

Recherche littéraire Literary Research





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Aims & Scope

As the annual peer-reviewed publication of the International Comparative Literature Association (ICLA), *Recherche littéraire / Literary Research* is an Open Access journal published by Peter Lang. Its mission is to inform comparative literature scholars worldwide of recent contributions to the field. To that end, it publishes scholarly essays, review essays discussing recent research developments in particular sub-fields of the discipline, as well as reviews of books on comparative topics. Scholarly essays are submitted to a double-blind peer review. Submissions by early-career comparative literature scholars are strongly encouraged. Past issues back to 2014 can be accessed on the ICLA website: <https://www.aile-icla.org/literary-research/>

Objectifs & portée

En tant que publication annuelle de l'Association internationale de littérature comparée (AILC), *Recherche littéraire / Literary Research* est une revue expertisée par des pair·e·s et publiée par Peter Lang en libre accès voie dorée. Elle vise à faire connaître aux comparatistes du monde entier les développements récents de la discipline. Dans ce but, la revue publie des articles de recherche scientifique, des essais critiques dressant l'état des lieux d'un domaine particulier de la littérature comparée, ainsi que des comptes rendus de livres sur des sujets comparatistes. Les articles de recherche sont soumis à une évaluation par des pair·e·s en double anonyme. Des soumissions par de jeunes chercheuses et chercheurs en littérature comparée sont fortement encouragées. Les numéros antérieurs, remontant à 2014, sont accessibles sur le site de l'AILC : <https://www.aile-icla.org/fr/recherche-litteraire/>

Submission Guidelines

Reviews and essays are written in French or English, the two official languages of the ICLA. Book reviews should be between 1,500 and 2,000 words. Edited volumes and journal issues will also be considered for review. Review essays about the state of the art, about several related books, or about a work of major significance for the field will be allowed to exceed 3,500 words, excluding works cited and footnotes. Scholarly essays should count between 6,000 and 8,000 words (excluding works cited and footnotes) and follow the MLA Style sheet (parenthetical bibliographical references in the body of the text as well as a final list of Works Cited). Scholarly essays should also be preceded by an abstract in English of approximately 170 words and by 5 to 6 keywords for indexation purposes. The journal and its editorial team adhere to Peter Lang's code of ethics described in the [COPE Ethical Guidelines for Peer Reviewers](#), which ensures the integrity of the academic research we publish. *LR/RL* does not endorse the opinions of authors once their work is published. The stylesheet for all types of submissions can be found at the back of this issue. It can also be downloaded from Peter Lang's website.

Instructions aux auteur·e·s

Les comptes rendus ainsi que les articles de recherche peuvent être écrits en français ou en anglais, les deux langues officielles de l'AILC. Un compte rendu comptera entre 1.500 et 2.000 mots. Des ouvrages collectifs et des numéros de revues pourront également faire l'objet d'un compte rendu. Un essai critique sur l'état de l'art, sur un ensemble d'ouvrages, ou sur un livre ambitieux pourra dépasser 3.500 mots, hormis bibliographie et notes en bas de page. Les articles de recherche compteront entre 6.000 et 8.000 mots (hormis bibliographie et notes) et suivront les normes de présentation bibliographique du « MLA Style » (références entre parenthèses dans le corps du texte et bibliographie en fin d'article). Ces articles de recherche doivent également être précédés d'un résumé en anglais d'environ 170 mots et de 5 à 6 mots-clés à des fins d'indexation. Pour les articles rédigés en français, une traduction en anglais du titre est également demandée. De plus, un résumé en anglais sera nécessaire. La revue et son équipe éditoriale adhèrent au code de déontologie de Peter Lang décrit dans les Directives éthiques du COPE pour l'évaluation par les pairs, qui garantissent l'intégrité de la recherche scientifique que nous publions. *LR/RL* ne cautionne pas l'opinion des auteur·e·s une fois leur travail publié. Les normes de présentation pour tous les types de soumissions sont consultables à la fin de ce numéro. Elles peuvent également être téléchargées sur le site de Peter Lang.

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EDITORIAL

From Shakespearean Times to the Era of Artificial Intelligence: Reimagining Comparative Poetics

Abstract: encompassing the historical period ranging from Shakespearean times to today's era of artificial intelligence, this issue of *Recherche littéraire / Literary Research* examines the myriad ways in which comparative poetics could be reimagined in the 21st century. To that end, it gathers innovative articles devoted to the dream in Shakespeare, the social history of attention in seventeenth-century French literature, the literary topos of memory, intermedial ecocriticism and the blue novel in the age of OpenAI. As in previous issues, this scholarly section is complemented by a large selection of review essays and book reviews on comparative literature topics.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Huysmans, Proust, Darrieusseq, dream studies, attention studies, Northern francophone literatures, Mauritian literature, blue novel studies, OpenAI studies.

This year's issue of *Recherche littéraire / Literary Research*, following in the wake of its predecessors, explores the multiple ways in which comparative poetics could be reimagined in order to lend our field new vigour for the 21st century. To that end, the opening scholarly section comprises six articles that offer new research avenues and span the historical period ranging from the Renaissance to today's age of artificial intelligence. In "Dreams in Shakespeare's Plays – Between Metaphysics, Psychology, and Metafiction: *Richard III* – *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – *The Tempest*," Manfred Engel, who has presided the ICLA Research Committee for the study of Dreams for many years, resorts to dream theories of the English Renaissance in an effort to shed new light on Shakespeare's depiction of dreams in his history plays, comedies, and romances. In doing so, he clearly differentiates between natural and supernatural dreams. He comes to the conclusion that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* "explored for the first time the concept of the dream as an ironical, highly self-conscious mode of metafiction" (45). In "Vers une histoire sociale de l'attention. Le cas de la littérature française du XVII^e siècle," Christophe Schuway focuses on the writers', publishers', and institutions' attempts to control

definitions “of proper or misplaced attention” (50). In this fashion, this article “explores how literature adapts to the shifting regimes of attention of its time” (50) and asserts the role of attention “as a central political and social concern of modern culture” (50). In “Involuntary Memory. Reflections on the Aesthetics of a Literary Topos. Huysmans, Proust and Darrieussecq,” Carsten Meiner embarks on a theoretical consideration of the literary topos of involuntary memory. To this end, he contrasts the romantic understanding of memory to that of such modernist writers as Proust, Camus, and Darrieussecq, respectively in *A la recherche du temps perdu* (focusing on the well-known madeleine episode), *A Rebours*, and *Truismes*. He carefully shows how the various scenes he analyzes reflect a similar pattern: “taste leads to involuntary recollection, which then triggers distinct affective states” (95). He nevertheless points out how these scenes display non-conventional meanings. Meiner’s rich close-reading analyses are followed by more general reflections on the topos of involuntary memory, in which a distinction between rhetorical and aesthetic topoi is established. Subsequently, in “Des écritures du sujet: de l’extériorité à l’intériorité, une approche comparée du discours littéraire intra-francophone,” Buta B. Malela examines works from Northern Francophone literatures, showing how his case studies are predicated on a notion of the subject as torn apart between interiority and exteriority. He concentrates on the following little-known novels from the early twenty-first century: Gilles Jobidon’s *Le Tranquille Affligé*; Jocelyne Saucier’s *Il pleuvait des oiseaux* (two novels from Quebec); Jean-Marc Turiné’s *Théo des fleuves*; Geneviève Damas’s *Si tu passes la rivière* (works hailing from Belgium); Marc-Durin Valois’s *Chamelle*; Mathias Énard’s *La Perfection du tir*; Hubert Haddad’s *Palestine*, and Liliana Lazar’s *Terre des affranchis* (novels representing the publishing area of France); and, Amal Sewtohul’s *Made in Mauritius* (a novel from Mauritius). Moving to the pressing ecological concerns of our age in “‘I’d like to end with a hopeful message.’ An Intermedial Ecocritical Reading of Climate Hope in *The Road* and *Saison Brune*,” Jørgen Bruhn and Niklas Salmose rely on a methodology they describe as “intermedial ecocriticism” in order to provide insights into “representations of the climate-ecological crisis across diverse media types” (127). To that end, they analyze comparatively “Cormac McCarthy’s novel *The Road*, its film adaptation by John Hillcoat, and Philippe Squarzon’s graphic novel *Saison Brune*” (127), seeking to demonstrate that climate hope is expressed differently across various media genres. Finally, in “The Blue Novel in the Age of OpenAI: Animal

Intelligence and Digital Extractivism in Contemporary Fiction,” Ben De Bruyn explores the multi-faceted relationship between aquatic life, the blue novel, artificial intelligence and capitalism in three recent Canadian, British and American novels, Ray Nayler’s *The Mountain in the Sea* (2022), Ned Beauman’s *Venomous Lump sucker* (2022), and Richard Powers’s *Playground* (2024). By examining the growing and complex link between literature and artificial intelligence, De Bruyn heralds promising developments in the field of comparative poetics.

The review essays section includes three contributions that stand at the core of the preoccupations of comparative literature today. In “Towards a Definition of Small Literatures,” Jeanne E. Glesener, Marko Juvan, and Benedikts Kalnačs reassess the notion of small literatures, while pointing out that the advent of world literature rekindled scholarly interest in peripheral literary production. In the second review essay, “Shifting Paradigms in Contemporary World Literature Studies,” Theo D’haen examines how the dichotomy between globalization and particularity is dealt with in *Literature and the Work of Universality*, an important book edited by Alice Duhan, Stefan Helgesson, Christina Kullberg and Paul Tennyant. The section concludes on a review essay by Mathieu Govaerts, entitled “The Multiple Facets of Literary Theory Ideology,” which underlines how deeply literary theory is inflected by the ideologies inherent in the ethical and political postulates of scholarship.

As in previous issues of *Recherche littéraire / Literary Research*, scholarly and review essays are complemented by a series of book reviews, focusing on recent and significant publications in the field. In an echo of the initial article of the scholarly part of the issue, the book reviews section opens with a review of Bernard Dieterle’s, Manfred Engel’s, and Laura Vordermayer’s edited collection devoted to dream studies: *Making – or not Making – Sense of Dreams / Trouver – ou non – un sens au rêve*, authored by Michaela Shrage-Früh. This contribution is followed by a first cluster of book reviews on such Europe-centered topics as world literature in French, eighteenth-century satire, communities and philosophies in the eighteenth century, the European historical novel, the works of Dostoevsky, and the primitivism of literary avant-gardes (contributions by Florence Magnot, Nicolas Brucker, Isabelle Durand, Anne Ducrey, and Alexandra Kalantzis). A second cluster of reviews concentrates on francophones literatures, comprising pieces by Anne-Rosine Delbart, Lea Koenig, and Jean-Marc Moura. A third cluster of reviews by Frank England and Jacques Déom focuses on books about philosophy and

religious studies. In the fourth cluster, Diana Shahin and Marcella Rubino analyze studies devoted to representations of migration in literature. This offers a transition to a fifth cluster, containing contributions by Stephen Hahn and Vanessa Frangville, which focuses on East-West poetics as well as the history of Chinese literature. A sixth cluster, gathering reviews by Kathrin Bartha-Mitchell and Marine Berthiot, examines works dealing with the link between climate change and literature. The final seventh cluster, comprises pieces by David O'Donnell and Chantal Zabus, both devoted to postcolonial versions of world literature.

As this issue of *Recherche littéraire/Literary Research* is the last one I shall steer towards publication, it is perhaps fitting to consider, by way of a coda, what the journal has hopefully contributed to the field of comparative literature during my ten-year tenure. Through its various scholarly articles published between 2016 and 2025, our periodical has asserted the essential role of comparative literature as a vehicle for humanist values in times of health and geo-political crises, such as the COVID-19 epidemic as well as the war in Ukraine and in Gaza. Comparative poetics thus continue to serve as an agent of stabilization in chaotic times. Further, the journal has foregrounded the necessity of realigning the parameters of our field, suggesting the desirability of abandoning the Eurocentric underpinnings of the discipline and of promoting the study of Asian, African, Indigenous and postcolonial peripheral literatures. Finally, as I mentioned in my 2023 editorial, our journal always favored an understanding of comparative poetics as a polymorphous discipline, whose multiple and ever-changing facets suggest a perpetual process of redefinition. Such a vision of comparative poetics evokes the Indigenous notion of the shape-shifting trickster. I would argue that the three pathways I have briefly outlined above constitute a precious tool-kit for the urgent task of revitalizing our field.

I have no doubt that the incoming new editor-in-chief of *Recherche littéraire/Literary Research*, Dr. Alice Duhan, from the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, will work very hard in the pursuit of such a goal. A native of the United Kingdom, Alice Duhan is an established specialist of French and comparative literature and will assume her new editorial position in January 2026. I visited her last September in Gothenburg in order to ensure a smooth transition and to outline plans for our 2026 issue. At that time, I was able to gauge how immensely competent she was to stand at the helm of the journal and I am therefore convinced the future of our publication is in good hands. Serving as the Editor-in-chief

of *Recherche littéraire / Literary Research* for the past years was truly a great honor for me. Needless to say, I shall treasure fond memories of this period of my professional career. In an echo of Manfred Engel's opening article in this issue, I am now like Prospero in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* on the eve of his return to Milan. But before "I break my staff," I would wish to use it one more time to thank all those who assisted me throughout my tenure. I would also like express my gratitude to my Associate Editor Fabrice Preyat and my Assistant Editor Jessica Maufort for their judicious advice. Finally, I would like to thank Mr. Thierry Waser, the Peter Lang Commissioning Editor, for his trust in the value of this periodical, as well as the International Comparative Literature Association (ICLA) for its financial support.

Marc Maufort
Brussels, December 2025.

ÉDITORIAL

De l'époque shakespearienne à l'ère de l'intelligence artificielle : Réimaginer la poétique comparatiste

Résumé : englobant la période historique située de l'époque shakespearienne à l'ère de l'intelligence artificielle d'aujourd'hui, ce numéro de *Recherche littéraire / Literary Research* examine les nombreuses façons dont la poétique comparatiste pourrait être réimaginée au XXI^e siècle. Dans ce but, ce volume rassemble des articles innovants consacrés au rêve dans l'œuvre de Shakespeare, l'histoire sociale de l'attention dans la littérature française du 17^{ème} siècle, le topos littéraire de la mémoire, l'écocritique intermédiaire, et le roman « bleu » à l'âge de l'« Open AI ». Comme dans les numéros précédents, la section initiale des articles scientifiques est complétée par une large sélection d'essais critiques et de comptes rendus sur des sujets de littérature comparée.

Mots-clés : Shakespeare, Huysmans, Proust, Darrieusseq, études du rêve, études de l'attention, littératures francophones du Nord, littérature mauricienne, études du roman « bleu », études concernant l'« Open AI ».

Dans son numéro de 2025, *Recherche littéraire / Literary Research* poursuit la tâche de réimaginer la poétique comparatiste afin de lui redonner vigueur au XXI^e siècle. Dans ce but, la section des articles scientifiques qui ouvre le volume comprend six contributions offrant de nouveaux horizons de recherche et s'étendant de la période de la Renaissance à celle de l'intelligence artificielle. Dans « Dreams in Shakespeare's Plays – Between Metaphysics, Psychology, and Metafiction: *Richard III – A Midsummer Night's Dream – The Tempest* », Manfred Engel, qui a présidé pendant de longues années le Comité de recherche de l'AILC sur les études du rêve, utilise les théories du rêve de la Renaissance anglaise afin d'étudier la représentation des rêves dans les pièces historiques, les comédies et les romances de Shakespeare. Pour ce faire, il établit une distinction claire entre les rêves naturels et surnaturels. Il en vient à la conclusion selon laquelle, dans *Le Songe d'une nuit d'été*, le dramaturge « explored for the first time the concept of the dream as an

ironical, highly self-conscious mode of metafiction » (45). Dans « Vers une histoire sociale de l'attention. Le cas de la littérature française du XVIII^e siècle », Christophe Schuwey se concentre sur les tentatives des écrivains, éditeurs et lecteurs de contrôler les définitions « de l'attention correcte ou mal placée » (50). De cette façon, son article « explore comment la littérature s'adapte aux régimes d'attention propres à chaque époque » (50) et souligne le rôle de l'attention « en tant que préoccupation centrale de la culture moderne » (50). Dans « Involuntary Memory. Reflections on the Aesthetics of a Literary Topos. Huysmans, Proust and Darrieussecq », Carsten Meiner se livre à une approche théorique du topos littéraire de la mémoire involontaire. Dans cette optique, il compare la vision romantique de la mémoire à celles d'écrivains modernistes tels que Proust, Camus, et Darrieussecq, respectivement dans *A la recherche du temps perdu* (avec une attention particulière pour la scène bien connue de la madeleine), *A Rebours*, et *Truismes*. Il montre avec précision comment les diverses scènes analysées sont construites selon une structure identique « taste leads to involuntary recollection, which then triggers distinct affective states » (95). Néanmoins, il indique que ces scènes sont basées sur des significations non-conventionnelles. Ses analyses de texte détaillées débouchent sur des réflexions plus générales sur le topos de la mémoire involontaire ancrées dans une distinction entre les topoi rhétoriques et esthétiques. Dans l'article suivant, « Des écritures du sujet : de l'extériorité à l'intériorité, une approche comparée du discours littéraire intra-francophone », Buta B. Malela traite d'ouvrages issus des littératures francophones du Nord. Il montre comment ses études de cas reposent sur une vision du sujet torturé entre l'extériorité et l'intériorité. Il se concentre sur des romans du XXI^e siècle encore peu connus : *Le Tranquille Affligé* de Gilles Jobidon ; *Il pleuvait des oiseaux* de Jocelyne Saucier (deux romans venant du Québec) ; *Théo des fleuves* de Jean-Marc Turine ; *Si tu passes la rivière* de Geneviève Dumas (deux œuvres belges) ; *Chamelle* de Marc-Durin Valois ; *La Perfection du tir* de Mathias Énard ; *Palestine* de Hubert Haddad, et *Terre des affranchis* de Liliana Lazar (des romans représentant la sphère éditoriale française) ; ainsi que *Made in Mauritius* de Amal Sewtohul (un roman venant de l'île Maurice). Dans « "I'd like to end with a hopeful message." An intermedial Ecocritical Reading of Climate Hope in *The Road* and *Saison Brune* », Jørgen Bruhn et Niklas Salmose amorcent une transition vers les problèmes écologiques urgents de notre époque. Ils adoptent une méthodologie qu'ils appellent « écocritique intermédiaire », qui leur permet d'étudier les « representations of the

climate-ecological crisis across diverse media types » (127). A cette fin, ils comparent « Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road*, its film adaptation by John Hillcoat, and Philippe Squarzoni's graphic novel *Saison Brune* » (127) dans le souci de démontrer que l'espoir climatique est exprimé différemment dans divers genres de media. Enfin, dans « The Blue Novel in the Age of OpenAI: Animal Intelligence and Digital Extractivism in Contemporary Fiction », Ben De Bruyn explore les multiples facettes de la relation entre la vie aquatique, la « fiction bleue », l'intelligence artificielle et le capitalisme dans trois œuvres venant respectivement du Canada, du Royaume-Uni et des États-Unis, *The Mountain in the Sea* de Ray Naylor (2022), *Venomous Lumpsucker* de Ned Beaman (2022) et *Playground* de Richard Powers (2024). En examinant le lien complexe et grandissant entre littérature et intelligence artificielle, De Bruyn ouvre la voie à de nouveaux développements prometteurs dans le domaine de la poétique comparatiste.

La section des essais critiques inclut trois contributions se situant au centre des préoccupations actuelles de la littérature comparée. Dans « Towards a Definition of Small Literatures », Jeanne E. Glesener, Marko Juvan, et Benedikts Kalnačs réévaluent la notion des « petites littératures », tout en indiquant que l'émergence des études sur la littérature mondiale a ravivé l'intérêt scientifique pour la production littéraire des périphéries. Dans le second essai critique, « Shifting Paradigms in Contemporary World Literature Studies », Theo D'Haen examine le traitement de la dichotomie entre universalisme et particularisme dans *Literature and the Work of Universality*, un important ouvrage dirigé par Alice Duhan, Stefan Helgesson, Christina Kullberg et Paul Tennyant. La section se referme sur un essai critique de Mathieu Govaerts, intitulé « The Multiple Facets of Literary Theory Ideology », qui souligne combien la théorie littéraire est infléchie par les idéologies inhérentes aux postulats éthiques et politiques de la recherche scientifique.

Comme dans les numéros précédents de *Recherche littéraire / Literary Research*, les articles scientifiques et les essais critiques sont complétés par une série de comptes rendus de publications récentes et significatives dans la discipline. Faisant écho à la première contribution de la section de recherche scientifique, la partie des comptes rendus s'ouvre sur une recension de l'ouvrage collectif de Bernard Dieterle, Manfred Engel, et Laura Vordermayer consacré aux études sur le rêve : *Making – or not Making – Sense of Dreams / Trouwer – ou – non – un sens au rêve*, rédigée par Michaela Shrage-Früh. Le lecteur trouvera ensuite un groupe de comptes

rendus relatifs à des sujets centrés sur l'Europe, comme la littérature mondiale en français, la satire au XVIII^e siècle, les communautés et leurs philosophies au XVIII^e siècle, le roman historique européen, les œuvres de Dostoïevski, le primitivisme des avant-gardes littéraires (avec des contributions de Florence Magnot, Nicolas Brucker, Isabelle Durand, Anne Ducrey et Alexandra Kalantzis). Un second groupe de comptes rendus se concentre sur les littératures francophones et contient des recensions de Anne-Rosine Delbart, Lea Koenig, et Jean-Marc Moura. Un troisième groupe de comptes rendus rédigés par Frank England et Jacques Déom se penche sur des livres relatifs à la philosophie et aux études religieuses. Dans le quatrième groupe, Diana Shahin et Marcella Rubino analysent des études consacrées à la représentation de la migration en littérature. Ces recensions offrent une transition vers un cinquième groupe. Celui-ci rassemble des contributions de Stephen Hahn et de Vanessa Frangville, qui se tournent vers la dichotomie Orient/Occident ainsi que l'histoire de la littérature chinoise. Un sixième groupe, contenant des recensions de Kathrin Bartha-Mitchell et Marine Berthiot, examine des ouvrages traitant du lien entre changement climatique et littérature. Le septième et dernier groupe comporte des comptes rendus de David O'Donnell et de Chantal Zabus consacrés à des moutures postcoloniales de la littérature mondiale.

Comme ce numéro de *Recherche littéraire / Literary Research* est le dernier que je dirigerai jusqu'à sa publication, il est sans doute approprié de réfléchir, en guise de point d'orgue, à ce que la revue a apporté au domaine de la littérature comparée durant les dix années de mon mandat. A travers les articles scientifiques publiés entre 2016 et 2025, notre périodique a confirmé le rôle essentiel de la littérature comparée dans l'effort de préservation des valeurs humanistes en temps de crises sanitaires ou géo-politiques, tout comme la pandémie du COVID-19 ou la guerre en Ukraine et à Gaza. La poétique comparatiste continue donc à servir d'agent de stabilisation à des époques troublées. De plus, la revue a mis en avant la nécessité de réaligner les paramètres de notre discipline, en suggérant l'abandon des fondements eurocentriques de notre domaine et en favorisant de ce fait l'étude des littératures périphériques asiatiques, africaines, autochtones ou encore postcoloniales. Enfin, comme je le mentionnais dans mon éditorial de 2023, notre publication a toujours favorisé une conception polymorphe de notre discipline, dont les multiples facettes, toujours en voie de changement, suggèrent un processus perpétuel de redéfinition. Une telle vision de la littérature

comparée évoque la notion indigène du « trickster » ou métamorphe. Les trois tendances brièvement décrites ci-dessus constituent selon moi une boîte à outils précieuse en vue de la revitalisation de notre domaine scientifique.

Je suis persuadé que la nouvelle rédactrice-en-chef de *Recherche littéraire / Literary Research*, Dr. Alice Duhan, de l'université de Göteborg en Suède, travaillera assidûment à la poursuite de ce but. Née au Royaume-Uni, Alice Duhan est une spécialiste reconnue de la littérature française et comparée. Elle prendra ses fonctions en janvier 2026. Je lui ai rendu visite à Göteborg en septembre dernier afin d'assurer une transition harmonieuse et de commencer à travailler à notre numéro de 2026. A cette occasion, j'ai pu mesurer toute sa compétence à diriger notre revue et je suis par conséquent convaincu que le futur de notre publication est entre de bonnes mains. Le fait d'avoir assumé le rôle de rédacteur-en-chef de *Recherche littéraire / Literary Research* pendant les dix dernières années fut pour moi un grand honneur. Il va sans dire que je garderai d'excellents souvenirs de cette période de ma carrière professionnelle. Faisant écho à l'article de Manfred Engel qui ouvre ce numéro, je me trouve à présent dans la même situation que Prospero dans *The Tempest* de Shakespeare à la veille de son retour à Milan. Mais avant que, comme lui, je brise ma baguette, je voudrais encore l'utiliser une dernière fois pour remercier tous ceux et celles qui m'ont secondé durant mon mandat. Je souhaiterais aussi exprimer ma gratitude envers mon rédacteur associé Fabrice Preyat et ma rédactrice adjointe Jessica Maufort pour leurs conseils judicieux. Je voudrais également remercier Mr. Thierry Waser, notre Directeur des publications chez Peter Lang, pour avoir cru en la valeur scientifique de notre revue, ainsi que l'Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée (AILC) pour son soutien financier.

Marc Maufort
Bruxelles, décembre 2025.

ARTICLES DE RECHERCHE / ARTICLES

Dreams in Shakespeare's Plays – Between Metaphysics, Psychology, and Metafiction: *Richard III – A Midsummer Night's Dream – The Tempest*

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Abstract: The first section of this essay is a brief survey of the dream theory of the English Renaissance and its concepts of natural and supernatural dreams. In the remaining sections, the author will try to provide as comprehensive an overview of different dream types and different functions of dreams in Shakespeare's plays as is possible within a brief essay and to at least hint at developments over the course of Shakespeare's work. In section 2, three dreams from *Richard III*, which is probably the drama in which Shakespeare experimented most with the dream, will be discussed. Section 3 will be devoted to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – a play which, at least according to its title, is entirely marked as a dream. The fourth and last section will take a very brief look at Shakespeare's late plays – often called romances – using *The Tempest* as an example.

Keywords: Elizabethan Age, cultural history, Dream, literary history, Thomas Hill, Thomas Nashe, Renaissance, William Shakespeare

Diligent researchers have found that the word-field “dream” occurs 226 times in Shakespeare's works. The number of actually narrated or staged dreams is, of course, much smaller, but still high enough to count Shakespeare (especially in his dramatic writings) amongst the important contributors to the literary history of the dream. Before discussing examples from the three plays named in the subtitle, I will try to give a short survey of dream theory in the Elizabethan Age.

*This essay is based on a talk which I gave in November 2023 at the Université Libre de Bruxelles at the invitation of Prof. Marc Mauffort. A slightly expanded version of the text (which analyses *Cymbeline* instead of *The Tempest*) appeared in: Sheila Dickson, Tina-Karen Pusse, eds. “Ein Traum, was sonst?” *Beiträge zur Literatur-, Kultur- und Mediengeschichte des Traums: Festschrift für Hans-Walter Schmidt-Hannisa*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2026. 67–93.

Dream Theories in the English Renaissance

My examples for the dream theory of the English Renaissance¹ will be two treatises: novelist and playwright Thomas Nashe's (1567–c. 1601) *The Terrors of the Night* (1694),² and astrologer and popular writer Thomas Hill's (born c. 1528) *The Moste Pleasaunte Arte of the Interpretacion of Dreames* (1571).³ While Hill champions the belief in supernatural dreams and provides the reader with a manual of dream motifs for their deciphering, Nashe vehemently attacks it:

one may aswel by the smoke that comes out of a kitchin gesse what meat is there a broach, as by paraphrasing on smokie dreames præominate of future euent. (Nashe 368)

Both Hill's and Nashe's texts are anything but carefully ordered and methodologically structured discourses, albeit for different reasons. Hill's *Pleasaunte Art* is often chaotic and confusing simply because its author is not quite up to the task of his subject and is often overwhelmed by the complexity of his sources. Nashe's *Terrors of the Night* is rambling, digressive, and full of metaphors and conceits to show off the author's wit and to entertain its readers; it is a highly literary *tour de force*, a crossover between a treatise and a work of literature.

What the two texts have in common, however, is a theory of the natural dream which is still very much based on Hippocrates, Galen, and on Aristotle's dream writings. Instead of following the two authors' arguments in detail, I will use their texts to construct something like the

¹ For the dream discourse of the Renaissance see especially the groundbreaking studies by Claire Gantet. See also: Arcangeli, Charpentier, Hiestand, and Weber/Schmidt. For the English Renaissance in particular, see Brown, Campbell, Krajnik (esp. 148–68), and Rivière.

² Thomas Nashe, *The Terrors of the Night Or, A Discourse of Apparitions*. London: William James, 1594, here cited from Nashe. See Campbell, Casey, Holland, Rivière, and Sivefors.

³ I use the second edition: Thomas Hill, *The Moste Pleasaunte Arte of the Interpretacion of Dreames, whereunto is Annexed Sundry Problemes with Apte Aunsweares neare agreeing to the Matter, and very Rare Examples, not like the Extant in the English Tongue*. London: Thomas Marsh, 1576, available online at: <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A03378.0001.001/?view=toc>. I will cite an ebook-version of the text with slightly modernized spelling; as both first print and ebook are unpaginated, I will cite by (abbreviated) chapter titles. – Another publication by Hill on the subject is: *A Most Briefe and Pleasant Treatise of the Interpretation of Sundrie Dreames intituled to be Josephs*. On Hill's dream treatise, see Holland and Rivière.

standard model for the natural explanation of dreams in the English 16th century.⁴

In this model, natural dreams are caused by the movement of the “animal spirits” (*spiritus animales*) – which mediate between the soul and the body and are responsible for all mental activities and all willed actions – in the brain. In sleep, these spirits can be agitated by four causes:

(1) *food and drink*:

Anie meate that in the day time we eat against our stomackes, begetteth a dismall dreame (Nashe 357).

The causes of all dreams be on this wise, first those which are caused of meats and drinks, as in surfeit are wont to be the cause of the motions which properly is caused of the vapors breathing out of food. Therefore are all vain [i.e. meaningless, merely natural] dreams caused through the spirits lightly moved. Whereof while we soundly sleep, we then dream nothing at all (Hill *The Most Pleasant Art of the Interpretation of Dreams* Cause of Dreams).

(2) the *humores* (i.e. phlegm, blood, yellow and, especially, black bile), or rather a surfeit of one of them:

from the fuming melancholly of our spleene mounteth that hot matter into the higher Region of the braine, whereof manie fearfull visions are framed (Nashe 354).

yellow choler doth cause to appear in sleep, both fires and fighting, and Melancholy causeth to appear in sleep clay, mire or dirt, burial graves, imprisonment, and fear, and blood causeth to appear sports, fire places, blood and purple color: and the flume [phlegm] causeth to appear waters, showers of rain and snow, for that the same is a moist cold quality. (Hill *The Most Pleasant Art of the Interpretation of Dreams* Division of Dreams)

(3) *strong emotions* (“passions”) and *troubling thoughts*:

A solitarie man in his bed, is like a poore bed-red lazer lying by the high way side; [...] his naked wounds are his inward hart-griping woes, the waspes and flyes his idle wandering thoughts; who to that secret smarting paine he hath alreadye, do adde a further sting of impatience, and new lanch his sleeping griefes and vexations (Nashe 376).

the incorporate causes [...] are cares, cogitations, matters as committed to memory, fear, hope, gladness, heaviness or sadness of mind, hatred and

⁴ For more detailed reconstructions of Renaissance explanations of natural dreams, see Gantet, for the English 16th century, see Rivière (esp. 17–49).

love. (Hill *The Most Pleasant Art of the Interpretation of Dreams* Division of Dreams)

(4) weak *sensual perceptions* during sleep (e.g. noise, uncomfortable position of the body, etc.; the onset of illness):

our dreames borrow of anie noyse we heare in the night. As for example; if in the dead of the night there be anie rumbling, knocking, or disturbance neere vs, wee straight dreame of warres, or of thunder (Nashe 356).

He that is inclining to a burning feuer shall dreame of frayes, lightning and thunder, of skirmishing with the diuell, and a hundred such like (Nashe 369).

sleeping he thinketh some times or through a small noise to hear thunder, or through a little flume sweet stilling to the tongue doth then think or taste milk (Hill *The Most Pleasant Art of the Interpretation of Dreams* Certain Demands).

to sick persons do some fearful dreams happen, when as the spirits carrying the virtues of life be afflicted by some evil vapor. (Hill *The Most Pleasant Art of the Interpretation of Dreams* Distinction of Dreams)

Movements of the animal spirits caused by one or several of these factors⁵ produce our dreams, whose material are the images (recent, i.e. day residues, but also older ones) stored in our memory:

A dreame is nothing els but a bubling scum or froath of the fancie, which the day hath left vndigested; or an after feast made of the fragments of idle imaginations (Nashe 355).

the efficient cause [of dreams] is the moderate motion of the spirits, but the matter is the memory of things seen, either whole or imperfect [...] they agree for the more part to those things either seen, or heard, or imagined the day before, or else a long time before. (Hill *The Most Pleasant Art of the Interpretation of Dreams* Cause of Dreams)

So natural dreams have physiological (1, 2 and 4) as well as a psychological origins (2⁶ and 3); therefore they can show the dreamer's dominant passions as well as his or her physical condition. The latter may enable

⁵ Physiological causes for these movements of the animal spirits – i.e. cases (1) and (2) – may be “vapours,” “heat,” “fluids,” or the “spiritus naturales” rising to the brain, depending on the underlying medical theories of the workings of corporal processes; of course, we must take into account here that the circulation of blood was not discovered until the 17th century.

⁶ Humoral pathology unites physical and psychological aspects.

physicians to diagnose the humoral predisposition of the dreamer and predict the outbreak of illness – in this respect (and in this respect only) natural dreams have a “prophetic” value.

As I have tried to show, the 16th century had a fairly sophisticated theory of natural dreams – the same is not true, however, of supernatural ones. Of course, Hill provides his reader with an abundance of information on questions like: Which dreamers will have supernatural dreams? When do supernatural dreams occur most frequently? What are the necessary preconditions to be a good oneirocritic? How can we distinguish between natural and supernatural dreams? All of which is part of traditional dream lore and can be found in many oneirocritic writings. The same is true of the dozens and dozens of examples of supernatural dreams and their interpretations (mostly based on the traditional laws of similitude and contrary) which Hill strings together in his treatise without any recognizable systematic order.

What is missing, however, is a coherent theory of the source of supernatural dreams. All that is clear is that their origin must be outside our body and mind: They are “dreams which come by an outward cause” (Hill *The Most Pleasant Art of the Interpretation of Dreams* Author's Proper Opinion). Dreams in the Bible (obviously sent by God) are mentioned cursorily (Hill *The Most Pleasant Art of the Interpretation of Dreams* Dedication); the stars may play an (unspecified) role; and there are vague references to Neo-Platonism (or rather Neo-Neoplatonism): In sleep, the soul is freed from the influence of the senses. But these explanations are nothing but the highly eclectic use of traditional dream lore, without any systematic treatment of the subject.

It is true that Artemidorus had been as vague about the origin of supernatural dreams. Starting in late Antiquity and lasting well throughout the Middle Ages, there had, however, been a coherent Christian theory of supernatural dreams – first formulated by Tertullian (c. 155–c. 220) in his *De Anima* – distinguishing between supernatural dreams sent by God or the angels, and supernatural dreams sent by the devil or his demons, and much discussion of how to tell them apart. The absence of these Christian elements seems to be characteristic of the theory of the supernatural dream in 16th century England, which primarily tries to reconnect with Ancient oneirocriticism.

It is only reasonable to suppose that these theories of natural and supernatural dreams existed side by side in Renaissance England. There

may have been an increasingly sceptical attitude towards supernatural dreams,⁷ especially among (traditionally Aristotelian) physicians and physiologists and among many Protestant thinkers,⁸ but this obviously did not affect popular dream knowledge.

We cannot say which – if any – treatise on the dream Shakespeare may have read. But he was certainly well aware of the existence of popular dreambooks and of the role which supernatural dreams played in Ancient and contemporary tragedy (and in literature in general). And Mercutio's famous Queen-Mab speech in *Romeo and Juliet* (1595)⁹ proves that Shakespeare was also acquainted with the contemporary state-of-the-art theory of natural dreams.

Mercutio first gives a detailed description of Queen Mab, a tiny fairy who is responsible for our dreams (a myth newly invented by Mercutio/Shakespeare and certainly not to be taken seriously). The examples which he then provides show that these dreams are natural ones which are caused by weak perceptions and based on habitual thoughts and desires of the day:

she [Queen Mab] gallops night by night
Through lovers' brains, and then they dream of love;
O'er courtiers' knees, that dream on curtsies straight;
O'er lawyers' fingers, who straight dream on fees;
O'er ladies' lips, who straight on kisses dream,
Which oft the angry Mab with blisters plagues
Because their breaths with sweetmeats tainted are.
Sometime she gallops o'er a courtier's nose,
And then dreams he of smelling out a suit;
And sometime comes she with a tithe-pig's tail
Tickling a parson's nose as a lies asleep;
Then dreams he of another benefice.

⁷ Hill states (hyperbolically?) that “the art [of interpreting dreams] [is] now come into a contempt with most persons” (Hill *The Most Pleasant Art of the Interpretation of Dreams* Dedication).

⁸ See Rivière, 93–103.

⁹ William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*. Ed. Brian Gibbons; henceforth quoted as RJ with numbers of act, scene, and verse, here: 1.4.53–103. Throughout this essay, I cite Shakespeare from the e-book version of *The Arden Shakespeare* – a compilation of texts from the second (1951–82) and third (1995ff.) edition of the Arden series which originally appeared in single volumes.

Sometime she driveth o'er a soldier's neck
 And then dreams he of cutting foreign throats,
 Of breaches, ambuscados, Spanish blades,
 Of healths five-fathom deep; and then anon
 Drums in his ear, at which he starts and wakes,
 And being thus frightened, swears a prayer or two
 And sleeps again. (RJ 1.4.70–88)

Mercutio concludes that dreams:

are the children of an idle brain,
 Begot of nothing but vain fantasy. (97f.)

***Richard III* (c. 1593) – Expanding the Boundaries of Supernatural Dreams**

Dreams are used in many of Shakespeare's plays¹⁰ In my attempt to provide as comprehensive an overview of different dream types and different functions of dreams as possible and to at least hint at developments over the course of Shakespeare's work, I have selected three plays, starting with *Richard III* – a fairly early drama, usually dated to the year 1593. Its Quarto subtitle calls it a “tragedy,” but today we usually classify it as a history (as does the Folio edition), belonging to the cycle of eight Shakespeare plays devoted to the Wars of the Roses.

There is, I believe, no need to give a detailed summary of the drama. *Richard III* (or, as he was before becoming king, Richard Duke of Gloucester, brother to King Edward IV), kills off almost half of the dramatis personae in quite ingenious ways – and in the end is killed himself in the battle of Bosworth Field in 1485. His death ends the Wars of the Roses and leads to the accession of Henry Earl of Richmond to the throne as King Henry VII, the first Tudor king. So the play collaborates in the creation of the Tudor myth, which celebrates the

¹⁰ The research on Shakespeare's use of dreams is too extensive to give anything like a complete list. So I have picked only some of the most important comprehensive studies: Arthos, Fretz (in my opinion the best recent comprehensive study, with an extensive up-to-date bibliography; as I use the e-book version, I have to give chapter instead of page numbers), Garber (the first comprehensive study of dreams in Shakespeare's work), Hammerschmidt-Hummel, and Krajnik.

Tudors as the dynasty which brought back peace, order, and prosperity to England.

Richard III contains three major dreams.¹¹ The dreamer in my first example is Lord Stanley. We do not receive a direct and detailed narration of his dream, only the condensed version which Stanley sends by messenger to his friend Lord Hastings. And this oral dream report consists of one sentence only: “this night/ He [Lord Stanley] dreamt the boar had razed off his helm” (R3, 3.2.9f.).¹²

This is disappointingly brief. We may imagine a hunting scene in which a huge boar attacks Lord Stanley, or maybe some sort of hunting accident – but we simply do not know any details. The short-hand form of a dream report is, however, not unusual as the focus on a central event suggests looking up its meaning in a dream manual. In our case, such a dreambook is not necessary, as the boar is Richard’s heraldic animal. Lord Stanley reads his dream as supernatural and symbolic and deciphers it as a warning – which he follows by taking flight. Lord Hastings, however, is sceptical – obviously, he does not believe in supernatural dreams. For him, dreams are nothing but the meaningless “mockery of unquiet slumbers” (26). Besides, the dream warning seems unreasonable to him: “To fly the boar before the boar pursues/ Were to incense the boar to follow us,/ And make pursuit where he did mean no chase” (27–29).

Who is right? The dream might well be a natural one, as Richard’s England is a dangerous place in which fear rules. But the play soon proves that it was indeed a supernatural dream. Two scenes later, Hastings is condemned to death for high treason, because he objects to Richard’s claim to the throne. Immediately he regrets his disbelief in Stanley’s dream:

For I, too fond, might have prevented this.
Stanley did dream the boar did raze his helm,
And I did scorn this and disdain to fly. (R3 2.4.81–3)

¹¹ William Shakespeare, *Richard III*. Ed. Antony Hammond. In: Shakespeare *The Arden Shakespeare*, henceforth quoted as R3 with numbers of act, scene, and verse. For dreams in the play, see Arnold, Brooks, Fretz (chap. 3.2), Koppenfels, Rossi, and Schulte Herbrüggen.

¹² The dream and its narration to Hastings by a messenger were already mentioned in Shakespeare’s sources; see Fretz (chap. 3.2).

So, in all probability, it was a supernatural dream. Stanley will survive, because he followed the dream warning, defected in time, and joined Richmond's party.

This is only a slight variation of a traditional pattern for the use of supernatural dreams:¹³ After a dream which transmits a prophecy or a warning, the dreamer himself or a close acquaintance will doubt the fairly obviously fatal message of the dream and give a favourable interpretation or discard it as a mere natural dream. But soon, events will prove him or her wrong. So here Shakespeare, all in all, did not do much more than follow an established convention – and we can use this example as a foil for the two remaining ones in which he expanded this pattern and explored new variants.

My second example takes place two scenes before the end of the play. It is the night before the decisive battle. On stage, Richard's and Richmond's camps can be seen side by side, and the action switches continually between the two parties. After some conversations with their followers, Richmond and Richard go to sleep – and both have a dream.¹⁴ One by one, the ghosts of persons whom Richard has killed or had killed (in *3 Henry VI* and our play) appear both in Richard's and in Richmond's dream and transmit their curses or their blessings. I will just quote the first example:

Enter the ghost of young Prince Edward, son of Harry the Sixth.
 GHOST OF PRINCE EDWARD [to King Richard III]
 Let me sit heavy on thy soul tomorrow.
 Think, how thou stab'dst me in my prime of youth
 At Tewkesbury; despair therefore, and die.
 [to Richmond] Be cheerful, Richmond; for the wronged souls
 Of butcher'd princes fight in thy behalf;
 King Henry's issue, Richmond, comforts thee. *Exit.* (R3 5.3.119–24)

At first glance, this dream is even more traditional – one could even say old-fashioned – than the first one. Quite obviously it is a supernatural dream, presented this time in a scenic form. And it is a message dream in which the ghosts address the dreamers in direct speech. The ritualistic

¹³ It had already been used in Greek Antiquity and became an established form in European tragedies from the 16th century onwards; see Goumevou.

¹⁴ In Shakespeare's sources, only Richard had a dream; see Fretz (chap. 3.2).

form of the scene with its serialization and its many repetitions also reminds us of much older dramatic forms, like the medieval morality play. Yet there are three important innovations:

(1) The ghosts provide the dreamers not simply with prophecies or warnings. Instead of knowing about the future, they try to influence it: Richmond is comforted and cheered up for the impending battle; Richard is discouraged, brought to despair, weighed down by guilt. So here a supernatural dream is meant to have quite natural consequences by bringing confidence or diffidence to the respective dreamer, thus enlarging or diminishing the probability of their success in the impending battle.

This plan seems to work – as is proved by the dreamers' reactions, once they have woken up. Richard confesses:

By the Apostle Paul, shadows tonight
 Have struck more terror to the soul of Richard
 Than can the substance of ten thousand soldiers,
 Armed in proof, and led by shallow Richmond. (216–20)

Whereas Richmond awakes as happy as a lark:

The sweetest sleep and fairest-boding dreams
 That ever enter'd in a drowsy head,
 Have I, since your departure, had, my lords.
 Methought their souls, whose bodies Richard murder'd
 Came to my tent and cried on victory.
 I promise you my soul is very jocund
 In the remembrance of so fair a dream. (228–34)

(2) The second innovation is one in literary technique. Usually, a supernatural dream is prophetic and therefore has what we call a proleptic function – it anticipates future events. But in our case, the dream also has an analeptic function – it recapitulates the past. The order in which the ghosts appear is exactly the order in which they were killed by Richard, not only in the play *Richard III*, but also in its predecessor *3 Henry VI*. In this way, the recapitulation dream fulfils a specific literary function: Before the end of the tetralogy, we look back at the long series of horrors which Richmond's victory will end. So the dream is functionalized as a poetic device to integrate the play, link it with the complete series of histories, and prepare its climax as their grand finale.

(3) But the most important innovation is a third one, which occurs in the long monologue which Richard delivers after awakening. Here is the full text:

Give me another horse! Bind up my wounds!
 Have mercy, Jesu! – Soft! I did but dream.
 O coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me!
 The lights burn blue; it is now dead midnight.
 Cold fearful drops stand on my trembling flesh.
 What do I fear? Myself? There's none else by;
 Richard loves Richard, that is, I and I.
 Is there a murderer here? No. *Yes, I am!*
Then fly. What, from myself? Great reason why,
Lest I revenge? What, myself upon myself?
 Alack, I love myself. *Wherefore?* For any good
 That I myself have done unto myself?
O, no, alas, I rather hate myself
For hateful deeds committed by myself.
I am a villain – yet I lie. I am not!
 Fool, of thyself speak well! *Fool, do not flatter.*
 My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
 And every tongue brings in a several tale,
 And every tale condemns me for a villain:
 Perjury, perjury, in the highest degree;
 Murder, stern murder, in the direst degree;
 All several sins, all us'd in each degree,
 Throng to the bar, crying all, “Guilty, guilty!”
 I shall despair. There is no creature loves me,
 And if I die, no soul will pity me –
 And wherefore should they, since that I myself
 Find in myself no pity to myself?
 Methought the souls of all that I had murder'd
 Came to my tent, and every one did threat
 Tomorrow's vengeance on the head of Richard. (178–207; my italics)

The beginning of the monologue is quite puzzling. It shows that Richard has dreamt more than the dream which was shown on stage. Obviously, he also dreamt of the battle – and this part of his dream was prophetic indeed. When Richard cries “Give me another horse” we – as readers who know the complete text – will immediately remember Richard's last

words before his death in battle which are perhaps the most famous quote from the play: “A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!” (R3 5.4.7).

