at all» (*New York Times*, 22, June 2002). Protesting an innate shyness, she insists that as an anonymous participant in group orgies, she “wasn't seen at all” and felt little or no emotional involvement, thus attesting to the kind of anhedonia and flatness of mood associated with post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as with borderline or dissociative personality. Male scopophilia gives way to female sexual accommodation in obsessive-compulsive tableaux that rarely reach the cohesion of narrative testimony. Might such relentless iconographic images of anonymous sexual receptivity obscure a post-traumatic ritual of repetition-compulsion? Deprived of her father's love at an early age, Millet welcomes the phallic attentions of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of admirers, who reassure her of the powerful sexual attraction that historically proved impotent in her infantile quest to secure Daddy's approval and devotion. Where compulsion reigns, Oedipal anxiety cannot be far behind. Or is my own diagnostic assessment simply a naive Freudian analysis of a mindless erotic romp, free of sexual inhibition, in celebration of the infamous sexual revolution of 1960's Europe?

I am somewhat abashed to confess that Millet and I are of approximately the same vintage and both came of age, in Europe and America respectively, in the late 1960's. One would have to have been a female student at the University of Paris – as I myself was in the 1960's – in order to understand how thoroughly Millet's provocative memoir is imbued with – and distorted by – millennial nostalgia. There is a giant gap in her salacious testimony, and it is not simply the Rabelaisian braggadocio of her sexual adventures or the gargantuan “generosity” of her genitalia. What is missing from this memoir is the density of cultural context and the thick description of gendered history.

For a female student at the Sorbonne in the 1960's, sexuality was neither a liberated landscape nor a carnivalesque romp, but a psychological war zone for explosive engagements in the battle of the sexes. Desire was a minefield fraught with physical danger, and vulnerable females were obliged to negotiate this treacherous terrain with extreme caution. Gallic guys took pride in their sexual prowess and were every bit as *macho* as other Mediterranean males. But here is the paradox: in France in the mid 1960's, contraception was hard to come by. Foreign students like myself could take a boat to England and visit the Marie Stopes Center, which boldly advertised «birth control for bachelor girls». (But even so, the principal methods of choice were the IUD and the diaphragm. Oral contraceptives were still in the inaugural phase of high-dose estrogen that often made women terribly ill). Back in Catholic France, the Church initially prevailed, and the government banned the Pill. When oral contraceptives did become available in 1967, physicians prescribed birth control pills almost exclusively to married (or ostensibly engaged) women. Abortion was illegal, costly, and dangerous. Gutsy French guys could always request condoms (by size), a supply of which was sequestered in the back room of their local pharmacies. But testosterone-driven males often protested that such encumbrances were too awkward and inefficient to handle, and too much of a turn-off to be considered.

As an ingenuous American student with fledgling feminist sensibilities, I was shocked to encounter fatalistic French attitudes concerning sexuality. A number of my 20-something female friends simply assumed that they would “play around” until they got caught by unplanned pregnancy, then would demand conjugal reparation from a reluctant partner in a dangerous game of Gallic roulette. How, I wondered, could my contemporaries treat their emotional lives, as well as their future careers, with such insouciance?

Take Jaqueline, for instance. She was dating an American G. I. and had fantasies of emigrating to an affluent home in the United States. «*Quand on a fait l'amour, il m'a dit que je suis "roostie". Quest-ce que ça veut dire en Anglais?*» None of us had the heart to inform Jaqueline that “rusty” wasn't normally a term of amorous endearment. When she got pregnant, her Yank jumped ship. He indicted his partner as a “dumb blonde” who had been stupid enough to get herself knocked up. Jaqueline was forced to seek a backstreet abortion and almost died from sepsis after a botched surgical procedure. Indelibly seered on my imagination is a picture of this French ingenue, riding home in excruciating pain on the Paris Metro during rush hour, and watching with horror as a torrent of blood seeped down her legs into a new pair of black patent leather shoes.

In the spring of 1972, as a finalist for the first Rhodes fellowship to be awarded to a woman, I was flown to Oxford to be interviewed, then spent a term at this illustrious university and traveled to Paris for Easter vacation. When I arrived at a flat rented by a Paris friend, she cautioned me to speak in soft whispers, since her housemate had just returned, via overnight bus, from an abortion clinic in Belgium. I felt vertiginous at the announcement of a chilling synchronicity. That same morning, my friend's cat had given birth to a litter of kittens, and all the newborns had been drowned in the toilet. Sex, it would seem, might have perilous consequences for females, either human or feline.

In Millet's memoir, the immediate clue to a male scopophilic and pornographic perspective is its astonishing proliferation of cunts and cocks, with nary a clitoris – nor a condom – in sight for more than a hundred pages. First of all, Millet is obsessed with numbers – with husbands (she wants more than one); and with lovers (she wants dozens or hundreds at a time, and thousands over a lifetime). *La pauvre Catherine*, raised in a suburban, middle-class, Catholic family, must rebel against her conservative upbringing and cast off the withering shackles of Catholicism by practicing an almost ascetic discipline in the art of lustful accommodation. I eschew the word “love” here because so few of Catherine's amorous adventures seem to offer any kind of gratification resembling emotional exchange or meaningful personal communication. In fact, just the opposite goal seems to characterize the proliferation of narratives celebrating orgies and group sex. The more the merrier,

and exclusive partnerships are apparently for sissies – or for sexually unadventurous, middle-aged females and impotent males (without benefit of Viagra).

If pornography has historically been a commodity produced by imaginative males for the scopophilic delectation of other men desirous of genital engorgement, then Catherine Millet fits right into the mold of formulaic sex, based on the glorious fantasy of an absolutely uninhibited, perpetually available vagina. She is writing in what Linda Hutcheon identifies as a «long tradition of instructional literature whose purpose is to tell women how... to make themselves desirable – to men» (*Politics*, 155). So why do I think that Millet's confessions were largely, if not totally based on sexual fantasy rather than on female experience? First of all, because there is very little mention of issues concerning contraception, fertility, or protection against sexually transmitted diseases. Catherine's initial round of sexual experimentation results in a sobering dose of the clap, which she dismisses as a minor inconvenience and part of the price of liberating herself from the shackles of Catholic conventionality. For a contemporary reader, the threat of gonorrhea seems minor in comparison to syphilis, herpes, chlamydia, and most devastating of all, HIV/AIDS. (Surely this succession of unwashed, unprotected casual lovers would engender, at the very least, an unpalatable legacy of genital warts and troublesome crab lice).

But here is my argument: male-oriented pornography sterilizes women from the start and completely severs any connection between sexual activity and female fertility. So Catherine is surprisingly sterile for an 18-year-old “late bloomer”, who only leaves home when she simultaneously loses her virginity, her faith, and her Catholic family's love and support. Had she introduced some serious concern about methods of contraception, her memoir might have stirred identification on the part of ex-Catholic female readers searching for signs of authenticity in this tell-all confessional text. Millet dates herself as a child of the 1950's and 60's (with Brigitte Bardot offering a childhood celluloid model of sensuality). So it seems likely that her initial sexual concerns pursuant to adolescent defloration would most certainly have had to focus on the avoidance of unwanted pregnancy and on self-protection in a country where both contraception and abortion were illegal at mid-century. (In the course of this memoir, she makes one scornful reference to the use of condoms, then introduces a surprisingly casual allusion to a calcium deficiency she discovered when she got an abortion. The calcium deficiency, rather than pregnancy loss, is the focus of her anecdote).

Then there is the male fantasy of uninhibited and impersonal sexual encounters. Catherine loves to drive in a parade of cars through the Bois de Boulogne and switch partners with dozens of occluded males in the penumbral shadows of the Bois, or in the equally dim regions of a tunnel near Vincennes. She celebrates a seemingly endless – and somewhat torturous – succession of faceless, anonymous pricks – large or long, limpid or engorged, and all streaming with ejaculate that ostensibly fills some metaphorical lacuna in her ever-ready vagina. In fact, her most thrilling fantasies entail an exchange of banter with a particularly imaginative lover who titillates his partner with threats of the enforced sale of her sexual services to hundreds of paying customers, in an orgy that culminates in bestiality with a neighbor's dog. One of her favorite imaginary scenarios involves becoming a high-class prostitute, like Catherine de Neuve in the film *Belle de Jour*.

I have to admit feeling wildly uncomfortable with Millet's narratives of sustained sexual performance in somewhat torturous positions. For instance, she rhapsodizes over four hours of sexual servicing while lying on her back on a wooden table, as her vertebrae are gently ground into the wood, and a slight scar develops on Catherine's coccyx. Four minutes of such acrobatic agility might damage most skeletal structures and put the patient in a decidedly unsalubrious orthopedic brace. In a Rabelaisian narrative of gargantuan erotic appetites, Catherine delights in an entire evening of table-top sex, with her boots flailing in the air, and men greedily devouring her sexual aperture with irresponsible, infantile enjoyment.

Insouciance and the lack of emotional involvement are the (male) watchwords of this awesome performance. As in *The Story of O*, Millet emphasizes the ostensibly masculine pleasures of impersonal sex, with men casually penetrating this willing sex-doll as they eat a communal meal (and are sucked off underneath the table), or watch a football game on television and turn to Catherine's

palpitating genitals between rounds of beer, pretzels, popcorn, and soccer goals. In *The Story of O*, male subjects are masked and manifest a fascist authority in their violent penetration of female sex slaves willingly incarcerated and subjected to their masters' brutal and sadistic demands. Millet sardonically admits having modeled many of her own sexual fantasies on *The Story of O*.

So why was *The Sexual Life of Catherine M* a bestseller in both Europe and the United States? I cannot speak for France or the European Union, but my guess about the *New York Times* bestseller list has to do with the infamous prurience of my fellow countrymen (and women) who want to believe, perhaps, that the French of old Europe are exotically different and morally corrupt. Perhaps in the age of AIDS and fatal sexuality, it gives disempowered subjects pleasure to imagine a life of utterly uninhibited sexual pleasure. Surely this text should come with a warning label: «Don't try this at home or in your car without first arming yourself (the wrong appendage, to be sure) with a family-sized box of condoms.» And what about the ever-present threat of sexual violence, always throbbing on the edge of her imagistic prose; and the implicit dangers of murder, mayhem, or scarification? Real-life vulnerability has largely been erased from Millet's purportedly candid narrative – though she does mention one nasty episode of battering by an irascible lover, as well as a grotesque scene of scarification on her shoulder with a razor blade. For the most part, however, the protagonist functions as an utterly accommodating sex-machine, without significant danger to her body or her person.

In *The Sexual Life of Catherine M*, Catherine Millet has made promiscuous sexual activity into a potentially dangerous but always thrilling reality show. Luckily for her, the scores of men whom she encounters in a variety of titillating orgies rarely beat, batter, knife, or maim this proudly unintimidated sexual subject. Catherine lives to tell the salacious tale, and to titter, with her current husband, Jacques, all the way to the bank. Paradoxically, Millet believes that she is always in control of situations that often mimic the violence of rape and perpetuate sex-role stereotypes of women as willing victims or uninhibited nymphomaniacs.

On the other hand, perhaps Millet and her wily photographer partner simply had a great idea about how to bilk sex-starved but curious audiences in puritanical America and make millions of dollars in the wake of prurient fundamentalism and a veneer of patriotic family values. (As a conjugal couple, their own particular penchant is for *alfresco* erotic acrobatics on parched arid windy hillsides overlooking wide desert landscapes). Where is a contemporary Steven Marcus to analyze the cultural phenomenon of an updated *Story of O* appearing on the *New York Times* bestseller list? That, in itself, is enough for an exhausted and depleted Catherine Millet to crow about. And she had better do so quickly, before she turns sixty and joins the ranks of global “senior citizens” demanding health care and prescription drug plans from intransigent, parsimonious, post-1960's conservative governments.

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## “What Do Women Want?”: Pedro Almodovar’s *Talk to Her*

NANCY BLAKE (\*)

Pedro Almodovar has used the topos of organ donation in two recent films, inviting us to ponder the definitions of life and death, and what it is that we love in our loved ones. At the same time, Almodovar is well known for his queer sensibility: a gay-coded director whose films reject fixed libidinal positioning in favor of a celebration of the fluidity of gender identities and the ‘unnaturalness’ of all human desire. In fact, Almodovar’s work seems to be a perfect illustration of Tim Dean’s statement that «All sexuality is queer sexuality». If you are following me with any degree of approbation so far, let’s see where this reasoning leads us.

If all human desire is created equal, then it makes sense that an advanced society should have as a goal to provide an opportunity for every type of libidinal fulfillment. Freud, in fact, led the way by demonstrating the “polymorphous perversity” of childhood, and today activists militate for the rights of diverse desiring patterns. And that is the reason for a proposal that people make provision to donate their bodies, in the event of accidental death, on the model of organ donation, to be available to necrophiliacs. For the rights of necrophiliacs are strangely neglected by libertarians in general. The above proposal was reported to me by Slavoj Zizek so I make no claims as to its authenticity. It is not part of the film *Talk to Her*, still, it could be relevant.<sup>1</sup>

Two women in a coma, one of whom is raped and impregnated and thereby awakened, the other of whom dies, Pedro Almodovar’s fourteenth feature film retrieves these admittedly tasteless tales from the edge of credibility and composes them into an uncharacteristically low key picture that manages to be strangely moving. This is a story worthy of its creator, somewhere between

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<sup>1</sup> The reference to necrophilia, and perversion in general, is always present in Almodovar’s work. In a 1984 interview on *What Have I Done to Deserve This?*, the final question on projects for the future elicited this response from Almodovar: «It’s a story about two necrophiliacs, and I hope that it gives rise to a delirious, crazy, and unusual film.» That film is *Matador*. Interview with Enrique Alberich and Luis Alla, reprinted in *Pedro Almodovar: Interviews*, ed. P. Willoquet-Mericondi, Jackson: University of Miss Press, 2004, p. 31.

Fellini and Lynch, the central fiction of *Talk to Her* is one that probably only Pedro Almodovar could have come up with, yet it has its origin in a real life news item as the director himself revealed at the film's Barcelona premier. Like Truffaut, Almodovar has a predilection for themes uncovered in the "*faits divers*". In fact, another director, Louis B elanger, made his film *Post mortem* after reading the same news clipping. It happened in Rumania where a night watchman in a morgue violated a beautiful female cadaver. This crime would not have been discovered, but the shock of sex brought the woman back to life. According to Almodovar, the ex-dead woman's family was extremely grateful to the rapist, though they recognized the repulsive nature of his act, however the authorities could not be mollified and the savior was incarcerated.

Benigno's relationship with Alicia was always pure fantasy, (he watched her from the window of his mother's apartment, as she took her ballet class across the street), now that she is in a coma and he is her nurse, he can possess her as his perfect object, living (just barely) doll. Certainly there is something perverse, or at least entirely selfish about Benigno's love for Alicia. She is not an other for him, but a doll to be bathed, coiffed, manicured and sensually massaged, as well as talked to, and she is always available. Benigno's scopophilic desire has been rewarded with the perfect object and the spectator shares his pleasure in contemplating Alicia's body, until we wonder if this is not what film, in general, is all about. Personally, my favorite scene is the dressing of the bullfighter, who just happens to be a woman, Lydia, (but the ritual of the costume would be the same for a man), these gorgeous images feed our scopophilic urges. Is love of the cinema structured on the principle of necrophilic pleasure?

*Talk to Her* opens, paradoxically, on a scene without words. Two women, expressing great distress, trash about on a stage cluttered with bistro tables and chairs; their eyes are closed, but a man desperately tries to anticipate their movements in order to push the objects out of their way. What is important is not so much to learn why an audience member is weeping while watching a ballet by Pina Bausch, what matters is that another man, Benigno, and through him, the spectator, is able to identify, to recognize, his own desire for strong emotion. It is not talking, but drama without words, dance, which expresses the frenetic, and doomed, need of the male to alleviate the painful difficulty of being female.

Benigno lived with his mother and cared for her, apparently becoming a nurse, but also studying cosmetology and hairdressing, exclusively for her benefit. Yet, he insists, she was not an invalid, nor a madwoman. She was a beautiful woman and he did not want to see her to let herself go. Although he spied on the ballerina while his mother was still alive, it is only after her death, that he substitutes Alicia for her. That necrophilic desire originates in fusion with such a possessive mother is no doubt a lesson from Hitchcock.

But Benigno and Alicia represent only half of the equation of *Talk to Her*. The weeping man in the audience at Pina Bausch's *Caf e M uller* is Marco, an Argentinean travel writer who weeps for lost love. His lover Lydia, a female bullfighter whose work is every bit as artistic, stylized and expressive as the ballerina's, had been betrayed by her bullfighter boyfriend and taken up with Marco. Apparently she wanted to tell him something, but was gored by a bull and has fallen into a coma before she could do so.

But perhaps words are over-rated. The only character in this film to be treated in the grotesque manner we have come to associate with Almodovar is the television talk-show hostess who blurts out the platitude of the day: «Talking about problems is the first step toward overcoming them.» This harkens back to the Argentinean Lacanian psychoanalyst in *Labyrinth of Passion*, who advertises the therapeutic value of confession, but is actually motivated by her own nasty curiosity.

Is speech really necessary? Is it even useful? The film within the film is a silent one and other forms of expression, dance or bullfighting do without words; the dialogues in the film, on the other hand, are more likely to be obstacles to understanding. One of the lessons of *Talk to Her* is that film is a visual art, moving beyond words.

In *All About My Mother*, Almodovar's Oscar winning international success just previous to

*Talk to Her*, a 17 year old boy begs for information on the other half of his being. Raised by his single mother, Esteban asks to know the identity of his father. When his mother finally agrees to reveal the story of his origins that evening, once they get home, Esteban's fate is sealed. He will die minutes later, run over by a car in the pouring rain.

Benigno chatters constantly to comatose Alicia and advises Marco to talk to Lydia. Although Marco's preaccident relationship with Lydia was apparently more real than Benigno's with Alicia, now that she is unconscious, he cannot talk to her. Perhaps he never really could. After a long car ride, she says, «We have to talk», he replies, «We talked the whole way», she replies, «You talked the whole way». «We'll talk after the corrida», Marco and Lydia agree, but she will be gored and never regains consciousness to present with words the truth of her desire.

Marco has no luck with women. Physically, bullfighter Lydia, with her strong gypsy features, is very different from blond and vulnerable Angelika, the woman Marco is trying to get over when he meets Lydia. Yet he falls in love with Lydia when he discovers the phobia of snakes both women share. Angelika was a drug addict and Lydia's, self destructive bent is betrayed, not only by her chosen profession, but by her obsession with her bullfighter boyfriend, *El niño de Valencia*.

In previous works by Almodovar, mothers were omnipresent and fathers absent or severely mutilated. Here the parallelism between Alicia's psychiatrist father who watches over her quite jealously, and Lydia's dead father who dreamed of being a bullfighter himself, but always remained a banderillo, and who gave his daughter the name that sealed her fate,<sup>2</sup> is striking and poses the question of the relation of the woman, as object of the perverse obsession, and the phallus.

«For one who is burdened with the phallus, what is a woman? A woman is a symptom», according to Lacan in *Séminaire XX*. «Woman is the symptom of man» is one of those supposedly misogynistic Lacanianisms, and is often quoted. But what is a symptom if not a coded message. For Freud, the symptom is a compromise formation. In the symptom, the subject receives, as a disguised and unrecognized message, the truth of his desire, the truth that he has betrayed, or was unable to accept. Therefore if we understand the axiom, «Woman is the symptom of man» against this background, we find an explanation of the structure of the *film noir* tradition where the *femme fatale* disappears, disintegrates, vanishes, as soon as the hard-boiled hero drops her. The power of the *femme fatale* was only a function of the belief of the hero in the desire which she inspired in him. The other infamous Lacanian formula, «Woman does not exist», suggests much the same thing. Woman does not exist *per se*, but only as the symptom of man.

However, if we follow the argument of Slavoj Žižek reading the late development in Lacan's writing on Joyce "le sinthome", in particular the effort to understand the formation of the subject in its ontology, the foundations of its relation to *jouissance*, then the entire relation of man to his symptom is reversed. If the symptom dissolves the subject loses his bearings, his entire relationship to the world is overturned. In this case, saying that «Woman is the symptom of man», would mean that man himself only exists through woman as symptom. This could be the nutshell description of the two male protagonists of *Talk to Her*. In other words, man ex-sists, the whole of his being is situated outside of him, in the woman. On the other hand, woman does not exist, she insists, and that is why as Almodovar has demonstrated in previous films, she does not come into being only through the agency of, and in relation to, man. The reference to non-phallic *jouissance*, which Lacan will come to call, mysteriously, «the Other *jouissance*», is explained by this asymmetry. Woman, as the being which insists, is illustrated in all the preceding films of Almodovar.

In my previous reading of *All About My Mother*,<sup>3</sup> I underlined the importance of the desire of the mother as the fundamental question for the subject. When Lacan puts the accent on the question

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<sup>2</sup> *Lidiar* is the equivalent of *matar*, and *lidia* equals *muerte* in the context of bullfighting. *Los toros de Lidia* are bulls for the bullring.

<sup>3</sup> «Image, Identité et le désir de la mère: *Todo sobre mi madre* de Pedro Almodovar», *Gravida*, Lisbon: ISPA, forthcoming.

emanating from the big Other, «*Che vuoi?*»), he defines the enigma of the alterity of the Other. What does the Other want of me? In my previous paper I insisted that for Lacan the “translation” of the desire of the mother is the Name-of-the-Father. This symbolic invention is necessary for the child who awakens to desire through the caresses of the mother. Most of the disappointing introductions to Lacan explain that the paternal function is to be understood as that which intrudes to break up the wonderful symbiotic fusion of mother and child. The father would thus be introduced as prohibition. Against this interpretation, one would do well to recognize that the Father, for Lacan, is not the name of a traumatic intrusion, but rather the resolution of an enigma caused by the intrusion of reality into the desired fusion. The father is a response to the enigma and the enigma is «What does mother want?» What does she want, beyond me her child since it is obvious that I do not satisfy her. After he made *All About My Mother*, Almodovar’s own mother died and he made *Talk to Her*, where a lover talks to his beloved in a coma, impregnates her and thereby wakes her, but sacrifices his own life in an effort to join her in the other world of the coma. In *Talk to Her*, a short silent film, *The Shrinking Lover*, obvious homage to Courbet’s *Origine du Monde*, a painting that belonged to Lacan, and is now on exhibit at the Musée d’Orsay, presents Benigno’s and perhaps Almodovar’s, fantasy of the loneliness and the tinniness of man in his dream of fusion with the mystery of life incarnated by woman/mother.

One of the most memorable lines in the film is spoken by Benigno confiding in Marco that he intends to marry comatose Alicia. Faced with Marco’s outrage at the idea, Benigno insists, «Alicia and I get along better than most married couples». This is the perfect justification of necrophilic desire: there is no one there to oppose my scenario for the relationship. Marco responds that Benigno cannot marry Alicia because she cannot signify with any part of her being, «I do». The fetishist can be defined as one who has never gotten beyond the desire of his mother who has made him the substitute for everything she lacked. Living phallus of the mother, the whole of the perverse subject’s effort consists in making his place in this mirage of himself as phallus of the mother and finding in it the accomplishment of his own desire (Baudrillard, 1976, 156).

What of Marco, clearly the more “normal”, adult, responsible, but also sensitive, of the two protagonists? Žižek notes that in Fritz Lang’s *Scarlet Street* (1945), Robinson [the film’s weak-willed protagonist] misperceives a simple “lover’s tiff”, which Joan Bennet is clearly enjoying, as the suffering she is to be rescued from. This scene provides the key to the constellation of the impotent gaze: the unbearable traumatic element witnessed by this gaze is ultimately feminine enjoyment whose presence suspends the authority of the big Other, of the Name-of-the-Father, and the fantasy (the fantasy of the “threat” woman is to be rescued from) is a scenario the male constructs in order to elude the feminine enjoyment (1994, 75).

The limits of this essay do not permit a study of the cinematography, and in particular the extraordinary images of the two protagonists seen through the glass panels of the prison parlor as their differences become fluid and merge into identities. However, unlike many critics who have seen underlying homosexual desire between Benigno and Marco, I read this scene and the film in general, quite differently. If I quoted Tim Dean’s «All sexuality is queer sexuality», earlier, it is because desire, in Almodovar, is not recognition of identity, but rather discovery of enigma.

And it should by now be obvious that, if the enigma is the desire of woman, the goal is not to discover it, but on the contrary, to succeed in continuing to avoid it. That is the libidinal economy of the moment in *The Piano Teacher* when the professor, beautifully represented by Isabelle Huppert, presents to her would-be seducer a detailed masochistic scenario. Far from being delighted, he is horrified. What repulses him is this total disclosure of her desire.

In conclusion, then, this is what psychoanalysis is all about: as Freud noted, explaining why, in the midst of well-being, we are haunted by nightmares. This paradox also indicates how we should grasp Lacan’s notion of “traversing the fantasy” as the concluding moment of the psychoanalytic treatment. This notion may seem to fit perfectly the commonsense ideas of what psychoanalysis should do: of course it should liberate us from the hold of idiosyncratic fantasies,

and enable us to confront reality as it really is! However this, precisely, is what Lacan does not have in mind – what he aims at is almost the exact opposite. In our daily existence, we are immersed in reality (structured and supported by the fantasy) and this immersion is disturbed by symptoms which bear witness to the fact that another, repressed, level of our psyche resists this immersion. To “traverse the fantasy” therefore, paradoxically, means fully identifying oneself with the fantasy – namely, with the fantasy which structures the excess that resists our immersion in daily reality.<sup>4</sup>

One final anecdote: recently in southern France, the trailer for Almodovar’s latest offering, *Bad Education*, his portrayal of the Catholic clergy’s pedophilia, was run before screenings of *The Passion of Christ*. Predictably, the region’s priests expressed some outrage, however, they may have been overly hasty. In his fifteenth film, Almodovar extends the same compassion and sad tenderness towards the clergy as he demonstrated for various sex offenders in *Matador* (1985), *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* (1989) and *Talk to Her*. After viewing a film by Almodovar, we are in the position documented by Freud in his article on “The Uncanny”. That most alien of psychiatric positions, perversion, is somehow heartbreakingly understandable, nearer to us than we could ever have imagined.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Richard Boothby, *Freud as Philosopher*, New York: Routledge, 2001, pp. 275-276.

# Dark mirrors, blind projections and sister trouble: Psychoanalysis and gender in Robert Siodmak's *The Dark Mirror*

CLAUDIA LIEBRAND (\*)

Robert Siodmak's film *The Dark Mirror* (USA 1946) is a thriller and *film noir*<sup>1</sup> with Olivia de Havilland in the double role of Terry and Ruth Collins, a pair of identical twin sisters.<sup>2</sup> (Olivia de Havilland played the part of Melanie Hamilton, the ideal wife in *Gone with the Wind*<sup>3</sup> and Robert

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<sup>1</sup> *The Dark Mirror* is a small A-picture, not a B-movie, a category film noirs are often (and not always correctly) grouped under. The term B-movie stands for the second film of a double feature; these films were often part of a series (*Boston Blackie*, *Sherlock Holmes*, *The Whistler*) or they were small, inexpensive productions, rarely adorned with stars. Siodmak, too, made several B-movies, e.g. *Phantom Lady* (USA 1944). The assumption that *film noirs* were predominately B-movies, a prominent belief in German film studies, however, cannot be sustained. Labeling *film noirs* as small-scale, inexpensive productions is also incorrect – large-scale productions such as *Casablanca* and *The Big Sleep* can be classified as *film noirs*, too. Whether a film was produced as a B-movie or not, has to be determined for each film individually. This can be done historically – by looking at film programs etc. – or by taking into account the movie's stars, studio, awards, and box office gross. In the case of *The Dark Mirror* all these factors support the fact that the film was not a B-movie: it was certainly the first part of a double feature (star: Olivia de Havilland, studio: Universal; award: Oscar nominations, box office gross of more than \$2 million).

<sup>2</sup> Siodmak had made a fantasy film about twin sisters before, one of them good, the other bad, *Cobra Woman* (USA 1944): «Camp classic, with Maria Montez as voluptuous twins. She's the good Tollea, a South Seas girl who is kidnapped just as she's about to marry Jon Hall (who smiles his moony, Mona Lisa smile and looks as boneheaded as ever), and she's the evil High Priestess Nadja, who rules a tribe of snake worshippers on Cobra Island. The impeccably lifeless cast includes Sabu, Edgar Barrier, Lon Chaney, Jr., Lois Collier, Mary Nash, Samuel S. Hinds, and Moroni Olsen. Among the exotic treats: a rumbling volcano, a pet chimp, ominous gong sounds, forest-glade love scenes, human sacrifices, Nadja's handmaidens in their high-heeled pumps, her imperious writhing during what is supposed to be a demonic dance, and the good Tollea's plea for the symbol of the power that is rightfully hers, "Gif me the cobra jool!" Produced by George Waggner for Universal, and directed by that playful wit Robert Siodmak (on sets that are often parodistic), from a script by Gene Lewis and Richard Brooks, based on a story by W. Scott Darling. This heavenly absurdity has been an inspiration to Charles Ludlam, of the Ridiculous Theatrical Company, and Gore Vidal (*Myra Breckinridge*, *Myron*).» – Pauline Kael, quoted from: *Cinemanía* 97.

<sup>3</sup> *Gone with the Wind*, USA 1939, R: Victor Fleming et al.

Siodmak is a celebrated thriller and *film noir* specialist.) The generic conventions<sup>4</sup> of the *film noir* include a mysterious *femme fatale*. Susan Hayward states: «Generally speaking, in the film noir the woman is central to the intrigue and it is therefore she who becomes the object of the male's investigation.»<sup>5</sup> The male investigator, often a *private eye*, observes and analyzes the female protagonist, sometimes failing to uncover her secret; what we are faced with here is the cultural pattern of Oedipus and the Sphinx: «But [...] it is less her role in the intrigue that is under investigation, much more her sexuality because it is that which threatens the male quest for resolution», writes Hayward. «The ideological contradiction she opens up by being a strong, active, sexually expressive female must be closed off, contained. That is the diegetic trajectory and visual strategy of film noir.»<sup>6</sup> *The Dark Mirror* – the film's title already refers to its dark genre – complicates this constellation of the *film noir*: Instead of *one* male investigator there are two: a psychologist and a police officer. And instead of one mysterious woman at the center of the plot there are two: not one woman puzzles psychology and criminology, but two – sisters, twins.

In one of its first shots Siodmak's film presents us with a corpse – the body of Dr. Frank Peralda, as we later learn from the police officer, Lt. Stevenson. The time of death can be confirmed as 10:35 p.m., this is when the neighbors heard a dull thump. A classic case of *whodunit*. The neighbors also happened to see the woman who accompanied the doctor into his apartment, the case seems practically solved. The woman can be identified as Terry Collins, who runs a magazine stand in the lobby of the medical building. The accused, however, has a solid alibi: She names a number of reliable witnesses, among them a policeman, who testify to have seen her elsewhere between 9:00 and 11:30 p.m. (at a concert at Jefferson Park). The lieutenant is in trouble: «I don't get it. I just don't get it», he says. «Don't make any more sense to me than Chinese music.» It is only when he visits Terry Collins's apartment – where he meets not only her but her identical twin sister Ruth, who looks exactly like her, that the scales fall off his eyes. But he still cannot arrest the murderer: the women, who were both working in the news stand under Terry's name, tell him that one of them was at Jefferson Park, the other at home, but they refuse to tell him which of them has the alibi. Terry, who is well informed of the law, knows that under these circumstances none of the sisters can be arrested and charged. The district attorney has no choice but to let the two sisters go, eloquent and outspoken Terry as well as Ruth, who is shy and frightened by the police. The district attorney releases the two sisters with the words: «I have no words adequate to express my contempt and abhorrence for both of you.» The lieutenant, no longer afraid of losing his mind as he was at the outset of the case, nevertheless cannot stand to see his hands tied, he turns to psychiatry and psychology to prove one of the sisters' guilt: he prevails upon a twin expert, Dr. Scott Elliot, to analyze Terry and Ruth – in order to solve the murder: «Someday you call me and tell me you found the answer», he tells the psychologist. And Dr. Elliot, concealing his cooperation with the

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<sup>4</sup> «The question whether to classify *film noir* as a genre is still debated today. Understanding *film noir* as a genre is sometimes seen as problematic because it constitutes a break with economically based definitions of genre. In the 1940s, French critics identified a number of dark Hollywood movies as a thematically and stylistically coherent genre. Thus, *film noir* did not develop from a historical process of differentiation between film production and reception, but was retroactively assigned to a number of films usually classified as crime stories or melodramas at their time of production. To reject the use of the term "genre", however, disregards the impact of this assignation. On the one hand, movies regarded as *film noirs* are today marketed under this label, on the other, newer films are related to the *film noir* – since the 1970s movies have been categorized as *retro-noirs* or *neo-noirs*. *Film noir*, only retrospectively classified as a genre, is today as influential as the (accepted) genres western or melodrama. The academic debate over *film noir* as a genre is thus representative of the shift from structuralist to poststructuralist genre theory, because it implies a broadening of the economically based concept and points out the necessity to historicize genres» (Gereon Blaseio: «Genre und Gender. Zur Interdependenz zweier Leitkonzepte der Filmwissenschaft», in: Claudia Liebrand/Ines Steiner [ed.]: *Hollywood hybrid. Genre und Gender im zeitgenössischen Mainstream-Film*, Marburg: Schüren, 2004, pp. 29-44, here p. 33, my translation).

<sup>5</sup> Susan Hayward: *Key Concepts in Cinema Studies*, London/New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 120.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

police from the twins, does convince both women to let him examine them. «I'd like to add you two to my collection», he tells them. For a fee, Terry and Ruth agree to his wish: «If it's for a good purpose.» (In the German language version, they even say: «Wenn es für die Wissenschaft ist.») Both of them separately attend a number of sessions. And as promised, the psychologist tells the detective his diagnosis after a while – based on the evaluation of a Rorschach test. One of the twins, Terry – we learn – is mad, a paranoid with no more sense of right and wrong than a two-year-old. Terry is capable of committing murder. The other, Ruth, amiable and normal, is not. Mise en scène, costume and lighting seem to be consistent with the doctor's diagnosis: Terry often wears black, she is the one who smokes, who displays herself seductively on the analyst's couch, and she is altogether not as brightly lit as her well-behaved sister Ruth, who wears light colors and usually sits on chairs. Both sisters are thus staged according to the rules of *chiaroscuro*, the high-contrast black-and-white photography omitting shades of gray.

Lt. Stevenson now sets up a trap for the alleged murderer Terry, who – with the help of hidden musical clocks and flashes of light – has been quite successful for some time, in driving her lovely sister insane, or worse: in driving her to commit suicide. Stevenson phones Dr. Elliot while Terry is with him (she, however, is pretending to be Ruth during this visit, because it is Ruth who Dr. Elliot has fallen in love with). The sad message the lieutenant delivers over the phone is that Ruth has committed suicide. Dr. Elliot and Terry meet up with him at the sisters' apartment, and Terry (still pretending to be Ruth) explains to the lieutenant what Dr. Elliot has just explained to her: that her sister Terry, who took her own life, was insane and that she was also the one who killed Dr. Peralda. At this moment, the door opens and the supposedly dead sister enters the room – Terry is handed over to the custody of an institutional psychiatrist. The final sequence of the film shows Ruth resting on a couch while Elliot serves her tea – along with the question why she is so much more beautiful than her sister. (In the German version he asks her why in the world she, little Ruth, likes him so much: «Wieso hast du mich überhaupt so lieb, kleine Ruth?») So, the couple has been created, and the sister, who Dr. Elliot perceived to be standing in the way of his union with Ruth, has been removed to a mental hospital: a picture-perfect happy ending.

The pair of protagonists presented in the film is a common one in the cultural repertory: we are faced with a good and a bad sister, one is lovely and loving, the other snippy and smart, one is healthy, “normal”, the other pathological, Goldmarie and Pechmarie (Marygold and Pitch Mary). For the psychologist and the detective, however, both in the role of Oedipus trying to snatch the secret from the Sphinx, angelic innocence and devilish cleverness are difficult to tell apart: the devil comes along in an angel's disguise, is, in fact, the angel's mirror image. In order to decide which of the two women is the one to marry, which the one to lock up, the doctor and the criminal investigator have to leave the surface of things behind and chart the depths of the matter. Eventually, the woman who murders men (we are faced with a literalization of the men-killing vamp, *film noir's* prototypical *femme fatale*) is put away in a mental institution; her innocent sister is taken into the – as yet – womanless home of the doctor. The film's diegesis thus clearly marks the sisters as *different*: don't be fooled by the similarity or identity of their looks, we learn: the good sister's lovely smile is an expression of her angelic nature, the same smile on the bad sister's face is satanic masquerade.

In the following, I will examine the ways in which *The Dark Mirror* processes this dynamic of separation by neatly dividing the two formerly heterogeneous characters of Terry und Ruth Collins into two opposed, easily distinguishable concepts of womanliness. Ruth, who works under her sister's name, who seems friendly but unstable, ends up as the pretty bride. Terry, who appears confident and self-assured, who takes on responsibility for her sister, who is, however, not as popular with the opposite sex as her sister is, ends up as a pitiable madwoman (the proverbial «madwoman in the attic»), a woman who needs to be locked away. My reading of the film will follow closely the ways in which the film establishes this dichotomous matrix. At the same time, I will show that, and how, *The Dark Mirror* – despite its almost manic «separating-frenzy» – deconstructs *precisely* this dichotomy by showing how utterly inseparable and «impossible to tell

apart» the two sister-protagonists really are. If I merely contrasted one twin sister with the other – in order to outline the film’s project of separation – this would fall short of the film’s complexity, which continually and ironically crisscrosses its lines of demarcation. All things said about Ruth and Terry, in order to do the movie (and the intricate game it proposes) justice, I would still have to consider that the one labeled «Terry» might possibly be Ruth, and vice versa. And the reason why Ruth could possibly be Terry and Terry Ruth, is that we can absolutely *not* tell them apart by their looks. In the following, I won’t constantly reflect on the fact that we never really know which twin sister we are dealing with – for reasons of the technical and economical limits of representation. It is important, however, to keep this problem in mind – I will come back to it later.

The game of inclusion and exclusion in *The Dark Mirror*, the exculpation and idealization of one woman and the demonization of the other, is executed by the institutions which represent what Lacan calls «the Law»: the juridical and the medical order. We are, in fact, dealing with a case of *Nachträglichkeit* (deferred action), as Freud and Derrida have described it. That is: what these orders and their representatives claim to *diagnose*, they actually *produce* through the act of diagnosis – an insight the movie does not keep under wraps: *The Dark Mirror* is «framed» by a «reading directive» (*Lektürearweisung*) which points to the projection process that will eventually lead to the separation of «good» and «bad» woman. This directive is inscribed in the film’s opening and final credits: both feature images from a Rorschach test, hence referring to the psychological test Dr. Elliot employs in order to determine the insanity of one sister as well as the sanity of the other. On the one hand, the Janus-faced blots of ink suggest the twin motif: one side looks just like the other. On the other hand, the Rorschach inkblots and the Rorschach test evoke the theme of *projection* (and that includes, I would argue, the domain of film projection: the film is negotiating its own mediality here). The Rorschach test, part of the inventory of psychiatry (outmoded today), is a projective test developed by the Swiss psychiatrist Hermann Rorschach (1884-1922). As a personality test, the Rorschach test covers type and degree of intelligence, social attitudes, emotional state and disposition.<sup>7</sup>

Elliot now separates the «pathological» from the «non-pathological» twin, operating as Dr. Freud *redivivus*, who uses his psychiatric knowledge in order to solve the Janus-faced riddle of «femininity». Medical literature describes the Rorschach test as a procedure in which a subject is asked to interpret a set of one- or multi-colored standard «meaningless» inkblots. Now, the «meaninglessness» of the inkblots does not only provide the subject’s interpretive efforts with plenty of «elbowroom», the psychologist, too, has a certain degree of free play when evaluating the answers – clinical psychologists therefore agree that the reliability and validity of the Rorschach test is open to debate.<sup>8</sup>

Precisely because of its «meaningless», «non-sensical» inkblots, however, the Rorschach test becomes a «generator of meaning», an «interpretation machine». And it is not only the patients who interpret and try to *make* sense of the inkblots: in one of the movie’s key scenes we watch Dr. Elliot *observing* the twins, first Terry then Ruth, while they interpret the Rorschach plates.<sup>9</sup> Then,

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. <http://www.sign-lang.uni-hamburg.de/Projekte/PLex/PLex/Lemmata/R-Lemma/Rorschach.htm> (last visited: Dec. 15, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> The Rorschach-test scene is of great importance to the movie because it turns around the impression the audience has so far had of the twins’ personality: In the beginning of the film we meet *one* Miss Collins only – *Terry* Collins, in fact (both twins work in the news stand under this name, we are informed later on) – who politely answers all of the detective’s questions and who faints when she hears that Dr. Frank Peralda is dead. This protagonist is introduced to us as «Terry», we believe her to be «Terry» (only later will we learn that it was actually Ruth pretending to be Terry that day). What is more, when the detective visits the sisters’ apartment we hear that Terry is left-handed, the victim, however, was killed by somebody’s right hand – an information which confirms the impression that determined and confident Terry is probably not the murderer. As far as first impressions go, Ruth, nervous and insecure, seems the more likely suspect, especially after she has a crying fit in front of the detective. Only the Rorschach test scene changes this view of the twins, when Terry’s somewhat

the psychologist himself sets out to interpret the interpretations he has just observed (and the musical score translates the sensations evoked by his readings quite drastically). His interpretation, which labels Terry insane, the psychologist then passes on to the detective who himself interprets this reading by concluding that the «mad woman» is necessarily the murderer. We are thus faced with a string of interpretations, a series of readings whose validity and reliability remains questionable – a close look at the answers of both sisters reveals, for example, that these are by no means radically different from each other. The fact that Dr. Elliot is somewhat piqued about Terry’s reading of one of the inkblots as a white lamb with two men – faces down, arms outstretched – beneath its front paws, tells us just as much (or more) about his fear of castration (of «female» lambs that, in a gesture of conquest, put their front paws down on a man’s chest) as about Terry’s alleged «insanity». It is precisely the inversion of the «natural» order of the sexes (men are supposed to dominate little lambs, not the other way around), which Elliot identifies as *de-ranged*, as disturbed. What is more: by now, Dr. Elliot has fallen in love with Ruth. Freud wasn’t the first to point out that the most striking characteristic of a person in love is their projective force, the «illusion machinery», which transforms the beloved into a luminous angel. Scott Elliot’s diagnosis that Ruth could by no means kill a person (Terry, however, might), only proves that he is blinded by love, or, that psychologists who do not observe the principle of abstinence cannot be expected to produce valid findings. This is also true for the way Elliot reconstructs the twins’ biography: His opinion that Ruth, the healthy one, has always been favored, which – in contrast to Terry – enabled her to develop a stable personality, seems to be a generalization derived from his own inclinations: he prefers women who act as Ruth does, childlike, affectionate – women who, because he prefers them, seem «normal» to him.<sup>10</sup>

Dr. Elliot’s «objective» findings are therefore not objective at all – they are the result of his projective wishes and manipulations. The Rorschach test tells us at least as much about him as it does about his patients. The twins’ behavior, in any case, can be regarded from more than one perspective: instead of describing Terry as insane and evil (as the doctor does), one could also characterize her as self-assured, intelligent, and challenging, instead of calling Ruth healthy and normal, one could describe her as naïve and simple-minded.