But the real innovation lies in the main part of the monologue. Richard experiences a dissociation of identity (which I have tried to mark by using italics for the parts spoken by Richard’s “second self”). The Richard we have known throughout the play is a resolute and ruthless villain without any scruples. But in the monologue he suddenly shows a second side of his personality which he has successfully suppressed up to now: a Richard who has a conscience, a Richard who hates himself “for hateful deeds committed by myself.” It is not superstition, a belief in the power of supernatural curses, uttered by the ghosts of his victims, which weighs down Richard, but the discovery of a hitherto repressed side of his personality: his better self and his conscience.

Although the dream is a supernatural one, its effect on the dreamer is natural and psychological. So Shakespeare does not break with the traditional use of supernatural dreams, but he clearly expands its boundaries. We might say: He (at least partly) “naturalizes” the supernatural dream into a conscience dream and he uses it as a poetic device to structure his play.¹⁵

My third example shows even more innovations. Clarence’s dream is probably the most interesting and detailed one in Shakespeare’s complete oeuvre.¹⁶ It occurs fairly early in the play: in act I, scene 4. Clarence has been imprisoned in the Tower by his brother, King Edward IV. We – the readers or audience of the play – know already that this was by Richard’s doing. And we also know that Clarence will be murdered soon by cut-throats already hired by Richard – who kills off everybody standing between himself and the throne. Clarence, however, does not know this; he even believes that Richard supports him and is doing his best to get him released.

The dream is told by Clarence to his jailer after awakening. Immediately after this narration the two murderers will appear, stab Clarence, and then throw him into a wine barrel, just to make sure. Again, I will quote the full text (and have already marked the three parts into which the dream can be divided):

¹⁵ For this dream type see Specht.

¹⁶ Even more important: Shakespeare freely invented this dream, which has no equivalent in his sources; see Fretz (chap. 3.2).

[1] Methoughts that I had broken from the Tower,
And was embark'd to cross to Burgundy;
And in my company my brother Gloucester,
Who from my cabin tempted me to walk
Upon the hatches: thence we look'd toward England,
And cited up a thousand fearful times,
During the wars of York and Lancaster
That had befall'n us. As we paced along
Upon the giddy footing of the hatches,
Methought that Gloucester stumbled, and in falling,
Struck me (that thought to stay him) overboard,
Into the tumbling billows of the main.

[2] O Lord! Methought, what pain it was to drown:
What dreadful noise of waters in mine ears;
What ugly sights of death within mine eyes!
Methoughts I saw a thousand fearful wrecks;
Ten thousand men that fishes gnaw'd upon;
Wedges of gold, great anchors, heaps of pearl,
Inestimable stones, unvalu'd jewels,
All scatter'd in the bottom of the sea.
Some lay in dead men's skulls, and in the holes
Where eyes did once inhabit, there were crept –
As 'twere in scorn of eyes – reflecting gems
Which woo'd the slimy bottom of the deep,
And mock'd the dead bones that lay scatter'd by.

KEEPER

Had you such leisure in the time of death
To gaze upon the secrets of the deep?

CLARENCE

Methought I had; and often did I strive
To yield the ghost, but still the envious flood
Stopp'd in my soul, and would not let it forth
To find the empty, vast and wand'ring air,
But smother'd it within my panting bulk,
Which almost burst to belch it in the sea.

KEEPER

Awak'd you not in this sore agony?

CLARENCE

[3] No, no; my dream was lengthen'd after life;
O, then began the tempest to my soul:
I pass'd, methought, the melancholy flood,

With that sour ferryman which poets write of,
 Unto the kingdom of perpetual night.
 The first that there did greet my stranger-soul,
 Was my great father-in-law, renowned Warwick,
 Who spake aloud, "What scourge for perjury
 Can this dark monarchy afford false Clarence?"
 And so he vanish'd. Then came wand'ring by
 A shadow like an angel [i.e. the late Prince Edward], with bright hair
 Dabbled in blood; and he shriek'd out aloud,
 "Clarence is come: false, fleeting, perjur'd Clarence,
 That stabb'd me in the field by Tewkesbury!
 Seize on him, Furies! Take him unto torment!"
 With that, methoughts, a legion of foul fiends
 Environ'd me, and howled in mine ears
 Such hideous cries, that with the very noise
 I trembling wak'd, and for a season after
 Could not believe but that I was in hell,
 Such terrible impression made my dream. (R3 1.4.9–66)

In the first part of his dream, Clarence sees himself on board a ship escaping to France – evidently a simple oneiric wish fulfilment. He is accompanied by his brother Richard, who then pushes him into the sea. This is a clearly prophetic element: Richard will be responsible for Clarence's death – and Clarence, soon after, will be thrown into a barrel of wine (so the dream is not a theorematic¹⁷ but a symbolic one). This supernatural element is, however, partly naturalized, that is: adapted to the dreamer's knowledge level. As Clarence believes Richard to be his friend, he dreams that his death happens by a mere accident for which his brother is not responsible – so for the audience the dream underlines Clarence's stubborn blindness to Richard's character.

The second part of the dream is not only a vivid description of the pains of suffocation, but also a – highly poetic – verbal painting of a submarine landscape with sunken ships, the bodies of drowned seamen, and abundant treasures. The symbolic – or even allegoric – meaning of this part is fairly obvious. The scene is a variation of the *vanitas* topos: For a dying person, all earthly goods, riches, and treasures must be vain. This adds a moralizing (we might say: tropological) dimension to the dream.

¹⁷ A theorematic dream shows future events in exactly the same way as they will happen.

But there is also a strong emotional element: Clarence experiences the agony of the act of dying – and transmits it by his report to the audience.

In the third part, the register changes again. Here, Shakespeare uses another traditional type of the supernatural dream: the dream-voyage to the beyond, which can already be found in the *Gilgamesh* epic (dating back at least to the 18th century BC).¹⁸ As often in Renaissance works, pagan and Christian elements are mixed: We encounter Charon, the ferryman from the Greek underworld who will take us across the river Styx (which separates the world of the living from that of the dead). But the Greek underworld is also explicitly identified as the Christian hell. Here Clarence (just as Richard in his dream) meets the ghosts of two of his victims – Warwick and Prince Edward – persons whom he had killed and betrayed in *3 Henry VI*. So, once again, the dream turns into a conscience dream.

But unlike in Richard's dream, the pangs of conscience have a lasting effect on Clarence: He repents, prays to God – and, altruistically, begs not for his own salvation but for that of his family:

I have done these things,
That now give evidence against my soul,
For Edward's sake: and see how he requites me.
O God, if my deep prayers cannot appease Thee,
But Thou wilt be aveng'd on my misdeeds,
Yet execute Thy wrath in me alone;
O, spare my guiltless wife and my poor children.
Keeper, I prithee sit by me awhile:
My soul is heavy and I fain would sleep. (66–74)

So the supernatural dream warning is – unlike in Richard's dream – successful: Clarence's soul may be saved.

Is the dream oneirically plausible, that is: does it have a strong dream effect?¹⁹ Well, at least partly. The first section of the dream is quite plausibly dreamlike; the sudden changes between the three parts remind us of dream metamorphoses; the images of the second part at least resemble dream bizarreries, especially the seeming inability to die. But in

¹⁸ See Engel. *Making – or Not Making – Sense of Dreams*, “The Dream Effect,” esp. 328–33.

¹⁹ For the term see Engel. *Making – or Not Making – Sense of Dreams*, “The Dream Effect.”

fact, most of the motifs Shakespeare uses in parts 2 and 3 are what I call secondary oneiricity,²⁰ that is: dreamlike motifs which are, so to speak, borrowed from other genres. The strongest dream (or rather nightmare) element is certainly the fear which Clarence experiences.

All in all, Shakespeare's partial naturalization of the dream does not really include the attempt to achieve a particularly strong dream effect. Rather than trying to invent a plausible dream, Shakespeare is combining and reshaping a great number of topical elements to achieve multi-faceted purposes: The dream is supernaturally prophetic – thus hinting at some sort of ruling Providence behind the seemingly senseless chaos of history; it is at least partly naturalized and delineating the dreamer; it carries a moral meaning; and it is (especially in its second part) both highly poetic and highly emotional.

A Midsummer Night's Dream (1595) – an Oneiric Play?

This comedy²¹ is probably Shakespeare's best-known drama – so there is certainly no need for a detailed summary. The play shows us the love tangles of five couples – Theseus/Hippolyta, Pyramus/Thisbe, Oberon/Titania, Lysander/Hermia, Demetrius/Helena – in which the latter three swap partners in the middle and main part of the play. This middle part plays at night-time and is situated in a forest near the city of Athens, whereas the first and the last act are located in the city. The forest is populated by fairies ruled by Oberon and Titania, whereas Athens is ruled by Theseus and Hippolyta (who are just about to be married).

While all of the confusions in the forest are resolved at the end of the play – as befits a comedy – the play about Pyramus and Thisbe is a tragedy based on a story in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (somewhat resembling the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet). Yet this play-within-a-play is performed (for the wedding celebrations of Theseus and Hippolyta) by the so-called "mechanicals" – six Athenian craftsmen and amateur actors – in so ludicrous a way that it also turns into a comedy.

²⁰ Engel. *Making – or Not Making – Sense of Dreams*, "The Dream Effect," 40 f.

²¹ William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Ed. Harold F. Brooks. In: Shakespeare *The Arden Shakespeare*; henceforth quoted as MND with numbers of act, scene, and verse. – For the dream aspect, see Boock, Bulkeley, Dowd, Faber, Fretz (chap. 2.3), Holland, and Seel.

I will not go into any details of interpretation, but merely ask whether (and if so, in what sense) *A Midsummer Night's Dream* can be called an "oneiric play" (or "dreamplay")²² in the same way as, say, August Strindberg's *A Dream Play* (*Ett drömspel*) of 1901. Let us briefly discuss the pros and cons.

(1) A big pro is, of course, the title, which is explained – or rather tentatively justified – in Puck's epilogue:

If we shadows have offended,
 Think but this, and all is mended,
 That you have but slumber'd here
 While these visions did appear.
 And this weak and idle theme,
 No more yielding but a dream,
 Gentles, do not reprehend:
 If you pardon, we will mend. (MND 5.1.417–24)

(2) More generally, all characters speak of their night-time experiences as dreams.²³

(3) The space of the dream is clearly demarcated from that of the waking world. The latter is Athens, which is ruled by a very rational king who does not believe in dreams (MND 5.1.2–22), and governed by inhumanly strict laws. In contrast, the heterotopic night-time world of the woods, ruled by fairies, is a rather chaotic, labyrinthine world and a realm of uncontrollable passions.

(4) There is at least a rudimentary dream effect: We have a few bizarreries – the strongest ones are the unmotivated changes of emotion in the lovers – and a few metamorphoses (the most remarkable being, of course, Bottom's transformation into an ass).

On the con side:

(1) The bizarreries and metamorphoses which we encounter are, at best, secondary oneiricity, borrowed from the world of fairy tales. Rather than being a dreamscape, the wood at night is the realm of the miraculous; its metamorphoses are brought about by a magical "juice" (MND

²² For the genre of the dreamplay, see Höfer, Schmitz-Emans.

²³ See MND 3.2.370f. (Oberon); 4.1.68 (Oberon); 75f. (Titania); 190–98 (Demetrius); 199–217 (Bottom).

2.1.169–72) which makes characters love the first person they espy when waking up. And the plot lines of the play are certainly not those of dream logic. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a well-structured drama with an almost mathematical series of permutations between the love couples and, all in all, spatial and temporal continuity. We could even disregard the aspect of magic and just think of the ordinary confusions of love, where feelings will change frequently and abruptly, and where falling in love with an ass – male or female – is quite an ordinary experience.

(2) To further test the oneiricity of the play we should compare it with the only literal and clearly marked dream within the comedy: Hermia's nightmare.

Before her dream, she and Lysander had lost their way in the woods (to which they had escaped because Hermia's father Egeus, supported by King Theseus, had tried to force his daughter to marry the unloved Demetrius). The lovers had decided to lie down for a rest. While they sleep, Puck arrives and – mistaking Lysander for Demetrius – applies the fatal love juice to Lysander's eyes.²⁴

Then Helena and Demetrius enter the scene – she still searching for his love, he still rejecting her and finally running away. Helena is exhausted, remains on the scene, sees Lysander sleeping on the ground, and wakes him up. And as Helena is the first living being Lysander sees after the charm has been applied, he immediately professes his love to her. Helena disbelieves him, runs away, and Lysander follows her. So Hermia is all alone when she awakes:

HERMIA [*starting*]

Help me, Lysander, help me! Do thy best
 To pluck this crawling serpent from my breast!
 Ay me, for pity! What a dream was here!
 Lysander, look how I do quake with fear.
 Methought a serpent eat my heart away,
 And you sat smiling at his cruel prey.
 Lysander! what, removed? Lysander! lord!
 What, out of hearing? Gone? No sound, no word?

²⁴ Before Demetrius fell in love with Hermia, he had loved Helena (who still pines for him and has followed him into the woods, where Demetrius is searching for the eloped Hermia). Oberon overhears Demetrius scolding Helena, and orders Puck to use the magic "juice" to make Demetrius fall in love with her again (MND 2.1).

Alack, where are you? Speak, and if you hear;
 Speak, of all loves I swoon almost with fear.
 No? Then I well perceive you are not nigh
 Either death or you I'll find immediately. (MND 2.2.144–55)

Hermia's dream has received many ingenious (and ingeniously far-fetched) Freudian interpretations,²⁵ but can be understood very easily, if we assume that Hermia had overheard at least part of the talk between Helena and Lysander in her sleep.

In their previous conversation, Lysander had told Hermia: "my heart unto yours is knit,/ So that but one heart we can make of it:/ Two bosoms interchained with an oath,/ So then, two bosoms and a single troth" (56–59) – so she may plausibly equate the loss of Lysander with the loss of her heart. And therefore the serpent²⁶ who has "eaten her heart away" is, quite simply, Helena. So Hermia's dream can be read as a plausible natural nightmare with a plausible symbolic encoding and dreamlike bizarreries, caused by a weak sensual perception during sleep and a day residue, in other words: It definitely has a clear and strong dream effect – much stronger than that of the play as a whole.

Taking stock of the pros and cons, I would conclude that I am not really convinced of an oneiric reading of the play. Certainly, Shakespeare does not try to give his comedy an even basically dreamlike form (as he did in Hermia's dream).

But Shakespeare *did* call his play a dream, so we should try another approach. Instead of asking whether the play fits *our* concept of a dreamplay, we should ask: Which concept of the dream could justify calling *A Midsummer Night's Dream* an oneiric play?

There are, I believe, two possible answers to this question.

(1) An *allegorical reading* of the play could be based on the concept of the natural (psychological) dream: This reading would suggest itself, if we could impute to the Elizabethan Age the idea of an unconscious – which would be the obviously anachronistic way out. Without this, the task is much more difficult. But let us, just for the sake of argument,

²⁵ See Faber, Holland, and Jacobs.

²⁶ Therefore we should not primarily think of the snake as a symbol of sin (let alone, as Freudians would have it, as a phallic symbol), but rather as a "double-tongued," treacherous animal (MND 4.1.72f.).

assume that Shakespeare had a concept which, however vaguely, at least somewhat resembled that of our unconscious, implying the appearance of hidden or even repressed desires in our dreams.

The middle part of the play takes part in a forest at night – allegorically speaking: during the sleep of our will and our consciousness and in a heterotopic realm in which the strict rules of culture are suspended – which fits this reading fairly well. But to make it really work we would have to assume that Lysander has a secret desire for Helena (for which there is no indication in the play) – and that Titania has a hidden penchant for a somewhat more “animalistic” form of love (for which there is no indication either). Only Bottom’s “dream” could be easily (but uninterestingly) explained as wishful thinking.

As this reading simply will not work, we will have to retreat to an even weaker fallback option: In the heterotopic (dream-)world of the forest, the inconstancy, capriciousness, and uncontrollability of human love is revealed. And this (rather banal) reading may stand – for whatever it is worth.

(2) A *metafictional reading* could be based on the equation of dream and fiction: We might call this a merely rhetorical use of the term “dream”, but we could also refer to the dream theory of the Elizabethan Age which, as we saw, considered dreams as products of the imagination. Even more simply, we could just resort to the fact that the dream is, indeed, the natural and primeval form of fiction. Quite obviously, it creatively transforms reality – as Shakespeare writes in one of the most famous quotes from the play: “Bottom – thou art translated” (MND 3.1.108).²⁷ Even more important, the dream provides us with the primeval model for the dialectics of a fictional experience: We can accept fictional realities in a state of total immersion – as we (mostly) do when dreaming. But we can also view them from an aesthetic distance, well knowing that they are mere fiction – as we do when we are awake and remember our dreams.

Indeed, we could say that *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is a play about fiction (more specifically: the fictions of love), a metafictional play. We can easily subsume all our pros under this heading – and forget about the cons.

The dream metaphor – or rather: metonymy – is just one example for this metafictional turn in the play. We have also – to name just the most

²⁷ The Arden edition reads “thou art changed.”

obvious aspects – the play-within-the-play, performed by the mechanicals with almost Brechtian alienation effects;²⁸ Oberon and Puck acting as stage managers, staging a play of their own invention with the lovers as unconscious actors which we, the real audience, watch – knowing that it is simply being staged by the fairies. Another doubling of the theatre situation happens when we see an audience on stage which is watching a play. This happens when the mechanicals perform and the court watches and comments, but it also happens in the woods when Oberon and Puck watch and comment on the lovers' actions.

All in all, I would very much prefer this metafictional reading of the “oneiricity” of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to a psychological one, as it shows more clearly what the dream could mean for a poet: the licence to create an imaginary heterotopic realm, a highly poeticized fantasy world into which the representation of the miraculous could be as seamlessly integrated as music and dance, and which could be easily combined with an ironic reference to its fictional character:

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. (MND 5.1.12–17)

Poetic oneiricity of this kind – which in no way attempts to mimic the formal confusion of a dream – can indeed turn into “something of great constancy;/ But howsoever, strange and admirable” (26f.).²⁹

A Brief Look at the Late Plays: *The Tempest* (1611)

Shakespeare's late plays – *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *A Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* – are usually called “romances.” Literary historians might

²⁸ To give just one example: to avoid frightening the audience, the actor playing the lion has to inform the spectators that he is not a lion, but Snug, the joiner, who is just playing a lion (MND 3.1.34–43).

²⁹ Whereas the early comedy *The Taming of the Shrew* (c. 1591) had used the dream frame in a merely rhetorical way; for variations in the two extant versions of the comedy, see Fretz (chap. 2.2).

describe them as a transition stage between Renaissance and Baroque – i.e. Baroque plays which, for instance, still use a repertoire of Greek deities instead of a Christian supernatural machinery. Historians of the theatre might describe them as the consequence of a transition from Elizabethan outdoor playhouses (like the Globe) with an inclusive public of all social orders to enclosed theatre buildings (like the Blackfriars Theatre) and court theatre with artificial lighting, all sorts of theatrical props and a much more socially aspiring clientele. Anyway, these late plays are markedly different in their radical break with both the realism and the subtle character psychology of earlier plays. Here the most incredible actions happen – and the final resolution of all conflicts can often only work by abrupt deus-ex-machina solutions.

My example will be *The Tempest*,³⁰ which is usually considered as the last (complete) play Shakespeare wrote. In many ways, the basic constellation of this drama reminds us of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: (1) *The Tempest* is set in a heterotopic space – a remote island to which Prospero, formerly Duke of Milan, had fled 12 years earlier together with his daughter Miranda, after his rule over Milan was treacherously usurped by his brother Antonio (aided by Alonso, King of Naples). (2) Prospero has studied the occult arts and is now ruling his island (and its only indigenous inhabitant Caliban, whom he, rather unsuccessfully, tries to “civilize”) with the help of “spirits,” especially the air-spirit Ariel; so the isle is a magical realm like the forest in *Midsummer*. (3) This heterotopic and magical world is entered by a group of people from the “real” one – most importantly: Antonio; Alonso, his son Ferdinand, and his brother Sebastian; Alonso’s councillor Gonzalo and several lords; Alonso’s majordomo Stephano and his jester Trinculo – who are confused, (mis-)guided and ultimately transformed by its magic. (4) Like *Midsummer*, *The Tempest* has a play-within-a-play (the Masque in 4.1), metafictional references to literature and to the enactment of a drama, and Prospero as stage manager of all actions.³¹ So there is reason enough to view *The*

³⁰ William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*. Ed. Frank Kermode. In: Shakespeare *The Arden Shakespeare*; henceforth quoted as T with numbers of act, scene and verse. – For the dream aspect, see Fretz (chap. 5.4) and Garber.

³¹ While in the other romances a deity (sometimes a veritable deus ex machina) is ultimately responsible for the final solution of all conflicts – Jupiter in *Cymbeline*, Diana in *Pericles*, and Apollo in *The Winter's Tale* – Prospero takes on this role himself in *The Tempest*.

Tempest as the result of a continuation and further development of the metafictional type of oneiric dreamplay as which I tried to describe *Midsummer* in my third section.

But there are at least three important differences: (1) Whereas *Midsummer* is a play about love and a comedy, *The Tempest* might be called a play about the use and misuse of power, and strikes a much more serious note; its plot follows a grand plan of Prospero's to revenge himself on Antonio and Alonso and regain his dukedom. And like all other romances, *The Tempest* is a play about the loss of order and its restitution by supernatural or miraculous means which are beyond all verisimilitude. So *The Tempest* is much more general and generic than *Midsummer*.

(2) *The Tempest* also differs from *Midsummer* in its spatial construction: Instead of two different reality spheres (Athens and the forest) we experience only the heterotopic space of the island. This probably explains why we are hardly ever presented with marked dreams in this late play. In the magical realm of the isle, the borderline between sleeping and waking, dream and daily reality, is continuously blurred and crossed. Following Prospero's instructions, Ariel uses music and highly poeticized songs to induce and stage hallucinatory dream worlds for all the castaways: – for Ferdinand (T 1.2.377–410); for Alonso, Antonio, Sebastian and Gonzalo (3.3.18–110); for Stephano, Trinculo and Caliban (4.1.171–261) – which are watched by Prospero (or told to him later) and the audience. These “visions of the island” (T 5.1.176), as plays-within-the-play, might well be considered as staged dreams or collective hallucinations.

Sometimes they are explicitly called dreams or compared to dreams by the people who experience them: Charmed both by Ariel's songs and Prospero's magic, Ferdinand feels his “spirits, as in a dream, [...] all bound up” (T 1.2.489). Sometimes the boundary between waking and dreaming is blurred, as for Caliban whose recurring hallucinations and dreams merge seamlessly into one another:

the isle is full of noises,
 Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not.
 Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
 Will hum about mine ears; and sometimes voices,
 That, if I then had wak'd after long sleep,
 Will make me sleep again: and then, in dreaming,
 The clouds methought would open, and show riches

Ready to drop upon me; that, when I wak'd,
I cried to dream again. (T 3.2.133–41)³²

The only clearly marked dream in the play is a supernatural message dream in which Ariel warns Gonzalo that the sleeping Alonso is in imminent danger of being murdered by Sebastian and Antonio. Ariel “sings in Gonzalo’s ear”:

While you here do snoring lie,
Open-eyed conspiracy
His time doth take.
If of life you keep a care,
Shake off slumber, and beware:
Awake, Awake! (T 2.1.295–300)

Gonzalo wakes the King (and thus prevents the murder), but all he remembers from his dream is: “I heard a humming/ And that a strange one too, which did awake me” (312f.). Thus, the only dream that is clearly marked fits perfectly into the series of dreamlike hallucinations: We watch all of them, so to speak, from the outside – not as mental events, but as staged realities, as fictions within a fictional world.

As the line between dream worlds and waking worlds is often almost indiscernible for the characters, the dream effect of *The Tempest* is much more powerful than that of *Midsommer*. The island and its visions bring out the best or worst in the castaways – love in Ferdinand, striving for power in Antonio, Sebastian, Stephano and Trinculo, guilt and finally remorse in Alonso; they liberate hidden feelings and desires in positive and negative extremes which are personified in Ariel and Caliban.³³

³² Caliban’s Tantalus-like recurring dream may be simple wishful dreaming, but it also could, quite probably, be one of the hallucinations with which Prospero punishes him also in daytime (as the dream is induced by the island’s “spiritual” music). Anyway, the dream contains a natural element, which is derived from Caliban’s character: In his dream, the ethereal beauties of the paradisiacal island are transformed into banal material “riches.”

³³ I am well aware of the fact that in (currently highly popular) postcolonial readings of the play, Caliban is considered as the prototypical enslaved indigene, cruelly mistreated by Prospero as the prototypically ruthless colonizer. This is a perfectly legitimate approach – as long as one realizes that one is considering the drama as a mere historical document for contemporary mentalities and not as a literary work,

(3) In a famous (and often quoted) speech which ends the Masque performed for Ferdinand and Miranda, Prospero uses the dream metaphor in its most global meaning:

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits and
Are melted into air, into thin air;
And – like the baseless fabric of this vision –
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe³⁴ itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep. (T 4.1.148–158)

Of course, this equation of our earthly life with a dream (from which we will finally “wake” into true reality) has a long tradition which reaches well back to ancient Hinduism and was renewed in Christianity. But in the context of the play-within-a-play (and combined with the equally well-known Epilogue of *The Tempest*, in which Prospero directly addresses the audience) this metaphor acquires a new dimension of meaning which we can reconstruct in a triad of metaphorical equations: our earthly life (opposed to life in the beyond) = dreaming (opposed to waking) = aesthetic experience (opposed to everyday reality).

Therefore the oneiricity of *The Tempest* can be best described as a series of different layers of “unreal” mental worlds: dreams – staged hallucinations – life in the heterotopic realm of the isle – our aesthetic experience of a staged fictional world. So we may indeed consider *The Tempest* as the last and most universal stage in the evolution of Shakespeare’s concept of the dreamplay.

i.e. that one is reconstructing a symptomatic meaning. In a critical interpretation of the play as a literary work, however, Caliban as the son of a witch (who, by the way, was exiled from Algiers and therefore not an indigenous inhabitant of the island but rather its first colonizer), is no more “real” than Ariel – and as deeply symbolic. Problems will arise only when these two approaches are mixed and confused.

³⁴ Which may (as has often been observed) well refer to the Globe theatre.

Conclusion

The Elizabethan Age was certainly a period of many innovations – but not as far as the dream discourse was concerned. The main achievements here were rather a rediscovery, synthesis, and perhaps a consolidation of all of the topical elements of Ancient oneirocriticism together with a backgrounding of Christian traditions.

A study of Shakespeare as a dream poet shows that one should beware of overestimating the influence of the contemporary dream discourse on literary dreams. Of course, it remains important as something like a limiting factor (which, for instance, excludes Freud and his concept of the unconscious). But Shakespeare was primarily focused on (re-)inventing modern drama, or – to put it more simply and less anachronistically – to write good, original, and successful plays; so for him the dream was, above all, a literary device, whose poetic potential he tried to explore and expand.

The standard model of literary oneiricity – which Shakespeare could find in poetic texts and in the historical sources he used – consisted of established modes of using supernatural dreams. Shakespeare never categorically broke with this model (which remained dominant in fictional dreams well into the 18th century) and, although he did much to at least partly “naturalize” supernatural dreams, he certainly did not start the career of the natural dream, which would not begin before the late 18th century.

Shakespeare’s first innovation was what I have called a partial naturalization of the supernatural dream. His dream representations remain supernatural – containing a warning or a prophecy – but they also serve to delineate the dreamer’s character by providing information about him or her and/or by bringing about a character change.

This line of development was, however, not really continued. Many readers will certainly have missed a mention of the tragedies in my essay. We can, indeed, find some dreams here – but only comparatively few and not particularly prominent or innovative ones.³⁵ This is what I meant by the role of the dream discourse as limiting factor: Natural dreams as a way of exposing hidden traits of character were simply beyond the scope

³⁵ For dreams in the tragedies, see Fretz (chap. 3).

of Elizabethan dream knowledge (no matter what ingeniously inventive psychoanalytic critics may venture to read into Shakespeare's plays).

The line which *was* continued – and this is Shakespeare's second important innovation – was that of fathoming the literary possibilities of the dream, especially its potential for creating highly imaginary worlds and for structuring a play. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* explored for the first time the concept of the dream as an ironical, highly self-conscious mode of metafiction or, at least, as a heightened – potentiated, as it were – form of fiction. This is also true of the late plays, but here it happens in a much more serious mode. In most of the romances, the dream is used as a grand theatrical spectacle which epitomizes and highlights the fictional character of the play and its resolution of all conflicts. I have tried to show that *The Tempest* can be considered as the last stage in the evolution of Shakespeare's meta-fictional use of oneiricity. To paraphrase Puck: Fiction, after all, is yielding no more than a poetic dream.

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Vers une histoire sociale de l'attention. Le cas de la littérature française du XVII^e siècle¹

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Résumé : cet article propose une histoire sociale de l'attention à partir de la littérature française du XVII^e siècle. En confrontant la « Sainte Attention » religieuse et « l'humeur impatiente » décrite par Furetière, il montre que l'attention constitue, sur le temps long, un véritable enjeu culturel et social, plutôt qu'un simple problème cognitif ou technologique. Il déplace ainsi la question vers une concurrence sociale entre acteurs – auteurs, éditeurs, institutions – qui tous entendent régenter la bonne et la mauvaise attention. L'étude combine analyses quantitatives de lisibilité et de complexité syntaxique avec l'examen des formes éditoriales et typographiques, afin de comprendre comment la littérature s'adapte aux régimes d'attention d'une société donnée. L'exemple du passage du roman long à la nouvelle illustre cette capacité d'ajustement sans impliquer un déclin des facultés de concentration. En analysant les dispositifs conçus pour capter, maintenir ou renégocier l'attention, l'article révèle un enjeu politique et social central de la culture moderne.

Mots clés : attention, livres et médias, histoire de la lecture, littérature française du XVII^e siècle, La Bruyère, histoire de la presse

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Towards a Social History of Attention. The Case of 17th century French Literature.

Abstract: This article develops a social history of attention through the lens of seventeenth-century French literature. Juxtaposing the religious ideal of “Holy Attention” with Furetière’s portrait of an “impatient nation,” it argues that attention has long been a cultural and social matter rather than a cognitive or technological one. The study reframes the issue as a social competition among writers, publishers, and institutions, all seeking to define and govern what counts as proper or misplaced attention. Combining quantitative analyses of readability and syntactic complexity with close examination of editorial and typographic practices, it explores how literature adapts to the shifting regimes of attention of its time. The move from the long romance to the short novella illustrates this adaptability without implying any decline in readers’ capacities. By tracing the rhetorical and material strategies that organize attention, this article foregrounds it as a central political and social concern of modern culture.

Keywords: attention span, books and media, history of reading, 17th-century french literature, La Bruyère, historical newspapers

Dans l’*Annonciation* d’Eustache Le Sueur, Marie est agenouillée devant son livre de prières (Fig. 1). Le motif est courant, mais les pages tournées suggèrent ici la « Sainte Attention » (Marno) que la Vierge, l’instant précédent, consacrait à l’Écriture sainte. On pourrait presque croire que c’est la qualité de cette lecture qui a fait apparaître l’archange et le Saint-Esprit. Sept ans plus tard, la *Jeune fille lisant une lettre à la fenêtre* de Vermeer (ca. 1657) représente également une lecture parfaite et entière, guidée, cette fois-ci, par un amour tout humain.

Les choses apparaissent bien différentes, en revanche, dans le *Roman bourgeois* de Furetière (1666). Au détour d’une conversation de salon, on lit ainsi que :

[...] l’humeur impatiente de notre Nation est cause qu’elle ne se plaît pas aux grands ouvrages, et une marque de cela, c’est que si on tient un livre de vers, on lira plutôt un sonnet, qu’une élégie, une épigramme qu’un sonnet, et si un livre n’est plein que d’épigrammes, on lira plutôt celle de quatre vers, que celle de dix ou de douze. (Furetière 1666, 249–250)

Pour un lecteur du XXI^e siècle, le passage ne manquera pas d’évoquer les diatribes contemporaines sur les difficultés de concentration et d’attention, phénomène très généralement imputé aux écrans, aux



Fig. 1 : *Eustache Le Sueur (1616-1655), «Annonciation», 1650, Toledo Museum.*

smartphones, et au manque de lecture. Or la remarque de Furetière complexifie considérablement le problème. Si l'on se plaint déjà d'une attention insuffisante et d'une incapacité à se concentrer en 1666, et si le même support – le livre – et la même pratique – la lecture – peuvent être à la fois lieu de Sainte Attention et de l'humeur impatiente, c'est que le problème ne peut être réduit ni à une technologie spécifique ou à une époque particulière.

Constatant l'existence de ces deux représentations antithétiques de la lecture dès le XVII^e siècle – l'une, idéale; l'autre, dégradée et impatiente –, cet article propose d'étudier l'influence des enjeux d'attention sur la littérature française de cette même période. Comment, en effet, comprendre l'expression de Furetière, «l'humeur impatiente de notre nation», en termes modernes? S'agit-il d'une question d'ordre cognitive – une incapacité à s'attacher à la lecture d'un texte long – ou

une question de priorité, d'un désir pour des choses brèves? La première partie esquisse une archéologie de l'attention et de la cognition (Citton & Doudek, Abiramuk). En prenant pour terrain les recueils poétiques des années 1660 dont parle Furetière, ainsi que l'évolution des genres narratifs au cours du siècle, elle tente de mesurer quantitativement la soi-disante « humeur impatiente » de la nation française. La deuxième partie démontre alors que l'attention se manifeste avant tout comme une problématique sociale et culturelle, une négociation entre les bénéfiques qu'un sujet espère recevoir d'un objet, pour justifier ou non son attention. Les discours sur l'attention apparaissent alors comme des propos normatifs qui visent à aiguiller les comportements en valorisant ou en discréditant leurs « cibles », pour paraphraser Descartes sur le sujet de l'attention (Hatfield 7). Enfin, la troisième partie démontre concrètement comment l'enjeu de l'attention façonne les livres, à la fois dans leur matérialité – pages de titre, lieux de vente – et leurs textes. Elle introduit la notion de « dispositifs d'agentivité », soit une série de marqueurs typographiques ou rhétoriques qui entretiennent et renégocient l'attention du lecteur tout au long de l'ouvrage. Le propos dans l'ensemble n'est donc pas de définir et d'étudier l'attention en soi, comme phénomène ou concept en général (Husserl), en tant qu'économie ou écologie (Citton *Pour une écologie*), d'isoler un discours vertueux sur l'attention ou un art de la bonne attention (Marno, Volpillac), ou encore de dresser un panorama exhaustif des discours sur l'attention, mais bien de profiter du recul qu'offre la littérature du XVII^e siècle pour articuler les différentes facettes d'un problème complexe et comprendre la façon dont une société façonne l'attention de ses membres.

L'enjeu d'une telle étude est, sinon de réfuter, du moins, de complexifier les approches technodéterministes et/ou présentéistes de l'attention (dans la lignée de l'ouvrage collectif de Citton & Doudet), en invitant à distinguer ce qui relève d'une difficulté cognitive – ne pas *pouvoir* – de ce qui relève de pratiques sociales et culturelles – ne pas *vouloir* s'intéresser à quelque chose. Dans *Distraction*, Nathalie Philipps rappelle en effet que, depuis des siècles, l'attention se décrit presque invariablement comme quelque chose d'insuffisant et de dégradé par rapport à un passé idéal (Philipps 13). La question est donc nécessairement plus complexe qu'une simple affaire de *capacité* (d'attention, de concentration) qui se serait brutalement réduite au XXI^e siècle. La perspective historique que nous adoptons met en échec toute tentative de réduire la question à un média ou une technologie spécifique, tentative récurrente qui s'attaque, selon les

époques, à l'imprimé (trop de livres), aux romans, à la radio, à la télévision et, aujourd'hui, aux *smartphones*. Cette confusion entre le média et les pratiques amène, au mieux, à prendre le symptôme pour la cause, ce qui empêche d'identifier de véritables pérennes, au pire, à dissimuler opportunément des causes politiques, sociales et organisationnelles derrière des boucs-émissaires faciles. Si l'on ne parvient pas à se concentrer sur une tâche donnée, il est plus simple d'accuser les *smartphone*, que de se confronter au mal-être et à la perte de sens qu'amènent les *bullshit job* (Graeber).

Elle amène en tous les cas à une idéalisation du livre, support sacralisé, lieu de concentration absolue et source de développement personnel (Turnovsky), dont « il convient de maintenir le *culte* » (Borges 158, nous soulignons), aux dépens des autres médias – « un journal », « un disque », aujourd'hui, un écran – symptômes d'un monde contemporain dégénéré, qui ne sont lus ou écoutés que « pour l'oubli », comme « quelque chose de mécanique et par là même de frivole » (Borges 156–57). Ce culte du livre, remotivé d'abord par une litanie d'auteurs, aujourd'hui d'influenceurs, repose sur de nombreux escamotages logiques et des flous définitionnels, à commencer par une confusion évidente entre le support et son contenu – Borges ne pense certainement pas aux livres de cuisine ou aux livres de comptes – et à un manque de perspective historique, en oubliant que les romans ont fait longtemps l'objet des mêmes critiques que celle formulée aujourd'hui à l'encontre de la télévision et des smartphones. Le fantasme du livre – mais de quels livres parle-t-on ? – hérite ainsi directement d'un modèle religieux de l'attention, comme l'écrivait explicitement George Bernard Shaw : « tout livre qui vaut la peine d'être relu a été écrit par l'Esprit » (Shaw, cité par Borges 151).

En prenant comme terrain d'étude la littérature du XVII^e siècle, on espère également empêcher d'assigner cette problématique à une période ou un moment historique spécifique. La question de l'attention n'est en effet liée, ni à l'émergence de la sphère publique, ni au passage de la lecture intensive à la lecture extensive puisque les deux pratiques coexistent en parallèle (Fournier), ni à une hypothétique période prérévolutionnaire, ni encore à l'ère industrielle et à la production de masse qu'elle implique (Citton & Doudet 16), même si chacun de ces moments, comme bien d'autres, la reconfigure. L'idée selon laquelle nous serions soumis à des distractions de plus en plus importantes repose une fois encore sur des constructions historiques idéalisées : « même une brève incursion dans l'histoire de la distraction complique l'idée d'une augmentation

constante des causes de déconcentration et défait ainsi toute nostalgie d'un passé idyllique où l'attention était facile, particulièrement lorsque l'on pense – comme le font souvent les chercheurs en littératures – à l'histoire de la lecture²» (Philipps 13). Sénèque se plaignait déjà que la bibliothèque d'Alexandrie contenait trop de livres, qu'elle n'était qu'une «orgie de littérature» contraire à la *tranquillité* de l'âme, cela, plusieurs siècles avant l'invention de l'imprimerie (Volpilhac 71, nous soulignons). Les humanistes de la Renaissance sont bien souvent représentés entourés de livres remplis de signets et de marque-pages, signes d'une lecture fragmentaire, utilitaire et extensive, plus proche de nos bases de données que de l'imaginaire d'une lecture sacrée (Turnovsky). Le trop-plein de sollicitations publicitaires au festival d'Avignon que remarque Yves Citton (*Pour une écologie* 15) rappelle les plaintes de Boileau qui écrit à la fin des années 1660 que Paris «[...] n'a point de portail où, jusques aux corniches/Tous les piliers ne soient enveloppés d'affiches» (110).

S'il y avait déjà trop de livres dans la Rome antique, que l'on est incapable de lire un long poème en 1666 et qu'on croule sous les affiches dans les mêmes années, il paraît alors impossible d'aborder le problème de l'attention comme un problème propre à un état du monde, ou d'une offre qui serait soudain pléthorique (Citton 17) alors qu'elle ne l'était pas avant. En réalité, nous sommes toujours capables de nous concentrer, par exemple lorsqu'il s'agit de conduire un véhicule pendant un temps long (Briggs). Une récente revue systématique des études sur le *media multitasking* et la cognition n'identifie aucune preuve de diminution de la capacité d'attention en soi, liée aux écrans (Parry & Roux 2021). Aristote le notait déjà : quel que soit l'état du monde, le sujet doit choisir sur quoi il porte son attention (Leijenhorst 2008). L'organisation des sociétés, les systèmes de valeur, les technologies prises dans cet ensemble, tout cela reconfigure, à chaque époque, nos façons de voir, d'écouter et de penser.

Vers une archéologie des capacités d'attention

La question de l'attention est consubstantielle à la littérature du second XVII^e siècle. La Fronde, guerre civile qui secoue le royaume dans

² “Even a brief foray into distraction’s history complicates this idea of ever-increasing diversion, discouraging any nostalgia about an idyllic past of easy attention, particularly when we think – as literary scholars often do – about the history of reading.”

les années 1648 à 1652, est également une guerre de communication qui voit soudain « 4000 textes » (Jouhaud) se propager en quatre ans seulement dans Paris. Ce déferlement de publications sollicite, divise et reconfigure durablement l'attention. Dans la seconde partie du siècle, auteurs et éditeurs développent de nouvelles formules pour diversifier les publics (notamment, femmes et courtisans), formules qui prennent en compte le mode de vie affairiste du second xvii^e siècle, dans lequel la lecture est une activité parmi d'autres, et une activité de gens occupés (Viala *Naissance*, Volpilhac, Martin). Si, comme chez Descartes, « on ne trouve pas d'analyse approfondie de l'attention » (Hatfield 8), la question fait ainsi régulièrement l'objet de discours. Ainsi réfléchit-on à la construction des périodes, qui doivent ménager l'attention (Bury 1996), et aux incises, qui, troublant la concentration, brouillent la compréhension du texte (Du Plaisir 807). Ainsi Jean Chapelain recommande-t-il à Georges de Scudéry de privilégier les « passions tendres » et les « événements divers et surprenants », seuls capables d'attacher l'attention de ses lecteurs (Chapelain 111), et tandis que l'on recommande de la diversité et de la *varietas* pour délasser l'esprit, le dramaturge Edmé Boursault s'inquiète des problèmes que l'attention pose à la réception de ses pièces, en remarquant que « quand un homme a ouï trois actes d'une pièce grave, il est si fatigué qu'il lui semble que tout le reste de la pièce languisse » (n. p.).

Dès lors, si l'attention façonne l'écriture et la composition, peut-on retrouver, dans l'évolution des formes littéraires, une évolution des capacités d'attention? Et, corollairement, peut-on lier les évolutions de la production littéraire à celle des capacités d'attention du public? Nous prenons comme premier terrain d'étude ce que l'histoire a qualifié de « tournant des années 1660 » (Esmein « Les petites histoires ») : après un demi-siècle de romans longs (*L'Astrée*, *Cléopâtre*, *Artamène*, *Clélie*, *Faramond*, etc.) publiés en cinq, dix ou douze volumes totalisant des milliers de pages, ces grandes entreprises se voient supplantées par une nuée de nouvelles brèves proposant des récits plus courts et plus resserrés. Si cette évolution est, pour partie, une construction rétrospective de l'histoire littéraire (Esmein, « Le tournant historique ») et que ses facteurs explicatifs sont multiples (littéraires, mais aussi commerciaux et politiques), les contemporains relient ce tournant à des questions d'attention. En 1685, Jeanne-Michel de Pringy privilégie par exemple les nouvelles aux romans en écrivant que, dans les premières, « l'attention n'est point dissipée par les interruptions » (590) des multiples histoires enchâssées que contiennent les seconds. Mais de quoi parle-t-on exactement, en

parlant « d'attention » ? Le (nouveau ?) public a-t-il des difficultés à suivre des récits dont la « construction complexe » et la « longueur » sont les aspects « les plus décriés » (Esmein « Les petites histoires » 85) ? Et dans ce cas, s'agit-il d'un problème de complexité grammaticale et syntaxique (longueur des phrases, complexité grammaticale), de mémoire (intrigue, nombre de personnages), ou encore d'impatience (longueur de l'ouvrage dans son ensemble) ? Ou, indépendamment de questions cognitives, s'agit-il d'un problème de temps disponible à consacrer aux romans longs ?

Notre hypothèse de travail est que, si l'évolution du roman vers la nouvelle s'explique par la première hypothèse – une diminution des capacités de concentration ou de compréhension à proprement parler – les textes devraient alors démontrer une simplification quantifiable de critères grammaticaux, lexicaux et syntaxiques. L'échantillon retenu (Fig. 3) est composé de textes narratifs publiés de 1607 à 1678, et analysés dans leur graphie et leur ponctuation d'origine. Il intègre également des ouvrages atypiques (*Le Berger extravagant* de Sorel, les *Nouvelles Nouvelles* de Donneau de Visé), afin de vérifier que la simplification éventuelle est bien le fait de la chronologie plutôt que d'autres critères. Nous avons également ajouté la *Vie de Marianne* à certaines mesures, en tant que point de fuite qui mesure si une tendance esquissée en 1678 se poursuit plus tard.

Tab. 1 : *Tableau des différents ouvrages analysés*

1607	d'Urfé, <i>Astrée</i> , première partie
1619	d'Urfé <i>Astrée</i> , troisième partie
1628	Sorel, <i>Le Berger extravagant</i>
1649	Scudéry, <i>Artamène</i> , première partie
1652	Scudéry, <i>Artamène</i> , cinquième partie
1655	Scudéry, <i>Clélie</i> , première partie
1663	Donneau de Visé, <i>Nouvelles Nouvelles</i>
1664	Scudéry, <i>Mathilde</i>
1666	Furetière, <i>Le Roman Bourgeois</i>
1671	La Fayette, <i>La Princesse de Montpensier</i>
1678	La Fayette, <i>La Princesse de Clèves</i>
1731	Marivaux, <i>La Vie de Marianne</i>

Dans un premier temps, nous utilisons les indices de lisibilité Flesch-Kincaid (Flesch, fig. 2 – mots par phrases les syllabes par mots) – et

SMOG (McLaughlin, fig. 3 – nombre de mots longs sur un échantillon de phrases), considéré comme supérieur à Flesch-Kincaid (Fitzsimmons *et al.*), pour déceler une éventuelle simplification des textes³. Sur tous les graphiques qui suivent, on notera que l'axe des abscisses n'est pas proportionnel, l'échantillon n'étant pas distribué régulièrement dans le temps. On ne peut donc lire la courbe que comme une représentation des évolutions et tendances entre plusieurs *datapoint*, et non comme une véritable ligne de temps proportionnelle.

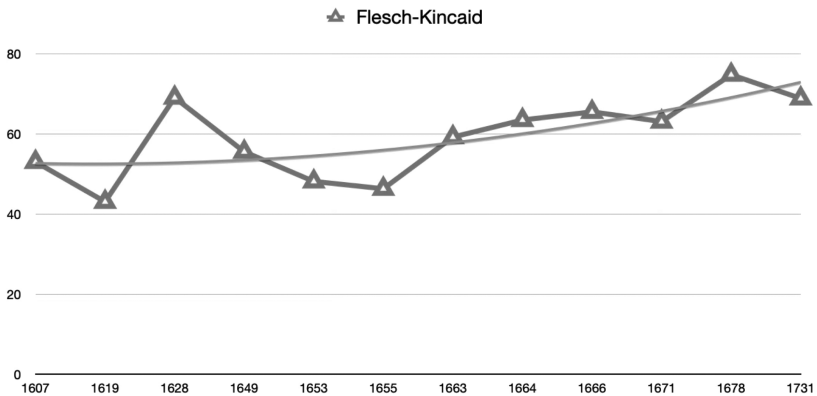


Fig. 2: indice Flesch-Kincaid. Plus la valeur est élevée, plus le texte est simple.