And even if one sides with the psychologist, this does not solve the problem of identifying which sister is which at the end of the movie. True, *one* is taken away – the one who claims to be Ruth – because the *other* enters the room and claims to be Ruth herself. None of the people present, however, can *really* tell the women apart – we are faced with two conflicting statements (that the «doctor in love», as well as the detective, whose sole source of information is this doctor, believe that they know which one is crazy and a murderer, is, in fact, only their *own*, highly precarious truth – a truth which might merely tell us something about male desire and male fantasies of domesticating renitent and confident women). If one thing is for sure, it is that no one, whether dealing with the twins within the movie or watching them on screen, can tell Ruth and Terry apart, as long as no visible sign of «identity» marks their bodies. The film wittily reflects on this problem of identification and stigmatization by marking the protagonists with a necklace or a monogram pin. We are watching *Ruth* when Olivia de Havilland is wearing the R-pin or the Ruth-necklace, and *Terry* when she sports the T-variant. We know, however, that pins and necklaces can be taken off, that they can «wander». Even though the movie is constantly separating and differentiating between the two sisters, the viewers must ask themselves whether the sign (which, in any case, always refers to the body of a *single* actress, Olivia de Havilland) refers to the «right» or the

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gloomy visions stand apart from the rather happy and childlike imaginings of her sister – a reading which is supported by the way both scenes are staged: Terry, dressed in black, lasciviously stretched out on the couch, is not as brightly lit as Ruth who wears a light dress and politely sits on a chair. The Rorschach scene thus turns the tables – from now on the narrative pretty clearly moves towards Dr. Elliot’s diagnosis that Terry is paranoid, and «very insane».

<sup>10</sup> In his relationship with Ruth the doctor plays the active part (he asks Ruth for a date); Terry, on the other hand, asks him out herself.

«wrong» body. When asked why they pretended that only one of them, Terry, worked in the magazine stand (and why they didn't tell the truth about the two of them working there), one of the sisters replies that attempted deceptions such as these are highly typical of twins: «All twins do now and then», she claims. Throughout the entire film we are therefore never completely sure which twin we are currently faced with – one could turn out to be, in fact, the other. Not only the other protagonists or the moviegoers, the twins themselves are dealing with this question of difference: regarding their respective traits – which one is to be the smart one, for example<sup>11</sup> – they have reached agreements. It is especially Terry (and this is indeed some sort of sibling rivalry) who repeatedly and insistently poses the «question of difference». Time and again she asks Dr. Elliot: «Which one did you like the best?» – thus casting him in the role of Paris who has to hand out the golden apple. The film makes very clear that this question of difference, which particularly the male investigators, but also the audience and the twins themselves are obsessed with, is intricately linked to the *riddle of femininity*, in fact – deconstructive feminism has demonstrated this – femininity is construed as (the search for) difference.<sup>12</sup>

Siodmak's movie tells its twin-story in the tradition of Romantic *Doppelgänger* *sujets* and Victorian Dr.-Jekyll-and-Mr.-Hyde configurations. While *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* portrays two souls living inside *one* person, *The Dark Mirror* tries to distribute these opposite souls neatly among the two sisters. Dr. Elliot's diagnosis, claiming that Terry is «twisted – inside», is hence grotesquely wrong. It is not *one* sister who suffers from split personality in Siodmak's story; the sisters *as a couple* are divided into a creature of light and a creature of darkness, into angel and devil. However, no matter how eloquently the representatives of law enforce this configuration of angelic versus satanic woman, the film's visual level constantly subverts these very dichotomies which it introduces through lighting, costumes etc. – it subverts these dichotomies especially in those moments when it brings in the narcissistically charged key prop, the mirror: framing one of the sisters from behind, the mirror image then shows the face of the other, which is, of course, also that of the first. Puzzling and confusing the senses, the camera thus proves: these sisters are inseparable. And the film demonstrates the way in which Lacanian institutions operate: how the judicial system, but also psychology and psychoanalysis produce their subjects, and how they mark them – as wives or murderesses (or inmates of insane asylums, respectively). At the same time, however, the movie shows how precarious and twisted these processes of attribution really are, it reveals the blind spots of these institutions.

I would like to conclude with a, I think, very delightful little anecdote which serves as a further comment on these filmic strategies. Throughout the entire shooting process, Olivia de Havilland, the movie's «twin» star, kept her psychoanalyst by her side – this piece of information can be found, among other things, in Siodmak's autobiography.<sup>13</sup> Every day, the analyst would be at

<sup>11</sup> Ruth, for example repeatedly mentions that Terry is the smarter of the two.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. for example Barbara Vinken (ed.): *Dekonstruktiver Feminismus. Literaturwissenschaft in Amerika*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Siodmak: *Zwischen Berlin und Hollywood: Erinnerungen eines großen Filmregisseurs*, ed. Hans C. Blumenberg, München: Herbig, 1980. Cf. also the introduction to the retrospective on Siodmak at the Berlinale 1998, <http://www.filmfestivals.com/berlin98/cfilm23.htm> (last visited: Dec. 15, 2003): «Robert Siodmak harks back to the classic Germanic theme of “the double”, updating the expressionist motif to a psychological treatment of two people – seemingly identical – who possess diametrically opposite characters. Olivia de Havilland plays the twins, one of whom is a murderess who must fool both a psychiatrist and a detective, not to mention the audience, as she tries to hide her crime by getting rid of the “good” sister and taking her place. Siodmak went out of his way to make the illusion work and the film is full of tricks to make the double role convincing. De Havilland embraced herself, kissed herself on the cheek and even sat on her own lap – coincidentally enough, through the special effects work of Eugene Shufftan – the original cameraman from *Menschen am Sonntag*. An integral part of the story relied on Freudian analysis and Ms de Havilland was, herself, at the time, under psychiatric care. Her doctor was at the set every day and at the end of every scene would be the judge of whether the take was good or not. At the end of the film, the only one who was crazy was Siodmak.»

the set, and after every cut, her patient and main protagonist de Havilland would ask her what she thought of the scene. A configuration which, according to Siodmak himself, drove him quite crazy. I find this piece of biographical information rather intriguing, because de Havilland – with the help of her analyst – is here, in fact, staging a counter-narrative to the movie's plot: *The Dark Mirror* tells a story – this in any case is the movie's preferred and inscribed reading – in which a bond between men attacks and splits up the bond between two women, controlling both women and stigmatising one of them as mad. On the set of *The Dark Mirror*, too, somebody loses his mind – this time, however, it is not a woman, but Siodmak who, even though he is making a movie about the workings of patriarchy, is being pushed to the limits by his leading lady and her psychoanalyst. While shooting the movie de Havilland/Terry does not drive her double de Havilland/Ruth insane but the *director* – at least to some extent. While the female protagonists in *The Dark Mirror* lose control over their lives, de Havilland holds the rei(g)ns firmly in her beautiful hands. This time the female bond stands its ground: de Havilland and her analyst cannot be separated.

*Translated by Katrin Oltmann*

# Gender trouble in Thomas Mann's early novella *Der kleine Herr Friedemann* [*Little Herr Friedemann*]

ASTRID LANGE-KIRCHHEIM (\*)

Since the nineties at least, that is after the publication of his diaries, every examination of Thomas Mann's early novellas has had to face up to the conjecture that they are making ample use of those literary structures, which serve to conceal the topic of same sex love. They seem to represent progressive stages of the author's working through of his personal stigma. As a result, in the year 1912 – comparable to a *coming out of the closet* – homosexual love, the love of an aging man towards a boy, was openly made the subject of a narration for the first time (that is in *Death in Venice*). In the preceding stories the narration of homosexual desire had been taking place under the guise of heterosexuality. Yet the motif of *Heimsuchung*, that is the visitation by the idealised love object, the divine dispensation of what has been ardently longed for – Thomas Mann uses this sort of biblical language to indicate the homosexual love encounter in his self-commentaries – the motif of *Heimsuchung*, then, is fully developed already in *Little Herr Friedemann* (1897) and thus allows to identify the techniques of camouflage. According to his own statement, Thomas Mann developed these techniques in his 'breakthrough story' in a way, that entirely satisfied his needs for the first time: «Since *Little Herr Friedemann* I am suddenly able to find those discrete forms and masks which enable me to present my experiences to the public [without being ashamed, so to speak, or causing a scandal].»<sup>1</sup>

«Discrete forms and masks» – today, with regard to gender studies, these words invoke the notion of masquerade while at the same time clearly differing from it. Whereas with Thomas Mann the mask refers to a core, that has to be protected, gender as a masquerade is understood as an imitation without an original. That is, the assumption that there is something behind or beneath that

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Rudolf Vaget, *Thomas Mann-Kommentar zu saemtlichen Erzaehlungen*, Muenchen: Winkler, 1984, p. 55. Translation mine, A. L.-K..

should be related to the mask as being is related to seeming, as essence related to appearance or as the kernel to the shell, is refuted. On the contrary, according to Judith Butler, it is only the repetitive gender performance, the acts, words and gestures that «produce the effect of an internal core or substance». Between her understanding of masquerade and Thomas Mann's view of the mask as concealment there is, however, a fertile connection. Mann's camouflaging evokes quasi detachable characteristics of femininity and masculinity as signs, as it were, so that the disguise can fulfill its function of covering up the homosexual desire. The author's predicament to veil and to signal the socially inadmissible desire requires a keen perception and identification of the *discrete forms* of gender performance in order to make them a means for montage. As the strategy of camouflage works with dislocating and displacing the gender specifics, it implicitly assumes that gender identity is a construction, a fabrication, *and*, at the same time, camouflage is operating on redesigning the gender order as a whole. Not only the position of the stigmatized protagonist – behind which the despised homosexual hides –, but also the entire symbolic order, ostracising, for example, according to class, race and gender, is put to the test in Thomas Mann's stories. Thus the need to camouflage results in drawing up an alternative order, that should also redefine the position of woman in the gender system. It is precisely this subversive potential inherent in Mann's narrative use of masquerade that I want to draw attention to.

As has already been shown in Thomas Mann criticism, the virile Gerda von Rinnlingen can be understood, with regard to the author himself, as the «male lover in disguise», as «a cover of the man desired in vain [...] and as a screen for the fantasies of downfall and death triggered by him».<sup>2</sup> According to this reading, «the 'mask', which the 'homosexual' Thomas Mann has found in his narration *Little Herr Friedemann*, is the one of an eccentric, who is being scoffed at and drowning in self-disgust, coupled with a 'man-eating vamp'»<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, even until today, there is a tendency «to take Friedemann's story 'literally', to look upon it as the story of a physically impaired man, who comes to grief with the impossibility of being loved by the woman *he* loves».<sup>4</sup> Yet I do not agree with Boehm in that necessarily the complete work- or diary-context of Thomas Mann's is needed as a sub- or pre-text, to be able to discover the camouflage. It belongs with the requirements of 'homosexual' writing, so to speak, that the mask has to function as a signal as well so that the author is exposed and can be 'recognized', also with regard to his sexual orientation.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, all names, for example, in Thomas Mann's work with *Mann* in the beginning (like *Mann-heimer*) or *-mann* at the end (like *Friede-mann*) point towards the problematic masculinity of their author. In this respect it is indeed useful to know about the biographical documents and the intertexts, that Thomas Mann has woven into his work – as Michael Maar has demonstrated with respect to Hans Christian Andersen.<sup>6</sup> And the reader's socio-historical knowledge of the practices of stigmatization, that a homosexual had to fight with around 1900, undoubtedly have to be taken into account. Yet still semantic signals have to be expected in the text itself, so that the critic's de-masking will not turn into a piece of circumstantial evidence.

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Werner Boehm, *Zwischen Selbstzucht und Verlangen. Thomas Mann und das Stigma der Homosexualität. Untersuchungen zu Frühwerk und Jugend*, Würzburg: Koenigshausen & Neumann, 1991, p. 177, p. 180.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. My translations, A. L.-K.

<sup>5</sup> 'Mask' and 'signal' are the key-concepts in a book on homosexual writing by Marita Keilson-Lauritz, *Von der Liebe, die Freundschaft heisst. Zur Homoerotik im Werk Stefan Georges*, Berlin: Verlag Rosa Winkel, 1987. Heinrich Detering has taken up these ideas by developing his central category of 'camouflage', see his extensive analysis of homoerotic writers since the 18th century: *Das offene Geheimnis. Zur literarischen Produktivität eines Tabus*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Maar, *Geister und Kunst. Neuigkeiten aus dem Zauberberg*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1997.

In my view, one of the signals in the story of *Little Herr Friedemann* is the deformity of Friedemann, the hump, and its ironisation. The use of physical abnormalities as a metaphor for sexual deviation is nothing new: Herman Bang, who was much read by Thomas Mann, called homosexuality – and that still in the year 1909 – «a type of hunchbackedness».<sup>7</sup> According to Bang, the aberration is an unalterable one, one by necessity and existing since birth. This is suggested in Thomas Mann's text by the fact that the wet-nurse caused it: «It was the fault of the wet-nurse» («Die Amme hatte die Schuld»); it has to be noted that in German it is «the guilt», not «the fault» as the English translations have it).<sup>8</sup> Addicted to alcohol, she dropped the little boy and that brought about his deformity. The placement of this apodictic formulation right at the beginning of the story as well as the correlation of the concept of 'guilt', derived from high tragedy, with the dregs of the service staff already betrays, however, an ironic perspective, in which the given causality of Friedemann's predicament is exposed as a fairy tale (there seems to be an allusion to 'Ammenmaerchen'); the hunchbackedness, by contrast, turns into a social metaphor.

The circumstance, that little Friedemann grows up fatherless in a household, which is exclusively populated by women and in which he remains until the year of his 30th birthday (which is also the year of his death), constitutes an 'effemination', which belongs as a cliché in the catalogue of stigmata for identifying the homosexual. Additionally, Friedemann comes alarmingly close to femininity by virtue of name similarities with his sisters, two of whom are called *Friederike* and *Henriette*: here the derivation of the female names from the male ones (*Friedrich* and *Heinrich*) must be noted. As 'ugly women without a dowry', the sisters correspond to their deformed brother, who is not popular with the opposite sex with his fatal 'dowry', the hunchback. Yet his sisters also contrast with him, as his hands, feet, eyes, face and hair can almost be called «beautiful» (206). This «beautiful» man, who is *peaceful* ('fried-lich' in German) like the women and beardless, significantly enough (212), thus signals a reversion of the gender order: the attribute of beauty, which is traditionally ascribed to women, has been shifted. Consequently, Gerda, «boyish» (in German: «burschikos»), sickly and childless, is his precise, mathematically constructed female counterpart. With a name that is derived from the masculine «Gerd» and from germanic *ger* (= spear) and being «quite devoid of feminine charm» (215) she counteracts the heteronormativity of the gender order in the same way that he does. Being attracted to her *he* suffers from a visitation by *the man within her*. *She* is construed as an emancipated, a 'phallic woman', and akin to *him* by way of her sickliness. «Was she not a woman and he a man?» (233), Friedemann asks himself when provoked by Gerda's penetrating and humiliating look that forces *him* to look down like a woman. Friedemann who, in a mixture of asceticism and epicurism, made himself believe to have made his *peace* («Seelenfrieden» [72]) with the dominant gender order by renouncing *amour* for ever is subjected to a break down of his carefully built up male identity (213). «Was she not a woman and he a man?» – this question becomes the prime signal for the reader and strengthens his presumption, that the seemingly fixed positions in the gender system and the institutions correlated with them are being all set into motion within the text.

In this perspective an unfavourable light is shed on the married couple of the von Rinnlingen's. The malicious provincial house-wives in the town, who compassionately attend to Gerda's husband

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<sup>7</sup> Herman Bang, «Gedanken zum Sexualitaetsproblem. Mit einer Einleitung von Heinrich Detering», *Forum Homosexualitaet und Literatur*, 10, (1990), pp. 63-81, p. 74.

<sup>8</sup> All quotations from *Little Herr Friedemann* (page numbers in brackets) are taken from the following collection: Thomas Mann, *Children and Fools*. Translated from the German by Herman George Scheffauer, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1928, pp. 201-245, here p. 203. For the German text see Thomas Mann, *Der Wille zum Glueck. Erzaehlungen 1893-1903*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1991, pp. 66-94.

because of her «ice-cold» looks, accentuate his exemplary manliness as follows: «[...] you ought to see *him* – correct, a fine figure of a man, courteous, a splendidly preserved man in the forties, a brilliant officer! They have been married four years, my dear» (215). These wives apparently blame their gender comrade for the childlessness of the couple, although the hypervirility of the officer, which they praise without reflecting on it, suggests an entirely different causality. For it is the male bonding within the military, that Herr von Rinnlingen represents, and that is invoked, for instance, when his wife Gerda addresses her husband as «Dear friend» (215). That she as his wife complies with his wishes and fulfills his orders, but, at the same time, looks «straight past him» (233) makes it perfectly clear that he is not her true partner.

Further more, when Friedemann pays his first visit to the house of the von Rinnlingen's, the appearance of the officer is tantamount to a homoerotic performance. Not only does Herr von Rinnlingen bow «to Herr Friedemann and to her [that is his wife] with *equal* courtesy» (233), he is also contrasted with his wife's icy coldness as follows: «His brown face was quite suffused with warmth» (233).<sup>9</sup> If, in the German text, the combination of «braun» and «ganz blank vor Waerme» amounts to a homoerotic signal, then 20 years old Gerda does not get what she needs in the marriage with this man from the military; instead she is being abused to camouflage a homosexually orientated husband.

Is her 'phallicness' motivated by this insult to her femininity? Or did the realization that she was being abused as a woman to represent heteronormative masculinity, lead her to a reflection upon her own desire(s)? If this is the case, then it is consistent, that Gerda acts as the protagonist of a lesbian love scene at the party towards the end of the novella: «In the back of the room, on the ottoman, close to the low, red-shaped lamp, sat Gerda von Rinnlingen in conversation with young Fraulein Stephens. She sat leaning back a little on the yellow silk cushions, one foot placed over the other, and slowly smoked a cigarette, exhaling the smoke through the nose and thrusting forward her under lip. Fraulein Stephens sat upright and as though carved from wood and made her replies, smiling anxiously» (240). Here, Fraulein Stephens, sitting «upright», turns, speaking with Lacan, into the phallus of the actively desiring and thus manly de-formed woman, Gerda.

In the service of criticising the existent gender dichotomy and the compulsory heterosexuality corresponding to it, it is structurally downright necessary, that Gerda does not give in to Johannes Friedemann, since, firstly, he mistakes his own homoerotic desire for love of her and, secondly, he expects her to love and accept him and his sexual problem in a motherly way. His exclamation at the end: «You know it [...] – my God – my God –» (244) corresponds with his previous confession: «She sees through me!» (229) After Gerda has literally rejected him, he lies «on the floor» at the end of the narration as he did in the beginning when the wet-nurse dropped him. But he lies on the floor also like «a dog», which alludes to the stigmatized gender of same sex love, to the «dogs in the basement» as Thomas Mann used to say. This is why the rejection is not only a sexual rejection for Johannes Friedemann, but primarily a narcissistic injury, that destroys his entire being. Correspondingly it must hurt Gerda to be, firstly, misjudged in her own desires and urged to behave like a mother or nurse («he buried his face in her lap» [244]) and secondly, to be abused in the same way as in her marriage, in which she is made an instrument of the male gender order either in the sense of representation or of camouflage. The callous Gerda does not only stand, quasi-allegorically, for sexuality, here primarily in its non-admitted homoerotic version. She also represents a devaluated, abused femininity. Her «contemptuous laugh» (244) would for this reason retaliate for having been the object of contempt. This contempt of the feminine is constitutive of the phallic-

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas Mann's wording is: «Sein braunes Gesicht war ganz blank vor Waerme» (p. 74). The English translations do not catch the meaning here, which to a great deal is incapsulated in «ganz blank vor Waerme» (p. 86); «blank» belongs in the semantics of «glatt», that is: smooth, unrelieved, sheer, white, shining as the statues of Greek antiquity. For another – equally unsatisfactory – translation see Lowe-Porter: «His bronze face glistened with the heat.» Thomas Mann, *Stories of Three Decades*, translated from the German by H. T. Lowe-Porter, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955, p. 16.

monistic gender order, in which the woman only exists as the contradictory opposite of the man, that is as a not-man.

This order is based upon the taboo of homosexuality, so that every loving affection towards the same sex, be it between father and son or mother and daughter, is frowned upon. *Little Herr Friedemann* would probably have been more strengthened in his sexual identity, had he experienced the tender love of a father when he was a *little* boy. The fact that this love is a taboo is metaphorized in a blatant way in the novella by the father's early death even before the birth of his son. This melancholic, unattainable love towards the father explains Friedemann's trancelike condition in the presence of the virile officer von Rinnlingen: «Herr Friedemann looked up at him with his large expressionless eyes and half expected to be kindly patted on the shoulder» (233). If homosexuality is a result of various socialization processes, which are equally conditioned by cultural and political circumstances, and if, psychologically speaking, the development of the core gender identity is completed at the age of two, then this seems to be metaphorized in the narration by the catastrophic incidents just before and after Friedemann's birth, by the missing father and the «dull» mother-substitute, the wet-nurse, who herself needs to be nursed – with alcohol.

Being under the social compulsion of having to mask as well as to signal his homoeroticism, Thomas *Mann* – in his story about «Little Herr Friedemann» – also demonstrates the deficits of the asymmetric androcentric gender system as a whole, in which the devaluated and despised woman turns into a mirror for the excluded homosexual. Both of them are victims of the idolization of the authoritative man and his dominance. But in the same process Thomas Mann also indicates the change of the binary gender order, which excludes the Other, be it the male or the female Other. A student of the paradigmatically masculine science, namely mathematics, this student of all people who on top of it is a nephew to the officer Herr von Rinnlingen, calls into question a hitherto undoubted scientific assumption, the axiom of parallelism, on the occasion of the garden party: «Immediately to the right of the door a group sat about a small table, the centre of which was the student, who spoke with enthusiasm. He had made the assertion that more than one parallel to a straight line could be drawn through a point; Frau Hagenstroem, the wife of the attorney-at-law, had exclaimed: “That’s impossible!” but he had gone on to prove it so conclusively that his hearers were constrained to behave as though they understood.» (239).<sup>10</sup> If we understand this image correctly, it is the assumption of a natural, unquestionable heterosexual gender matrix, it is binarism, that is denied here in a parabolic way. For, as if following the tradition of mathematical proofs, the subsequent passage presents to us the female homosexual pair, Fraeulein Stephens and Gerda von Rinnlingen, absorbed in erotically connotated conversation. The young people – as yet another «Fraeulein», the daughter of «Mrs. attorney-at-law Hagenstroem», is joined with the student – are the ones, who question the heteronormativity of their parents' generation. According to modern handbooks of mathematics, additional geometries have been developed since 1816 as alternative models to the Euclidian geometry: the hyperbolic geometry on the one, the elliptic geometry on the other hand.<sup>11</sup> And within these geometries the traditional axiom of parallelism is not valid. If it is thus possible within non-Euclidian geometry to «draw more than one parallel to a straight line through a point», the conclusion seems to be obvious, that mankind, be it man or woman, can also be imagined in «more than one» gender relation. With that the binary model is annulled and by association we have got close to Plato's myth of the ball-like people, in which he demonstrated erotic attraction on the basis of *three* genders. (The gender of the sun is characterized by male to male attraction, the gender of the earth by female to female and the gender of the moon by male to female attraction).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Translation slightly altered by myself, A. L.-K.

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance: E. Zeidler (Ed.), *Teubner-Taschenbuch der Mathematik*, Leipzig: T. B. Teubner, 1996, pp. 779-783.

<sup>12</sup> «Das Gastmahl». Platon, *Sokrates im Gespräch*. Nachwort und Anmerkungen von Bruno Snell, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Bucherei, 1959, p. 161.

For Gerda and Friedemann there is no third gender. They are enclosed in the dominating phallic monism, the rigidity of which seems to be alluded to by the metaphor of the «central path» of the park (241), in which Friedemann's self-destruction takes place at the end. Two obelisks, phallic symbols, stand at the entrance, which prove, as it were, the validity of the axiom of parallelism for heterosexual love relationships and allow for homosexual relations only upon the condition of death. Thomas Mann stylizes his protagonist clearly to someone suffering from the given cultural and social order: Johannes *Friedemann* experiences his visitation at the age of 30 like Christ, the Lord of *Peace*; at the same time, he goes by the name of Johannes which refers to St. John, the Baptist; and this biblical figure, like the martyr St. Sebastian, well belongs in the treasure house of homosexual iconography.

Apart from mathematics Thomas Mann also uses music, primarily opera, to deconstruct the dominant polarized gender order. Gerda von Rinnlingen and Johannes Friedemann watch a performance of Wagner's *Lohengrin* together, sitting, significantly enough, in the box of misfortune, that is box No. 13. Each protagonist of the opera has things in common with both of the protagonists of the narration, which shows that the boundaries of gender are made to dissolve. Friedemann is abandoned at the end of the narration like Elsa and like her he dies. On the other hand he – being an outsider and a man with a stigma – shares with Lohengrin, who is an outsider in a heavenly guise, the pain of loneliness and the desire to be accepted and understood without reservation. The secret of the name, that is the secret of descent, as the central motif of the opera corresponds with the sexual secret in the narration, which is symbolized by Friedemann's stigma, the hump. The analogy of Gerda's arrival («in the yellow hunting-trap» [216]) with the arrival of Lohengrin (in the ship drawn by the swan) shows, that the phallic woman *Ger-da* (that is the woman with «the spear») is a «discrete mask» for the «noble, fair man», Lohengrin, the knight in the service of the grail,<sup>13</sup> and that is the male lover. Thomas Mann picks up the play on the sexual connotation of the biblical word «erkennen», that is «to know», «to recognize». In his encounter with Gerda Friedemann confesses: «You [do] know it...» ([244] «Sie wissen es ja...»), and Lohengrin, in the opera, laments: «If you know him [know him by his name], then he must withdraw from you» («erkennt ihr ihn,/ dann muss er von euch ziehn»<sup>14</sup>). Since Lohengrin is tied to the knighthood of the grail and acts in its service and mission, which is the only way to safe-guard his «virility» (in German: «Manneskraft»),<sup>15</sup> he could have had only a short relationship with Elsa (that is one year): heterosexual love being reduced to an intermezzo in an organization of male bonding, so to speak. These predictable losses in a relationship, that is preordained with respect to duration, as it were, stand in analogy to the melancholy of gender identity, that results, according to Judith Butler, from the cultural demand on the individual to be either man or woman.

I have tried to show, that the figure of the eccentric, of the cripple, is a mask for the excluded Other, who is ostracized on the basis of his sexual orientation. The behaviour patterns of resignation and melancholy, roaring fury and self-destructive aggression, that are typical for this kind of stigmatized individual, are all being developed in the plot of *Little Herr Friedemann*. From that follows, that Gerda appears as *femme fatale* only at first glance. Also, she does not represent sexuality as such or, exclusively, the unreachable masculine lover. She is constructed as counterpart to and mirror of Friedemann and she suffers from the heterosexual gender order in the same way as he does. She, however, is able, to turn her fury to the outside and to take revenge on the opposite gender. This woman figure of Thomas Mann's, in which the virile features are doubtlessly

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<sup>13</sup> Richard Wagner, *Lohengrin*. Romantische Oper in drei Aufzuegen, Stuttgart: Reclam, 1999, p. 61.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

predominant, points ahead to Madame Chauchat in *The Magic Mountain*. Chauchat holds a similar fascination for Hans Castorp as Gerda does for Friedemann. She is fascinating, because she reminds Castorp of his repressed love for his school-friend Hippe. Like Gerda, who defies the norms, the «licentious» Madame Chauchat triggers off a development in the protagonist, that can be seen as a process of de-conventionalization and re-homosexualization. So both Gerda and Madame Chauchat are woman figures, that are functionalized with regard to the main character. Whereas in the early novella, Friedemann, the protagonist, still has to perish with the visitation by his love object, that is in the process of re-homosexualization, Madame Chauchat, in the later work, simply disappears from the novel leaving Hans Castorp on his own; and the deadly homosexual embrace takes place somewhere on the battlegrounds of the first World War. Does that mean, war is the consequence of an unbearable gender order, in which Friede-men [i.e. «peaceful men»] do not have a chance? Kurt Robert Eissler, at least, has established a connection between war, monotheism and our gender system, that is organized around the oedipus-complex, by asking: «could not the periodicity of wars in the Christian-occidental cultural area be connected with the fact, that the killing of a son at the beginning of the Christian religion was a deed pleasing in the sight of God?»<sup>16</sup> Do not homophobia and homophilia actually coincide in this killing?

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<sup>16</sup> Kurt Robert Eissler, “Zur Notlage unserer Zeit (Ein Schreiben an Herrn Prof. Alexander Mitscherlich anlaesslich seines 60. Geburtstages)“, *Psyche*, 22, (1968), pp. 641-657; my translation, A. L.-K.

# Cinematic cross-dressing: Sexual disguise vs. gender transformations

EMILY FOX-KALES (\*)

So never judge a book by its cover  
Or who you gonna love by your lover  
Love put me wise to her love in disguise  
Lord, imagine my surprise....  
Oh, he was a lady.

*Dude (Looks Like a Lady)*, Aerosmith (1994)

The use of the gender disguise as a narrative device appears as far back as the *Illiad*, when Achilles' worried mother Thetis dresses her young son in girl's clothing in an attempt to protect him from his ultimate warrior fate. Through the Elizabethans, most prominently in Shakespeare and beyond, the device has endured, and only gathers more resonance as it appears in cinema, which has the power to visually construct – and then deconstruct – images of gendered bodies to give shape to both conscious and unconscious desires, fears and beliefs about our own sexuality.

The cross-dresser, clinically the *transvestite*, is indeed crossing boundaries – not merely of costume, but more profoundly of hegemonic constructs of masculinity and femininity; thus the act of cross-dressing is a sartorial *transgression* of cultural heterosexual norms which also contains the radical possibility of gender *transformation*. We will see how cinematic cross-dressing in turn creates many cross-conversations involving psychosocial as well as psychoanalytic understandings of gender identity and sexual difference as they intersect still other discourses about gender performance, acting, and masquerade.

Dress is literally a code, one of Umberto Eco's "intentional" communications which serves as a signifier for how we wish to be "read" in terms of class, generation, politics, and most particularly

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of gender. And for non-heterosexuals (whom Susan Sontag has included among society's "creative minorities") fashion is the sartorial semiotics of one's sexual orientation, gender identity, as well as a hidden code meant to signal and be interpreted by members of a sexual sub-culture. In a pivotal moment in Von Sternberg's *Morocco* (1930), when Marlene Dietrich appears on stage dressed in a man's tuxedo, Dietrich's costume, much like the monocle or the cigarette, serves as a signifier of sexual ambiguity and her availability to both sexes, even before her subversive action of kissing a woman in the audience takes place on the screen. We might also take a moment here to note the existence of a cross-dressing "double standard" of sorts in cinema. As Mary Ann Doane points out: «Male transvestism is an occasion for laughter; female transvestism only another occasion for desire» (1982).

Since the borders of alternative sexualities are so much more fluid and permeable than those of the traditional heterosexual binary, fashion codes are constantly shifting from signifiers of the sexual sub-culture to mainstream appropriation, so that Marlene Dietrich's or Judy Garland's top hat and tails or the leather jacket, pierced earring and pastel shirts originally adopted as gay fashion become conventional couture a half-generation later. (Witness the recent phenomenon of the "metrosexual" – an urban sophisticate male who carries a pocketbook, has facials, and is into interior design.)

Within this system of vestimentary signifiers, the transvestite occupies a particularly complex space. For one thing, he or she destabilizes not only the conventional gender constructs of "masculine" male and "feminine" female, but also confounds other binaries as well – of gay and straight, of anatomy and sexual orientation, of bimorphisms and polarities of any kind. In fact, the enormous literature emerging from efforts of psychiatrists, sociologists, and political activists to wrestle with differentiating the transvestite from the transsexual from the gender identity-disordered is best understood as what critic Marjory Garber (1992) has called a "crisis of category"; these efforts to disentangle the varieties of sexual identity represent an attempt to manage cultural anxiety about alternative sexualities by establishing systems of clinical diagnostic criteria or a fixed gender taxonomy. Nonetheless, confusion and misconceptions abound: the most frequent of these is the conflation of transvestitism with homosexuality. (In fact the majority of male transvestites are not homosexual – many are happily married to women – nor are they to be confused with transsexuals or anatomically transgendered individuals or so-called genetic variants of hermaphroditism). Beyond classification, and ultimately central to the representation of the cinematic cross-dresser, is how the transvestite through the iconography of dress plays with the freedom outside of fixed gender representations and identities, and in so doing, challenges and threatens, delights and arouses – often simultaneously – our own sexual subjectivity.

The notion of play, of illusion, embodied by the cinematic cross-dresser renders gender a performative act, the creation of a self through the spectacle of dress. We wear our gender like a costume, "trying on" different sexual identities and just as quickly discarding them. This gender masquerade serves to support Judith Butler's deconstruction of the solidity of the very idea of gender, which turns out to be something that we *do* (perform-enact), not what we *are* in any immutable sense. The masquerade of femininity and masculinity deconstructed and "un-done" culminates in cinematic images of the drag queen, whose exaggerated femininity serves as parody, self-conscious irony, as well as both commentary and critique of establishment rejection of gender bending. The parody of drag is not to copy or imitate heterosexuality, but rather to expose gender as what Butler (1991) calls a «panicked imitation for which there is no original».

The gender disguise, through imitation and artifice, must by its very nature include the element of deception. Indeed, drag queens, theatrical voguers, and professional entertainment cross-dressers are referred to as impersonators, illusionists, practitioners of the art of artifice, and their performances of gender illusions serve to destabilize our expectations: we are surprised, thrown off balance, and may react with both pleasure and anxiety. But from a psychoanalytic perspective, we must also consider that films organized around the gender disguise narrative force

us to re-visit our early confrontation with the trauma of sexual difference. During the pre-oedipal developmental phase we believe we can have both male and female genitalia, only to discover in the subsequent separation-individuation phase the difference of the opposite sex's body from our own. We are fascinated, shocked, but also distressed that we must give up the fantasy of "having it all" within our own bodies. Films which let the audience in on the secret of a character's actual anatomy camouflaged by the gender disguise allow us to return to that early unsettling moment, this time with advance notice and an opportunity to master the anxiety it initially engendered. In mainstream Hollywood comedies like *Tootsie* or *Mrs. Doubtfire*, we laugh at the images of a male "temporary transvestite" who fools the unsuspecting women he is pursuing – or the men who are pursuing him. These popular films thus recreate Freud's recipe for the dirty joke, whereby the woman (the object of desire and the sexual joke) is absent (from knowledge) while the spectator becomes the person to whom the sexual joke is directed.

No cross-dressing film better represents this psychodynamic function than Billy Wilder's *Some Like It Hot* (1960), honored as the No. 1 comedy of all time by the American Film Institute. We get our first glimpse of the gender disguise of Jerry and Joe, two marginal musicians on the run from the mob in the roaring 20's who dress up as girl band members, as they wobble on their high heels in newly-shaven legs rushing to catch their train. The viewer is given no preparation shots; Wilder's abrupt editing here cuts immediately from Jerry and Joe to their transformation as "Daphne" and "Josephine," precisely to emphasize the fluidity of their transformation. They are "quick change artists" who magically succeed in the ensuing identity charade. But by using the camera view-from-behind, the film invites the spectator "in" on the joke of their true gender identity. In an ensuing scene, again the audience shares the "dirty joke" of Jerry/Daphne's sexual arousal in bed cuddling with Sugar, the Marilyn Monroe character, who as the woman is duped by the deception and thus "absent" from the knowledge of the true sexual identity of her bedmate. The cognitive dissonance between Sugar's "lack" of knowledge and the spectator's insider position allows us to recuperate our own childhood confusion about sexual difference as we laugh at her ignorance of the joke.

Later in the film, the camera view-from-behind privileges the spectator with foreknowledge of the gender identity revelation that is its narrative climax. We are first presented with a shot of Josephine/Joe, wig now askew, his longing gaze at Sugar signaling unambiguous masculine desire, so we can then sit back and laugh knowingly when he kisses her, enjoying the astonishment of all the other characters in the scene who weren't "in the know". The final – and probably the most famous – line in the film, "Nobody's perfect!", spoken by Daphne's unflappable lover Osgood, captures Wilder's cynical view of a world filled with con men and deceivers, but a world which he ultimately accepted with Osgood's equanimity. More importantly, it suggests that this mapcap romp through a fantasy world of shifting gender roles and identities in which there are no "perfect" or solid gender categories might serve as a vision of a freer, far less bounded world of human sexual expression yet to come.

Nonetheless, true to comedic form, traditional order is restored with the revelation of the lovers' true gender identity; after all, the cross-dressing proved only a strategy for the guy to bed the girl and live happily ever after. In contrast, Neal Jordan's *The Crying Game* (1991) purposefully offers no such reassurance or reaffirmation of traditional gender constructs. Instead, the film is based on a series of deceptions and disguises designed to create disequilibrium. First, it destabilizes the viewer's expectations of genre by beginning as an "action thriller" (the opening sequences focus on the narrative of IRA terrorists kidnapping a British black soldier in Ireland, and is filled with images of bombs and violence) which transforms abruptly into a "romance" set in a gritty London district. Not only does the protagonist Fergus change his name and his appearance but his expected behavior: instead of a tough IRA guerrilla he reveals himself to be a nurturant lover and compassionate caretaker. Meanwhile Jude, the terrorist brigade's only female leader, emerges as its

most lethal and “macho” – gun or knife in hand as she ruthlessly stalks and murders and menaces, showing no mercy to her victims.

The primary deception (which led to the film’s pre-release promotion about not “telling” the secret) is revealed in the scene when Fergus is confronted with the true nature of his lover’s anatomy. In contrast to the comedic “view-from-behind” discussed earlier, designed to provide narrative closure and re-assurance in the return to socially ordered gender binaries, here the spectator remains until this moment as uncertain about Dil’s sexual identity (in fact she is a biological male who identifies as female) as Fergus/Jimmy and thus shares his limited point of view and subjectivity as the camera shoots him lying in dreamy sexual reverie of anticipation on the bed as Dil moves into the bathroom. And it is through his point of view that we share in the film’s revelation, as the camera slowly pans down Dil’s body to the moment of his gaze at the male genitals that concludes the shot. Here again not only Fergus but the spectator is jolted by the rude discovery of sexual difference, visually captured by the film’s abrupt shift in color tones from sensuous red to an aseptic blue while the soundtrack’s soft romantic music stops and is replaced by harsh street noises outside; but this time the shock would appear to be intensified by his revulsion at the awareness of his own possible homoerotic desire. From a psychoanalytic perspective, as Stoller (1975) has pointed out, Fergus is also nauseated and appalled at the image of the phallic woman the transvestite represents, embodying the boy’s childhood fantasy that his mother (i.e. the woman) is not castrated after all, and therefore could threaten and penetrate his vulnerability. The moment also sheds light on the gap between “seeing” and “knowing” not only in the film’s diegetic space, but also in the male child’s early sexual development, where Freud posits that during the boy’s first glance at his mother’s genitals he sees the difference but doesn’t really know its significance until castration anxiety endows it with meaning. Similarly many male audiences claim they never “saw” the shot of Dil’s penis – or insist it must have been a body double inserted into the scene (Gabbard, 2001). Perhaps they are in as much denial as Fergus, who managed to miss the suggestions and clues which precede the traumatic revelation.

Thus the motif of cross-dressing here is used to make the subversive statement that love and intimacy are not necessarily a function of anatomy; and that there need be no proscribed limits about the many ways people express their sexual nature. In the end, the deception of costume leads to more essential truths – that kindness transcends racial, political as well as sexual differences, and that true transformation does not reside in gender assignment. Instead the film offers a transformative vision beyond the constraints of culture – of the freedom to explore all “guises” of sexual expression, new territories and erogenous “zones” that lie outside the borders of the heterosexual gender binary.

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# Maternal legacy in *Frankenstein*

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«We think back through our mothers if we are women.»  
(Virginia Woolf [1928], 1929: 79)

«He died raving about some phantom.»  
(Captain Walton, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, 1994)

«In December of 1987, Saul Kent's mother Dora, was eighty-three years old and in failing health. When she seemed close to death, Saul Kent, a member of the board of the Alcor Life Extension Foundation in California, moved her to the premises of Alcor laboratory to freeze and preserve her remains. Mrs. Kent, formerly a seamstress, lived a day and a half longer, and when she died, without a doctor present, a lab worker immediately hooked her up to a heart-and-lung machine that kept her blood circulating. She was injected with the barbiturate Nembutal to keep her from reviving. Then she was preserved "as a neurosuspension – that is, simply a head."»