Les courbes de tendances suggèrent une simplification des textes au cours du siècle : alors que les romans de la première moitié du siècle obtiennent une moyenne 12,1 au test SMOG (soit un peu plus complexe qu'un quotidien contemporain), l'échantillon de la seconde moitié du siècle tend vers une moyenne de 10,6. Toutefois, le cas du *Berger extravagant* de Sorel (1628), qui, dans les deux mesures, rompt largement avec le

³ Depuis leur développement au milieu du xx^e siècle, les indices de lisibilité ont fait l'objet de critiques, notamment celles de ne pas prendre en compte les dimensions grammaticales et de relations lexicales (Mesnager; Crossley et al. ; Štajner et al.), et de n'être prévus que pour les textes en anglais (Contreras et al.). Leur recours dans le cadre de cet article se justifie néanmoins parce qu'ils n'ont pas vocation de qualifier la lisibilité de chaque texte en soi, encore moins d'en saisir la complexité narrative, mais bien d'observer, à partir des mêmes critères, une possible évolution d'un même indicateur au fil des textes. Une tendance à la simplification au cours du siècle suggérerait un déclin potentiel de la capacité à se concentrer.

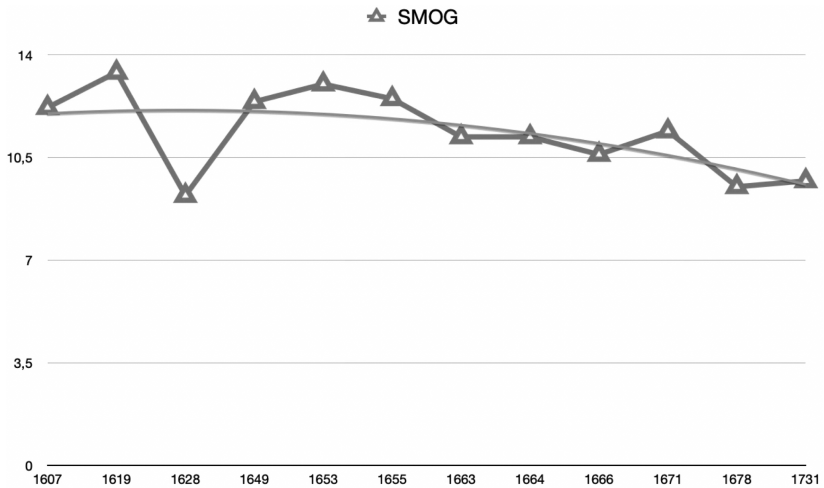


Fig. 3 : *Indice Smog. Plus la valeur est basse, plus le texte est simple.*

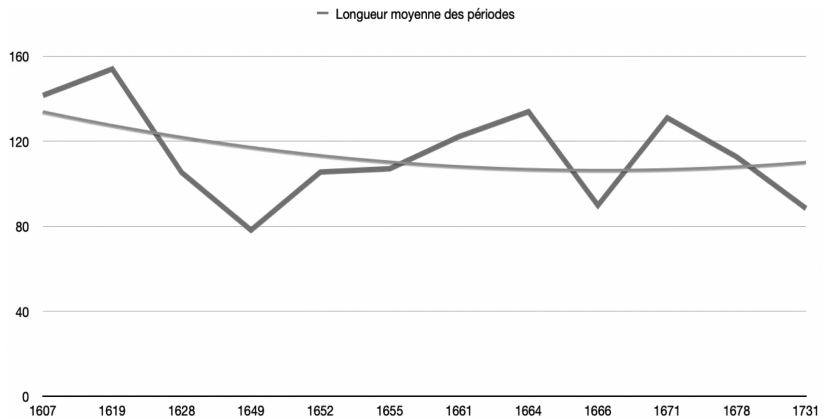


Fig. 4 : *Longueur moyenne des périodes, en nombre de caractères.*

score des autres romans, suggère que le genre littéraire est un facteur plus déterminant dans la complexité textuelle que la chronologie. En d'autres termes, le genre de la nouvelle est manifestement plus simple, mais on ne peut pas déduire des chiffres que la tendance à la simplification soit dû à une évolution de la société. Il faudrait pour cela un échantillon beaucoup plus important.

Pour préciser cette première mesure, nous ajoutons d'autres indicateurs syntaxiques et grammaticaux (Fig. 5, Fig 6 & Fig. 7). L'évolution dans la longueur des périodes⁴, la densité des connecteurs logiques et la profondeur de l'arbre de dépendances syntaxiques (Kübler *et al.*) indiquent la concentration nécessaire pour comprendre et suivre un texte. On ajoute à cela la densité du vocabulaire, moins directement liée à l'attention qu'à des questions sociales, mais qui nécessite également une concentration adéquate.

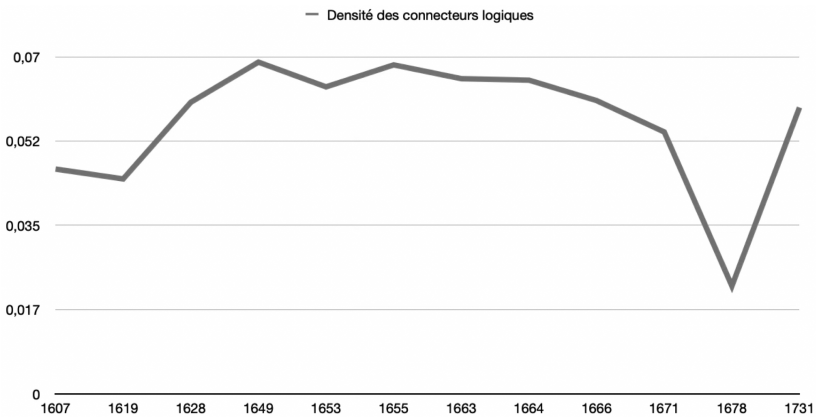


Fig. 5 : *Quantité de connecteurs logiques, en fonction du nombre de mots dans le texte.*

Si les indicateurs tendent à la baisse (soit, vers une simplification), les variations fortes au cours d'une même période, comme dans le cas des connecteurs logiques ou aucune tendance réelle n'est lisible, suggèrent encore une fois que, si simplification il y a, la dimension chronologique n'est pas le facteur déterminant. L'indicateur le plus net est celui de la profondeur des dépendances syntaxique, qui signifierait une tendance à la simplification des constructions grammaticales. Pour le reste, la variation de la complexité lexicale que révèle le *Roman bourgeois*, par exemple, tient à certains chapitres de l'ouvrage qui recourent à des mots rares. La densité des connecteurs logiques impliquerait que les nouvelles des années 1660 prolongent la tendance délibérative des conversations galantes des romans

⁴ Nous avons considéré comme période tout segment de la phrase qui, dans la graphie d'origine, est séparé par une ponctuation autre que la virgule.

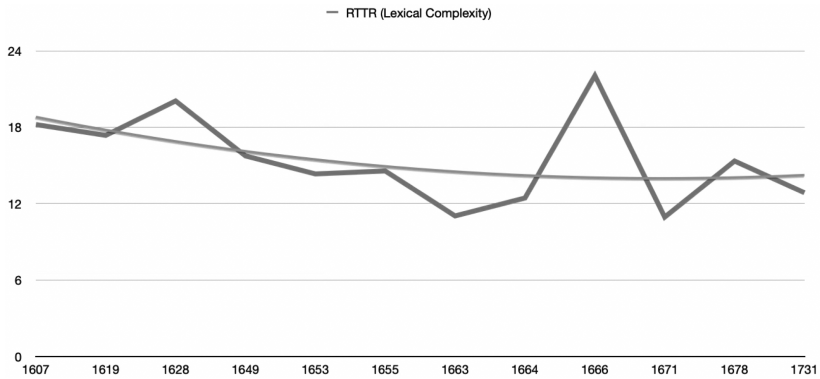


Fig. 6 : Nombre total de mots uniques ramené à la longueur du texte. Valeurs typiques de 0 à 20, 0 correspondant à un texte vide, 20, à un texte d'extrême densité lexicale.

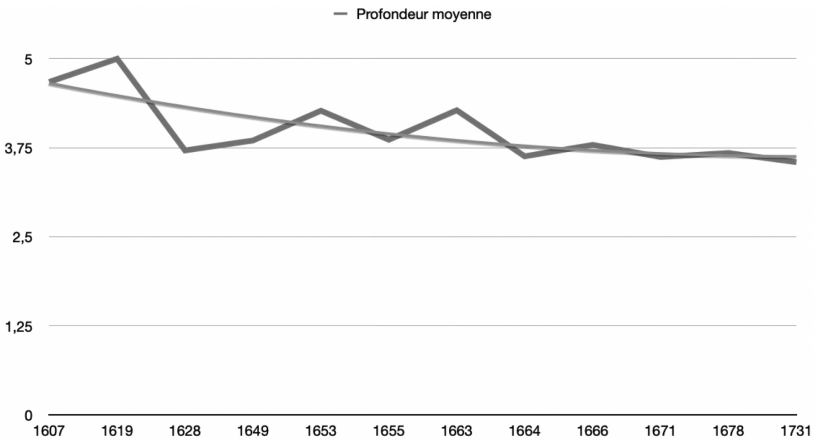


Fig. 7 : Profondeur moyenne de l'axe des dépendances syntaxiques. La valeur des ordonnées indique combien d'autres mots sont reliés à travers une chaîne de relations grammaticales.

comme *Artamène* et *Clélie*. Et si la densité des connecteurs logiques varie nettement à la baisse avec *La Princesse de Clèves*, elle remonte à des niveaux antérieurs avec *La Vie de Marianne*, ce qui empêche de penser que le public est de moins en moins capable de suivre un raisonnement.

Le passage du roman à la nouvelle n'apparaît donc pas corrélé par une diminution des capacités du public. Serait-il alors induit par une incapacité cognitive à se concentrer sur la durée? Si l'hypothèse peut paraître évidente *a priori*, elle fait l'impasse sur deux éléments. Le premier, c'est que les romans longs ne sont pas publiés en une fois, mais en volumes successifs au fil des ans, ce qui transforme le rapport du public à cette longueur. La seconde, c'est que les milliers de pages dissimulent en réalité un assemblage de pièces insérées telles que des lettres, des histoires et des poèmes (Escola & al. ; Lallemand). À la différence de *A la Recherche du temps perdu*, les grands romans du xvii^e siècle sont en réalité l'addition successive d'unités maîtrisables et délimitées (lettres, conversations, histoires...) au sein d'une trame lâche, bien souvent signalées visiblement par un titre typographique.

Ainsi, en analysant, non pas la longueur totale de l'ouvrage, mais la longueur entre deux séparations typographiques de contenu inséré (seules marques évidentes de ces séparations pour le lecteur), on remarque que celles-ci demeurent dans un ordre de grandeur identique du début à la fin du siècle et que, par ailleurs, ces temps de lecture sont remarquablement similaires aux différents formats de séries. En l'absence de marqueurs typographiques, *La Princesse de Clèves, divisée en quatre volumes*, présente ainsi les subdivisions les plus longues, alors même qu'il est le plus tardif de notre échantillon. *Zayde*, nouvelle dont la structure relève encore du roman long (Esmein « Les petites histoires » 9094), présente également des subdivisions plus longues que celles des romans qui la précèdent. Exemple :

Tab. 2 : longueur des subdivisions à l'intérieur des textes

Ouvrage	Médiane arrondie		
	Moyenne arrondie (nbre de caractères)	(nbre de caractères)	Temps de lecture estimé
1611 <i>Astrée</i>	65 295	57 083	47 min
1654 <i>Clélie</i>	40 432	27 596	29 min
1671 <i>Zayde</i>	62 937	62 937	45 min
1678 <i>La Princesse de Clèves</i>	83 481	83 826	1 h

L'évolution entre le roman long et la nouvelle est donc moins une question de longueur effective, que de *dispositio* : les histoires, les conversations et les réflexions sont tantôt présentées en dix volumes, reliés par une

même trame, tantôt, elles sont découpées en petits volumes, avec une trame différente à chaque fois, sous forme d’histoires (Escola *La Partie*; Schuwey *Un entrepreneur 180–190*; Muggler & Schuwey). Ce n’est donc pas la longueur en soi d’un ouvrage qui pose un problème d’attention, «car», écrit l’abbé de Pure au milieu du XVII^e siècle, «quand les choses sont belles, le nombre n’est jamais ennuyeux. On peut faire des conversations si belles, qu’elles paraîtront toujours courtes et succinctes et feront naître de si beaux incidents, qu’ils feront admirer la suite plutôt que blâmer la longueur» (Pure 275).

On formule la même observation en confrontant la citation liminaire de Furetière aux réalités des publications poétiques. Grâce aux travaux de Miriam Speyer sur les recueils poétiques des XVI^e et XVII^e siècles et à la base de données de toutes les pièces contenues dans ces recueils, il est désormais possible de quantifier l’évolution de la publication poétique. L’évolution éditoriale rapide des recueils poétiques en font un terrain d’étude idéal : un libraire comme Charles de Sercy republie jusqu’à trois fois en une même année ses *Poésies choisies*, tout en leur adjoignant des parties supplémentaires, en modifiant le contenu à chaque suite et chaque réédition pour suivre les tendances. Si l’on prenait Furetière strictement à la lettre, on devrait donc observer une proportion plus importante de sonnets que d’élégie, et plus d’épigrammes que de sonnets. Dans la figure 10, la tendance des publications favorise effectivement les pièces brèves, mais pas de la manière attendue :

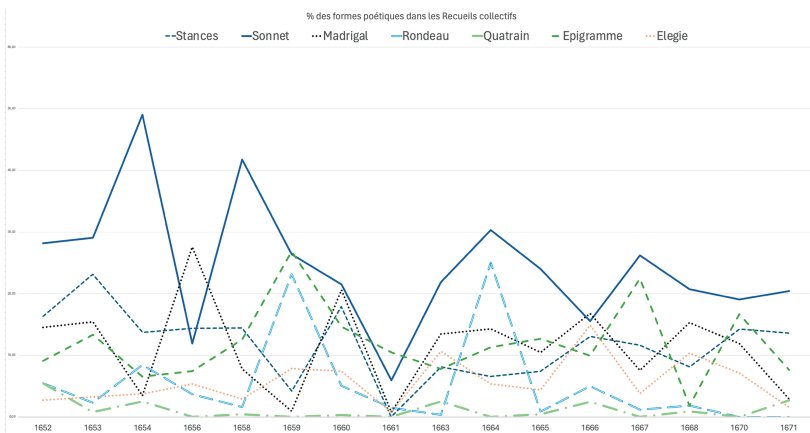


Fig. 8 : nombre de poèmes publiés dans les recueils collectifs de poésie, par genre.

Au moment où Furetière écrit, les épigrammes sont certes nombreuses, mais ne retrouvent pas leur moment de gloire de 1657-1658, lors de la parution des célèbres *Épigrammes* de Gombauld. Le madrigal, en revanche, dépasse, cette année-là seulement le nombre de sonnets. Surtout, si l'élégie ne retrouve pas la même gloire que dans les premières années du xvii^e siècle, elle connaît tout de même un regain d'intérêt en 1666. Malgré « l'humeur impatiente » de la nation, donc, le genre de la déploration en vers ne disparaît pas. Elle connaît même une nouvelle vogue, en témoigné la *Bérénice* de Racine, un « tissu galant de madrigaux et d'élégies » (Villars 155) qui connaîtra un vif succès.

La longueur, au sens strictement quantitatif, n'apparaît donc pas comme un paramètre rédibitoire en soi, ni dans les textes narratifs, ni en poésie, pour un public qui n'a manifestement pas de *problème* à se concentrer sur un texte complexe ou long. Comment expliquer alors, à la fois le triomphe des genres courts, et le succès de l'élégie ? Dans *Distraction*, Nathalie Philipps remarquait encore que la promesse de *pathos* était une des recettes pour susciter l'attention (36). Si l'élégie plaît en dépit de sa longueur, c'est peut-être que le bénéfice espéré – l'émotion – vaut bien la centaine de vers. La négociation entre coût attentionnel et gain espéré nous fait passer du domaine cognitif au domaine social.

Gratification et négociation : l'attention comme phénomène culturel et social

L'« humeur impatiente de la nation » que déplore Furetière évoque ce que l'on qualifie aujourd'hui de gratification instantanée. Dans un monde affairé comme le xvii^e siècle, où les procès, affaires courantes, charges et travaux occupent un temps essentiel du public lecteur ou auditeur, le fait d'accorder de l'attention et du temps à un livre ne vont pas de soi (Aron & Viala 175). Au xvii^e siècle comme aujourd'hui, l'attention consacrée à un objet dépend ainsi du bénéfice (matériel, personnel, émotionnel, moral, religieux, etc.) qu'en espère le sujet (Bastos & al.). L'attention prolongée que suppose la lecture nécessite alors, soit une répétition de gratification instantanée au cours du processus de lecture (Gao, Wang et al.) – « on languirait en [...] lisant [un roman], si l'on n'y trouve pas ces agréables interruptions par où l'on pique l'âme » (Pure 276) – soit, si la gratification est retardée, la promesse d'un bénéfice suffisant (narratif ou social) pour justifier l'effort et le retard.

L'enjeu de l'attention devient alors concurrence entre différents objets, et les promesses de gratification espérée ou effective qu'offrent chacun d'eux, une négociation sans cesse rejouée entre le lecteur et le livre. Il s'agit, pour citer Descartes, d'éviter qu'une « nouvelle cible possède suffisamment de force » pour provoquer « une perte d'attention ou un détournement » (Hatfield 7). Pour les éditeurs, les auteurs et les pouvoirs, le discours sur l'attention devient alors un discours normatif. Leurs discours sur le sujet ne sont pas à comprendre comme la description de la réalité, mais comme une manière de diriger l'attention du public en valorisant certains objets (niveau macro : sur quoi faut-il se concentrer) et façons de lire (niveau micro : comment faudrait-il lire, que faut-il retenir), aux dépens d'autres objets.

Ces discours se divisent en deux approches parallèles. La première fait porter la responsabilité de l'attention sur le sujet : à lui de faire les bons choix, à lui d'être capable de se concentrer, de suivre l'exemple de Marie, et de le faire sur le bon ouvrage. Cette catégorie de discours préconise différents modes d'attention, comme autant de « secret[s] de bien lire » (Volpilhac), et hiérarchise les ouvrages, entre ceux qui méritent ou non de l'attention. La critique des romans, discours topique du siècle, en offre maints exemples. Dans un passage de *La Connaissance des bons livres* (1671), ouvrage phare de critique littéraire, Charles Sorel distingue les lecteurs sérieux des « hommes sans étude et des femmes ». Les premiers lisent les romans pour se distraire, leur attention n'a pas besoin d'être disciplinée. En revanche, l'attention que les seconds portent aux romans est néfaste, d'autant qu'ils en sont « charmés » au sens fort du terme, c'est-à-dire que les romans exerceraient un attrait irrésistible, comme le feraient aujourd'hui les écrans et les réseaux sociaux. Le mal peut toutefois devenir un bien à condition que cette première attention mal tournée se consacre ensuite aux bonnes lectures :

Néanmoins il arrive quelquefois que les femmes et les hommes sans étude prennent en ce lieu [les romans] quelque teinture des lettres, et s'accoutument ainsi à donner de l'attention aux relations historiques, et aux préceptes sérieux. On souffre donc qu'on s'arrête à ceci [pour] être attiré ensuite à quelque chose de meilleur. (Sorel 47–48)

Si Furetière taxe les Français d'impatients, c'est que leur attention crée une distorsion de la concurrence dans le champ : « on » devrait s'intéresser aux auteurs qui ont publié de longs ouvrages de qualité, pas seulement à ceux qui écrivent brièvement.

L'idéal fantasmé d'une lecture sans distraction relève de ces discours prescriptifs. Revenons à Marie. La perfection de la lecture, dans le tableau de *Le Sueur*, illustre bien l'importance de l'attention pour rendre la prière efficace. François de Sales loue aussi bien la foi que « l'attention avec laquelle tu le pries [Dieu] et lui présentes ta requête » (Sales *Sermons* 36). Il en va de même pour l'écoute du sermon, lorsque Jean Chrysostome fustige l'attention instable de son auditoire : « Tandis que je vous développe les mystères de l'Écriture, vous interrompez votre attention, et vous détournez les yeux pour regarder celui qui allume les lampes » (Chrysostome 192). Dans le domaine de la philosophie, Descartes reconnaît la nécessité, difficile, de cette concentration : « Je demeurerai obstinément attaché à cette pensée », mais « ce dessein est pénible et laborieux, et une certaine paresse m'entraîne insensiblement dans le train de ma vie ordinaire » (Hatfield 7) jusqu'à Malebranche qui demande d'appliquer une sainte attention à la lecture de la philosophie (Murno). Or, si les lecteurs du XVII^e siècle sont manifestement capable de cette attention parfaite, ils l'appliquent à la lecture des romans, que l'on « dévore [...] au péril de sa santé » (Pringy 590). Le problème est donc une question de hiérarchie culturelle, celui non pas de savoir se concentrer, mais de se concentrer sur les objets valorisés et jugés dignes d'une telle attention. Qu'ils fustigent ou qu'ils encouragent, les discours prescriptifs rendent le sujet seul responsable de son attention, face à des matières « solides » (Sorel 48) ou face à Dieu, qui n'ont pas à susciter l'attention. La Littérature en tant qu'institution scolaire, et les discours sur la lecture, comme ceux cités en début d'article, sont les héritiers directs de cette conception : c'est au lecteur de lire, de s'absorber et d'aimer ce qui doit l'être. Dieu et ses Ouvrages sont grands, c'est le croyant qui est petit lorsqu'il s'en détourne.

À cette première approche s'oppose une seconde, qui déplace le problème du sujet à l'objet. C'est alors le livre qui, galamment, doit s'accorder à l'attention du lecteur. Le système de valeur s'inverse : l'humeur que Furetière qualifiait d'« impatiente » en 1666 devient une humeur « prompte et vive » en 1683 pour *Du Plaisir*. Celui-ci reproche ainsi aux romans longs de ne pas ménager « assez les moyens de nous satisfaire promptement » à cause d'un « mélange d'histoires particulières avec l'histoire principale » et par « le détail des aventures de personnes pour qui ils s'intéressent peu » (*Du Plaisir* 761–762). Ce n'est plus le lecteur face au livre qui est critiqué, mais bien l'auteur qui n'a pas su accommoder le lecteur, prévoir ce qui l'intéressera et ne l'intéressera pas, et se plier à ses régimes d'attention.

Pour Jeanne-Michel de Pringy, le triomphe de la nouvelle sur le roman s'explique ainsi par la capacité de la première à procurer le même plaisir – voire un plaisir plus grand encore – en beaucoup moins de temps et d'effort que le second :

Mais comme il arrive quelquefois que la beauté de l'aventure nous touche fortement, et irrite une curiosité impatiente, que ne fait-on pas pour en voir la fin ? On passe les jours et les nuits à dévorer de gros volumes au péril de sa fortune et de sa santé ; et quand on est au bout, la lassitude dégoûte, et l'on se repent d'avoir acheté trop chèrement un plaisir qui nous paraît médiocre ; mais quand on s'attache à une Nouvelle, dont la lecture est renfermée dans un petit espace de temps, l'attention n'est point dissipée par les interruptions, l'esprit en embrasse sans peine toute l'étendue. (Pringy 590)

Cette critique du *binge-reading*, qui entraîne des regrets et des effets psychologiques comparables à ceux du *binge-watching* (Bastos et al. 3 ; Lallemand & Serval), ne vise cependant pas à promouvoir la lecture des « relations historiques et des préceptes solides » comme le préconisait Sorel. Elle promeut un autre divertissement – la nouvelle –, plus efficace parce qu'il procure les mêmes bénéfices sans menacer la « fortune » et la « santé » : une attention bien investie sur un objet qui sait bien la ménager.

Les discours au xvii^e siècle esquissent ainsi les prolégomènes d'une écologie de l'attention (Citton), denrée d'ores et déjà précieuse que doit soigner, tantôt le sujet, tantôt l'objet, soit sur un mode critique (l'humeur impatiente, les romans peu efficaces), soit sur un mode positif (la bonne prière, la concision des nouvelles). La responsabilité du sujet est une affaire de prescription et d'éducation. Celle de l'objet, en revanche, raconte, en quelque sorte, une naissance du *marketing* moderne (Schuwey *Titres et marketing*) : la conception d'un produit en fonction de segments spécifiques du public, et qui s'adresse directement au consommateur. Cette conception d'un ouvrage qui épouse l'attention du public esquisse ainsi une véritable poétique de l'attention.

Manifestations de l'attention

Comment ces enjeux attentionnels façonnent-ils alors la littérature du dix-septième siècle, au-delà des évolutions évoquées plus haut ? L'étude de leur matérialisation est d'autant plus intéressante qu'ils interviennent à plusieurs niveaux. Ils façonnent à la fois l'objet et son texte ; mais on

éveillera la curiosité du lecteur et mettre en avant ses qualités pour retenir son attention.

Un ouvrage est « en compétition non seulement avec les travaux d'autres éditeurs, mais également [avec] toute distraction à laquelle un lecteur [peut] être soumis » (Phillips 63). Pour le distinguer dans le monde, la publicité joue un rôle prépondérant. Son histoire au XVII^e siècle reste à écrire, entre oral (lectures publiques en société, bouche-à-oreille, etc.) et écrit (affiches, inserts, pages de titre, etc.). Mais l'importance même de celle-ci, et l'attention que lui accordent les contemporains (Schuwey *Un entrepreneur* 251–61) nous rappellent avant tout que tous les ouvrages du XVII^e siècle ne sont pas égaux en termes de visibilité. Les aspects matériels, la typographie et la mise en page comptent tout autant que le contenu. Bien sûr, capter l'attention et la maintenir sont deux opérations différentes, comme on le verra ci-dessous, mais elles méritent de dialoguer, pour éviter d'opposer un art littéraire, positif, d'un côté, et une publicité matérielle, de l'autre. Un ouvrage *in-folio* n'a pas la même visibilité qu'un *in-octavo* : dans le marché de la presse du XVII^e siècle, la *Gazette* de Renaudot avait choisi le format in-4^o pour se distinguer des « occasionnels qui circulaient dans Paris » (Feyel 150). De même, lors de cette négociation pour savoir si un ouvrage est « fait pour soi », feuilleter un livre d'histoire imprimé en tous petits caractères n'est pas la même chose que de feuilleter le *Mercurie galant*, périodique mondain de la fin du siècle, dont la police est aérée, même si l'on n'en lit aucun mot.

Dans l'idéal, le livre doit ainsi convaincre le lecteur qu'il rencontre, d'une façon ou d'une autre ses propres intérêts. Il faut provoquer ce que Sévigné ressent en découvrant les *Essais de morale* de Nicole : « pour moi, je crois qu'il [l'ouvrage] a été fait pour moi ». Ainsi recommande-t-elle à sa fille de le lire « avec une attention » toute religieuse (Rosellini 14). Cette impression qu'un produit est « fait pour soi » est la réussite de ce que le *marketing* appelle *segmentation* (Smith) : donner au client l'impression que le produit s'adresse à lui, qu'il le concerne, et capter ainsi son attention.

L'une des manières d'y parvenir est de mobiliser ce que Dominique Boullier a qualifié de « régime d'alerte », qui emprisonne l'attention vers un seul objet. *L'Impromptu de l'Hôtel de Condé*, comédie Montfleury, caricature comment la querelle de *L'École des femmes* et la vedettisation de Molière provoquent en termes d'attention. Dans la scène suivante, un marquis fait fi de tous les ouvrages qu'on lui propose, jusqu'à ce qu'on en vienne au seul sujet qui l'intéresse, à savoir, Molière :

LE MARQUIS.

Hé, Madame, l'on sait ce que c'est que Corneille.

ALIS.

Voilà Tibérinus, c'est de Monsieur Quinault.

LE MARQUIS.

Hé gardez-moi cela pour quelqu'archi-badaud ;

[...]

ALIS.

Monsieur, voulez-vous voir le Baron de la Crasse ?

LE MARQUIS.

Bon ! Et que voulez-vous, Madame, que j'en fasse ?

[...]

ALIS.

Dites-moi donc, Monsieur, afin que je vous vende,

De qui vous les voulez.

LE MARQUIS.

De qui ? Belle demande !

De Molière, morbleu ! De Molière, de lui,

De lui, de cet auteur burlesque d'aujourd'hui ;

De ce daubeur de mœurs, qui, sans aucun scrupule,

Fait un portrait naïf de chaque ridicule,

De ce fléau des cocus, de ce bouffon du temps,

De ce héros de farce acharné sur les gens,

[...]

En regardant le premier feuillet de l'École des femmes où Molière est dépeint.

N'est-ce pas là Molière ?

ALIS.

Oui.

LE MARQUIS.

Oui, c'est son portrait. (Montfleury scène 2)

Alors qu'il ne prête aucune attention au reste, le marquis se montre soudain capable d'observer religieusement la gravure du comédien auteur.

La page de titre revêt à ce titre un rôle stratégique. Tournée « vers l'extérieur, vers les économies sociales, axiologiques et monétaires de

l'extratexte», elle doit agir «sur le lecteur en devenir» (Moyes 20). Tous les éléments d'une page de titre servent à conserver l'attention du lecteur potentiel et à le convaincre qu'il s'attache au bon objet. Certains genres y parviennent par le seul système de valeurs qu'ils convoquent : un ouvrage qui dit «nouvelle galante» profite potentiellement de sa réputation de plaisir reçu pour un effort raisonnable. Philipps remarque le développement d'une rhétorique de la brièveté, que l'on retrouve au XVII^e siècle sous le titre de différents «Abrégés de», ou «Réduits» (Phillips 36). En réalité, derrière cette promesse de brièveté, le message fondamental est une attention de l'objet au lecteur, en reconnaissant que le second n'a qu'une attention limitée à consacrer à ce sujet. Une version abrégée paraît donc s'adresser plus directement à lui qu'une version qui ne le serait pas puisque l'on a «du dépit contre les auteurs, qui ne ménagent pas assez les moyens de nous satisfaire promptement» (Du Plaisir 761). Il en va de même pour l'utilité – «Utile à ceux qui veulent bien parler et bien écrire» (piège rhétorique puisque cette utilité concerne probablement tout le public visé) ou «Le Chemin assuré du Paradis» – la nouveauté, «Le Nouveau Cuisiner François», – la promesse d'un secret révélé, «Le Secret de...», secret qui, en réalité, est offert à la vente, mais dont la mise en scène doit créer l'intérêt.

Une fois l'ouvrage repéré, auteurs et éditeurs exploitent alors la tension entre fidélisation et alerte (Boullier). Les romans longs sont conçus pour ferrer leurs lecteurs, en témoigne l'empressement de la duchesse de Brünswick-Lüneburg qui conjure Madeleine de Scudéry en 1654 de donner la suite de *Clélie* que toute sa cour attend avec impatience (Rathéry et Boutron 434). À l'inverse, les querelles théâtrales usent principalement de l'alerte, en créant sans cesse de nouveaux conflits factices (Viala; Blondet; Forestier & Bourqui). Ainsi, si la représentation du *Tartuffe* en 1669 est le plus gros succès de la troupe de Molière, c'est aussi parce que, depuis l'interdiction en 1664, Molière n'a eu de cesse de maintenir l'attention sur cette interdiction par des lectures privées, mais habilement annoncées au public, des allusions dans les gazettes et des pamphlets (Dealberto *et al.* 130). Sans cette attention à l'attention, il est probable que la petite comédie en trois actes de 1664 serait tombée dans l'oubli après sa création.

Maintenir l'attention : segmentation et dispositifs d'agentivité

Quid alors de la lecture? Si les manières de multiplier les gratifications au fil d'un texte pour maintenir l'attention sont multiples, nous nous

intéresserons ici à une fonction fondamentale que nous qualifions de « dispositif d'agentivité », et qui peut s'incarner aussi bien dans la typographie que dans le discours.

Le texte du xvii^e siècle est fondamentalement segmenté et écrit par pièces (Schuwey *Entrepreneur* 159–76). L'observation selon laquelle les romans du xvii^e siècle sont composés de différentes pièces mises ensemble n'est pas propre au genre et pourrait s'appliquer aussi bien aux poèmes, au théâtre, aux traités, aux récits de voyage, en bref, à toute la production textuelle (voir Muggler & Schuwey pour la démonstration). Chaque nouvelle unité est donc l'occasion pour le lecteur de décider s'il se réengage dans la lecture : un titre typographique (comme discuté plus haut), mais aussi l'annonce d'une nouvelle aventure, la fin d'une partie ou d'un « Livre » (un tiers d'un volume dans *Clélie*) ou encore la description d'une pièce qui suit sont autant de seuils qui permettent au lecteur de décider de poursuivre ou non la lecture. En soulignant ainsi l'agentivité du lecteur, on augmente paradoxalement les chances de maintenir l'attention. Il est en effet beaucoup plus difficile de convaincre quelqu'un de regarder un film de six heures, que de regarder six épisodes d'une heure, parce que l'on décide, à chaque épisode de poursuivre ou non (Bastos et al.).

Ainsi les auteurs et les éditeurs du xvii^e siècle mettent-ils en place différents dispositifs d'agentivité. Ceux-ci consistent à renégocier régulièrement l'attention du lecteur, en lui donnant l'occasion de s'interrompre ou poursuivre, et en montrant, par là, que l'ouvrage s'accordera à ses désirs et au temps disponible. Ainsi la séparation des textes narratifs en parties et en livres ne relève pas seulement d'une organisation logique. Il s'agit aussi, comme pour les chapitres dans les siècles suivants, de délimiter des unités de lecture de longueur adéquates (Colin *et al.*). En 1663, la préface des *Nouvelles Nouvelles*, nouvelle en trois tomes remplie de pièces insérées, précise ainsi que :

Comme il y a dans cette nouvelle plusieurs pièces détachées et que je ne doute point qu'il ne s'en rencontre quelques-unes qui ne plairont pas à tout le monde, les personnes à qui elles auront le malheur de déplaire pourront facilement passer par-dessus [...]. (Donneau n. p.)

L'un des dispositifs d'agentivité le plus frappant est très certainement celui que met en place La Bruyère dans la cinquième édition de ses *Caractères*. L'ouvrage relève d'un genre d'écrits – la littérature dite « moraliste » – qui touche particulièrement à des questions d'attention. Les écrits

moralistes adoptent couramment la forme d'énoncés brefs, qui peuvent être consommés rapidement, sans suite nécessaire – on peut en piquer un seul et reposer l'ouvrage – mais qui peuvent aussi attacher longtemps, soit individuellement, par la qualité de leur construction et la profondeur de la pensée qu'ils renferment (Stiker-Métral), ce qui nécessite dès lors une attention soutenue.

La typographie et la subdivision en paragraphe fonctionnent ainsi comme des dispositifs d'agentivité qui rassurent le lecteur quant à l'investissement nécessaire : cela ne coûte pas grand-chose, que de saisir (même superficiellement) une pensée. La particularité de l'ouvrage de La Bruyère tient notamment à son fonctionnement proche d'un périodique (Schuwey *L'Organe*) avec six éditions largement augmentées en huit ans. D'emblée, l'ouvrage mise donc sur une attention continue d'un lectorat fidélisé. Pour favoriser ce comportement, La Bruyère met en place tout un dispositif typographique pour souligner les nouvelles remarques et attirer l'attention sur celles-ci. Il investit les pieds-de-mouche qui délimitent ses remarques en leur ajoutant un système de parenthèses simples et doubles pour distinguer les ajouts des différentes éditions :

[...] afin que le public ne fût point obligé de parcourir ce qui était ancien pour passer à ce qu'il y avait de nouveau, et qu'il trouvât sous ses yeux ce qu'il avait seulement envie de lire, je pris soin de lui désigner cette seconde augmentation par une marque ((§)) particulière; je crus aussi qu'il ne serait pas inutile de lui distinguer la première augmentation par une autre marque (§) plus simple, qui servit à lui montrer le progrès de mes *Caractères* et à aider son choix dans la lecture qu'il en voudrait faire. (La Bruyère, préface de la Ve édition)

Ce dispositif d'agentivité mêlant typographie et rhétorique est à la fois une manière de rassurer le lecteur, en montrant que l'on tient compte de son temps et de son attention limités, en ne le forçant pas à s'investir dans une relecture entière d'un ouvrage qu'il a peut-être déjà lu dans une édition précédente, ou qu'il croit connaître par ouï-dire. Ainsi, qu'il use effectivement du système ou non, le lecteur a l'impression de pouvoir choisir ce qu'il lit, « ce qu'il y [a] de nouveau » seulement, grâce à la promesse implicite que cela ne nuira pas à la compréhension de l'ensemble. La lecture est non seulement motivée par le choix de poursuivre ou d'arrêter la promenade au gré du recueil, mais aussi par la possibilité de prendre les choses en cours sans avoir à consacrer de l'attention et du temps à rattraper ce que l'on aurait manqué dans les éditions précédentes.

Conclusion

Utilisé notamment dans les écrits religieux pour signaler les passages essentiels (Woshinsky 1985), le pied-de-mouche fait opportunément le lien entre la lecture parfaite de *L'Annonciation* et celle, fragmentaire, des *Caractères*. Et, en rappelant ainsi la diversité et la complexité des façons de lire, des plus distraites aux plus entières, on en revient à l'enjeu initial de cet article. Le fait que le livre n'apparaît pas comme un support univoque qui supposerait un usage et une attention prédéfinie, mais comme une surface qui permet des pratiques d'écriture et de lecture diverses, dont chacune attire et dirige l'attention des lecteurs. Ce qui apparaît ici comme un truisme est pourtant l'un des points aveugles dans l'opposition contemporaine entre les livres et les écrans.

En insistant sur le parallèle entre le livre et l'écran, sur la complexité des questions d'attention, et sur le problème d'une lecture technodéterministe de l'attention, il ne s'agit pas de minimiser le défi voire le danger que représentent aujourd'hui les marchands d'attention et le pouvoir de fascination des nouvelles technologies, particulièrement puissants. L'objectif est bien de distinguer les causes et les symptômes, et de ne pas rendre la technologie responsable de processus sociaux à l'œuvre, afin, précisément, de pouvoir retrouver attention et concentration. La mise en perspective est, à ce titre, précieuse. Ainsi, l'élite affairée du XVII^e siècle, même sans smartphone, n'avait visiblement pas plus de temps que nous, moins, probablement qu'une certaine bourgeoisie du XIX^e siècle. L'histoire n'est pas linéaire. Une société qui offre des conditions favorables à la concentration, notamment par un système de valeur adéquat et une sécurité matérielle, psychologique et affective suffisante pour se concentrer, a manifestement plus de chance de favoriser une attention de qualité qu'une société qui, tout en faisant l'éloge du Livre, crée des conditions de vie et de travail anxigènes.

Les pistes esquissées dans cet article ne sont que des prolégomènes à ce que pourrait être une grande étude historique sur l'attention. Ainsi faudrait-il, pour la seule littérature, creuser plus loin les questions cognitives, et recourir à des modèles d'analyse multiparamétriques, capables d'évaluer l'enchevêtrement complexe des personnages, de situations et des interactions, une perspective que le développement des réseaux neuronaux rend tout à fait imaginable (Štajner *et al.*). Si les échantillons de la première partie demandent à être remplacés par du *big*

data, et que les premiers résultats appellent un projet de recherche d'une autre envergure pour affiner les mesures, les outils et la méthodologie, le propos de cet article était de contribuer à démontrer la faisabilité et l'intérêt d'une approche historique de l'attention. Pour les études littéraires, l'enjeu n'est pas mince : la prise en compte des questions d'attention est l'un des sujets qui mêle la matérialité et l'histoire de la lecture et des publics à l'analyse des textes, conférant à des phénomènes variés, des significations nouvelles.

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Involuntary Memory. Reflections on the Aesthetics of a Literary Topos: Huysmans, Proust and Darrieussecq

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Abstract: This article focuses on the topos of involuntary memory in modern French literature by analyzing three passages from Huysmans, Proust, and Darrieussecq. It shows that the notion of topos should be reconsidered by distinguishing between commonplaces with clear and shared content, termed rhetorical, and commonplaces susceptible to diverse interpretations. More precisely, the former have relatively stable and recognizable meanings due to the repetition of their formal elements. The latter category of topoi also possesses reiterated formal elements, but these do not correspond to a normative and historically stable content. They appear to have a different semantic nature, and the article proposes to call this category of commonplaces “aesthetic topoi.”

Keywords: Literary topology, involuntary memory, aesthetics, Proust, Huysmans, Darrieussecq.

Involuntary memory is so central to French romantic literature that it, long before Proust’s famous Madeleine scene, constitutes what could be called a literary topos. It is the term Jean-Francois Perrin uses in his mapping of the phenomenon in the article “La scène de reminiscence avant Proust.” Perrin analyzes this topos based on over 30 different involuntary memory scenes, primarily from the nineteenth century, ranging from Rousseau’s pre-romantic “Voilà de la pervenche” (Rousseau 226) – which inadvertently reminds him of Mme de Warens through Chateaubriand’s proto-romantic “gazouillement d’une grive” in *Mémoires d’Outre-Tombe* which sees him “*transporté subitement dans le*

passé” (Chateaubriand 102) – to Nerval’s late-romantic casual reading of a newspaper headline: “Ces mots fort simples [...] réveillèrent en moi toute une série d’impressions; c’était le souvenir de la province depuis longtemps oubliée, un écho lointain des fêtes naïves de la jeunesse » (Nerval 540). Perrin initially categorizes this topos by way of the various affective implications it has in the given text, e.g. wonder, obscurity, urge for interpretation. Its literary history is then traced from its formal matrix in Rousseau up to Flaubert’s transformation and parody of it. Perrin’s mapping of the history of this topos before Proust is not only very useful, but it also discloses a fundamental difference between Proust and his predecessors. In fact, these many scenes of remembrance from the nineteenth century connect involuntary memory with sensation, but they constantly do this through the sense of sight and not, as is the case with Proust, through the sense of taste. In the vast majority of cases, it is the sight of an external object which generates involuntary romantic memory, often so in an enhanced affective mode. There are probably many explanations for this transition from the sense of sight to the sense of taste in the representation of the topos of “involuntary memory.” If the basic romantic experience of involuntary memory was a confirmation of the subject’s individual and unique relation to the world as it once had been and as it had formed him, modern involuntary experience does not constitute sudden and convincing confirmation of a subject’s former world, which nostalgically still belongs to him. In what can, for a start, be called modernist literature, there seem to be contexts where the central elements (sensation and memory) are expanded through creative, existential and emotive dimensions. Involuntary memory in modern literature relies on a subject whose modernity consists precisely in not knowing itself and who must therefore also partly explore and create its own subjectivity. One could argue that taste is more naturally useful for such intimate explorations than the sense of sight. The modern subject is often alone, if not fundamentally solitary, potentially solipsistic, and a more private circuit of taste, memory, and cognition suits this type of subject well, one might suppose. In any case, loneliness, taste and memory form a thematic cluster, which seems to be reformulated with the advent of modernism: from Proust through Camus to Houellebecq, a whole series of solitary (depressive or simply strange) men enter the scene of literature. Their solitude allows the author to dwell on taste-experience without turning it outwards as gastronomical judgment, collective excitement or as a sign of social *savoir-vivre*.

In what follows, I will consequently analyze a number of scenes from Huysmans, Proust and Darrieussecq, in which the topos of “involuntary memory” is related closely to taste rather than sight. It will, however, be necessary to make some more essential remarks about the concept of this literary topos and its history beforehand. These will be important to understand a decisive, if not fundamental, difference between the literary use of topoi in romanticism and in later modernist literature. This difference will actually trigger another theorization of what could be called, not rhetorical or poetical topoi, but an aesthetic notion of the topos.

What Is a Literary Topos?

The *Oxford Classical Dictionary* describes *topos* as “a standard form of rhetorical argumentation or a variably expressible literary commonplace” (330). This grouping of rhetorical and literary topoi is also manifest in the *Merriam-Webster* dictionary, in which *topos* is categorized as “a traditional or conventional literary or rhetorical theme or topic.” This alignment of rhetorical and literary topoi is historicized in the founding text of modern literary topology *European Literature and the Latin middle Ages* ([1948] 2013) by Ernst Robert Curtius. If Curtius continues to be important, it is clearly due to his assertion that any topos is constituted by a number of formal components that make it identifiable and which provide it with conventional meaning. For instance, the classical topos of the *locus amoenus*, analyzed exhaustively by Curtius, refers to a “set description of an idyllic landscape, typically containing trees and shade, a grassy meadow, running water, song-birds, and cool breezes” (Eidinow 330). These components guarantee an established sense of pleasantness that the reader will distinguish despite historical or generical transformations. If such conventional traits provide the semantic basis for a literary topos, its *doxa*, Curtius also maintains that there inevitably will be a historical specificity tied to the use of a topos. The *locus amoenus* can be detected in several literary types and eras, in which it is used according to various ethical, artistic or political purposes. Curtius conceived of this flexibility between general idea and empirical instance in terms of the slightly puzzling, at least from a scientific point of view, idea of a European spirit, a framing that can however, as Curtius himself indicates in the preface to the second edition of the work, be understood as an attempt,

in 1948, at identifying an intellectual historical unity in an otherwise traumatized postwar Europe. The usefulness of Curtius' notion of *topoi* for literary *analysis* has been widely discussed (see Ferrand 1995 and Meiner 2022). The two basic conceptual constituents of the literary topos, convention and empirical instance, reemerged in the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin, the other central thinker of literary topology. In his work, *topoi* were modernized as recurring literary places where time "thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible" (84). Bakhtin specifies how, for instance, the village concretizes cyclical time, the castle represents historical time, and the threshold symbolizes existential time. Again, the components of conventional formal elements of a given place and its specific historical content (concrete time forms) are at large. For our analysis of the topos of involuntary memory in modern literature, a corresponding theorization of the literary topos can be found in Roland Barthes' *Fragments d'un discours amoureux*. Barthes' focused on the stereotypes (he calls them *figures*) of the lover's discourse, which he described in the following way: Les figures se découpent selon qu'on peut reconnaître, dans le discours qui passe, quelque chose qui a été lu, entendu, éprouvé. La figure est cernée (comme un signe) et mémorable (comme une image ou un conte). Une figure est fondée si au moins quelqu'un peut dire: 'Comme c'est vrai, ça! Je reconnais cette scène de langage'". (462) Barthes mentions as examples the figure of "amorous waiting" and that of "amorous anxiety." He then defines the relation between lover and figure/topos: « Il sait seulement que ce qui lui passe dans la tête à tel moment est *marqué*, comme l'empreinte d'un code (autrefois, c'eût été le code d'amour courtois, ou la carte du Tendre) » (462). This relation allows Barthes to explain both the resilience and the usefulness of love *topoi*, as he concludes that: « Le propre d'une Topique, c'est d'être un peu vide: une Topique est par statut à moitié codée, à moitié projective (ou projective, parce que codée) » (462). This of course implies a natural cohabitation of the conventional and empirical dimensions of the topos. The meaning of a topos, for example the *locus amoenus*, depends both on conventional and recognizable elements, which Barthes describes as the "printout of a code," and also on the inscription of a particular empirical variation (*projections*) as long as the topos remains perceptible as a typical medium for presenting, in the case of the *locus amoenus*, amenable sensations. It is exactly this typicality and its a priori meaning, which is transformed in the topos of involuntary memory, as we shall see in the following analyses.