The doctor who signed her death certificate four days later said she had died of pneumonia. The coroner said maybe the Nembutal had killed her and asked the lab for Dora Kent's head. Mr. Kent said he had given it to a friend, who had hidden it in his house. The District Attorney threatened to prosecute for murder, but a judge declined to have Mrs. Kent's head thawed for autopsy. The case ended without legal charges.»

(Alec Wilkinson, "The Cryonic Castle", The New Yorker, January 19, 2004: 46)

Mary Shelley's famous 1818 gothic novel about the reanimation of dead body parts alludes several times to The Arabian Nights (c. 850) and deploys a narrative structure of nested stories opening into stories, like Chinese boxes, or Russian nested dolls suggesting pregnancy. The story takes nine months to tell, starting with a letter from Captain Walton, dated St. Petersburg, December 11, 17- -, and finishing with a last letter dated September 12th the following year. In this letter Walton describes the monster as looking like a "mummy" and reports that the monster

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complains that he is “abandoned”, an “abortion”. In the book’s opening, Walton writes to his sister what Victor, near death, reports aboard Walton’s ice-bound ship. Within Victor’s narrative comes the monster’s tale, the heart of the book. This oral communication within oral communication within a written transcription belongs to the tradition of story telling associated with Scheherazade, who generated narratives to avoid beheading.

Kenneth Branagh’s 1994 film Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein invents a going away party for Victor on the eve of his departure for university at Ingolstadt. Midway through the festivities, Alphonse stops the music and dancing to present his son with a somber gift from the dead Caroline Beaufort Frankenstein, Alphonse’s wife, Victor’s mother. This gift is a journal that begins, «This is the journal of Victor Frankenstein». Alphonse notes that the pages of the journal are blank, and adds, «To be filled with the deeds of a noble life». This blank book from the absent mother exemplifies the way Branagh’s film makes explicit themes that remain submerged in Shelley’s novel, where the maternal signifier is not a journal but Caroline’s portrait, which travels from William to Justine, marking both for death.

In the novel, Caroline’s unspoken past haunts Victor in the form of a compulsion to bring the dead back to life in order to go down gloriously in history as a great man. Branagh brings forward the novel’s theme of the Enlightenment gone wrong in the way the film’s art direction contrasts the decorous architecture, furnishings, music and light of the Frankenstein household in Geneva with cramped, dark, crowded, noisy, disease-ridden Ingolstadt. The film emphasizes the historical context of the original novel by introducing Mary Shelley as a voice-over character at the outset of the movie, along with a moving textual panel invoking guillotine horrors during the French Revolution of 1789, when Enlightenment ideals eventuated in bodily dismemberments, especially decapitation.

In describing his grief for his mother’s death, in the novel Victor says, «I need not describe the feeling of those whose dearest ties are rent by that most irreparable evil; the void that presents itself to the soul; and the despair that is exhibited of the countenance. It is so long before the mind can persuade itself that she, whom we saw every day, and whose very existence appeared a part of our own, can have departed for ever...» The phrase «the void that presents itself to the soul» suggests an inner emptiness as the psychic space kept within the survivor as a memorial to the dead, a kind of inner crypt, the space psychoanalysts Abraham and Torok have called the shell where the kernel of the secrets of the dead are stored as transgenerational family secrets haunting survivors who are unconsciously possessed by phantoms or specters. Note the emphasis Victor places on the permanence of death when describing his grief and the way he views death as the «most irreparable evil», for this is an evil he feels determined to repair. In Branagh’s film, Victor rides on horseback to his mother’s funeral monument and declares, «No one need die». This mad sense drives him to animate lifeless matter. In the University scenes in the film, it is clear that Victor is an outsider at Ingolstadt, where he is looked down upon as Swiss. His readings of ancient alchemical texts are regarded as outré and passé. Professor Krempe dismisses Paracelsus as an «arrogant and foolish Swiss» and Victor himself as «another Swiss».

Victor however seems quite proud of his Swiss ancestry, introducing his story to Walton with the words, «I am by birth a Genevese; and my family is one of the most distinguished in the republic. My ancestors had been for many years counsellors and syndics; and my father had filled several public situations with honour and reputation». This identifies the paternal side of Victor’s family.

The maternal side, Caroline Beaufort’s, presents another story. In «the decline of life», Victor’s father Alphonse Frankenstein took a wife, the daughter of a merchant friend, Beaufort, fallen into poverty and removed to Lucerne, where he lived unknown in wretchedness with his only daughter and caretaker, who was reduced by their unfortunate circumstances to plaiting straw from a pittance scarcely sufficient to support life. Since Beaufort had formerly been distinguished by rank and magnificence, Shelley’s readers must imagine him as declassed and humiliated; and indeed he seems to be in despair at death’s door when Alphonse arrives to the rescue in time to see Caroline

become a bereft orphan, her father having «died in her arms». After interring his disgraced and departed friend, Alphonse conducts the orphan to Geneva, where, two years later, she becomes his bride.

Victor recounts his happy infancy as the first child and “idol” of this happy pair who lacked for nothing except a daughter. In the 1818 version of the book, at the age of four years, Victor obtains a foster sister who is actually his first cousin, the daughter of Alphonse’s sister, who had married an Italian “gentleman”, traveled to his country, and died. A few months after her death, Alphonse received a letter from his brother-in-law declaring an intention to marry again and asking to have his infant, Elizabeth, educated in Switzerland, and proposing that Alphonse consider her as his own. In other words, this Italian gentleman, Lavenza, does not want to parent his own child.

In the 1831 revision of the novel, Victor’s future bride is actually a stranger though she continues to call him “cousin”. In this version of Elizabeth’s adoption, Caroline Beaufort Frankenstein fulfills her desire for a daughter when Victor is five, by discovering among the poor on the shores of Lake Como a fair-haired, blue-eyed child appearing to be “of a different stock”, “a distinct species” among the dark “vagrants” who comprise her peasant family. Caroline learns that this “heaven-sent” being with features of “celestial stamp” is a foster child, the daughter of a Milanese nobleman and a German woman who died giving birth to Elizabeth.

This fair angel set in poverty, in other words, has a history that varies slightly Caroline’s own story of displacement into obscurity and then redemption by a fortuitous sponsor who restores due and true class positioning, an abbreviated version of the family romance Freud analyzes as part of Otto Rank’s *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*. The idea of innate superiority in this revision runs counter to the progressivist critique of established privileges and the corrupting, demonizing effects of being a social outsider implicit in the monster’s tale at the heart of the novel.

Caroline’s will to restoration in her adoption of Elizabeth fuses with her symbolic haunting of Victor after she dies, for Caroline makes it clear that she intends Elizabeth to be Victor’s bride. At about the time Victor Frankenstein is to become a student at Ingolstadt, Elizabeth Lavenza catches scarlet fever. She is cared for in her illness by her foster mother, Caroline Frankenstein, who saves Elizabeth, but dying in the process, tells Elizabeth to “supply her place”. Not only does Victor know that his mother chose his wife, this wife-to-be gets explicitly identified in the novel as a mother substitute and family stand-in for the dead mother.

The substitutability of Elizabeth and Caroline, the living and the dead, expresses itself in a dream Victor has during the night he succeeds in revivifying dead body parts in order to give birth to the monster. In building up to this achievement, Victor reasons, «if I could bestow animation upon lifeless matter, I might in process of time... renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption». The drive to animate the dead can be read as Victor’s grieving response to his mother’s death, an uncanny desire to mix the living and the dead, to create the living dead, seeing life infuse into what was formerly lifeless. The project turns Victor into an emotional zombie, removed from the cycles of the seasons and the ongoing of natural life around him. At the moment Victor does see composite dead body parts convulse into life as a hideous monster, he is unable to endure the «aspect of the being [he] had created». He paces his bedchamber, «unable to compose [his] mind to sleep». Victor can neither look on what he has achieved nor fall asleep and face his dreams. When he finally does sleep in what he calls that fatal night of November, he is disturbed by a nightmare vision of Elizabeth, «in the bloom of health, walking the streets of Ingolstadt». Delighted and surprised, Victor in his dream embraces her, but as he imprints a kiss on her lips, they become «livid with the hue of death». Her features appear to change, and he dreams that he is holding the corpse of his dead mother in his arms. He reports, «a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the *graveworms crawling in the folds of the flannel* [my italics]. I started from my sleep in horror; a cold dew covered my forehead, my teeth chattered, and every limb became convulsed.» This convulsion of the dreamer repeats the “convulsive motion” of the monster when the creature’s “dull yellow eye” first opened. The dreamer’s eyes now open to see by the «dim and yellow light

of the moon» the monster staring down at him. Victor, now a lunatic, jumps away from the creature, whom he perceives as a “demoniacal corpse”. Victor declares, «Oh! no mortal could support the horror of that countenance. A mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch». Though the “mummy” can be contextualized as an allusion to the Egyptian antiquities Napoleon in his grandiose exportation of the French Revolution had excavated and paraded through Europe after his invasion of northern Africa in the early nineteenth century, the “mummy” here suggests as well the dead Caroline. The dream sequence and then the figure of the creature horrify Victor because the creature embodies the scientist’s ideal of giving life to the dead; as an uncanny form of symbolic maternal revivification, his ideal has proved deformed and monstrous. This dream coming immediately after Victor’s success in giving life to the monster expresses a psychic connection between Victor’s desire to give life, a form of maternal identification, and the legacy of his mother in his wish to become a great man by overcoming the limits of being one.

A morbid detail in this dream, of graveworms crawling in the folds of the flannel on the maternal corpse, recurs with compelling power in the scene in which the monster comes upon Justine sleeping with Caroline’s picture after the murder of William. Like Elizabeth Lavenza, Justine Moritz models herself on Caroline Beaufort Frankenstein. Elizabeth writes to Victor that Justine paid «the greatest attention to every gesture of my aunt. She thought her the model of all excellence, and endeavored to imitate her phraseology and manners, so that even now she often reminds me of her». Justine had attended Caroline in her final illness, and contracted the same fever, which, according to her mother, caused the deaths of all the other Moritz children. So Justine’s closeness to and identification with Caroline carries guilt associated with the death of her siblings. This death leaves Justine an orphan of sorts because Madame Moritz neglects her only surviving child, but then frets herself to death and Justine actually becomes an orphan, in effect adopted into the Frankenstein household as a Caroline-replacement for Elizabeth, who is continually reminded of her aunt by Justine’s mien and expression. Similarly, we may add, Mary Shelley herself would have been reminded of her own dead mother in the person of her half-sister Fanny Imlay, who had witnessed and co-experienced Mary Wollstonecraft’s abandonment by the love of her life, the American adventurer Gilbert Imlay, who failed to provide child support for their daughter (Todd, 1993: 133).

After the monster kills Justine and she is accused of William’s murder, she actually confesses, suggesting that she unconsciously feels guilty for it. Victor, stunned into silence, fails to speak up to save her life, letting her be punished for a crime he knows the monster had committed and for which Victor himself feels responsible. The scene the creature recounts in confessing William’s murder and the framing of Justine for the crime verbally echoes the scene of the monster leaning over the sleeping Victor as he awakes from his nightmare of the decomposing body of his mother. The monster killed William because the boy rejected an overture of friendship, just as Victor had rushed away in horror from the outstretched hand of his creation on the first night, a traumatic rejection repeated by the horrified response of the De Lacey family to the sight of the monster trying to make friends with their patriarch, a rejection the creature avenges by burning down their house. The monster recounts his exultation in seeing his first murder victim dead at his feet: «I exclaimed, “I, too, can create desolation...” As I fixed my eyes on the child, I saw something glittering on his breast. I took it; it was a portrait of a most lovely woman. In spite of my malignity, it softened and attracted me. For a few moments I gazed with delight on her dark eyes, fringed by deep lashes, and her lovely lips; but presently my rage returned: I remembered that I was for ever deprived of the delights such a beautiful creature could bestow; and that she whose resemblance I contemplated would, in regarding me, have changed that air of divine benignity to one expressive of disgust and affright. Can you wonder that such thoughts transported me with rage? While I was overcome by these feelings, I left the spot where I had committed the murder, and seeking a more secluded hiding-place, I entered a barn which had appeared to me to be empty. A woman was

sleeping on some straw; she was young: not indeed so beautiful as her whose portrait I held; but of an agreeable aspect, and blooming in the loveliness of youth and health. Here, I thought, is one of those whose joy-imparting smiles are bestowed on all but me. And then I bent over her, and whispered, “Awake, fairest, thy lover is near – he who would give his life but to obtain one look of affection from thine eyes: my beloved awake!”» This scene of a thwarted lover spying on his beloved as she sleeps gruesomely transforms the scene in A Midsummer Night’s Dream where Oberon spies on Titania in love with a monster, only here the monster is the onlooker, a fused version of the horse’s head and the incubus who haunts the sleeping woman in Fuseli’s famous late-eighteenth century icon The Nightmare.

The monster reports how the sleeper stirred and a “thrill of terror” ran through him. «Should she indeed awake, and see me», he wondered, «and curse me, and denounce the murderer? Thus would she assuredly act, if her darkened eyes opened and she beheld me. The thought was madness, it stirred the fiend within me – not I, but she shall suffer; the murder I have committed because I am for ever robbed of all that she could give me, she shall atone. The crime had its source in her: hers be the punishment!... I bent over her, and placed the portrait securely in one of the folds of her dress. She moved again, and I fled.» The detail of the “folds” is one of many connecting this scene to the November scene of the monster’s stirring from death to life and then causing Victor to flee when he awakes from his nightmare of the decomposing maternal body to see the monster leaning over his bed with lunar, yellow eyes. The monster plants the portrait of the dead mother in the folds of Justine’s dress, marking her for death.

The reader is invited to participate in a scene of looking on at a murder when the monster, by the light of the moon, watches Victor destroy the half-created creature intended to be the monster’s wife. Victor reports, «The remains of the half-finished creature, whom I had destroyed, lay scattered on the floor, and I almost felt as I had mangled the living flesh of a human being». When the monster sees his bride torn to pieces, he enters the scene to threaten the killer with the words, «I shall be with you on your wedding night». Fearing the monster’s revenge for the dead female creature, Victor is haunted by these words, «*I will be with you on your wedding night*», which appear in italics in the text of the novel as they replay in Victor’s mind.

In her essay, “My Monster/Myself”, Barbara Johnson (1982) has pointed out that this is one of only two italicized passages in the book. The other italicized words appear in Mary Shelley’s 1831 author’s Introduction to the text, where she recounts the now famous genesis of the book in dream serving her participation in an authorship contest to think up a horror story. We read, «On the morrow I announced that I had *thought of a story*». It began with the words, «*It was on a dreary night of November*, making only a transcript of the grim terrors of my waking dream» – her dream, that is, of the «pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together», then rushing away to sleep «in belief that the silence of the grave would quench for ever the transient existence of the hideous corpse which he had looked upon as the cradle of life». «He sleeps», she reports in the present tense as if reliving the dream, «but he is awakened; he opens his eyes; behold the horrid thing stands at his bedside, opening his curtains, and looking on him with yellow, watery, but speculative eyes. I opened mine in terror».

This scene of genesis, in the italics in its report as well as in its configuration of horror during sleep, connects not only to Victor’s November nightmare but to the scene of Elizabeth’s murder on her wedding night. Victor exclaims in reporting the scene of his discovery of his bride’s corpse, «Great God! Why did I not then expire! Why am I here to relate the destruction of the best hope and the purest creature of earth. She was there, lifeless and inanimate, thrown across the bed, her head hanging down, and her pale and distorted features half covered by her hair. Every where I turn I see the same figure – her bloodless arms and relaxed form flung by the murderer on its bridal bier».

More than one reader of Frankenstein has recognized Henri Fuseli’s 1781 The Nightmare as an apposite association to this scene of nighttime horror. In his annotated version of the novel

Leonard Wolf notes that this «famous painting inspired the description of Elizabeth’s dead body flung across her bridal bed just after her murder by the creature (in Chapter 23 of Frankenstein). This painting is also known as “The Incubus” – an incubus being a male demon or spirit that visits sleeping females in the night, usually for sexual purposes». «As if this weren’t enough», says Wolf, «Mary Shelley’s mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, had a relationship (not quite a sexual affair, apparently, to Wollstonecraft’s disappointment) with Fuseli, a fact which Mary Shelley knew». Wolf notes that Mary Wollstonecraft had fallen in love with Fuseli, a fixation which lasted nearly four years and that «[I]t may be relevant to the skein of relationships that the egotistic Fuseli, like Frankenstein, was born in Switzerland» (Wolf, 1977).

By adding to Leonard Wolf Barbara Johnson’s observation of the italicized connection between Elizabeth’s dead body on her bridal bed and the scene Mary Shelley recounts of the genesis of the book, we may conclude that Fuseli’s The Nightmare can be regarded as a primal scene of the novel, iterated not only on the night of monstrous birth, but also in the scene of the monster’s leaning over Justine’s sleeping body, and indeed in the final view Captain Walton has of the monster leaning over his creator in Victor’s death scene aboard ship in the frozen arctic, a setting that conveys the lack of affection exuded by Victor’s quest, which is ultimately suicidal.

Ellen Moers (1977) has read this book as working out Mary Shelley’s response to fears of pregnancy rooted in the death of her mother from a childbirth fever following Mary’s birth. The unconscious logic of the book, suggests Moers, is, *Having lost my mother to a childbed fever at the time of my birth, if I myself give birth, I will be pursued by my own childhood, monstrous wishes for revenge for that abandonment.*

I am arguing that Frankenstein as a creator is motivated by his mother’s legacy, which involves not only reviving her symbolically from the dead but working out her secret disgrace – her declension in class, her intimacy with her father as a widower. This disgrace, presumably transmitted cryptically to her son, suggests an intergenerational, incestuous primal scene reminiscent of Fuseli’s Nightmare. In this image, the night mother is represented in the form of the head of a mare on which the incubus rides. Ernest Jones (1931) thought this picture condensed a fantasy of incest – the incubus as parent figure visiting the child’s bed at night, along with horror associated with the incestuous visitation. It is worth observing that Mary Shelley’s Mathilda, a novella written in 1820 but suppressed from publication until 1959, treats father-daughter incest in a story in which a father compensates for his dead wife by falling in love with his daughter. The image of the spectral mother and the fantasy of parent-child incest was evidently a thematic preoccupation for the teen-aged Shelley. Moreover, her father William Godwin, who claimed his family name derived from the Norse God Odin, was chronically short of money and expected his daughter Mary to keep him in cash from whatever resources her aristocratic husband Percy Shelley could extract from moneylenders. This drama took place in the midst of Mary Shelley’s grief for the suicide of her half-sister Fanny Imlay, the daughter of the depressive Mary Wollstonecraft and the abandoning father Gilbert Imlay, maternal trauma that found expression through the character of Justine in Frankenstein.

Kenneth Branagh’s film increases the violence of the bridal death scene and dissolves the distancing a reader’s recognition of Fuseli’s famous icon might provide by having De Niro crash through the roof of the bridal chamber and rip Elizabeth’s heart from her body, possibly in allusion to the 1633 revenge drama, ’Tis Pity She’s a Whore, a tale of brother-sister incest, by John Ford, in which Giovanni avenges his beloved sister’s betrothal to a rival by stabbing her to death and bringing her heart impaled upon his dagger to what was supposed to be her wedding banquet. Piling on the Jacobean-like scenario of the monster offering Victor the spectacle of Elizabeth’s heart still beating in her murderer’s hand perhaps points to the film’s precursors in Francis Ford Coppola’s violent 1971 Godfather film saga as well as to Branagh’s own background and training as an Shakespearean actor. The appalling and borderline funny bridal murder scene goes over the top of the long theatrical and cinematic tradition associated with Frankenstein.

Heidi Kaye points out that Kenneth Branagh's revising of Mary Shelley's novel in his film version brings forward 1970s and 1980s feminist themes, emphasizing the history of eighteenth-century childbirth techniques, giving Shelley herself a voice in the film by having parts of her 1831 introduction to the book spoken in voice over at the film's outset, and building up the part of Elizabeth Lavenza by casting the box office draw Helena Bonham-Carter in the role of Elizabeth and making her Victor's peer and potential collaborator in having her travel to Ingostadt to tend him in his postpartum depression.

On the other hand, notes Kaye, this film is about male bonding. Branagh was brought aboard the film project as director when Francis Ford Coppola of Godfather fame declined the job. Branagh, in the early stages of his film career, was building alliances with powerful male players in the financial establishment of the Hollywood dream factory. Two years before, in 1992, Coppola had made Bram Stoker's Dracula, a postmodern treatment of Stoker's 1897 novel. The novelist's name appears in Coppola's film title because the title Dracula per se was previously copyrighted. Similarly, says Kaye, Branagh's use of the author's name in his title Mary Shelley's Frankenstein serves to avoid copyright disputes with earlier film treatments of the novel. It also aligns Branagh's film with Coppola's of the parallel title. It is less Shelley among the feminists that preoccupies Branagh, argues Kaye, than his own role vis-à-vis the producer Francis Ford Coppola and the box office star Robert De Niro, cast in the role of the monster.

Kaye points out how Branagh's incorporation of Mary Shelley's female authority and his enlargement from the novel of the role of not only Elizabeth but also of Justine is countermanded in the film by the building up of male-to-male alliances. Whereas Alphonse is a lawyer in the original novel, the screenplay for Branagh's film makes him a doctor, thus emphasizing male genealogy in Victor's choice of profession. The film also builds up Victor's relationship with Professor Waldman at Ingostadt, showing Waldman as a disgraced, shadowy, suspect professor already having tried himself to bring the dead back to life. When De Niro in the role of a hatchet-faced, peg-legged man stabs and kills Dr. Waldman during an attempted inoculation against cholera, Victor removes Waldman's brain and puts it into the skull of the monster. Thus the monster is a mental and physical collaboration between professor and student. The birthing of the monster from a symbolic, exteriorized womb in the form of a copper cauldron penetrated by electrical eels looking like gigantic sperm descending from billowing testicular shapes suspended above the cauldron culminates in a slimy wrestling match between Branagh as Victor and De Niro as the monster, recalling the male-to-male eroticized, semi-nude confrontation between the male protagonists in Ken Russell's 1969 film Women in Love, based on the D. H. Lawrence novel. De Niro as peg-legged ruffian, transformed by the insertion of Waldman's brain and the grafting on of various body parts, becomes an outsized authority figure who confronts Branagh's Victor at the end of an icy tunnel suggesting a birth canal the monster forces his creator to pass through on the way to a fireside chat, wherein Victor receives a stern lecture on the duties of a parent. In a film that itself seems in a grand manner to be very alive, the male-to-male birth scenes connect Branagh to a lineage of male filmmakers, including Fritz Lang (the scene of the animation of the robot in 1926-7's Metropolis) and James Whale, director of the famous 1931 Frankenstein film starring Boris Karloff as the monster. Though his Frankenstein film was a box office failure, thanks to Branagh-Victor's depressive demeanor, the outrageousness of the denouement, and the ridicule reviewers heaped on Branagh's oiled muscles in his shirtless scene and the credit he gave to his personal trainer, Branagh was hoping to join a line of male box office heavy hitters and he was playing opposite Robert De Niro.

Branagh alludes to the image of male on male creativity represented in Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel painting of God extending his finger to animate Adam in the scene where Victor takes William, Justine, and Elizabeth to a picnic when a thunderstorm is about to start. Victor pulls out a lightning rod suggesting Benjamin Franklin with his kite and key among the stormy elements, transmitting electricity. As the lightning rod attracts lightning from the sky, Victor and his entourage join hands in a circle. Afterward, in delighted surprise and awe at Victor's scientific prowess, they

spark electricity between their fingers. This lightning rod scene prefigures the stormy night Victor uses electricity to animate his amniotic golem.

In place of Caroline's picture in Mary Shelley's novel, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein has Branagh/Victor's picture in the locket that travels between William and Justine. Justine is in love with Victor in Branagh's film, an addition to the novel. Trevyn McDowell, a blond Justine (played as a child by the blond Christine Cuttall) contrasts visually with the dark-haired Helena Bonham-Carter in the role of Elizabeth. During the Frankenstein film project, Branagh transferred his erotic affections from the blond Emma Thompson, then his wife, to the dark-haired Bonham-Carter. Emma Thompson around this time made the movie Junior with Arnold Schwarzenegger, who plays a man giving birth with Thompson's character as his scientific assistant. So if this married couple were going to give birth, one might conclude, it would seem to be to the form of male birth fantasy. In Branagh's film the blond Justine and the dark-haired Elizabeth are joined together in a single figure when Victor cuts off the heads and hands of the two women in order to put Elizabeth's head on Justine's body and Elizabeth's hands on Justine's arms, a radical alteration of the climax to Shelley's novel. In this grotesque way, Branagh-Victor seems to have both women at once, thus suggesting in the psychology of the making of the film the emotional monstrosity of Victor in Shelley's original novel. Kaye thinks the decapitating of the women represents masculine backlash against the feminist themes made manifest by the bringing forward of Mary Shelley's authority and the building up of the women's roles in the story. These decapitations also recall the horse's head in Fuseli's Nightmare, and produce an effect of horror comparable to the decapitated horsehead placed in the bed in Coppola's 1971 The Godfather. We can discern here a masculine defense taking the form of identification with powerful father figures against the threat of castration implied by a persistent maternal imago.

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# Religion, age, and identity after the Holocaust

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In the past Holocaust scholars and psychoanalysts have assumed that most survivors of wartime trauma would permanently suffer from post-traumatic stress syndrome. For some victims the pain is still palpable.<sup>1</sup> Jewish and Christian religious scholars have also suffered from an assault on their faith. They have sought to reconcile their trust in a just and good God with the horrors that were inflicted on innocent people, merely because they were Jewish. At the heart of this struggle is the question of evil, a problem for which there are no satisfactory answers. Why was it possible for Hitler to convince so many people to attempt to exterminate Jews in so many different countries? Why did otherwise decent people join in the task or at least keep silent when they saw evidence of atrocities? If God had specially chosen the Jews to be his people, many wondered if He had been trying to punish them for some reason.<sup>2</sup> Needless to say if rabbis and clerics found the task daunting, the rank and file of the Jewish community have also, as well as thoughtful members of the Christian laity. Rather than attempt to explain the inexplicable, it has been far easier to agree with Elie Wiesel's reaction to the horror of seeing small children burned in the crematoria. In *Night*, published in 1958 when he was thirty-years-old, he asserted, «Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever» (p. 32).

Few of us, however, maintain the vehemence of youth. Over time some of Wiesel's anger has dissipated. In speeches and essays written during the 1980s, he reported how his religious belief reemerged. The real crisis, he recalled in a 1981 essay, came after the war was over. He withdrew from companionship, beginning «to despair of humanity and God; I considered them both enemies

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<sup>1</sup> Sara Houghteling, *Envisioning Paris* (2004) describes a painful interview with a woman «war orphan». She screamed at Houghteling for having the temerity to attempt to write a novel about the Holocaust. «I wish it were fiction», the woman shouted, «that I lost my four brothers and my parents in the Shoah». The interviewer reeled «back at the chasm of her grief» (n. p.).

<sup>2</sup> After Auschwitz some Jews have found it impossible to continue to believe in «the transcendent God of the covenant and election». An alternative path attracted them. They have responded to the appeal of «mysticism and nature paganism», a position described by Richard Rubenstein in *After Auschwitz*. According to Rubenstein turning to «Buddhist enlightenment is to choose a synthesizing *system of continuity* over a dichotomizing *system of gaps*» (Rubenstein, 1992, p. 296).

of the Jewish people» (1981, p. 139). For a time he turned to Hindu mysticism, but could not bear the suffering he saw in India. Ultimately he found it possible to speak about his experiences, and is still «surprised to feel a forgotten need to recite certain prayers, to sing certain melodies, to plunge into a certain atmosphere that defined my adolescence» (*Ibid.*, p. 144). In 1994 after receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, he told the story of his return to religion a bit differently. He recollected recovering much of his religious fervor shortly after being liberated (1994, p. 113) and reported studying the Bible and the Talmud at that time. He regained his belief in God but not in unconditional love, saying that «because I love Him, I am angry at Him» (*Ibid.*, p. 402). «I have never renounced my faith in God», recalled the older man looking back upon the ardent misery of his youth (*Ibid.*, p. 84). Clearly over time both his perspective and his memory have changed. His example demonstrates that living with unresolved ambiguity and unanswerable questions is easier for the old than for the young, especially if their postwar lives have brought them success.<sup>3</sup>

Wiesel's metamorphosis has been publicly enacted, but other survivors have undergone similar transformations in more private arenas. Of course, those who have lost most of their family, endured the suffering of concentration or work camp, followed by the stresses of exile have not forgotten the pain and confusion of their youth. Nonetheless, over time they have carved out new lives in a new country and in some cases restored their lost faith. Most married and reared children. In old age some have even found new roles to play. They have taken on the challenge of educating the next generation, as well as those older folk who grew up far from the horrors of World War II. Most appear to have relished their new importance. A positive response to their reminiscences has had a healing effect. Their resilience makes one wonder what characteristics separate them from more troubled survivors, those who like Primo Levi eventually commit suicide or others who have lived a life of seemingly endless complaint. Two texts are instructive: Isaac Goodfriend's 2001 memoir, *By Fate or By Faith: The Saga of a Survivor* and Ben Wajikra [Lou Leviticus]'s *Tales from the Milestone* (2003). According to terms established by a survey of Holocaust survivors in Israel, Goodfriend belongs in the category of those whose religious practices changed after the war. He grew up in an ultra observant household, but in adulthood he became highly rather than ultra observant (Brenner, p. 47). Despite the upheavals of his youth, Leviticus has maintained his mostly secular way of life. Yet, he writes, by choosing the pseudonym of Ben Wajikra – the name means son of Leviticus – he is paying homage to his dead parents (Wajikra, p. 1).

As Wiesel puts it, survivors of trauma need to live in more than one world, to accept «the mystery inherent in questions», and to convert «tensions and conflicts... into culture, art, education, spiritual inquiry, the quest for truth, the quest for justice» (1987, p. 195). Although those who have experienced massive disruption can live with ambiguity, they also feel a certain need to reconstruct a usable past. Just as Wiesel in later memoirs talks about his religious childhood with feeling, other survivors remember aspects of their youth that gave them the strength to endure.

The story that Isaac Goodfriend records in his 2001 memoir, *By Fate or By Faith*, follows Wiesel's example in both respects. Not only does he reconstruct his religious childhood, but his later life suggests that he has successfully converted the religious conflicts he experienced into a remarkable example of “spiritual inquiry” and “the quest for justice”. Goodfriend's narrative shows how flexibility, a devout childhood, good luck, a good marriage, impressive musical talent, and a tolerance of ambiguity have provided him the means to live through the Holocaust and remake his life far from home.

Throughout the memoir, Isaac Goodfriend showed rare flexibility when faced with difficult situations. Moreover he ultimately benefited from being unable to live in his childhood community.

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<sup>3</sup> Amir Cohen-Shalev, *Art in Old Age*, describes a similar process in the lives of artists and their characters. For example, Cohen-Shalev argues that in Ingmar Bergman's *Fanny and Alexander*, at the end of the film the grandmother finds that «empathy replaces, or rather preempts, the need to “make sense” or to “mend” the loose fragments of her experience.... Late-life freedom has supplanted hierarchy as the source of authority» (p. 133).

Born in 1924, he was just old enough when the war began to share some of his father's burdens. Goodfriend adjusted quickly to his family's altered circumstances and ultimately made good use of the skills circumstances forced him to develop. For example, he did not want to leave school at fifteen for an apprenticeship, but learning how to make socks helped support his family in those desperate early war years (2001, pp. 49, 72). After his father's premature death from typhoid, Goodfriend was taught to mix mortar by Polish chimney builders (*Ibid.*, p. 97). In a labor camp later on, mixing mortar became his job and a life line. He was so useful to the master masons that they saved his life when he «nearly killed three men» in an industrial accident (*Ibid.*, p. 123). Then in the postwar period, his wartime experience of bartering and scrounging turned out to be essential skills. Once again he profited from an unsought education. Even in the face of radical changes and the murder of his mother and brothers and sisters, three things sustained him: his emotional attachment to the Jewish community, his religious education, and his good fortune in having a beautiful singing voice. Ironically enough, the exigencies of war and the destruction of his ancestral home opened a new path for him to follow, one far more congenial than the world into which he had been born.

Childhood religion and education turned out to be the bedrock of Goodfriend's later life. He was born into a close-knit Hasidic community, the warmth of which he never forgot nor the lessons of his Jewish education. His narrative contains many Yiddish and some Hebrew words, suggesting the long term importance of the language of his youth. He attended *cheder* at the age of three, and his musical ability emerged very early. Had the war not intervened he might have followed in his father's path and run a dry goods store. Although in youth he expected to live in the traditional manner, in retrospect he emphasizes the self-questioning he underwent during his adolescence. His musical gifts would have been considerably restricted by Hasidic conventions. He longed to play the piano but realizing that piano playing was not part of their tradition, he did not dare ask if lessons were possible. He knew other Jews who were not as observant as his family, but to follow their example might well have alienated him from those he loved. Fearing that his musical gifts could force him to disobey the tenets of Hasidism, after his bar mitzvah he wondered if he were fit for this traditional life. As it happened the war came, destroyed the shtetl and altered the trajectory of his religious life. Those early doubts, he declares, were intensified by the upheaval, not diminished by his suffering (*Ibid.*, p. 50).

Ironically, the exigencies of the early Nazi regime freed young Goodfriend to experiment by reading secular material, long forbidden by Hasidic practice. Moreover he was fortunate in being fifteen and very strong. Had he been somewhat older the Nazis would have beaten him as they did his father. If he had been a young child, most likely he would have perished. In contrast his parents felt responsible for their two-year-old son and aging parents. That situation made it almost impossible for them to flee to Russia as some of their friends planned to do (*Ibid.*, p. 55). Wartime deprivations turned this merchant family into barterers, who searched for anything that they might sell. As Goodfriend remembers, he became expert in trading gold and paper money.

Despite Goodfriend's conflicts about religious practice, his religious education continued to sustain him. He never lost his emotional commitment to his faith. For example, when his father died prematurely from typhoid fever, Goodfriend found new meaning in the ritual prayers of mourning. As he put it later, «it was then that I began to notice the words, when the prayers stopped being automatic and there was meaning in every phrase». His father's *shiva*, the mourning that follows a funeral, taught him «to pray, how to conduct the services and give the prayers proper *kavana*, their spiritually unique expression».<sup>4</sup> This sense of connection, he reports, still emerges «every time I conduct a weekly service» (*Ibid.*, p. 86). These strong feelings demonstrate that the

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<sup>4</sup> Goodfriend, 2001, pp. 85-86. Lou Leviticus wrote me that *kavana* actually means purpose (e-mail message sent, October 15, 2004).

ties to his family's faith survived the changes in his religious practice. In the long run this connection mattered more to him than the experiments with non-kosher food and the secular life he led for a time during and soon after the war. Not surprisingly his belief wavered in the face of tragedy, such as the moment when his older sister was hauled off by the Nazis. Feeling guilty he remembered, «My heart was heavy, my faith was crumbling. I had watched my entire family be taken away and I did nothing» (*Ibid.*, p. 114). Yet a few days later he recovered, saying he was comforted by the High Holiday's liturgy. In this text «I found the solid rock of courage. I found a way to hold on to the little bit of faith that remained. In my mind's eye I saw the legless man [mentioned in an earlier passage], saying Jews don't despair» (*Ibid.*, p. 115). Religion continued to matter to him even though at times it brought him little comfort. For example, he continued to pray even after he had violated dietary laws by eating Polish sausage (*Ibid.*, p. 113).

Besides flexibility and a religious background, unlike most European Jews, Goodfriend and some of his relatives had the remarkably good fortune to be hidden by an exceptionally brave Polish family, headed by farmer Wypych Marcinkowski. Just before the first Nazi roundup, on the spur of the moment Mrs. Marcinkowska offered sanctuary to his aunt and her young daughter (*Ibid.*, 109-110). One by one Goodfriend's surviving relatives fled from the ghetto to join the aunt at the farm. Goodfriend stayed on the work site until in 1943 the approaching Russians meant that the Nazis would move the Jews to another camp (*Ibid.*, p. 127). Then he and a friend joined their families at the farm where he became a farmer named Roman. Life was not easy. His family clung «to the same old pettiness». Nearly sixty years later he still dislikes his aunt for refusing to use a Rosenthal china service she had brought with her (*Ibid.*, p. 144). Gratitude, however, had its limits. After the war was over the farmer's nephew, Stanislaw, proposed marriage to Goodfriend's aunt. The young nephew was forced to explain to his benefactor that such a marriage would show disrespect to his dead relatives and to their God (*Ibid.*, p. 162). Fortunately, Stanislaw was religious and accepted this explanation with remarkably good grace.

Unlike many memoirists, Goodfriend continues his story into the postwar period and beyond. It took him many years to find a home and a lasting career although he was such a resourceful person that he found many ways to make a living. For a short time he and his friends traveled back and forth bartering. They moved from Lodz, in the Russian zone, to Berlin, under American occupation. Immediately they were struck by the difference in behavior between the two armies. The Russians distrusted us; the Americans gave «with a full heart». For a time he almost abandoned his religious traditions, and like any young person he «thrived in this air of freedom» (*Ibid.*, pp. 181-182). During the war starvation and deprivation had caused him to abandon keeping kosher. He deemed it more important to live than to refuse to eat food considered by observant Jews to be unclean. Still, unlike many other young people, he did not abandon his people and customs for long. The pull of the past was too strong for complete independence. Goodfriend was introduced to Aharon Saurymper, an older man who had known his family. He scolded the younger man for abandoning the faith of his ancestors. Fortunately the older man did more than complain. He offered companionship and helped the young one improve his considerable skills as a barterer. Not too long thereafter Goodfriend met and married Betty, another survivor who had grown up in a Lithuanian shtetl.

For many years Goodfriend and his companions avoided reminiscing about the miseries of the war. Reticence became second nature, a fact which may explain why he says so little about Betty's suffering in the war. Of course, he might well have considered that it was up to Betty to tell her own story. About the only detail he offered was that only one of her sisters survived the war. The rest of her family perished (*Ibid.*, p. 200). Directly after the war, religion was also a taboo subject. «We held on to the feelings that we had a complaint», he recalls, «a complaint against God for everything that happened during the war». Quite understandably like other young survivors they longed for some understanding of their suffering. Instead of raising unanswerable questions, «all we could do is talk, reminisce about a time when we had faith in our community and in a God that

would deliver us from our enemies» (*Ibid.*, p. 197). Being of a different temperament from the more philosophical Elie Wiesel, Goodfriend remembers avoiding thinking «about adjusting to a religious life». «Still», he recalls, «God finds a way». As in his youth he was led back to belief by his emotions, not his intellect. «The answer lay in who I was, how I was raised» (*Ibid.*, p. 198).

The first event in his journey back to religious practice occurred at Rosh Hashanah in 1946. The congregation where he prayed needed a cantor. The rector approached Goodfriend, even though he was aware that the young man no longer was observant. Using considerable tact, he said, «we forgive you. You should be our *shaliach tsibur*, our messenger. And you know», he added, «you can always repent». Then, having offered Goodfriend the chance to reconcile himself to God, he offered him an *aliyah, maftir*. That means he paid money so that the young man would have the honor of leading the congregation in prayer. Not surprisingly Goodfriend felt overwhelmed by this gesture, recited the blessing, «and repented though my tears» (*Ibid.*, p. 199).

Nonetheless, the path to a renewal of religious faith was not a steady one, but one that for several years depended upon the community in which the young people lived. For a time the Goodfriends lived in Paris, where Isaac learned to be a tailor. Both learned French and enjoyed the freewheeling French life. As a result of the French influence, Betty and he decided against emigrating to Israel. Instead they wanted a visa to go to Canada or the United States, but to obtain one they had to move back to Berlin. Once back there, they rejoined the congregation and in time Goodfriend became its cantor. The congregation arranged for him to take music lessons at a conservatory as well. As he describes the situation, many moments in the couple's life were marked by surprises and contingencies. They ended up leaving for Montreal, Canada, in 1951. Unlike the Americans, the Canadians welcomed Poles as immigrants. The officials were impressed by his career as a tailor and his mastery of French. In Montreal he became the cantor of a well-established congregation.

Although in Montreal Goodfriend proved himself to be a successful salesman, as well as a tailor, music turned out to provide a more satisfactory long-term career. Despite success he had to live with his recognition of the impermanence of his place in the world. In the short term, he not only became a cantor, but he also continued his musical education. He gave lieder recitals and sang opera to the consternation of his Montreal congregation, most of whom disapproved of such secular activities. Rather than face disapproval, he made several more moves, from Boston to Cleveland and eventually to Atlanta. There he met Governor Jimmy Carter and later used his talents to convince his old friends in Cleveland to vote for the Georgia politician. The highlight of his later life occurred when Carter asked him to sing the national anthem at his inauguration in 1977.

Goodfriend takes pride in that memory, but he has not forgotten the losses of his youth. To borrow Wiesel's ideas, success made Goodfriend realize that he had a foot in two worlds. He became «a man who somehow managed to build a bridge between two distinct lives: the ashes from whence I came and the heights to which I soared». When he contemplates his legacy, however, «the fog of accomplishment lifts and the memories come flooding back, of a time when everything was dark and everything was bleak and when we said that there was no way out». Rejecting the idea that he was somehow special, he declares, «God gave me a chance; He gave me life. He gave me another sixty or seventy years, and this is who I am» (*Ibid.*, pp. 267-268).