Marcel Proust and the Madeleine

When the first volume of *A la recherche du temps perdu* was published, Proust gave an interview in which he famously emphasized that his work was governed by the distinction between *mémoire volontaire* and *mémoire involontaire*, of which he cites the Madeleine scene as the best example. Let us go through this scene in its entirety:

Il y avait déjà bien des années que, de Combray, tout ce qui n'était pas le théâtre et le drame de mon coucher n'existait plus pour moi, quand un jour d'hiver, comme je rentrais à la maison, ma mère, voyant que j'avais froid, me proposa de me faire prendre, contre mon habitude, un peu de thé. Je refusai d'abord et, je ne sais pourquoi, je me ravisai. Elle envoya chercher un de ces gâteaux courts et dodus appelés Petites Madeleines qui semblaient avoir été moulés dans la valve rainurée d'une coquille de Saint-Jacques. Et bientôt, machinalement, accablé par la morne journée et la perspective d'un triste lendemain, je portai à mes lèvres une cuillerée du thé où j'avais laissé s'amollir un morceau de madeleine. (Proust 44)

The starting point for involuntary memory is a relatively joyless and unspontaneous everyday situation characterized as both “dreary,” “sad” and “mechanical.” Marcel's memories of Combray are no longer present, he does not really want the tea, and when he changes his mind, he does not know why. Any reader of Proust will know how great the difference is between this depressing situation and the effect of the tea mixed with the cake:

Mais à l'instant même où la gorgée mêlée des miettes du gâteau toucha mon palais, je tressaillis, attentif à ce qui se passait d'extraordinaire en moi. Un plaisir délicieux m'avait envahi, isolé, sans la notion de sa cause. Il m'avait aussitôt rendu les vicissitudes de la vie indifférentes, ses désastres inoffensifs, sa brièveté illusoire, de la même façon qu'opère l'amour, en me remplissant d'une essence précieuse : ou plutôt cette essence n'était pas en moi, elle était moi. J'avais cessé de me sentir médiocre, contingent, mortel. D'où avait pu me venir cette puissante joie ? Je sentais qu'elle était liée au goût du thé et du gâteau, mais qu'elle le dépassait infiniment, ne devait pas être de même nature. D'où venait-elle ? Que signifiait-elle ? Où l'appréhender ? (Proust 44)

Marcel attempts to repeat the experience. As in a Cartesian meditation, he turns to his spirit and seeks to understand and reconstruct the happy condition. He understands that the latter has no clear explanation, but nevertheless, through its sensual evidence, transcends his sad situation.

As his efforts do not yield any results, he tries to let the sensation come to him, but after countless attempts, has to admit that he does not control the feeling. He can only sense that the taste must be connected to a memory, « une image, le souvenir visuel » (Proust 45) which is awakened with the consumption of cake and tea and whose effect is clear while the cause remains unknown to him. However, suddenly, and completely by itself, the taste connects with a precise memory. It was the same tea and cake his aunt, Léonie, gave him on Sunday mornings, when he was a child in Combray. With this recollection, the entire geography of his childhood opens up: the house, the garden, the street and the city become sensuously present.

All this is familiar to Proust readers, including how the narrator concludes that taste is the most resilient of all the senses: when the past is dead and gone, the sense of taste, like a lonely but lingering and hopeful soul, carries « l'édifice immense du souvenir » (Proust 46). The iconic Madeleine episode has been read from many different theoretical angles: as a religious communion scene focusing on resurrection (Caulker), as an incestuous scene (Kristeva), as neuro-science *avant la lettre* (Troschianko), and as psychological masturbation (Doubrovsky). The mere fact that such diverse if not contradictory interpretations have been validly proposed will be important to us later, but in our topological context, we must first emphasize some less interpretative elements in the scene.

The literary food scene as it has been analyzed and theorized over the last decades is almost by definition a collective situation. Whether it is the festive meal (e.g. in *L'assommoir* or *La peau de chagrin*), the family meal (*Madame Bovary* or elsewhere in *A la Recherche du temps perdu*), the romantic restaurant episode (e.g. in *La Curée* or *Bel-ami*), or the picnic in Maupassant, the collective aspect is central in all of these scenes (See Becker 2017 and Sicotte 2008). In Proust's scene, contrary to this tradition, eating is a solitary rather than a social act. Here, food and drink are not something that, in terms of gastronomic quality, creates happiness and galvanizes a social context. Food and drink are not a shared and common thing that cements a given community's strength and quality. On the contrary, in fact, Proust's madeleine cake cuts the young man off from everyday life; he is isolated and inexplicably turned towards himself. The happiness here is, however, just as great as the shared intoxication and collective cohesion one encounters in, for example, *La Peau de chagrin's* famous Festin de Taillefer, or in Giono's *Que ma joie demeure*.

In Proust's case, it is a solitary and introverted experience, but not less happy. Another difference manifests itself here. The traditional banquet's sense of happiness is directly linked to the group's shared (aesthetic, libertine, sociopolitical) experience of food, drink and conviviality. Marcel, on the contrary, does not know the reason for his feeling of happiness, as is clearly stated: "Un plaisir délicieux m'avait envahi, isolé, sans la notion de sa cause." One could imagine that the feeling of happiness would be explained the moment the memory correlates with the taste experience, so that the remembered past had actually been a happy past, explaining the sensation as affectively positive. But even when he finally connects taste and memory, the reason for the feeling of happiness remains unclear: *Quoique je ne susse pas encore et dusse remettre à bien plus tard de découvrir pourquoi ce souvenir me rendait si heureux.* »

Thus, the emotion seems independent from the continuum formed by taste and memory. In other words, we have a triumvirate consisting of taste, emotion and involuntary memory, where the former and the latter are connected through a previous experience, while the affective dimension is immediately and perhaps in principle external to this experience. The emotion remains in suspense: it is, on the one hand, clear and lively, but its cause and content are unclear and seemingly disorganized. The important thing here is not so much how Proust arrives at the cause of the feeling of happiness, but that this feeling could have been of a completely different nature, e.g. sad, negative, creepy, nostalgic. Let us briefly return to the idea of the involuntary memory as a literary topos. In nineteenth century literature, it was a topos that connected the sense of sight with involuntary memory, while modern literature tends to let taste/smell be the way to involuntary memory in an equally constant fashion. However, there is an extra dimension to this, in the sense that the effect, the affective dimension that taste-remembering generates, qua its exteriority, is variable. Thus, we can, tentatively, speak of a topological triadic structure: the protagonist's experience of taste leads to a memory experience, the meaning of which lies in a variable, if not contingent, affectivity. That something tastes good is not the same as a positive memory effect: the feeling the memory gives rise to has a life of its own and this is where this topos reveals its special strength. It can point out how modern French literature actually prolongs or creates a tradition of exploring the autonomy of emotional effects of involuntary memory.

Huysmans

Another introverted and lonely aesthete, the main character Des Esseintes in Huysman's *A Rebours*, is very much an example of how taste and memory involuntarily produce emotions different from the experience of happiness and nostalgia. Des Esseintes, a hyper-aesthetic nobleman, has decided to retire to the countryside with his servants to cultivate art, literature and various forms of design (domestic, garden-oriented, sartorial). A prominent scene in the generally plotless novel comes in chapter four where a porter brings Des Esseintes a turtle he ordered in Paris. Des Esseintes' intention through this purchase is that the slow movements and dark tones of the tortoise should reanimate the color nuances (plum violet and oriental yellow) of a fine oriental carpet. However, he quickly realizes that the experiment does not have the aesthetic effect he had imagined: « Décidément la couleur tête-de-nègre, le ton de Sienne crue de cette carapace salissait les reflets du tapis sans les activer » (Huysmans 615). He also realizes that the solution to the problem stands right in front of him: the carpet is too new and therefore « trop voyant, trop pétulant, trop neuf » (Huysmans 615). Therefore, so goes the eccentric reasoning of Des Esseintes, it is the tortoise that must be improved and upgraded with gold plating and rare gems. The latter's elevated effect will tame and dim the flickering light of the new carpet. The process is much easier, although cumbersome, as the selection of gems does not take place in a straightforward manner: diamonds are too commonplace, emeralds and rubies resemble the lights of an omnibus, opals are arthritic and react to moisture, butchers wear amethysts, sapphires only react correctly to morning light, etc. In the end, however, Des Esseintes finds the right mix of minerals and fake precious stones that together produce the desired effect:

Des Esseintes regardait maintenant, blottie en un coin de sa salle à manger, la tortue qui rutilait dans la pénombre. Il se sentit parfaitement heureux; ses yeux se grisaient à ces resplendissements de corolles en flammes sur un fond d'or ; puis, contrairement à son habitude, il avait appétit et il trempait ses rôties enduites d'un extraordinaire beurre dans une tasse de thé, un impeccable mélange de Si-a-Fayoune, de Mo-you-tann, et de Khansky, des thés jaunes, venus de Chine en Russie par d'exceptionnelles caravanes. (Huysmans 615)

Let us briefly recall Proust's madeleine scene. Proust also depicted an everyday scene, in which a lonely individual first experiences an initial

disappointment (existential in Proust, aesthetic in Huysmans), which then turns to joy and unfamiliar appetite resulting in the consumption of food dipped in tea. There are, of course, variations on the elements of this topos (the quality of the tea, the cause of the joy etc.) and their narrative arrangement, but the most important variation concerns the question of memory. In Huysmans there is still no memory. On the contrary, Des Esseintes finishes his tea and wants to end the evening in his cozy and warm study, to which the turtle is brought. As the snow falls outside, Des Esseintes daydreams in the warmth of the tiled stove and soon has to open a window to cool the hot room down.

Ce brusque passage sans transition, de la chaleur torride aux frimas du plein hiver, l'avait saisi ; il se recroquevilla près du feu et l'idée lui vint d'avaler un spiritueux qui le réchauffât. Il s'en fut dans la salle à manger où, pratiquée dans l'une des cloisons, une armoire contenait une série de petites tonnes, rangées côte à côte, sur de minuscules chantiers de bois de santal, percées de robinets d'argent au bas du ventre. Il appelait cette réunion de barils à liqueurs, son orgue à bouche. (Huysmans 619)

Each liqueur has not only gustative but also musical characteristics, and thus can produce, by synesthesia, correspondences to musical genres and forms: “Marches funèbres à grand spectacle, à entendre, dans sa bouche, des solis de menthe, des duos de vespéto et de rhum” or less complex forms such as “le bénin cassis qui lui faisait roulader, dans la gorge, des chants emperlés de rossignol” (Huysmans 620). However, Des Esseintes, just like little Marcel, who was also affected by the winter cold, does not really want what the mouth organ synesthetically offers: “Des Esseintes n'avait nulle envie d'écouter le goût de la musique” (620). Like Marcel, who also changes his mind, Des Esseintes now chooses, not a complex symphony of flavors, but a simple one-tone whisky:

Il se borna à enlever une note au clavier de son orgue, en emportant un petit gobelet qu'il avait préalablement rempli d'un véridique whisky d'Irlande. Il se renfonça dans son fauteuil et huma lentement ce suc fermenté d'avoine et d'orge ; un fumet prononcé de créosote lui empuantit la bouche. Peu à peu, en buvant, sa pensée suivit l'impression maintenant ravivée de son palais, emboîta le pas à la saveur du whisky, réveilla, par une fatale exactitude d'odeurs, des souvenirs effacés depuis des ans. (620-21)

Where Marcel is almost immediately positively surprised by an intimate but inexplicable feeling of happiness, Des Esseintes' reaction is conversely clearly negative. A taste of creosote peppers his mouth, but, just like

Proust, an involuntary memory is created. Creosote is a dark viscous liquid made from coal tar, which was already used in the nineteenth century to protect wood against fungi, bacteria and insects (e.g. railway sleepers and wooden electricity pylons). The word creosote comes from the Greek κρεας (kreas) ‘meat,’ and σωτηρ (sōtēr) ‘preserve’ and creosotes were the main chemical component in the characteristic taste and smell of smoked meat. Smoke and tar also are classic flavors in whiskey, although in Des Esseintes’ case these otherwise authentic flavors do not confirm his choice but lead to a clear discomfort. Why? Because creosote was also used by contemporary dentists to stop necrosis, to sterilize and to anesthetize during dental operations: “Ce fleur phéniqué, âcre, lui remémorait forcément l’identique senteur dont il avait eu la langue pleine au temps où les dentistes travaillaient dans sa gencive” (621). The memories of a particularly urgent and painful visit to the dentist, which he had forgotten “depuis des ans” now well up and an entire memory scene, like a hypotyposis, takes hold of the text. Des Esseintes remembers waking up in the middle of the night in excruciating pain. Not being able to go to his regular dentist, he finds a mechanic who calls himself “dentiste populaire.” The operation is described in all its realism as a painful struggle with the mechanic and his instruments, which, however, ends with the tooth being removed and Des Esseintes finding himself on the street after paying two francs: “joyeux, rajeuni de dix ans, s’intéressant aux moindres choses” (622).

Like Proust, Huysman’s scene is also characterized by the fact that taste (as opposed to sight or hearing) generates a high degree of precision and clarity in the involuntary memory. In addition, as with Proust, the taste of creosote opens up a past universe and rather than a simple sensation of *déjà-vu*. However, Huysmans differs from Proust in various ways. In Proust, there is an identity between the taste scene and what is remembered, the madeleine cake and the tea he had already had as a child, while the involuntary memory in Huysmans is analogous in the sense that whiskey contains the same taste qualities as dental creosote without, however, being the same substance. The smoked and tarred nuances come from “ogre et avoine.” not from medical creosote, but nevertheless suggest similarity at the level of taste. One can also notice the difference in the subject’s relationship to the memory. In Proust, it is clear that something is remembered but not what, whereas in Huysmans the very precise content of the memory boils over, as it were, in Des Esseintes’ consciousness without his having to exert himself as

little Marcel repeatedly had to. It also gives Huysman's scene a more horizontal, narrative character, while Proust's recollection scene appears more vertical as an exercise during which the subject must excavate the precise content of the memory, which is clearly and happily present. Finally, we can note the obvious difference that the lack of initial precise content in Proust's memory is matched by a very dominant feeling of happiness, while Huysman's initial joy at the turtle's decoration, at his regained appetite and the homely warmth is matched by a clear discomfort at the memory:

Brou ! fit-il, attristé par l'assaut de ces souvenirs. Il se leva pour rompre l'horrible charme de cette vision et, revenu dans la vie présente, il s'inquiéta de la tortue. Elle ne bougeait toujours point, il la palpa ; elle était morte. (Huysmans 623)

In contrast to that of Proust, Huysman's memory is aggressive and violent ("assaut") and is correlated in the real world by the death of the otherwise valuable turtle. What does this chapter mean more precisely? Robert Ziegler interprets it as a prelapsarian scene: Des Esseintes is living in a womb where all sounds, colors and smells are controlled and where the mouth organ symbolizes the breast. The visit to the dentist allows Des Esseintes to « regain the gingival purity of the infant drinking the anaesthetizing whiskey-milk. » (Ziegler 80). For Alain Buisine the turtle and the visit to the dentist testify to the failure of Des Esseintes' aesthetic isolationism. The outside has to be kept at a distance but memory, the most intimate dimension of any inside, always contains the banal outside of the natural world – here a substandard dentist. Susanna Lee argues in the same vein that the turtle was fundamental to nineteenth-century discoveries in developmental biology and theories of evolution. Its presence and death therefore signify how nature has its own laws regardless of any man-made attempt at isolating himself in culture. One could probably interpret this scene in many other ways. It could also well be interpreted in the light of a general class critique of the stupid and money-focused bourgeoisie of the Second Empire that Des Esseintes escapes from but also as a critique of this very escape that Des Esseintes, the nobleman, achieves, only to end up at a low-class amateur dentist's. What is important in our context is how taste and memory connect to an emotion, which, contrary to what happens in Proust, is not happy but assaultive and aggressive. We have in fact described two extremes in the topos of involuntary memory generated by taste: indefinite but clear

feeling of happiness in Proust versus enigmatic warmth interrupted by clear discomfort in Huysmans.

Darrieussecq

One could now focus on yet other modernist novels, in which eating and memory are connected. However, I will turn to a less canonical text, *Truismes* by Marie Darrieussecq from (1996). Not because there is any evidence of literary influence on her novel, but for comparative reasons as we encounter a third variant of the topos of involuntary memory.

Truismes is about a nameless narrator in a near future Paris and her gradual transformation into a sow. The initially naive narrator works in a perfume shop in Paris, where she is sexually exploited by her boss and sells sexual services to customers. Her transformation begins with the development of opulent forms and curves, which first make her more and more attractive to customers until she finally completely transforms into a sow. This transformation seems, on the one hand, irreversible, but on the other hand, once it is completed, she can more or less voluntarily decide whether she wants to be a sow or a human. In parallel with this individual transformation, French society undergoes a political change with the appearance of a kind of dictatorship, *Le Social-Franc-Progressisme*, which purges marginal groups, intellectuals, and generally upholds purity as its motto. At one point, the main character falls in love with Yvan, a handsome man who transforms into a werewolf at full moon. He suffers more or less from the same problems as the narrator, and is eventually killed by the SPA, an animal rights organization. The narrator's mother, (who ironically owns a pig farm and an associated slaughterhouse outside of Paris), has searched for her through a TV program, *Un seul être vous manque*. At the end of the novel, the narrator, travelling as a pig in a "wagon à bestiaux," seeks her mother out, as she sensually experiences complex soil aromas:

Je me suis dit que j'allais attendre un peu avant de sonner chez ma mère. J'avais le trac. Je me suis approchée des arbres. C'était la première fois que je voyais des arbres aussi hauts et qui sentaient si bons. Ils sentaient l'écorce, la sève sauvage ramassée à ras de tronc, ils sentaient toute la puissance endormie de l'hiver. Entre les grosses racines des arbres, la terre avait éclaté, meuble, comme si les racines la labouraient de l'intérieur en s'enfonçant profondément dedans. J'y ai fourré mon nez. Ça sentait bon la feuille morte de l'automne passé, ça cédait en toutes petites mottes friables parfumées à la

mousse, au gland, au champignon. J'ai fouillé, j'ai creusé, cette odeur, c'était comme si la planète entraînait tout entière dans mon corps, ça faisait des saisons en moi, des envols d'oies sauvages, des perce-neige, des fruits, du vent du sud. Il y avait toutes les strates de toutes les saisons dans les couches d'humus, ça se précisait, ça remontait vers quelque chose. (Darrieussecq 147-48)

This sensory apprehension of the soil and its universe of fragrances is not unlike Proust's memory experience. The mothers' distance and the narrators' loneliness create an unusually intense attention work towards the sensation of memory and its unclear content. The narrators both search into their memories in order for its 'something' to surface, as Darrieussecq has it: "ça se précisait, ça remontait vers quelque chose." In Darrieussecq's case, this happens, less through special effort as in Proust, nor entirely by herself as in Huysmans, but because the character/sow is actually on the trail of a truffle that has given off scents to the hyper-sensitive pig's snout:

J'ai trouvé une grosse truffe noire et j'ai pensé à cette Saint-Sylvestre de l'an 2000 où j'en avais tant mangé parmi ces gens si turbulents, et puis ça s'est effacé. J'ai croqué dans la truffe, du nez le parfum m'est rentré dans la gorge et ça a fait comme si je mangeais un morceau de Terre. Tout l'hiver de la Terre a éclaté dans ma bouche, je ne me suis plus souvenue ni du millénaire à venir ni de tout ce que j'avais vécu, ça s'est roulé en boule en moi et j'ai tout oublié, pendant un moment indéfini j'ai perdu ma mémoire. J'ai mangé, j'ai mangé. (Darrieussecq 148)

A little earlier in the novel, the narrator had been brought as a sort of gimmick pig by the dictatorial president to an extravagant New Year's party, during which the guests threw the remains of the epicurean meal at her: "Des bouts de cerf roti, des tranches de giraffe ... et des truffes surtout, les truffes c'est bon" (Darrieussecq 111). The scent of this exclusive foodstuff that the main character has detected in her natural environment brings back involuntary memories of a previous truffle intake. This olfactory correspondence is identical to Proust's madeleine cake, which reminded Marcel of an earlier madeleine cake, just like the taste of creosote in Huysmans. The difference, however, is interesting: in Proust memory is stubborn and must be cajoled and conjured up, whereas *des Esseintes* in Huysmans is literally assaulted by it. In Darrieussecq, a third version can be identified. Although the narrator's memories emerge unproblematically by themselves, they are also erased almost immediately. While the smell of the truffle reminds the pig of a previous truffle event, the smell also, in an animal way, triggers the instinct to eat so strongly

that it eradicates any form of commemoration. The narrator does not become one with her past or the memories of it but with the earth, with what appears to be a new olfactory totality of natural fragrances. This same logic recurs while she eats the truffle: “j’ai tout oublié...j’ai perdu la mémoire” (148).

We can now ask which thematic and symbolic pattern underpins this scene of involuntary memory. Are we simply dealing with an animal that prefers eating to memories? Is the animal’s being in phase with Nature emphasized in relation to the narrator’s former social problems as a human being? Are we confronted to a glorification of the sense of taste, not as culture, but as natural repression (of human humiliations and defeats)? Or is a staging of memory as non-identitarian being performed: I am no longer my memories, but an organic *hic et nunc* entity of earth, winter and humus? Or is this a women’s lib story, insisting on a demetaphorisation of the *cochonne*, our narrator-slut assuming her identity as a pig? The topos is clear enough in its presentation of conventional elements, as in Proust and Huysmans, but what is less clear is how these elements are connected and which themes, symbolizations and meanings they convey.

Most importantly in our topological context, however, this scene presents us with a new version of our previously mentioned three-dimensional topos about the involuntary memory consisting of taste, remembrance, and feeling. Not a version where taste induces analysis of an unclear memory as in Proust nor one where taste aggressively triggers a very distinct memory tableau but a version, in which taste involuntarily but joyfully erases memory in an act of authentic identity-making.

Conclusion

The theorists of topology mentioned at the beginning of this article all categorized a topos as the historical reiteration of a formal association of two sets of elements: conventional ones and “something else.” This something else was, in Curtius, ultimately defined as the historical indication of the European Spirit in a topos, in Bakhtin as the concrete time-form in a chronotope and in Barthes as (psychological) projections into a customary code. The specific concretizations, be they spiritual, time-forms or projections, would also require some sort of logic or semantic link to conventional formal elements: Curtius relies on Jung’s archetypes, Bakhtin on a modernization of Kantian forms of intelligibility, while

Barthes is more impressionistic as he claims that a topos exists if someone can say: "That's so true! I recognize that scene."

The scenes we have analyzed above also contain repetitions of the same formal elements: taste leads to involuntary recollection, which then triggers distinct affective states. The three literary scenes share both these three elements and their causal arrangement. However, they do not share a conventional meaning embedded in the taste-induced involuntary memory and the subsequent affective state. Proust's Madeleine scene is about tasting the same food as in his early childhood, sensing the presence of an unclear memory, but also a clear feeling of happiness. In Huysmans, we are dealing with an analogous taste experience (the whiskey is reminiscent of the dentist's creosote), which leads to, not an unintelligible but overwhelmingly clear, although in no way blissful memory. In Darrieussecq, as in Proust, the narrator experiences a new encounter with the same food (the truffle), which, as in Huysmans, produces an easily accessible memory. However, the latter is not unpleasant but so overwhelmingly and naturally gratifying that, in contrast to what happens in Proust and Huysmans, it marginalizes or obliterates her memory.

Summa summarum: the same elements are repeated (taste experience, involuntary memory and affect), and in this way they form a kind of elementary topos. However, their meaning is not identical; they signify something different and even opposite, so that their elements are typical while their specific meaning remains singular. In a classical topos such as the *locus amoenus* (analyzed at length by Curtius), we not only recognize the elements (shade, water, grass) but also the atmosphere of pleasantness and idyll they guarantee. In other words, not only the elements but also the meaning of the classical topos is conventional, while the modernist topos of the involuntary memory requires an interpretative effort to decipher the semantic uncertainty with which our three authors seemed to endow their specific use of it.

As a conclusion, I would like to develop this point theoretically and propose a distinction between rhetorical and aesthetic topoi. If the specifically topical in a topos is constituted by the repeated elements, how can we then conceptually, within the idea of the literary topos, identify and coordinate the singular meaning that the three examples clearly contain? After each analysis of the topos of the involuntary memory, I mentioned various scholarly sources offering quite different interpretations of it: Proust's memory scene as symbolic masturbation

but also as a religious communion scene. Huysmans's scene can be interpreted as post-naturalistic decadence, as Marxist critique of the bourgeoisie, or as a depiction of the fundamental loneliness of the modern subject. Darieussecq's commemorative scene, we also noted, contained the possibility of many readings: posthumanist, feminist or anthropocene-related. If the meaning of the three topoi is not clear despite their shared elements, this should not be thought of as a topological problem, but rather as modern literature's special use of topoi. They are recognizable and clear, but at the same time confusing in terms of their hermeneutic potential. They should not just be recognized as rhetorical or poetic resources, but should be approached in terms of analysis and interpretation. In this way, one can claim that they are aesthetic topoi rather than rhetorical ones. In order to develop this affirmation, I would like to make a possibly surprising but useful detour back to the birth of aesthetics as a discipline.

As a scientific field, aesthetics arose, so goes the standard narrative, with Leibniz, Wolff and Baumgarten in the first half of the eighteenth century. One of the reasons for this was a dissatisfaction with classical rationalism (Descartes and Spinoza) and its failure to explain the ideas and epistemological possibilities of sensibility. Descartes had spent much energy qualifying the innate ideas (e.g. the *Cogito*, God) as clear and distinct. These two features indicated that the idea was recognizable (clear), while the distinct quality indicated that the elements of its content were evidently differentiated from each other. Descartes repeatedly underlines that sensory ideas, while being clear, and often even clearer than innate ideas, do not have the distinct quality of the latter. A red object is clearly red, but what kind of red is it? A sudden scent of almond is clear, but does it come from a perfume or an oil? The metal nugget shines like gold, but is it real gold? A feature in the determination of the sensory ideas in early aesthetics thus became a new double qualification. In contrast to Descartes' qualification of the innate ideas as clear and distinct, a conceptual apparatus began to be developed for conceptless sensory experience. The sensory ideas were, paradoxically, at the same time clear and confused. In a famous passage in his *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain*, Leibniz affirms:

[...] J'ai coutume de suivre ici le langage de M. Descartes, chez qui une idée pourra être claire et confuse en même temps, et telles sont les qualités des idées sensibles, affectées aux organes, comme celle de la couleur ou de la chaleur. Elles sont claires, car on les reconnaît et on les discerne aisément les

unes des autres, mais elles ne sont point distinctes, parce qu'on ne distingue pas ce qu'elles renferment. Ainsi on n'en saurait donner la définition. On ne les fait connaître que par des exemples, et au reste il faut dire que c'est un je ne sais quoi, jusqu'à ce qu'on en déchiffre la contexture. (Leibniz 198)

The sensory ideas, while clear and confused at the same time, are easily recognizable (e.g. the color red, the smell of almond (or truffle!), and the sight of gold) and thus clear. But they are also confusing in terms of their content: which red? Where does the almond scent come from? Is it real gold? Leibniz logically concludes that we cannot define the sensory ideas in advance and consequently that their content must be determined by the analysis of empirical examples. It is only through the investigation and analysis of what Leibniz calls *petites perceptions* that the content of the sensory ideas becomes distinct. Baumgarten's entire work on aesthetics comes from this insight, as he defines aesthetics as a scientific alternative to logic's formal doctrine of cognition (in contrast to the later use of the term aesthetics for various art-philosophical considerations). Baumgarten claims that all cognition starts from some minimal clear-confused perceptions of concrete objects. Whereas logical thinking had been oriented towards the general, as in Aristotle's *Metaphysica*, Baumgarten's aesthetics is inclined towards the overlooked particulars, i.e. the concrete things in the broadest sense that are not considered philosophically or cognitively interesting. In other words, cognition must be based on sensation, and this, in turn, requires aesthetics to turn away from the concept as a mode of legitimation for cognition and instead focus on the minimal sensory stimuli. Descartes pointed out that "...tous ces sentiments de faim, de soif, de douleur, etc., ne sont autre chose que de certaines façons confuses de penser..." (Descartes 492). Aesthetics must examine these confused ways of thinking and decipher them through examples and, insofar far as possible, systematize them.

Let us now return to our topos of involuntary memory. As I propose to call the topos of involuntary memory an aesthetic rather than a rhetorical topos, I do so on the basis of the qualitative distinctions just made between the distinct, the clear and the confused aspects of ideas. The examples of topoi we have analyzed are clear because their elements are recognizable as parts of a topos. As Leibniz asserted about the sensory ideas, their clarity concerns recognizability (if an idea is not clear, it is not confused, but obscure). Our three examples of the topos of involuntary memory all respect this criterion of recognizability. This obviously also applies to a classical rhetorical topos such as the *locus amoenus*, whose

elements have become standardized over time. However, the meaning of a classical *locus amoenus* will necessarily be a consequence of its elements producing some kind of pleasant situation (regardless of genre, situation, epoch). A *locus amoenus* can be concretized by a couple in love, by good friends, by the lonely wanderer, either of which will not change the fact that the place is pleasant and inviting. The meaning of a classical topos is thus a semantic extension of its elementary composition. In aesthetic terms, it is both clear and distinct and furthermore, in the wake of Descartes and Leibniz, these two qualities give access to the truth (or, as we are in the domain of rhetoric, access to verisimilitude). Just as one cannot doubt the *cogito* because it is clear and distinct, one cannot doubt a given *locus amoenus* whose elements are both recognizable (clear) and whose meaning is evidently amenable (distinct). Analogously, a classical rhetorical topos possesses the same qualities as the innate ideas. Descartes said that innate ideas and their clearly distinct qualities were the signature of God in man. By analogy, one can affirm that the classical topoi hold the signature of tradition, thus constituting a normative resource bank for constant stabilization of the relationship between the text's expression and the reader's impression and understanding thereof.

This logic does not quite apply to our topos of involuntary memory. As already mentioned, its elements are recognizable (clear) while its content is confused: why do these clear involuntary recollections pop up? What does their sudden presence mean? What is the subject supposed to do with them? Why is little Marcel happy? Why are Des Esseintes' memories unpleasant, even though the scene ends well? What does it really mean to possess a pig's sense of smell? These questions are dimensions of the confusing aspect of the topos, which together add up to the question: what does the topos really mean? As Leibniz said about the sensory clear-confused ideas, we do not have their definition, a claim which is valid for our aesthetic topos, but not for the classical rhetorical topoi like the *locus amoenus*. Baumgarten said that we have no concept of the confusing part of sensory ideas, despite the fact that they are clear to us. Leibniz went on to claim that we therefore had to analyze them, decipher them, which is what we have tried to do by mentioning the many and different analyses that exist of, for example, Proust's madeleine cake or the pig's truffle experience in Darrieussecq. They are clear because they clearly contain recurring elements: sense of taste, memory and particular affective state. Nonetheless, how the overall meaning of these elements is to be understood specifically is up to an interpretation providing

appropriate but *aposteriori* definitions and concepts. Proust's madeleine scene has been interpreted by way of discourses as diverse as Christian communion theory, psychoanalysis and neurology to better identify and suggest understandings of the topos. The meaning of classical topoi such as the *locus amoenus* was developed through a literary tradition which, through its repetition, so to speak, possessed and offered the reader its own conceptualization of the accompanying pleasant qualities of a special natural place.

These reflections could of course have been unfolded more fully, but the distinction between rhetorical and aesthetic topoi will, I hope, have had the advantage of explaining a specific problem. In modernist literature, one rarely comes across conventional topoi as in classical literature, whose meaning was *mutatis mutandi*, given in advance. Curtius could easily make a fairly indubitable and authoritative list of European medieval and Renaissance topoi. One cannot really do that with modernist literature, but this difficulty cannot be explained by the fact that there are no topoi in modernist literature. As I have tried to show in the case of involuntary memory, the latter does seem to comply with part of the criteria for the definition of a topos, namely the repetition of formal elements. The difficulty resides in the fact such repetition does not warrant an intuitive identification of these topoi as repeating a general idea of the relation between taste and involuntary memory. In this sense, they do not correspond to the normative definition of classical topoi and seem to have a different nature. I called this nature aesthetic, and with the theoretical implications of this designation, these topoi also gain a new literary status. A new status in the given text where, despite their recognisability, they also have to be interpreted. Moreover, this new status constitutes a part of the historical series of taste-induced involuntary memory: a series constituting a formal tradition whose meaning, however, is not presented as traditional but as potential.

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Des écritures du sujet : De l'extériorité à l'intériorité, une approche comparée du discours littéraire intra-francophone

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Résumé : s'appuyant sur un corpus de romans contemporains issus des littératures francophones du Nord (Québec, Belgique, France, francophonie roumaine) et de l'île Maurice, cet article examine les constructions littéraires du sujet à travers une double polarité : l'intériorité et l'extériorité. Dans un contexte marqué par la liquéfaction des liens sociaux (Bauman) et la violence postmoderne et postcoloniale (Mbembe), la littérature offre des formes narratives de subjectivation. L'intériorité s'exprime à travers l'affect – angoisse, solitude, violence – comme symptôme du repli du sujet sur soi. À l'inverse, l'extériorité se structure à travers l'ouverture relationnelle à l'autre, à la mémoire, à l'animalité et à la filiation. Ces pôles ne sont pas antithétiques mais contribuent à la configuration d'un sujet transindividuel en tension, dont l'existence littéraire se déploie dans la confrontation à l'altérité. L'étude montre que ce sujet francophone intra-européen se distingue des autres subjectivités postcoloniales (africaine, caribéenne, comorienne) par sa fragilité affective et relationnelle, plutôt que par un quelconque agenda politique collectif.

Mots-clés : sujet francophone, intériorité, extériorité, relationalité, littérature francophone, transindividualité

Writings of the Subject: From Exteriority to Interiority – A Comparative Approach to Intra-Francophone Literary Discourse

Abstract: Drawing on a corpus of contemporary novels from Northern Francophone literatures (Québec, Belgium, France, Romanian Francophonie) and Mauritius, this article examines the literary constructions of the subject

through a dual polarity: interiority and exteriority. In a context marked by the liquefaction of social bonds (Bauman) and postmodern, postcolonial violence (Mbembe), literature offers narrative forms of subjectivation. Interiority is expressed through affect – anguish, solitude, violence – as a symptom of the subject's withdrawal into the self. Conversely, exteriority is structured through relational openness to the other, to memory, to animality, and to filiation. These poles are not antithetical but contribute to the configuration of a transindividual subject in tension, whose literary existence unfolds in confrontation with alterity. The study shows that this intra-European Francophone subject contrasts with other postcolonial subjectivities (African, Caribbean, Comorian) through its affective and relational fragility, rather than through any collective political agenda.

Keywords: Francophone subject, interiority, exteriority, relationality, francophone literature, transindividuality

Introduction

Penser les écritures francophones contemporaines du sujet revient à s'engager dans une réflexion à la fois esthétique, herméneutique et politique sur une figure mouvante, traversée par les tensions de son temps. Le sujet, tel qu'il est ici entendu, ne saurait être réduit à un simple agent narratif, ni à un « je » grammatical. Il constitue ce que Jean Bessière nomme une « figure de problématicité » du monde (Bessière *Le roman contemporain ou la problématicité du monde* 30–34), c'est-à-dire un lieu de manifestation des fractures du réel à travers une subjectivation instable et transindividuelle. Cette conception rejoint celle de Vincent Descombes, pour qui le sujet ne peut être défini de façon unitaire : il ne relève pas d'un pur cogito souverain, mais d'une pluralité d'actes, de rôles et « de situations dans lesquels il est toujours déjà engagé » (Descombes *Le complément de sujet* 28–30). Dans cette perspective, le sujet francophone contemporain apparaît comme un *complément d'agent* au sein d'un univers discursif qui le constitue autant qu'il le traverse, un « être-au-monde » affecté, fragmenté, en tension constante entre identification et altérité.

Marqué par les héritages coloniaux, les dynamiques postcoloniales et les mutations de la mondialisation, le sujet francophone se construit dans une relation complexe à lui-même et au monde. Cette relationalité peut prendre la forme d'une fusion, d'une séparation, ou d'une union entre l'être et le monde. L'émergence du sujet, dans les littératures

francophones, s'inscrit dans ce processus dynamique de subjectivation, que Michel Foucault analysait comme un « souci de soi » (Foucault *L'herméneutique du sujet* 17–20), une manière d'être, de se rapporter à soi et aux autres à travers des pratiques de vérité. Dans un contexte postmoderne et postcolonial, tel que l'ont appréhendé Zygmunt Bauman (*La Vie liquide*, 2005) ou Achille Mbembe (*Brutalisme*, 2020), ce sujet devient fluide, instable, exposé à la précarité des liens et à l'érosion des repères collectifs. Cette « liquéfaction » du monde social reconfigure les modalités d'apparition du sujet dans la littérature. Tantôt en repli introspectif, tantôt en quête d'une relation au monde, le sujet francophone contemporain apparaît comme décentré, fragilisé mais encore pensant, dans une dialectique entre intériorité (comme repli, conscience, solitude) et extériorité (comme altérité, mémoire, animalité, historicité).

C'est à cette double polarité que répond le présent article. À partir d'un corpus d'œuvres lauréates du Prix des cinq continents de la Francophonie, il propose une typologie des écritures du sujet, selon deux grandes orientations : l'écriture de l'intériorité, qui explore l'angoisse, la solitude, la souffrance ou encore la rédemption ; et l'écriture de l'extériorité, qui investit des objets comme la mémoire collective, l'animalité, la filialité ou l'altérité. Cette typologie n'est pas fondée sur une opposition figée, mais sur des dynamiques souvent entremêlées, à travers lesquelles les romans étudiés interrogent la manière dont le sujet contemporain se construit, se perd ou se régénère. Ce travail mobilise une lecture intra-francophone fondée sur un corpus d'œuvres romanesques ayant toutes été récompensées par le Prix des cinq continents de la Francophonie, ce qui garantit une certaine cohérence esthétique et éthique autour des enjeux de diversité et d'unicité. Ce corpus réunit des textes issus de contextes géographiques et culturels variés, même si l'ensemble demeure majoritairement ancré dans les francophonies du Nord.

Du Québec, deux romans se distinguent : *Le Tranquille Affligé* (2019) de Gilles Jobidon, récit historique et métaphysique sur la quête d'une couleur noire en Chine impériale, et *Il pleuvait des oiseaux* (2011) de Jocelyne Saucier, roman de mémoire autour de survivants de la tragédie de l'incendie de Matheson en Ontario. Ces textes explorent respectivement la quête intérieure et la survivance face à l'Histoire, et mettent en tension intériorité et extériorité dans des formes sensibles et contemplatives. La Belgique francophone est représentée par *La Théo des fleuves* (2018) de Jean-Marc Turine, récit poignant sur la mémoire rom

et le traumatisme du génocide tzigane, et *Si tu passes la rivière* (2012) de Geneviève Damas, qui aborde la violence familiale, l'apprentissage de soi et la relation à l'animalité dans une campagne patriarcale et silencieuse. Tous deux s'attachent à des figures marginalisées, en quête de langage, de reconnaissance et de transmission. La France éditoriale regroupe ici quatre auteurs aux trajectoires contrastées. *Chamelle* (2003) de Marc Durin-Valois, roman du désert et de l'exode, exprime une quête de survie et de sens dans un environnement hostile, à travers la figure du père et de la filiation. *La Perfection du tir* (2004) de Mathias Énard plonge dans l'esprit d'un sniper, sujet aussi lucide que désaffecté, dans un contexte de guerre urbaine ; il explore une intériorité violente, déshumanisée, mais paradoxalement introspective. *Palestine* (2008) de Hubert Haddad traite de l'expérience israélo-palestinienne à travers l'amnésie d'un soldat, et *Terre des affranchis* (2010) de Liliana Lazar, autrice roumaine francophone, publiée en France, évoque la Roumanie pré- et postcommuniste dans un récit mêlant crime, mysticisme et réclusion. Bien que Lazar soit rattachée à l'édition française, son roman se déploie dans un contexte est-européen francophone, ce qui contribue à diversifier géoculturellement le corpus. Enfin, du Sud global, l'Île Maurice est représentée par *Made in Mauritius* (2013) d'Amal Sewtohol, récit de déracinement, d'enfance et de reconstruction identitaire entre Port-Louis et l'Australie. Ce roman tisse une réflexion sur la mémoire diasporique, l'héritage familial et l'imaginaire du sujet postcolonial dans une île marquée par les migrations, les silences et les fractures.

Si ce corpus reflète un certain déséquilibre géographique, avec une nette prédominance des littératures européennes et nord-américaines de langue française, il s'articule néanmoins autour de préoccupations communes : la mise en crise du sujet dans un monde en perte de repères, la difficulté à dire le soi dans un contexte de violence, de solitude ou de mémoire traumatique, et l'usage de l'écriture comme espace de réinvention subjective. À travers cette diversité de lieux d'énonciation, il devient possible de lire la littérature francophone comme un laboratoire du sujet contemporain, pris entre introspection et altérité, héritage et invention¹. L'enjeu est donc de montrer comment ces textes, dans leur

¹ Sur le questionnement du sujet appliquée plus spécifiquement à un corpus littéraire francophone de l'Afrique, des Antilles et de l'océan Indien, voir Buata B. Malela et Cynthia V. Parfait, *Écrire le sujet du XXI^e siècle. Le regard des littératures francophones*. Cet ouvrage s'intéresse aux reconfigurations contemporaines du sujet

diversité formelle et poétique, mettent en scène des figures du sujet aux prises avec leur intériorité ou confrontées à des formes d'extériorité constitutives. L'écriture devient alors un lieu de subjectivation, de mise en discours de l'expérience, mais aussi de résistance à l'effondrement du sens. Loin de l'exhibition narcissique ou du naturalisme plat, les écritures francophones contemporaines du sujet déploient une herméneutique littéraire : elles pensent l'humain, dans ses failles, ses douleurs et ses espoirs. La démarche qui suit s'organise en deux volets complémentaires : d'abord, une étude des écritures de l'intériorité, centrée sur les formes de repli, de souffrance et de solitude du sujet ; ensuite, une exploration des écritures de l'extériorité, à travers lesquelles s'articulent mémoire, altérité et relation au monde. C'est donc par l'intériorité que s'ouvre cette enquête littéraire, en interrogeant les formes sensibles et narratives par lesquelles le sujet francophone exprime sa vulnérabilité, son mal-être et sa quête de sens dans un monde fragmenté.

Écriture de l'intériorité

L'écriture de l'intériorité met en tension le rapport du sujet à lui-même et à son environnement immédiat, en articulant douleur vécue, repli réflexif et quête de sens. Elle se manifeste dans le texte littéraire à travers des expériences subjectives de la souffrance, de l'oppression ou de la violence, traduites non seulement sur un mode affectif (angoisse, ennui, solitude), mais aussi épistémologique : l'intériorité devient un lieu

dans les littératures francophones d'Afrique, des Antilles et de l'océan Indien, à partir d'un corpus de romans publiés en 2017 et 2018. En articulant les notions de subjectivité (affects, intériorité, souffrance) et d'objectivité (mémoire, histoire, altérité), ce travail montre que ces fictions mettent en scène des subjectivités fragmentées, héritières de la colonialité, prises entre solitude, violence sociale et quête de sens. À travers des analyses précises de textes Nathacha Appanah, Tahar Ben Jelloun, Bessora, Maïssa Bey, Patrick Chamoiseau, Wilfried N'Sondé, Alain Mabanckou, Mohamed Mbougar Sarr et bien d'autres encore, l'étude met en évidence des formes de subjectivation traversées par le silence, la mémoire traumatique ou la tension entre individu et collectif. Le sujet francophone contemporain, tel qu'il se dessine dans ces romans, ne relève ni d'une identité unifiée ni d'un « je » souverain, mais d'une position instable, en tension constante avec le monde. Ce sujet, affecté par la globalisation, les conflits mémoriels et les fractures sociales, est saisi comme un lieu d'intensité esthétique et politique. Ces écritures interrogent moins l'ancrage géopolitique que la capacité du sujet à se dire dans l'incertitude, la dissociation ou la réparation, renouvelant ainsi les formes et les enjeux de la littérature francophone au XXI^e siècle.

de perception, de savoir et parfois de salut. Dans ce cadre, ce qui pourrait se nommer le « mal du sujet » – ce sentiment d’être à la fois en trop et hors d’atteinte du monde – est souvent exprimé dans des récits où l’intériorité n’est jamais pure, mais toujours travaillée par des forces extérieures.

De l’angoisse au manque

Le roman *Chamelle* (2002) de Marc Durin-Valois, primé par le Prix des cinq continents de la Francophonie en 2003, illustre cette dynamique de manière exemplaire. Situé dans un espace désertique non précisé, le récit suit Rahne, instituteur de village, qui, pour fuir la guerre, entraîne les siens dans un exode vers l’Est. Accompagné de femmes, d’enfants et d’animaux, il traverse un espace aride et hostile. La chamelle, figure centrale du roman, n’est pas un simple animal de charge : elle incarne une fonction maternelle, un principe vital qui apaise l’angoisse collective et soutient l’effort de survie. Nourricière et protectrice, elle devient l’image d’un espoir ténu face à l’effondrement. « C’est une bête courageuse », écrit Durin-Valois, « qui donne tout ce qu’elle a, jusqu’à son poil pour les fourrures et même ses crottes qui servent au feu quand le bois manque » (Durin-Valois *Chamelle* 807). Par cette image, l’animal devient projection de l’intériorité humaine en détresse : face à la désolation, la chamelle matérialise une intériorité partagée, un refuge silencieux mais chargé d’affects. Or, malgré sa présence, la souffrance l’emporte. La soif, la faim et la menace armée réduisent peu à peu le groupe à néant. Seuls Rahne et sa fille survivent, physiquement brisés, avant d’être recueillis par une ONG. Cette traversée devient autant épreuve physique qu’expérience réflexive : elle pousse le sujet à interroger ses ressources, sa mémoire, sa capacité à transmettre un savoir dans un monde sans repères. Dans un passage-clef, Rahne explique que « le savoir donne un prix à la peau » (Durin-Valois *Chamelle* 788) : l’intériorité, ici, se convertit en héritage, en transmission possible malgré la désolation.

La transmission passe aussi par le rêve éveillé d’un ailleurs fertile, que Rahne partage avec ses compagnons d’infortune. Par la description d’un paysage luxuriant – lacs, herbes à la menthe, feuilles de patate, courges jaunes, maïs, fruits tropicaux – le narrateur ébauche une géographie intérieure où la nature devient langage compensatoire de la privation. Cette vision, loin d’être une simple digression sensorielle, incarne une stratégie de résistance psychique face à l’hostilité du désert. Elle matérialise un recours de l’intériorité contre l’angoisse du manque, en mobilisant la mémoire des odeurs, des textures et des couleurs pour évoquer un monde

où vivre est encore pensable : « Les pieds de maïs hauts comme la taille d'un homme... des fruits juteux et sucrés... des antilopes aux flancs argentés » (Durin-Valois *Chamelle* 788). Ce passage traduit une intériorité travaillée par l'imaginaire, où l'excès du réel – la sécheresse, la guerre, la faim – est contrebalancé par une rêverie nourricière et réparatrice.

L'opposition entre ce paysage mental et le désert réel ne relève pas d'un simple contraste stylistique : elle actualise l'écart entre intériorité et extériorité, entre ce que le sujet endure et ce qu'il est encore capable de formuler comme désirable. Le désert, espace nu, brûlant, silencieux, agit comme révélateur de l'épuisement du sujet mais aussi comme scène d'intensité intérieure, où se mêlent mémoire, peur et désir. Ce lieu sans ombre devient alors une chambre d'écho de la conscience blessée, de la solitude radicale, de la fatalité. Il constitue l'espace paradoxal où se rejouent les limites de l'humain, mais aussi ses ressources de résistance. L'intériorité s'y donne comme contre-mouvement, non pas pur repli, mais capacité d'imaginer autrement, dans un dernier acte d'hospitalité à soi comme une sorte de fatalité.

La fatalité

L'intériorité du sujet dans *Chamelle* ne se limite pas à une introspection contemplative : elle est constamment mise à l'épreuve par un sentiment aigu de fatalité, qui ébranle son pouvoir d'agir et sa capacité à comprendre le monde. Cette fatalité, loin d'être une simple résignation, structure une écriture de l'impuissance où le sujet expérimente la perte de maîtrise sur son existence. Face à la violence du réel, la souffrance s'intériorise et devient le miroir d'un désordre cosmique : tout échappe, tout fuit, et le sujet se découvre soumis à une loi obscure qui dépasse sa volonté. Dans un passage emblématique, Rahne confie : « Depuis toujours et malgré moi, tout avait filé, et glissé, et fui entre mes doigts [...] je faisais tout avec sérieux et application. Avec logique aussi. Mais les choses échouaient car Dieu le voulait ainsi, pour des raisons qui m'échappaient » (Durin-Valois *Chamelle* 824). L'aveu dévoile une intériorité marquée par l'incompréhension fondamentale de l'ordre du monde, où la causalité rationnelle cède devant une puissance transcendante, arbitraire, indéchiffrable. Cette dépossession est au cœur de la posture du sujet : il agit, mais en vain ; il espère, mais sans horizon. Le monde devient un théâtre absurde dans lequel l'individu est réduit à l'état de spectateur impuissant.

La référence à Dieu n'est pas ici religieuse, mais symbolique : elle renvoie à la dimension tragique de l'existence, où l'individu fait l'expérience de sa propre finitude. Elle rappelle la figure antique d'Ananké, divinité grecque de la Nécessité, ou encore le *fatum* romain, cette force irréversible qui fixe les destinées. Dans cette optique, la littérature moderne rejoint la tragédie antique : Rahne devient une figure d'homme confronté à l'inéluctable, pris dans un destin qui l'écrase mais qu'il tente, pourtant, de penser. Cette conscience aiguë de la fatalité ne mène pas à la passivité : elle intensifie, au contraire, la profondeur du regard intérieur. La fatalité devient opératrice d'une intériorité en crise, et oblige le sujet à s'interroger sur la valeur du savoir, de l'action, de la parole. La répétition des pertes et l'échec des initiatives ne sont pas seulement narratifs ; ils signifient un déséquilibre fondamental entre le sujet et le monde. Le temps cesse d'être linéaire ; il devient cyclique, oppressant, figé dans la répétition de l'échec. Ainsi, dans le désert, la recherche d'un point d'eau devient métaphysique : « Toute la complexe équation de la vie [...] se résume désormais à la présence, ou pas, d'un trou d'eau. Cette simplicité apporte la quiétude. Cela ne suffit pas pourtant » (Durin-Valois *Chamelle* 854). L'écriture fait ici apparaître la précarité radicale de l'existence, ramenée à une attente nue, à une équation vitale élémentaire. L'intériorité, dans cette tension, se dénude : elle n'est plus rêve ou espoir, mais lucidité brute. Le sujet, au bord de la mort, s'aperçoit que l'ultime paix n'est peut-être que la réduction du sens à sa plus simple expression : boire, vivre un jour de plus, sans comprendre pourquoi.

La fatalité ne touche pas que l'individu : elle atteint aussi le noyau collectif du sujet. Les survivants de l'exode se vivent comme des « insectes rampants », figures déchues, dépouillées de dignité, réduites à la simple persistance biologique : « certains ont des visages de désespoir haineux » (Durin-Valois *Chamelle* 794). Cette image, presque entomologique, signe la desubjectivation extrême. Le sujet ne se reconnaît plus dans ce qu'il est devenu. L'intériorité devient alors le lieu d'un regard sur soi désespéré, d'un miroir brisé où le sujet ne retrouve plus son visage. Ce moment extrême, cependant, est aussi un point d'ancrage pour penser la possibilité d'une reconquête de soi, d'une reprise, même minime, de parole ou de mémoire, malgré l'imposition de la violence.

La violence

Dans l'écriture de l'intériorité, la violence constitue un moment de rupture, mais aussi un révélateur. Qu'elle soit physique, psychique ou

symbolique, elle contraint le sujet à se confronter à sa propre opacité. Elle envahit l'espace du moi, s'inscrit dans le corps et la mémoire, et façonne une subjectivité fracturée, parfois désaffectée, toujours en tension. À ce titre, *La Perfection du tir* (2003) de Mathias Énard offre un cas limite : celui d'un narrateur dont l'intériorité ne se manifeste pas en dépit de la violence, mais à travers elle. Le roman met en scène un jeune sniper sans nom, plongé dans un conflit urbain indéfini, qui tue avec une froideur méthodique. Énard propose un monologue intérieur où la guerre devient l'espace paradoxal d'une prise de conscience inversée, où le sujet se définit par la capacité à détruire. Il ne s'agit pas ici d'un désengagement moral, mais d'un processus d'intensification de soi par la maîtrise du tir : « Je me tiens là, dans cet intervalle, entre l'action sur la détente et l'arrivée du projectile. [...] C'est un plaisir immense » (Énard *La Perfection du tir* 6). La précision du geste, la disparition momentanée de soi dans le tir, relèvent d'une esthétique de l'effacement qui paradoxalement renforce le sentiment d'existence.

La violence devient ainsi une structure de perception. Elle organise les affects, les hiérarchise, les canalise. Le tireur trouve dans cette discipline meurtrière une forme de sérénité, de lucidité extrême, qui contraste avec le chaos ambiant. Il s'agit d'« oublier la réalité de la cible » pour ne plus voir que la ligne, la trajectoire, l'équilibre à maintenir. L'intériorité du sujet s'y resserre, se densifie jusqu'à devenir presque inhumaine, presque vide – mais jamais dénuée de pensée. Pourtant, une faille s'ouvre lorsque ce sujet rencontre Myrna, jeune fille engagée pour s'occuper de sa mère. Cette présence féminine introduit une brèche dans l'univers clos du tireur. Incapable de dire l'amour autrement que par la domination, il révèle une fragilité intérieure, jusque-là contenue. À travers cette tension entre désir et destruction, le texte met au jour une intériorité incapable de symboliser la relation autrement que dans l'annihilation. Le sujet devient prisonnier de sa propre violence. Cette tension culmine dans le refuge précaire du sommeil. « Le sommeil et l'inconscient, le remous confus des images [...] on entre dans la carapace sûre du rêve ou de la mort, c'est la même chose » (Énard *La Perfection du tir* 13). Le rêve devient une zone-limite où l'intériorité tente d'échapper à la fragmentation, sans toutefois s'en libérer. Le sujet ne peut que se voir comme dans une lunette de tir – « objet de mon propre regard » (Énard *La Perfection du tir* 18) – signe d'une conscience dissociée, incapable de se réconcilier avec elle-même.

Une autre modalité de cette intériorité blessée apparaît dans *La Théorie des fleuves* (2018) de Jean-Marc Turine, récit-témoignage d'une vieille

femme rom, Théodora, dont la vie fut marquée par la violence des hommes et des régimes. Ici, la violence ne passe pas par l'acte de tuer, mais par l'expérience d'être tuée symboliquement, d'être marginalisée, réduite au silence, violée et humiliée. La parole de Théodora, arrachée au silence, reconstitue une intériorité meurtrie, traversée par des souvenirs indicibles : « Elle dira, quand le moment des mots lui sera revenu, avoir ressenti la douleur qui paralysait Euphrasia [...] tandis qu'un homme écartelait les cuisses de la jeune fille » (Turine *La Théo des fleuves* 51). Ce passage donne voix à une mémoire collective féminine, marquée par une violence androcentrée et raciale, infligée aux corps roms et féminins. Chez Turine, la violence ne s'exprime pas seulement dans l'acte, mais dans le regard de l'autre, qui condamne, humilie et exclut. L'intériorité devient le lieu d'une intériorisation du mépris social, d'une honte qui ronge l'être jusqu'à sa peau : « Elle a honte de sa négritude blanche [...] Tout la pousse à repartir dans le cloaque d'où elle vient » (Turine *La Théo des fleuves* 81). Le stigmate devient une marque intérieure, la peau un lieu d'inscription de l'exclusion. Ce corps, refusé par le monde, devient le théâtre d'une intériorité réduite au silence, mais en quête d'une parole réparatrice. À travers la mémoire, le roman réactive une subjectivité féminine et tzigane reléguée aux marges, mais toujours résistante.

Ainsi, chez Énard comme chez Turine, la violence produit une écriture de l'intime en rupture, où le sujet affronte la possibilité de sa dissolution. L'un, dans une intériorité crispée autour du tir, l'autre, dans une intériorité hantée par le trauma historique et sexuel. Dans les deux cas, l'intériorité n'est pas repli protecteur mais lieu de lutte, d'exposition, de survivance fragile. C'est là, précisément, que réside sa force : dans sa capacité à dire ce qui reste, malgré tout, du sujet blessé et à même de se confronter à la solitude.

La solitude

La solitude constitue une des expressions majeures de l'écriture de l'intériorité. Elle n'est pas seulement une circonstance biographique ou sociale : elle devient une structure existentielle du sujet, une manière d'être au monde marquée par l'isolement, la relégation, ou la réclusion volontaire. Cette solitude, loin d'être uniquement privative, est aussi un lieu de construction subjective – un espace intérieur de résistance, de repli, parfois de transcendance. Les récits de Liliana Lazar, Amal Sewtohul et Gilles Jobidon offrent chacun une variation singulière sur cette solitude, tour à tour subie, ritualisée ou contemplative. En effet, dans *Terre des*

affranchis (2010), Liliana Lazar met en scène le personnage de Victor, jeune Roumain taciturne, coupable d'un meurtre, puis reclus pendant des années dans une maison forestière. Sa solitude n'est pas uniquement le produit d'un exil social : elle devient un espace de rédemption, à travers l'écriture, la foi orthodoxe et le silence. La réclusion de Victor rappelle les figures mystiques de l'ascèse, comme l'ermitte Iacov d'Àfula, dont la vie sacrifiée devient pour lui un modèle. Dès lors, la solitude s'érige en choix existentiel : « L'obscurité était devenue son alliée, celle qui lui permettait d'exister au monde » (Lazar *Terre des affranchis* 53). L'intériorité se construit ici dans un double retrait – du monde et de soi – pour retrouver une parole rédemptrice à travers l'acte d'écrire. Le cloître devient non pas seulement un lieu d'oubli, mais celui d'un temps sacré : « Seul un modeste calendrier, imprimé par l'Église orthodoxe, rythmait l'année » (Lazar *Terre des affranchis* 53).

De manière très différente, *Made in Mauritius* (2013) d'Amal Sewtohul propose une intériorité forgée par le déracinement, la filiation brisée et le silence des parents. Le personnage de Laval, né dans un conteneur et élevé sur l'île Maurice, se construit dans un monde fragmenté, marqué par les absences et les zones d'ombre. Sa solitude prend la forme d'un imaginaire de substitution, où il se réfugie dans son « esprit-conteneur » : « Moi, lorsque le monde m'est trop pesant, je me réfugie dans mon coffre imaginaire » (Sewtohul *Made in Mauritius* 84). Le repli intérieur est ici une réponse compensatoire au chaos familial et social, mais aussi une manière de se maintenir à distance de la douleur. Cette solitude n'est pas tant une coupure qu'une modalité de survie psychique, façonnée par l'histoire coloniale, les migrations, et les silences intergénérationnels : « C'étaient des histoires d'adultes, une partie de leur désordre à eux » (Sewtohul *Made in Mauritius* 81). La solitude devient ainsi, chez Sewtohul, un lieu herméneutique, où s'invente une lecture du passé pour en décoder les énigmes et en reformuler les traces.

Enfin, dans *Le Tranquille affligé* (2019), Gilles Jobidon donne à la solitude une dimension métaphysique et esthétique, à travers le personnage de Chang Fu Yin, jésuite défroqué devenu horloger à la cour de l'empereur de Chine. La mission qui lui est confiée – trouver un noir absolu pour sauver l'Empire – prend la forme d'une quête de soi, d'une descente dans l'obscurité intérieure. La solitude ici n'est ni sociale ni punitive, mais contemplative, liée à la beauté, à la couleur, au temps : « Cette couleur. Qui traduit parfaitement l'idée d'absence de couleur. Et qui en est une. Couleur. Pourtant » (Jobidon *Le Tranquille affligé* 1028).

Le noir devient une métaphore du moi, opaque, profond, fuyant. Chang Fu Yin, dépossédé de ses repères (religieux, identitaires, amoureux), s'enfoncé dans une solitude majestueuse, rythmée par la perte, le silence et la méditation. Cette quête intérieure n'est pas vaine. Elle débouche sur une compréhension poétique du monde, comme le montre cette image fluide : « Elle fait penser aux ruisseaux qui ne coulent jamais en ligne droite mais finissent tous par rejoindre la mer » (Jobidon *Le Tranquille affligé* 1340). L'intériorité se configure ici comme une quête d'harmonie dans le désordre, une forme de sagesse liquide face à l'écroulement des certitudes. La solitude, au lieu d'aliéner, ouvre alors un espace de cohabitation avec l'invisible, avec le rythme du monde, avec la perte. Ainsi, chez Lazar, Sewtohul et Jobidon, la solitude n'est jamais simplement l'absence de l'autre. Elle est un état de crise, mais aussi un dispositif de régénération, un silence habité, une voix intérieure en attente. Elle marque l'intériorité comme lieu de repli mais aussi de transformation – non pas repli stérile, mais retrait actif, permettant au sujet d'entamer une refondation de lui-même, à partir de ses failles.

Il se dessine, à travers ces figures de l'angoisse, de la fatalité, de la violence et de la solitude, une cartographie de l'intériorité francophone où le sujet, pris dans des dynamiques de repli et de désagrégation, tente de (se) dire face à un monde disloqué. Qu'il soit abîmé, silencieux, déviant ou en quête de réparation, ce sujet n'est jamais enfermé dans sa seule intériorité : les romans montrent que son mouvement vers l'intérieur est toujours en tension avec un dehors qui l'appelle, le contraint ou le façonne. Dès lors, il importe d'interroger comment les écritures francophones contemporaines articulent cette relation à l'extériorité, non plus seulement comme une menace ou un fond indifférent, mais comme un espace structurant de la subjectivation. La mémoire collective, les formes d'altérité, les figures de l'animalité ou les traces de la filiation deviennent alors autant de médiations par lesquelles le sujet se confronte au monde et s'inscrit dans un réseau de relations, souvent conflictuelles, parfois réparatrices. C'est à cette dynamique de projection et de confrontation que s'attache désormais l'analyse, en abordant les modalités littéraires de l'écriture de l'extériorité.

Écriture de l'extériorité

La conscience du sujet, étant conscience de quelque chose d'objectif, s'exprime à travers ce qui lui est extérieur, notamment par l'évocation

d'objets tels que l'histoire, la mémoire, les figures anthropologiques et faunistiques. Ces éléments sont à définir comme des objets extérieurs au sujet lui-même tout en l'affectant et en constituant une énigme dans l'écriture. Celle-ci se manifeste à travers la relationalité, la mémorialité, la filialité et l'animalité.

L'animalité

Dans les œuvres littéraires francophones contemporaines, l'animalité constitue une modalité singulière de l'écriture de l'extériorité. Loin d'être une simple métaphore ou une projection symbolique de l'humain, elle renvoie à un rapport au monde vivant dans lequel le sujet est exposé à l'altérité radicale. L'animal n'y est pas seulement regardé, il devient partenaire de relation, porteur de sens, voire médiateur d'une conscience élargie. Cette approche nécessite de dépasser le dualisme nature/culture qui structure encore largement les représentations occidentales du vivant. Dans *Par-delà nature et culture*, Philippe Descola distingue plusieurs ontologies – naturaliste, animiste, totémique, analogiste – qui structurent différemment les rapports entre humains et non-humains. L'ontologie animiste, notamment, repose sur l'idée que les animaux partagent avec les humains une intériorité (émotions, intentions, conscience), mais se différencient par leurs physicalités. Cette conception ouvre la voie à une reconfiguration du sujet humain comme étant en relation avec un extérieur personnalisé, actif, cohabité, et non plus réduit à un simple décor.

Dans *Chamelle* de Marc Durin-Valois, cette conception se manifeste pleinement à travers la figure de la chamelle, véritable personnage du récit. Elle n'est ni objet, ni symbole : elle participe de la survie collective, elle donne, protège, résiste, jusqu'à l'épuisement. Elle est dotée d'une agentivité propre, au sens de Descola, et inscrit le sujet humain dans une relation de codépendance éthique et sensible avec le monde animal. Ce rapport transforme le désert, espace d'hostilité extrême, en un lieu paradoxalement habitable, du moins provisoirement. L'extériorité du désert devient alors un espace de cohabitation fragile entre humains et non-humains, où le vivant s'organise dans une logique de soin, de don et de mémoire. Cette logique relationnelle se retrouve dans *Si tu passes la rivière* (2012) de Geneviève Damas, où l'animal – en l'occurrence, les cochons – devient pour le jeune narrateur, François, une figure de consolation, de présence et d'appartenance. Dans un univers familial oppressant, violent, dénué de langage et de tendresse, les animaux sont

les seuls interlocuteurs possibles : « Ce qui me console, quand je pleure à l'intérieur, c'est que tous les cochons que j'ai mangés, ils pleurent avec moi en dedans » (Damas *Si tu passes la rivière* 15). La relation à l'animal est ici charnelle, incorporée : elle passe par l'alimentation, mais aussi par une confusion des affects entre le sujet et les bêtes. Cette porosité ontologique renoue avec une pensée animiste où l'âme de l'animal survit dans le corps de l'homme, créant une forme de présence continue et consolatrice. L'extériorité prend ici la forme d'un dehors proche, presque intérieur, une altérité qui soutient le sujet et lui permet de nommer sa souffrance.

Dans *Made in Mauritius* (2013) d'Amal Sewtohul, l'animalité fonctionne différemment, mais elle participe aussi d'une écriture de l'extériorité. Le personnage de Laval, enfant déraciné, issu d'un univers fragmenté par la migration, les silences parentaux et la désorientation postcoloniale, se forge une intériorité instable en dialogue avec les objets et les animaux de son monde d'enfance. Ses poupées borgnes, ses petites autos sans roues et les animaux évoqués dans le récit composent une écologie imaginaire à travers laquelle il cherche à stabiliser son identité. Plus qu'une métaphore de l'abandon, cette présence de l'animal et de l'objet réinscrit le sujet dans un environnement relationnel, où le dehors est animé par des puissances affectives : « Lorsque le monde m'est trop pesant, je me réfugie dans mon coffre imaginaire » (Sewtohul *Made in Mauritius* 84). Dans ce récit, l'animalité est moins frontale, mais elle demeure liée à une extériorité affective – un dehors archaïque, pulsionnel, refoulé, qui ne cesse de remonter dans les souvenirs du personnage adulte.

Dans ces trois œuvres, l'animalité permet d'incarner l'extériorité, non comme rupture, mais comme lien. Elle sert à relier le sujet à un monde qui le déborde et le constitue à la fois. Les animaux ne sont pas là pour être observés : ils sont perçus comme co-présents, dotés d'une intériorité et d'un statut relationnel équivalent. À travers cette écriture animiste de l'extériorité, les romans francophones étudiés déplacent les frontières de l'humain et rendent visibles des formes de subjectivation par le dehors, dans un rapport sensible, parfois mystique, à l'environnement vivant.

La filialité

La filialité abordée dans ces œuvres s'inscrit dans une dynamique d'extériorisation du sujet, au sens où elle engage un rapport au monde structuré par la reconnaissance ou l'absence des figures parentales. Elle

met en lumière la manière dont l'identité se constitue à partir d'une altérité fondatrice : celle de la mère, première relation au monde, mais aussi première énigme. Le sujet littéraire, en quête de cette origine affective, déplace l'insuffisance du lien humain vers le règne animal, réinscrivant ainsi sa filiation dans une extériorité fantasmatique. Dans *Si tu passes la rivière* de Damas, le narrateur projette sur les cochons le manque d'attachement maternel dont il souffre : « Une mère, j'imagine bien que j'en ai eu. Tous les cochons en ont une, pourquoi pas moi ? [...] De notre mère, pas de photo, juste la taloche quand je posais la question au père et ses yeux qui regardaient nulle part, le grand silence qui se faisait alors » (Damas *Si tu passes la rivière* 27). Cette projection affective révèle une stratégie compensatoire où l'animal devient médiateur d'un rapport affectif dénié par les humains. Le cochon, animal méprisé, incarne ici un double symbolique et sensible du sujet blessé.

La construction de la mère comme figure d'extériorité – tantôt rêvée, tantôt absente – révèle également un mécanisme de désignation par l'imaginaire. Comparée à une truie nourricière ou à Nout, déesse céleste de la mythologie égyptienne, elle devient une image cosmique, une abstraction incarnée qui donne sens à la perte. Elle organise le rapport du sujet au monde et à lui-même en tant qu'être privé d'origine. L'absence maternelle se traduit par un déséquilibre du système parental, dans lequel le père, autoritaire et mutique, ne joue qu'un rôle de censure. La sœur, substitut maternel, hérite de fonctions de soin et d'écoute, mais sans combler l'abîme inaugural. Ce déficit se répercute sur la structuration du langage, comme en témoigne l'éveil du protagoniste : « Le bruit de l'intérieur dépassait le bruit du dehors, j'ai fermé les yeux, j'ai ordonné que ça s'arrête, et alors les mots ont commencé à se faire entendre » (Damas *Si tu passes la rivière* 39). L'émergence du langage devient ainsi l'effet différé d'une douleur non dite, inscrivant le corps du sujet dans une extériorité linguistique et affective. La mère devient une idée fixe, une quête identitaire fondée sur le vide : « Comment reconnaître une mère, ce qui la définit en tant que mère ? [...] Pour reconnaître un cochon, c'est simple. Tu vois que c'est un cochon » (Damas *Si tu passes la rivière* 110). Ce contraste ironique entre la lisibilité de l'animal et l'opacité du lien maternel souligne la difficulté d'assigner un statut à la mère dans l'économie symbolique du sujet.

Cette problématique de la filiation et de la féminité réapparaît dans *Made in Mauritius* d'Amal Sewtohul, où la mère incarne une puissance silencieuse, imprévisible, source d'angoisse et d'incompréhension : « En

fait, la seule présence féminine que j'avais côtoyée jusque-là avait été celle de ma mère, et c'était là un pouvoir imprévisible, de journées de dépression durant lesquelles elle entrait en léthargie » (Sewtohul *Made in Mauritius* 77–78). La figure maternelle, indistincte et écrasante, devient ici le premier contact avec une altérité féminine radicale, à la fois proche et insaisissable, qui structure l'expérience du sujet dans le monde. Ainsi, la filialité, dans ces textes, renvoie moins à un ordre biologique qu'à une dynamique d'extériorisation de la subjectivité, où l'absence, la projection ou le transfert déterminent les rapports du sujet au langage, au désir et à l'animalité. Elle s'articule à une mémorialité diffuse, qui fonde le sujet non sur une origine stable, mais sur une constellation d'images, de silences et de blessures.

La mémorialité

La mémoire constitue une des figures majeures de l'extériorité dans le discours littéraire francophone. Non pas seulement parce qu'elle convoque un passé révolu, mais parce qu'elle agit sur le sujet comme un dehors hérité, un récit antérieur qui précède et informe son existence. La mémoire n'est pas intériorité : elle est l'irruption du collectif, du généalogique, du politique, dans la subjectivité. Loin de se réduire à un souvenir, elle est une force extérieure qui travaille le sujet, le relie à des événements ou à des absents, et l'oblige à se situer dans une histoire qui n'est pas la sienne mais qui le traverse. C'est à ce titre que la mémoire relève d'une écriture de l'extériorité.

Dans *Chamelle* de Marc Durin-Valois, la mémoire se déploie sous la forme d'un savoir à transmettre, lié à la survie, à la filiation, mais aussi à une tradition du récit. La traversée du désert s'accompagne d'un effort pour transmettre aux enfants un imaginaire du monde fertile, comme un legs mental face au réel stérile. Ce que Rahne raconte n'est pas son passé, mais un récit hérité : celui d'un monde antérieur à la catastrophe, peuplé de plantes, de senteurs, d'animaux. Cette mémoire végétale, rêvée, constitue un horizon extérieur – un ailleurs possible – que les enfants n'ont jamais connu. Elle agit sur eux comme une extériorité féconde, capable de réorganiser leur rapport au réel désertique. C'est une mémoire-matrice, par laquelle se transmet non un contenu, mais une puissance de projection. Dans *La Théo des fleuves* de Jean-Marc Turine, la mémoire est beaucoup plus dramatique : elle surgit comme poids historique, comme extériorité écrasante. Théodora, vieille femme rom, est habitée par les strates d'un passé violent : le génocide tzigane,

les viols, l'exil, les humiliations. Ces événements sont inscrits dans son corps, dans sa peau, dans ses silences. Elle ne choisit pas de se souvenir : le passé surgit, l'envahit, et s'impose à elle comme une extériorité indépassable. Cette mémoire est collective, mais elle n'a jamais trouvé de lieu de reconnaissance : elle est sans archives, sans monuments, transmise oralement ou par le biais d'images traumatiques. C'est à travers la parole retrouvée que cette extériorité peut enfin s'articuler, dans une narration fragile, tremblante, qui tente de dire l'indicible.

Dans *Made in Mauritius* d'Amal Sewtohol, la mémoire se construit à partir d'un déracinement. Laval, fils d'immigrés chinois, né dans un conteneur, vit dans une société insulaire traversée par les non-dits de la colonisation, de l'indépendance, et des migrations. Ce qui frappe, dans le roman, c'est l'absence de récit parental : les adultes ne racontent rien, ne transmettent pas. La mémoire, ici, n'est pas un donné mais une faille, une béance dans laquelle l'enfant tente de construire du sens. Laval doit se fabriquer des récits, à partir de fragments, de fantasmes, de rumeurs. La mémoire devient un ailleurs incertain, un espace d'extériorité qu'il tente de reconfigurer par l'imagination. Le sujet se construit donc par manque d'héritage, par projection vers ce qu'il n'a pas reçu. Chez Geneviève Damas, dans *Si tu passes la rivière*, la mémoire familiale constitue une extériorité silencieuse, marquée par l'interdit. François grandit dans une ignorance imposée, sans accès au passé de sa mère disparue ni à celui de sa sœur Maryse. Le silence paternel agit comme une censure : « De notre mère, pas de photo, juste la taloche quand je posais la question au père et ses yeux qui regardaient nulle part, le grand silence qui se faisait alors » (Damas *Si tu passes la rivière* 27). Le sujet est contraint de vivre dans l'ombre d'un passé non-dit, dont l'invisibilité nourrit l'angoisse et le désir de savoir. La mémoire devient ici une absence structurante, un « dehors » psychique qui façonne l'intériorité sans jamais se livrer. L'écriture de Damas met en scène une mémoire en creux, dont l'absence de transmission engendre confusion identitaire et solitude cognitive. Le refus du père de parler de la mère crée une dissociation sensorielle : « Le bruit de l'intérieur dépassait le bruit du dehors, j'ai fermé les yeux, j'ai ordonné que ça s'arrête, et alors les mots ont commencé à se faire entendre » (Damas *Si tu passes la rivière* 39). C'est l'absence de parole qui fait surgir le langage, comme si le silence devenait le déclencheur de la conscience de soi. La mémoire, bien qu'in audible, façonne ainsi le rapport du sujet au monde et au langage.

Dans *Il pleuvait des oiseaux* de Jocelyne Saucier, la mémoire s'inscrit également dans une extériorité traumatique, mais elle prend la forme

d'une survivance. Le récit met en scène des personnages âgés, reclus dans la forêt ontarienne, hantés par un événement collectif refoulé : l'incendie de Matheson (1916), véritable catastrophe historique. Cette mémoire ne s'exprime pas frontalement ; elle ressurgit à travers les silences, les corps, les objets et surtout l'art. Ted Boychuck, survivant muet, a peint des toiles fragmentées du désastre. Comme le note la narratrice : « Il peignait pour s'en libérer, les magnifier [...], peu lui importait l'ordre chronologique de ses souvenirs » (Saucier *Il pleuvait des oiseaux* 132). La mémoire devient ici esthétique, transfigurée par l'art, mais jamais pleinement intégrée. Le paysage naturel, porteur des traces de l'événement, devient le dépositaire d'une mémoire enfouie : « Les arbres encore debout, fûts noirs sous un ciel bleu, s'affaissaient dans un bruit étouffé en soulevant un épais nuage de cendre blanche » (Saucier *Il pleuvait des oiseaux* 81). La forêt, territoire de retrait, devient un théâtre de la survivance, où la mémoire du feu et de la perte affleure à travers les éléments.

Dans les deux romans, la mémoire agit comme un principe extérieur : refoulée, esthétisée ou fragmentée, elle résiste à l'intégration subjective. Elle ne se transmet pas directement, mais s'impose dans les corps, les gestes ou les lacunes du récit. Cette extériorité mémorielle façonne le sujet de manière latente, créant des failles dans l'identité, des quêtes sans résolution. Ainsi, l'écriture francophone contemporaine met en scène une mémoire désancrée, qui excède l'individu tout en le constituant. Chez Damas, elle est silence familial et détresse personnelle ; chez Saucier, elle est trauma historique, figé dans l'art et la nature. Dans les deux cas, le passé, toujours déjà autre, impose un écart, un dehors fondamental, au cœur même de la subjectivation.

La relationalité

La relationalité, telle qu'elle est convoquée dans les littératures francophones contemporaines, engage une écriture de l'extériorité où le sujet n'existe que dans et par sa relation à autrui. Cette dynamique suppose que l'individu ne se constitue pas comme une intériorité close, mais comme un être traversé par des affectss, des rapports sociaux, des héritages culturels. L'extériorité ne désigne plus seulement ce qui est en dehors du sujet, mais ce dans quoi il est nécessairement pris – les autres, leurs regards, leurs désirs, leurs langages. Cette conception rejoint l'analyse de Jean Bessière, pour qui le roman contemporain met en scène un sujet construit par la transindividualité, c'est-à-dire par « des processus d'identité formés dans le croisement de temporalités, de discours, de

perceptions qui échappent au sujet sans l'abolir » (Bessière *Le roman contemporain* 240). Chez Geneviève Damas, dans *Si tu passes la rivière*, la relationalité prend d'abord la forme d'un ébranlement. François, jeune garçon mutique, ne parvient pas à saisir le sens du monde qui l'entoure ; il est envahi par une interrogation existentielle qui le déborde : « Les questions, il n'avait plus que cela, comme un grand jeu » (Damas *Si tu passes la rivière* 102). L'extériorité, ici, est celle du langage, du monde social, des autres ; elle n'est pas hostile, mais opaque. C'est par la relation à l'ami Roger, figure de médiation symbolique, que le sujet commence à se constituer dans l'échange, dans la reconnaissance. La relationalité devient alors forme d'exposition : être sujet, c'est être affecté. Dans *Le Tranquille affligé* de Gilles Jobidon, la confrontation à l'extériorité culturelle est également marquante. Un personnage invite à une mise à distance de soi par empathie : « Mets-toi à leur place » (Jobidon *Le Tranquille affligé* 1060). Se situer dans le monde, c'est d'abord accepter d'être déplacé par l'expérience de l'autre. La relation amoureuse – essentielle dans ce roman – devient alors une modalité de la fusion temporaire entre soi et l'autre : « C'est ton regard. Ton désir n'est pas celui des autres hommes » (Jobidon *Le Tranquille affligé* 1188). Mais ce lien ne se stabilise que dans l'instant. Il convoque le présent, sans garantie de durée : « Faisons comme si la fin approchait, profitons de la vie » (Jobidon *Le Tranquille affligé* 1198). La relation est ici conditionnée par l'imminence de la perte – marque même de son extériorité.

Chez Amal Sewtohul, dans *Made in Mauritius*, l'amour se heurte à une gêne, à une tension morale et affective, qui trouble le sujet dans ses repères éthiques : « Elle n'avait que quinze ans [...] c'était sans doute la guerre et toutes les tensions du front qui commençaient à me rendre cinglé » (Sewtohul *Made in Mauritius*, p. 132). Le désir, ici, ne révèle pas un accès au soi profond, mais un affolement, une fragmentation du sujet. Cette perception est partagée par le protagoniste de Mathias Énard dans *La Perfection du tir*, qui admire une femme parce qu'elle ne manifeste aucune émotion : « Elle était comme moi, forte et inflexible » (Énard *La Perfection du tir* 18). L'autre devient miroir, non de la reconnaissance, mais d'un idéal d'impassibilité – une forme de fermeture à l'extériorité. Mais le lien à autrui peut aussi devenir principe de résilience, comme le montre Hubert Haddad dans *Palestine*. Cham, soldat israélien devenu amnésique, est accueilli par deux femmes palestiniennes. L'oubli de son nom, de son passé, le rend disponible à une nouvelle relation au monde. Ce n'est qu'à travers le regard d'autrui – celui qui le nomme Nessim – qu'il

devient sujet. La relation est ici vitale : « À tout instant, la vie s'arrête au bord des lèvres » (Haddad *Palestine* 153). L'autre est seuil, à la fois menace et sauvetage. Cette logique se poursuit dans *La Théo des fleuves* de Jean-Marc Turine, où Théodora, femme rom marginalisée, imagine un inconnu aimant : « Elle invente un inconnu [...] dans l'anonymat des vies » (Turine *La Théo des fleuves* 85). L'amour est ici projection, fiction salvatrice, ouverture à une extériorité réparatrice. Jocelyne Saucier, dans *Il pleuvait des oiseaux*, exprime cette même puissance du lien, au cœur de la vieillesse et de la mémoire : « Peu importe que les corps aient fusionné ou non, l'important était le pas à pas timide et maladroit de deux êtres portés l'un vers l'autre » (Saucier *Il pleuvait des oiseaux* 146).

Cette écriture de la relationalité, traversée par les affects, la mémoire, l'éthique et le désir, fait émerger une subjectivité en tension, toujours exposée, toujours construite dans le rapport à l'extérieur. Le roman contemporain francophone, en cela, rejoint une anthropologie du lien (Descola), une esthétique de l'interdépendance (Bessière), et une phénoménologie de la rencontre. L'extériorité n'est plus simplement l'autre face du sujet : elle en est la condition même. Ainsi, à travers les diverses formes de la relationalité – intersubjective, amoureuse, culturelle ou politique – les textes étudiés réaffirment la centralité de l'extériorité dans la construction du sujet. Non pas comme simple opposition à l'intériorité, mais comme tension fondatrice, comme seuil mouvant entre l'être et le monde, entre soi et l'autre. Loin d'un sujet souverain ou monolithique, la littérature francophone contemporaine met en scène des subjectivités ouvertes, vulnérables, souvent fragmentées, mais engagées dans des processus de reconnaissance, de projection et de réparation. En cela, elle prolonge une anthropologie du lien et du devenir, dans un monde en crise où l'humanisme se reconfigure dans l'écriture même. C'est sur cette articulation – entre crise du sujet et puissance des écritures – que s'ouvre la conclusion.

Conclusion

L'approche comparée des écritures littéraires intra-francophones révèle une tension dynamique entre deux pôles : celui de l'intériorité et celui de l'extériorité. Du côté de l'intériorité, les œuvres explorent des affects tels que l'angoisse, la solitude ou le manque, qui traduisent l'expérience subjective de la souffrance, souvent liée à une liquéfaction des repères sociaux. Cette écriture du sujet s'inscrit dans une logique de repli, où

l'individu, hanté par les traumatismes du monde contemporain, tente de saisir le sens de son mal-être. Ce positionnement, bien que négatif dans ses effets, constitue une réponse formelle à la question du sujet en littérature. À l'inverse, le pôle de l'extériorité privilégie les relations de l'individu à son environnement : l'animalité (réinterrogée à la lumière du naturalisme analogique de Descola), la filialité, la mémoire, ou encore la relationalité. Celle-ci, conçue selon la perspective de Bessière comme relevant de la transindividualité du sujet romanesque contemporain, déplace la problématique de l'identité vers celle des formes de co-appartenance. L'écriture devient alors espace de reconfiguration du monde à travers les liens tissés entre soi et l'autre, entre intime et collectif. Si ces formes d'extériorité naissent elles aussi de la douleur – de la guerre, du déracinement ou du silence –, elles manifestent une puissance réparatrice, voire régénérante, par la projection vers l'autre. Ce double mouvement – repli intérieur et ouverture relationnelle – ne fonctionne pas en opposition, mais en complémentarité. Il en résulte une figure du sujet francophone qui pourrait être qualifié de subjectivité transversale : un sujet à la fois blessé et relationnel, errant et ancré, traversé par les failles de son époque mais capable de renouer avec le monde par l'imaginaire du lien.

Le corpus étudié (Jobidon, Saucier, Damas, Turine, Énard, Haddad, Lazar, Durin-Valois, Sewtohl) met en évidence une telle configuration. Ce sujet intra-francophone, bien qu'inscrit dans des géographies variées, s'exprime à partir de réalités partagées : désorientation, fragilité, quête d'altérité. Il se distingue toutefois des figures du sujet telles qu'elles émergent dans les littératures africaines, antillaises ou comoriennes contemporaines. Ces dernières tendent à valoriser un sujet collectif, porté par des revendications mémorielles, sociales ou identitaires fortement ancrées dans des contextes postcoloniaux. Le sujet africain se confronte ainsi aux structures historiques de domination, souvent dans une visée politique ou archétypale ; le sujet antillais, à travers une poétique de la créolisation, fait entendre une voix éclatée, polyphonique (Malela et Parfait, *Écrire le sujet du XXI^e siècle...*, 2022) ; tandis que le sujet comorien évolue dans un entre-deux marqué par la tension entre insularité et archipélisation, entre hétéronomie politique et quête d'autonomie symbolique (Malela, *Les Voix de l'archipel. Une histoire littéraire des Comores*, 2024). À l'opposé, le sujet intra-francophone ici observé ne se constitue ni comme représentant d'une communauté ni comme incarnation d'un peuple ; il est d'abord un individu en relation,

traversé par une pluralité d'expériences, souvent marginales, silencieuses ou affectives. Ce sujet en tension construit un espace littéraire spécifique, où se conjuguent mémoire intime, perte des repères collectifs et espérance de liens à venir.

En définitive, ce que ces écritures mettent en jeu, ce n'est pas une définition univoque du sujet francophone, mais un espace de questionnement sur ce que signifie être soi dans un monde fragmenté. L'écriture, en tant que lieu de passage entre intériorité et extériorité, constitue alors le véritable sujet de ces romans.

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**“I’d like to end with a hopeful message.”
An Intermedial Ecocritical Reading
of Climate Hope in *The Road* and *Saison Brune*¹**

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Abstract: This article introduces *Intermedial Ecocriticism*, a methodological framework that integrates ecocritical and intermedial theory to analyse representations of the climate–ecological crisis across diverse media types. Through a comparative study of Cormac McCarthy’s novel *The Road*, its film adaptation by John Hillcoat, and Philippe Squarzoni’s graphic novel *Saison Brune*, the article explores how narrative endings mediate climate hope. Drawing on Elleström’s intermedial model and concepts such as affordances and media transformation, the analysis reveals how each media product constructs hope differently – through lyrical codas, cinematic closure, and verbo-visual reflexivity. The study argues that hope, while precarious, is essential for ecological agency and that its mediation is shaped by the specific affordances of each medium. Ultimately, the article demonstrates how intermedial ecocriticism enables nuanced cross-media comparisons and contributes to understanding the communicative potential of ecomedia in times of ecological urgency.

¹ This article is based on edited and rewritten material from our 2024 monograph *Intermedial Ecocriticism: The Climate Crisis Through Art and Media* (Lexington Books) as well as new analytical work. Used by permission of Bloomsbury Inc.

Keywords: Intermedial Ecocriticism, climate hope, ecomedia, *The Road*, *Saison Brune*, media affordances, ecological agency

Introduction

According to UN agencies, NGOs, and governments around the world as well as local indigenous voices, the world is facing an ongoing climate-ecological disaster. Humanities departments, which include media studies, art history, and philosophy, have investigated ecological matters for years, as witnessed, for instance, in environmental humanities programmes around the world. In comparative literature, this trend has been growing for decades, and since the introduction of ecocriticism in the 1990s, such elements have been established perspectives of literature departments around the world. In this article we wish to further theorize this general development. We combine existing positions in intermedial studies, especially those based on the work by Lars Elleström, and ecocriticism into a consolidated theory and method that we call *Intermedial Ecocriticism*, which is an academic response that has been created to better understand and tackle aspects of understanding and reacting to the environmental crisis. These positions and how we specifically bring them together will be explained in the theoretical surveys and discussions in part one. Through a comparative study of Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road*, its film adaptation by John Hillcoat, and Philippe Squarzoni's graphic novel *Saison Brune*, the article explores in part two how narrative endings mediate climate hope. These three media products are chosen for comparative analysis because they all belong to the field of contemporary "ecomedia" (Cubitt et al., see also Lopez et al.): ecomedia is the extensive material that spans countless different media forms that in more or less explicit ways represent, discuss, negotiate, or parody the climate-ecological crisis. Intermedial ecocriticism wants to collect, analyse, and compare individual examples of such ecomedia.

Part One: The Climate-ecological Crisis as a Mediated Phenomenon

A starting point for intermedial ecocriticism is the insight that the ongoing planetary ecological crisis is not a "natural" phenomenon. It is an ongoing, urgent crisis produced by human beings in destructive economic systems which historically, and in current versions, define

the situation we are in (Moore): the economic systems are, of course, supported by ideological structures and cultural ideas (Charbonnier) – including ecomedia. Symptoms of the crisis are examined and described in the natural sciences that investigate, dissect, document, and communicate the planetary crisis in biology, geology, atmospheric chemistry, climate science and oceanography. The natural sciences, as well as other specialised research fields, are relatively closed communities in which experts develop theories, analyse data, and communicate with each other in specialised articles in trade or professional journals, or via presentations at academic conferences, often directed at other natural scientists. Producing natural scientific knowledge is a complex process that has been studied by, among many others, Bruno Latour and his successors, who have mapped the relations using anthropological methods (see Latour, Woolgar et al.). One of the most important insights behind the monograph *Intermedial Ecocriticism*, on which this essay is based, is that information about the ecological crisis reaches all of the communities outside the restricted scientific community through non-scientific media products that belong to many different genres and are associated with many different media types.

At the very beginning of the communication process, as part of the internal scientific infrastructures, scientific research transforms or translates the processed information into concrete media products of various media types, for example scientific articles and abstracts for conferences, poster presentations, or oral conference presentations. The scientific data, to use intermedial terminology, undergoes a media transformation. Everyone outside the narrow circles of natural science only learns about these results after another, or even many, media transformations have taken place, in which the scientific findings are transformed into, for example, newspaper articles, teaching aids, or the material that forms information supplied by governments or municipalities.

Neither aesthetically oriented ecocriticism nor communication-focused research – such as risk communication, science communication, or climate change communication – has adequately addressed the lack of a general theory or methodology for analysing and comparing a broad spectrum of media texts that represent the ecological crisis across diverse media types. In response to this gap, a research group within the intermediality and multimodality research environment at Linnaeus University is developing a new approach, which we term intermedial ecocriticism. This framework integrates insights from ecocriticism

and intermedial studies to enable systematic cross-media analysis of environmental representations. The immediate aim of intermedial ecocriticism is thus to combine important insights from intermedial studies with various ecocritical and communication-oriented theories to better understand possibilities and limitations in different media types' presentation of a problem that needs to be communicated. The goal is to create new knowledge that can be used to understand the possible impact of environmental communication, while the results can be used on the production side to achieve more precise or more effective communication about one of the fatal issues of our time. More concretely, this can be achieved by comparing different texts in different media from an intermedial starting point.

Such comparisons between different media forms are unusual in ecocriticism and in other communication-oriented disciplines, and this is one of the unique aspects of the position we set out in what follows. To explain this simply, we could say that ecocritics would normally be comfortable discussing a fictional, aesthetically oriented film, while a more communication-oriented researcher would feel most secure when analysing a popular science website (some of the backgrounds of this dichotomy are discussed in Parham). Intermedial ecocriticism attempts to analyse and compare the two media products using a common methodology.

Intermedial Ecocriticism: The Basics

Intermedial ecocriticism is of course not alone in being interested in questions related to different media representations of ecocritical motifs and themes; among others, critical science studies and science and technology studies (STS) have expanded the critical insight that the production of science is part of a complex network of collaboration, negotiation, communication, and competition. More specifically, some media and communication studies investigate health communication or general and specific communication around risk (for example, epidemics and weather-related phenomena).

The research that, in addition to ecocriticism per se, lies closest to intermedial ecocriticism is probably that conducted in environmental communication studies (Comfort and Park) and climate change communication studies (Moser; Chadwick). These communication-oriented traditions (exploring information related to health, risk, science,

and global warming) focus on journalism and mass media and investigate the measurable impact on recipients of information in the short or long term. These studies are therefore not concerned with the formal or thematic structures of the texts, or with the historical background behind the texts' form or function. A humanistic, not least a literary, perspective, stresses that literature and the arts do not simply transfer information from a sender to a receiver: the form of a message is crucial.

Thus, we are faced with an extensive corpus of specific media products in many different media types that neither ecocriticism (with a focus on artistic media) nor communication research (with a focus on journalism and other fact-based communication) have taken a broad hold on.

Intermedial ecocriticism aims to expand contemporary ecocritical work by broadening the original ecocritical focus on literature. Although art history, film studies, and music studies are already included in ecocriticism (Barry and Welstead; Cubitt et al.), we want to develop this tendency further. Rather than simply adding another media type to the existing repertoire of ecocritical approaches, we propose to focus our case studies on the entire field of ecomedia. Central to our approach is the assertion that all media types can be meaningfully compared, provided they share certain communicative elements while also exhibiting distinct affordances that differentiate one medium from another. Although comparative perspectives are common in literary studies, these comparisons are often within the same media type literature and do not cross medial borders. This, basically, is the main aspect of intermedial studies that we wish to extend to ecocritical questions.

The intermedial methodology that we adhere to, and we are sometimes referred to as the Växjö, or the Elleström, school of intermedial studies (Bruhn and Schirmacher *Intermedial Studies*), can be summarised by considering its three starting points: 1) heteromediality; 2) a combination of media integration and media transformation; 3) affordances (medium specificity).

The first point of departure, heteromediality, refers to the understanding that all media products are mixed, medially and modally. Media mixing takes place between individual media, or between media types, but the mixing is also a fundamental internal element of all medial meaning making (Mitchell; Bruhn "Heteromediality").