In contrast to Goodfriend, Lou Leviticus reacted differently to the trials of the war. The key factors that explain his reactions include the nature of his religious upbringing, the specifics of his war time trials, his age, and postwar experiences. Unlike Goodfriend who was fifteen when the war began, Leviticus was born in 1931. He was only nine in 1940 when the Germans invaded the Netherlands, eleven when he lost both parents, and fourteen when liberated. His memoir is remarkable for its candor about religion, sex, violence, and anger. He writes with refreshing honesty about his actions and the ensuing «demonic feelings of hatred and guilt» (Wajikra, 2003, p. 2).

For many years after the war Leviticus did not talk about his experiences. Then in the 1990s he was interviewed by a man from the Spielberg Foundation. When he saw the videotape afterwards,

«I was dissatisfied with my performance». He realized that he had spoken «only of a tiny fraction of the many things that happened» during the war and «was not able to express my feelings about them» (*Ibid.*, p. 2). One of the reasons he composed his memoir, he confides, was «to purge myself of the bitterness, the sadness, the guilt of being alive, the guilt for what I did to stay alive, and all the other feelings which had accumulated as a young boy and had kept hidden» (*Ibid.*). Thanks to the Nazis several times he had been faced with what Lawrence Langer calls “choiceless choices” (1995, p. 46).

Like Paul Steinberg (1996) who describes the many feelings dredged up by composing his memoir, Leviticus records how the act of writing affected his daily life. He worried that his recollections about the traumas of his youth might cause him to misrepresent the sequence of events. To insure the accuracy of his memories, he consulted Karel Brouwer, his foster father during the war, Harry Theeboom, a slightly older survivor, and Elly Duits, who also spent much time at the Milestone, Leviticus’ house of refuge (*Ibid.*, p. 3). He also consulted several books on the war and the resistance, most of which were written in Dutch.

The memoir can be divided into four main sections: his prewar upbringing, hiding with his parents and escaping capture, being sheltered by members of the underground, and finally being placed against his will in an orphanage run by Orthodox Jews. He stayed there until 1949 when he turned eighteen. The latter experience inflicted gratuitous injury on the boy. He had bonded with the Brouwers, his Gentile foster parents, but his mother’s surviving relatives were very observant Jews. They objected to the Brouwers who had become Roman Catholics during the war. Apparently his relatives had fewer objections to Protestants, but on the whole they were determined to restore the boy to his familial heritage.

Unfortunately for the adolescent boy he had no positive recollections of any religious practices. His parents had led secular lives but felt obliged to give him some religious education to please his mother’s orthodox relatives. In youth he had found his aunt’s religiosity offensive. To make matters worse he had reason to believe that this aunt was «a liar and a hypocrite» (*Ibid.*, p. 52). Once-a week Hebrew Sunday school bored him as well. He was well aware that his parents sent him there only «to placate my mother’s family» (*Ibid.*, p. 51). Before the war began he had identified with his Dutch heritage not his Jewish one. After the Nazis occupied his country, suddenly being Jewish became a grave misfortune. He was forced to wear a yellow star and was deserted by all his erstwhile friends. When he was summarily dismissed from his junior league soccer team, he «felt a bitter hatred toward the whole world, including those damned lousy Jews who had made me one of them» (*Ibid.*, p. 53). In frustration and rage he wondered why he had been singled out. Lacking positive attitudes about his Jewish heritage, he began to internalize the pervasive Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda.

At the same time he recalls the horror of being victimized by the Nazis. The new regime, he recalls, created «tacit bystanders and cooperators out of many “devout” Dutchmen» (*Ibid.*, p. 53). As a result he remembers hating “being a Jew” (*Ibid.*, p. 51) and resenting the Dutch bystanders who failed to assist victimized Jews. «That feeling of resentment», he decided in retrospect, hurt him worse than the physical pain he endured. «It destroys one’s trust in people» (*Ibid.*, p. 55). He had good reasons for feeling powerless and seeking revenge. Many of his school friends disappeared one by one, including his beloved German refugee classmate, Anita Maria Grünewald. He describes hunting for her after the war and breaking into sobs when he learned of her death at Sobibor. He recalls still feeling «this terrible loss when rewriting and rereading this – sometimes I do lose it and break down in the solitude of my little office in the basement». Although he feels sustained by the love of his wife, Rose, «sixty years later I still cannot forget her [Anita], it still hurts and I still don’t understand the reason for it all» (*Ibid.*, p. 68).

Physical cruelty added considerably to his sense of powerlessness. He describes in vivid detail one episode in which Nazi youths set upon him and his friends. He emphasizes the sexual elements of the cruel bullying and the unwillingness of adults to intervene. Some grownups were intimidated by the vicious behavior, but at least one of the observers clearly enjoyed the spectacle

(*Ibid.*, pp. 62-63). Looking back on the episode, he realized that he was grateful to have more or less escaped from the worst of the attack, but he also felt guilty because the Nazi youth had broken the fingers of one of his friends after attempting to attack him sexually.

Then in 1942 his parents decided to leave Amsterdam. Some brave Dutchmen had formed an active underground. Just as his classmates had disappeared, one day he left school never to return. He was escorted from the building by a man whom he called Oom (uncle), who turned out to be «a plain-clothes detective in the Amersfoort police» (*Ibid.*, p. 82). Oom Piet took Leviticus to a farm near Amersfoort where he joined his parents. The farmer was willing to hide the family because he needed money badly. He housed the boy in the barn far from the adults, a situation of which the farmer's daughters quickly took advantage. The elder girl, Riek, was sixteen and Stien, the younger, was fourteen. Both were older and taller than young Lou.

Leviticus' ensuing sexual initiation aroused considerable confusion and conflict in him. The daughters took turns introducing the eleven-year-old boy to sexual play, but they combined their advances with threats to betray him to the Germans. He describes how confusing was the mixture of intimacy and danger. As a result his reactions bear some resemblance to those of children abused by Catholic priests. The boy, who was quite ignorant about sexual matters, was not always aware of what was happening to his body. In contrast the girls had been as active sexually as they could be in a boarding school run by Roman Catholic nuns. Leviticus describes the scenes in detail explaining how befuddled he became when he ejaculated for the first time. He felt as though his «insides were coming out» (*Ibid.*, p. 91). Nonetheless he soon rejected the role of victim. After a relatively short time, he convinced himself that he was in love. His "love" life did not last long. In August 1942, his parents arranged a quick departure from the farm without taking time for him to say goodbye to the girls. Only after they settled in Amersfoort did he learn that the farmer had tried to increase the fee for hiding their family. Like his daughters he threatened to turn them in to the Germans if they did not give him the money he required. As a result the family fled.

The move turned out to be disastrous for the parents. For a time the family hid in a third floor apartment owned by a coachman and his wife. They had to be quiet all day long and be vigilant lest the neighbors see them. Unfortunately someone must have betrayed them. In November the police arrived. His mother began to scream in terror. The boy, aided by his father, jumped over the railing of the porch and managed to hide out under a wash tub in a nearby apartment. His parents were arrested and killed at Auschwitz before the end of the year. Miraculously the young boy managed to escape and made his way to the house of the milkman, who was part of the underground. He soon discovered that the milkman's family thought it best to turn him over to the police, assuming that one so young should be with his parents. He thought that «the suggestion was probably made out of genuine compassion and ignorance of the fate which awaited us Jews and the wish to do the best for me and for themselves».<sup>5</sup> Realizing that his life was at stake, he ran away early the next morning before the family arose. He returned to the farm from which he and his parents had been summarily expelled. This time the farmer refused to take him in permanently, but he did make contact with the Dutch underground who later paid him "handsomely" (*Ibid.*, p. 108). During his short sojourn on the farm, the older sister Riek returned and for the first time had intercourse with Leviticus. Fortunately she had listened carefully to the boy's escape story so that he felt nurtured by her concern. As a result, the sex seemed consensual, not as coerced as the earlier encounters had been.

Young Leviticus felt much safer and less confused during the next section of his life when he lived with the Brouwers at "De Mijlpaal", the Milestone. Because day-to-day events were less upsetting, Leviticus describes in detail the activities of the TD, an underground organization devoted to obtain or create false identity cards for Jews. Karel Brouwer, Leviticus' foster father, was one of

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<sup>5</sup> Wajikra, 2004, p. 104. The milkman also had to hide the next day. The whole group had been betrayed (Leviticus, e-mail, October 15, 2004).

the leaders who created false documents for Jews and other Dutchmen whom the Germans sought to imprison. He subverted the system of universal registration that ordinarily benefited the Nazis' plan to exterminate Jews. Fortunately the administrators lacked computers, which could have created one vast database. The central registry in The Hague depended on local registrars sending them updated information about the movements of residents. Each citizen had to carry identification, and Jews had a large J on their card. Karel Brouwer was an undersecretary of his municipality, which meant he had intimate knowledge of the workings of the identification system. He created a method of converting data by giving Jews duplicates of the cards of non-Jewish citizens. Occasionally both citizens met, but Brouwer wrote legalistic-sounding letters that mostly confused the officers of the municipality. When the Germans added special stamps to the identification records, the TD group learned how to copy them. The TD group saved the lives of 400 Jews and about 10,000 non-Jews. According to Leviticus, after the war Brouwer spent two years correcting the records by removing the false information (*Ibid.*, p. 126).

Throughout Leviticus' stay at the Brouwers he felt reasonably safe. Using the name Rudy Van Der Roest, he attended local schools whenever classes were in session. In many ways Leviticus' experiences in the farm town were similar to that of London evacuees, whose lives are described with great sympathy by Joyce Cary, the Anglo-Irish novelist, in *Charley is My Darling* (1940). The Amsterdam boy spoke standard Dutch and had received an education superior to that of the farm children. Being short, he learned to fight hard with his clogs when attacked by another boy. Needless to say he took advantage of his precocious sexual education with local girls, including one named Lien Kieviet. She and her sisters were notorious collaborators who had their heads shaved after the war ended (*Ibid.*, p. 139). Most important, fear of capture had taught him to live by his wits. His trust of adults was severely limited. Therefore he took precautions lest the situation deteriorate. He stole money from farmhouses in case he needed funds to make a quick escape.

During the last "Hunger Winter" of the war, the situation deteriorated for the Dutch. Food was in very short supply, and the Germans were busily rounding up able-bodied men. The Dutch who were not taken into custody felt as helpless as some Amsterdam adults had felt when witnessing Nazi youth brutalize young Jews. Just as the peril increased for Jewish prisoners, many of whom died on death marches out of concentration camps, so civilians were more at risk. If hunger did not kill them, angry Nazis might (*Ibid.*, p. 159). On February 8, 1945, a crisis arose. Two men left the Mijlpaal to fetch wood and ran into Germans. They fled into the Mijlpaal's garden. Rita Brouwer, Karel's pregnant wife, and Leviticus were both fast thinkers and managed to hide incriminating evidence of their identity card-manufacturing activities. In the process Leviticus became identified as part of the group and had to be whisked off to a nearby farm.

Unfortunately young Leviticus' troubles were not over. For a time he lived relatively peacefully with the farming family, attending Catholic mass with them. He remembers loving the service, the organ music, and the singing. He was baptized but did not take the rite very seriously. He found the catechism «very easy and as silly as the stuff they had tried to teach me at the Synagogue in Amsterdam». On the other hand, being baptized protected the priest and him somewhat. The priest, he reports, was glad to receive a convert, one who «stayed awake and sang well and would help clean the church» (*Ibid.*, pp. 167-168). He realized that the war was nearly over and created two sustaining fantasies, neither of which came to fruition. The first was that he would return to the Mijlpaal and the Brouwers, the second that he would be reunited with his parents.

When the Allied troops arrived, the farm provided a pivotal point in the skirmish between Germans and Canadians. A few days later two German SS soldiers appeared to commandeer food. One of them dragged off Trijn, a daughter of the family, to the back of the farmhouse, probably with rape in mind. The other made the mistake of hitting Leviticus in the kidneys. He responded by hitting the German with his "pit-spade", killing him immediately. When the second soldier left the girl in order to avenge his friend, Henk, the farmer's son, «launched the pitchfork like a harpoon into the German's back and thereby saved my life». In a rage of fear and fury, Leviticus plunged

his spade repeatedly into the soldier's body until he died. All members of the farm family were hysterical by now, but they quickly pulled themselves together to bury the dead soldiers (*Ibid.*, pp. 174-176). In the aftermath Leviticus recalls being «shocked, shamed and exhilarated» (*Ibid.*, p. 177). The farm family was frightened by his “crazy temper”. They did not respect him, for in his rage he had «made them accessories to murder» (*Ibid.*, p. 178). Looking back upon the carnage, Leviticus insists he suffered no guilt or nightmares from the slaughter (*Ibid.*, p. 167), for the killings were unavoidable. Nonetheless, he longed to tell the village priest, do penance, and be absolved. Realizing that would be too dangerous, he kept quiet. Luckily for them all, the war was drawing to a close thereby reducing the chance that German soldiers would come looking for the missing men.

After the war ended Leviticus felt some pride in having dispatched his enemies and avenged those whom he loved who had been killed by the Nazis. In retrospect he realizes that he was lucky to have survived. «I neither dream of the event nor do I feel that I was a monster – just a fourteen-year-old under lots of pressure» (*Ibid.*, p. 179). He distinguishes between the two killings. He killed the first soldier accidentally, but the second he dispatched in a murderous rage. «Of course, he [the second SS officer] would have eliminated us, had he been given the chance. But still....» Not until his son died in the 1973 Israeli war did he feel much sympathy for the families of the slain officers. Only then could he entertain feelings of compassion impossible for the beleaguered youth. He reports having agonized over the decision to include this incident in his memoir. Ultimately he decided «to write the truth and let the chips fall where they may» (*Ibid.*, pp. 179-180).

For a short time after the war he was reunited with the Brouwers, but his religious aunt was determined to seize control of any reparations that might come to Leviticus. She willingly told lies about the Brouwers. She snatched the young boy from this family to put him in an orphanage full of traumatized Jewish children. Those who ran the orphanage had little idea how to be helpful youths. Hearing about the problems of others served no useful purpose. «We were too mixed up ourselves and too engrossed in, and ignorant of, our own problems», Leviticus recalls, to learn from the suffering of others (*Ibid.*, p. 181). The counselors did not understand the children and did not talk about sexual abuse, which many including Leviticus had experienced.<sup>6</sup>

The orphanage officials hoped to create a new generation of Jews from the orphans, but their insensitivity subverted their efforts. Rather than acknowledging that righteous Gentiles had saved many of the children from extermination, some teachers tried to teach them to distrust Christians. As a result many of the orphans rejected orthodoxy when they were free to choose for themselves. Leviticus believes also that many of the children, like him, resisted indoctrination.<sup>7</sup> Their experiences had taught them to equate being Jewish with persecution.

Although one would like to think that propaganda would not have long term effects on vulnerable children, his memoir suggests that it can, especially when the war was followed by insensitive treatment. On the other hand, Leviticus has had a successful life. Like some of his fellow orphans he «sought help from professionals or support groups later in life» (*Ibid.*, p. 183). He retired from being a tenured professor of Agricultural Engineering at the University of Nebraska in 1997. He is still married and has children and grandchildren and has maintained his ties with the Brouwers. In September 2004, he took a 1650 mile trip in the American west with one of his host Dutch “sisters”.<sup>8</sup> He travels to the Netherlands frequently to see members of his host family and has

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<sup>6</sup> Unlike the Israeli children who have lost family members under traumatic circumstances but have learned to help each other at summer camp, the Holocaust orphans had experienced too much pain to become “wounded healers” without professional help, cf. Freedman, “Young Lives”, A21.

<sup>7</sup> Judaism still has little place in Leviticus' life. «My religion is in what is above my house and back yard» (Leviticus, e-mail, October 18, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> He described the trip in an email message, September 28, 2004. In another message, October 15, 2004, he said that he has eight sisters and three brothers from the host family. Several have visited him in the United States.

also kept in touch with some of the orphans from the institution. No doubt his success in later life has made it possible for him to reassess his early life and compose this engrossing memoir.

In conclusion, successful survivors have learned to live with «a system of gaps» (Rubenstein, p. 296). As Elie Wiesel put it in his 1986 Nobel Prize address, survivors of the Holocaust live with unanswerable questions. They cannot explain why good people witnessed atrocities but turned away when they saw the suffering of Jews. Instead of assuming that God wanted to punish the Jews as some theologians and survivors have argued, Wiesel places his hope in the power of memory balanced by judicious forgetting. He finds inspiration in the story of Job, who after great undeserved suffering «still found the strength to begin again, to rebuild his life» (1986, p. 248). Goodfriend, Leviticus, Wiesel, and other survivors who have remade their lives in far away places may serve as an inspiration. Their stories sustain us as we encounter unresolved questions and tensions in our own lives.

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# The changeling child in the mirror: Siri Hustvedt's fiction and the uncanny

GEORGIANA M. M. COLVILE (\*)

«As an artist, Bill was hunting the unseen in the seen.»

Siri Hustvedt<sup>1</sup>

«La représentation, dans l'hystérie, cesserait la jouissance-même faite perte, en tant que la perte advient *événement*, événement visible, événement mouvementé aussi.»

Georges Didi-Huberman<sup>2</sup>

In addition to a volume of poetry and various essays, Siri Hustvedt (born 1955) has produced three novels to date: the first, *The Blindfold* (1992)<sup>3</sup>, is set in New York and divided into four autonomous but interconnected, achronological short stories, one of which was adapted for the screen by Claude Miller<sup>4</sup>. In each section, the autobiographical narrator/protagonist Iris<sup>5</sup> Vegan, a twenty-two year-old graduate student at Columbia, experiences an uncanny adventure. The next novel, *The Enchantment of Lily Dahl* (1996)<sup>6</sup> focuses on Iris's small town of origin, Webster, Minnesota, which resembles Hustvedt's native Northfield. Iris is mentioned when her father, Professor Vegan, appears at the local café, establishing a link with *The Blindfold* and Hustvedt herself, whose father taught Scandinavian Literature at the University of Minnesota.

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<sup>1</sup> Siri Hustvedt, *What I Loved*, London: Sceptre, 2003, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention de l'Hystérie*, Paris: Macula, 1982, p. 150.

<sup>3</sup> Siri Hustvedt, *The Blindfold*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1992, Sceptre Paperbacks, 1994. Abbreviation: TBF.

<sup>4</sup> Claude Miller, *La Chambre des magiciennes/Of Women and Magic*, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Iris is of course an anagram of Siri.

<sup>6</sup> Siri Hustvedt, *The Enchantment of Lily Dahl*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1996. Abbreviation: ELD.

Hustvedt inscribes an amateur production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* into ELD, with the nineteen-year-old Lily as Hermia. Shakespeare's human and fairy comedy itself interpolates another play, *Pyramus and Thisbe*, which adds to the imbroglio of thwarted loves and misguided couples, secretly orchestrated by elfin mischief. In the last act, Theseus, the wise Duke of Athens, unaware of supernatural perpetrators of the uncanny, ponders on human frailties, juxtaposing madness, love and art, before watching a clownish performance by Bottom and his fellow hams:

The lunatic, the lover and the poet,  
Are of imagination all compact:  
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold,  
That is, the madman; the lover, all as frantic,  
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt;  
The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,  
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;  
And as imagination bodies forth  
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing  
A local habitation and a name...<sup>7</sup>

In her third novel, *What I Loved* (2003)<sup>8</sup>, Hustvedt expands her vision to a wider scope of three generations of human experience. It unfolds in New York, with episodes in other places, including Minnesota and Paris. The protagonists all embody an abstraction of at least one of Shakespeare's trio. Lunacy extends to the unknown within the familiar (Freud's "uncanny" or Todorov's fantastic<sup>9</sup>) and at times refers to crime or perversions; love applies to friends, children and fellow humans as well as to partners and objects of desire; finally poetry includes the visual arts. *What I loved* is a meditation on art, an uncanny prismatic mirror, in which the characters's and reader's subjective imago frequently appears fragmented or smashed<sup>10</sup>.

Hustvedt favours trinary structures in her fiction, as a feminist means of subverting patriarchal binaries and also because three is a magic, mythical or sacred number. The Kabbala made ample use of triads, to define a course of action for example: 1) the cause or subject of the action, 2) the subject's action, which can be verbal, 3) the object, effect or result of the action; this pattern can apply to creator, creation and creature. On another level, Freud treats three as a sexual symbol and as the Father-Mother-Child Trinity<sup>11</sup>. According to Marjorie Garber:

The third is that which questions binary thinking and introduces crisis (...) the "third term" is *not* a *term*. Much less is it a *sex* (...) The "third" is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of possibility. Three puts in question the idea of one: of identity, self-sufficiency, self-knowledge<sup>12</sup>.

It is into that third space that Hustvedt weaves her fiction's "uncanny" dimension.

<sup>7</sup> William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act V, sc.I: 7-17.

<sup>8</sup> Siri Hustvedt, *What I Loved*, New York: Henry Holt and London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2003. Abbreviation: WIL.

<sup>9</sup> See Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*, Paris: Seuil, 1970, p. 29.

<sup>10</sup> See Jacques Lacan, "Le Stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je", in *Écrits I*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, Collection Points, 1966, pp. 89-97.

<sup>11</sup> See the article on "Trois" (Three) in Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrandt, *Dictionnaire des symboles*, Paris: Robert Laffont/Jupiter, 1982, pp. 972-976.

<sup>12</sup> Marjorie Garber, *vested Interests/cross-dressing and cultural anxiety*, New York: Routledge, 1992, 1997, p. 11.

Before deciphering her texts, a look at Freud's 1919 essay on "Das Unheimliche"/"The Uncanny"<sup>13</sup> seems in order. It opens with an appropriately ambiguous statement:

... It is only rarely that a psycho-analyst feels impelled to investigate the subject of *aesthetics* even when aesthetics is understood to mean not merely the theory of *beauty*, but the theory of *feeling* (ibid., p. 122, my emphasis).

This uncertain rapprochement between beauty and feeling in a negative, hypothetical mode is followed by the idea of semantic doubling and culminates in the opposite meanings of the word "unheimlich". "Heimlich" in German may signify homely, friendly, intimate, i.e. familiar, or conversely secret, concealed, deceitful, i.e. unfamiliar and possibly eerie or frightening. Subsequently the negative "unheimlich" can either contradict or reiterate the term, creating a reversible word, which in Freud's analysis of Hoffmann's "The Sand Man", combines the familiar with the incomprehensible or the horrific.

Most of Hustvedt's characters evolve on this level of blurred meaning, while her narratives inscribe a triple pattern of erotic drives, cross-dressing and artistic creation including self-representation and object-fetishism.

## I

An impressive and disturbing first novel, *The Blindfold* is also a deliberately fragmented *Bildungsroman*. The theme of portraiture, so crucial in the other texts, is only directly dealt with in part two, but appears in veiled form in the others. Iris, the narrator/protagonist is represented as a sensitive young intellectual, plagued with migraines and financial problems. Her job-search brings strange adventures and alarming self-insights. In the first section, she works briefly for Mr. Morning, a disturbed fetishistic writer, who has her tape whispered descriptions of insignificant boxed objects having belonged to a murdered woman (a dirty glove, a used cotton ball, an unadorned mirror). The descriptions suggest a metonymic, posthumous portrait of the victim and for Iris a negative self-portrait as "a set of discarded objects" (TBF:38). Fear of the uncanny finally kills fascination and she:

... ran away from those things as if they were about to rise up and pursue (her)... (ibid.)

In the second part Iris is involved with Stephen, who:

... rationed his body (...), holding it back for days, even weeks and I lived in a state of constant longing... (TBF:41).

She then meets George, a young photographer and, she suspects, Stephen's lover. In George's apartment, a photograph of «a naked young man cut off at the shoulders, his back to the camera» (TBF:45) reminds her of Stephen. When George asks to shoot her portrait, Iris feels flattered at first and then «had the fleeting thought that I no longer inhabited myself» (TBF:52). The picture-taking process turns into a form of primitive mating ritual: «I chose a plain black dress with buttons up the front, reddened my mouth with lipstick» (ibid.); Iris then performs accordingly:

I danced, carefully at first (...) then I forgot myself and moved faster and faster. I gyrated and spun like a lunatic for George, who (...) took what seemed like hundreds of pictures (TBF:54).

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<sup>13</sup> Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny'", in *On Creativity and the Unconscious*, Papers on the Psychology of Art, Literature, Love, Religion, Edited by Benjamin Nelson, New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1958, pp. 122-161.

George upsets Iris by retaining only one mutilated image:

It wasn't a full-body shot. I was cut off below my breasts, and my extended arms were severed at the elbows (...) I had the awful impression that the parts of me that weren't in the photo were really absent (...) A long piece of hair was swept across my right cheek and part of my mouth, slicing my face in two. A dark shadow beneath my uplifted chin made my head appear to float away from my body. My whole face lacked clarity (...) It was a face without reason and I hated it (TBF/63).

The photo soon takes on a life of its own. Iris's fragmented and publicized portrait precipitates her break-up with Stephen and literally makes her go to pieces, as in Lacan's definition of a problematic mirror-stage:

I was unable to really see it (...). Its presence in my mind was, in fact, an absence that I felt as a small but constant threat (Lacan, op. cit.:71).

This absence also connotes Stephen's and the vicarious eroticism experienced with George during the photographing session. As Stephen tells her: «George isn't anyone's lover (...) It's something else», i.e. the uncanny, third dimension in George's art.

I'll not deal with part three here. Part four has a literary subtext. Iris attends the seminar of a middle-aged professor, Michael Rose, becomes his research assistant and he gives her a 1936 German novella, "Der Brutale Junge" by Johann Krüger to translate, calling it a "Pandora's box" (TBF:143). The hero, ten year-old Klaus, gradually discovers his evil Mr. Hyde - like persona and starts to commit cruel petty crimes. When classes break up, Iris scrounges odd jobs again, and begins hanging out at night in a sleazy bar in drag, as Klaus, wearing a borrowed man's suit. Rather than homoeroticism, her transvestism reflects what Garber calls the "Betwixt and between", as in *Peter Pan* (Garber:175):

This intervention of "seeming" (...) substituted for "having", and protecting against the threat of loss, is, precisely, the place of the transvestite (Ibid.:346).

When Michael Rose finds Iris in her boy-girl changeling garb, they fall in love. She reintegrates her femininity, while he remains obsessed with her androgynous image. The hiatus between them soon surfaces and one night he becomes "someone else", carries a cruel game of blindfold too far and can't face his shame. After they separate, Iris becomes a teacher and exorcises Klaus by teaching Krüger's novella. Here growing up means shedding the uncanny, its last trace being Iris's friendship with Paris, «a tiny man of no identifiable age» (TBF:125), an elfish and vicious art-critic, with a prurient interest in her androgynous episode: «Life is the circus, my dear, why fight it?» (TBF:220). Paris jeers at Iris's confidences and makes a crude pass at her when she strikes back. The book ends with her running «like a bat out of hell» from the no longer fascinating little freak, leaving the reader to wonder whether he's a woman in drag, i.e. another (rejected), uncanny mirror-image.

## II

*The Enchantment of Lily Dahl* presents a kaleidoscope of literary genres. The opening parodies a harlequin romance with Lily's erotic vision of the town newcomer, New York artist Ed Schapiro, soon to become her lover:

She had been watching him for three weeks. Every morning since the beginning of May, she had gone to the window to look at him (...) she had noticed him in the shining square: a beautiful man standing near a large canvas. Stripped down in the heat to only his shorts, he had stood so still for a minute that he hadn't looked real to her etc.... (ELD:1)

The feminine focalization is distanced by a 3rd person narrative. The relevant town locations and the main characters are soon introduced and an early triple mirror image including Lily Dahl, a poster of her idol Marilyn Munroe and her elderly neighbor and mother-figure Mabel Wasley, emulates a successful accompanied mirror-stage for Lily. Mabel, a retired professor and writer, whose name evokes Mary Wesley<sup>14</sup>, helps Lily learn her part as Hermia for the local production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and determines the Bildungsroman dimension. Scenes in the Ideal Café, where Lily waits on tables, strategically bring the characters together, like the New York Café episodes in Carson McCullers's *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*<sup>15</sup>.

The murder of Helen Bodler, supposedly buried alive by her husband in 1932 and found in 1950 (ELD:15) is referred to but never solved. Another murder attempt aborts, by Martin Petersen, a deranged youth with a small part in the play, fascinated by grisly news items and morbidly obsessed with Lily. When the original Lily Dahl discovers the lifesize "Lily Doll"<sup>16</sup> he keeps in a cave with various fetishistic objects, he tries unsuccessfully to strangle her and later commits suicide. According to Freud, dolls, death and dead bodies are frequently associated with the uncanny, in particular when the inanimate presents a replica of the animate. Martin Petersen's eerie behavior gives him an uncanny aura in both life and death. He had also failed to grow up and in Freud's words:

... in their early games, children do not distinguish at all sharply between living and lifeless objects, and (...) they are especially fond of treating their dolls like live people...<sup>17</sup>

Martin embodies the uncanny for Lily: she is fond of him as a childhood friend and yet puzzled and repelled by him: «He gave off something peculiar» (ELD:9). Androgynous and supposedly "born both" (ELD:8), Martin cannot quite integrate language and the Symbolic, he stutters and makes Lily repeat the word "mouth", in a regressive attempt to merge the verbal with the Imaginary and to reconstitute the infant's fantasy of osmosis with his mother.

Transvestism and identity fluctuations occur within the theatrical space of rehearsals. In the play, Puck points to the fairy Queen Titania's new favourite, as the problem:

... A lovely boy, stol'n from an Indian king;  
She never had so sweet a changeling (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act I, sc.i, 22-23.)

and Mabel tells Lily, before coaching her:

I've always liked the idea of changelings (...) because the older I get, the more certain I am that you can't know who's who and what's what (ELD:34).

When dressed as the fairy Cobweb, Martin is transformed and no longer stutters. His changeling quality springs from a feeling of not belonging to the "real" world:

It's, it's like there's a skin over everything, and if you could just get under it, you'd, you'd get to what's real, but you never can, so you've got to look for a way to cut through it... (ELD:64).

Lily finds a girl's T-shirt in Martin's house and the latter stages his gory death by entering the café where she works wearing make-up and without stuttering, and blows his brains out directly in front of her. Lily has two doubles (another instance of Freud's uncanny): the dark-haired doll dressed in

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<sup>14</sup> A very popular English novelist who began writing in her 70s (Mabel's age).

<sup>15</sup> Carson McCullers's first novel, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* was first published in 1943, by the Cresset Press, then by Penguin in 1961.

<sup>16</sup> cf. the doll Olympia, whom Nathaniel falls in love with in the Hoffman story Freud analyses to illustrate the notion of "the uncanny".

<sup>17</sup> Freud, op. cit., pp. 139-140.

Hermia's costume Martin is seen carrying across a field and Mabel's lost daughter Anna:

... she wondered if Anna wasn't turning her into a ghost, if she hadn't become in some funny way a substitute for the baby Mabel had lost (ELD:269).

Early on, Lily steals a pair of 1930s shoes from the junk yard of the Bodler Twins Filthy Frank and Dirty Dick. Imagining them to be the men's murdered mother's, she keeps the shoes as a fetish and feels empowered when wearing them. The magic dimension, so present in the embedded Shakespeare text, punctuates this uncanny story, but drops away after Martin dies and Lily gets rid of the shoes.

Lily, Ed, Mabel and Martin embody Shakespeare's lunatic, lover and poet, Martin is the lunatic, Lily the lover, Mabel the poet and Ed the visual artist. The Poet-cum-artist plays the most important part. A triple creative process (Lily's acting, Mabel's writing and Ed's painting) provides a mirror for the invisible, uncanny "third" dimension of their subjective lives. Lily seduces Ed dramatically by stripping at her window one night, Mabel feeds her autobiography into Ed's portrait of her, while he produces an unflattering vision of Webster's population, by choosing for models Dolores Wachowski, an aging alcoholic prostitute, Tex, a half-crazed bum and jailbird, Stanley Blom, a pathetic little loser and old Mabel. He finally presents Lily with some unfinished sketches of Martin... Ed's work is first seen through Lily's eyes:

Across the top of the canvas was a series of three boxes with drawings inside them that reminded Lily of the funny papers (ELD:74).

He then explains his narrative, conceptual art to her:

It's the story part (...) Everyone I paint chooses a story to tell with pictures inside the portrait. You see I always collaborate with the person I'm painting. We talk during the sitting and (...) he or she decides what story to tell in the narrative series (ibid.:75).

A box theme in art appears in all three novels: In TBF, Mr. Morning's boxed objects represent fragments of a hypothetical written portrait, in ELD, Ed's cartoon-like frames turn his canvases into a form of therapy.

### III

In the third book boxes loom large. The title, *What I Loved*<sup>18</sup> (not whom) points to an uncanny inanimate object-dimension and also evokes the "Id" and man's unbridled passions. It is Hustvedt's strongest novel and narrates a New World three-generational saga, in the wake of past Scandinavian women writers like Selma Lagerlöf (1858-1940) and Sigrid Undset (1882-1949).

The opening focuses on two symbolic objects: a set of five torrid love letters to artist Bill Wechsler from Violet Blom his second wife to be, intended to prevent his reconciliation with his first wife Lucille Alcott, found after Bill's death, by his friend Leo Hertzberg, the narrator:

... I felt they had the uncanny weight of things enchanted by stories that are told and retold and then told again. (WIL:3)<sup>19</sup>

The other is a painting by Bill, mentioned in Violet's letters and bought by Leo shortly before they met and made friends, titled *Self-portrait*: «there were actually three people in the painting (...) a young woman lying on the floor in an empty room (...) wearing only a man's T-shirt...» (Violet)

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<sup>18</sup> Siri Hustvedt, *What I Loved*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2003.

<sup>19</sup> Incidentally, repetition is yet another representation of the uncanny according to Freud.

(WIL:4), a second woman (Lucille) «was leaving the picture. Only her foot and ankle could be seen (...)», her loafer «had been rendered with excruciating care» (ibid). «The third person was only a shadow». Leo takes it for his own, since «the beautiful woman (...) was being looked at by someone outside the painting» but he also «noticed the darkness that fell over her belly and her thighs» (ibid): – portrait of the artist and/or the viewer as a shadow and a visual representation of Lacan’s theory of desire as the desire of the other’s desire.<sup>20</sup> The picture predicts the whole plot and constitutes its traces after tragic circumstances have scattered the protagonists. As they leave his life, Leo collects fetish-souvenirs of his loved ones in a desk drawer he peruses in secret. He begins with the wedding photo of an aunt and uncle killed in the Holocaust and ends with copies of Violet’s letters, bringing the narrative full circle. The story itself, Leo’s autobiographical chronicle of the protagonists’s lives and work, like Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, mirrors the inanimate object before the reader. On the first page Leo writes: «When I put the letters down, I knew I would start writing this book today» and on the last: «I’m going to stop typing now (...) and rest my eyes». Early on, Leo publishes a book titled *A Brief History of Seeing in Western Painting* (WIL:120), after telling the reader in the narrating present, about twenty years later: «I have a condition called macular degeneration – clouds in my eyes» (ibid.). He keeps interrupting his later work on Goya to write about Bill, his “moving reference” (WIL:255). After the latter’s death, he feels like a mere shadow or reflection: «I’m only whole to myself in mirrors, photographs and the rare home movie» (ibid.), an imago without an ego. And yet Leo’s path echoes King Lear’s or what Paul de Man called “Blindness and insight”.

Hustvedt sets the specular pattern by having an aging male as first person narrator and implied author of a fictitious autobiography: the novel’s double. This Lacanian “self-portrait of the other”, like Bill’s picture, reveals more doubles such as Violet, another young woman from Minnesota, like Iris, Lily and Hustvedt herself. As Bill’s meta-double, Leo also desires Bill’s women, which prompts a one night stand with Lucille and later a longing for Violet’s «imaginary twin – the woman I took to bed in my mind» (WIL:207).

*What I loved* divides into three parts, punctuated by two deaths, Leo’s son Matt’s and Bill’s, but unlike TBF, it reads as a sequential whole. The characters form a close-knit creative unit. Bill the artist and Leo the professor and art critic become intimate friends, involved with each other’s work. All three women are academics and writers. Erica Stein Hertzberg teaches English, writes on Henry James and shares Leo’s German Jewish background. She reads Bill’s *Self-Portrait* as: «... another person’s dream» and later notices that: «Lucille was wearing the shoes, or rather the shoe, in our painting. She’s the woman walking away» (WIL:19).

The displaced dream uncannily comes true when Bill marries Violet, his model and soul mate. A French History specialist, Violet publishes books on three contemporary topics: hysteria, eating disorders and psychotic automatism, which she feeds into Bill’s corresponding plastic creative drives. Her main source for hysteria is a book by Didi Huberman<sup>21</sup>, denouncing the hatred triggered by Charcot’s propagation of images representing ‘hysterics’. Bill’s microcosmic “hysteria constructions”, following a set of portraits of his father after the latter’s death, include «three huge hollow boxes» (WIL:70) and incorporate some texts by Bill’s mentally handicapped brother. Leo notes that «By abandoning the flatness of painting, Bill had leapt into new territory» (WIL:75) and puns on the names Blom and Wechsler as reflecting Violet and Bill’s productive collaboration: «Blooming and changing, I thought» (ibid:67). A crucial, androgynous, figure represents the uncanny in their work: Charcot’s patient Augustine:

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<sup>20</sup> See Jacques Lacan, “La Direction de la cure” in *Ecrits* (1966) and Jean-Michel Palmier, *Lacan*, Paris: Editions Universitaires, Collection Psychothèque, 1972, p. 100.

<sup>21</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention de l’hystérie*, Paris: Macula, 1982. The author’s sister, Asti Hustvedt researched hysteria at la Salpêtrière for her PhD thesis, like Violet, and provided important information and advice for the novel in that field.

Whether Bill knew it or not, the little figure of a woman dressed like a man was another self-portrait. Augustine was the fictional child he and Violet had made together (ibid:76).

Lucille is described as a dry, almost scientific poet, rigid and puritannical:

“I make rules for myself”, Lucille said about her poems. “Not the usual rules of metrics, but an anatomy I choose, and then I dissect it. Numbers are helpful. They’re clear, irrefutable” (WIL:16-17).

Violet says: «Don’t you know she’s only half alive!» (WIL:349) and Bill calls her «a fictional character» (WIL:117). Erica and Lucille’s brief complicity ends with the births of their almost twin sons Matt Hertzberg and Mark Wechsler, as does Bill and Lucille’s marriage. Shortly before his death, despite guilt over his son’s delinquency, Bill tells Leo: «Violet’s my life. I chose to live» (WIL:244). Violet’s lasting friendship with Erica restores the symmetry between the families, till Matt’s death breaks it again.

Death proves to be the ultimate manifestation of the uncanny. When Matt drowns at 12, during summer camp, the vital sexual bond between Leo and Erica also dies. Unable to weep, Leo takes comfort in Bill’s friendship: «Without Bill, I think I would have dried up completely and blown away» (WIL:141). Mourning work also involves research on Goya’s “black paintings”. Erica moves to Berkeley, remains “stein”/stone to life, like Duras’s Lol V. Stein and continues working on James.

Both boys have a changeling quality. Matt, Leo and Erica’s son, a sensitive budding artist, gets close to Bill and after losing Matt, Leo gets close to Mark, but the latter gradually turns out to be a shallow automaton, a compulsive liar and a junkie. He even steals Leo’s savings after accepting his hospitality. The son of a genuine artist, Mark loses himself under the influence of Teddy Giles, the anti-artist, who produces so-called “entertainment art”, sensational horror scenes of cut-up bodies. He is shown as a negative evil double of Bill with no fixed principles, identity, age or sex. He destroys Mark’s self-image on two levels, first literally with drugs, sexual perversions and other forms of enslavement and then symbolically by buying from Lucille a portrait:

Bill had painted of Mark when he was two years old. The little boy was laughing madly as he held a lamp shade over his head like a hat (WIL:299),

using it as raw material and recycling it in a show of his own:

A figure of a murdered woman, missing one arm and a leg, had been pushed through Bill’s painting of his son (ibid.)

While Bill’s canvas had a live quality, Giles’s hybrid piece looks dead, like Mark himself, once Giles has finished with him and Leo finds himself «Looking into Mark’s shallow, dead eyes» (WIL:321). Giles is acclaimed by Leo’s negative double the evil art critic Henry Hasseborg – in German ‘Hasse’ means ‘hate’ and counters ‘Her(t)z’ (heart), in Hertzberg. Long after Matt’s death, Leo finds keys to the recurring personae in his son’s drawings and paintings. Dave the omnipresent old man becomes a mirror for the aging Leo: «... he was drawing his own father. I am Dave now» (WIL:366). The eerie Ghosty Boy was Mark, Bill’s ‘changeling’ in his “story of substitution” (342) and conversely the tale of his son, for ‘changeling’ also means ‘little Wechsler’:

Bill loved his changeling child, his blank son, his Ghosty Boy. He loved the boy-man who is still roaming from city to city and is still reaching into his traveling bag to find a face to wear and a voice to use (WIL:365)

Bill’s work on “the Changeling” and the Icarus myth, his favourite of a series of fairy-tale constructs, coincides with Violet’s research for her third book, “The Automaton of Late Capitalism”, and continues in his last unfinished project: a long-term video-taping of children’s lives over several years. All the more mechanical, later work concerns Mark. Yet the technically alive but mentally

dead, mostly absent Mark cannot replace the physically dead, but ever-present Bill, whose work clothes Violet dons every evening in his studio. Paradoxically, Mark only goes on existing through Bill's and Matt's art. Leo's statement:

... whenever an artist dies, the work slowly begins to replace his body (WIL:257).

sums up the uncanny mirroring and reversal process developed throughout the book between Eros and Thanatos in relation to art.

«What was it that I loved?», Violet asks Leo, near the end of the text. Her answer is Mark's docile, agreeable persona: «... that was the *thing* I learned to love – that automaton» (WIL:352). The mark<sup>22</sup>, not Mark the person. Yet, if we return to the title, “I” points to a shifting identity: Leo, the reader, the implied author, you, me... *What I Loved* is what *I* loved most in Hustvedt's work. All I can say in conclusion is read it! You'll have no regrets.