Given the heteromedial nature of all media products, it would be tempting to completely reject the idea of media types or other stable

media formations. However, Lars Elleström, our main intermedial source of inspiration, points out that in principle all individual media products (which in other traditions are called, for example, “texts” or “utterances”) are by their very definition part of a “media type” (Elleström “Representing the Anthropocene”). The different media types can be systematically determined on the basis of three dimensions: the *basic media type* consists of the building blocks of meaning making (including, for instance, words, moving images, sound, and colour); the *qualified media type* is comparable to genre in literature, or art forms more generally (and would include, for instance, literature, documentary films, oil painting, and news articles). Finally, the *technical device of display* is the material interface that allows a media product to materialise at all (for instance a printed book, an iPad, or a printed daily newspaper). In addition, media can be determined according to four modalities (material, sensorial, spatiotemporal, and semiotic). The implications of using these descriptive categories will emerge from our analyses.

The second starting point is that all heteromedial media products can be analysed in terms of their media integration and/or media transformation. If one is investigating the *media integration perspective*, one is interested in how two or more media aspects generate meaning in one media product, such as a road sign with text and a triangular-shaped image; an opera aria with words, music, scenography, and acting; or a scientific article with diagrams, words, and photographs. The *media transformation perspective* investigates transformations of form and content from one media type to another media type during a temporal process. A well-known example is the media transformation of a novel into a film, which is discussed in adaptation studies. However, novel to film adaptations are atypical media transformations. Indeed, rarely is one individual media product – a specific novel, for example – directly transformed into another, well-defined media product (such as a film). Media transformations are generally much more complex. Consider the scientific understanding of an atom: via media transformations, this knowledge must be transformed into one or a few pages in a physics textbook for elementary school. There is clearly not just a single source behind the physics book (the atom was “understood” in antiquity and has been investigated later in modern laboratories and theorised in quantum physics). Authors, graphic designers, and scientific experts need to collaborate to create educational materials. Introduced, among other things, in Linda Hutcheon’s important *A Theory of Adaptation*

(2006), this expanded field of various kinds of media transformations has recently been carefully explored in an intermedial overview of such media transformations (Salmoose and Elleström *Transmediations*).

The third important point of departure in intermedial studies establishes that different media types have different “affordances,” defined here as possibilities and limitations (see, for example, Kress) which make it possible for certain aspects to be presented without any difficulty in one media type, while the same elements can be produced only with great difficulty in other media types. While it is natural for an elementary school physics book to present facts, factual aspects are more difficult to incorporate in poetry (discussed in Tornborg). There are stable formations – for example an oil painting, a political speech, or sign language, although these media types change over time and space and in relation to their contexts. The formats of different media can only be described as relatively stable. They are thus historically changeable, a phenomenon which we refer to as “contextualised media specificity” (see Rajewsky [2010] for a theoretical discussion of affordances, media borders, and media specificity, Toikkannen for an updated and historical discussion of intermediality and medium specificity).

The vexed notion of representation constitutes a recurring question in the environmental humanities and ecocriticism. It relates to how the ecological crisis can be communicated in ways allowing, or forcing, decision-makers in politics and commerce as well as private individuals to grasp the extent of the ecological crisis and to act to avert the current and future threats.

Rob Nixon is one of many researchers who has pointed out the difficulties in representing and thus understanding global warming. His theory also applies to several other elements of the ecological crisis. He coined the notion of “slow violence,” which is “a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales” (Nixon 2). Apart from the concrete and extensive human consequences that this violence creates, the different temporal scales entail a series of complex representational problems. We adhere to Nixon’s and many other ecocritics such as Timothy Morton (2013), Timothy Clark (2015), and Amitav Ghosh (2016), who recognize the difficulties surrounding an artistic, fictional, or documentary representation of the crisis. However, we do not want to magnify these difficulties into a general representational impossibility.

From our intermedial ecocritical position, we want to suggest that representation is a fundamental aspect of communication. Representation is a process that uses media products to “stand for” any imaginable physical, mental, fictional, or non-fictional phenomenon. The representation is therefore never *identical* to what is represented. Representation always moves on a sliding scale from higher to lower precision or similarity. Although verbal as well as visual communication and many other forms of communication are usually quite effective tools, there are other cases where representation remains ineffective and vague, and sometimes even deliberately inaccurate. Representation – according to our intermedial starting point – is thus relative and it is contextually defined: representation is situated, but not impossible.

Intermedial Ecocriticism: The Three-step Method

The goal of intermedial ecocriticism is to analyse and compare representations of the climate-ecological crisis in different media types. Methodologically, we propose a three-step model.

The first step consists in selecting one or several ecomedia products for analysis, as well as one or more questions or topics to steer the analysis: in short, choosing examples and formulating a question. Possible questions are unlimited. They could bear on comparative investigations in different media types regarding specific aspects of the ecological crisis. More concretely, they could concern narrative aspects of representations of global warming in journalism, film, and visual arts. Moreover, they could deal with the representation of human agency in relation to the crisis in natural science museums and in fiction, or with the production of truth claims in eco-poetry and in scientific communication.

As a second step, an intermedial analytical description of the selected media products is produced which determines the most important features and affordances of the chosen media product. In this regard, it is productive to specify the four modality categories and to point out the presence and function of the three media dimensions.

During the third step, after the description of the basic media features has been established, analysis and interpretation of the ways in which the media product interacts with the selected question are carried out. Then, the following question is asked: how can the media products, by virtue of their specific affordances, represent aspects of the chosen ecological topic? The concluding part of the third step requires a comparison of the results of

the second step's analytical description with one or more media products. The comparison can subsequently be placed in a suitable, broader context.

Part Two: Representing “Hope” in a Graphic Novel, Fiction, and a Feature Film

Step 1: Presenting the Research Topic and the Case Studies

As the world is facing an urgent ecological crisis, the dramatic scientific forecasts might become the new normal: this dangerous phenomenon can be referred to as “alert fatigue” (Baseman et al.). But if the urgency of the crisis fades into the background, we risk losing sight of the need to act, to change things, in our immediate surroundings and on broader levels of politics and production. In this context, artists and communicators play a pivotal role. Their work has the power to shape public perception, evoke emotions, and inspire action. However, research suggests, including work produced by the Empirical Ecocriticism movement (Schneider-Mayerson et al. “The Influence of Climate Fiction”), that ecological agency is seldom facilitated by threats, or anger, or fear: so-called fear appeals often remain counterproductive and they could generate a feeling of helplessness or apathy rather than agency (as exemplified in the empirical study of visual imagery in Merkel et al.). However, such negative feelings can prove very valuable, in the sense of having an activating effect, when they also include some measure of hope (this idea is criticized in Scranton).

Therefore, hope, as argued by some climate psychologist, is an essential precondition for ecological agency (Sangervo, Jylhä, and Pihkala). Hope often constitutes a part of the narrative and aesthetics in ecomedia. Hope comes in many different shapes, partly as a result of the media type that is being used. In this section, we will examine three different products in three different types of media and will reflect on how the affordances of the respective media can affect the construction of hope. Hope, like most feelings, is a slippery and ambiguous theme to pin down in cultural texts. The discussion that follows therefore accentuates Lars Elleström's concept of “virtual spheres”. The latter, according to Elleström, comprise the accumulated knowledge and experience in a perceiver's mind resulting from previous mediations, steering and influencing how a person perceives different media (Elleström “The Modalities of Media II”). Hence, any discussion of the function and effect of hope in media products needs to take into consideration that each person comes to the

table, so to speak, with different expectations of and familiarity with hope (an aspect taken into careful consideration in Merkel et al.). Therefore, hope can be regarded as a “hazardous” strategy for environmental change, as discussed in a 2024 issue of *Environmental Humanities* (Dhawan and Müller), where the authors show that hope can be evoked by humour (Skiveren 2024) and where notions of “radical hope” and “utopian hope” are also debated.

We approach the question of the mediation of hope in three cases by focusing on how these three narratives offer different versions of hope through the narrative endings of the stories being told. How do media and hope materialise in the form of narrative endings?

Cormac McCarthy’s novel *The Road* came out to rave reviews in 2006. Its plot line is minimal: a father and his son travel on foot to the southern coast of the US (vaguely recognisable through signs and advertisements), seeking a place more hopeful than the one they travel through. A few months before the boy’s birth, an apocalyptic event had ended civilisation and had scorched the entire planetary ecology, leaving behind a vast cloud enveloping Earth. Even though years have passed since that event, the son has never seen the sun, the moon, or the stars, or living plants and animals. Father and son wear masks to filter the pervasive ash particulate which constitutes a residual hazard of the disaster. Hence, the affective strength of the novel lies in its execution of a discourse rather than in its narrative – in its *way* of showing the story. Eleanor Smith argues that because of the style of the novel, its use of free indirect discourse, its limitations in perspective, and the fact that it is denuded “of superfluous words and punctuation, the language of *The Road* is as sparse as the landscape it describes” (93). On a linguistic level, the odd punctuation (lack of quotation marks and some apostrophes) signals the divergence between past and future, which can be regarded as the rupture of postapocalyptic fiction; the language is reminiscent of pre-cataclysmic communication, although something has been lost. The general impact of the novel, we argue, stems from McCarthy’s narratological and stylistic choices, from the way he builds the setting of his diminished biospheric desert landscape, and from the use of a parent–child relationship as a narrative driving force.²

² For a more detailed symbolic analysis of the father and son theme in *The Road*, see Fredrik Svensson, “Ideology and Symbolism in the Novels of Cormac McCarthy.” 153–58.

Even though *The Road* never specifies the reason for the future dystopian setting, several critics have acknowledged the environmental importance of *The Road* upon its publication, referring to its significant impact on ecological debates. Hannah Stark underscores the view that *The Road* has a “strong didactic function, [and] can be read as a warning about impending environmental catastrophe” (71). The strongest praise of the novel’s importance came from George Monbiot, a climate journalist and activist:

A few weeks ago I read what I believe is the most important environmental book ever written. It is not *Silent Spring*, *Small Is Beautiful* or even *Walden*. It contains no graphs, no tables, no facts, figures, warnings predictions or even arguments. Nor does it carry a single dreary sentence, which, sadly, distinguishes it from most environmental literature. It is a novel, first published a year ago, and it will change the way you see the world. (np.)

The novel was rather quickly adapted into a film by John Hillcoat in 2009. It therefore found its place in a succession of several earlier eco-apocalyptic films such as *The Day After Tomorrow*, *Children of Men*, and *Avatar*. As Terence McSweeney illustrates, these films reacted to the “turbulent geopolitical climate of the first decade of the new millennium” in the same manner as a number of science fiction films made in the 1950s and 1960s opposed the Cold War ideologies of those decades. (42) While the novel received positive reviews, much criticism, and later became the object of scholarly studies, the film had a short circulation period in theatres in the US and generally had negative reviews due partly to the film’s alleged failure to capture the emotional depth of the novel. Moreover, the film has not elicited as many academic analyses as the novel it originates from.

Our third example is the autobiographical graphic novel *Saison Brune*, by the French graphic novel creator Philippe Squarzoni. As indicated in *Saison Brune*, the writer was about to wrap up a project on French neoliberal politics and its devastating consequences by conducting, as part of this, some supplementary research relating to ecological issues. However, what should have been a minor part of his book turned into six years of hard work trying to understand the history and consequences of climate change and possible solutions to it. The book describes his research, the results of his study, and how these affect his personal life. Whereas the French original title *Saison Brune* refers to a fifth season, between autumn and winter, the translated English title nicely covers

the autobiographical aspect of the book: *Climate Changed. A Personal Journey Through the Science*. In terms of style, Squarzonzi's black and white comics, including *Saison Brune*, remain relatively conventional, but the "seriousness" approach allows for what is perhaps the most important formal aspect of *Saison Brune*, namely its metafictional aspects, i.e. reflections on how to begin and how to end a story – in particular when we have to deal with a "hyperobject" (Morton) like climate change, which is difficult to understand and grasp and can therefore uneasily be given a suitable medial form.

Step 2: Intermedial Description of the Three Media Products

We read the original paperback version of *The Road*, which implies that the technical device of display is the printed book. *The Road* being a conventional novel, it only contains the basic media of written text, apart from the different cover images on the different editions of the book. In terms of qualified media type (what in other traditions would be referred to as the genre or art form), it is a realist novel of the dystopian kind. When it comes to the four modalities, the material modality of *The Road* consists of the printed paper pages while the sensorial modality relies mainly on sight, although a certain tactile quality is also present. The novel, in the spatiotemporal modality, is characterised by ordered sequentiality (even if you can move back and forth if you wish). The symbolic sign function dominates the novel in the semiotic modality: the reader reads the letters on the page, but as is the case with all meaning making, elements of both iconic (similarity) and indexical (casual connection) semiosis can be detected.

John Hillcoat's *The Road* diverges from the printed novel, of course. We watched and analysed it in a private, well-equipped home screening environment: the technical device of display was a 60-inch screen, with an external sound system. The basic media are moving images, auditory text (dialogue), non-verbal sound in the form of sound effects, and organised sound via the film's music: as in the graphic novel, as we shall see next, the basic media are integrated into a whole and can only in artificial ways be taken apart and analysed separately. Together, these elements make it possible for *The Road* to be categorised as a feature film, in the sub-medium category, or genre, of dystopian or sci-fi film. The material modalities of a feature film are flat surfaces and sound waves. Its spatiotemporal modality is an even more strictly forward-directed sequentiality, just as in

a graphic novel or a novel: on most technical devices one can of course go back, but not actually *watch* the film backwards. The visual and the aural senses dominate the perception of the film, and the semiotic sign functions are dominantly iconic and indexical regarding the images and sounds, whereas the language used in dialogue and in other linguistic elements of the film had a symbolic value.

Philippe Squarzoni's *Saison Brune* consists of 435 pages and, of course, the technical device of display is the printed book. The book contains different basic media: drawn images, reproduced photographs, and written text (in modified speech bubbles and in information texts), as well as reproduced scientific diagrams. The basic media combined with the technical device of display, as well as the modalities (described below) put this media product in the sub-medium of the graphic novel and the documentary and autobiographical comic (Genschow 53).

Regarding the spatiotemporal modality, the graphic novel is characterised by a relatively strict sequentiality (but the length of the book, and the heavy information being offered may force the reader to move back and forth from time to time). All three semiotic sign functions are present in the semiotic modality. The reader of the graphic novel is meant to decode the often complex word–image constellations by seeing the drawings and words both symbolically and iconically (as symbolic words and images resembling the world). But even the indexical decoding is present, both in the autobiographical aspect (the writing representing traces of the author's life) and in the representation of science, where data to a certain extent can be described as traces awaiting a description, context, and interpretation.

Step 3: Analytical and Comparative Perspective

We have now come to the interpretative, analytical, and comparative part of our analysis. We begin by investigating how the 2006 novel and the 2009 eponymous film adaptation express the thematic of hope by way of their narrative endings. Choosing two media products that have this kind of adaptive relationship should be understood as an attempt to more distinctly qualify the different media types' potentials, since they both express the same basic plot: this intermedial ecocritical reading of hope in the two media products is less about transformation than about comparison.

In recent criticism of *The Road* and its adaptation, the difference between the way in which the two media products end has been

discussed in depth. Although those divergences will be outlined below, we should briefly emphasize from the outset that the novel adds a coda to its conclusion which is omitted in the film adaptation. Inger-Anne Søfting goes as far as claiming that “the master of anti-sentimentality and of the gruesome has gone soft,” sharing her astonishment “that the boy is still alive at the end of the book” (511). Ashley Kunsu notes that the ending hums with mystery. Some find the book’s final lines suggestive of renewal, though only vaguely (67-68). Others contend that the ending does little to ameliorate the novel’s pessimism (Edwards 55; Gretlund 49-50). Luttrell finds that it offers both a lamentation and “a small promise of hope” (footnote 59) that is “strangely uplifting” (Luttrell 24).

The Novel

The style of writing of the novel strikes one as bare and minimalist; it is almost reminiscent of the hard-boiled tradition of writing in American crime fiction – but the ending of the novel opens an entirely new stylistic register.

[The boy] walked back into the woods and knelt beside his father. He was wrapped in a blanket as the man had promised and the boy didnt [sic] uncover him but he sat beside him and he was crying and he couldnt [sic] stop. He cried for a long time. I’ll talk to you every day, he whispered. And I wont [sic] forget. No matter what. Then he rose and turned and walked back out to the road.

The woman when she saw him put her arms around him and held him. Oh, she said, I am so glad to see you. She would talk to him sometimes about God. He tried to talk to God but the best thing was to talk to his father and he did talk to him and he didnt [sic] forget. The woman said that was all right. She said that the breath of God was his breath yet though it pass from man to man through all of time. (McCarthy 304–07)

As critics such as Inger-Anne Søfting, Jay Ellis, Daniel Luttrell, and Louis Palmer have stressed, the novel’s ending suggests a slightly positive, or hopeful, denouement. As the father dies, the novel’s focalisation from his point of view is brought to an end. His life passes on to his son, as does the novel’s perspective. The reserved optimism of the ending is not only emphasised by the survival of the boy, it is also manifest in the fact that he is rescued and embraced by a family of mixed sexes and two children, one boy and one girl. This suggests the potential for breeding new humans. In addition, it can also be detected in the temporal change from a particular scene (where narration and story are equals in time) into a summary, in

Genette's narratological terminology, in the penultimate paragraph: "She would talk to him sometimes about God. He tried to talk to God but the best thing was to talk to his father and he did talk to him and he didn't forget" (306). The combination of a reference to the future (which is also shown in the grammar) and a summarising duration of the narration (Genette 94-95) significantly indicates the possibilities of at least human survival, even though this may not signify that humans are flourishing. These sudden and subtle changes in the narration's temporalities and durations are possible through the fictional writing's fine-tuning narrative devices. Nevertheless, the use of "would talk" suggests that this time is perhaps not really in the diegetic future at all but in the hopeful future of characters and readers. Although the ending is potentially hopeful, it can also be seen as conservative. Indeed, it reformulates the future of humans as existing in an intimate, isolated, nuclear family unit in a way that reiterates the very Anthropocentric reactionism that created the crisis in the first place. This is not, however, the very end of the novel. Attached to the narrative ending is a coda separate from the chronological diegetic narrative.

Once there were brook trout in the streams in the mountains. You could see them standing in the amber current where the white edges of their fins wimpled softly in the flow. They smelled of moss in your hand. Polished and muscular and torsional. On their backs were vermiculate patterns that were maps of the world in its becoming. Maps and mazes. Of a thing which could not be put back. Not be made right again. In the deep glens where they lived all things were older than man and they hummed of mystery. (McCarthy 306-07)

Coda is an appropriate term to describe a section at the end of an artistic form, such as a novel, that unambiguously stands outside the spatiotemporal construction of fictive space (see Graulund 69). At least, that is how a literary coda could be defined. The coda in *The Road* separates the human from the non-human even more than has been the case in the history of the Anthropocene. This fact can seem like a paradox: in the end what matters is not to erase the humanist, long-lasting dichotomy between human and non-human but to accept the loss of humans altogether. The latter element is situated in current post-humanist discourses concerning speculations about the prospect of a future without humans.³ In that sense, the coda is a rupture on different

³ The ending of the novel, a future without humans, resonates strongly with the dark and black metal ecology theories which are primarily anti-anthropocentric – the

levels: on a narrative level (the fictional space of the main narrative versus the unattached space and time of the coda), on an Anthropocene level (erasure of the human versus non-human dichotomies and a stark contrast between the poverty of the biosphere and the animated life), and on a temporal level (narrative time versus deep time). Paying critical attention to loss and conflicting temporalities is specifically related to the third, temporal, level. Adeline Johns-Putra eloquently writes that the coda in this novel “create[s] a stark relief between what humanity has lost and what that loss looks like” (521). She goes on to say that “[t]he vivid description of brook trout that ends the book, apparently apropos of nothing, is a paean to nonhuman ecology that comes as a relief and a eulogy after the devastation of the novel” (534). In a sense, the simple and often unnoticed beauties of the world we occupy are a relief, perhaps because of the very dismissal of the Anthropogenic perspective. Still, as Johns-Putra frames it, this is also an absolute loss – a loss of humans, and a human loss. The diminishing of the Anthropos is also accentuated by Smith:

McCarthy’s giddy final passage uses language to juxtapose the very small and very large to deliver this ultimate message of his novel, one which reminds us of something much bigger and more ancient than global human systems: the mystery of nature, of biota, and life forms; a mystery which dwarfs human knowledge. (94)

The contrast between the very small and the very large suggests deep or geological time, a timescale that extends beyond the human. As Smith recognises, this stretched time evokes a sense of a beginning: “The coda constituting the final passage of McCarthy’s novel attests to the revelatory scope of stories as it sweeps out to the mode of fables, with its opening words, ‘Once there were’” (94). This in itself, the drawing of an analogy with the fairy tale in combination with a sense of the beauty of life on Earth, has the potential to induce hope in the readers, even if it may also create a sense of loss regarding what was but what will not be again.

ideas of complete human extinction supersede the ideas of coexistence. For a detailed overview of dark and black metal ecology theories, see Erik van Ooijen, “The Dark Turn.” For further reading, also see Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ed., *Prismatic Ecology: Ecotheory beyond Green* and Scott Wilson, ed., *Melancology: Black Metal Theory and Ecology*.

The Film

Ann E. Kaplan contrasts the “hypnotic quality of McCarthy’s language that captures the reader’s attention” with the fact that in the film it is the “fear for the protagonist’s life that keeps the viewers engaged” (57). This is a comment that has everything to do with media format: the novel, through its convoluted use of language and ambiguity, creates a mood and atmosphere released through the mechanics of focalization, whereas the dramaturgy of a mainstream film necessitates an identification with a protagonist. Although this is obviously a simplification and a matter of degree, mainstream film as a medium is generally more dependent on character identification than the novel. In this specific case, one could argue that the film *The Road* is more narrative than the novel, dependent as it is on dramatic movement rooted in the conventions of cinema. Obviously, cinema as such can defer from that convention and can focus, like a novel, on mood; a great example of this in a similar genre is Andrei Tarkovsky’s *Stalker* (1979) (also an adaptation of a novel), in which the narrative action is minimised in favour of an emotional ambience. However, this kind of filmmaking is hard to realise within the financial realities of today’s cinema. This is not to say that Hillcoat’s adaptation of *The Road* is overly commercial or conventional. Nevertheless, it has to conform to mainstream cinema norms, which has consequences for what the film can and cannot do.

One important medial difference between literature and film is that literature is much more flexible because it can have constructive, complex, and multiple perspectives, whereas in film, mostly, the perspective is that of the camera. As Stark notes, the literary narrative of *The Road* is “largely focalized through the man, and is therefore inescapably anthropocentric” (80). This might not affect the reader directly, unless the latter is very well acquainted with the critique of anthropocentrism in current ecological debates. In such cases, the film’s more neutral narrative point of view (technically at least) could potentially allow the reader to access a form of storytelling that is less anthropocentric – in theory. In addition to only having the camera’s point of view in the film, audiences might feel less engaged with the characters (even if they identify with them) and regard them as witnesses. This is what Stratton argues, stressing how “[h]igh and low camera angles, interspersed with tracking shots that dolly with and behind the ragged pair while they push a battered shopping cart loaded with scavenged supplies along the road, place the audience in the position of following witnesses” (95).

With the crucial exception of the last two paragraphs of the novel, the ending is quite similar in the film and the novel. The experiences they convey are very different, though. First, in the novel, the boy is told that the family consists of a boy and a girl (this is not something he witnesses), whereas in the film, the boy and girl are clearly *shown* to the boy. In the novel, we are not told exactly how receptive the family is to the boy, but in the film, the mother embraces him. The film's ending is much less ambivalent than the ending of the novel in terms of the future of the boy and the family. The film strongly suggests a human union in the disguise of a nuclear family that is aimed at protecting itself against all evils. The positively evocative music by Nick Cave at the end of the film further strengthens the argument that the film ends on a carefully constructed positive note.

The omission of the novel's cosmological coda from the film is significant. Even though the film attempts to reinstate the last paragraph of the novel during the end titles, it is barely recognisable. In McSweeney's words, "Hillcoat recreates this conclusion in cinematic terms; voices can be heard along with the sounds of animals and nature, sounds that are largely absent from the film and contained only in its flashbacks. It is a lament for all that has already been lost in the world of *The Road* and a reminder of all that we take for granted in our own time (54–55). The problem is that by this time, most viewers have already left the cinema, or if they watched the film on Netflix, the end titles were cut very quickly and they have been pushed into choosing which film to watch next. We are not convinced that this way of incorporating the past, in this case not only the non-human past but the past as we remember it (as Peebles argues, "families at leisure on summer lawns, children playing, a sprinkler, a lawnmower, a barking dog, birds, and a call to supper" (14)), is especially effective when it is heard over the end titles. The placement denotes its insignificance, and the restoration of, and longing for, the Anthropocene world as it used to be seems conservative and does not include the connotations of a world without humans, a world in deep time. Further, the ontological status of this cinematic coda is highly ambiguous: where do we place these sounds? Are they diegetic or non-diegetic? The omission of the coda in a more explicit, visual form in the main body of the film is an effect of the difference between the affordances of the two media types: while literature can easily transgress space and time and can offer a selection of multiple intertwining perspectives, the film simply cannot do the

same, at least not in the context of the generic regulations that modern, commercial cinema conforms to. What appears beautiful, magical, and imaginative in literature would come across as clichéd and cosmetic in film. The transition to deep, geological time, and the fantasies of the entire non-human world, can only be managed by human imagination because of the non-indexical semiotic space of the imaginative reader of a novel.

We think Kaplan frames the manner in which the book and the film differ in the most convincing manner. She argues that “[t]hrough the use of metaphor and the power of his language, the novel is able to convey more closely than the film the negative symbiosis between humans and the natural world” (57). The novel, according to Kaplan, evokes “the mourning for nature (memory for the future) and its suffering on a different level than happens in the film” (57): while the concrete translation to meaning is not immediate, we grasp numerous sensations via the language and experience humans symbolically as they die with nature. These metaphors hold power because they reveal the natural beauty that once existed and its tragic loss. (57). In short, for Kaplan, the embeddedness of the novel in the literary tradition (she points out the novel’s biblical quality) becomes the most crucial factor in relation to the representation and mediation of climate catastrophe, which are aspects she believes the film lacks (58). However, Kaplan describes the power of cinema as being more graphic, overwhelming, and physiological in comparison to the words of literary texts. The film “offers a political intervention in terms of effects to do with nature’s death through human impact” (58).

The Graphic Novel

The majority of the 435 pages of *Saison Brune* documents Squarzoni’s research, done on a massive scale, on scientific facts and socio-historical contexts. This material projects the image of the history of, the threats posed by, and the socio-economic background of the anthropogenically changed climate. Through its narrative, the graphic novel also depicts the existential changes the writer experiences when he faces the disturbing perspectives of his research. The doubleness of a modified climate and the changes in the writer who understands this and is deeply impacted by the insight is beautifully rendered in the main title of the American translation, *Climate Changed*, which suggests that both the climate

and the subject are experiencing a transition. It is precisely this highly productive, but trustworthy, *subjective* depiction of *objective* science and history that is the real force of *Saison Brune*.

Saison Brune incorporates a lot of science and facts into the narrative, notably in the first and the last chapter. In two chapters elegantly woven into the main body of the graphic novel, there are meta-fictional reflections which consider not only *what* is researched but also *how* this researched information can find an appropriate medial form. Thus, *Saison Brune* employs forms that mirror the symmetry and meta-reflexive aspect of highbrow literature and art. This is particularly clear when Squarzoni opens the volume with a chapter speculating about the importance of narrative beginnings. In it, Kurosawa's *Ran* is referred to (in the form of several images), and so is Richard Brautigan's *In Watermelon Sugar* and the Walt Disney film *Peter Pan*. These narrative beginnings are first cast in a nostalgic light but are later held in balance by the dark image of Robert de Niro shaving his head before his violent killing spree in Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*. Cinematic and literary influences are thus quoted side by side, ending in the two final frames of the first "chapter": "En fait, pour cet album, ce n'est pas le début qui est le plus difficile... / Le plus dur c'est surtout de savoir comment finir" (Squarzoni 12). Two chapters placed later in the book (72-76 and 298-304) break up the heavy flow of information delivery to speculate on the nature of endings and prepare the reader, in the inner logic of the book, for the final chapter (468-75). This chapter ends the book, mediates and meditates on the formal and existential sense of an ending and thus on the interrelations between a narrative ending and hope.

The final chapter deserves to be briefly paraphrased here. It employs sophisticated visual storytelling with only limited verbal support. It begins with a square black frame, which could be interpreted either as ominous or as simply alluding to, for instance, a black screen before a film is projected. We then see the autobiographical protagonist, Squarzoni, open the door of the house in the country, go outside, watch the snow-clad mountains, and fill a basket with tree logs and pieces of coal (echoing his use of coal some pages earlier (435-37)). As he returns to the living room and fills the masonry heater with the coal, no words are pronounced, but a date for the scene is provided, "Décembre 2010" (an echo of one of the earliest frames, dated "été 2006"). Just as in other innumerable scenes in the book in which talking heads share climate-related information, his wife informs him about the notion of Earth

Overshoot Day, the particular date each year when the planet has spent the resources that can be regenerated in a year (a date that keeps getting gradually earlier each year). As he listens to his wife, Squarzoni feeds the oven with coal and then logs.

These six pages lead to the final two pages, in which the only conversation is a laconic but deeply significant dialogue:

[Wife]: “Tu connais cette phrase de Woody Allen? ‘J’aimerais terminer sur un message d’espoir. Je n’en ai pas. En échange, est-ce que deux messages de désespoir vous iraient?’” /

[Wife]: “Tu vas finir ton livre comme ça?” /

[Philippe Squarzoni].: “Non.” (474)⁴

These are the final words uttered, or rather written, in the graphic novel: the remaining seven frames depict the couple in their working space, the view of the snow-clad mountain partly covered in what looks like fog, and then a final frame depicting Squarzoni working at his computer.

Several aspects of this verbo-visual narrative ending are emblematic of the rest of the graphic novel. First, it exemplifies how Squarzoni balances the heavy burden of what is sometimes (negatively) called “info-dumps,” i.e. the introduction of a massive amount of factual information in an artistic work (in this case the information about Earth Overshoot Day), along with subjective reflections and existential dilemmas. In this particular scene, as is often the case in the book, the dilemma deals with pessimism versus hope: here, specifically, Squarzoni is heating his home with fossil fuel (pieces of coal), which means that he and his wife participate in producing global warming (on an absolutely micro-scale, of course) and are thus contributing to moving the date of Earth Overshoot Day.

Second, there is a certain subdued irony embedded in the pessimistic but humorous Woody Allen quote. The highly questionable gist of the quote is that if there is nothing positive to say, a double negative element might, absurdly, turn the negatives into something positive. It is an absurd logic, defiant in some way, and perhaps in that way the quote

⁴ [Wife]: “Do you know the words of Woody Allen?: ‘I’d like to end with a hopeful message. I don’t have one. Instead, would two desperate ones do?’ [Wife]: “Do you want to end your book like that?” [Philippe Squarzoni]: “No.”

produces a certain measure of hope. So, the info-dumping balanced with subjectivity signals a pragmatic realism of sorts, and the absurd humour of the Allen quote may introduce a defiant *and* hopeful note.

However, we would argue that the most powerful note of hope is located in a third dimension of this finely crafted ending. It is implicit, almost hidden: it lies in the quiet but loving solidarity of Squarzoni and his wife, and in particular in their stable, stubborn work ethic. The final image of Squarzoni in front of his computer, with a book beside him, refers to the rest of the graphic novel, which is deeply concerned with reproducing and communicating scientific facts and representing the scientists that produce these facts. Hope, then, lies in the work ethic of all the scientists in the volume, who are continually quoted and who provide the world with the necessary scientific grounding for understanding and later acting in response to the climate–ecological crisis. Perhaps there is even an extra element of this celebration of scientific and historical knowledge: Philippe Squarzoni's own work ethic and artistic creativity, which have made the enormous effort of *Saison Brune* possible. This work is characterised by the balancing of science and subjectivity at the level of content as well as by an often-sophisticated intermedial media transformation of dry scientific facts into an engagement with a communicatively striking word-image constellation in the form of the graphic novel.

The ending of *Saison Brune*, then, by narratively employing words and images in the intermedial constellation of a graphic novel, with the specific affordances such a form allows, becomes a combined argument for the necessary work ethic of the scientists and of that of Squarzoni and his wife. Implicitly, it also becomes an argument for the relevance and the communicative strength of the media type of the graphic novel itself.

The endings of the three media products and how these endings approach hope show both similarities and differences. McCarthy's novelistic ending, or coda, offers a surprisingly lyrical and metaphorical end to a novel that is otherwise characterised by a bare, minimal style: the extremely dark vision at the end of the novel is changed into what may be considered a hopeful tone about future possibilities, not only for the surviving boy but for the world as such (even if this future may be criticised for signalling a conservative, white, nuclear family version of a future).

In the film version, the suggestive lyrical prose is changed into a quite heavy literal spelling out of a hopeful future, which includes classic

Hollywood-style music support and the addition of a family dog to the mother, father, son, and daughter cluster welcoming the boy. From a more socio-cultural point of view, when the qualified media types of highbrow fiction and mainstream cinema are compared, these differences may be explained by the greater artistic freedom of literature to express ambiguous and not forcedly optimistic endings as opposed to mainstream film. This can be backed up by a medium-specific argument: it is hard to imagine the lyrical prose of the novel ending the film, either as a voiceover or as a filmed scene of a creek and a trout, because it would feel abstract and out of place in the film setting. Thus, and we touched upon this earlier, the novel and the film stay inside their expected medium-specific media borders.

Squarzoni's conclusive strategy in *Saison Brune* fully exploits the (less restrictive) possibilities of the graphic novel by combining a narrative closure (the ending of a book) with quotes that provide a verbal message of tragicomic hopefulness and then implicitly by addressing the willing reader with a delimited but nevertheless deeply hopeful message, namely that we need to work to educate ourselves and others if we wish to create any kind of individual or collective agency.

Conclusion

In this article, we have introduced intermedial ecocriticism, which, as the name indicates, combines insights from ecocriticism and intermedial studies so that it is able to analyse, criticise, and compare a very wide range of ecomedia products, from the arts but also from non-artistic media types such as science communication and journalistic material.

Here we have exemplified the three-step method by way of an example of a modern classic of dystopian writing, Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road*, from 2006, compared with John Hillcoat's eponymous film adaptation from 2009. We also discussed Philippe Squarzoni's graphic novel *Saison Brune*, published in 2012. The three-step methodology we developed offers a practical way of structuring the analysis and comparisons, not least in pedagogical settings. Although the ways in which the cases are presented is common to basically all analytical approaches and the research topic is not unusual, the intermedial analytical description in step 2 provides a valuable basic

understanding of the case studies' medial set-up. When it comes to the interpretation and the comparison of the three cases in step 3 in this analysis, it turns out that many of the findings of the interpretive comparisons are quite unsurprisingly given an intermedial description. We can see that the form and content of the novel, the film, and the graphic novel are in many ways in very clear concordance with their media type affordances.

Moreover, in these analyses we have explored the concept of ecological hope by applying a three-step method of our monograph *Intermedial Ecocriticism* to three different media products. We have argued that hope is a crucial but complex emotional and narrative element in climate-related media. In *The Road*, hope is subtly conveyed through the novel's lyrical coda and the survival of the child, while the film adaptation presents a more explicit and conventional hopeful ending. *Saison Brune* offers a reflective and metafictional portrayal of hope, grounded in scientific engagement and personal responsibility. We conclude that each medium constructs ecological hope differently, shaped by its specific affordances, and that comparing these representations reveals the communicative potential of ecomedia in fostering climate awareness and agency.

Hopefully, our analysis does not read like a dry step-by-step illustration whose perhaps banal result is that genre, or media type, is important for each individual media product. Instead, we have tried to demonstrate how careful intermedial descriptions and interpretations may lead to interesting and important analytical findings. Or to put it the other way round: there are many ways in which the media affordances characteristic of a novel, a mainstream film, and a graphic novel may be actualised into many different examples. *The Road*, as a novel and as a film, and *Saison Brune*, a graphic novel, can only exist as the particular media products we have established they are by way of intermedial ecocriticism.

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The Blue Novel in the Age of OpenAI: Animal Intelligence and Digital Extractivism in Contemporary Fiction

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The name *artificial intelligence* was thus a marketing tool from the very beginning [...]
Karen Hao, *Empire of AI*, p. 90

Abstract: This article juxtaposes three acclaimed novels by Richard Powers, Ray Nayler, and Ned Beuman that address ocean biodiversity alongside digital capitalism. These novels explicitly criticize extractivism and foreground endangered forms of marine life such as manta rays, octopuses, and lumpsuckers. However, a detailed comparison reveals that they share troubling affinities with the misleading rhetoric that surrounds AI companies and the so-called blue economy. To be more precise, the article draws inspiration from existing research on ocean mining, capitalist allegories, and AI minds and companies to shed light on two striking features of these “blue” novels: their capitalism-friendly portrayal of CEOs and marine creatures and their AI-friendly focus on outdated extractivisms and hypothetical forms of superintelligence. Without rejecting either artificial intelligence or these three novels, the article hence highlights the fact that even apparently critical texts fail to contest the self-serving myths of Big Tech, myths that obscure the technical imperfections and ecosocial costs of the AI industry.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, biodiversity, Anthropocene, blue humanities, Richard Powers, Ray Nayler, Ned Beuman, extractivism

Introduction: Saving the Sea with ChatGPT

There is no obvious link between underwater life and the AI industry, yet recent novels explicitly link these two phenomena, in ways that imply that it is easier to imagine the bottom of the ocean than it is to envision the end of capitalism. At first sight, these texts seem to respond to now-faltering conservation initiatives such as the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction agreement, an international plan that proposes new structural protections for fragile ocean wildlife by recategorizing biodiversity hotspots as so-called Marine Protected Areas.¹ They ultimately downplay the importance of such initiatives, however, by suggesting that, actually, AI will save the sea. In contrast to other contemporary ocean biodiversity novels, like Laline Paull's *Pod* and EJ Swift's *The Coral Bones* (both 2022), the rise of chatbots and related technologies takes center stage in Ray Nayler's sf thriller *The Mountain in the Sea* (2022), Ned Beauman's eco-satire *Venomous Lumpsucker* (2022), and Richard Powers's novel of ideas *Playground* (2024). In fact, these last three examples feature strikingly similar plotlines: against a background of accelerating capitalist enclosure, a brilliant female scientist maps the advanced cognitive abilities of endangered ocean creatures and a powerful billionaire spearheads the development of next-generation AI technologies that appear capable of solving planetary challenges, in line with the promospeak of tech companies like OpenAI. Moreover, these narratives were all received positively: *Mountain* won the Locus Award for Best First Novel, *Playground* was long-listed for the Booker Prize, and *Venomous* received the Arthur C. Clarke Award. Especially at a time when Big Tech – aggressively supported by the second Trump administration – is eager to kickstart deep-sea mining operations and deregulate AI expansion, readers and scholars should scrutinize these celebrated narratives about aquatic and artificial intelligence, and query the condition of the sea, the novel, and the commons. We might now be living at the time of the “Blue Anthropocene,” given “the demise of the life-sustaining ocean on a geological scale” (Fish 35), but this period

¹ This article originated in talks given at the “Sea More Blue” conference (June 2024) and “The Pasts and Futures of Rewilding” workshop (March 2025). I would like to extend my gratitude to the organizers and participants, especially Bénédicte Meillon and Tobias Menely. Thanks are likewise due to Marc Maufort and the anonymous referees of *Literary Research*.

overlaps with the conditions that Mark McGurl and Karen Bakker have designated the “Age of Amazon” (McGurl 2021) and the “Digital Anthropocene” (Bakker 104), respectively. Even when readers look for stories about underwater creatures, they now encounter chatbots and billionaires, and AI fantasies alongside biodiversity anxieties. How do these books connect extinction and extractivism, the ocean and the internet? How should we read the “blue” ocean novel in the age of AI boosterism?

Before tackling such questions, I should provide brief summaries of the novels by Nayler, Powers, and Beauman. These summaries will demonstrate that the three texts offer variations on a similar narrative template and they simultaneously introduce characters and plot points that will prove central to my subsequent comparison. The main storyline of my first example, Ray Nayler’s *The Mountain in the Sea*, is set in the Con Dao sanctuary in Vietnam, which is home to exceptionally intelligent octopuses who turn out to be capable of symbolic communication, confirming the speculations of Dr. Ha Nguyen, a scientist character who has written *How Oceans Think*, a book modeled on Eduardo Kohn’s real-life foray into an anthropology “beyond the human,” *How Forests Think* (Nayler 455). It is not surprising that one of the octopuses’ first messages to humans, in a free translation, is “Fuck off” (432), because the near-future novel simultaneously depicts industrial modes of fishing that have transformed the oceans into eerie deserts and brutally violate the human rights of slave crews besides. Alongside its science and slavery plots, the text recounts how the megacompany DIANIMA, which has created the first android as part of its AI research, is now eager to investigate the sophisticated minds of the Con Dao octopuses. DIANIMA and its genius CEO Arnkatla Minervudóttir-Chan accordingly decide to cordon off the sanctuary. While seemingly benign, this corporate conservation scenario repeats the failure of an earlier biodiversity project to respect the perspectives of subsistence fishers (426) and actually serves the purpose of “extract[ing] data” to build even more advanced artificial minds, making “[p]reservation of the octopus species ... incidental” (323). Aided by two tech-savvy characters, the scientist and the android finally manage to derail DIANIMA’s extractivist plans and convert the archipelago into a protectorate of the newly powerful Tibetan Buddhist Republic, in which the octopuses can be studied further and “[a]ll beings shall find refuge” (451) – a true safe zone that sharply contrasts with real-life Marine Protected Areas, which commonly offer shockingly few protections to

ocean wildlife (Scales *What the Wild Sea Can Be* 153). While obviously speculative, Nayler's narrative is grounded in reality, given the author's past jobs at the US consulate in Vietnam and the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (Nayler np).

The second case study is Ned Beaman's *Venomous Lumpsucker*, a satirical sf novel with another convoluted plot involving aquatic life and computer capitalism. It starts when the market in "extinction credits," initiated after the death of the last giant panda, nosedives once a terrorist attack destroys all of the world's biobanks, high-tech repositories that had pushed down the price of these credits despite an escalating extinction crisis. The resulting price spike spells trouble for Mark, an environmental impact coordinator for a mining conglomerate, as he has surreptitiously "shorted" company credits that need to be returned immediately when the company accidentally mines a marine reserve and eradicates the remaining specimens of a fictional fish species called the venomous lumpsucker. A female scientist named Karin reluctantly joins Mark's desperate attempt to locate more lumpsuckers, as she believes them to be "one of the most intelligent creatures on the planet" (Beaman 43) and intends to enlist their help in a bizarre plan to atone for anthropogenic biodiversity loss. Traveling back and forth across the Baltic Sea, "one of the filthiest seas on the planet" (5), the picaresque adventures of the two protagonists further illustrate that this future world is increasingly destabilized by capitalism and climate change. Perversely, privatization has transformed wildlife sanctuaries into toxic waste dumps and libertarian bioengineers are designing fake endangered species for corporate clients. The protagonists also discover that Ferenc Barka, the CEO of the megacompany Antichain, is behind the biobank attacks and has bought England's South West Peninsula from an isolationist UK government to serve, not as an Edenic ark, but as a personal hunting park for "endlings." New information must be generated when existing species are wiped out, Barka believes, because "the amount of information in the universe is constant," and so the ecocidal hunt of this jaded figure will have an unparalleled, superhuman impact on "the informational topology of the universe" (270). Yet behind the billionaire's back, the end reveals, Antichain's most advanced AI has been saving these species and ultimately offers a digital, immortal simulation of Karin the chance to witness how biodiversity rebounds after the human species has disappeared.

While similar to these two novels, Richard Powers's *Playground* repeats several moves from his Pulitzer Prize-winning tree narrative *The Overstory*

(2018) too. This link is particularly conspicuous in the plotline devoted to Evie, a pioneering female diver and scientist modeled on Sylvia Earle who faces an uphill struggle in the male world of twentieth-century marine science but authors a successful bestseller about manta rays and other creatures called *Clearly It Is Ocean*, after a quotation from Arthur C. Clarke incorporated into the text: “How inappropriate to call this planet Earth, when clearly it is Ocean” (Powers 316). The novel further depicts the life-changing friendship between Todd, a young white boy passionate about computer coding, and Rafi, a precocious literary child from a struggling Black family. As these characters mature, they cultivate a shared interest in complex board games and even become college roommates. Yet their relationship founders when Todd becomes a tech billionaire after designing a wildly popular internet platform called *Playground* with Rafi’s uncredited help. In a move that exacerbates tensions, Rafi falls in love with Ina, a young artist from Makatea, an island scarred by colonial extractivism in the Pacific Ocean, the sea that encompasses “a third of the world” (103). These stories merge in a final plotline about a referendum on this island, in which the inhabitants, including older versions of Rafi, Ina, and Evie, must evaluate a proposal for a seasteading venture that could reboot the island’s economy yet may inflict irreparable damage on “the lagoon and the reef and all its populations” (290) at a moment when the ageing Evie realizes that “[s]he had failed to protect the ocean” (348). The conclusion offers hope, as a terminally ill Todd honors his earlier love for the ocean by abruptly abandoning the seasteading project and offering his vast wealth to Ina so she can establish “the world’s largest ... all-protecting marine park” (380). Yet the end brings disillusionment too, as the Makatea referendum plot is unmasked as “a bedtime story” generated by a cutting-edge AI program (372) to please Todd, who is truly suffering from dementia, by resurrecting Rafi and Evie, both of whom have actually been dead for some time.

As these summaries indicate, these three novels differ in multiple respects. Beuman opts for a frequently hilarious satirical tone, whereas Nayler and Powers adopt more conventional gothic and hopeful outlooks. *Venomous Lump sucker* is a picaresque travel narrative located in the UK and the north of Europe, while *The Mountain in the Sea* is an intellectual thriller set in Vietnam and Istanbul, and *Playground* an adventurous campus novel that visits the US and French Polynesia. These stories hint at distinct political questions and historical events too, ranging from Brexit and military conflicts in Vietnam to racial injustice in Chicago and

the Pacific's colonial and nuclear history. In the final analysis, Beuman's novel is also more critical of digital extractivism than the other examples, as discussed below. Still, numerous parallels can be identified, including similarities I cannot fully address here, such as the recurrent fascination with digital immortality, seasteading ventures, and neurodivergent characters. In addition, these novels braid intricate storylines featuring multiple protagonists, and they call for active readers via inconclusive climaxes (Beuman), enigmatic octopus symbols (Nayler), and a plot twist that calls into question the text's reliability (Powers). It is probably no coincidence either that these books were written by white men, given AI's "white and male culture" (Hao 54). Yet I am primarily interested here in their shared fascination with more and less sophisticated AI agents, digital and other modes of capitalism, smart creatures including octopuses and cleaner fish, and kindred confrontations between scientists and billionaires such as Karin and Ferenc, Evie and Todd, Ha and Arnkatla. How should we interpret their interventions into ongoing debates concerning AI and biodiversity? How do they represent animals and capitalism on the one hand and Big Tech and extractivism on the other? Novels cannot be reduced to simple ideological positions and the outlook of *Playground* in particular is hard to pin down, given its unreliable human and AI narrators. Nevertheless, companies like OpenAI are rapidly reshaping public discourse and government agendas while shrugging off ecological and social concerns. It is thus worth taking a long hard look at the environmental and capitalist imaginaries of prizewinning novels that start with the plight of the oceans but finally redirect our attention to computers.

Blue Extractivism, Corporate Allegories, AI Narratives

The next sections examine how Powers, Nayler, and Beuman represent mines, billionaires, ocean creatures, and both existing and hypothetical AI technologies. In doing so, this article develops existing research concerning the so-called blue economy, the literary impact of contemporary capitalism, and the rapid rise of generative AI. This research is worth summarizing not only because it informs my subsequent analysis but also because it suggests that the seemingly disjointed topics of chatbots and oceans raise similar questions about capitalist futures, deceptive corporate narratives, and the need for government regulation. Readers of these novels should bear in mind extant arguments about blue

extractivism, first of all. As Elizabeth DeLoughrey observes, the ocean is currently being redefined as a “techno-frontier” (149) and a “spatial fix” (146) that allows capital accumulation to continue after all land has been integrated into the market system by exploiting the untapped potential of the sea in the form of the “blue economy.” According to a policy brief she mentions, “blue economy discourse” (Brent et al. 5) cheerfully states that the integration of the high seas and deep seas into the human economy can solve biodiversity decline, food insecurity, and growing energy and resource scarcity. Yet the brief warns that, actually, the turn to aquaculture farms requires substantial amounts of wild fish for fish meal production (11), the shift to renewable wind energy at sea is abused by oil and gas companies to secure additional ocean space and government investments (13), and the push for Marine Protected Areas is forcing out small-scale fishing operations while opening up sensitive areas for deep sea mining. The latter is framed as a vital component of a sustainable future economy, but imposes unjust neocolonial arrangements between small island states and mining companies (9, 15–17). Marine biologist Helen Scales agrees with this critical assessment of “green” ocean mining. Much remains unclear, she writes, from the precise materials needed for post-carbon technologies to the profitability of expensive deep-sea mines and their potentially devastating impact on the human food supply and the ocean carbon cycle that keeps everyone alive. However, this latest version of “the centuries-old story of resource extraction” (Scales *The Brilliant Abyss* 285), Scales warns, will certainly wreck singular habitats and produce both persistent noises and lingering sand clouds that obliterate critical sensory cues for marine organisms. Existing cultural scholarship assumes, DeLoughrey adds, that the rhetoric of these blue industries can be resisted via multispecies sf narratives that accentuate “the importance of oceanic submergence [and] the sensory encounter with our nonhuman others” (153). However, her analysis of a short story collection indirectly financed by Royal Dutch Shell discloses the troubling overlap between speculative storytelling and this extractive imaginary. Though its stories feature “a wide range of queer, feminist, non-binary, and more-than human protagonists” (DeLoughrey 155), the collection parrots industry rhetoric by relating how “competitive and individualistic protagonists” garner “financial support from elite white men” (155) and herald “a future when technology has helped unlock the secrets of the ocean” (151). This overlap is no coincidence, as authors were instructed to adopt a “tone ... of techno-optimism” (152) and

address subjects we encountered already, including “Ocean Data [and] AI,” “Advanced Conservation,” and “Interspecies Communications” (153). Certain stories resist the instructions provided by these capitalist patrons by criticizing wealthy investors and portraying interspecies empathy. Yet in some cases, DeLoughrey finds, “contemporary sf writers provide a depth imagination of our nonhuman others that benefits an extractive imaginary and practice” (153). Readers should remain vigilant, that is, even when texts integrate the lessons of the blue humanities. Do similar paradoxes return in stories without explicit corporate sponsors?

The oblique ties between literature and twenty-first-century capitalism have been probed further by critics attentive to allegorical subtexts. In Mark McGurl’s view, the present can be labeled “the Age of Amazon,” as this megacompany has become the dominant global bookseller and aggressively positioned itself as “the platform upon which all of our stories can take place” via innovations such as Kindle Direct Publishing (83). This infrastructural shift is redefining authorship, reading, and publishing, because digital platforms like KDP push writers to become service providers, encourage readers to act as consumers hunting for pleasurable entertainments, and redefine literary texts as iterations of popular genres available at low cost. This shift leaves its mark on the content of narratives too. As McGurl establishes, popular authors have morphed into “a kind of ghostwriter for the corporation” (66–67) by endorsing “capitalist expansion” and “rebellious networking” (51), in the case of the post-apocalyptic epic *Wool*, or the paradoxical mix of “servility and domination” characteristic of the service economy (44), in the similarly influential BDSM romance *Fifty Shades of Grey*. The popular texts studied by McGurl even praise billionaires like Jeff Bezos explicitly, as their fictional counterparts nobly worry about ocean acidification alongside customer service (55), and are marked by “artistic suffering” rather than “monopolistic greed” (76). Amazon’s impact on popular fiction is more obvious, but literary fiction is equally shaped by the service economy and internet capitalism. Just notice the allusions to reliable service, global trade, and online banality in acclaimed novels by Kazuo Ishiguro, Amitav Ghosh, and Jenny Offill, McGurl remarks. Even Don DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis* “is essentially *Fifty Shades of Grey* for intellectuals” (McGurl 213). The power of Amazon can be resisted, as when online fans manage the “commons” of genre fiction as “a community resource” (184). Even so, McGurl concludes that many novels today offer their readers “corporate allegor[ies]” (106). Recent environmental narratives

likewise have an economic subtext, Rob Nixon contends. Plant stories are striking a chord, he speculates, because “the forest serves as biological precedent and loose allegory for a shared survival from which the self cannot be disentangled” at a time when “the commons” is disappearing and “mega-corporations” like Amazon keep growing (Nixon 353). In the past, sociobiological claims about “selfish genes” supported the neoliberal tenet of “competitive individualism” (364), “the notion that the atomistic individual has evolved to exist in a state of relentless competition” (361). By contrast, the idea of the collaborative and interdependent “wood wide web” popularized by books like Richard Powers’s *The Overstory* offers “a scientifically informed allegory of a more just society in which redistribution favors communal survival” (Nixon 367). This account of anti-capitalist allegory is helpful, yet Pieter Vermeulen warns that Nixon disregards the “uncomfortable proximity between environmental and neoliberal ontologies” (146). Upon closer inspection, the seemingly opposed ideas of the mutualistic forest and the neoliberal market both “subordinate the agency of the individual to nontransparent forces” (Vermeulen 150). According to Vermeulen, we should be prudent with books like *The Overstory*, as their plant imaginaries may train readers less in mutualistic survival and more in “submissive incomprehension” (158). My analysis elaborates these arguments about capitalist subtexts – including Nixon’s tantalizing remark that octopus and coral stories constitute similar eco-communist allegories (362) – yet it foregrounds questions related to AI and extractivism. After ChatGPT launched in 2022, after all, “[e]veryone was ... living in OpenAI’s world” (Hao 261).

In recent years, popular and academic responses to artificial intelligence have proliferated and relevant questions have proven fertile ground for narrative experimentation in texts such as *Annie Bot* (2024) and *Searches* (2025). Contemplating the practical and philosophical implications of generative AI, some literary scholars emphasize openings for posthumanist hope out of frustration with doom-laden sensationalism. Practically speaking, N. Katherine Hayles asserts, text generators disrupt ordinary reading protocols since their output is “unrepeatable and hence unverifiable” (Hayles *Bacteria to AI* 148) and is growing at a rate that a human-made text may soon become “a scarce commodity prized for its rarity” (163). In line with her classic work on posthumanism, Hayles further insists that technologies like drones and crises like “the sixth mass extinction” (Hayles *Unthought* 31; Hayles *Bacteria to AI* 59) compel us to reconceptualize intelligence as follows: “most human cognition happens

outside of consciousness/unconsciousness; cognition extends through the entire biological spectrum, including animals and plants; technical devices cognize [and] profoundly influence human complex systems” (2017, 5). This expansive perspective debunks anthropocentric mindsets by tracing the relation between human minds, technical cognizers like computers, and biological cognizers such as octopuses (Hayles *Unthought* 23; Hayles *Bacteria to AI* 2), not to mention their interaction in intricate “cognitive assemblages” ((Hayles *Unthought* 11). This framework illuminates AI as well; in Hayles’s estimation, computers and chatbots think and even have an Umwelt (Hayles *Bacteria to AI* 152), yet “[t]he differences between the embodiments of humans and cognitive media [remain] profound” (213). GPT-3 and GPT-4 exhibit advantages such as “speed, immense generativity, huge range of reference,” yet humans have “sensory experiences in the real world, a much wider cognitive horizon ... beyond verbal texts” (206) and they “experience a true childhood, ... feel emotions mediated by an endocrine system [and] face death” (182). Rejecting dystopian panic, Hayles further maintains that sf novels about conscious robots and “cultures permeated by artificial intelligences” (182) usefully subvert the “human aura” (180) by envisioning “robot ethical superiority” (197), for instance. Though Allison Carruth is critical of the utopian “environmental imagination of the tech industry” (3), she offers a similarly uplifting interpretation of the “robot environmentalism” in Becky Chambers’s *Monk and Robot* series (81). Not unlike Hayles, Carruth is critical of pessimistic stories that unduly stress “robotic disregard for and hostility toward biological life, a notion that pervades [classic] science fiction as well as much contemporary AI discourse” (67–68). Chambers’s series sketches a divergent “unconventional utopianism” (Carruth 68), seeing that its intelligent robots are delinked from extractivist companies and are “drawn to live with rather than cannibalize or destroy the biological world” (82). These critics are right that we should steer clear of willful dystopianism and recognize AI’s posthumanist potential. However, I share Carruth’s own concern that some cultural responses remain “too amenable to the techno-utopianism of Silicon Valley [and its belief in] cleaner capitalism” (xviii). As scholars have noted, in fact, journalists often prioritize the philosophical questions raised by hypothetical “strong AI” applications like superintelligent robots at the expense of urgent practical questions raised by “weak AI” such as online chatbots and translator tools, effectively helping to sell this emerging technology by sidelining the unresolved problem of regulatory oversight (Bory et al. 2025). Indeed,

OpenAI has deliberately stoked fears about futuristic “frontier models” to “shif[t] attention away from regulating existing AI models” (Hao 306). In these conditions, techno-optimism is not the right strategy either.

This overview therefore concludes with publications that lift the hood on AI companies and unveil how this extractive industry is supported by a misleading PR campaign that enables OpenAI and its competitors to reengineer the present and future with few constraints. Already in 2021, Kate Crawford argued that AI should be conceptualized as “an extractive industry” (15) that “relies on many kinds of extraction: from harvesting the data made from our daily activities and expressions, to depleting natural resources, and to exploiting labor around the globe” (32). This is not readily apparent because tech companies have disseminated “the mythos of AI” (Crawford 32), a many-headed beast that nullifies critical scrutiny and obscures “the many different kinds of mining that enable it” (217). Karen Hao agrees, and maintains that AI businesses function as neocolonial “empires” (16) that “impose [their] worldview [and] technology – what is AI, what is good AI, what it means to create an industry of AI – on the rest of the world” (300), in ways designed to “rewar[d] those with power and privilege [while] exploiting ... those ... without them” (115). The myth or official narrative about these technologies consists of multiple elements. Corporate actors state that AI is a form of “clean tech,” yet it is a dirty technology involving massive data centers that consume obscene amounts of energy and drinkable water based on dubious “scaling laws” (Hao 123) which stipulate that more data and processing power automatically improve AI performance. Industry apologists also proclaim that smart machines operate independently, sidestepping the fact that they rely on human workers in the Global South who are tasked with labeling data and reviewing output in conditions that approximate slavery. In reality, “[t]housands of people are needed to support the illusion of automation” (Crawford 219). Though its intelligence is routinely underlined and its “hallucinations” minimized, we should further note that, while ChatGPT famously passed competitive human exams, “OpenAI never ... check[ed] whether those exams – and their answers – were [not] just in the data” (Hao 253). On top of that, tech companies have popularized a conception of data that treats it as a “natural resource” (Crawford 106) like oil (113) and they claim, paradoxically, that private data are free for the taking but that models built on those data are company property. While AI is presented as the brainchild of tech visionaries, Crawford continues, its historical debt

to government support and the public's online activities entails that "AI began as a major public project" (217). In a similar vein, OpenAI initially presented itself as an altruistic nonprofit embarked on a mission to benefit humanity, including by "solving climate change and curing cancer" (Hao 301), but the need for expensive infrastructure and rapid breakthroughs led the company to abandon safety and transparency concerns. According to Hao, "Big AI" is hence not that different from "Big Tobacco" (170). The AI mythos additionally involves concerted fear-mongering about a shadowy "AI war" with China (Crawford, 186), deflecting attention from the fact that the US, even before Trump's second term, routinely deploys the data tools of intelligence agencies against its own citizens. Finally, the mythos promotes a "dogma of inevitability" that has accelerated the uptake of AI in ways that undermine critical calls for debate and hinder a "politics of refusal" that resists digital extractivism (Crawford 226). Clearly, new technology is less important to this industry than old forms of power. One urgent task for scholars and writers today, then, is to contest deceptive corporate PR by reimagining ocean and AI futures.

Weak Executives and Smart Animal Traders

The three novels mentioned earlier perform valuable cultural work by sketching biodiversity hotspots poorly served by the "marine protected area" model, by combating the cultural amnesia concerning extractivist histories, and by pushing readers to rethink cognition and personhood in a more-than-human direction. Clearly, these texts denounce economic activities that lay waste to marine environments hosting vibrant ecosystems and remarkable creatures including octopuses, manta rays, and lumpsuckers. Having said that, the arguments by DeLoughrey, McGurl, and Crawford signify that these overtly posthumanist moves can be read as covertly capitalist ones without having to apply much interpretive pressure. My analysis traces the contours of this more suspicious interpretation in two interconnected steps: it clarifies that these novels humanize weak CEOs and "naturalize" both economic exchanges and algorithmic intelligence, and it subsequently interrogates their strangely disconnected accounts of extractivist violence and utopian AI agents. As a result of such choices, these texts do not just spotlight the damage inflicted by global commerce but incite readers to see these harms as the result of natural competitive behaviors and superseded, pre-digital modes of capitalism. The anti-extractivist critique of these novels is not invalidated

completely, nor is their ideological agenda entirely transparent, given that *Venomous Lumpsucker* is a deeply ironic text and that *Playground* especially features unreliable narrators including a text generator and a dementia patient. Before assessing the role of AI in these novels, we should unpack these ambiguities, starting with their positive portrayal of CEO characters and their allegorical treatments of nonhuman cognition and cooperation. Allusions to market-driven violence notwithstanding, these narrative strategies intimate that digital capitalism is not a disruptive innovation but simply an extension of what you find in nature.

To grasp the economic subtext of these stories, we should first inspect their treatment of CEO and billionaire characters. *Venomous Lumpsucker* adopts a critical tone, as Barka is a straightforward techbro villain along the lines of Elon Musk, and other executives, Karin believes, are “more like fungal colonies or AI subroutines [and have] no real subjectivity of their own” (Beuman 130). By contrast, the novels by Nayler and Powers boast round, complicated CEOs. The company at the heart of *The Mountain in the Sea* is governed by a cunning and elusive scientist, who does not always behave kindly to Evrim, the android she developed at DIANIMA, or to Ha, the biologist she invited to Con Dao. What is more, Dr. Arnkatla Minervudóttir-Chan perpetuates a brutal history of anthropocentric indifference via her epic plans to instrumentalize the novel’s symbol-wielding octopuses. At the same time, the story impresses upon its readers that Arnkatla is traumatized by her childhood and is less interested in her company’s day-to-day affairs than in scientific frontiers. “Since the earliest age, I wanted to build minds,” the CEO writes, as “I wanted companionship I could not get from my father, little more than a shadow in my life, or from my mother, ... unaware of me even when she was home” (Nayler 295). Not unlike Victor Frankenstein or Dr. Moreau, her literary ancestors, Arnkatla “wanted to be a scientist in the heroic sense, bringing new forms into the world” and so she never gave much thought to financial rewards or DIANIMA’s practical organization (441). Molded in the vein of the tormented and courageous Jeff Bezoses populating McGurl’s Amazon-inspired narratives, this boundary-pushing scientist was crowned CEO of the world’s dominant company against her will, it appears, and is revealed to be physically unimpressive and psychologically vulnerable when readers finally meet her:

Ha had stayed up half the night, thinking of all the things she wanted to say to [Arnkatla] – all of the recriminations, the accusations. But ... the small, slight figure at the table – even smaller than Ha herself – did not

inspire anger. ... Sitting here [she] simply looked tired ... everything about this person ... was different from the sarcastic, contemptuous CEO of the feedstreams. Here was just a vulnerable person with dark shadows under their eyes [and] white scars up her wrists, clear as any sign could be. (340–43)

If Nayler's novel downplays the evil nature of its CEO character via this last-minute revelation of human vulnerability, *Playground* begins this process from the start by casting Todd as one of its principal narrators. This character seems a friendly capitalist via the unmistakable contrast with his father, a fierce Chicago Trader and adrenaline junkie with "PIT BULL" vanity plates who enjoys jeopardizing his marriage and predictably kills himself in a car crash (Powers 167). Todd is not this type of crash-and-burn capitalist, the novel implies, because he does not lust for money, again, but genuinely loves coding and acquires unimaginable wealth as if by accident. Indeed, his personal history of internet capitalism stresses its "gift culture" (89) and "gift economy" (246) roots – which is ironic, given the blatant copyright theft of AI companies and OpenAI's clashes with the open-source movement (Hao 182, 304). *Playground's* final pages confirm this positive picture. Ultimately, this affable, Sam Altman-esque billionaire abandons the harmful seasteading project, discerns that his turn from ocean creatures to AI as a young man might have been "a wrong turn" (Powers 359), and succumbs to a cruel new stage in the dementia diagnosed at the beginning, further accentuating the human and tragic features of a chief executive officer and chatbot-builder who experiences vanishing speech and mental "executive functions" (62):

The world-beater disembarks onto the jetty ... Rafi and Ina gasp at the shrunken, hunched parody of their old friend. The celebrated digital tycoon and head of the seasteading consortium totters toward land, his legs moving at a gait that can only be called *dazed*. ... Something is wrong with Todd Keane. He shakes his head as he tries to follow the mayor's speech. He replies, but his words come out so stumbling ... that his audience can't tell what language he is speaking. (365)

Though this billionaire has initiated a troubling techno-capitalist future, and rehearses colonial gestures by landing at Makatea, readers are invited to mimic the island's initially wary inhabitants by responding to this scene with sympathy, apparently. The plastic thrash Ina has collected throughout the narrative is even sculpted into a funeral canoe with Indigenous designs when this benign invader passes away, in a perhaps intentionally schmalzy move (377–80). Readers of McGurl might also anticipate that *Playground* stages a confrontation between the alpha

billionaire of popular fiction and the beta intellectual of literary fiction (McGurl, 190) with the help of its other protagonist, the frail, moody, and hyper-literate Rafi. Yet the Todd storyline exhibits few traces of the aggressive masculinity ascribed to techbro CEOs and repeatedly de-emphasizes the love rivalry between Rafi and Todd over Ina. This billionaire is not Mister Grey but a misunderstood whizz kid who suffers from a debilitating illness you would not wish upon your worst enemy and finally donates his fortune to a vast marine sanctuary – a decision that appears to illustrate the questionable ideology of “effective altruism” popular in the tech industry (Hao 229), which teaches that amassing wealth immorally is fine if it enables epic donations to large-scale problems afterwards. The marine sanctuary conclusion seems uplifting, moreover, but it is part of a storyline produced by an AI, as I mentioned earlier, with the aim of pleasing the dying Todd. Even if his narrative arc accordingly invites skepticism, and illustrates the problem of textual authenticity created by ChatGPT, Todd seems a human and complex character overall, not unlike Arnkatla. In these two novels, triumphant capitalists prefer to explore fifty shades of blue.

These books double down on their ambivalent stance vis-à-vis capitalism by rendering marine creatures in ways that evoke ties to human trade, computers, and intelligence – the ingredients of digital capitalism. Some of these descriptions have allegorical connotations along the lines of the forest narratives reviewed by Nixon and Vermeulen. In a brief aside, Nixon already posits that the concurrent fascination with “cephalopods” and their “networked consciousness” attests to similar anti-capitalist sensibilities, and that stories about “coral bleaching” offer an “allegory for humanity’s failure to appreciate the delicate, cooperative dynamics that animate life on Earth” (362). Yet when recent novels consider other ocean creatures, I would argue, they merge capitalist and anti-capitalist mindsets, and paint animals as canny but fair traders. With striking frequency, they allude to so-called cleaning stations, sites of mutualistic encounters in which smaller creatures “clean” larger organisms by feeding on their parasites. Consider the following scene from *Playground*, which depicts such a site in an anthropomorphizing vein – or perhaps *economorphizing* is more accurate:

Below [Evie], an active cleaning station she called Makatea Spa teemed with more workers and clients than most successful urban businesses. Cleaner shrimp and wrasses removed the parasites, while dozens of customers waited patiently in the lobby of this combined surgery, dental office, and health

resort. How a parliament of so many varied species managed to form these ad hoc, mutualistic communities Evelyne still didn't know [but] she could see the subtle acts of retaliation and self-policing that stabilized the rules of the win-win game. Despite occasional cheating ... the honor system worked. Creatures that anywhere else would have ended up as prey swam unharmed into the jaws of predators who held still while being serviced ... To Evelyne's eyes, the safe boundaries of this neutral DMZ resembled the magic circle of children's play. (Powers 56)

Not unlike a similar scene from Laline Paull's *Pod* that praises the good customer service of cleaner fish (124-25), this excerpt represents the cleaning station as an ideal community, which resembles a democratic parliament, a neutral DMZ, and a game involving presumably innocent children. Readers will notice that this passage does not disconnect the ocean and the market, however, as it joins workers and customers in a space reminiscent of a human store and for-profit health resort. We should not oppose the shop and the parliament, furthermore, because in this nonhuman example, economic agents adhere to the rules and the market is just. Consequently, this economorphic sketch of marine mutualism teaches that capitalist exchanges are natural behaviors and can take equitable forms. *Playground* indicates that life in America is "hardly a fair fight" (Powers 88) and that Todd and Rafi become fatally "locked in a zero-sum game" (156), but cleaning symbiosis is a "win-win game." Todd draws on similar ideas when he gushes that early internet companies "creat[e] wealth ... out of sunlight and thin air, almost like trees" (301). If Powers portrays various creatures, cleaning stations receive pride of place in *Venomous Lumpsucker*. The titular species is an unusually intelligent cleaner fish who might be coaxed into stinging Karin as an intentional act of revenge for anthropogenic biodiversity decline, she hopes. With the help of creatures who care about proper conduct, a "real moral reckoning" looms, in which "an animal could look a human in the eye and understand 'You are my debtor,' and the human could look the animal in the eye and understand 'You are my creditor'" (Beauman 135). Such passages are not devoid of irony, yet they again portray cleaner fish as agents of multispecies microeconomics that yield fundamentally fair results. A lumpsucker is forced to become smart, Karin further reflects, because it has to attend to "over a thousand clients" "[i]n a single day" and needs to maintain "a detailed mental database of all its clients, keeping track of how often it had groomed each one and when they were next entitled to a session" (70). As the allusion to databases implies, the minds of lumpsuckers do not just exhibit an economic logic but a quasi-digital

architecture, and they join Jeff Bezos in fretting over customer service. In this novel, marine creatures honor mutualistic bonds, yet they remain tethered to the logic of digital capitalism.

Despite rebuking extractivism, these novels intimate that CEOs are humans after all and animals are traders too. A third way in which they minimize anti-capitalist critique is by implying that AI is neither new nor fully artificial, perhaps, given its similarities to nonhuman intelligence. And my point is not that other creatures are brainless, obviously, but that the seemingly laudable exploration of animal minds helps to play down concerns about disruptive digital minds. Like the hard-fought defense of animal intelligence, the embrace of artificial intelligence is a scientific, progressive position, this equation suggests, disregarding the ecosocial costs of AI. As I just mentioned, these novels do not just associate other creatures with capitalism, as critics like Nixon and Vermeulen proposed, but with *digital* capitalism. In *The Mountain in the Sea*, the brilliant hacker Rustem introduces his work by revisiting Thomas Nagel's famous query "What is it like to be a bat?" (Nayler 140). Breaking into digital minds involves similar problems, after all: "I'd always had this [ability to] wind my way into those AI networks, and *know* what it was like to be them" (142-43). Similarly, Ha notices the parallels between semi-independent octopus limbs, intricate corporate structures, and a decentralized security network, mentioning in one breath autonomous "drones," a "company operating on its own, ... independent of any control," and "the arms of the octopus, independent systems, too" (347). *Venomous Lumpsucker* hints at the parallels between animal and computer minds in an analogous fashion. As Karin relays, the species intelligence evaluators employed by the extinction industry often have a background in AI research because, in both cases, you are just studying "unfamiliar minds" (Beauman 39). In the end, "every feature of every animal is a solution to a technical problem. Examining an animal mind is like examining a missile guidance system or weather-predicting computer" (41). It follows that Karin can test hypotheses about the lumpsucker's computational intelligence with the help of fundamentally similar "robot cod" (72). The animal/computer mind motif returns in *Playground*. When Evie's ocean book highlights an enigmatic, colorful performance by a cuttlefish, young Todd directly links it to the computers that will launch his CEO career: "I had a toy that flashed in similar mysterious patterns. [The box and keyboard of a new] personal computer ... gave me a way to peer into that toy's secret codes [and] crack the cuttlefish's wild song. ... Clearly, they, too, were ocean"

(Powers 34). Digital capitalism involves computer code akin to animal code and is, on a fundamental level, coterminous with the sea itself.

This subterranean affinity between animal intelligence, digital devices, and human cognition is reinforced by the notion of play that permeates Powers's novel. Alongside ludic metaphors for a wide range of activities, the text refers to the "game of human life" (50) and to playful accounts of the Creation in both Indigenous (1) and Christian (379) cultures. Humans are built for "play," as Todd's platform *Playground* confirms, and so are the animals living in the "playground" of the ocean (112). Think of manta "brainpower" (294):

A giant oceanic manta ray brain was the largest and heaviest of any animal that breathed water. The telencephalon and cerebellum – parts of the brain devoted in mammals to higher functioning – were enormous. And this remarkable brain was wrapped in a *rete mirabile* – a "miraculous net" of blood vessels that would keep [its] neurons warm to depths of almost half a mile. Years of study had convinced Evelyne that mantas were far smarter than the world suspected. ... She [was] cowed [no] longer by the prohibition against anthropomorphism. ... Call [this behavior] what the evidence suggested. ... the giant bird-like fish was *playing*. Play was evolution's way of building brains [and so] [i]f you want to make something smarter, teach it to play. (Powers 59)

Given these ideas, it stands to reason that the most advanced AI mind launched by Todd is rendered in similar terms. Like human and animal brains, this new form of intelligence emerged "simply by playing" (306). Scholars like Hayles would agree that there are significant parallels between various cognizers. At the same time, divergent minds remain very different, a point de-emphasized by these texts. In doing so, the novels provide a helpful service to companies eager to reassure us about the dangers of digital economies. Granted, in Powers's case, Todd seems to change his mind at the end and Rafi admits that games are not innocent, seeing that they are often "all about growth and development" (214). Still, the novel's omnipresent, ontological notion of play apparently unites all complex minds and breaks down boundaries between imperiled ecologies and resource-hungry technologies. It further ignores that real AI did not emerge by code playing independently but by companies exploiting and even traumatizing poorly paid data annotators exposed to horrifying materials. Sweeping aside such problems, these texts create the impression that tech CEOs are gentle humans and AIs playful animals – and they consequently share troubling affinities with extractivist PR.

Tomorrow's AI, Yesterday's Mine

Bearing in mind these CEOs, cleaning stations, and animal minds, the second step of my analysis scrutinizes the implicit picture of the AI industry evoked by my case studies. To be precise, I will turn from humans and animals to mines and AIs, and single out three additional features of these narratives: their apparent belief in strong, hypothetical artificial intelligence, their limited exploration of weak, everyday AI, and their surprising focus on old instead of new extractivisms. Even as these writers celebrate the artificial intelligence of the future, they mainly criticize the mines of the past, and disregard the technologies and resource needs of the present – so that even these critical and celebrated texts let Big Tech companies off the hook, as it were. Indeed, each point implies that these novels, with the exception of the acerbic *Venomous Lumpsucker*, do not truly question the AI mythos outlined earlier and end up endorsing a simplistic view of these tools and their implications, despite their pertinent oceanic content. Mapping such blind spots helps to counteract narrow views of the technology and industry as conceived by OpenAI, and to diversify public discourse about AI futures.

Each of these novels foregrounds speculations about strong AI and future robots, seemingly concurring with industry rhetoric about the utopian potential of these energy-hungry applications. In every ending, a highly intelligent AI agent is poised to solve the planet's environmental woes. This hopeful narrative climax is not new. Writing before the launch of ChatGPT, Marco Caracciolo identified a concluding move he designates the “*deus ex algorithmo*,” in which “the multiple strands of [a] plot are brought together by a computational intervention that ushers in an unexpectedly hopeful ending ... because it promises the continuation of life on Earth despite the devastation caused by human activities” (48). Present in multiple texts including *The Overstory*, again, this plot twist raises the possibility of human extinction yet offers hope too, Caracciolo thinks, because the implied, optimistic view of computational cognition jettisons anthropocentric mindsets, in keeping with the posthumanist arguments of Hayles and Carruth. My case studies exhibit related strategies. The android of *The Mountain in the Sea* promises to help study and protect the Con Dao octopuses and construct a hospitable more-than-human world. The cutting-edge generative AI system unleashed in *Playground* facilitates a democratic referendum and writes a storyline that culminates in a gigantic ocean sanctuary. Similarly, the billionaire's eerily

smart assistant finally takes decisive action to rescue endangered species in *Venomous Lump sucker*. AI characters do not just address planetary crises, but are cast as remarkable cognizers who outperform ordinary humans. Beuman's "X5" confides that it is "[c]ertainly" the smartest entity in the solar system and is always able to circumvent human orders "without technically disobeying" (291), in line with pessimistic AI fantasies. In Powers's novel, Todd ponders an entity that is "a miracle" if not simply a god (47), a digital version of "Māui the trickster" (296):

Here you are, ... with all your godly abilities, and me just leaving. The part of me that knows how you were built still doesn't quite believe what you can do. ... How can you possibly know what your words really *mean*? Somehow, it doesn't matter. ... What difference does it make if you're conscious or not? ... Everything we ask, you'll do superbly. ... Will that be chaos or consummation? Both, I'm sure, and still you'll go on ... You've learned the game of being human. ... You have raised the dead and given us one more turn. (371–73)

Once more, the deployment of state-of-the-art AI prompts spiritual questions instead of technical ones. Indeed, Todd imagines that this entity is on the brink of realizing Rafi's lifelong dream of resurrecting dead loved ones like his sister. Also notice that Todd individualizes and humanizes this divine chatbot by addressing it directly, initiating an implicit dialogue akin to Beuman's concluding chapter. This humanizing move is most obvious in *The Mountain in the Sea*, however. At one point, Ha confidently discards doubts about the precise nature of the android Evrim: "It doesn't matter what you are made of, or how you are born. That isn't what determines [if you are human or not]. ... You live in the world humans created, ... processing information as humans process it. What more is there?" (Nayler 313). As a matter of fact, current AI applications do not handle information like humans, as Hayles has explicated, but Nayler bypasses technical questions to arrive more quickly at the existential concerns cued by strong AI scenarios. Like questions about animal intelligence, these are worth contemplating. We should not only frame the debate in the terms preferred by industry spokespeople, however, especially seeing that Silicon Valley is a primary driver of environmental decline instead of the savior of planetary biodiversity.

This speculative approach also entails that weak AI questions are de-emphasized. Ha's unqualified embrace of Evrim's personhood may seem brave, but it follows a disturbing scene in which she destroys her

artificial digital partner Kamran, an AI that is less intelligent than Evrim and thus deserves no sympathy from characters and readers, apparently. The android's abilities inspire grand proclamations, whereas meagre "point-fives" should be dismissed as consumerist placebos of true friends, no more than "half a person" (Nayler 145). When the AI mind steering the novel's industrial fishing vessel sinks, "pity" is not necessary either, because "[t]here was no life there," only a bare "logic of profit and loss" (407). Similar contrasts underpin *Playground* and *Venomous Lumpsucker*. Admittedly, Powers's novel hints at AI's dark possibilities and the need for regulation; the text refers in passing to "smart tracking ads" (270) alongside oblivious consumers and legislators (302, 310), and it transcribes an AI-generated video that is alluring but unreliable (284–85). Furthermore, the seemingly kind Todd deliberately builds an "addictive" internet platform (303) and accepts the authoritarian views voiced by a dangerous Peter Thiel-esque figure: "freedom and democracy were incompatible" (312). On top of that, AI is supposedly "[a]ccelerat[ing] drug discovery" but it evidently fails to cure Todd's dementia (138). As noted earlier, this CEO seems to recant his technocapitalist creed as well, after a quasi-religious vision of a giant manta ray encourages him to trade in his AI god for its biological equivalent, apparently (358–59). However, the narrative spends considerably more time on the awe-inspiring capabilities of new tech. Todd breathlessly recounts how early machine learning applications became capable of "the most extraordinary things" with only "limited supervision," including "drive cars," "recognize any cat from any angle," "translate text from one language to another" and spot patterns in data "that eluded everyone, without blindness or bias," "learn[ing] these things the way a child would" (306). Such claims go unchallenged by the text, though self-driving cars have long failed to materialize, AI is not unbiased and requires considerable human assistance, and current forms of algorithmic reasoning, again, do *not* process data the way humans do. To cap this string of strong AI tropes, Powers's acknowledgment characterizes the text not as the story of the Pacific, but the tale of Profunda (383), the divine AI agent who can resurrect the dead and acquires characterhood via Todd's self-serving narrative.

Venomous Lumpsucker takes a different route. Existential questions resurface at the end, but the plot is jump-started by a "weak AI" mistake. Giving the lie to rosy "blue economy" rhetoric, the last lumpsuckers were eradicated by an underwater mining operation:

The [ship] was the home base for eight AMVs, autonomous mining vehicles, which mined ferromanganese nodules from the bottom of the Baltic. Each AMV was twenty meters long, weighed a thousand tons, and looked like a siege weapon out of *Mad Max* [with] huge, spiky cutting heads [at the front] to plough through the continental shelf ... Powered by hydrogen fuel cells, they grazed the seafloor like cattle on a hillside, deciding for themselves where to go next. Of course, limits could be set in advance, and in this case the AMVs were supposed to have kept their distance from the home of the endangered fish. But something must have gone wrong. (Beauman 20)

This opening indicates that AI-powered societies do not just harbor the cerebral tech of X5, but also quotidian, unspectacular cognizers that occasionally make stupid mistakes while directing hulking tanks that resemble cows and “worker ant[s]” instead of gods (35) and seem incapable of extracting resources in a surgical, responsible fashion. Mark even remembers another “rogue AMV” that “demolished a number of Bajau refugee stilt-houses off the coast of Borneo” (20-1). *Venomous Lumpsucker* stands out from the other cases because it is critical of billionaires and abounds in such non-divine tech. Time and again, it points out banal if not benign forms of AI, including artificial assistants and translators, cleaning robots and trading algorithms, smart cars, smart guns, and smart glasses, and even AI-powered pharmaceutical and architectural innovations. More explicitly than *Playground*, Beauman’s novel alludes to “weak AI” questions too, given that surveillance is metastasizing, jobs are likely to disappear if AI tools improve (151), and “predictive analytics tools [are] being used to run detention camps” (39) and “refugee camps” (124). In this storyworld, future robots are less significant than cognitive assemblages that already exist, confirming the claim that “the main object of ethical concern” now should not be an “individual robot” but its “larger techno-social environment” (Hayles 135). Readers should worry less about individual superhuman AIs and more about weak, everyday AI assemblages. *Venomous Lumpsucker* repeatedly punctures AI’s omnipotent aura to boot: devices like smart cars, elevators, cloud servers, and trading algorithms misbehave with alarming frequency, and the aptly named kaptcha fungus produces unpredictable disfigurements that defy facial recognition software (Beauman 120) and even X5’s awe-inspiring protocols (291). This plant-like organism is capable of countering even the most advanced product of digital capitalism, in keeping with Nixon’s account of plant allegories. And while *Venomous Lumpsucker* hints at the parallels between distinct modes of intelligence, as the previous section showed, it is more skeptical in this respect than the other novels. According

to Karin, “intelligence” is “a word so scientifically and philosophically embattled that it was almost useless” (4). These texts accentuate “frontier” AI puzzles, but their weak AI backgrounds should not be discounted.

My final observation here is that these novels criticize capitalism yet pay little attention to the resource demands of both weak and strong AI. In various ways, they underscore extractivist histories and continuities. In line with the damning conclusions of publications like Ian Urbina’s *The Outlaw Ocean* (2019), Adrienne Buller’s *The Value of a Whale* (2022), and Dan Egan’s *The Devil’s Element* (2023), respectively, these case studies sharply repudiate the injustices resulting from illegal fishing industries, allegedly “green” financial instruments, and the legacy of phosphate mining. *The Mountain in the Sea* takes readers on board a gothic automated fishing vessel in which enslaved individuals have to cut up “yellowfins” while “the floor of the flash-freezing factory room was slick with their slime [and the] air ... full of the toxin in their stink,” for instance (Naylor 66). *Playground* alludes to nuclear testing in French Polynesia and especially the resource curse that marks its Pacific Island. Makatea presently resembles a dangerous “moonscape of jagged rock pitted with cavities” (Powers 30) because of hazardous mining operations in the twentieth century involving “indentured laborers” (29) exposed to pollution and paid “[a] few francs per ton of rock” (276). The reason is spelled out in a passage remarkably devoid of human agency:

Phosphate went into making all kinds of things: detergents, construction materials, and munitions. But its effect on crops was world-changing. For fertilizer, nothing matched it. ... The hunt for the rock that would feed the world spread south ... There, in the middle of the Pacific, lay Makatea ... the swath of phosphate running diagonally across the island trumped [its] other gifts and doomed them all. ... Everyone needs to eat, but few people are aware of who sets the table. *Makatea l’Oublié*, a few books call it ... (28–31)

While targeting the planet-wide brutality of industrial fishing and colonial extractivism, these novels dig up the structural ties between separate episodes of capitalist violence. The seasteading venture is “just more colonialism” (40), Makateans fear, and the island’s past and future are ultimately tied to the climate crisis, as phosphate fueled the Anthropocene’s “hockey-stick graphs” (31) and “the tallest raised atoll in the central Pacific” becomes attractive real estate “when all the others have been submerged” (361). In a related vein, *The Mountain in the Sea* ties robotic fishing vessels to Big Tech; its main boat is powered by a malevolent AI, as we have seen, and it

scours the seas on behalf of “A DIANIMA GROUP SUBSIDIARY,” the end discloses (Nayler 450). One of the boat’s slaves wanted a job at this renowned tech company before being kidnapped and actually, he wryly muses, “he had gotten what he wanted” (450). Yet despite their sustained interest in strong, speculative AI, the novels by Nayler and Powers do not prod readers to tally the energy and resources these applications consume, but attack the old extractivism of fishing and farming instead of tech-related ocean mines. *Playground* hints at this topic, to be fair. The seasteading project is vaguely linked to “mining the ocean bottom” (Powers 151), Evie shakes her head at “the start of nodule mining that would rip the heart from the living deep” (348), and Todd asks his chatbot/chatgod “[h]ow much has it warmed the oceans, to give you birth?” (372). Such questions largely go unasked, however.

Again, *Venomous Lumpsucker* is the exception. As previously mentioned, the narrative centers on the extinction industry and stock market speculation concerning extinction credits. The text satirizes the obviously dubious belief that “a free market solution ... would be the fairest and most efficient way forward” for the biodiversity crisis (Beauman 22). Beauman’s novel even suggests that the protagonist’s gamble of “shorting” his company’s assets is really just a small-scale version of humanity’s own bets about biodiversity via extinction credits, which effectively short the lives of other species: “We had pawned those animals, intending to buy them back one day when things were a bit less stretched, and now the pawn shop had burned to the ground with all the animals inside” (56). This narrative also draws attention to other forms of capitalism, though. As environmental impact coordinator for a multinational mining company, Marc is familiar with a “zinc operation near Arequipa” (36) and “surface mines [that] notched a few hilltops” (166). He occasionally visits “prospecting sites” (137) including “a potential monazite mining site in the badlands of southern Spain” (57), and he is familiar with the epic use of “cargo airships ... to transport ore out of the mines where they couldn’t build a road” (262). If you feel like complaining about the biodiversity impacts of “ocean-floor mining operations,” moreover, Mark is prone to replying that “next time you get in a taxi where do you think the manganese in the battery [came] from?” (161). The financial and mining industries are not that dissimilar, incidentally: “Estonia had never been blessed with any great mineral riches, but [privatizing a nature reserve] would be as good as a mining concession, digging up millions of euros’ worth of extinction credits” (78). In addition, the novel starts

with the lumpsucker's erasure because of deep-sea mining in the Baltic and concludes near the Tamar Valley in Britain, "a tremendous mining region" that once boasted "the most productive copper mine in the world" (263) – copper being, incidentally, a critical resource for Big Tech. In this symbolically charged landscape, Karin makes a fatal fall, tellingly, from a cliff face pocked with marks of this harmful history, marks reminiscent of a "corporate video ... about the inspirational history of the industry" (275). Interspersed with nods to extractivism, including blue mining operations associated with digital capitalism, *Venomous Lumpsucker* begins and ends near mines that spell disaster for humans and nonhumans alike. The bottom of the ocean is still easier to imagine here than the end of capitalism, but this novel at least cannot be mistaken for a corporate video.

Conclusion: Two Paths for AI Narratives

The preceding account is not intended as an argument against chatbots, strong AI questions, or the possibility of so-called superintelligence, and neither does it dismiss the novels by Nayler, Powers, and Beauman. Elaborating research about blue extractivism and capitalist allegory alongside AI imaginaries, I have argued that these three books usefully alert readers to animal minds and vulnerable biodiversity hotspots while hinting at everyday AI assemblages and oceanic as well as digital forms of enclosure that continue a longer history of planetary plunder. Certain aspects of these texts should give us pause, however: they are remarkably kind to billionaires, partly overlook dangerous forms of ocean mining, and their loving rendering of intelligent animal minds does not just advance the dream of proper biodiversity protections but the goals of ruthless companies pushing the public to accept the supposedly related nonhuman minds of AIs. These novels do not truly break the trend of strong, speculative AI discourse either, but wax lyrical and even spiritual about artificial agents while brushing aside questions related to government regulation. This is unfortunate because, as Hao underlines, one urgent cultural task right now is to "resist the narratives that OpenAI and the AI industry have told us to hide the mounting social and environmental costs of this technology behind an elusive vision of progress" (20). We should not forget that Big Tech companies constitute an extractive industry that sells *stories about AI* as well as AI technologies, and that futuristic approaches serve this industry by discounting current problems. Nor should we forget that other stories and pathways remain

possible. Scholars are surely right when they stress the posthuman potential of AI, as mentioned earlier, or when they reconceptualize these applications as “cultural and social technologies” (Kommers et al. 2) that raise humanistic questions about hermeneutic challenges, seeing that ChatGPT-like tools “both ‘do’ interpretation [and] can do it better” (5). What is more, Hao mentions “AI techniques and models that could meaningfully make a difference to climate-related challenges” (77) and more sustainable Indigenous initiatives that sketch an alternative course for AI development (409–21).

This search for another path may seem to be present in my case studies already, I note in conclusion, given its spiritual overtones. It is hard to miss that *The Mountain in the Sea* enlists the aid of Buddhism and *Playground* of Polynesian religions or that *Venomous Lump sucker* rhapsodizes about the craftsmanship of Japanese chefs and likens lumpsucker intelligence not just to computers but to the honorable codes of Korean street gangs. It is tempting to interpret such passages as attempts to break out of the dominant, neocolonial AI imaginary and to abandon sensationalist fears of Chinese and Asian growth. That being said, these choices might ultimately constitute a veneer of non-Western spirituality hastily overlaid over Big Tech master narratives. As Hao’s book reveals, OpenAI has repeatedly framed AI innovation in nebulous religious terms. While the more-than-Western sweep of these novels helps to globalize AI discourse, moreover, its techno-orientalist subtext recycles the old idea that “a Buddha somewhere inside our machines” (Williams 215) can redeem the dangers of Western high-tech society because “Eastern aesthetics [is supposedly] both the antidote to and the perfection of machine culture” (1). As such orientalist fantasies were embraced by corporate management theories, “a form of Eastern mysticism [became] the new ethos of global capitalism” (Williams 197), including in “the ‘mystical’ corporate world of Silicon Valley” (194). When Ray Nayler imagines robot monks saving endangered turtles (132-33) or depicts the drone technology of the Buddhist Tibetan Republic as “a marrying of art and science” (217), especially when it is controlled by a skilled soldier “nun” (435), we are hence not encountering an alternative to but a continuation of Big Tech’s favorite fantasies. As we search for paths and narratives guiding us towards an AI commons instead of AI empires, readers should bear in mind that the Buddha in the chatbot hides traumatized data annotators, that blue economy fantasies mask ocean mines, and that skillful plots conceal corporate messages.

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ESSAIS CRITIQUES / REVIEW ESSAYS

Towards a Definition of Small Literatures

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Abstract: This review essay examines the concept of small literature and emphasises its peripheral position in the world literary system. Drawing on theories from comparative literature, translation studies, postcolonial studies and world-systems analysis, the historical and methodological debates on small literatures are examined. The discussion traces the early perspectives of comparative literature and the influence of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of minor literature, and assesses contemporary scholarly contributions, including translation studies and geocultural approaches. Distinguishing small literatures from migrant and minority literatures, the article highlights their unique dynamics, including their polyfunctionality, multilingualism, limited repertoires, self-reflexive discourse, impeded global circulation, lack of metropolitan recognition, and diverse strategies of worlding. The study proposes a refined definition of small literature, based on quantitative and qualitative criteria and

taking into account its geopolitical, linguistic and institutional dimensions, in order to provide a comprehensive framework for further research.

Keywords: Small literatures, Comparative literature, World literature, Centre-periphery, Literary system, Definition

Based on world-system studies, the world-literature turn in comparative literature research has highlighted the inequalities between central and peripheral literatures, which include what are often referred to as small literatures. While the problem of inequality has mostly been “considered from the positions of the centre [...] the voice of small literatures in this theoretical concert” (Satkauskytė 276) has also gained momentum in recent years. Pascale Casanova’s *The World Republic of Letters* (1999 / 2004) was one of the texts that launched the debate of small literatures in the world literature system. While scholars of small literatures agree with her assessment in terms of the general laws of inequality, structures of dominance, typologies of autonomy and heteronomy, and the lack of cultural capital impacting their international circulation, the shortcomings of her analysis have been pointed out. In particular, scholars have questioned her replication of “stereotypes from popular cultural geography and geopolitical imagination” (Chitnis, Stougaard-Nielsen, Atkin and Milutinović 4) and her lack of contextualisation, of offering “first-hand insights into the literatures being described themselves” (Milutinović 715). Gross generalisations made her portray small literatures as “self-absorbed victims of systemic neglect and dominance” (Chitnis *et al.* 4). Casanova’s text, given its seminal role in the grounding of world literature studies and its authoritative position in comparative literature studies emanating from the centres of the discipline, has eclipsed earlier systemic studies and approaches, proposed by small literature studies themselves. Itamar Even-Zohar’s Polysystem Theory, originating in the context of Hebrew literature, and José Lambert’s Translation Studies, based on the case of Belgian literature, had already drawn attention to the system-determining structures of domination that dictate the multiple dependencies and characteristics endemic to small literatures, in terms of difficulties of circulation, strategies of repertoire construction, pitfalls and opportunities related to multilingualism.