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<sup>22</sup> “The mark” is one of the nicknames for Mark, coined by Giles and his friends.

## Ritual murder as literary fiction: The inversion of logic or the logic of inversion?

MARIE-FRANCE ROUART (\*)

Entre cannibalisme et communion, la rumeur va bon train pour accuser le coupable qu'elle ne connaît pas. En 1911, en Russie, les quarante cinq traces de blessures retrouvées sur le corps d'un enfant chrétien, mort, valent un procès mémorable à un juif, Mendel Beilis, le contremaître de la fabrique, accusé d'avoir perpétré un crime rituel (Kennan, 1913; Beilis, 1926). Il en sortira aux Etats Unis le roman très connu de Bernard Malamud *The Fixer* (1966). En 1946, à Kielce en Pologne, un pogrom s'organise spontanément autour de la disparition d'un enfant qui, après avoir été retrouvé bien vivant, conduit la foule à la maison des Juifs où il aurait pourtant été égorgé... Il sortira de ce fantasme collectif de nombreux articles polémiques sur l'utilisation coupable du sang par les minorités juives. Dans les deux cas, plutôt que l'évènement, en lui-même tragique d'in vraisemblance, ce qui interroge le lecteur témoin, c'est la permanence de l'accusation de sang à partir d'un scénario d'infanticide sacré.

Le sacrifice rituel est une donnée anthropologique aussi ancienne que les premières sociétés: détruire, offrir, consacrer, les trois composantes du sacrifice visent à verser le sang d'une victime consentante ou désignée pour donner sens à la collectivité et la transformer en communauté (Hubert & Mauss, 1899). Or les rapports entre ces composantes sont très instables (Roux, 1988). Offrir une victime au dieu, c'est interposer entre monde sacré et monde profane une médiation. Mais faire couler le sang d'un autre, bête ou homme, c'est aussi déclencher un rituel spectaculaire puisqu'il y va de la vie et de la mort d'une victime à des fins collectives. Ainsi donc, en son principe apparent, le sacrifice rituel pourrait consister à dominer la mort en la donnant. Mais du sacrifice au crime, se pose le problème du rituel adopté qui peut faire dériver le sacrifice vers l'homicide. Comment donner la mort sans que l'anthropophagie ou la haine se greffe sur l'oblation, et pour que soit maintenu le rite de consécration?

Sur cette constante anthropologique se dessine une réalité historique fort complexe, celle des religions, et des rites sacrificiels situés dans un hors temps: cérémonies secrètes, prédication, emblèmes à adorer et auxquels s'identifier (Strack, 1891, 1903). En cas de narrativisation du

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sacrifice, l'auteur se fait porte-parole d'un groupe, dont il défend les pratiques religieuses comme essentielles à sa survie, et par conséquent concurrentielles en matière d'efficacité... On peut donc s'apercevoir assez vite que dans l'histoire des sociétés orales et écrites, à partir du moment où le sacrifice humain est dénoncé (à des dates très différentes selon les civilisations), il devient objet de récit polémique pour souligner les différences de valeur entre les sociétés; ce phénomène est constant, mais plus visible *a fortiori* en temps de crise, quand chaque communauté se sent investie du devoir de se défendre, et par ce processus de différenciation met en texte la hantise d'une contrefaçon.

Cette réflexion préalable permet de dire que lorsque survient en Occident le message chrétien, entre motif cannibalique et communion eucharistique, il n'y a pas un simple passage du sens propre au sens figuré. Les écrivains dénoncent le rite d'ingestion de chair humaine ou divine en exhibant des rites antérieurs ou archaïques: incisions rituelles, égorgements cruels, parodies de crucifixion, ces dévoiements prétendus ne visent pas seulement une confession minoritaire (Chrétiens vus par les Romains: Wilken, 1984). Appliqués aux lépreux, aux homosexuels, aux hérétiques comme aux sorciers démonolâtres (Cohn, 1982; Ginzburg, 1989), ils structurent des récits qui visent un large public en surdramatisant des faits hypothétiques. Etant donné l'importance des enjeux pour chaque communauté, il suffit de peu pour que la violence purificatrice du sacrifice ne soit représentée comme la violence impure d'une mise à mort criminelle, à incriminer...

On étudiera donc ce jeu de bascule entre bon et mauvais sacrifice au gré des accusations de crime rituel qui sont autant de façons dévoyées d'énoncer le meilleur en prétextant le pire. Derrière une rhétorique qui vise à persuader et s'adresse logiquement à la raison, la déraison des constantes archétypales dessine un étrange procès.

## 1. UNE DÉFENSE PAR CONTRE ACCUSATION

A partir du moment où se répand la pratique chrétienne de l'Eucharistie (Watteville de, 1966), manger le corps du Christ sous les espèces du pain et du vin revient pour les premiers Chrétiens à réactualiser la crucifixion du Christ. Or vue de l'extérieur par les Juifs et les Romains, cette pratique revient à profaner le nom de Dieu en renouant avec des rites primitifs de cannibalisme et d'orgie sacrée. Ironiquement, cette accusation met en place les arguments de la défense chrétienne, lesquels deviendront ceux de l'accusation quand les minorités auront changé de camp.

I, 1. Carthage, en l'an 197: «Nous sommes, dit-on, les plus grands des criminels, à cause du rite de l'infanticide, à cause de la pâte que nous en tirons.»<sup>1</sup>

Infanticide et cannibalisme: Tertullien est surtout l'un des premiers rhéteurs chrétiens d'Afrique du Nord, et il sait de quoi il parle dans une région connue pour sa tradition de crimes rituels. En ramenant les accusations antichrétiennes des Juifs et des Romains à ces deux chefs d'accusation principaux, il procède par simplification, et réfute en accusant le bourreau des crimes imputés.

### *Les artifices du récit d'accusation*

Accusations d'anthropophagie et d'inceste participent, dit-il, de l'inventaire diffamatoire qui amplifie ces accusations, pour légitimer la persécution contre ceux qui s'appellent "frères" et "sœurs". Tertullien reprend donc les imputations, mais en les détournant à des fins spéculaires: «Pour mieux réfuter ces calomnies, je vais montrer que c'est vous qui commettez ces crimes, partie

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<sup>1</sup> Tertullien, *Apologeticum*, texte établi par Jean-Pierre Waltzing, Paris: Belles Lettres, 3e édition, 1971, VII, 1.

*en public, partie en secret, car c'est peut-être pour cette raison que vous les avez crus de nous*» (Tertullien, IX, 1).

La contre accusation va s'articuler ironiquement sur trois principes, l'*amplificatio*, ou liste des crimes prétendument commis: «*Nous avons près de deux cents ans d'âge. Pendant ce temps là, tant de criminels parmi nous, tant de croix divinisées, tant d'enfants massacrés, tant de pains ensanglantés, tant de lampes renversées, tant d'unions accomplies dans l'égaré...*»<sup>2</sup>; l'analyse du phénomène de propagande est fondée sur la *fama* pour démontrer l'inconsistance des preuves: «*Même alors qu'elle rapporte la vérité, elle ne s'abstient pas du plaisir de mentir*» (*Ad Nationes*, 69). On décèle la part de l'amplification dans la mise en fiction: écrire une rumeur développe le besoin incoercible de la prouver à proportion de son invraisemblance, car ce qui entre en jeu alors relève du mécanisme psychologique de l'auto-conviction: plus un mensonge est gros, mieux il est cru (cf. Goebbels).

Le plus spécifique dans cette contre-accusation, c'est la *comparatio* qui permet à un Tertullien de confronter pratiques alléguées et pratiques réelles, et de réduire à l'absurde le procès anti-chrétien. Il dépeint en effet la projection des sacrifices antiques sur la dramaturgie du crime rituel prêtée aux assemblées chrétiennes suspectes... (*Ad Nationes*, 75). En pastichant pareille accusation, Tertullien interdit toute confusion entre deux sortes de prosélytisme «*Il te faut un enfant à la démarche encore incertaine, pour l'immoler*»... (I, 71). Pareil raisonnement par comparaison blanchit les premiers chrétiens, en faisant valoir l'antithèse comme preuve d'innocence. Mais l'ambiguïté “mimétique” du grief de crime rituel consiste à se faire accusateur en se disant défensif.

#### *L'argumentaire de l'exemplum*

La base de cette démonstration prend appui en effet sur des exemples empruntés à des historiens grecs ou romains. Outre l'intérêt démonstratif, l'*exemplum* donne sel au récit, qu'il se réfère à des pratiques réelles: bachiques, orgiaques, ésotériques, ou à des représentations mythiques: Oedipe et Thyeste, illustrant l'unité entre l'imaginaire de la condamnation et le culturel.

Un historien scrupuleux comme Tacite s'appuie sur une rumeur commune à des traditions divergentes pour attribuer une origine hypothétique aux Juifs; il souligne par comparaison les différences entre Juifs et Romains, puis entre Chrétiens et Romains pour en faire crime (Tacite, 1992, V). Avec Tite-Live, le repas est comparé à des Bacchanales que l'état romain avait interdites.

Les historiens latins accumulent ainsi les stéréotypes, sans nécessairement les reprendre à leur compte; c'est Pline le jeune qui démentira l'accusation de crime rituel à l'encontre des assemblées eucharistiques (*Lettres à Trajan*, X). Mais en cela même, il démontre la force d'une *comparatio* à l'œuvre à titre de défense chez les chrétiens: «*Nous pourrions dire que par l'homicide, nous célébrons les mystères de Cronos; que quand nous nous repaissons de sang, comme on le dit, nous célébrons un culte semblable à celui que vous accordez à l'idole qui est honorée chez vous par des aspersion de sang...*» (Justin, 2<sup>o</sup> Apologie, 12). Et le procédé ironique qui consiste pour les Chrétiens à se défendre en mettant ces griefs dans la bouche d'un accusateur romain procède d'une même *retorsio* ironique.

Consigner des rumeurs, c'est courir le risque de leur donner consistance. C'est aussi se les approprier par glissement de cible, comme le traduit Augustin au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle. (*De Haeresibus*, 26). L'argumentaire “contre accusateur” traduit toujours la hantise de la contrefaçon du rite. Mais ces textes qui comparent reposent toujours sur des témoignages indirects “*audivimus*”, par conséquent

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<sup>2</sup> Tertullien, *Ad Nationes* (197), I, 7, 10, trad. André Schneider, Institut Suisse de Rome, 1968, p. 71.

sur l'amplification des griefs et sur l'in vraisemblance des événements. Ceux-ci relatés en forme d'*exempla* à valeur illustrative servent alors de pièce à conviction (Pétré, v., 1955).

L'ambiguïté d'une polémique qui défend un rite par les déformations d'un autre consiste souvent à faire passer du sens figuré au sens propre la séquence même du sacrifice. Ce va-et-vient des images accusatoires est au cœur de débats entre les différentes communautés, au fur et à mesure que le sacrifice sanglant est proscrit par les sociétés civiles.

### *A imposture, imposture et demie*

Le sacrifice chrétien proclame l'abolition des sacrifices sanglants, mais de plus, la réitération symbolique d'un sacrifice sanglant qui pour les Juifs était le comble du blasphème envers la divinité. La polémique se développe parmi les rabbins dès les premiers siècles, qui aboutit vers le Ve siècle à un corps de textes diffamatoires pour la jeune Eglise, les *Toledoth Jeshuh*. La croix du sacrifice devient prétexte à dérision, elle est transformée en un énorme chou fleur qui revient à ironiser sur naissance et mort du Christ, pour différencier foi juive et foi chrétienne. Et renchérir sur les controverses<sup>3</sup>: une contrefaçon de la vie du Christ destinée à la réduire à l'absurde; le même schéma narratif est alors repris, constituant une sorte d'Évangile à rebours, «une réponse juive, à la fois polémique et parodique, à l'existence des Évangiles canoniques chrétiens» (Osier, 1984). Pas d'infanticide rituel, mais à cette circulation des textes juifs en milieu urbain, va répondre à son tour un argumentaire antijudaïque qui renforce par réaction la dimension sacrée de la croix, dans une orientation violemment polémique.

On voit donc autour de quelle concurrence missionnaire tourne le récit polémique du crime rituel, qui cherche à accuser pour convertir ou pour dissuader de toute conversion. La thématique de la contrefaçon est bien au cœur du dispositif qui conjugue édification et rétorsion. En guise de contre preuve, le grief de crime de sang se développe selon une double dimension, théologique (le corps du Christ), et magique (la naissance du Diable)<sup>4</sup>. De quel poids pèsent des lors les *exempla* prétendus dans la démonstration polémique? Empruntés aux traditions les plus diverses, antiques, celtiques, mystiques, au lieu de disparaître, le scénario de l'infanticide se précise et s'affine, comme étant l'inversion du pacte avec le Christ. Le motif du corps vidé de son sang va se constituer en preuve de l'Incarnation, mais progressivement unifier les accusations de crime rituel autour de l'homicide, interprété comme une preuve des déviations hérétiques.

Tout un mouvement de mobilisation religieuse vise d'une part à rechristianiser la Palestine et conjugue, à travers les Croisades, héroïsme et cruauté. A cet effet, tous les moyens sont bons. Ainsi, au dieu Baal auxquels les Juifs associent Jésus, le monde chrétien oppose le légendaire oedipien, en brochant autour de la vie de Judas (Voragine, 1265).

## 2. UN RETOURNEMENT: LA RÉVERSIBILITÉ DES ACCUSATIONS D'INFANTICIDE RITUEL

1144, William de Norwich, 1168, Harold de Gloucester, 1182, Richard de Pontoise... vrais ou faux sacrificateurs, autant d'histoires inventées qui permettent de conjuguer accusation de crime rituel et miracles; bien plus même, il s'agit de raconter une accusation par le miracle, sur le seul fait d'un témoignage (Dundes, 1991).

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<sup>3</sup> Jean-Pierre Osier, *l'Évangile du Ghetto*, Paris: Berg International, 1984.

<sup>4</sup> Norman Cohn, *Démonolâtrie et sorcellerie au Moyen Age*, Paris: Payot, 1982, p. 37.

### *La hantise de la dérision*

Aux stéréotypes des accusations de parodies sacrificielles, s'ajoute la légende des "vrais" sacrifices d'enfants-martyrs. La hantise de la dérision du sacrifice fondateur est toujours tapie au fond du récit, en particulier à l'encontre des Juifs (Strack, 1903). Ainsi, le moine bénédictin anglais Matthieu Paris évoque dans sa *Chronique* le cas d'un enfant circoncis par les Juifs de Norwich «pour le crucifier en dérision de Jésus-Christ crucifié»<sup>5</sup>.

Une autre croisade se développe qui permet de rallier le peuple, les clercs et les instances politiques autour du premier procès de crime rituel. En dépit de réfutations autorisées, l'accusation s'adapte aux nouvelles formes du rite eucharistique. Ce rite est raconté selon la déformation de toute une hagiographie sanglante qui se constitue autour de trois séquences: meurtre de l'enfant par incision, parodie rituelle, et miracles. La constante de ces dramaturgies repose bel et bien sur la hantise du pastiche. Le corps de l'enfant devient alors mémorial du corps du Christ, ses saignées ou les blessures susceptibles de se rouvrir, deviennent preuves et contre-preuves. On comprend que l'accusation lancée contre tout autre hérétique ne revête pas la même force impressionnante.

Le crime rituel permet dès lors de rassembler contre les Juifs les images de pacte diabolique (l'enfant vendu aux Juifs), de saignée rituelle (incisions, circoncision), de crucifixion (cinq blessures), de repas cannibalique (détournement eucharistique). La dimension spectaculaire du récit fait le reste. La notion de contrefaçon est également à l'œuvre lorsque les accusations s'étendent vers l'est de l'Europe (Prague, 1305; Brno, 1343; Cracow, 1407) et suivent l'exode des Juifs, mais aussi la carte des grandes épidémies pour lesquelles il faut trouver des responsables. On peut certes relever deux niveaux de légendaires, celui des clercs et des laïcs, le premier centré sur le miracle, le second sur l'anthropophagie, mais les motifs spectaculaires en sont souvent les mêmes. Dans les deux cas, le récit de la rumeur amalgame pain, vin, sang et urine, cadavre d'un enfant, hostie, pour signaler la parodie carnavalesque ou magique de la Cène. La thématique du repas rituel homicide unifie les composantes d'un tableau hétérogène autour d'une métamorphose interdite, qui rejoint les rumeurs concernant le pouvoir de métamorphose de la magie juive ou démonolâtre.

Pouvoir de métamorphoser: ainsi, la confusion entre le profane et le sacré est à la fois effectuée et dénoncée, donnant aux orgies magiques un poids qui va séculariser la charge antihérétique de l'accusation de crime rituel.

### *Une propagande de rappel*

L'instrumentalisation de la rumeur de crime rituel s'appuie sur la preuve par retour et recours à des rites archaïques, qui sont présentés comme une incursion ethnologique. Alors que la Synagogue et l'Eglise ont toujours condamné les sacrifices sanglants, ceux-ci sont exhumés par les institutions comme chefs d'accusation probants. Pour différencier bon et mauvais sacrifices, les prédicateurs figent les pratiques juives autour du sacrifice sanglant de la Pâque: «*Le meurtre rituel est une sorte de monomanie (...), une espèce de névrose ethnique, une des plus frappantes manifestations faisant revivre dans le Juif proscrit à travers le monde la volupté de sang propre au sémite*»<sup>6</sup> (Desportes, 1846, 10).

Au XIXe siècle, les écrits hagiographiques sont une façon d'officialiser le légendaire comme instrument d'édification. A partir du récit édifiant, le polémiste peut gommer la spécificité d'un rite sacrificiel en prétendant la souligner par l'antithèse: il y a en fait réduction des minorités au plus grand commun dénominateur de la barbarie. Appliquées à des victimes interchangeables – sectes, magiciens, juifs et dissidents – dès lors que leurs pratiques ou leur influence ne sont pas reconnues par le pouvoir officiel, les particularités dites ethniques du crime rituel sont en l'occurrence la

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<sup>5</sup> Matthieu Paris, O.S.B., *Chronica Majora* (1235-1259), Paris: Paulin, 1840, t. IV, pp. 86-87.

<sup>6</sup> Henri Desportes, *Tué par les Juifs, Histoire d'un crime rituel*, Paris: Savine, 1890, p. 10.

traduction du stéréotype le plus résistant, celui qui implique la contrefaçon du rite eucharistique, ou de la mort en croix. A preuve persistante, la preuve douteuse du «miracle des hosties sanglantes de Bruxelles».

Cette tendance se laïcise de façon éminemment spectaculaire avec le développement de la presse. Les tsiganes hongrois de Jassbérény sont ainsi représentés dans *Le petit journal* en train de dépecer des enfants pendus à des branches d'arbre après les avoir saignés. Appendice ou avatar des théories raciales, la presse sert de caisse de résonance nouvelle à une différenciation du sang par l'accusation de crime.

Drumont en plein XIXe siècle ramène à un substrat mythique païen le rituel juif, ce qui revient à creuser la différence par la ressemblance avec le barbare: «*Ce qu'on adore dans le ghetto, ce n'est pas le dieu de Moïse, c'est l'affreux Moloch phénicien auquel il faut, comme victimes humaines, des enfants et des vierges*» (Drumont 405)<sup>7</sup>. La version laïcisée du crime rituel récupère donc l'iconographie du sacrifice interdit. A croire que plus s'atténue la preuve fondée sur le miracle, plus la fascination pour l'accusation de crime rituel est incapable de subsister autrement que sous la forme de propagande de rappel. L'argumentaire accusateur consiste en ce cas à recourir aux mythes d'origine. A partir des temps modernes, d'autres procès occupent le devant de la scène, qui réclament leur part de rationalisation des rumeurs: au XVIe siècle, la science démonologique renvoie les accusations à ce qu'elles sont, billevesées, et cherchent à différencier crimes de sorcières et infanticides.

#### *Du mémorable aux enquêtes médiatiques*

Entre XVe et XIXe siècles, dans les différents pays d'Europe, les comportements divergent envers les minorités dissidentes, et plus particulièrement à l'égard des Juifs. Mais cette confiscation du rituel par le politique fait apparaître un infléchissement dans la finalité de l'accusation: la charge proprement rituelle du crime reste à l'arrière-plan du récit au lieu de servir d'argument théologique. Andreas Osiander, pasteur évangéliste de Nuremberg, avait dissocié l'argument magique de l'accusation de contrefaçon: «*De nos jours, beaucoup de princes et d'autorités chrétiennes n'accordent aucun crédit à de tels mensonges*» (Po-Hsia 140). On retient moins le contenu rituel du crime qu'on n'invente l'horreur de la victimisation.

Alors que le document de base était au Moyen-Âge l'interprétation christique des faits – un cadavre est retrouvé, on projette sur lui une explication qui en fait l'enfant Christ molesté par les infidèles – ce document désormais n'est plus crédible en tant que preuve miraculeuse des faits. Mais on le réutilise comme un décor susceptible de mettre le feu à d'autres poudrières. Ainsi, à Damas en 1840, un chantage est exercé sur soixante trois mères juives à qui l'on avait retiré leurs enfants pour qu'elles révèlent où était caché le sang des victimes qui ne furent jamais retrouvées! «*L'usage est que le sang que l'on met dans les pains azymes n'est pas pour le peuple mais pour quelques personnes zélées*» fait-on dire aux accusés (Laurent II, 45)<sup>8</sup>. A partir d'une traduction arabe des interrogatoires, on rapporte ainsi la contrefaçon délibérée d'une contrefaçon rituelle si longtemps incriminée...

Quarante procès furent intentés en Europe et au Moyen-Orient au XIXe siècle, dont plus de douze en Allemagne. En dépit de ces efforts d'objectivité, la rumeur de sang persiste à réviser elle-même contre toute évidence les conclusions des juges. Ainsi l'accusation d'incision rituelle destinée

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<sup>7</sup> Edouard Drumont, *La France Juive*, Paris: Marpon et Flammarion, ed. 1886, p. 405.

<sup>8</sup> Achille Laurent, *Relation historique des Affaires de Syrie depuis 1840 jusqu'en 1842*. Paris: Gaume Frères, 1846, t. 2, p. 45.

à vider le corps de son sang est-elle préférée à celle, plus vraisemblable, d'un meurtre par viol, dans le cas d'une jeune fille employée chez les Juifs, Esther Solymosi, à Tisza-Eszlar, en Hongrie (1882). Il y a donc par voie de presse volonté de rejouer la sinistre supercherie en projetant sur un fait divers le scénario du meurtre rituel. Ainsi, la disparition d'une jeune fille gipsy est-elle prétexte à accuser son maître juif de vouloir se procurer son sang pour la Pâque.

On voit donc que l'accusation persiste comme principe d'explication fondé sur une perversion du rite d'offrande sacrée, dans un siècle où la dimension religieuse de l'accusation est laïcisée ou racialisée. Il y a plus, les sciences ou parasciences en viennent à cautionner l'accusation elle-même. L'argument scientifique est détourné pour conforter l'argument ethnique, fallacieux s'il en est, quels que soient les démentis officiels, comme celui du futur Président de la République tchèque, Masaryk, ou d'Alexandre 1er en Russie (1818).

Dans tous les cas mentionnés, en dépit des variantes, la logique d'un argumentaire vise à démontrer avant tout "la volupté de sang" pour se différencier d'un groupe concurrent, sur le plan économique, religieux ou politique. Le crime rituel semble donc exister avant tout comme chaînon manquant de l'accusation! Le scénario revient à plaquer, sur des groupes qui en ignorent le sens ou le réfutent, les rites à défendre sous prétexte qu'ils seraient dévoyés. Tout se passe comme si cette polémique focalisée sur le sang sacrificiel visait à exhiber le sacrifice purificateur par son contraire. Reste alors que les récits de dramaturgies perverses en fonction d'une pratique réelle révèlent l'unité des accusations autour d'archétypes.

### 3. RÉALITÉ DES ARCHÉTYPES, A L'ORIGINE DE CETTE CONTREFAÇON

L'historiographie du crime rituel dans l'Occident chrétien est tout entière tributaire d'une évolution de la conception du sacrifice rituel.

#### *Sacré et séparé*

Les récits d'accusation veulent démontrer qu'il y a contrefaçon du rite de la Cène pour différencier les hérésies. La dimension historique de cette perversion du rite en crime est indiscutable, mais alors, on est amené à s'interroger sur les véritables fondements de cet argumentaire.

Le sacrifice consiste à rendre quelqu'un ou quelque chose de sacré en le *séparant* du sacrificateur pour en faire offrande inaliénable à la divinité (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 839). Or dans toutes les traditions, sacrifice et consommation collectives restent les moyens les meilleurs de résoudre conflits et tensions, à condition que la collectivité obéisse impérativement au seul rituel prescrit. L'accusation de criminalité, dont le bien-fondé en soi se vérifie *a contrario* par le passage du sacrifice protecteur aux holocaustes contemporains, trace les lignes de déviations possibles, dont elle a fait un grief réel. Elle exprime ainsi le déséquilibre toujours possible et l'inversion réelle entre libido, eros, thanatos, qui fait passer le sacrificateur de l'amour à la mort (Solié, 88). Pourquoi? Le symbolisme sur lequel repose le crime rituel invite à une communion orale au corps offert (*ômosphagie* à partir d'une *hémorragie*). Or bien évidemment, rien ne ramène davantage à l'ambivalence possible du sacrifice rituel qui relie adoration et pulsion cannibale, tout en invitant idéalement à spiritualiser l'offrande partagée en nourriture divine.

#### *Images de sang*

Les différentes contrefaçons signalées par les accusateurs prétendent ainsi à tort ou à raison délimiter l'espace de la véritable communion à partir d'un contre-modèle hérité du temps des origines, toujours flottant, et d'images primordiales. Le modèle se donne toujours à partir d'un contre-modèle.

A l'origine, l'accusation de meurtre rituel implique l'hostilité envers un peuple ennemi et l'on en trouve trace dans la Bible à partir du Lévitique, qui interdit les sacrifices humains. Mais les Romains en accusent généreusement les premiers chrétiens. Cette accusation reprise à leur compte par les populations d'une Europe christianisée va privilégier à partir du XIIe siècle les récits d'infanticides, et arguer du besoin de sang chrétien chez des Juifs ou les dissidents pour confectionner le pain de la Pâque. Or l'immolation d'un enfant, voire d'un enfant-Dieu, est commune à toutes les traditions de sacrifices (Frazer, 1924). Cette image primordiale du fils premier-né offert à la divinité se trouve à la fois condamnée par le passage de la Loi à la manducation de la Chair divine, mais aussi célébrée dans le rite christique qui repose sur les trois actes archétypaux: vénérer, manger, aimer (Rouart, 1997, 277). Il s'agit donc avant tout de différencier deux sortes de sacrifice. La nécessité de différencier tout en unifiant a conduit dans certains cas à reproduire pour séparer une offrande d'une autre, un sacrificateur d'un autre, en surenchérissant sur la dimension "barbare" du rite primitif, réinventé en l'occurrence pour stigmatiser des communautés qui ne le pratiquaient plus.

D'où cette double orientation du récit: jouissance énumérative et descriptive, horreur démonstrative que l'on retrouve aussi bien dans le folklore européen que sur le théâtre (Rysan, 1955).

### *Chair et âme, puer aeternus*

L'âme selon la pensée hébraïque possède un support matériel dans le sang (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 840). Cette croyance juive en l'unité du corps et de l'âme est fondamentalement différente de tout un courant chrétien qui dès les premiers siècles, après saint Paul, tendait à opposer la chair et l'âme, et haïssait la façon de certains rabbins de guérir la plaie de la circoncision en la léchant. D'où leur appellation de bouchers-sacrificateurs. D'où le glissement du "sacrifice d'offrande" à l'infanticide sur le corps de jeunes chrétiens, qui transforme l'accusateur en victime, si bien que le récit du crime rituel ne représente pas un sacrifice, mais deux, celui de la victime et celui à l'encontre des meurtriers fictifs.

Ce corps blessé de l'enfant – comme celui du Christ – devient emblématique du corps de la nation, unité organique menacée par les ennemis de l'intérieur dont il faut signaler l'étrangeté. De plus, à travers l'enfant tué "comme", on ne retrouve pas seulement l'image des Saints Innocents, mais c'est l'innocence, virginité et chasteté à la fois, qui serait parodiquement offerte à Dieu par le sacrificateur (Chaucer, 1387). L'archétype de l'enfant-Dieu, du *puer aeternus*, est relié à tous les autres aspects de la mythologie de l'enfant selon Jung. Il est victime d'une contrefaçon de sacrifice, il en porte les traces réinterprétées comme une imitation dérisoire par le rival. Cet archétype se traduit dans l'insistance des poèmes et des ballades à affirmer le crime par un refrain qui vaut preuve: la contrefaçon oppose à l'enfant "la fille du Juif" et son petit couteau de sacrificateur, et détourne la figure de la Mère Église dans le sens de la mort et de la profanation érotique.

A Kiev, le député Markoff répondait ainsi à la nullité des preuves: «Vous souvenez-vous que le jeune André Ioutschinski a perdu son sang par quarante cinq blessures "légères et caressantes", blessures faites à cet enfant chrétien par un couteau juif?» (Monniot 6). Le corps nu, prétendument offert en détournement du sacrifice symbolique, s'offre depuis le Moyen Age comme un livre ouvert qui permet de déchiffrer ce que l'on veut y lire. Modèle différenciateur de la sainteté, le corps de l'enfant ainsi raconté permet de réécrire le mythe du père qui tue son fils pour lui survivre: Cronos, Agamemnon, Abraham serviraient de modèles aux dissidents tels qu'ils sont vus par les yeux des "vrais" croyants, comme si le sacré ne pouvait se survivre que dans la violence des contre-modèles, plus vrais que nature.

«Comment se peut-il qu'en tous lieux, sans s'être concertés, les hommes se soient trouvés d'accord dans une conduite énigmatique, qu'ils aient tous éprouvés le besoin ou ressenti l'obligation de tuer des êtres vivants rituellement?» A cette question de Georges Bataille, qui universalise la

dimension incoercible du meurtre rituel et son mystère (1973), James Hillmann a répondu à sa manière en évoquant la dimension archétypique des sentiments et des comportements humains: «supposons, dit-il, que leur étrange irrationalité soit nécessaire à la vie» (Hillmann, 1977: 7).

Les quelques faits que nous venons de rapporter mettent davantage l'accent sur le mystère du sacrifice rituel que sur l'authenticité prétendue du meurtre rituel, peu pratiqué en tant que tel en Europe, mais constamment réécrit à l'encontre des minorités dissidentes et plus particulièrement des Juifs. Se défendre: le sacrifice sanglant est une pratique qui offre le plus d'ambiguïté au regard d'un spectateur étranger au rite lui-même. Car cette étrangeté n'est jamais absolue, sinon ledit spectateur, à la façon d'un Candide sans Voltaire, en ferait une scène tout au plus surprenante. Non, le narrateur qui rapporte le sacrifice "étrange" cherche à surdramatiser un sacrifice pour condamner une pratique culturelle qu'il s'agit surtout de différencier de la sienne, avec laquelle elle risquerait de présenter plus d'une analogie.

Cette authenticité est donc constamment menacée de perversion, si bien que la justification des accusateurs opposant sacrifice authentique et sacrifice interdit rappelle en fait l'instabilité des modèles proposés, quand ils sont perçus à travers des gestes d'offrande qui traduisent une ambivalence paradoxale. Cette accusation de crime rituel en Occident semble en effet traduire un souci de différenciation plus ou moins argumentée des messages religieux. Or, par l'amalgame caricatural qui en est fait, elle crée de façon délibérée ou naïve des scénarios parodiques perçus comme nécessaires à la révélation du sacrifice purificateur. Il semblerait alors qu'en toute logique le sacrifice fondateur ne puisse être célébré que par la représentation de son contraire: la contrefaçon d'une offrande déviée qui, sous couleur de révélation unique, sépare les communautés à partir d'archétypes communs.

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# Anatomy of hatred: John Wilkes Booth, Shakespeare's Brutus, and Lincoln's murder

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Sigmund Freud once declared, «analysis allows us to suppose that the great apparently inexhaustible wealth of the problems and situations the imaginative writer treats can be traced back to a small number of primal motifs, which stem for the most part from the repressed experiential material of the child's mental life, so that the imaginative productions correspond to disguised, embellished, sublimated new editions of those childhood fantasies». It might seem implausible to claim that Freudian principles were put into deadly practice at Ford's Theater in Washington on 14 April 1865. It is. Nonetheless, the psychological element in the tragic deed can be explored. Before any application is tried, however, we are reminded of what Peter Gay had to say with regard to Freud's approach. Such «analyses threaten to become, even in skillful and delicate hands, exercises in reductionism».<sup>1</sup> No writer – least of all one of Shakespeare's genius – needs to experience the full range of emotions of any single character conjured up. Would not the same be applied to an actor-assassin?

Oblivious to such perils of interpretation, several historians, novelists, and psychoanalysts in the 1940s and 50s charged John Wilkes Booth was filled with oedipal rage. His assault on the President was thus an act of parricide, motivated by his hatred of his own father, the deceased Junius Brutus Booth. Philip Van Doren Stern, a novelist and New York editor, psychiatrists Edward J. Kempf and George W. Wilson, and even the more responsible historian Stanley Kimmel, author of *The Mad Booths of Maryland*, adopted this psychological course. Each furnished different sources for substantiating their case. But the documentation was sometimes completely inaccurate and most of it misleading. They all charged that in childhood, the youngest son John Wilkes resented, feared, even loathed his parent. Junius Booth was no model father. He was alcoholic, periodically deranged, and hot-tempered. The renowned actor who trod the boards chiefly in Shakespearean roles had been called “Crazy Booth, the mad tragedian”. At Natchez, Mississippi, he once had mounted a ladder and crowed “like a rooster”, while the stage manager wrung his hands below.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Gay, *Freud: A Life for Our Time*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1988, 377.

<sup>2</sup> Roy Z. Chamlee, Jr., *Lincoln's Assassins: A Complete Account of Their Capture, Trial, and Punishment*, Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1990, 14.

According to these interpreters, John Wilkes could not fill the stage pumps of his parent, was a failed actor, jealous of the acting talents of his brothers, and filled with parricidal rage. Kimmel argued that while Booth was a better performer than the others thought him to be, he had ruined his voice for improper training in projecting it. Although still young, Booth, Kimmel surmised, had so damaged his vocal chords that he faced a very uncertain future. Impending failure drove him over the edge, Kimmel reasoned.<sup>3</sup>

When his son was thirteen, Junius died from drinking polluted water. But the fact is John Wilkes worshiped his father, and the affection was reciprocated. He was his father's favorite son.

Fantasies of heroic daring could have filled the emotional void in his similarly manic and wildly erratic son. In view of the current war on terror, it is fitting to return to the period of hatred and upheaval that dominated the Civil War era. So far we have no current and tragic parallel to Abraham Lincoln's assassination. Yet, there are other similarities to events that prompt us to consider if recent troubles reflect a pattern of American behavior and not just an aberration. At the moment we are riveted to the television screen watching photographs of vile and subhuman atrocities. In all wars horrors are practically inevitable. The process of confronting enemies includes their dehumanization. Desperation to win or fend off the shame of defeat, desire for vengeance, and sheer sadism assure defeating the horrors of war, the abuse of prisoners for conspiracies alleged or real, and in the ethical realm the dictates of incandescent hatreds. The latter passion for vengeance and retribution emerges on both sides of the Iraqi conflict, complicating the restoration of peace and stability – just as the same resort to shaming the enemy and the same appeals to honor the fighters figured in the last days of the North-South tragedy. In addition we have the example of Brutus's conspiracy against Julius Caesar, an event that provided inspiration for the Shakespearean actor, John Wilkes Booth.

Three aspects of the two events need elaboration. The first is the role of fanatical ideology in demonizing the enemy and snatching heroic immortality out of death. Of course we do not know exactly what the full plans of Brutus and his collaborating senators were. Documentation is sketchy. The second translates that credo into total aggression or "black-flag warfare", as a recent author cites the Civil War underground strategies. The phrase with its piratical overtones, originated in an 1862 Philadelphia newspaper. Finally, we touch on the far-reaching effects that grow out of the two national traumas. Beyond question, Booth won a disproportionate victory even as defeat confronted the states in rebellion. His purpose required no gigantic fuel-laden machinery but only a single-shot derringer and a bullet the size of a fingernail. Yet, despite the disparities in weaponry, the two acts of vengeance were alike in their suicidal and homicidal destructiveness. The losses arising from the incidents did not assail the powerful alone. They touched thousands of ordinary civilians, regardless of race, status of class, or ethnicity. In 1865, though, the vulnerable freed people were those whose hopes were dashed and whose hearts were most overwhelmed.

With reference to the first issue of ideology, to carry out the kind of mission that Booth and his colleagues undertook had to spring from a fanatical intensity. Conspiracy demands not just stealth but complete engrossment in an incandescence of loathing. Like the Ku Klux Klan in later years, the Confederate slaveholding cause swept up white masses in waves of a wrath hard now to fathom. After the critical 1860 election, packages of preserves and other condiments from the South – most of them poisoned – arrived on Lincoln's doorstep in Springfield. Pro-southern groups materialized in the mid-western states. They boasted grand names: "the Circle of Honor"; "Knights of the Golden Circle"; and "the Circle and Knights of the Mighty Host". Still greater dangers lay closer to the District of Columbia. Owing to the efficient intelligence work of New York police and

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<sup>3</sup> Stanley Kimmel, *The Mad Booths of Maryland*, New York: Dover, 1969; Edward J. Kempf, *Abraham Lincoln's Philosophy of Common Sense: An Analytical Biography*, New York: Academy of Sciences, 1969; Philip Van Doren Stern, *The Man Who Killed Lincoln*, New York: Literary Guild, 1955; George W. Wilson, "John Wilkes Booth: Father Murderer", *American Imago* 1 (1940). BF 1400, AI A49.

Pinkerton detectives, President-Elect Lincoln was spirited in late February through Baltimore before two separate groups of skulkers could eliminate him. Similar plots and threats of assassination simmered throughout the war. The government departments were riddled with Southern sympathizers. Nor could longtime Washington residents be casually trusted. After Lincoln announced the Emancipation Proclamation and after he authorized African-American recruitment, Confederates and proslavery elements in the other states, slave and free, reached frightening heights of indignation.

Swept up in the fervor for retaliation and white purity, Booth reflected the ideals of the Southern slaveholding elite. In a statement for the Washington *Intelligencer* shortly before the assassination, Booth lamented the fall of «southern rights and institutions [i.e. slavery]». Impatient to return the country to a blissful past, Booth hated what he deemed a Yankee commercial imperialism. It seduced Americans away from old principles – white man’s liberty, feminine submissiveness, and black subordination. His convictions were not wholly dissimilar from what radical Islamists in Iran denounce as the temptation to become “Westoxicated”.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, he proposed that Lincoln’s road to black freedom would extinguish the Negro race. They needed their white masters’ protective arms. Preserving slavery, preventing racial mixing, and saving the South from «her threatened doom», as Booth framed it, required immediate and bold measures. For too long had the Union flag waved above scenes of blood, «spoiling her beauty and tarnishing her honor». In closing, he referred to his favorite Shakespearean character: «I answer with Brutus: “He who loves his country better than life or gold.”»<sup>5</sup>

The only photograph of the second inaugural on March 4 1865, taken by Alexander Gardner, shows John Wilkes Booth listening to Lincoln’s profound address. He must have heard his deeply moving and conciliatory words: «It may seem strange that any man should dare to ask a just God’s assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of another man’s face; but let us judge not that we may not be judged. The prayers of both could not answered; that of neither has been fully. The Almighty has His own purposes... Fondly we hope, fervently we pray that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bondsman’s two hundred and fifty years of toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was a thousand years ago, so still it must be said the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.» On hearing Lincoln’s insistence that slavery and human liberty were the polarities of sectional hostility, Booth no doubt sneered behind the mask of an experienced actor. Perhaps he squeezed the arm of his fiancée, John P. Hale’s daughter Lucy, whom Booth had escorted to the Capitol rotunda. Hale was a senator from New Hampshire and onetime Presidential candidate on the antislavery Free Soil ticket, a forerunner of the Republican party. Booth was present not to court a pretty belle, whatever her father’s politics might be. Instead he sought to witness the alleged monster whose blood he intended to be that “drop” to which the President himself had referred in his speech. In fact, he had told himself, on that brisk morning, March 4, 1865, «What an excellent chance I had to kill the president».<sup>6</sup>

As for Booth himself, he had never any intention of losing an ounce of flesh or blood in the ordinary military way to honor. When the war began, he had judged himself “a coward”, who despised his very existence. He never enlisted in a Confederate unit. Hard marching, cold tents, and death in a ditch had no appeal to Booth’s histrionic temper. Appeasing his guilt, however, he grew active in Confederate espionage. Later, Booth boasted that «an uncontrollable fate» drove him to strike at «the most ruthless enemy the world has ever known». «Sacred duty» required that

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<sup>4</sup> Emmanuel Sivan, “The Holy War Tradition in Islam”, *Orbis* 42, Spring 1998, 190; John Rhodehamel and Louise Taper (Eds.), “*Right or Wrong, God Judge Me*”: *The Writings of John Wilkes Booth*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997, 147.

<sup>5</sup> John Wilkes Booth, “To the Editors of the *National Intelligencer*, Washington, D.C. 14 April 1865”, in John Rhodehamel and Louise Taper (Eds.), “*Right or Wrong, God Judge Me*”: *The Writings of John Wilkes Booth*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997, 148-50.

<sup>6</sup> Jay Winik, *April 1865: The Month that Saved America*, New York: HarperCollins, 2001, 345.

he no longer tarry as a «hidden lie among my country's foes».<sup>7</sup> His resolve did not signify a religious conversion to some divinity of retribution, but he pictured himself an instrument of holy intent.

The ethical force behind his words could be called the ethic of honor. Booth often complained that Yankee women were too forward, too egalitarian. They had no shame. Although a notorious womanizer himself, he recoiled at the notion that young ladies in the family might sit and joke with common laborers. After all, his sister Asia contended, “ignorant menials”, who were «too often the refuse of other countries», should keep a distance from their betters.<sup>8</sup> Although happy to take the money of Yankee theatergoers in New York, Booth berated his sister Asia and brother Edwin about the enlistment of Irishmen in the Union cause. «The suave hordes of ignorant foreigners, buying up citizens before they land, to swell their armies.... Americans will blush to remember one day when Patrick coolly tells them that *he won their battles for them, that he fought and bled and freed the nagur.*» When his sister retorted that Booth ought to join the Confederate army, if he felt so, he replied that his money from acting, his freedom to move about up North, his “knowledge of drugs” and, above all, he repeated, his money – these would be the means «by which», he said, «I serve the South». He had been smuggling supplies of quinine into the malarial Confederacy.

Booth's hatred of Lincoln was visceral, and he added to his bile the conviction that Lincoln was both a Bonaparte who intended to overturn the Constitution and create a kingly dynasty and a tool of «false-hearted, unloyal foreigners who would glory in the downfall of the Republic». Lincoln, he assured himself, meant to «crush out slavery, by robbery, rapine, slaughter and bought armies».<sup>9</sup>

Reared in slaveholding Harford County, Maryland, Booth, ninth of ten children, delighted in the fixed hierarchy of races, sexes, nationalities, and degrees of wealth. Booth's concept of masculine worth was a warrior's recipe for action: the bid for immortal glory. The dreams of zealots have often made that ideal an ultimate goal. As remembered through the ages, the noble deeds of warriors on earth were supposed to find replication in the blessings of afterlife. In a memoir, Booth's sister Asia explained that her brother killed Lincoln «so that his name might live in history». Regarding the assassin «in a high, honorable light, a Patriot and Liberator», whites would forever rejoice, she rhapsodized, that his «single arm raised» at a «critical moment» had retrieved Southern liberty.<sup>10</sup>

A factor leading to Booth's theatrical career was a marital scandal. His father had married Maria Delannoy whom he later abandoned for his bigamous marriage to Mary Ann. Maria traveled to America and publicized the actor's infidelity. According to his biographer, John Wilkes, age eight, took the humiliation to heart and «determined to reclaim the family honor, follow his family profession, and adopt the family politics». When his son was thirteen, Junius died from drinking polluted water. Fantasies of daring could have further filled the emotional void in his similarly manic and erratic son.

On the second issue, the implementation of terrorism itself, Confederate strategies showed marked ingenuity. Implementation, though, usually fell short. Biological terrorism was a case in point. Operating from Canada, Luke Pryor Blackburn, a Kentucky physician whose specialty was

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<sup>7</sup> Booth to Mary Ann Holmes Booth, November 1864, in Rhodehamel and Taper, *Right or Wrong*, 130.

<sup>8</sup> Asia Booth Clarke, *The Unlocked Book: A Memoir of John Wilkes Booth by his Sister Asia Booth Clarke*, New York: Putnam's Sons, 1938, 64.

<sup>9</sup> Clarke, *The Unlocked Book*, 116-15, 124-25. He was particularly attached to the state of Virginia. Once, Junius, another acting brother, was walking with him through the darkened streets of Washington and noticed that tears were streaming down Booth's face, as he muttered in broken tones, “Virginia-Virginia”. Their sister Asia, who reported the incident, declared, «it was like the wail from the heart of the Roman father over his slaughtered child. This idealized city of his love [Richmond] had a deeper hold upon his heart than any feminine beauty». Defending him against any possible charge of effeminacy, she added, «but this very weakness of tears was proof of the depth of his strength». (Clarke, *Unlocked Book*, 119-20.)

<sup>10</sup> Clarke, *Unlocked Book*, 157-58.

treating yellow fever, collected victims' garments during an epidemic in 1864 on the island of Bermuda. With Confederate President Jefferson Davis's personal approval, he and his accomplices prepared the shipments. One suitcase contained expensive dress shirts to reach Lincoln as an anonymous present. Eight trunks of allegedly contaminated apparel were readied for the destinations of Washington, Norfolk, Virginia, and New Bern, North Carolina, all occupied by federal troops. If Blackburn's diagnosis of how the virus was transmitted had been valid and the clothes had reached their targets, the results would still have been unsatisfactory. Confederate civilian sympathizers and not the enemy could well have become the chief casualties. Failing to receive his promised compensation, Godfrey Joseph Hyams, a disgruntled operative, took his story to Canadian authorities at Toronto. He hoped for immunity and greater reward from the United States. Hyams also identified in Toronto a Confederate "bomb house". It was promptly seized. At Blackburn's subsequent Canadian trial, however, the physician won acquittal. The clothing had indeed entered Canadian soil at Halifax, Nova Scotia, but the court in Montreal claimed a lack of jurisdiction in that province. Paying no penalty and lavishly acclaimed in the South, the Rebel doctor was later elected governor of Kentucky (1879-83), one of many Civil War ironies.

As to more dangerous acts of terror, the Lincoln plot included many more than the four prisoners hanged later that summer. Booth belonged to a circle of pro-Confederate agents, chiefly from lower Maryland. They included the well educated: for example, Dr. Samuel Mudd and college-trained Booth himself, along with the nearly illiterate – the brutish Lewis Payne from Florida and the feckless George Atzerodt, a Prussian immigrant. Sketched out by Thomas Nelson Conrad of the Confederate Secret Service, the initial scheme was to take Lincoln hostage. In the summers, the unsuspecting President often traveled to an early Camp David, a cottage on the grounds of the Soldiers' Home, north of the White House. Conrad and Secretary of War James B. Seddon reasoned that the kidnaping would bring the fighting to a halt. Bestowal of Confederate sovereignty would follow. The unanticipated appearance of a cavalry guard escorting Lincoln's carriage on the three-mile trips frustrated the plan – much to Booth's disappointment. Hijacking the President would most likely have resulted in homicide. Critics of the military commission underestimate the heinousness of the assassins' crimes.

New York City, symbol of Union villainy and nerve center of national commerce and finance, made a tempting target, just as it did some months ago. In late 1864, Rebel Captain Robert Cobb Kennedy and compatriots hoped to light a fast-spreading conflagration. With the approval of Confederate authorities in Richmond, they poured "Greek fire", a mix of turpentine and phosphorus, around Barnum's Museum and in ten hotels. They set fires in bedrooms at the Astor House, Belmont, United States, LaFarge, St. Nicholas, St. James, and others – all of them bursting with thousands of guests and service personnel. Most of the hotels were situated along Broadway from Courtlandt to 25th Street. The arsonists sought chiefly to destroy property, as Kennedy later put it, to retaliate for "Sheridan's atrocities" in the Shenandoah. Yet, Kennedy further explained that the saboteurs had no misgivings about endangering «the lives of women and children». The plan proceeded without a hitch. The saboteurs, however, made a calamitous mistake. They neglected to open windows to feed oxygen to the fires they were setting.

Miraculously no fatalities or injuries ensued. It was not all good news at least as later events would prove. It happened that adjacent to the LaFarge Hotel, one of those targeted, stood the Winter Garden playhouse. That very night before a packed house of 2000 theatergoers, John Wilkes Booth was playing the role of Marc Anthony in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. His talented elder brother Edwin took the demanding part of Brunus, and Junius Booth was the dignified patrician Cassius. The brothers did not share the same political views. Edwin mocked his handsome younger brother's "secession froth", as he called it.<sup>11</sup> On stage, though, they worked in full professional harmony. The

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Francis Wilson, *John Wilkes Booth: Fact and Fiction of Lincoln's Assassination*, Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1929, 45.

first act ended with a thunderous ovation; it was a performance, many said, not to be forgotten and seldom seen on the American stage. The three Booths' proud but widowed mother Mary Ann, seated in a private box, received her sons' bows as they turned toward her at the footlights. Then, just as the curtain went up for the second act, the alarm of fire rang out. The lobby of the LaFarge next door was aflame, and smoke could be smelt in the theater itself. The crowd began to rush madly for the exits. But before a real crush developed, Edwin Booth calmed the audience down. A fire chief also materialized to allay any fears of danger. Gradually the fleeing patrons did as instructed, and act two began again.<sup>12</sup> Had the flames become uncontrollable, the future assassin might have died, and the President's life spared as a result. On the other hand, if the city had been razed to the ground with great loss of life, as the conspirators anticipated, the wrath of the North would have been catastrophic for Southern civilians – especially those New York Irish recruits, whom Booth so despised. The war would have probably become even bloodier and more barbaric than it already was.

Meantime, as the firemen doused the flames, federals were in hot pursuit of the conspirators. A few days later, they caught up with Captain Kennedy who was heading for Canadian safety. He was spotted on a train chugging into Detroit and immediately handcuffed. Defiantly, Kennedy waved the shackles about and, in furious denial of his humiliation, bellowed to the startled passengers, «These are badges of honor! I am a Southern gentleman».<sup>13</sup> Although the President often let mercy prevail over retribution, there was no pardon from Lincoln for this Southern gentleman. On 25 March, he was hanged at Fort Hamilton, New York. The method of his death was not by dropping the body through a trap door but by jerking it up some six feet with an arrangement of weights, pulley, and rope. Before that event, he shook violently, cursed the federal government, swore that Jeff Davis would avenge his “murder”, then sobbed, and finally sang a cheery song in choking voice. Thus, Kennedy spent his last minutes on earth without fortifying his claim of stoic gentility.

In early 1865 another scheme, organized out of Richmond, nearly carried equally grave consequences. Again, with Jefferson Davis's explicit approval, Sergeant Thomas F. Harney, an expert in the Torpedo Bureau, headed for Washington with a powerful explosive to demolish the White House. Accompanying him were 150 irregular cavalymen in John Singleton Mosby's command, who worked behind Union lines.<sup>14</sup> Luckily, on 11 April 1865, Harney and three others fell into federal hands not far from the city and sent to the Old Capitol prison. Desperate to act before all hope had vanished, Booth and company abandoned the kidnaping idea and schemed planned to strike down not just Lincoln but also Vice-President Andrew Johnson and Secretary of State William H. Seward – all simultaneously. Such a decapitation of successive chiefs would have deposited Lafayette Sabine Foster, an obscure Senator Pro Tem from Connecticut, in the President's chair.

Although no direct link was ever uncovered, President Davis himself might well have favored Lincoln's killing. Earlier in the war, however, he had opposed it. The turning-point came with the Union's Dahlgren raid against Richmond, February 1864. By then, Lincoln himself had thought seizing Davis worthwhile, if coupled with the rescue of Union captives in the disease-ridden Libby Prison. The mission was ill-planned and poorly executed. Richmond's defenders whipped the force, and Ulric Dahlgren, leader of the expedition, was cut down. On his body, the Confederates found an incriminating statement of objectives: firing of the city and taking or exterminating Davis and his cabinet. Such «an act of terrorism», as the Rebels called it, freed them to do likewise.

It is very probable that Booth orchestrated his own plans but had the tacit if not explicit approval of Judah P. Benjamin, the last Secretary of War in Richmond. During his postwar imprisonment, Davis contemptuously dismissed accusations of collusion. Nevertheless, Benjamin,

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<sup>12</sup> Stanley Kimmel, *The Mad Booths of Maryland*, Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs Merrill, 1940, 191-92.

<sup>13</sup> Nat Brandt, *The Man Who Tried to Burn New York*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986, 223, 151.

<sup>14</sup> Rhodehamel and Taper (Eds.), “*Right or Wrong. God Judge Me*”, 121.

Davis's confidante, was conversant with all aspects of Confederate espionage and shared much information with his chief. Confederate agents had long been highly active. They used all the means of communication available: coded messages, apparently unlimited cash for bribes, weapons, and travel, prearranged signals, and other subterfuges. The network stretched from Canadian cities to safe houses along a route to the Maryland-Virginia border. (Ironically, the Rebel lines of communication paralleled the antebellum Underground Railroad by which fugitive slaves reached Canadian safety.)

Luckily, Booth's colleagues were neither as competent nor as properly equipped as he. While the actor was occupied at John Ford's Theater, Lewis Payne slashed his way to Seward's bedside at his house near Lafayette Square. The wounds to chest and throat nearly finished his life. A pistol instead of knife would have been more effective. Meantime, George Atzerodt was supposed to dispatch Andrew Johnson at the Kirkwood Hotel. Unnerved by the hazards of his task, though, Atzerodt drank his opportunities away, then fled. He did not have the kind of training that so handsomely nerved the Arab operatives to their recent suicidal daring.

Booth's well known success warrants only brief recounting. Resigned to fate, Lincoln had often remarked that, if someone sought to end his life, they would find the means. As it happened, Booth met no impediment to the President's box for that evening's performance of the comedy "Our American Cousin". He moved comfortably through the crowds and crossed under the stage, eluding close observation. With the muzzle of his derringer only two feet from the President's head, Booth fired. Seated next to his finance, Major Henry R. Rathbone, a young officer, Rathbone quickly tried to grab Booth who dropped the pistol but pulled out a knife. He cut Rathbone's arm, but Rathbone forced him toward the balcony. As he tumbled from the box, Booth snagged his left-foot spur on some patriotic bunting and fractured a bone in his leg upon hitting the stage 12 feet below. With hands upraised, the actor faced the stupefied theater-goers and shouted, "Sic semper tyrannis!" Quickly Booth limped past the lone, benumbed actor then before the lights and staggered outside.

Meantime, a physician in the orchestra hastened up to the President's box. He ascertained at once that the bullet had penetrated Lincoln's left ear and rested behind the right eye. The President could not move and his breath was ominously shallow. The rescue party then carried him to the lodging of Henry Safford, a tailor, who lived across from the theater on Tenth Street. The President's life came to a close at 7:22 AM on April 15th, nine hours after the assault. With regard to Lincoln and his party in the box, new information has come to light within the last month. An article in the New York *Times* reprinted the diary entry of an eye-witness to the murder. Horatio Nelson Taft, the author, was a functionary in the Patent Office, whose sons were playmates of Willie Lincoln, whose death from typhoid in 1862 brought such misery to the President and near insanity to Mary Todd Lincoln. I give the lengthy full text because it conveys such a sense of immediacy to the tragic episode. The words were set down on April 30, a little over two weeks after the event:

«When the shot was fired Mrs. Lincoln was sitting near her husband with her hand on his knee. She says she saw the flash and heard the report of the pistol, thinking it was in some way connected with the Play. She leaned forward to see what it was, and then looked to Mr. Lincoln to see where he was looking. He was sitting with his head drop[p]ed down and eyes shut. She was not alarmed at this, he sometimes held his head in that way when in deep thought, but she put her hand on his forehead and he not stirring she put it on the back of his head and feeling it wet she immediately withdrew it covered with blood. She then screamed and that is the last she remembered that took place in the Theatre. She says, as she put her hand on his head she recollects that something suddenly brushed past her and rubbing off her Shawl. It was Booth as he jumped from the Box. The President made no noise, nor attempted to speak, nor Stirred a limb after he was shot, nor was he conscious for one moment from that time until he died. When his skin was touched or his hand was taken, there was a slight quiver or tremor of the muscles, but that was all....»

For the last half hour before the death, the utmost stillness had prevailed in the room, not a word, not a whisper was heard. The President of the United States dying, surrounded by his Cabinet and many of the first men in the Nation standing like statues around the bed.... After the

President died Dr. Gurley went to Mrs. L. and told her «the President is dead». O – why did you not let me know? Why did you not tell me? «Your friends thought it was not best. You must be resigned to the will of God. You must be calm and trust in God and in your friends.» She soon after left, with Dr G[urley] for her Home. She was asked during the night if her son Tad (Thaddeus) (a boy about 12 years old) should be sent for.... When they reached the President's house Tad met them on the Portico. «Where is my Pa? Where is my Pa?» He kept repeating the question till they got into the room of Mrs. Lincoln. He had heard that his Pa had been shot but evidently expected him when his mother came. He was very much excited and alarmed but had not thought that his Pa could be dead. «Taddy, your Pa is dead», said Dr. Gurley. He was not prepared for this. He screamed in an agony of grief, «O what shall I do? What shall I do? My Brother is dead. My Father is dead. O what shall I do? What will become of me? O what shall I do? O mother you will not die will you? O don't you die Ma. You won't die will you, Mother? If you die I shall be all alone. O don't die Ma». Dr. Gurley said that up to that time he himself had not shed a tear, but he could not witness «“Tad's” grief unmoved and the Tears flowed freely».<sup>15</sup>

During the period when the shock of the assassination was still bursting forth, Booth was seeking safety in flight. After leaving the stage, he limped to the rear of the theater and went through the backstage door. With a knife's handle, the assassin in his excitement viciously struck a stable boy holding his horse and speedily galloped away. Joining David Herold, another operative, Booth headed for southern Maryland. Sympathizers there would marvel at his pluck, he imagined, and assist his flight. Indeed, Mudd set the bone and hid the pair in his Bryantown house. Later, the physician maintained that Booth was barely a chance acquaintance. The horseman simply required Hippocratic ministrations after taking a fall. Striving to reach Virginia and safety, the pair then fled southward. Meantime, in a diary the fugitive moaned that he was pursued “like a dog” simply «for doing what Brunus was honored for». What a “degenerate people” his unmanly fellow Americans were to dub him “a common cutthroat”. Like the arsonist Kennedy, Booth thought himself a gentleman of unimpeachable reputation. If returned to Washington, his station would become evident to all. Once there, Booth swore, «I will clear my name which I feel I can do».<sup>16</sup> For ideologues like Booth, reputation for valor is always uppermost. Within the last month, Maulvi Saif-ur-Rehman, an Al Qaeda leader in the mountains of eastern Afghanistan proclaimed, «We prefer death than living a shameful life».<sup>17</sup>

With federal troops swarming everywhere, the fugitives were traced to Garrett's Farm just south of Port Royal, Virginia. On the night of 26 April, Union cavalrymen surrounded Garrett's barn. The troopers set it ablaze. Shaking abjectly, Herold surrendered, but, gun in hand, Booth refused. Before he could fire, Sergeant Boston Corbett shot him in the neck. Booth fell paralyzed. His final words were: «Tell... my... Mother... I... die for my country.» Perhaps it was just as well. Had he lived, he might have earned in the South the reward of martyrdom that John Brown had won when executed at Charlestown with all the panoply and the rituals customary for such dramatic occasions. In fact, Booth himself had posed as a militia officer in full uniform to attend that historic event back in December 1859. Booth had admired Brown's self-possession as he mounted the gallows steps. In 1864, Booth told his sister that Lincoln was «walking in the footsteps of old John Brown, but no more fit to stand with that rugged hero – Great God! No.» No less ideologically driven than Brown himself, Booth anointed him as «a man inspired, the grandest character of the century!»<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Entry for 30 April 1865 in Horatio Nelson Taft, diary, Library of Congress, in “Lincoln on Line: New Treasures”, *New York Times*, 16 February 2001, A17. See also Timothy S. Good (Ed.), *We Saw Lincoln Shot: One Hundred Eyewitness Accounts*, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995.

<sup>16</sup> Entry for 21 April 1865, diary, in Rhodehamel and Taper (Eds.), “*Right or Wrong, God Judge Me*”, 154-55.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in *USA Today*, 1 March 2001, A2.

<sup>18</sup> Clarke, *Unlocked Book*, 124.

Taking command of the search and the government itself, Edwin Stanton, Lincoln's Secretary of War, directed a widespread round-up of suspects. Only a few of them were deeply implicated. Such sweeps as this are certainly not uncommon when conspiracies against the state have been exposed or suspected, whether justly or not. Government men and police quickly picked up and jailed Edward Spangler, Booth's confidante at Ford's Theater, Atzerodt, Lewis Payne, and the motherly Mary Surratt. They also arrested Samuel Arnold and Michael O'Laughlen, fingered as «two of the intimate associates of J. Wilkes Booth». As in Mudd's case, Mary Surratt's cause once enlisted pro-Southern scholars vigorously denying her guilt. But, specialists on the assassination have lately and rightly insisted upon her complicity. Most of the collaborators either had lived under her roof or often sat in her parlor – including Booth, her son John Surratt, a chief Confederate courier to Canada, and Lewis Payne, Seward's assailant. On the day that Lincoln was slain, Mary Surratt had early left home for Lloyd's tavern in Surrattsville. There she delivered Booth's binoculars and insured that weapons for Booth's flight were ready. Moreover, when later Lewis Payne haplessly arrived on her doorstep, federals were searching the premises. Facing the hulking workingman, she disclaimed ever seeing him before. The lie was obvious.

Mary's son John, who had helped in the planning, however, escaped to Canada and then abroad. He joined the Zoaves protecting Pius IX at the Vatican. When recognized, he again fled and next alighted from a freighter in Alexandria, Egypt. Waiting for him at dockside was the American Consul and local police. They packed him off to face trial at home. By then it was 1867. Indignation had faded, and three tries to win convictions in the District of Columbia courts failed. Thus Surratt, Blackburn, and several others whom the federal government did not pursue, went free. The result sadly demonstrated the whims of time and justice, even in cases of great national peril.

The final issue that illustrates a parallel with more recent circumstances concerns immediate public reaction, the application of justice, and, finally, the long-term tragic consequences. With regard to the initial response, the warring sections displayed entirely different moods as one might expect. In the South, there was both rejoicing and fear of terrifying reprisals. And not without reason. But the consequences could also take a curious turn. A Mrs Stuart, an embittered war widow and boardinghouse-keeper, glumly remarked on learning of Lincoln's death, «the wretch has gotten his just deserts». Her husband had died at Antietam and her only child, a drummer boy, had been killed while in Stonewall Jackson's command. Unfortunately, a young soldier in the occupying forces, had overheard her curse against the President. While other federals were ordering Southern civilians in the town to show their grief by hanging black crepe and other signs of mourning, the soldier reported Mrs Stuart's defiance. The troops then ransacked her house to find suitable black material and found her black widow's veil in a trunk. They demanded that she hang it outside. Reluctantly, she agreed. Watching from across the street, they saw her pull up a chair on the porch to fix the veil to a hook. Suddenly, she wrenched angrily at the veil, as if it were «the badge of her stricken life», as an observer recollected. Then, to the onlookers' further surprise, she kicked the chair out from under her feet. Her body suddenly convulsed. The soldiers rushed forward, but she as already dead. A witness to the event declared, «Under the crepe veil floating out upon the April-kissed breezes, with a strong cord firmly knotted about her neck hung what was mortal of that once proud southern woman».<sup>19</sup>

On the other side of the ideological boundary, Lincoln's death was felt most keenly in the Union ranks. An Ohio artilleryman observed that South Carolinians were lucky. Guards had been posted around the camps to prevent a rampage to avenge the death of Old Abe, as he was affectionately called. Transporting by train Confederate officers in Union custody by train became hazardous. At a New Jersey station, a mob howled its fury at Rebel General Orlando B. Wilcox and his men, but

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<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1880s*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001, 253.

their guards prevented any outburst of violence. In fact, given the circumstances it is a wonder that Southern whites did not suffer more from Yankee reaction than they did.

In fact, Northern reaction well fit Lincoln's own sobriety and sense of humanity. With spirits dampened by the President's death, Union armies did not gloat arrogantly over their signal triumph. Philip Stephenson, a private in the Army of Tennessee, surrendered at Meridian, Mississippi. To his surprise, his unit was treated with courtesy. «No excitement, no disorder. The federal troops were kept well in hand, were not allowed to insult us, and they showed no disposition to do so. There was no marching out, lining us up opposite the Federal forces, and our general surrendering his sword to the victor, no pomp and parade of triumph.» Perhaps Lincoln's example of magnanimity had something to do with this. In his last public speech, the second inaugural, he had famously closed with the words «with malice toward none, with charity for all». Although it might sound sentimental, perhaps his spirit helped to establish a climate of reasonableness. Too bad it was not reciprocated in the Rebel mind, still proud, still honor-bound, still gripped in the racial hatreds that had prompted Booth to his murderous aims.

With reference to the operation of justice, the wartime government of that era relied on military tribunals with greater zeal than it has more recently. During the war, thirteen thousand were arraigned on charges of sedition and violations of conspiracy laws before 5000 military commissions.<sup>20</sup> Until close to the end of the war, disaffection from the Union cause remained grievous. In the Pennsylvania coal fields, Irish "Buckshots" murdered a pro-Union mine official, violently resisted the draft, and struck so effectively that the federal navy nearly ran out of fuel. Military courts tried some of the troublemakers but largely with ill-success.<sup>21</sup> Suppressing the New York City Draft Riots of 1863 required the imposition of martial law. Under such disordered conditions, James Speed, the Attorney General, quite appropriately chose to try Lincoln's assassins under similar terms. Countering the demand of Horace Greeley of the New York *Tribune* and others for civilian trials, Speed and Stanton noted how often the Washington jury pool proved anti-government. A strong case can be made for the use of such courts in wartime. Under those circumstances, the Constitution permits military measures, as Secretary of War Stanton contended. The Attorney General defined the suspects as "enemy belligerents", subject to military jurisdiction. The phrase carries overtones of "detainees" and "unlawful combatants", terms of current usage.<sup>22</sup> Although ably defended by attorneys Reverdy Johnson and Thomas Ewing, Jr., the prisoners deserved conviction. Major General David Hunter, General Lew Wallace later (of *Ben Hur* fame), and their colleagues had fulfilled their duties without subverting the cause of justice. They spared the lives of Mudd (though on a narrow vote), Spangler, and Arnold, who spent varying numbers of years in prison. The others – Surratt, Herold, Payne, and Atzerodt – were fated to fall through the trap doors in the yard of the Old Arsenal Penitentiary below the Capitol.<sup>23</sup>

The long-term effect of Lincoln's assassination was profound. Gone was the leader who had patiently guided Union victory, deftly steered the Congress and nation through successive crises, and established black freedom. In his office at the White House, Andrew Johnson of Tennessee presided, a war Democrat of limited skills, resistant ego, unshakeable race prejudices, and intense loyalty to state rights and the old party system. The freed people had ample reason to mourn the "Great Emancipator's" death. Though slaves no more, their fate, thanks to Johnson, toppled into the

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<sup>20</sup> Edward Steers, Jr., *Blood on the Moon: The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln*, Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2001, 212.

<sup>21</sup> See Mark Bulik, "American Gothic: 'Terrorists' and Tribunals in the Civil War Era", *New York Times*, 30 December 2001, 7.

<sup>22</sup> William Safire, "Colin Powell Dissents", *New York Times*, January 28, 2002, A21.

<sup>23</sup> See the photographs in James L. Swanson and Daniel Weinberg, *Lincoln's Assassins: The Trial and Execution*, Chicago: Arena, 2002, 99 and passim.

hands of former masters. Later Reconstruction state governments under Congressional mandates could do little to make working conditions for the freedmen better.

Furthermore, the Union public gradually relinquished commitments to the forsaken. Northern voters grew ever more weary of crippled Republican efforts to create a two-party, bi-racial Southern political system. Lincoln could not have solved all the problems of the postwar years. Yet, his departure irremediably sapped the triumph of Union arms, helped to begin an era of corruption and cynicism, and hobbled national endeavors toward racial equity. At least, as it appears now, the current struggle between terrorists and western culture may, we can hope, be less tragic than Lincoln's fate and its impact on subsequent national history. Thanks to Booth, the President's death helped enormously to assure white Southerners of what became a century-long era of unchecked ascendancy, white over black.

# The psychology of the terrorist based on Joseph Conrad's vision (\*)

LÁSZLÓ HALÁSZ (\*\*)

The key location of our story is quite close to the place of our conference last year. The task of Mr Verloc, the secret agent of a foreign power is to blow up the first meridian in Greenwich as an absurd, «almost unthinkable (...) act of destructive ferocity» (Conrad, 1907/1926: 38). Verloc obtains the bomb from a specialist and teaches his brother-in-law, a poor boy «only fit for an asylum», how to use it. But the boy bumbles it and blows himself up. The consequences are fatal for Verloc's wife and for Verloc himself. I need not relate the story, which, one of our colleagues dealt with (Landau, 2003), focusing on the psychoanalytical motives for the poor boy's killing. My goal is quite different, namely to present and interpret how Joseph Conrad portrays the terrorist in *The Secret Agent* written almost one hundred years ago.

Conrad presents three character variations. Let's start with the most laconically described one. «The terrorist, as he called himself, was old and bald (...) An extraordinary expression of underhand malevolence survived in his extinguished eyes. (...) "I have always dreamed of a band of men absolute in their resolve to discard all scruples in the choice of means, strong enough to give themselves frankly the name of destroyers (...) No pity for anything on earth, including themselves, and death enlisted for good and all in the service of humanity (...) And I could never get as many as three such men together"» (Conrad, *ibid.* 46-47). Not a man of action, not even an orator. «With a more subtle intention, he took part in an insolent and venomous evoker of sinister impulses which lurk in the blind envy and exasperated vanity of ignorance, in the suffering and misery of poverty, in all the hopeful illusions of righteous anger, pity and revolt. The shadow of his evil gift clung to him yet like the smell of deadly drug in an old vial of poison.» Thus is he described by Conrad's omniscient narrator (Conrad, *ibid.* 52).

Although he calls himself a terrorist when the term was not at all fashionable, this man per-

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formed not one terrorist act. If we accept that «bombs are your means of expression» – as one of Conrad's characters put it when speaking of terrorists, then he ought to have a serious identity crisis which, however, he does not. He is a braggart who seems to be the least harmful of his kind. Reconsidering, however, his verbal behavior, innocence is rather far away from him. His profession is to arouse hostile impulses in the masses. He does nothing else and this is more than enough to exploit the misery, ignorance, envy, and despair which often go together with poverty.

Verloc – about whom we get to know much more – combines a longing to play a role, a longing for money, conviction, and acting on the other spur of the moment. It is certain that the idea of such a terrorist act, let alone the implementation of it would never have entered his mind by itself. Cowardice combined with scheming meant that it would not be he who took the bomb to the scene. Here his wife helped him unintentionally. She told him several times that «You could do everything with the boy (...) He would go through the fire for you», adding later, «That boy just worships you» (Conrad, *ibid.* 188, 190).

Verloc was not insensitive. Following the tragedy he tells his wife sincerely: «“You understand I never meant any harm to come to that boy. (...) I didn't feel particularly gay sitting there and thinking of you”» (Conrad, *ibid.* 234). As far as he was able, he loved his wife and liked the boy. Certainly, he did not want to cause any pain to him. It was not his way to kill anybody. He did not have any diabolic traits. Although, the terrorist act was definitely insane, it did not threaten human life. Nevertheless, Verloc's deed sprang from his base character that was insignificant in vain, since it represented a public danger. Verloc has no remarkable abilities his uninteresting appearance matches his internal qualities.

His above-average ability was his oratorical bass. This was unsatisfactory for a career in line with his ambition. Although he had no moral restraint, his longing for money and for adventure would not have made him a secret agent had he not, as a young soldier, begun spying because of a woman. He was sentenced to imprisonment, and, following his release, he would have needed to make a serious effort to reach even an average honest level. He therefore chose the other course without hesitation. And now he was not too happy, although he felt no guilt, remorse or repentance. He would not have objected to even his-brother-in-law's terrible death, there been no incriminating evidence left behind afterwards.

«His prestige with the Embassy would have been immense if – if his wife had not had the unlucky notion of sewing on the address inside Stevie's overcoat. Mr Verloc who was no fool, had soon perceived the extraordinary character of the influence he had over Stevie (...) he had calculated with correct insight on Stevie's instinctive loyalty and blind discretion. The eventuality he had not foreseen had appalled him as a humane man and a fond husband. From every other point of view it was rather advantageous. Nothing can equal the everlasting discretion of death. (...) Stevie's violent disintegration, however disturbing to think about, only assured the success» (Conrad, *ibid.* 238). Destruction is appropriate if useful to him.

However, one seriously misread Verloc if one thought that this self-image as an important man would have disturbed his self-image as a “humane man”. «He nourished no resentment against his wife. (...) “What's done can't be undone. (...) What you want is a good cry”» (Conrad, *ibid.* 239, 244). «“I don't blame you. But just try to understand that it was a pure accident” (...) His generosity was not infinite, because he was a human being – and not a monster, as Mrs Verloc believed him to be. (...) “I am fond of you. But don't you go too far”» (Conrad, *ibid.* 259-260). Unilaterally he was a harmonious man although he was on bad terms with the outer world, he was on good terms with himself.

I shall concentrate on the third variation, the specialist as I have called him, with some understatement. He is the most peculiar – and if I may say – the most real character of the novel. He is ready to blow up even himself. He is a “dingy little man” and is nicknamed the Professor because he was an assistant demonstrator in chemistry at some technical institute, before securing a post in the laboratory of manufacturer of dyes. «The lamentable inferiority of the whole physique

was made ludicrous by the supremely self-confident bearing of the individual» (Conrad, *ibid.* 66). He is not afraid of arrest. «I don't think they could get one of them to apply for a warrant (...) they know very well I take care never to part with the last handful of my wares. I've always by me. (...) In a thick glass flask» (Conrad, *ibid.* 69). Unfortunately, «A full twenty seconds must elapse from the moment I press the ball till the explosion takes place». That is the weak point. But the result is absolutely guaranteed. A terrible black hole with corpses torn to pieces. A perfect detonator is his goal. «I depend on death, which knows no restraint and cannot be attacked. My superiority is evident» (Conrad, *ibid.* 72).

The Professor despises the representatives of the social order and not less the revolutionary propagandists because all of them are the slaves of convention. His idea of morality is freedom from any kind of hypocrisy. He unambiguously prefers death as a means. Modifying somewhat Conrad's already quoted statement about terrorists in general that «bombs are your means of expression», we should say in his case: «Bombs are your only possible means of expression.» He sees the goal quite clearly: «a clean sweep and a clear start for a new conception of life. That sort of future will take care of itself if you will only make room for it» (Conrad, *ibid.* 77). His father was «a rousing preacher of some obscure but rigid Christian sect – a man supremely confident in the privileges of his righteousness. In the son (...) this moral attitude translated itself into a frenzied Puritanism and ambition. (...) To see it thwarted opened his eyes to the true nature of the world, whose morality was artificial, corrupt and blasphemous. (...) The Professor's indignation found in itself a final cause that absolved him from the sin of turning to destruction as the agent of his ambition». «To destroy public faith in legality was the imperfect formula of his pedantic fanaticism but the subconscious conviction that the framework of an established social order cannot be effectually shattered except by some form of collective or individual violence was precise and correct. He was a moral agent» (Conrad, *ibid.* 85).

His appearance and mentality were unfit for the acquisition of power and fame through clever engagement. Although he has some qualifications, real career possibilities lay rather far from the nonconformism and high ambition by means of which he compensates for his miserable physique. Following on his father's example, he becomes a fervent believer. He is sure what is important for him is at the same time fundamental and wonderful for mankind also. Now he is disappointed, because of Verloc's unfortunate endeavour, but his hopes are in the next more powerful and more successful action. Nevertheless, sometimes he feels that people are apathetic and that no threatening deed can move them at all. «Such moments come to all men whose ambition aims at a direct grasp upon humanity – to artists, politicians, thinkers, reformers, or saints» – remarks Conrad's omniscient narrator, reading in the Professor's mind (Conrad, *ibid.* 86).

As the Professor works on a new and perfect variety of bomb, he will, according to his self-image, come to occupy the place of an epoch-making creator as an inventor, artist and saviour in one person. The significance of his work will be revolutionary, not only in the technical, but in the psychological and social sense, too. Although he does not get drunk by uttering a stream of words as do Chesterton's parodistic figures a year later, nevertheless the sacred moment grasps him, too. «The man who throws a bomb is an artist, because he prefers a great moment to everything. He sees how much more valuable is one burst of blazing light, one peal of perfect thunder, than the more common bodies of a few shapeless policemen» (Chesterton, 1908/1937: 12), says Mr Gregory, the poet and conspirator. And one should not forget that De Quincey (1827/1959) was ahead of Conrad and Chesterton, even as regards an ironical approach to the subject, when nearly two hundred years ago he considered political murder to be one of the fine arts. He pointed out that the murder of kings and statesmen is particularly seductive for artists fascinated by theatrical effect. And De Quincey added that the ultimate aim of murder as one of the fine arts is identical with that of tragedy as defined by Aristotle, namely to arouse pity and fear in order to produce catharsis in the audience. For today we could substitute the murder of passers-by for the murder of kings of kings and statesmen, media effect for theatrical effect, and horror for pity and fear.

«The world is mediocre, limp, without force. And madness and despair are a force. And force is a crime in the eyes of the fools, the weak and the silly who rule the roost» (Conrad, *ibid.* 311), says the Professor. He is beyond good and evil, indeed. He is not directed by whimsical impulses or by necrophilic character traits full of longing to destroy only for the sake of destruction and to blow to pieces anything that is living (Fromm, 1973). Nevertheless, the Professor enjoys destruction caused by any technical means, thus showing his strong necrophilic inclination. One understands his moral superiority with horror. He entirely lacks the hypocrisy, self-deceit and pragmatic cynicism of Verloc, who would not have objected to his brother-in-law's terrible death had there been no trace left of it. For him destruction is appropriate if it useful. In contrast to this serious, but obviously and unfortunately human weakness, the Professor's "ascetically clear thinking" is inhumanity itself.

«And the incorruptible Professor walked too, averting his eyes from the odious multitude of mankind. He had no future. He disdained it. He was a force. His thoughts caressed the images of ruin and destruction. He walked frail, insignificant, shabby, miserable and terrible in the simplicity of his idea calling madness and despair to the regeneration of the world. Nobody looked at him. He passed on unsuspected and deadly, like a pest in the street full of men» (Conrad, *ibid.* 313). These are the last words of the novel. It is in this alarming way that Conrad's narrator bids farewell to the reader.

The Professor's paranoid possession – which would fit perfectly into Dostoevsky's wonderful novel *The Possessed* – has no place for such social emotions as love, pity, sympathy, or compassion. He is totally insensitive towards innocent people's sufferings. His only problem is how destruction can be made greater. His consistency has no limits. He lives in the fascination of destructive altruism. We respect him as a precursor of the later suicide terrorist of the real world.

Conrad tells us in a preface written later that his novel had some nonfictional basis (an attempt to blow up the Greenwich Observatory, the terrible death of a half-witted man and his sister's suicide all at the end of the 19th century). The writer's decision is that only the "ironic method" is appropriate «the whole treatment of the tale, its inspiring indignation and underlying pity and contempt, prove my detachment from the squalor and sordidness» (Conrad, 1920/1983:9). This is why he changes flexibly and utilizes ambiguously the author's narrative and the protagonists' direct or indirect speech (Hawthorn, 1990). As the omniscient narrator of the story, he outlines the interests of foreign powers, state power and poverty, but only as background factors. He suggests that even the worse circumstances would not cause terrorism in the absence of people who are distorted and committed to destruction, which they usually enjoy.

It seems to me that the idea of a necessary relationship between frustration and terrorism as a specific kind of aggression is far from Conrad's clear viewpoint. In contrast to some noisy opinion leaders who being competent in something, feel competent in everything, I suppose that Conrad would not think it self-obvious that a) aggression is a consequence of frustration, b) aggression is directed against the cause of the frustration, and c) that if one wishes to avoid a repetition of the aggression, one has to stop the frustration. As a matter of fact, all the three statements are totally wrong.

- a) The main hypothesis was advanced than six decades ago (Dollard, Miller et al., 1939). According to this, any occurrence of aggressive behavior is preceded by frustration and vice versa, frustration always leads to aggression. But the hypothesis was modified by the most important co-author even two years later, emphasizing that aggression is only one of the possible responses following frustration (Miller, 1941).
- b) Even if the result is aggression, you cannot predict from frustration how and against whom violence will be realized, or how you can stop it. To declare that a "healthy society" is free from the problems of frustration and aggression, is an empty rhetorical trick. Fromm (1973) is right to point out that you cannot achieve anything important without a

series of frustrations. To be able to endure frustration is an integral part of the human condition. A given degree of suffering together with frustration for one group of people is constructive, while even a lower degree of it can trigger destructive actions with another group. The psychological meaning of frustration, i.e. the relationship to frustration closely depends on the context. An obvious such context is the course of contemporary militant Islam.

- c) Experimental studies verify that hostile and aggressive patterns of behavior are weakened significantly if they cannot reach their goals or will be punished soon (Zilman, 1979). Not only is aggression not a necessary consequence of frustration, but avoiding the repetition of aggressive actions requires the frustrating potential of instigators by punishing them effectively.

Similarly to any other complex literary work, Conrad's novel can be interpreted in a many kinds of way. The degree of freedom enjoyed by an interpreter is relatively great, but it is not limitless. A literary text cannot be considered a projective test. The validity of different interpretations can be investigated when you compare their common points in the text. It is sure that if Kirschner's (1968:81) interpretation, namely, «as an artist, Conrad might well have sympathized with the Professor» is right, then mine is completely wrong. And you may believe, or, even more, you may say, that Conrad's whole text «detaches itself ironically from its own vision» as Eagleton (1996:160) states nevertheless I see no reason to change my view according to which the main characteristic of this text is just how much vision is suffused with irony, forming an inseparable unity. Not because it is in full accordance with Conrad's comment after all the author, too, may judge his work erroneously, but because his text does in fact show this unity. Eagleton's additional statement that «the Professor, who, wired up for instant self-consignment to eternity, is thus a graphic image of the text itself» (ibid. 163) seems to me ridiculously absurd.

One should remember that Conrad's narrator has explicitly spoken about the Professor's sub-conscious conviction which justifies any kind of violent means against the established social order. Even more, the narrator himself has presented some Freudian and Adlerian types of trauma behind the Professor's unconscious motives. As a matter of fact, we can say that they are the secret agents.

I find it rather instructive when Houen (2002:44), following on Michel Serres emphasizes that «the force of a traumatic event is conserved all the more when denied its effects, and keeps on acting long after its occurrence: «We must presume that the physical trauma – or more precisely, the memory of the trauma – acts like a foreign body, which long after its entry must continue to be regarded as an agent that is still at work. The trauma force is indissociable from the vacillation between memory and body that is describe in this passage. The unconscious itself is a secret agent, for the traumatic event already exists as a memory but never ceases to happen again, forming links with other times (...) Freud's and Breuer's early psychoanalytic writings on hysteria and trauma are particularly pertinent to the issue of terrorism at the time – particularly in so far as they posit transferences between the body and mind, violence and terror.»

Unfortunately, this much is not enough for the author. He extends the idea of unconscious to social life as such and speaks of the “political unconscious” which «begins to develop around transferences *between* subjects» (ibid.). I do not, of course, deny that intersubjective relations can generate psychological processes, but solely *in* the subject on the one hand, while the political unconscious is – even if someone finds it an appealing phrase – a nonexisting psychological phenomenon on the other hand.

It is rather remarkable how much not only ideologically directed critics of *bel esprits*, but also terrorists have misinterpreted Conrad. I do not, of course, think of Islamic terrorists, whose favorite readings are, as you must know, somewhat different. Again, Kaczynski, the Unabomber, has emphasized: «A revolutionary movement offers to solve all problems at one stroke and create a whole new world.» This is tantamount to the statement by one of Conrad's characters the Professor: «You

are perfectly determined to make a clean sweep of the whole social creation.» Kaczynski used the name Conrad or Konrad «when checking into hotels». He read Conrad's novels "about the dozenth time", said his family. According to a professor of English, «An extremely resentful person might see the Professor as a kind of revolutionary saint». Another professor said – and I fully agree with him – that the Unabomber «completely misunderstood Conrad». He saw all these people as "scum" (Scanlan, 2001:159-160).

For an ironical person, the given reality loses its validity completely. In a certain sense an ironical person is prophetic as he points out something that is coming but does not know what it will be. He leaves his epoch, his society and takes a stand against them. The future, which is, however, behind him, is hidden for him, says Kierkegaard (1961). No doubt, Conrad's ironical artistic imagination is ahead of life, although even he does not guess how the prototype will be perfected and will burst into blossom the reality, in both the technical and the political respects.

The twenty seconds required for the Professor's bomb on his body to detonate is rather disagreeable for the terrorist surely he is not out of the wood, after all, not to speak of the possibility that the situation will transform detrimentally during precisely this time and that the number of victims could therefore be much smaller than it could have been. But it is a more serious deficiency that the Professor wishes to use his epoch-making invention only in case of his arrest. Yet he has realized that his weapon is good for attack as well. You can choose place, time and destructive force. The Professor – only he or she can throw the first stone at him, who would have behaved differently in his situation – has not, however, taken the measure of the unlimited possibilities, the use of which is a mere issue of true belief, an even truer belief than his. What is Conrad's vision? It is «(...) deadly, like a pest in the street full of men.» Why should a suicide terrorist target a whole bus, even an airliner, and why should he blow up a plane either on the ground or in the air thoughtlessly, when he could direct it against any building he/she judged appropriate? For him/her, there is no greater value than the number of people blown to pieces, at the same time destroying everything that they or similar persons have produced so far.

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# Albert Camus' *The Stranger*: Indifference or the love of life

RAINER J. KAUS (\*)

Albert Camus' novel, *The Stranger*, begins with the scene of someone dying. The hero by the name of Mersault, whose first name is never given, travels to his mother's funeral in Marengo, a small town eighty kilometres from Algiers, where she spent the last years of her life in an old people's home. Because of the heat, the vigil by the body and the funeral take place already one day after his mother's death. Mersault has applied for leave from his boss in Algiers for the funeral service.

His contact with the gatekeeper, the head of the old people's home, the nurses and the mother's friends is from the start strained by unsureness, confusion and the seeds of mistrust caused by the impression of indifference that Mersault communicates. This is announced verbally in conversations with the gatekeeper about Mersault's feelings about his mother. His ambivalent behaviour – «No», «I don't know», «Perhaps» – is a central linguistic marker in the novel. Mersault's monological and dialogical way of speaking is sparse and hermetic.

The protagonist does not defend himself, but says things plainly just as he perceives and feels them. Somewhat like a freely associating patient on the couch, he sticks strictly to Freud's rule of saying everything that occurs to him without paying any regard to morality or social conventions.

This causes him a lot of trouble and arouses prejudices in the social environment. In view of his mother's friends at the vigil by the body, Mersault had «the ridiculous feeling that they were there in order to judge me».<sup>1</sup>

Camus' style varies. At first we find him with a concise, staccato reporting style (like that of Hemingway's, which however applies only to the first part of the novel). Later on, however, he describes yet another sphere of life:

... the pleasures of nature, the enjoyment of bodily states of happiness and the innocent friendly dealings with his own kind. And here, Mersault's mode of expression changes:

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Camus, *The Stranger*, translated from the French by Matthew Ward, New York, 1989, p. 10.

he puts feelings into words, makes associations and expresses satisfaction and joy, and this by no means in dry, linear sentences.<sup>2</sup>

Mersault's behaviour, mood and development are translated literarily by the times a day, especially the evenings when his feelings break out. Thus he describes an evening later on during his imprisonment, which at the same time signifies the evening of his life, when he hears:

Through the expanse of chambers and court rooms an ice cream vendor blowing his tin trumpet out in the street. I was assailed by memories of a life that wasn't mine anymore, but one in which I'd found the simplest and most lasting joys: the smells of summer, the part of town I loved, a certain evening sky, Marie's dresses and the way she laughed. The utter pointlessness of whatever I was doing there seized me by the throat.<sup>3</sup>

Just as Jochen Schimmang described a renaissance of interest in Albert Camus in 1993, so too today, shortly after Camus' ninetieth birthday in 2003, literary interest in this author has been ignited once again. Simultaneously with this renaissance, Schimmang speaks of a renaissance of the Mediterranean world with scenes and stories of light, sun, sea, poverty, solitude, old age and death.<sup>4</sup>

One could therefore

... speak of a 'condition méditerranée' and indeed, such a concept can be traced throughout Camus' oeuvre.... But that does not mean that the 'condition méditerranée' represented paradise, that it is friendly, sweet, harmonious.<sup>5</sup>

A further element that characterizes Mersault is the change of climate, especially the varying degrees of heat. On the day of the funeral it is very hot:

I was looking at the countryside around me. Seeing the rows of cypress trees leading up to the hills next to the sky, and the houses standing out here and there against that red and green earth, I was able to understand Maman better. Evenings in that part of the country must have been a kind of sad relief. But today, with the sun bearing down, making the whole landscape shimmer with heat, it was inhuman and oppressive.<sup>6</sup>

And a bit later on, describing the funeral procession, he writes:

The tar had burst open in the sun. Our feet sank into it, leaving its shiny pulp exposed.... I felt a little lost between the blue and white of the sky and the monotony of the colours around me – the sticky black of the tar, the dull black of all the clothes, and the shiny black of the hearse. All of it... was making it hard for me to see or think straight.<sup>7</sup>

At the funeral, a resident of the old people's home and a friend of Mersault's mother appears, Thomas Perez, who had a close relationship with her, who however loses his way during the funeral and cannot find the funeral procession.

After that, everything seemed to happen so fast, so deliberately, so naturally, that I don't remember any of it anymore.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Brigitte Sändig, *Albert Camus: Eine Einführung in Leben und Werk* (Albert Camus: An Introduction to his Life and Work), Leipzig, 1988, p. 70.

<sup>3</sup> Albert Camus, *The Stranger*, pp. 104f.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Jochen Schimmang, 'Der zärtliche Gleichgültige' (The Tender Indifferent One), in *Merkur*, 1993, No. 531, p. 542.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 544.

<sup>6</sup> Albert Camus, *The Stranger*, p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 16f.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 17.

After the funeral, Mersault drives back straight away to Algiers without spending any considerable time at the grave. He goes immediately to familiar places such as a restaurant with the symbolically meaningful name of Céleste, which means “heavenly” or “the vault of heaven”.

The next day he meets a former office colleague called Marie at a swimming pool where an attraction from earlier on is renewed, and the very same evening they start a relationship. They go to see a film with Fernandel and afterwards go back to Mersault’s place.

On Sunday Mersault wakes up and finds himself alone once again. Like every other Sunday, he is bored and wanders around his apartment a little and indulges in observing life on the streets, how they become empty and fill up once again, how the trams pass by and how suddenly rain threatens.

It occurred to me that anyway one more Sunday was over, that Maman was buried now, that I was going back to work, and that, really, nothing had changed.<sup>9</sup>

The following Monday, Mersault goes back to the office. When his boss asks him how old his mother was, he can only give a vague answer.

In the evening, Mersault speaks with some of the tenants, including Raymond, who invites him to dinner. During the course of the conversation, Mersault’s interest in Raymond increases. Raymond is a pimp, but calls himself a warehouse manager.

During the week, Mersault goes regularly to work in the office and goes to see films several times together with his colleague, Emmanuel. At the weekend, Mersault spends a wonderful, voluptuous day swimming with Marie on the coast outside Algiers, «to a beach with rocks at either end, bordered by shore grass on the land side».<sup>10</sup>

Camus speaks of the deep interweaving of living nature with cosmic nature. In view of the expansive technological developments and extensions of cosmic knowledge in the period after Camus’ death, his view of the ties between humankind and nature gain a new topicality and significance.

Innocence, stone under stones, home – these are all names for that original unity in which humankind as part of itself has become one with itself.... But this unity does not last.<sup>11</sup>

At lunch the next day, Marie asks her boy-friend, Mersault, whether he loves her. He replies:

... that it didn’t mean anything but that I didn’t think so. She looked sad. But as we were fixing lunch, and for no apparent reason, she laughed in such a way that I kissed her.<sup>12</sup>

An elderly tenant in Mersault’s block, Salamano, lives alone with his dog. One evening he knocks on Mersault’s door and tells him a story about his lost dog. Mersault tries to calm him down and tells him to go to the lost dog pound. When he comes back to his flat, Salamano’s bed creaks,

... and from the peculiar little noise coming through the partition, I realized he was crying. For some reason I thought of Maman.<sup>13</sup>

This is a telling example of how Mersault reconstructs feelings and at first does not translate experiences back into emotion.

Raymond calls up Mersault at the office and invites him to come with him to a friend’s who owns a beach house near Algiers. After Mersault’s initial hesitation because of Marie, Raymond says straight away that she is invited too.

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>11</sup> Annemarie Pieper, *Albert Camus*, Munich, 1988, p. 80.

<sup>12</sup> Albert Camus, *The Stranger*, p. 35.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p. 39.

Raymond's call, however, is not without ulterior motives. He asks Mersault to help him because he has been followed for some time by a group of Arabs, including the brother of his former girlfriend.

The same day, Mersault's boss tells him that he wants to open up a branch office in Paris. Mersault is not enthusiastic about it and responds:

I said yes but that really it was all the same to me. Then he asked me if I wasn't interested in a change of life. I said that people never change their lives, that in any case one life was as good as another and that I wasn't dissatisfied with mine here at all.<sup>14</sup>

Offers of a relationship leave Mersault cold. Marie wants to know how Mersault assesses the future of their relationship. In the evening she asks him whether he wants to marry her.

I said it didn't make any difference to me and that we could if she wanted to. Then she wanted to know if I loved her. I answered the same way I had the last time, that it didn't mean anything but that I probably didn't love her. 'So why marry me, then?' she said. I explained to her that it didn't really matter and that if she wanted to, we could get married. Besides, she was the one who was doing the asking and all I was saying was yes. Then she pointed out that marriage was a serious thing. I said, 'No'.<sup>15</sup>

For Mersault, love seems at first to consist purely of lust and sensuousness and the joys of nature.<sup>16</sup> Later on in the novel, however, it becomes clear that many feelings, sensations and fantasies are encapsulated in Mersault's soul and gradually open up during the course of the court proceedings and his imprisonment. Mersault recognizes the hollowness of many conventions.

The relationship between women and men is marked by ideals of masculinity. Camus shows how Marie's efforts to reach Mersault emotionally are constantly threatened by failure.

His descriptions are always of men. It is their lives that are spoken about. Of course, women also occur in this universe, such as Marie in *The Stranger*.... This constant feature of Camus' books should not be read as the expression of a contemptuous attitude towards women; rather it mirrors the basic ineradicable estrangement between the two sexes, a motif that is an integral part of the 'condition méditerranée'. Nothing can be done about it, you just have to get used to it.<sup>17</sup>

On the day of the invitation to the beach house owned by Raymond's friend, Mersault has difficulty waking up and felt empty. Marie has to wake him and noticed that he had a downright "funeral face".<sup>18</sup> She makes fun of him. The bright sunlight hits him like a "slap in the face".<sup>19</sup> Marie, by contrast, enjoys the fine weather.

At the beach house, the group of Arabs does not at first pursue Raymond as he had feared.

They were staring at us in silence, but in that way of theirs, as if we were nothing but stones or dead trees.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 41f.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Margot Fleischer, *Zwei Absurde: "Caligula" und "Der Fremde"* (Two Absurd Characters: "Caligula" and "The Stranger"), Würzburg, 1998, p. 70.

<sup>17</sup> Jochen Schimmang, 'Der zärtliche Gleichgültige' (The Tender Indifferent One), *op. cit.*, p. 544; and cf. Niklaus Meienberg and Michael von Graffenried, 'Im Strudel von Algier' (In the Maelstrom of Algiers), in *du*, 1992, No. 6, p. 75.

<sup>18</sup> Albert Camus, *The Stranger*, p. 47.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p. 48.

Mersault experiences his feelings mediated by others when Raymond's friend, Masson, says that he spends all his days off with his wife. He says he gets on well with her.

Just then his wife was laughing with Marie. For the first time maybe, I really thought I was going to get married.<sup>21</sup>

Mersault feels that the sun is doing him good and he enjoys swimming together with Marie. Only via nature, the sun and the landscape does Mersault gain contact with himself. In this way he can have empathy with someone close to him.

After lunch, the two women stay back to wash up, while the three men go to the beach.

The sun was shining almost directly overhead onto the sand, and the glare on the water was unbearable. There was no one left on the beach.... I wasn't thinking about anything, because I was half asleep from the sun beating down on my bare head.<sup>22</sup>

Suddenly, two Arabs in boiler suits show up. Raymond conceives of a fighting strategy for the three of them in case a fight breaks out. Mersault experiences the sun as becoming more and more threatening.

The blazing sand looked red to me now.<sup>23</sup>

And a bit later on:

By now the sun was overpowering. It shattered into little pieces on the sand and water.<sup>24</sup>

After Raymond is injured, he gives his revolver to Mersault who, however, says calmly:

«He hasn't said anything yet. It'd be pretty lousy to shoot him like that.»<sup>25</sup>

When the Arab pulls his knife, he'll let him have it. After Raymond has given his revolver to Mersault, both sides act calmly but tensely:

We stared at each other without blinking and everything came to a stop there between the sea, the sand and the sun... It was then that I realized that you could either shoot or not shoot.<sup>26</sup>

After the Arabs have withdrawn, Mersault returns with Raymond who seems to be relieved and hopeful, in stark contrast to Mersault who, with his head heated by the sun, feels indecisive about either talking to the women or going back to the beach.

At the beach once again he was at first alone. In search of a cooling spring, after a while he comes upon Raymond's guy who looks as if he were laughing. For Mersault time seemed to be standing still. The burning sun gripped his forehead, his cheeks, his entire face, and everything began to totter. He thinks that he can only get out of the sun by going forward. It is a single step that changes his destiny.

The Arab, who does not have a name in the novel, shows Mersault his knife which glints in the sun. Sweat streams over Mersault's eyes. Instinctively, he grasps the revolver with his hand whose trigger gives way almost automatically.

I shook off the sweat and sun. I knew that I had shattered the harmony of the day, the exceptional silence of a beach where I'd been happy. Then I fired four more times at the

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<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 52f.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

motionless body where the bullets lodged without leaving a trace. And it was like knocking four quick times on the door of unhappiness.<sup>27</sup>

Mersault is arrested and questioned several times during which he repeatedly emphasizes that he did not want an official defence lawyer. The court then assigns an obligatory defence lawyer to him who is young and inexperienced.

The entire prosecution gradually shifts from the act of murder proper to the infringement of social norms by virtue of Mersault's indifference to his mother's death. The lawyer visits him and tries to explain the information gathered by the magistrate about his cold behaviour at the death of his mother. Mersault does not give an answer satisfactory to the lawyer:

I explained to him, however, that my nature was such that my physical needs often got in the way of my feelings. The day I buried Maman, I was very tired and sleepy, so much so that I wasn't really aware of what was going on. What I can say for certain is that I would rather Maman hadn't died. But my lawyer didn't seem satisfied. He said, 'That's not enough'.<sup>28</sup>

Biographically it is known of Camus that his mother was hard of hearing, that she did not speak French and that, after the death of his father and because of a traumatic shock, she could not speak at all for a long time. For this reason, she could only care for her son materially, not emotionally.<sup>29</sup>

The court case takes its course. All the witnesses are heard: the head of the old people's home, the gatekeeper, the mother's friend, Thomas Perez, Céleste, Marie, Masson, Salamano and Raymond. All the evidence that speaks in favour of Mersault as a normal person who only got into this situation by accident or through unhappy circumstances is later reinterpreted by the state prosecutor as premeditated murder of an Arab without remorse, guilt feelings or human empathy.<sup>30</sup>

Mersault does something without this action proceeding from a self.<sup>31</sup>

In this question, Camus' recourse to the ancient concept of tragedy plays a central role for understanding.<sup>32</sup> In the ancient tragedy, the hero often does not know that through his actions he becomes entangled in guilt. As representative for this state of affairs, a statement from Sophocles' *Oedipus* is alluded to for clarification:

But the deeds I did  
Were more suffered than done by me...  
I did nothing through my own will!...  
Did without awareness and without guilt according to law, ...  
What I did involuntarily.

The concept of guilt and its cause cannot be solved on the level of rational language. During the court proceedings, Mersault himself gives the blame for his actions to the sun. Annemarie Pieper speaks of a guilt

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<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Brigitte Sändig, *Albert Camus*, pp. 9ff.; and Marie-Laure Wieacker-Wolff, *Albert Camus*, Munich, 2003, p. 35.

<sup>30</sup> Margot Fleischer remarks regarding the Mersault's normality: "Camus shapes the novel's theme around a figure who is situated very much in the realm of average human being and in so doing he says that what happened to Mersault could happen to anybody and that anybody could become a person like Mersault. Margot Fleischer, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Wolfgang Schadewaldt, *Antike und Gegenwart: Über die Tragödie* (Antiquity and the Present: On Tragedy), Munich, 1966, in particular the article 'Hölderlins Übersetzung des Sophokles' (Hölderlin's Translation of Sophocles, 1956), pp. 113-174.

... of which he is not conscious, which he thus cannot acknowledge as such and which he therefore feels justified in repudiating.<sup>33,34</sup>

Guido Rings underscores the absence of the cognitive component:

With the killing of the Arab, the cognitive component is missing and this is exemplary for most of Mersault's actions and reactions in the first part of the novel. His behaviour runs here according to the classical conditioning schema of behaviourism: exclusively in observable chains of stimulus and response.<sup>35</sup>

In the end, Mersault is no longer driven by simple stimulus-response mechanisms, but has more introspection and empathy than before.

In the essay 'Absurdity and Epic as an Aesthetic Problem in Camus' *Stranger*', A. Noyer-Weidner makes a comparable finding with respect to the development of the text.<sup>36</sup> The author describes a change in style which initially follows a behaviourist mode of writing oriented toward the American novel,<sup>37</sup> but in the second part tends toward an increasingly reflective manner of perception. In the beginning, the staccato-like sequence of events is made apparent mainly by the *passé composé*. Life is described as a sequence of individual acts not recognizable as sensible.

In his book *Tense. Discussed and Narrated World*, however, Harald Weinrich points out that when interpreting the novel one should not allow oneself to be misled by the concentration of *passé composé* to overlook other modes and times of narration.

Two forms of narration run in parallel and partially interpenetrate each other. Already the beginning of the novel does not narrate in the *passé composé* as the principal tense, but in the present as the main tense (...)<sup>38</sup>

With regard to the overall design of *L'Étranger* it cannot be overemphasized that Camus is an early precursor of the *nouveau roman* (e.g. Alain Robbe-Grillet) which is apparent above all in the sparse use of metaphors.

Some authors try to argue for Camus' interest in Kafka<sup>39</sup> by pointing to the change in the working notes for *L'Étranger* after he read Kafka's *Trial* as an important landmark in his development.

The comparison of Kafka's *Der Prozess* with Camus' *L'Étranger* is specifically justified. Camus was rewording his novel, he was keenly interested in Kafka. According to a letter from Camus, he read Kafka's *Der Prozess* in 1938. This is also the year that he reassembled his notes and began to work on the composition of *L'Étranger*.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Annemarie Pieper, *op. cit.*, p. 82

<sup>34</sup> Cf. regarding the problematic of guilt Rainer J. Kaus, *Kafka und Freud: Schuld in den Augen des Dichters und Analytikers* (Kafka and Freud: Guilt in the Eyes of the Poet and the Analyst), Heidelberg, 2000.

<sup>35</sup> Guido Rings, 'Der Konditionierte Fremde: Anmerkungen zu Selbst- und Fremdbetrachtungen in Camus' *L'Étranger* (The Conditioned Stranger: Remarks on Observations of the Self and Others in Camus' *L'Étranger*), in *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift*, Vol. 50, Heidelberg, 2000, p. 489.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Der Fremde von Camus', in *Der Mensch und die Dinge: Aufsätze zur Literatur 1938-1946* (Humans and Things: Essays on Literature 1938-1946), Reinbeck b. Hamburg, 1978, first publication of article in 1943, pp. 75-90.

<sup>37</sup> A. Noyer-Weidner, 'Absurdität und Epik als ästhetisches Problem in Albert Camus' *Etranger*', in *Annales Universitatis Saraviensis*, Vol. X, 1961, pp. 257-295.

<sup>38</sup> Harald Weinrich, 'Albert Camus: *L'Étranger*', in *Tempus. Besprochene und erzählte Zeit*, Stuttgart, 1964, p. 266.

<sup>39</sup> Albert Camus, 'Die Hoffnung und das Absurde im Werk von Franz Kafka' (Hope and Absurdity in Franz Kafka's Work), in his *Der Mythos von Sisyphos* (The Myth of Sisyphos), Düsseldorf, 1959, first published in 1943, pp. 102-112.

<sup>40</sup> Philip H. Rhein, *The Urge to live: A Comparative Study of Franz Kafka's Der Prozess and Albert Camus' L'Étranger*, University of North Carolina, 1964, p. 1.

This thought seems interesting, but can hardly be regarded as establishing an identity of structure. Kafka's style is not mirrored one-to-one in Camus' novel.

The magistrate has Mersault relate once again the course of events on the day of the Arab's murder:

I went back over what I had already told him: Raymond, the beach, the swim, the quarrel, then back to the beach, the little spring, the sun, and the five shots from the revolver.<sup>41</sup>

The magistrate promises to support Mersault with God's help.

Without working up to it, he asked if I loved Maman. I said, 'Yes, the same as anyone.'<sup>42</sup>

The magistrate also wants to know whether Mersault fired the five shots all at once and then why he paused between the first shot and the other four.

Once again I could see the red sand and feel the burning of the sun on my forehead. But this time I didn't answer.<sup>43</sup>

The magistrate is taken aback by the four further senseless shots into the Arab's lifeless body. Mersault does not respond and the magistrate seeks refuge with God. He shows him a silver crucifix which is supposed to elicit his respect and fear. But Mersault says quite openly that he does not believe in God. The magistrate is appalled and confesses that with this statement his own life has become senseless. Mersault remarks:

It was getting hotter and hotter. As always, whenever I want to get rid of someone I'm not really listening to, I made it appear as if I agreed.<sup>44</sup>

The investigation lasts eleven months. The magistrate takes his leave by alluding to Nietzsche when he says, "That's all for today, Monsieur Antichrist".<sup>45</sup>

At the beginning of his imprisonment, the hardest thing for Mersault was

... that my thoughts were still those of a free man. For example, I would certainly have the urge to be on a beach and to walk down to the water.<sup>46</sup>

He also thinks more often of women:

I never thought specifically of Marie. But I thought so much about a woman, about women, about all the ones I had known, about all the circumstances in which I had enjoyed them, that my cell would be filled with their faces and crowded with my desires.<sup>47</sup>

The head guard calls his attention to the fact that all prisoners feel this way and that that, the loss of freedom, was the real punishment.

Apart from these annoyances, I wasn't too unhappy. Once again the main problem was killing time. Eventually, once I learned how to remember things, I wasn't bored at all... I realized then that a man who had lived only one day could easily lived for a hundred years in prison. He would have enough memories to keep him from being bored. In a way, it was an advantage.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Albert Camus, *The Stranger*, p. 67.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 78f.

In prison, the rigidification of Mersault's soul transforms from the formerly emotionally encapsulated soul of an autistic human being into that of someone who was emotionally differentiated right down to the smallest nuances. His imaginary journeys become longer and longer.

I would remember every piece of furniture; and on every piece of furniture, every object; and of every object, all the details; and of the details themselves – a flake, a crack, or a chipped edge – the colour and the texture.<sup>49</sup>

In prison Mersault wakes up emotionally agitated and the blockage to his memory is removed.

In a completely unexpected place in his cell between “my straw mattress and the bed planks”<sup>50</sup>, Mersault finds an old, yellowed scrap of newspaper that relates the story of a Czechoslovakian which he had probably read a thousand times.

A young man from the country sets out “to seek his fortune”<sup>51</sup>. Twenty-five years later, and now rich, he returns with his wife and child. To surprise his mother and sister who run a small hotel, he books a room as a stranger. He regards this as a joke. During the night, his mother and daughter rob him and beat him to death with a hammer. In the morning his wife reveals his identity. The mother and daughter then commit suicide.

This story is a preview sketch of the play, *The Misunderstanding*, that was written only four years later in 1944.<sup>52</sup> The striking thing about this story is that the mother does not recognize her son. Here too, silence reigns between mother and son. The story also says something about Mersault, even though he cannot yet speak about himself.

In prison he goes through the various stages of isolation and loss of reality and everyday liveliness which leads increasingly to monologues.

For the first time in months, I distinctly heard the sound of my own voice.<sup>53</sup>

During the final session of the court with the sentencing which lasts until the afternoon, it gradually becomes evening.

Meanwhile, the sun was getting low outside and it wasn't as hot anymore. From what street noises I could hear, I sensed the sweetness of evening coming on.<sup>54</sup>

The jurors withdraw and return to the courtroom with their verdict. During the sentencing, Mersault does not dare to look at Marie.

I didn't look in Marie's direction. I didn't have time to, because the presiding judge told me in bizarre language that I was to have my head cut off in a public square in the name of the French people.<sup>55</sup>

In the period between the sentencing and execution, he thinks about many things. Only gradually does his final death penetrate Mersault's conscious awareness. On the one hand, he still hopes for mercy, but on the other, there is the image of the guillotine which signifies finality:

I'd been struck by this picture because the guillotine looked like such a precision instrument, perfect and gleaming.... Mounting the scaffold, going right up into the sky, was

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<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Albert Camus, *Dramen: Das Mißverständnis* (Dramas: The Misunderstanding), Hamburg, 1989, pp. 75-116.

<sup>53</sup> Albert Camus, *The Stranger*, p. 81.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*, p. 107.

something the imagination could hold on to. Whereas, once again, the machine destroyed everything: you were killed discreetly, with a little shame and with great precision.<sup>56</sup>

His plea for mercy is refused. For the first time, Mersault thinks of Marie. And, when the prison chaplain calls on him to look at the face of God, he sees instead Marie's face.

But the face I was looking for was as bright as the sun and the flame of desire – and it belonged to Marie.<sup>57</sup>

After the prison chaplain goes away, Mersault finds peace on his bunk. He wakes up and thinks that he has been awoken by the stars on his face. Country noises and odours overwhelm him. At that moment, “in the dark hour before dawn”<sup>58</sup>, sirens howl.

Once again he recalls his mother and realizes that he could understand her. Purified and emptied of hope, in this night,

... alive with signs and stars, I opened myself to the gentle indifference of the world.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*

# Excessive suspension of disbelief: Raymond Jean's *La Lectrice*

SHERRY LUTZ ZIVLEY (\*)

When I begin a class in fiction or poetry, I always talk for a few minutes about the various purposes of literature: escape, didactic, and interpretive. I tell my students that escape literature is a wonderful way to forget our problems for a while (less dangerous than drugs, alcohol, careless sex, or driving), but that escape literature can be harmful if one expects one's personal life to be as exciting, successful, or romantic as that in escape fiction. As Meg Ryan's friend says to her in *Sleepless in Seattle*, «You don't want to be in love. You want to be in love in a movie.» Thus my title, “Excessive Suspension...”.

In *The Literary Work of Art* (1931, trans. 1965), Roman Ingarden analyses the layers of meaning he believes exist within a work of fiction. His theories were popularized by Rene Wellek in *Theory of Literature* (Wellek and Warren. Ingarden identifies four stratum).

The first is the sound stratum, which he defines as «the stratum of word sounds and phonetic formations of various orders»; the second is “the stratum of units of meaning of various orders and phonetic formations of various orders”; the third includes objects represented in the “world” of the novelist, which he defines as “the stratum of manifold schematized *aspects* and aspect continua and series” (*Lit. Work of Art*, 30); and the fourth includes the stratum of represented objectivities and their vicissitudes» or the world as it «is seen from a particular viewpoint». As Ingarden complains in his preface to his second edition, Wellek had erroneously added a fifth layer, that of metaphysical qualities, which include «the tragic, the terrible, [and] the holy». Ingarden argues that this stratum is not inherent in the literary work but may be experienced in the minds of some readers.

Then in 1936 in *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art* (trans. 1973), Ingarden attempts to analyze the reader's experience while reading. The first two layers match those he found within a literary work itself: written signs and verbal sounds. He assumes that as a reader sees words on a page, his or her subsequent response is to *hear* the sound of the word, an assumption that would only be true of oral readers. But on seeing the words, most readers would then decode the meaning

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of the words. Ingarden does recognize, as do reader-response critics that various people respond to a work in quite different ways. But most of Ingarden's work analyzes the philosophical nature of the reading experience, rather than the experience itself.

My own conclusion is that there are more possible levels of experiences at which a reader can experience a literary work.

Of the phenomenological levels at which readers can experience the literary work, three are essential and each level is dependent on the reader's integrating the previous levels. Both Raymond Jean [Kermer]'s novel *La Lectrice* and Michel Deville's film, which was based on it, show characters experiencing nearly all of these levels.

The first level is a confrontation with the words, by seeing them as marks on the page, by hearing them as merely sound as one is read to, or by touching them using braille and merely feeling dots. At this level one may not be able to read them or understand. At this level, infants may first hear a Mother Goose story and be only able to recognize sound, and perhaps rhythm and rhyme. At this level I recently listened to Vietnamese poetry. In *La Lectrice*, all of the listeners focus and comment on the sound of the lectrice's voice, including the husband in the frame story, who says, «You read very well... You have a very pretty voice.»

The second level involves recognizing the words as units of meaning and being able to decode the words and the sentences they comprise. We've all watched the delight of a young child who is beginning to learn to read, who, as you drive through town, will repeat "Stop" at every single stop sign or "Coke" at every Coke ad. In *La Lectrice*, Eric's response is reduced to this level of decoding when the lectrice asks him if he knows the meaning of "marquetry" and when he asks her «What is the fleece?»

The third level goes beyond decoding individual words and sentences. It involves mentally perceiving the person, object, or action that is represented by a word or phrase. When one hears or reads the word "cat", one mentally pictures a cat. At this level the reader recognizes what the words and sentences signify, but perceives only that which is specified. When one read «See Jane. See Jane run», one "sees" Jane and the running, but may not think of Jane's surroundings or world. All of the lectrice's listeners respond at this level.

These first three levels are the ones by which we learn about words and how to read when we are children and the ones by which we learn to access a foreign language. These three steps are essential to one's being able to read and understand a text.

The fourth level involves filling in or constructing the *whole* picture of Jane running – on a sidewalk, by the grass, in front of a white house, etc. (When I talk to my students about this level I say, «A cat ran up the tree» and then ask several of them the size and color of the cat, the kind of tree, etc. Their answers vary greatly because they have filled in different worlds around the cat. At this level, the reader's experience is like looking through a window at a scene or incident. One sees all that is going on, but one doesn't participate in it emotionally. It is our personal filling in – and usually a vivid filling in – that we do when we read a novel that leads us to be so disappointed when we see a movie based on a novel we have read. In *La Lectrice*, when Françoise reads the story of the man and wife who visit the street of the prostitutes to the lectrice, the lectrice fills in unnarrated details of the setting and envisions Eric's mother as the wife.

Going beyond seeing and filling in that world is the reader's actual "experiencing" of that world. One feels the emotions, excitement, suspense, joy, and sadness of the characters; one feels that one is *living* in the world depicted in the novel, perhaps as one of the characters. This is like the experience John Barth describes of going *through* the pages of *The Arabian Nights* into the world of the Arabian Nights. At this level we even cry or scream in terror. We all know the experience of being startled at the end of a film when the lights go on and discovering we *aren't* still in Casablanca. And even the wisest among us has sometimes, as the lights go on in a theater at the end of a particularly engaging film, been briefly shocked to experience ourselves as *merely* ourselves again, after having so totally identified emotionally with one of the characters on the

screen. In *La Lectrice*, the degree to which a story can engross us is shown when the businessman, whose total focus has been in having sex with the lectrice's, uses the lectrice's bare buttocks as a book rest and continues to read, valorizing the reading experience over the real life experience and then lies there continuing to read after the lectrice has moved to the other side of the room. Likewise at the carnival, the lectrice gives her attention to reading rather than to the ride she is on.

There is a sixth level of perceiving the literary work that is not a part of this natural progression: it is what many of us spend our careers doing – analyzing and interpreting a literary work.

But occasionally, after reading or seeing a work of fiction, we remain in that fictional or cinematic world long after the book is closed or the theatre lights go on. I have to admit that I refused to take a shower or even a bath for several days after seeing *Psycho*: At first I could only take a sponge bath in the sink. Then I could only sit in the bathtub and bathe, but I couldn't draw the shower curtain or turn the shower on. That experience of remaining in the fictional world after the book is closed is what interests me about the film *La Lectrice*.

Today, I am interested in what can be the dangers of *believing* in escape fiction, because each of us has experienced, even if only as naive children, a response that goes far beyond any reasonable "suspension of disbelief" or "reasonable response" to a work of literature. It is the experience of a little girl who, after having had Cinderella read to her or after seeing the film, believes that she has become Cinderella, dressing up like Cindy and acting out Cindy's life. Little boys may become Spider Man or a Ninja Turtle or Harry Potter. This excessive suspension of disbelief is demonstrated vividly in Raymond Jean's *La Lectrice*. In *La Lectrice*, the heroine begins to read aloud to her husband, Phillippe. She reads a novel, also entitled *La Lectrice*, and notices that she and the heroine share certain qualities.

In the embedded novel, Marie-Constance decides to become a professional reader who reads aloud to individuals who cannot or do not want to read to themselves. Each of these people's lives is in some way incomplete or unfulfilled. Each of these characters has an almost desperate *need* to experience the written word. The lectrice's first customer/listener is a young adolescent boy who is confined to his wheelchair and his home with an overly protective mother. He yearns to hear of wider experience and symbolically gives most of what he hears sexual implications. He even wants to get a cat after reading Baudelaire's "Les Chats". The second listener is an elderly, bedridden, Hungarian expatriot whose life revolved around the communist revolution. To re-experience the excitement of her youth, she hungers to hear the works of Marx and Lenin. Showing that she has merged her memories of own history with what she has read, she recounts an episode about the belle of an aristocratic ball from *War and Peace* as if she had experienced it herself. Other listeners include a stressed-out, sex-deprived businessman, a child, Chlorinde, whose mother works, and an elderly lecher who wants to hear pornography.

In each case, hearing what they are interested in read to them not only amuses them, but effects their lives after the reading session is over. The young adolescent experiences sexual arousal in the presence of the lectrice, the elderly aristocrat gets up from her bed, dresses, and even goes out and participates in street protest. The businessman has sex with the lectrice. And the lectrice takes the little girl out of the house to enjoy a nearby street carnival.

It is particularly interesting that the lectrice, who has no initial interest in communism, revolutionaries, and sex with strangers, begins acting out with her listeners whatever their fantasies are. At first she had been a mere conduit of the reading process, but she begins to act out in real life the activities about which she has been reading. She pulls up her skirt for Eric, joins Madame la General in the protest in the street, has sex with the businessman, and takes the little girl, Chlorinde, on an adventure outdoors after reading of Alice's outdoor adventures in Wonderland. Even people associated with the person read to are changed. Eric's mother buys him a book of love poems, Chlorinde's mother lets her wear her jewelry, and Madame Generale's maid begins to sunbathe and dress prettily, gets rid of her spiders, and leaves Arles to travel.

In each case, not only is the reader's real life changed by the reading experience, but so is the lectrice's life, because she shares their real-life adventures with them. But she refuses some experiences. In both the novel and the film, she had read some pornographic De Sade to the old judge. But when she returns a second time and finds that she is expected to read to him and some of his friends, she refuses to read, because to do so would be to participate in their lechery. In the novel, that episode leads her to decide to give up reading and again become unemployed.

The film emphasizes that constructing one's life on the basis of a fictional world not only effects the lectrice in the embedded novel, it also effects the life of the woman in the frame who is reading the embedded novel to her husband. When she has read the last page of the novel she decides that she *herself* will become a lectrice. She says,

I read very well. I have a lovely voice. I'm going to place an ad. Many people can't read – those who are too old, too young, too sad, or too lonely. I'm not through yet!

Thus the frame story of the film emphasizes that one's life is inevitably changed by what one reads. And the implication of the frame story is that we, who see the film, *La LECTRICE*, will likewise be changed by the viewing of it. The story suggests that «You are what you read». And as much as I enjoy *La LECTRICE*, as pure entertainment, I think I must also recognize that it is a deadly serious cautionary tale. The novel may lead us to think about the fiction each of us as individuals read and view and how those fictions shape us. *La LECTRICE* is a testimony to the power a written text may have – that even a single reading experience may permanently change a reader's life.

But, most of all, *La LECTRICE* is great fun. But, as the policeman cautions the lectrice, «Reading is fine, but look where it leads. When you read a book, anything can happen.»

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## **IN HIS OWN NAME: Jack Kerouac's *Satori in Paris* and my travels to Paris and Provence**

DONALD VANOUSE (\*)

After the publication of *On the Road* in 1957, Jack Kerouac became recognized as a leading voice in the Beat Movement, which included, among others, Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Gary Snyder. *On the Road* presents the adventures of a group of young Americans traveling across the North American continent, exploring sensations and seeking to define their spiritual and cultural aspirations. At the end of the narrative, Sal Paradise, Kerouac's persona in the autobiographical novel, reflects upon their journey, and he identifies a goal which was not achieved: «I think of Old Dean Moriarty the Father we never found» (310). In *Satori in Paris* (1966), Kerouac's quest for the father is at the center of the narrative. This work is a memoir about his search for the origins of his father's family name in Brittany. Throughout the memoir, he refers to himself as "Jean Louis Lebris de Kerouac". This is not the name printed on his passport, but it identifies his Breton heritage and his membership in a French Canadian family.

My interest in *Satori in Paris* intensified during the weird period of rage in the United States after Jacques Chirac had refused to support the Bush-Cheney invasion of Iraq. French wines vanished from the racks at my liquor store. The clerk explained to me that the «distributor was not sending them». At about the same time, on the menu at a local restaurant, someone had crossed-out the word "French" and substituted "FREEDOM" to describe the fried potatoes. Of course, there also were numerous vague, negative comments on "Old Europe" on the television news reports. My own surname derives from France, and I felt culturally displaced, oddly threatened, by the projections of rage upon a group of despised others for whom I felt sympathy and a kind of kinship. I thought Kerouac's *Satori in Paris* might provide a space to glimpse of my own «profoundly unconscious instantiation of the self into the object world» during my travel in France (Bollas, *Being* 13) and, therefore, to clarify the cultural and personal investments in France which contributed to my feelings of estrangement and even danger during the period of American rage. In addition, of course, such an inquiry promised to clarify some of my psychological strategies as a reader.

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In June of 1965, Kerouac flew to Paris on the first step of a European journey in which he planned to include Brittany, St. Malo, London, Cornwall, and Amsterdam (*Letters*, 400). Perhaps it is significant as a cross-language pun that this mother-haunted traveler gets no farther than Brest. Kerouac's quest romance itself is fretted with comic digressions and missed connections. In fact, throughout the memoir, Kerouac debunks his pretensions to heraldic nobility and he reports numerous instances of his farcical "foreign" behavior in restaurants, bars and train stations. Furthermore, although he repeatedly affirms that an awareness-enhancing "satori" has taken place, the moment of this "sudden illumination" or "kick in the eye" is uncertain. In discussing at least eight different occasions, he speculates that this moment might have provided his satori (See: 7-8, 10, 65, for example).

Kerouac is the first of his family in 210 years to return (or to nearly return) to the place of patriarchal origins. Throughout the memoir, he describes himself as lonely, even as «the loneliest man in Paris» (12), and perhaps such a quest is importantly a desire for companionship. At some times, he depicts himself as a little boy with glamorous fantasies concerning his family's nobility. In several playful passages, the 43 year-old Kerouac even refers to himself as "Le Petit Prince" returning to Brittany (54, 114). He also refers to himself, at one point, as little "Ti Jean," the name of the child who encounters apocalyptic, Jansenist spiritual danger in the novel, *Doctor Sax* (Giampo, 54). In *Satori in Paris*, Kerouac refers to himself as "Little Ti Jean" when he arrives in Brittany and feels that he is being watched by his «father's ghost... [because] he and all his brothers and uncles and their fathers had all longed to go» to the place of their family origins (74-5). This seems to be precisely the sense of the term "ghost" that Christopher Bollas proposes: «the feeling of being inhabited by our history and its objects» (*Being*, 61). Kerouac does not uncover any listing of the names of the officers in Montcalm's Army of 1756, and he doesn't seem to know his Breton progenitor's full name, but he does experience the presence of the objects of his own emotional life.

I had been briefly in Paris twice before my journey to *Aix-en-Provence* for a conference, so stopping for a night near the *Gare du Nord* on my way provided a literal returning. I had reserved a room at the hotel where, with my wife and son, I had stayed for a long weekend the previous summer. This time I was alone. There were few American air-travelers that summer because of fears following Reagan's bombing of Libya. Upon my arrival, I had been anxious when I saw soldiers with Uzis standing guard in the airport, but my taxi ride to the city provided a glimpse of the sunlit dome of *La Basilique du Sacre Coeur*, and soon the sights of Paris had distracted me from my self-condemnations for risk-taking stupidity.

Kerouac says that he came to France «to do nothing but walk and eat» (40). He drinks much more than he eats, however, and his descriptions of his walks include more expressions of resentment at being given bad directions and fear of being mugged than there are expressions of delight in the streets of Paris. When I went for a walk, I passed by two young men talking intensely and pointing down the street. One of them stopped me, asking, «Excusez moi, parlez vous Anglais?» «Mais, oui, I do», I answered. I soon learned that one of the young men, Andy, was an Englishman on his way to Algeria. He couldn't speak French, and he couldn't find his hotel. The other young man, Jean, was a Parisian who didn't speak English. In spite of the limitations in my grammar and vocabulary, I became their translator. When the location of Andy's hotel was established, we sat at a café table, and I translated our conversation. «Vous etes un professeur de Anglais», Jean said, «mais aussie un professeur de Français.» It was a giddy moment of welcome to Paris. Kerouac, a native speaker of the French dialect of Quebec, delights in demonstrating his archaic, provincial fluency and in seeing that he is understood by the people of France. I felt rather like a trusting, ignorant, helpful, American con man.

Later, I continued my walk in the familiar, foreign neighborhood, passed the corner café where we had lunched the year before and came upon a vista of rather grim little shops. One bistro with a few teetering tables and chairs had a paint-chipped sign "*Etoile du Nord*". It was a preposterous, mocking restatement of the motto on the flag of the State of Minnesota where I had grown up. In

fact, in that world of Scandinavians, the motto on the flag had seemed in my childhood to assert some French precedence, some affirmation of belonging that was too good to speak, better even than the Voyageur resonance of the St. Croix River. Here, in Paris, the steadfast heraldry of “*Etoile du Nord*” was simply the name of an embarrassingly grungy bistro. In this instance, moving closer to a dimly perceived cultural heritage provided a challenge to a sheltered narcissism.

Throughout his memoir, Kerouac comments on issues of language and philology. He insists that his Canadian French has a historical authenticity that gives it greater legitimacy than the historically transformed pronunciations of Parisian French, and he proposes numerous philological speculations concerning his name. The philology leads him from Brittany to dim Celtic connections, to Cornwall, Carnac, Wales, Ireland, and Scotland, and in one rhapsodic and comic passage to affirmations of ancient genealogical connections to Russia, “outa” Mongolia, Siberia, and “Perish-the-Thought Persia” (25). Gerald Nicosia says that Kerouac begins with the «professed goal of distinguishing himself», but he ends by «learning that he belongs to the family of man» (661).

Searching in the libraries of Paris, Kerouac looks in vain for his baronial ancestors in the records of *La Bibliothéque National*, in the manuscripts of the French National Archives, and, finally, even in the *Bibliothéque Mazarine*. After leaving the *Mazarine*, he concludes, «nothing happened there either except the old lady librarian winked at me, gave me her name (Madame Oury), and told me to write her any time» (53).

Like Kerouac, I found something exasperating or even humiliating about not knowing the source of my own name when people in France raised the question. No doubt such experiences helped me to identify with Kerouac in his quest, which was “noble”, he says, «in the sense of hopeless, noble try» (52).

Among those who asked me, «Where in France did your father’s family come from?» the most persistent was Genevieve, who sat next to me on the train from Marseilles to Paris and talked about Surrealist works in Wallace Fowlie’s dual-language edition of twentieth century French poetry which I was reading. Genevieve was employed to bring cultural events from Paris to the provinces. I felt that she probably had strong opinions concerning which regions in France had the greatest histories of taste and sensitivity. «But where do you *think* they might have come from?» she pursued the issue. I had no answer. I felt like one of the historically myopic Americans in Gertrude Stein’s *The Making of Americans*, people who only need to «realize our parents» and «remember our grandparents» and «know ourselves and our history is complete» (1228). I could only sputter to Genevieve that the “Van” suggested to me some place in the North, near Holland. Subsequently, I received an e-mail message – from a very distant, unknown cousin – informing me that, if I could provide the names of my grandparents, I could learn the history of our family’s diaspora. So much for Gertrude Stein’s scoffing. I learned that the ancestor who emigrated from France, Francois Noel Vanasse, was born in St. Maclou, Rouen in 1642, and his father was named Paul. (My own son, Paul, is the first with that *prenom* in our branch of the family in over 300 years.) The gift of this genealogical data has rescued me from the discomfort of my earlier ignorance, and it has provided a mysterious historical weight to my sense of kinship with France.

Kerouac’s reports of over-indulgence in beer and cognac seem to express his out-of-control oral anxieties. At one point, providing a glimpse of his dismay at his cultural and personal dislocations, he indicts himself with a long, scoffing catalogue of self-abnegations:

THIS COWARDLY BRETON (ME) WATERED DOWN BY two centuries in Canada and America... this Kerouac who would be laughed at in Prince of Wales Land because he cant even hunt, or fish, or fight a beef for his fathers, this boastful, this prune, this rage and rake and rack of lacks, “this trunk of humors” as Shakespeare said of Falstaff, this false staff not even a prophet let alone a knight, this fear of death tumor with tumescences in the bathroom, this runaway slave of football fields, ... this yeller in Paris saloons and mum in Breton fogs... this tester of men’s patience and ladies panties.... This, in short, scared and humbled dumbhead loudmouth with the shits descendent of man (77-8).

Such extravagant scoffing at his history and himself disarms my critical distance and seems to deflate the demands of my superego. The poetic devices, such as rime and parallelism, provide pleasure by demonstrating a kind of verbal power even in this expression of abjection. According to Freud, jokes provide openings to the shared world of the unconscious. This passage does not occur within the social structure which Freud discusses: a speaker of the joke, a listener, and a butt to the joke (100). The speaker and the victim are the same in Kerouac's memoir. It seems to me, however, that the reader experiences pleasure in the breaking down of inhibitions concerning the shared world of desires and anxieties. Norman Holland, following Freud in discussing literary "affect", states that the «joke technique "evades"... ordinary inhibitions, allowing sexual or aggressive impulses sudden expression» (*Dynamics*, 284). Kerouac's humor liberates the reader by providing a verbal jazz riff of free association in which this pretender to an aristocratic lineage rejoins the egalitarian world through acknowledging that his fears, desires, and the burdens of his body are not the stuff of Celtic legends.

There is also a series of jokes concerning his relationship to Christian *caritas*. Upon first arriving in Paris, Kerouac visits the St. Louis de France Church on the island in the Seine because it has the same NAME as the Church in Lowell, Massachusetts where he was baptized. He is

... watching the guys in red coats blow long trumpets at the altar, to organ upstairs beautiful Medieval cansos or cantatas to make Handel's mouth water when all of a sudden a woman with kids and husband comes by and lays 20 centimes (4 Cents) in my poor, tortured, misunderstood hat (which I was holding upside down in awe) to teach them *caritas*... (12-13).

Although this passage is layered with concerns for names and naming, Kerouac becomes an inadvertent, unknown beneficiary of a blessing or of a spiritual test. Upon telling this story to his mother when he returns home, she asks, «Why didn't you then put the twenty centimes in the poor box?» (13). In a list of excuses, he says that he "forgot", that it wasn't much money anyway, and, he adds that, later, he gave francs to two poor beggars that he saw on the street. In a further expression of his cultural and "charitable" uncertainties, he notes that he yelled, "*Vieux voyou*" (hoodlum) at the old man begger in St.-Getrmain, and he wonders if he hurt his feelings; he had meant to say "*Guenigiou*" (ragpicker), using a "300 year-old" Quebec form rather than the modern form of the word. Both terms seem to be revealingly abrasive, however, as jokes used in addressing a man who seems to be a object-representation of the impoverished father. Of course, the terms "hoodlum" and "ragpicker" also refer to Kerouac's own identity as a recipient of the twenty centimes.

There are, elsewhere in the quest, indications of Kerouac's anxious or uncertain relationship to patriarchal Catholicism. In describing his train ride to Brest, for example, nearly two pages are given to a dual-language transcription of a wine-fueled, extravagant, theological monologue which he delivers to a priest and the French travelers in his compartment. The conclusion of the monologue appears to connect his genealogical quest to the issues of his Catholicism. «It's only the Son», he declares, «who knows the Father – therefore, Faith, and the Church which defended the Faith as well as it could...» There appears to be a fading of power ("as well as it could") at the end of this credo. Nevertheless, this theological rhapsody concerning the trinity, faith, and the church, which is delivered to "a priest-father", suggests that his quest for the place of the "ancient Kerouacs" includes a need to affirm his Catholicism in order to validate his status as his father's son. At the end of the monologue, Kerouac says, the silent priest gave the "sidelook" of "an applauder" (63-4). The priest's receptive silence – like that of a listening psychoanalyst – enables Kerouac to project the fulfillment of his desire for his father's approval.

My father was a somewhat anti-clerical Catholic, and his memory imposed no demand for such a credo upon me, but Kerouac's resurrection of Breton theology reminded me of some unexpected and oddly celebratory moments. «That is the church where Jean d'Arc swore her fealty to the French crown», my cab driver said as we snorted past a small, stone church outside of Paris.

«*Merci*», I said, wondering if it were true, and also experiencing a sacred past that was, in some unexpected way, suddenly my own. Was it that moment of identification with the French which had caused me to feel threatened, alienated by American rage? Or was it another occasion, that of sitting in the *seiza* position I had learned in Judo, in the weedy, monastic garden at *La Baum Les Aix*, and feeling a sudden gratitude toward all the foolishness and luck of my life that had brought me that moment? Was it a threat to that moment by American rage which triggered anxiety concerning my identity? And had that moment contributed to my interest in Kerouac's *Satori*?

In addition to his extensive library research and numerous personal inquiries concerning his surname, Kerouac even needs to explain to the French people – and to the reader – the American “*prenom*” on his passport. My name is “Jean”, not “John Louis”, he explains to a restaurateur in Brest, a Breton, Ulysse Lebris, who is as close to a French kinsman as he comes during his entire quest. He further explains – in an aside to the reader, not to his French cousins – that «you cant (sic) go around America and join the Merchant Marine and be called “Jean”. Jean is the man’s name for John, *Jeanne* is the woman’s name, but you cant (sic) tell that to your Bosun on the S. S. Robert Treat Paine» when he «calls on you to man the mine nets». Kerouac’s French name raises troublesome gender issues. And even this is not the end of the digression – or free association – on the problem of his name as a Merchant sailor in 1944. «Why did the Bosun pick old Keroach?» he asks, introducing a new spelling of his name. In a parentheses he adds, «(Keroac’h, early spelling hassle among my uncles)». Well, he explains, the Bosun «knew I had a steady hand!» (95). Kerouac’s name, which he frequently insists has remained unchanged for centuries, is here visible as a changing, uncertain signifier.

So what is the relationship between this often-intoxicated writer – who claims to have a steady hand and is on a quest to know his name – and the concerns of literature and psychology?

There are certainly encounters with the dead father and the inescapable mother in the memoir, but there are only a few specific references to psychoanalysis, and they are playful or scoffing. In one instance, Kerouac suggests that his «Reichian character armor» might protect him during his paranoid perception of a danger of being stabbed by street thugs in Brest at 3:00 in the morning (75). In another passage he playfully asserts a contrast between Sigmund Freud’s «cold depiction of helpless personalities» and W. C. Field’s observation that life is «Fraught with eminent peril» (89). Kerouac prefers the movie clown’s punning on “immanent” because it affirms an enhancement of the “eminence” of human helplessness. It is provocative that he quotes this same line from W. C. Fields at the opening of Chapter Seven in *On The Road* (40). Perhaps Kerouac’s use of the Zen term for “enlightenment” also is a finger pointing toward such “eminence” achieved suddenly, such as his meeting with the «polite, kind, hip, aloof cab driver, Raymond Baillet, who may have “handed him his Satori”» (7).

From Paris, I took the fast train to Nice to experience the Matisse radiance of the sun and the expatriate glamour of the *Promenade Anglaise*. The sky was grey, and it was dismally cold. The palm trees seemed misplaced and doomed. At the breakwall bordering the *Promenade*, I watched a group of policemen arrest three huddling North Africans and put them into a police wagon. Observing the arrest with me was Frenchman who looked at me and said simply, “*Pas de papier*”.

Then I walked to the *Hotel Chateneuf*. The concierge upon looking at my passport, exclaimed, «*Mais votre surname est Français; votre nationalité est Français, n'est ce pas?*» «*Mais, oui*», I answered, and then, haltingly, ungrammatically, «*Mon Grandpère et Grandmère été Français tous les doux, mais ils été né en Québec, Canada.*» Welcoming me as a prodigal who had returned, the concierge gave me a reduction of 28 francs in my hotel rate. «*Merci Beaucoup*», I said, experiencing an actual rush of delight which paralleled Kerouac’s fantasy of being recognized as “*Le Petit Prince de la Petit Bretagne*”.

It was under the influence of this moment, flushed with delight, that I was, in Henry James’ term, “picked up” by Marie Jose. She had come from Geneva, Switzerland to observe the Feast Day of the Ascension at the Russian Orthodox Church founded by Russian émigrés to Nice. She

invited me to join her and two of her friends for a walk to see the gorgeous onion dome and hear the choir.

Later, Marie Jose offered to drive me to Aix, and I offered to fill her little Renault with gasoline. There was no bus to Aix, and I would have needed to return to Marseilles to catch one. The back seat of her car was filled with clothes and suitcases, like the gathered possessions of a shopping cart lady. Explaining her journey to observe the celebration of the Ascension, she described herself as being “*né pour le douzieme fois*” into Russian Orthodox Christianity. Her mother’s family had come to Paris from Russia in 1917, she said, and she herself had been born in 1943. Her mother had deserted her. As a grown woman, having been married and living in Switzerland, she sought to recover her religious heritage. After being re-baptized into the Orthodox Church, she sought out an aged friend of the family to learn whether the any of them had been devout before leaving Russia. The old woman answered, «No, we were not. In fact, we were Jews when we fled from Russia. Your mother named you “Marie Jose” to protect you from deportation to the camps during the German occupation of Paris.» In Aix, where we had lunch, Marie had joked about French partisans during the War who had turned and moved the street signs to disorient the invaders.

The Second World War is significant aspect of “Generational Consciousness” (Bollas, 247-76) in Kerouac’s memoir, and it was, certainly, in my conversations with Marie Jose. Further, my sense of America’s shared history with France during that war certainly informs my dismay at the American condemnations of the French for rejecting the “pre-emptive strike” against Iraq. Christopher Bollas term “Generational Consciousness”, may blur the vividness of such major historical events across more than one historical generation. Kerouac makes several significant references to the “Great War” which he participated in as a merchant seaman. In addition to his manning of the minesweeping nets, the most important comment occurs at the *Mazarine* Library. Kerouac learns that many of the historical documents which he seeks are missing because, as he says, «the Nazis done bombed and burned all their French papers in 1944» (22). In addition to this destruction of possible access to his family history, the Second World War provides Kerouac with an image when he is exasperated by a rowdy motorcyclist at the train station in Brest. He hollers, «“That is a *voyou*” (hoodlum)... Hoodlums are what gave Hitler his start» (110). Perhaps those old enough to fight in World War II sometimes think that the French were not quick or ferocious enough in responding to the threat of Nazi hoodlums. France became an occupied country, and some French people collaborated in the Vichy government. Kerouac’s expression of resentment after a hotel-keeper’s favorable comment on polite German tourists may reflect this Generational Consciousness. In an aside, he reminds the reader that boys from Massachusetts and French Canada had “toured Brittany” in 1940 (82).

The red poppies I saw blooming in the vast meadow at *La Baum les Aix* were a glorious embodiment of Monet’s painting of a poppy field (1885). But within my recollection of that painting were the images of poppies in the World War I poem “In Flanders’ Fields” which I had recited in 6th grade for a Memorial Day audience which included my mother and father and a neighbor whose son had been killed in the Second World War. The war veterans in America no longer sell the red-paper Buddy Poppies of my childhood. I remember my father buying them, wearing them as boutonnières, and then placing them in drawers or in the glove compartment of his car. He cherished them without mentioning the war or any of the soldiers he had known. Encountering these blooms in a field in France was like placing a bouquet upon his grave. In *Strangers to Ourselves*, Kristeva suggests that the stranger, the other, is a person in mourning for the lost parents (21-4).

When Kerouac first arrives in Paris, he avoids the loneliness of the traveler «with “the wildest lay imaginable”» (16) with a woman he meets in a Montparnasse bar. He gives her \$120 and then avoids her and evades encounters with other possible lovers because he doesn’t have enough money (16), and he is «drunk for all the world», and «a fool in love with God» rather than a lover

of a woman (25). Upon my return to Paris from Aix en Provence, I talked with two friends from the Conference at bar in Montmartre until after the Metro had stopped. I was forced to walk to my hotel. On the way, I was greeted by two young women. They were not like the quite lurid loiterers that I had seen along the Rue Blondel. They seemed like neighborhood girls out for a stroll. One of them took my cap and playfully put it on her head. The second said something I didn't quite hear or understand. Numbers, prices in French were always a bit difficult.

The girl who had taken my cap looked from me to her companion, and said, «*Non, Non! Pour il ce soir, c'est libre.*»

I understood. I was startled, delighted, and quite wary. The offer was, first of all, the fulfillment of an adolescent fantasy. But it was as unsought as it was unexpected. My mind was turning toward home, and it was late, and I had to catch a plane, and I certainly did not wish to bring home some unexpected gift from France. Perhaps I was simply an inhibited American boy from the Midwest.

«*Merci beaucoup*», I said, «*Mais il ce n'est pas possible ce soir. Bon soir mes jolies.*»

I hoped this reply was gracious enough as a response to her deeply appreciated offer. Paris always has offered American travelers opportunities for the fulfillment of their sexual fantasies or, at least, a place for learning about the barriers in their relationships to desire. It seems to me unwise for Americans to become angry with a culture which provides such resources.

In *Satori in Paris*, Kerouac defines "literature" as «the tale that's told for companionship, and to teach something of... religious reverence about real life, in this real world which literature should... reflect» (10). I have found valuable companionship in reading *Satori in Paris* and allowing its energies to enrich both my feelings of estrangement in America and my awareness of the texture of my experiences in France. Kerouac insists that identity is *not* a stable thing. There is no discovery of a genealogical link or acceptance of an ascribed identity which will resolve this problem. But there are, he suggests, moments in traveling in which we gain valuable glimpses of what it is to be human, and, perhaps, these moments can change our thoughts. Kristeva, talking of her perceptions in America, says, «we all belong to a future type of humanity which will be made entirely of foreigners/strangers who try to understand each other» ("Europhilia" 3).

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# Clear liquid thought: The photographs of Jim Dine

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## ARGUMENT: THE PHOTOGRAPHIC UNCONSCIOUS

*The camera sees even beyond the visual consciousness.*  
(Ralph Eugene Meatyard)

In his article “Photographie avant analyse”<sup>1</sup> photography critic François Soulages discusses the reciprocal influence between photography (as an emerging technology in the nineteenth century) and the study of the unconscious (prior to the invention of psychoanalysis). To what extent, he asks, did a new technology such as photography enlighten, modify, or enrich the understanding of the unconscious? And, conversely, how did what he calls «the hypothesis of the unconscious» allow for a better understanding of a new technology? These questions, inherent in the beginnings of photography and essentially linked to its role in the comprehension of the visible and the invisible body, have gained considerable importance today.

The photographic works I will discuss here participate in our understanding of the unconscious in a paradoxical way, since they do not imply disclosing images of the artist’s unconscious specifically encoded into symbolic meaning. On the contrary, my concern is with these works’ potential to generate *visual equivalents* of inner life perceptions in a variety of puzzling formal patterns whose disclosure of meaning is cunningly deferred. The photographic compositions of Jim Dine are not

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<sup>1</sup> François Soulages, “Photographie avant analyse”, *Photographie et inconscient* (31-35). In this study, Soulage primarily deals with the beginnings of photography and with its paradoxical uses in psychiatry (the photographs of Duchenne de Boulogne, in France, and those of Hugh Welch Diamond, in England, are dealt with in the context of their institutional destiny and their consequent aesthetic status).

narratives of inner life, but *forms of visual experience* that inform our ways of thinking the unconscious.

Unlike documentary, informative, or testimonial photography, art photography – which has enjoyed much less attention in the academia – requires from viewers “a willing suspension” of their belief in the photographic reproduction of reality. Photography as used by artists reveals shapes which our eyes cannot perceive but which we experience rather synaesthetically. These shapes, which surface only dimly into consciousness, derive from elaborate technique. By turning the mirror inwards<sup>2</sup>, art photographers create what elsewhere I have called “une cassure photographique”<sup>3</sup> in our understanding of mimesis.

My discussion of Jim Dine’s photographic work here stems in two larger concerns in my ongoing research with how photography visualizes mental processes (or, part of what we call “the invisible”) and how current visual culture redefines our vision of the unconscious. The appeal to the psychoanalytic tradition in the critical discourse on visual culture, even by way of reevaluation, is, when not counter productive, of no avail to the scholar. Not only are the current paradigms of knowledge in Western cultures in a different configuration than that of the twentieth-century (no matter how many parallels we can establish between the two “turns”), but the techniques of image-making and the perception of images have undergone such considerable changes that force us to reconsider, if not to reinvent, our psychoanalytical frameworks. I would like to suggest in the following that one of the most productive ways of creating such new cognitive and discursive frameworks is by taking the time to look at what artists do when they bring into the viewers’ visual field not only mental and sensory images but also strategies through which these images come into consciousness?<sup>4</sup>

One can read, for instance, in Dine’s photographic explorations of the unconscious, instead of free association, an insistence on editing, a strategy, which – before its being generalized by the use of the computer – has early on been associated with photography.<sup>5</sup> Concerning the difference between *free association* – as a release from consciousness – and *editing* – as a form of peripheral grasp of consciousness – I take as a working hypothesis that it is related to a historically different distribution of the tensions between social, cultural, or historical determinations and the construction of subjectivity.<sup>6</sup> Although that aspect is only hinted at in what follows, it represents a reference point of my brief discussion here on the ways in which image-making technologies can inform our understanding of the unconscious (and, for that matter, our theoretical narratives of inner life),

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<sup>2</sup> On the occasion of photography’s 150th anniversary, photography critic Andy Grundberg reviewed two major shows: “On the Art of Fixing a Shadow: 150 Years of Photography”, at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, and “The Art of Photography, 1839-1989”, at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, Texas. His review is significantly entitled “Now, the Camera’s Eye Turns Inward”, in *The New York Times* (18-19).

<sup>3</sup> Anca Cristofovici, “Un frémissement de miroirs, la beauté inattendue”: les mondes photographiques de Geneviève Cadieux, in *Masques et Miroirs dans le monde anglo-saxon* (182).

<sup>4</sup> What a distance, for instance, between the visualization of the unconscious in Luis Bunuel’s films and that of David Lynch’s films, especially in his *Mulholland Drive* (2001), which epitomizes an entirely new way of thinking the unconscious.

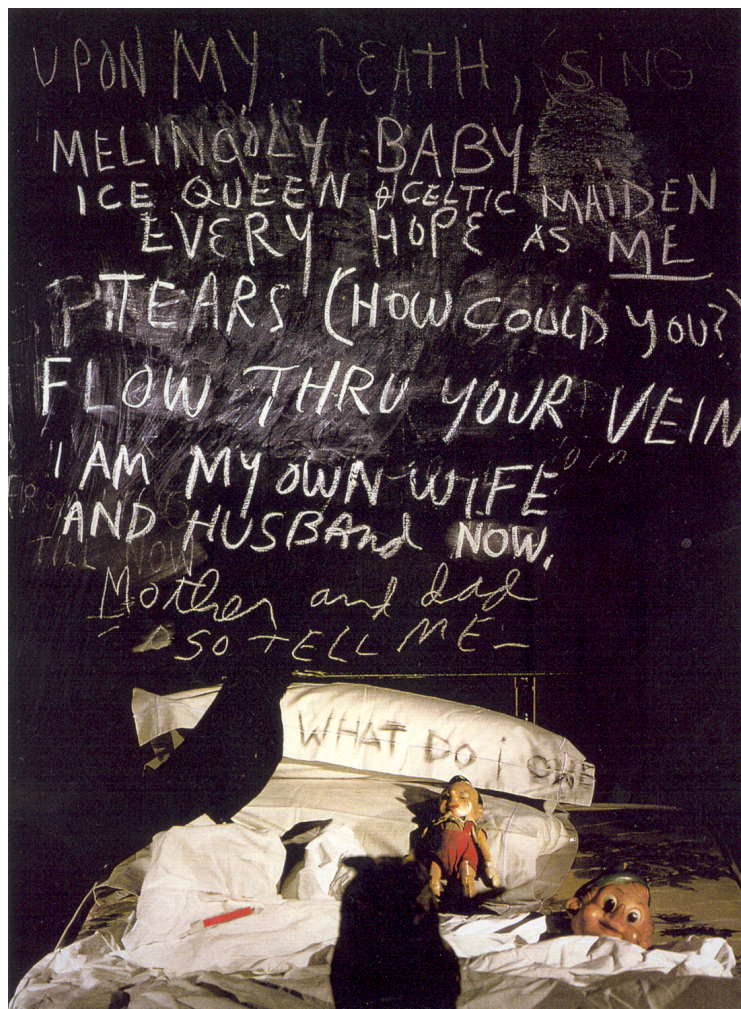
<sup>5</sup> With reference to the photographs of August Sander, for instance, Walker Evans used the term “editing” as early as 1931. For “editing” and “free association” in relation to photography and memory work, Richard Powers provides rich documentary and fictional material in his novel, *Three Farmers on Their Way to a Dance* (1985), which, in fictional terms, anticipates paths that the critical discourse on photography has taken only of late.

<sup>6</sup> Actually Powers refers to photography as «simultaneously the most free and the most determined procedure» (*Three Farmers...*, 250). The tensions at work in the making of a photograph, between the technical determinations of the photographic device and the photographer’s freedom to explore varied forms of reality, can be read as a metaphor for the tensions – in the larger picture of life – between determinations of various natures (social, cultural, psychic etc.) and individual freedom.

deriving from Soulages's first question evoked in the opening paragraph, which can, I would like to advance, be productively placed in the context of contemporary visual culture.

FIGURE 1

Jim Dine, "Nuptials", 1999, ink jet print on canvas, 169,5x122,5 cm, color.  
(D. Templon show invitation)



## WHY JIM DINE?

For many years now I have looked at American contemporary and recent fiction and photography from the perspective of patterns of memory as sites of creativity. Jim Dine's photographic work came to my attention while I was doing research on perceptions of aging in visual culture and the visualization of time in connection to that rather delicate issue in art photography. His work struck me for its potential to bring mental processes into the visual field and for its open and intentional relation to the unconscious. In almost every interview Dine associates his use of photography as an artist to his exploration of what he sometimes calls the subconscious, highlighting it as a major *theme* of his photographic work. At the same time, the unconscious is, as I will try to show, a source for his *innovative technique* as it is for his *aesthetics*.

Dine is known as an artist who has experimented since the 1960s with a wide range of materials and techniques, from drawing, printmaking, and painting, to sculpture and mixed media installations. His entire work can be described as a glossary of recurring images, «an aesthetic journey into a personal world».<sup>7</sup> He started working on his first series of photographs in 1995 precisely as a means of exploring psychic material more in-depth. As a matter of fact, his photographic work is not so different in purpose from his early work. The last performance Dine held in 1965 was suggestively entitled “Natural History (The Dreams).”

The Guggenheim has recently shown Dine's early works and a retrospective of his drawings was presented at the National Gallery of Art in Washington in the summer of 2004. Yet, in spite of important exhibitions in American galleries and museums, his photographic work seems to be less known in the United States. Dine has lived for many years in between Europe and the United States, and currently lives in Paris part time. Significantly, he donated the entire set of his photographic work to the Maison Européenne de la Photographie in Paris and he made the same donation to the Davison Art Center at the Wesleyan.<sup>8</sup> His living in different contexts, in different cultural and visual landscapes, might account, among other things, for his bend for layering and associating images in photographic tableaux that might remind the viewer of the collage, yet if collages they are, Dine's works result from a quite different technique (and philosophy) than that of the surrealists.

## INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL SPACE IN PHOTOGRAPHY

The cognate term “optical unconscious” was first used by Walter Benjamin and, more recently, by Rosalind Krauss in her book on modernism whose title is borrowed from that phrase.<sup>9</sup> In his “Small History of Photography” (1931), Benjamin points to the “unknown” which lies in wait for the photographic act and he stresses that it is precisely the technical devices (“slow motion and enlargement”) that make it possible for photography to “reveal the secret”. «It is through *photography*», he concludes, «that we first discover the existence of this *optical unconscious* just as we discover the *instinctual unconscious* through *psychoanalysis*».<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Jim Dine, *Paintings, Drawings, Sculpture. 1973-1993*, n. pag.

<sup>8</sup> In New York Dine is represented by the PaceWildenstein Gallery, while in Paris the Daniel Templon Gallery shows his most recent work, at an almost annual rate. For reasons of copyright his photographs cannot be shown here. Besides the appended bibliography, several sites present his photographic work. I hope this paper to be an invitation for the reader to become familiar with less known aspects of Dine's work.

The most up-to-date collection of his photographs has been published recently under the form of a catalogue raisonné, in four volumes, entitled *The Photographs, So Far*.

<sup>9</sup> Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*.

<sup>10</sup> Walter Benjamin, “A Small History of Photography”, in *One Way Street* (240-257).

Krauss analyses the ways in which the “optical unconscious” had to struggle its way out from a system based on the repressed as embodied in the logic of modernism. However, even in its rebellion against the domination of reason, the textual or visual surrealist outlook was based on the Freudian binary understanding of psychic life. Surrealist representations of the unconscious appeared therefore as the violent emergence into visibility of a mixture of strange and casual imagery.

Surrealism has shown that space was *reversible* within a view that opposed internal to external space. Accordingly, every external space represented in a visual work was supposed to be the symbolic equivalent of an internal one. Can we still think of inner life – visually – in the same terms?

#### THE SEAM (NO SUTURE)

The refinement of optical techniques in the second half of the twentieth century has extended our field of vision and redefined our notions of the corporeal and the mental. As a consequence, juxtapositions of various registers of reality can take quite different forms. Whereas in the surrealist collage, for instance, the seam between inner and external space is still visible, the computer collage gives the artists the possibility to smooth it, if not to completely efface it. As the use of digital manipulations<sup>11</sup> in photography shows, inner space can no longer be conceived of as a discreet unit, but as a conjunction of zones which we inhabit mentally. At the intersections between images of different zones melded in a photograph, uncanny effects occur, not (or not exclusively) as the emergence of something repressed, but rather as the recognition of dimly known shapes or emotions experienced in the more or less distant past and, as such, part of our affective self or of what in his book, *The Shadow of the Object* (incidentally, a wonderful metaphor for photography), Christopher Bollas calls «the unthought known», that is «the sense of being reminded of something *never cognitively apprehended but existentially known*» (emphasis mine, 17).

Dine’s photographs suggest that the visual model of the unconscious or of mental life as *photographic*<sup>12</sup> is linked to the understanding of photography as a mimetic form in a problematic way. Instead of a faithful image of a specific object, person, place, he considers a photograph as an image whose referent is a synthesis of spaces, of time moments, of fragmentary images of an object or of a person. Like imaginary referents in the rhetoric of literary texts, a speculative photograph can be the result of a juxtaposition of different iconic objects and mental images.<sup>13</sup> The editing or doctoring of images results in a seamless representation of mental space, one that highlights not discontinuity but reconfigured continuity as an essential element in the construction of subjectivity.

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<sup>11</sup> An important distinction should be mentioned here, that between the manipulations in journalistic or any other kind of testimonial photography, on the one hand, and art photography, on the other. In the former case, which is not my subject here, manipulation serves entirely different purposes (and, as historians of photography have shown, is not a new procedure).

<sup>12</sup> Daniel Sibony has attempted to draw an analogy between photography and psychoanalysis in his essay “Une technique de l’instant ou la machine à cliché”, based on the hypothesis that: “Our dreams function on the photographic principle,” in *La Recherche photographique* (69-73).

<sup>13</sup> Philippe Hamon studied this fascinating aspect of the interference between photography and other visual systems of the nineteenth century, on the one hand and literature, on the other. He paid particular attention to the ways in which the various aesthetics of the “imageries” circulating at the time forced literature to redefine itself, and had an impact on the process of reading as well. Hamon analyzes the juxtaposition of various iconic objects in nineteenth-century French literary texts and mentions a detail which supports my hypothesis here, that the objects juxtaposed in the rhetoric of the text were the result of mental images *which had already synthesized various visual systems*, or, the result of what one might call blurred mental images. *Imageries. Littérature et image au XIXe siècle*.

Such a perspective calls our attention to the formative character of aesthetic objects, an aspect that seems to have fallen into oblivion in the current visual culture critique.<sup>14</sup>

#### IN LEAGUE WITH THE DARK: AN AESTHETICS OF DOCTORED IMAGES

Dine has come to photography only recently and to a quite special use of it, one which unsettles categories of the mimesis as well as boundaries between art media. «I feel in photography it's part of the challenge», says Dine about his approach, «to bring that which is dead to life» (emphasis mine, 7).<sup>15</sup> In so doing he arrives at what photography critic Andy Grundberg calls a “latent metaphoric potency”.<sup>16</sup> His reflection on memory and temporality draws from a combination of new and old photographic techniques which allow him to represent, in one photographic tableau, different time levels and registers of visibility by layering various images, i.e. photographs coming from different captures.

What types of *latent images* do Jim Dine's camera works reveal? What, in fact, made him turn, around age sixty, to photography?

In his essay, “Assaying the Photographic”, Grundberg points out that it is precisely the wide range of possibilities provided by the varied techniques Dine uses that allows him to «refashion the consequences of the camera lens», in other words, to *modify* the impressions recorded by the camera. Significantly, the resulting photographs are not always reproduced from negatives, but either from printing plates (in the case of his photogravures) or from larger computer files of digital information. Through the shifts and combinations of images made possible by alternative photographic technologies, Dine unsettles what Grundberg calls the essential tension of his art: that between rational space and «the floating arena of the subconscious». The memory of the camera is articulated to the memory of the computer. Both the photogravures and the digital images are carefully processed, refined and redefined so as to render approximations that are closer to fleeting mental images in all their sensory dimensions. As a result, the photographic tableau becomes a more accurate representation of thinking processes and of emotional experience. «All my photographs», declares Dine, «are as accurate descriptions of a thought I've had, or a passion I've had, or a sorrow I've had, as anything I've ever done» (10).

Dine's combining analogic with digital photography, and traditional art techniques enables him to doctor the images recorded by the camera, and to transform them into, so to say, actual virtual images. The high resolution of the computer-produced image is associated in these works with another kind of more evocative precision that creates the illusion of depth. In his inkjet prints, for instance, the contrast between sharp and soft tones results from the use of a program which allows him to “paint in” elements derived from various captures. In his photogravures, the positive transparencies are printed on a copper plate and are then processed in a way similar to the technique of etching, which implies that the plate undergoes the intervention of the hand. Dine intentionally uses the fantasy of the control one can have over the camera in order to open up the photographic tableau to varied registers of visibility.

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<sup>14</sup> I would like to recall here an important contribution which would be worth reconsidering in the psychoanalytical approaches of art, that of Anton Ehrenzweig's book, *The Hidden Order of Art: A Study in the Psychology of Artistic Imagination* (1967), introduced in its French translation by Jean-François Lyotard (1975).

<sup>15</sup> Jim Dine, *Photographies récentes*, Interview with Jean-Luc Monterosso.

<sup>16</sup> Jim Dine, *Photographs.*, n. pag.

His creative use of the digital camera and of digital processing allows him to produce uncanny effects, an illusion of unfathomable distance, of layers of space displayed in puzzling perspectives, of depth sustained by closeness.<sup>17</sup> The elaborate processing of various captures, as well as the grain of paper they are printed on, result in an intense tactile effect, which is even more powerful in his recent series of large-scale pigment photographs printed on canvas. Paradoxically, such an effect enhances the allusion to the ungraspable character of mental images, and, at the same time, to the multiple sensory ways in which they can touch us.

Dine displaces the focus of the viewer's visual habits related to photographs from the real to the mental by insisting on the potential of the camera to record thought and emotion. In his commentaries he parallels the speed of the camera with the speed of dreams and with that of the eye-blink. For him, photography «mirrors *the marginal thought* – every frame – and it can be done so very quickly, not as quickly as the human mind can, yet very quickly, *so that one could have many, many thoughts on a roll of film*» (emphasis mine, 8). However, his photographic images are not snapshots of sudden associative flashes (in the sense of the surrealist automatic free association). On the contrary, they catch the viewer's attention as compositions that combine spontaneity with minuteness.

In his more recent work, Dine uses a different procedure: he recreates mental scenes in actual compositions of objects, which he arranges prior to the photosession and then photographs with a digital camera. These photographs are not manipulated; they are not the result of several juxtaposed captures as the first series was. Dine simply creates the scene and photographs “what's there”, as he puts it, that is already edited. In the first digital works, the “staging” done by way of computer manipulation resulted into a similar smoothing of different spatial planes. Editing seems to be for Dine a way of bringing together the conscious and the unconscious, instead of opposing or separating them into a binary.

Dine notes that for him «photography seems a more accessible road to bring down the unconscious and *channel it: as grist for my mill*» (emphasis mine, 8), a statement that highlights the fact that the objects and figures in his compositions are not illustrations of the unconscious but, like the camera itself, *instruments* to access it. These objects and figures – which represent analogs of inner or internal objects,<sup>18</sup> of spaces of memory –, have structural functions within the dynamic of the image that come near to the structural functions images have in the construction of subjectivity.

Because of its capacity to capture the fugitive instant, photography is commonly expected to preserve the past. But the compelling query for Dine is: how can photography record time levels and modes of perception – verbal, visual, sensory – that coextend in the fugitive instant of a mental image? And, what kind of knowledge of inner life do such photographs provide us with? For Dine, that knowledge seems not to be of narrative nature. The “events” that happen in his photographs are purely visual. Like in his other art works, the elements recurring in various combinations in his photographic tableaux contain only possibilities of narrative. Their recurrence itself allows for a wide range of potential narratives. However, any definite narrative development is blocked by the perceptual impact the image produces on the viewer, an aspect which I consider fundamental for what we can learn from Dine's visualization of the unconscious. Time as a factor of narrative

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<sup>17</sup> An interesting technical detail needs to be mentioned here for its metaphorical connotations: the print technology used by Dine «delivers a droplet the size of 10 microns (*the size of a human blood cell*), the droplet size is variable and therefore able to deliver an image of continuous tonality and richness with an apparent resolution of 1,800 dots per inch)». Information given in Jim Dine, *Photographs.*, emphasis mine, n. pag.

<sup>18</sup> Indeed a photograph can represent, for the image-taker and/or for the viewer, an internal object, as well as it can function as a transitional object in the Winnicottian sense in the adult's permanent construction of subjectivity.

development is embedded in the image (it represents, so to say, the very matter of the image) yet “the passage of time” is cunningly bracketed in a skillful visual suspense that compacts past, present, and future in one image and defers the exposure of meaning. Doesn’t such suspension of time through narrative freezing transpose, in fact, the common way in which we perceive the passage of time, namely that it passes without notice?

In his latest series (2004), mostly made of photographs of photographs, Dine edits various photographic images explicitly linked to his past seen from the perspective of the present. Most of them are self-portraits in which two images are confronted: the older Dine with the young – “I and him” –, or his present-day self-portrait with portraits of close people or with still lives. The compositions highlight the fact that the camera does not only record the past; it is also an instrument for reconstructing memory. As in the other series, the oblique angle, the play with the contrasts between sharp and soft focus, the subtle variations of light intensities create a visual dynamic that enables him to deconstruct the very fantasy of the photographic unconscious and of photographic memory as replicative processes, even while he makes use of this fantasy.

«Bringing that which is dead to life» means to Dine beating inert matter into life. He retains on film the capacities of the mind to *retain* – in time – parts of life faithfully, that is creatively. By being alert and faithful to process – to the mind in progress, to the eye in movement – his

FIGURE 2  
**Jim Dine, “Diana in white light”, 2004, chromogenic print on aluminium.  
(D. Templon show invitation)**



photographs integrate fantasies and realities of time passing, of light changing, of texture gaining in expressivity or becoming fragile on the verge of extinction. Even when decentered by asymmetrical framing, the photographs integrated in a composition do not appear like disintegrating memories but rather like parts suggestive of a whole, and as such reminiscent of the metonymic patterns of our lives sustained by objects and metaphors, by miniature or fragmentary reminiscences of personal or cultural representations. As they loom in chiaroscuro, these shapes have the immediacy of mental flashes. The viewer's attention is bidden not only by what the photographic tableaux represent, but – most importantly for my point here – by the suggestive way in which they bring inner life work into what photographer Ralph Eugene Meatyard called “visual consciousness”. As a result, the varied images incorporated in a frame seem to meet the viewer's eye in remote corners of early life memory, where thought and vision are in the process of being structured, where the unconscious is a way of editing our selves, and clear liquid thought<sup>19</sup> is the one that we see, unthinkingly.

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<sup>19</sup> The phrase used in the title of this article is coined after the title of one of Dine's black-and-white photogravure prints, “Clear Liquid Talking”, 1996.