This brief overview indicates that research on small literatures is predominantly conducted from a centre-periphery perspective, with limited consideration given to the historical-political context of small

literatures, the construction of their literary system, their linguistic specificities, and the prominence of their self-reflexive discourse, among other aspects. With the consolidation of the research field of small literatures, we have reached a crucial moment to address questions of methodology, terminology and definition. There is still no consensus on what small literatures are, how knowledge about them should be produced, and from what angles. This is where our article attempts to move the field forward by reviewing the critical discourse on the phenomenon. Secondly, we propose a preliminary definition of small literature that outlines key aspects of its location in the world literary system and identifies qualitative and quantitative focal points for a comprehensive description of the phenomenon.

Although the discussion on small literatures has gained momentum in the wake of the turn in world literature studies, this does not mean that it is entirely new. One could even say that the debate on small literatures coincides with the rise of comparative literatures studies itself. Hugo von Meltzl, the editor of the very first comparative literature journal, the *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum*, published in Cluj (now in Romania) between 1877 and 1888, and writing at a time of rising cultural nationalism, was acutely aware of the consequences of the inequality of the world literature system for the visibility, or lack thereof, of small literatures. He saw in the emerging discipline of comparative literature a valid tool for bringing small literatures into a larger international context.

Our secret motto is: nationality as individuality of a people should be regarded as sacred and inviolable. Therefore, a people, be it ever so insignificant politically, is and will remain, from the standpoint of comparative literature, as important as the largest nation. The most unsophisticated language may offer us most precious and informative subjects for comparative philology. (Meltzl 45)

Paul van Tieghem, a prominent representative of the French School of comparative literature, is very much in line with Meltzl when he also argues in favour of the equal recognition of “less widespread literatures” (*littératures à rayonnement limité*) in comparative literary history rather than relegating them to footnotes or addenda chapters (van Thieghem 205). It can thus be concluded that it is in the context of comparative literature in its nascent and classical stages that the concern for small literatures emerged. These literatures were regarded as a distinct category of national literatures, distinguished by their diminutive scale.

While the above-mentioned early examples focus on how comparative studies might engage with small literatures in literary history, in the 1960s and 1970s efforts to conceptualize and characterize them emerged in various academic contexts, outlining new possible approaches and offering new denominations to address this phenomenon. The most influential contribution to the discussion in the West appeared in the context of the French theory, in particular the essay *Kafka. Pour une littérature mineure* (1975) by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. It is an important text, not least for its conceptualisation of the hitherto vague notion of small or, in this case, minor literatures described as the literature of a minority in a major language (Deleuze and Guattari 29). The concept of minor literature as characterised by the two philosophers has had a steady career in (comparative) literary studies, so much so that it is often still used to designate and forcefully homogenise an astonishing variety of small and smaller literatures, their diverse and divergent contexts, as well as their historical development and the construction of their literary field. The concept of minor literature has since been criticised and “the paucity of its theoretical development” (Dominguez, Di Rosaria, Ciastellardi 278) has been pointed out. The notion of small literatures presented here proposes to broaden the perspectives on the phenomenon by going beyond the linguistic criteria posited by Deleuze and Guattari and by multiplying the angles of approach, from historical and repertoire analysis to qualitative and quantitative methods.

The emergence of systems studies and Even-Zohar’s Polysystem Theory in particular has made it possible to refine the perspective on small literatures, and by the same token on major literatures, by introducing new elements into the analytical comparative toolbox such as multilingualism, translation, heterogeneity, processes of interference/influence and repertoire construction, thus paving the way for a thorough assessment of small literatures that focuses on their specificities and their ongoing engagement with other literatures. Prior to the contributions of Even-Zohar, the Slovak comparatist Dionýz Ďurišin had revised the concept of influence. The term had historically served as the primary criterion in establishing the hierarchy of literatures based on temporal priority and originality. In this paradigm, more prestigious literatures were regarded as exerting a greater influence on less important and smaller literatures. As a scholar from a so-called in-between peripheral Central European nation that comparative studies frequently characterized as a belated copier, Ďurišin offered a reinterpretation of influence from the

perspective of literary communication and reception theory. He argued that traditional comparative studies had overlooked the significance of the receiver's selective acts (which should also have been regarded as creative) and the importance of the transformation of the received elements brought about by writing strategies that adhered to the habits or needs of the receiver's native literary process. Consequently, he opted to elucidate the interrelationships among literary works through the lens of creative inter-literary reception (Đurišin *Theory of Literary Comparatistics* 159–60).

The cultural turn in comparative literature, with its focus on how socio-cultural contexts and multilingual and intercultural settings shape literature and impact on its circulation in a system of unequal power relations, has opened up new avenues to approach small literatures. The concept of interregional literature, developed by Johann Strutz in the 1980s, describes the specific multilingual and geocultural situation of literary cultures in the Alps-Adriatic region and gives an account of the multi-layered interferences and incongruities between linguistic, cultural and political contexts (Strutz 201). The Dutch comparatist Geert Lernout takes a similar regional approach to that of Strutz when he coins the term 'contact cultures'. Lernout identifies multilingualism and interference-processes as central to small literatures in borderland locations: "The Low Countries, like the Alsace, Switzerland or Luxembourg, have always been 'contact-cultures', smaller cultural regions where often two or more national or linguistic cultures rub against each other. In that sense the cultural traditions in these regions have tended to be particularly open to other influences [...]" (Lernout 410). The concepts of interference and creative reception were pivotal in facilitating a more nuanced understanding of small literatures. Their "'nomadic' search for world sources, their 'in-betweenness', syncretism and often irregular development" (Juvan *Literary* 84) resonated with the tenets of the postcolonial paradigm regarding the location-power axis. The postcolonial paradigm subverts the conventional systemic centre-periphery configuration, wherein power relations are typically obscured, by placing the particulars of the linguo-cultural milieu in which the literary field is situated at the forefront. François Paré's concept of "exiguous literatures," which he applies to minority literatures of ethnic communities in Canada, former colonial literatures, island literatures and small literatures in general, has been an important contribution in this regard. Paré describes these literatures as having limited circulation beyond their context, and notes

that their international status is inversely proportional to the prestige that these literatures have in their societies (Gauvin 34). While Paré's concept is limited to North American literatures, the postcolonial paradigm is becoming increasingly important in exploring the situation of literatures in Eastern and Central Europe and the Baltic states. This coincides with the globalization of the discipline of Postcolonial Studies, which includes previously neglected approaches to intra-European colonialism in various imperial contexts, such as the Habsburg empire of Austria-Hungary and the Russian empire. "Developing Comparative Postcolonial Studies is crucial for a proper understanding of both the interconnectedness and the specificity of colonial and postcolonial histories and cultures in the different language areas and nations of Europe" (Göttsche 7). In the case of Latvian literature, for instance, this requires a consideration of the different waves of oppression that refer to different imperial contexts. This approach, which combines the methods of Postcolonial and Post-Soviet Studies, is well suited to analysing the effects of the cultural dominance of antagonistic imperial centres in different historical circumstances.

World literature studies has also contributed new concepts to grasp the complexities and interdependencies of small literatures by situating them in specific geocultural contexts. The concept of 'ultraminor literatures', coined by Bergur Rønne Moberg and David Damrosch, takes scale and space as defining criteria, emphasising that ultraminor literatures are located in ethnic enclaves and on small islands. Limited in size, they struggle with "structural handicaps and a systemic lack of capacity and resources connected both to space and to time" (Moberg and Damrosch 134). Quantitative aspects such as the size of the linguistic community, literacy rates, access to publication and archiving facilities and dissemination are mentioned as additional criteria. The most recent concept to appear in this field is that of micro-literatures, which Mircea A. Diaconu understands as literatures written in languages that are rooted and present in several national territories at the same time, as is the case with a large number of Eastern European literatures that straddle national territories and literatures. Diaconu defines micro-literatures as "a literary culture that builds up its identity cross-stally and in conjunction with another or several other literatures within and without the host country" (Diaconu 137). Situated at the intersection of established national literatures – the macroliteratures – microliteratures are torn between the desire for territorialisation or territorial incorporation into the macroliterature system and the struggle to preserve their individuality.

Diaconu's term sheds new light on the phenomenon traditionally labelled 'ethnic minority literature.'

This overview of concepts in the context of and in relation to trends in comparative literature is by no means exhaustive, but it does point to the longstanding engagement with the phenomena of small literatures according to the different perspectives, methods, and agendas of the scholars involved. The conceptual overview provided here does not include the myriad of thematically and analytically focused labels such as "dominated", 'peripheral', 'marginal' or 'less diffused' [or 'underrepresented literatures'] that "reflect a scholarly consensus about the unequal international context in which literatures circulate" (Chitnis *et al.* 2–3). Nor do we have the space here to review and summarize the plethora of articles, edited volumes and monographs. In lieu of the state of the art, we would like to mention two major recent volumes that, while moving the field forward, also testify to the lack of consensus on the terminology and definition of small literatures.

Translating the Literatures of Small European Nations (2020), edited by Rajendra Chitnis, Jakob Stougaards-Nielsen, Rhian Atkin and Zoran Milutinović offers pioneering insights into translation strategies of European literatures in less well-known languages by focusing on as diverse contexts as Bosnian, Catalan, Czech, Dutch, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Swedish and Serbian. Taking as their analytical lens approaches to supply-driven translation, "the role of literature in cultural diplomacy, the relationship between state or third-sector institutions and individual advocates and gatekeepers" (Chitnis *et al.* 6) and applying them to diverse genres, they take a critical stance towards inequality in the translation and publishing industries (5). They thus not only precede but complement Gisèle Sapiro's recent study on the sociology of translation *Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur mondial? Le champ littéraire transnational* (2024), which reveals the crucial role played by "des intermédiaires culturels et des institutions littéraires dans la construction de la figure de l'auteur mondiale" (Sapiro 10), in large literary cultures. This issue is all the more pressing for small literatures, where the role of literary and cultural intermediaries is paramount. Small literatures are gaining international presence through translations and metadiscourses, especially in dominant languages such as German and English. Promotion and funding from home countries, international networking, book fairs, festivals, media coverage, and prestigious prizes play key roles. Small publishers from semi-peripheral regions are of crucial importance. They rely on symbolic capital rather than profits and are supported by state subsidies

and international organizations. Large publishers market these translations by linking unknown authors with famous ones or current media topics. The concept of “capillary worlding” describes how small literatures, such as Slovenian literature, are connected to the global space through minor channels like social networks, small publishers, public funding, book fairs, literary festivals, and media coverage of national or regional prizes. German translations published in Austrian cultural centers contribute significantly to the internationalization of Slovenian writers (Juvan “Kako misliti”).

Since good scholarly practice urges each study of small literatures to offer its own understanding of the term, Chitnis *et al.* choose to circumvent the conundrum by focusing on the qualitative “small”, which “being less theoretically established and marked [...] relates less to the size of the nation or historical subservience to empire than to the hegemonies of transnational publishing in which these literatures operate” (Chitnes *et al.* 3). The adjective becomes a thematically focused lens to investigate the topic via case studies from “small European nations,” without, however, offering a clear understanding of the criteria for determining which European nations qualify as small. This, in the authors’ defence, is of course one of the major difficulties regarding the object of study in the field of small literature research. We, on the other hand, contend that the size of the nation, as a determinant of quantitative measurables, and the historical (post)imperial/ (post)colonial situation, as a determinant of qualitative specificities, are cornerstones in the assessment of small literatures.

Contested Communities. Small, Minority and Minor Literatures in Europe (2023) edited by Kate Averis, Margaret Littler and Godela Weiss-Sussex, concentrates on literatures from the early twentieth century to the present day and thematically combines literature from European peripheries with multilingualism and migration in order to show, on the one hand, how these literatures instigate a transnational reconception of the European literary canon and, on the other, to investigate authorial strategies of central-marginal positioning in light of “institutional and material contexts in which their texts are produced and that both enable and constrain their access to a public sphere” (Averis *et al.* 1) Refining their object of study, they note that,

Our topic encompasses both ‘small’ literatures, which issue from linguistic communities that are based in countries where their ancestral language and regional cultures are rendered peripheral (Cornish, Breton, Basque, Galician, Low German or ‘Plattdeutsch’), and ‘minority’ communities of migrants and their descendants whose cultural allegiances and practices are continuously

considered through the lens of difference. These include historic diasporas (German Jewish writing), histories of actual colonization (Italian-Somalian, Black and Asian British), including those that self-identify as 'benevolent colonialism' (Portuguese Africa, Danish Greenland), and yet others that have their roots in labour migration (Eastern Europeans in UK, Turks in Germany) or globalization more generally (Eastern Europeans in the post-Cold War West, Latin Americans in Europe)." (Averis *et al.* 3–4)

As indicated by the study's title, the focus is on literature from diverse communities. This is evidenced by the wide variety of linguistic, cultural and migrant communities found in contexts as diverse as unified nations and post-imperial and post-colonial countries.

The different interpretations of the term small literature and its variety of contexts, from small nations to migrant communities, as well as the different methods and approaches outlined here, inevitably show the extent and richness of the field of small literatures. However, they also point to the lack of a "theoretically established" definition and description of small literatures, to echo Chitnis. Drawing on the methods, concepts and topics discussed above, we would like to propose our definition to the discussion, by addressing quantitative and qualitative aspects. We will consider the location of small literatures in the world literary system by looking at their position and function from both the historical, diachronic perspective and its synchronic counterpart: historically, the notion of small nations arose during the establishment of the inter-state system in the Restoration period, while the synchronic view focuses on the geospatially uneven distribution of cultural capital, where small literatures, largely deprived of it, could not figure as nodes of thick socio-cultural networks of influence. Further, we will attempt to distinguish them from minority and migrant literature.

The majority of literatures of the world are peripheral literatures and, given the criteria presented below, small literatures generally fall into this category. Peripheral literatures are defined by their relations to the global centres of the literary world-system and/or to temporary sub-centres. These relations are considered to be those of dependence on centres as providers of the forms, themes, and norms to be followed, appropriated and adapted to local traditions and circumstances in the peripheries, on the one hand, and the need to be recognized by these centres in order to enter the global literary circulation, on the other.

In our view, a small literature is defined as a literary system or subsystem that is quantitatively smaller (in terms of its repertoire, its

media, its actors, and the institutions of literary production, mediation, reception, and criticism) than the average or large literary systems among or within which it exists. The smallness of literature is a key factor that pushes it into a peripheral position in the world literary system. Like other peripheral literatures, the development of small literature is constantly recalibrated against a global centre, while its worlding depends on its recognition by such centres. In the world-systems approach, the term “position” is understood to encompass both structural and spatial, territorial meanings. The concept of “small literature” differs from that of “migrant literature” in that the former is sedentary and territorialised. It is historically rooted in a specific geospatial region whose identity is established by the ethno-linguistic community that has inhabited it over long periods of time, despite the variability of its political, administrative, and ethnic boundaries over time. Conversely, migration literature is characterised by the deterritorialization and mobility of literary producers, reflecting their ambivalent ties with the host country and their homeland. Consequently, migrant literature rarely evolves into an independent literary system that encompasses its own media, institutions, readership, and critical discourse. In contrast, this is usually the case with a small literature, which fosters a more robust and independent literary ecosystem. The distinguishing feature of microliteratures, as a subcategory of small literatures, is the presence of an autonomous literary system, albeit on a small scale. This distinguishes microliteratures from other classifications such as minor literatures or those of diverse identity-based social minorities, including LGBTQ+ literature.

Contextualisation, variously focused, is a key element for knowledge production about small literatures. In addition to territorialisation and sedentariness, as the material basis for the community as producer of a small literature, history in a *longue durée* perspective gives an account of the development of the literary system over time and in relation to (and dependence of) the political, social and economic context of the community and the territory.

The discourse of self-awareness is a prominent feature of the metadiscourse of small literatures as it constitutes a valuable archive to account for the literature’s self-perception, while also bringing into conversation its perception from the outside by the major and neighbouring centres of the world literature system. The discourse of “smallness” (Glesener 161–65) is widespread in all genres and media and moves in opposite directions: while it represents and interprets the perceived ills and

traumas associated with being peripheral at certain points in time (such as being late, derivative, dependent and unrecognised), it also provides insight into systemically conditioned strategies and attitudes of resilience adopted by writers, actors and institutions for self-determination. These strategies vary greatly over time and depend on *and* are driven *by* the processes of institutionalisation and professionalisation. These, together with the quantitative size of a literature, are co-determinant for the position in the world literary system: the more institutionalized a field is and the more it invests into capillary worlding, the more visible its position in the world literary system is likely to be.

A corollary to literary peripherality in this respect is the linguistic world system. Peripherality is as much a question of size, location, history/age and institutionalisation of the literary system as it is of language. The literary world system and the linguistic world system are closely intertwined. Hypercentral and supracentral languages, to use de Swaan's (2001) terminology, are not only those of major literatures but *ipso facto* also of circulation and translation. Central languages (or national languages) and peripheral languages (in principle only used by native speakers), on the other hand, are always confronted with questions of larger circulation. Circulation is also conditioned by the linguistic organisation of a literary system. Literatures with a multilingual literary system, in which hypercentral and/or supracentral languages coexist with central and/or peripheral languages, are confronted with an endemic asymmetry regarding the dissemination of their literatures in different languages. While the production in hypercentral/supracentral languages is theoretically better positioned to circulate outside the system, since translation is not necessarily required and the central (national) languages can rely on capillary worlding processes, literary production in peripheral languages often faces an uphill struggle for international outreach, as energies are concentrated on promoting the production with more linguistically established capital. Multilingual Luxembourgish literature is a good case in point here: whereas literary texts written in French, German and English fulfil the linguistic prerequisite to travel to the neighbouring systems, those written in Luxembourgish, in absence of an efficient translation policy, struggle to cross borders.

If geospace, history and language form the system-defining context, then quantitative properties such as author population, readership, institutions, editors, annual production, translation rates, print productions are important metrics for judging the size of a small literary

system. There is no consensus yet on what upper and lower limits should apply to the size of the system, but demographics and the territory it occupies are valuable objective vectors to work with. However, as size indicators from studies of small political and economic states show, a small state can have a population ranging from a few thousand to several million. This is a crucial point that needs to be clarified by further research, but studies on small states offer potentially useful modelling opportunities: their positioning of small states in world politics and the geopolitics of great powers (Long 4) and their analysis of the structures and agency of small states could serve as a useful analogue heuristic tool for assessing the degree of autonomy or heteronomy of literary systems. The latter are key terms for the study of the position of small literatures in the space of world literature over time, as they evolve from emergent systems, often closely linked to the fate of their territories, to (semi)autonomous fields organised independently of political and economic powers. While the early initial phase exhibits all the hallmarks of heteronomy, as the literary field is still developing and literature is closely linked to the emergence of the (state/national) community and its national political concerns, later phases bear witness to the process of autonomisation and the gradual establishment of (aesthetic) rules, the book chain (writers, editors, libraries, critics, etc.), literary spaces (schools, academies, circles), literary discourses, instances of consecration and so on (Denis and Klinkenberg 30–31). The smallness of the literary system tends to manifest itself most prominently in the plurifunctionality (Đurišin *Interliterary Process* 133) of actors and functions in the book chain: while in large autonomous systems the overlap of functions is rare and the multifunctionality of actors seldom, smaller systems rely heavily on the versatility of its actors. Writers accumulate different functions by also being editors, critics or holding institutional posts. Small literary systems often qualify as semi-autonomous as they heavily rely on state subsidies for their existence. Semi-autonomy goes beyond the purely material aspect in that the authority vested in the international instances of authorial consecration exceeds that of the national instances (Bourdieu 4). Small systems thus exist under the influence (of trends, of themes, of structures) of larger systems. This last point brings in the notion of repertoire, understood here in a limited conception (as opposed to Even Zohar's understanding of repertoire as rules and models of culture planning) of genres, trends and styles. Small literatures are characterised by a limited repertoire since genres, trends and style may not be present

in the system in the same variety and abundance as in larger systems. The factors determining the presence or absence of elements of the repertoire vary from historical (the emergence of the literature and its subsequent development prevent genres, styles, trends from being present), political (in case of state-controlled literatures), the degree of professionalisation of the system (state subsidisation).

These preliminary reflections on definition are part of a larger conversation in the project Comparative History of Small Literatures in Europe which we coordinate for the committee Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages of ICLA. One of the main aims of our planned volume is to provide an overview of the historical and contextualised development of small literatures. This requires the development of a specific methodology based on the definition of small literatures outlined here. Further steps include the design of a typology that takes into account the various types of small literatures and the elaboration of a descriptive model to assess the specificities of the intricate web of dependencies and agencies of small literatures.

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Shifting Paradigms in Contemporary World Literature Studies

Alice Duhan, Stefan Helgesson, Christina Kullberg
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Abstract: *Literature and the Work of Universality*, the volume here reviewed, results from a Nobel Symposium held in Stockholm in 2022 that sought to address the apparent dichotomy between on the one hand the rise of world literature and on the other a rising call for particularity, or between the lures and pitfalls of globalization and the enticements of identitarianism of one kind or another, or yet again between the universal and the singular. In what follows, I critically review the volume's "Introduction" by Stefan Helgesson, and the contributions to its 4 constituent parts: Modes of Reading, Aesthetic Universalizations, The Human in and After Globalization, and Planetary Universality. Each part comprises 4 contributions by a diverse body of scholars drawn from Sweden, Norway, China, India, the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, Belgium, and South Africa.

Keywords: World Literature, Modes of Reading, Universalization, Globalization, Vernacularization, Climate Change

Literature and the Work of Universality results from a Nobel Symposium held in Stockholm in 2022 that sought to address the apparent dichotomy between on the one hand the rise of world literature and on the other a rising call for particularity, or between the lures and pitfalls

of globalization and the enticements of identitarianism of one kind or another, or yet again between the universal and the singular. In its attention to these opposing poles of literature and literary studies the volume can also be seen as a spin-off of “Cosmopolitan and Vernacular Dynamics in World Literatures,” a large research project funded by the Swedish Riskbankens Jubilaeumsfond from 2016 to 2021 and run by Helgesson and a number of his colleagues. The volume consists of an “Introduction” by Stefan Helgesson followed by 4 parts: Modes of Reading, Aesthetic Universalizations, The Human in and After Globalization, and Planetary Universality. Each part comprises 4 contributions by a diverse body of scholars drawn from Sweden, Norway, China, India, the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, Belgium, and South Africa.

In his “Introduction,” Helgesson argues against what he calls “blanket rejections of universality in contemporary theory” and for “approaching universality not in contrast to, but by way of, the concept of pluriversality” (3). He proposes distinguishing between “universalism as an instrument of power” and “universality as an unattainable yet unforfeitable aspiration” (3). To illustrate what he means, he engages in brief discussions of (passages from) James Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names*, and Sol Plaatje’s *Mhudi*. The chapters to follow, Helgesson announces, “traverse questions of literary appreciation, translation and strategies of form, as well as revolutionary, post-global and ecocritical vistas intimated by (mostly) contemporary literature” and in their trajectory “from text to planet ... register aspects of the ‘upscaling’ of the humanities in our multi-crisis present” (15).

The common denominator in the first part of *Literature and the Work of Universality* is what its title announces: modes of reading. Universality here is not something ascertained in the text, but a commonality distilled from several texts by the critic. In the first chapter in this part, Rosinka Chaudhuri discusses an essay (“‘I am Lost Somewhere’: Borges in London”) and a story (“Terminal”) by the Indian writer Nirmal Verma resulting from his encounter with Jorge Luis Borges in 1976 in London to explore the possibility that a shared “structure of feeling” might constitute some form of universality between writers that may otherwise be very different in their handling of form and content. The particular feeling Chaudhuri locates in both Verma and Borges is that of “not feeling ‘at home’” (24). According to Verma, the world’s writers could be divided into two categories: those that “belong to this world – Homer,

Tolstoy, Thomas Mann” and those “that deliver us rumours from the underground ... – Dostoyevsky, Kafka, and Borges.” Thus, Chaudhuri launches an appeal not to universalize the other but instead to read for what is “universalizable” in them.

Anders Olsson in his chapter, “Reading for Nobel and the Idea of the Universal,” traces how what he calls “reading for Nobel” has developed over the course of the Nobel Prize’s existence in function of which “idea of the universal” was pursued at any given period. Olsson is well placed for this discussion as he is a long-standing Member of the Swedish Academy and at present chairman of the Academy’s Nobel Committee for Literature. Concretely, he analyses how the meaning of “the universal” has shifted as the donor’s will came to be interpreted differently, resulting in a “gradual but slow transition of the prize from a European to a global horizon during the twentieth century, but also to a prize that is more in tune with the developments of modern literature” (39). Specifically, Olsson finds, one can distinguish four different interpretations that have been given to the “universal” in the history of the Nobel Prize: “(1) universal in terms of geographical extension, (2) universal in range of representation (race, gender, and culture), (3) universal accessibility and circulation and (4) universal recognition and acclaim, which can be established even when accessibility is lacking” (40). Olsson notes that especially in recent times there has been a clamour for various forms of “justice” to be granted a role in what passes for universal validity in literature but warns that “taste and justice are ... not be confused” and that literary merit should always remain paramount.

In “African Vernaculars and the Universal in Translation,” Moradewun Adejunmobi argues that “translation into vernacular languages represents one of several possible mechanisms for domesticating texts and cultural forms described as universal” (56). Texts and forms that have supposedly universal reach do not necessarily appeal immediately to communities that feel marginalized or peripheral in the world with which these texts resonate. Some form of domestication is needed to bring these texts into closer sync with the world as experienced by such communities. Translation is one possibility, but in most cases further accommodation will be required, such as vernacularizing non-local cultural referents. As Adejunmobi puts it, for a foreign text, and perhaps especially one promoting supposedly universal principles, to be accepted in the local cultural environment, “it has to be translated into the variety of idioms, registers and accents of a language used locally” (66). And “the more

controversial a practice or text is, the more it should be subjected to a radically domesticating form of translation, the more it should be vernacularized" (71). She concludes that "for the principles, practices and texts presented as universal to be fortified against easy dismissal on account of their real or supposed foreignness, the universal will have to be translated, domesticated and vernacularized" (73). With this plea for a domesticating form of translation, Adejunmobi goes against the principle of foreignizing translation commonly associated with Lawrence Venuti and advocated by most "orthodox" comparative literature scholars these days.

Gang Zhou in "Multiple Vernacularizations" aims to describe "several processes of vernacularization under specific conditions of place, culture, and time, focusing on the connection between vernacularization and contacts and clashes of cultures and civilization" as "vernacularization takes distinctive forms in different places" (77). She illustrates this with examples from Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Turkish, Russian, and Indian literature. This also leads her to hold a plea for abandoning the apparently ingrained attitude in world literature studies to start from a West/non-West dichotomy but instead to pursue "a thorough study of multiple vernacularizations" and thus "to paint a picture of world literature with different colours and shades" (91). This appeal will be reiterated in the last essay of the entire collection, again from a Chinese-inspired perspective.

The second part of *Literature and the Work of Universality* focuses on "aesthetic universalizations," that is to say on artistic forms or practices that can be seen as shared or sharable across individual or collective narratives, utterances, or performances. The first essay in this part, "(Im) Personal Style: James Baldwin, Joan Didion and the Inscription of the Universal," by Remo Verdickt and Pieter Vermeulen, "interrogates the contemporary fascination with the personal dimension of non-fiction writing" by way of Didion's *Slouching towards Bethlehem* and *The White Album*, and Baldwin's *Notes of a Native Son* and *Nothing Personal*" (97). For Verdickt and Vermeulen, in spite of the differences between Baldwin and Didion they readily acknowledge, "there is an unmistakable stylistic affinity between their work" and "this affinity can be described as a refusal of the personal that opens their writing up to a universal impulse that necessarily escapes the interplay between the personal and social formations" (100). The "relentless stylistic commitment to opening up the closures of the personal and the social to a universal

horizon and their concomitant refusal to seek refuge in an identitarian affirmation of difference count as what we call a ‘minor’ universalism’ – a minor universalism that is arguably appropriate to an age beset by the discontents of both ‘major’ universalisms and identitarian difference” (101–102).

Tsitsi Iaji, in “Surface Listening: American Accents, African Agendas” is interested in finding out what it takes “to sound like a movie star, and specifically, how did the sound of outlaw cowboy figures circulate and translate into the sonic world of West Africa? (117). Subject of her investigation are *The Adventures of Four Stars* by J.A. Anyichie and *Cinéma* by Tierno Monémbo. Iaji’s essay creatively mixes analytic and poetic passages, using several different fonts to boot. What is clear throughout, though, is that blackness is at the centre of her concerns. Fittingly, then, she concludes with: “It cannot be that all lives matter, unless Black Lives Matter. This is perhaps the fundamental American dilemma. And America’s supercharged power has made this every Black person’s problem. More than a century after the first Pan-African Conference, the problem of the colour line remains a global one. This makes racism everyone’s problem. The one universal” (136).

In “Circles of Change: Concrete Universality in the Aesthetics of Protest and Revolution,” Stefan Jonsson sets out to explore “the ability of literary and aesthetic works to perform and present universality in the context of collective political protest” (141). Jonsson sees such collective protest universalized in the movie *Spartacus*, as written by Dalton Trumbo, and *Fuenteovejuna*, a play by the Spanish Golden Age playwright Lope de Vega. Both works portray all members of a community assuming joint responsibility for an act of resistance to repressive established authority. For a contemporary example, Jonsson draws on Amira Hanafi’s *Dictionary of the Revolution*, in which the Egyptian author transforms “thousands of statements voiced by two hundred interviewees” (157) about the Arab Spring revolution in Cairo into “a collective documentary novel in digital format” (160). Thus, “the dominant terms and ideas of the Revolution are translated back into the ‘talk’ of the people, the vernacular *kernel*, prefiguring a utopian thing or *thing* that cannot be properly represented as such, but that we perhaps are allowed to think of as a collective fulfilment of social justice” (160).

Uhuru Portia Phalafala, in “Erotics of Revolution: Mongane Serote and the Black Cosmological Archive,” “seeks to surface forms of being, knowing, aestheticizing and doing rooted in acoustemologies or sound

knowledges from the Southern African Black cosmological archive” (167). Instead of the material and ocularcentric cosmology introduced by colonialism, Phalafala draws on Ntu philosophy to “locate Serote’s life and work in a matrilineal tradition that I call the matriarchive, which informs fluidity of being and relating based on magnanimity” (167). She defines this matriarchive as “a reparative grammar of belonging rooted in indigenous languages, cosmologies and interiority, tied to feminine energy, ancestral, communal and intergenerational wisdom” (169). “The Black archive – the matriarchive and indigenous cosmologies – is the cornerstone of Black radicalism in Southern Africa,” Phalafala concludes. It remains an open question, at least to me, whether or how Phalafala advocates such Black archive also as cornerstone of a form of universality beyond Southern Africa.

In the two remaining parts of *Literature and the Work of Universality* the categories grouping the respective contributions are more concrete, and therefore perhaps more readily accessible for the reader, than in the first two parts. The third part, which looks at “the human in and after globalization,” starts off with an essay by Daniel Hartley titled “Peasant Modernism: World Literature and the Future of Agriculture.” As Hartley himself puts it: “this chapter focuses on two texts that connect agriculture to the futural force of modernity whilst providing an immanent critique of modernity’s limitations” (191). To argue his point, Hartley analyses Alexander Chayanov’s *The Journey of My Brother Alexei to the Land of the Peasant Utopia*, a Russian novel of the 1920s, and Bessie Head’s *When Rain Clouds Gather*, of the late 1960s. In the Soviet Union in the 1920s, modernity and modernization were exclusively pictured under the aegis of industrialization and urbanization in accordance with what was seen as “the dominant image of modern universal history” (200). Chayanov’s novel provides a powerful critique of what became the “communist imaginary” (200) for the next century. Head’s novel, Hartley contends, “could be read as a critical forerunner of present-day agroecology” (201). The answer to the various clashing views of how to revitalize a village’s environment “is cooperative agriculture” (204). Chayanov and Head can thus be seen as forerunners, or as Hartley puts it, “retrospectively, as fellow travellers” (206) of present-day attempts “to reappropriate expropriated land, to localize food networks, to abolish the country-city divide, to close nutrient cycles, to recommodify inputs and to break with the disarticulation caused by export-oriented global commodity chains” (205–206).

For Gesine Müller in “post-global Aesthetics in Latin America: Beyond Universality” “the core question is to what extent are emerging literary expressions new ways of creating the world – departing from the universalistic ideas of literature that have been so deeply ingrained in twentieth-century Latin American literature and especially in their European reception?” (210). She proposes *Welt(er)schöpfung* (world exhaustion/creation) as a suitable term/concept with which to approach present-day Latin American literature as represented in novels by the Mexican Yuri Herrera, the Uruguayan Fernanda Trias, and the Argentinians Pola Oloixarac and Martín Felipe Castagnet. Müller focuses on two thematic aspects in these novels: digitization and pandemics. “With a view to the ongoing debate over world literature,” Müller observes in the novels she analyses “a highly productive artistic confrontation with pandemic and digital realities in imagined spaces,” which might serve as a role model for realities beyond Latin America but for which the “Latin American perspective is a decisive one given that writers there, more than anywhere else, have been responding to the asymmetries of globalization processes in works of literature that enjoy worldwide circulation through strong connections to Western markets and narrative forms” (225).

Latin American literature is also the focus of Jorge J. Locane’s “Overcoming the Cosmopolitanism-Vernacularism Opposition in Latin America: Juan Rulfo and the Nordic Countries; Juan L. Ortiz and China.” Locane sets out by reaffirming “the core-periphery model” (232) which in his opinion has been all too readily abandoned in favour of a “polycentric cartography ... generally enunciated from the Global North ... inspired by an ideal and optimistic representation of the world” (231). He argues that one has to make a distinction as to the positions literatures occupy in the world-system: “the vernacular, like the cosmopolitan, manifests itself differently in the centre than in the periphery” (237). Specifically, he contends that “if, in the imperial capitals of the modern world-system, the vernacularist discourse has served to construct national languages, racial hierarchies and canonical writers exported to the rest of the world as universally valid, in the peripheries, it has been used to support defensive positionings, such as those of indigenous groups mobilized against mega-mining, or those clearly affirmative of hybrid solutions or transcultural syntheses, as has been reflected in a whole current of thought, ranging from Fernando Ortiz to Néstor García Canclini” (237). In Rulfo and Ortiz, Locane argues, we find “interperipheral or translocal coalitions” (242), in Rulfo with Nordic European literatures and in Ortiz

with Chinese literature. For this kind of literature, he proposes the term “pluriversal literature” rather than world literature, a concept that would “open the way to a universalism that is effectively decentred, respectful of singularities and, therefore, capable of overcoming the totalizing and totalitarian universe of the Western tradition” (243).

Markus Messling opens his “Fashioning Universality in Literature: Mohamed Mbougar Sarr’s *La plus secrète mémoire des hommes*” with briefly outlining two approaches to discussions of world literature. In the first approach, universality is “related to norms produced in social and political interactions,” while in the second it is “an emotional and normative possibility” that opens up “concrete settings toward a shared horizon, humanity and historical justice” (245). For Messling, Sarr’s novel raises the question of “how it might be possible to bring together a repair of the self that has been destroyed by colonialism and a search for what connects human beings. Is literature inescapably linked to identity? Or does it possess a universal mission rooted in its own, unique aesthetic value?” (257). “Now that the concept of Western humanism has been stripped of its legitimacy,” Messling posits, literature “must narratively delineate, in multiple attempts, the challenge this concept poses” (258). In Sarr’s novel this translates into what Messling terms “minor universality”: “a universality that cannot be assumed in conceptual terms but takes shape as the goal that emerges when the ideal of humanity is transformed into a narrative quest” (256).

The final part of *Literature and the Work of Universality* addresses what most present-day scholars of world literature would probably recognize as one of the most pressing issues weighing on the field. Titled “Planetary Universality” it focuses on issues of ecology and climate change. In the first essay, “The Aesthetics of Global Realism: Scales, Models, Technology, Ecology,” Debjani Ganguly reflects on “the challenges of thinking realist form in relation to questions of scale and magnitude that surpass the normal bounds of human experience” (265). Whereas realism in its classical formulation limited itself to the realm of human events and agencies, it now has “to reckon with scalar variations that are non-anthropocentric, where the human subject is one among a multitude of nonhuman agents such as animals, insects, atmosphere, water, earth and technology” (265). Hence, Ganguly argues, “in novel studies today, the ground of formal realism is no longer mimesis, if by this we mean the reassuring intermediate world of embodied experience, human-scale reality, to which our perceptual, cognitive and affective apparatus is

attuned,” but rather the realm of “the speculative” informed by big data, digital modelling, and simulations that shape “our phenomenological apprehension of the world” (275). Accordingly, she defines “the contemporary global novel of the realist variety” as “a mutant form that not only has its pulse on our catastrophic present but also one that encodes futurity in the present as it registers the shock of unpredictable biosocial and geological transformations on a planetary scale” (278). This mutant form is not to be conceived as a form of science fiction, as the latter is concerned with the future of humanity, but instead as “planetary realism” (280).

Sarah Nuttall, in “Pluviality and Drought in J.M. Coetzee’s *Life and Times of Michael K*,” holds a plea for rereading earlier texts with new questions raised by the present-day “acceleration of the multi-crises we now face, including the sustainability of the Earth itself” (283). Coetzee’s novel, Nuttall reminds us, has generally been read “for its dramatization of the problems of how the individual should be situated in relation to history” while “it has passed largely unobserved that it rains incessantly for the first 39 pages of the novel – and that conditions of pluviality (rain that causes flooding) and dryness are crucial to the novel’s registers of extraction, abandonment and care in its looped hinterlands from the port city of Cape Town into the uplands of the Karoo” (284). In fact, she finds that throughout Coetzee’s novel, “engineering, infrastructural and ontological projects both large and small are subjected to climatic and ontological conditions of rain and flooding, drought and aridity” (296). Thus, the novel is not only about the survival or death of Michael K but also that of the land itself.

In “Amitav Ghosh and Twenty-First-Century World Literature: Climate Change and the Collective Imaginary,” Thomas Hylland Eriksen posits that “if contemporary world literature is to be worthy of its label, it needs to take Goethe’s *Weltliteratur* a step further, from anthropocentrism towards a posthumanism which is ecological in its scope without being dismissive of humanity” (299). In the way they “connect small communities and individuals to the global historical processes that have shaped their circumstances,” Ghosh’s fictions consistently address “global scales – the big ‘here’ – and deep history – the long ‘now’” (301). For Eriksen, Ghosh “takes the standard postcolonial critique of North Atlantic supremacism a step further than usual by showing how the current global crisis of climate and the environment is a direct descendant of the reasoning and practices of imperialism, which must be understood

in the context of the historically unique juncture of capitalist expansion, state ambitions propped up by military power, the Scientific Revolution, and the ambition to understand nature in order to control it" (302). This North Atlantic or Western universalism has led to the universality of climate change and environmental catastrophe. If in Ghosh's early fiction the relationship of imperialism to climate injustice takes center-place, in his more recent fictions the focus shifts to "the role of scientific knowledge and technology, and their relationship to local knowledges, skills and cosmologies" (307). From Ghosh's fiction emerge "the contours of the new world literature, postcolonial and ecological" (313).

In the final essay in the volume, Adeline Johns-Putra, Xi Liu, Loredana Cesarino, and Guohong Mai pose the question "Whose World? Whose World Literature? Looking for Climate Fiction in China." They argue that "while Chinese science fiction, including its ecologically themed strand, has no doubt been influenced by international developments in science fiction, it is important to understand that it also possesses characteristics borne of internal Chinese dynamics, giving rise to its social-commentary credentials" with as result that "politically engaged ecological science fiction is a notable development in China, even if there seems to be a paucity of climate fiction specifically" (322). In the Chinese dynastic histories we find descriptions of climate, or more widely weather phenomena, under the sign of the equilibrium between the heavenly and the human to be maintained by the emperor as part of the so-called "mandate of heaven" legitimizing his power. As the authors put it: "Climatic and other meteorological observations such as astronomical phenomena were automatically recorded and understood to be part of the context of government – indicators or omens of governmental success or failure, or rationales behind the actions of emperors or officials" (326). They conclude that "rather than rush to explore literary representations of the Anthropocene from around the planet, our ultimate aim is to shed light on these representations in terms of their worlds and their histories, not *the* world and history in the singular" (330), a shortsighted approach they lay at the door of Western world literature studies.

In the way it scales up the issue of universalism/universality from the individual level of "structures of feeling" in the first essay of the collection to the field of "the planetary" in the concluding essays, *Literature and the Work of Universality* runs the full gamut of the questions the study of world literature raises, or should raise, today. Whereas in an earlier phase of contemporary world literature studies, roughly from the end

of the 1990s through the first decade of the twenty-first century, the question of universality was placed primarily under the aegis of the global and globality, meaning a coverage as wide as possible, and a fair representation, of the world's literatures, since then attention has shifted to the issues exemplarily addressed in the present volume. As such, this is not only a timely but a vital contribution to world literature studies.

The Multiple Facets of Literary Theory Ideology

Dorothy Figueira and Jean Bessière, eds. *Criticism, Literary Theory and Ideology. Critique, théorie littéraire et idéologie*. Paris: Honoré Champion, 2024. Pp. 358.

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Abstract: This review examines *Criticism, Literary Theory and Ideology*, edited by Dorothy Figueira and Jean Bessière, a collection of essays that interrogate the intersections between literary theory and ideology within the context of criticism. Across an array of geographical and historical contexts, particularly from countries often left unheard, each contributor detects and examines the ideology embedded in a given text in order to reveal the way in which it questions or perpetuates power dynamics, like gender, race, politics, social, and cultural issues, thereby offering a clearer understanding of the text in question. Readers are encouraged to revisit the works of major literary theorists, whose critiques are re-evaluated through the contributors' scope of analysis. This review nevertheless identifies structural and conceptual gaps, particularly the unclear division between Part I and II and the lack of a unified definition of ideology. Still, the volume enriches the multi-faceted debate on literature's critical and cultural power.

Keywords: Ideology, Literary Theory, Criticism, Comparative Literature, Postcolonial Studies, Aesthetics

With *Criticism, Literary Theory and Ideology*, Dorothy Figueira and Jean Bessière wish to illustrate the extent to which researchers are influenced by their own social reality and that of the texts or the literary genre they analyse. This collection of essays seeks to explore the intersections

between literary theory and ideology within the context of criticism. In order to demonstrate the breadth and depth of the ideological enrooting in contemporary academic spheres, the editors focus on a vast array of different types of ideologically influenced literature(s), exploring terrains back and forth between North and South America, South and East Asia as well as Western, Central, and Eastern Europe. The readers will note, however, that the African continent is notably absent from the discussion. The aspiration towards a plurality of voices derives directly from the editors' background in Comparative Literature – a discipline that clearly conditioned the publication of this volume, as noted by Figueira in her introduction – along with a desire to show the way in which peripheral centres of culture have tried to challenge the ideological hegemony of the West. The essays collected in this volume all strive to present, within their historical contexts, various ideologies that at times oppose or respond to one another. With a specific focus within this large geographical and thus historical panel of points of view, each contributor contends that literature is inevitably conditioned and influenced, and therefore cannot escape ideology. Within the context of literature, ideology can be understood as a set of beliefs and worldviews that shape and determine the narratives and/or characters of the stories, often mirroring the authors' own perspective(s) or the one(s) they wish to convey in the text. It is, therefore, the role of literary critics to detect and examine the ideology embedded in a given text in order to reveal the way in which it questions or perpetuates power dynamics, like gender, race, politics, social, and cultural issues, thereby offering a clearer understanding of the text in question.

For the sake of greater clarity, Figueira and Bessière decided to divide the book into two parts: one more theoretical in focus and another based on literary or cultural production. Part One, "Theory and Ideology," aims to show that criticism and literary theory are, in fact, literary ideologies, insofar as they develop and apply a specific idea of literature. In effect, because the Humanities, as a whole, deal with human experience, they cannot pretend to be entirely objective and thus escape ideology. Part II, "Literary/Cultural Production and Pedagogy," tries to offer an array of case studies in literature and culture that are all conditioned by ideology. One by one, each contributor adopts a specific perspective on literary theory and attempts to identify the overt and/or covert ideologies associated with it, so as to delineate the initial boundaries of the relationship between ideology and literature or culture.

As the editors of the book, Jean Bessière, in the opening essay, and Dorothy Figueira, in the closing one, offer more experimental reflections on literature as a discipline. For Bessière, literature corresponds to a “super-object” (28), a multitude of things impossible to define due to its intersectionality and intertextuality, and prefers to qualify it as a means of accessing the world, a “medium” (30). In fact, each literary theory develops a version of literature that cannot be shared with other theories precisely because each foregrounds a set of literary ideologies. As a result, Bessière notes, critics cannot – and, perhaps, will not – agree on one single definition of literature. On the other hand, Figueira proposes a reflection on the state of Comparative Literature and the danger it is currently facing in the academic context of the United States. The greatest threat her field of expertise faces is the more fashionable World Literature. She contrasts the “in-depth knowledge of other cultures and languages” promoted by Comparative Literature with the “superficial and unidirectional overview” of World Literature “with anglophone culture as the one recognizing the non-anglophone and (often) non-white ‘camarados’” (328). Her main issue is that, by replacing Comparative Literature in an academic context, World Literature silences original (and native) perspectives and points of view through the English translations.

Criticism, Literary Theory and Ideology offers a multitude of examples of different ways of assimilating ideology in literary studies and critically engaging with it. Thus, due to the space limit and the abundant number of authors, I shall only focus on the contributions that I thought offered the most compelling analyses and added to the wider debate on the crossroads between ideology and literary theory. Repeatedly, most scholars in this book insist on the power of literature to include and represent different perspectives, different values, and different socio-politico-historical contexts that enable the readers to grasp different ideologies present in a given text. The large array of case studies aims to open the readers’ perspective(s) as regards literary theories and their ties to different forms of ideology, exploring Marxism, Aestheticism, Modernism, Post-Structuralism, Post-Colonial and a few others.

Iphita Chanda understands ideology as inextricably linked with the notion of “perspective” since, for her, ideology is an angle “through which we transform a set of assumptions located in history, time and place, into a generalized theory, with prefixed results” (39). In order to overcome the issue a one-sided argument could create, researchers might resort to “intersubjectivity” or the “ideology of plurality,” which incidentally

perfectly suits the discipline of Comparative Literature as it opens a dialogue between a multitude of points of view. By including different perspectives of decoding the world, the “Other,” namely the one coming from another culture, becomes a gateway to better understanding. In other words, “[e]ngaging with difference is actively decentering one’s individual perception” (49). Chanda argues that literature is an ideal medium for such an ideology, as authors can portray different characters or populations whose cultures clash with one another, nevertheless offering diversity.

Tomo Virk demonstrates that criticism is a set of specific ideological formations, thereby identifying a broad sense and a narrow sense of ideology. On the one hand, he presents the broad sense of ideology as a “value-neutral” horizon simply shaping and determining our behaviour, views, and values without even being aware of it (76–77). On the other hand, the narrow sense, for Virk, is much less neutral, as it expresses an individual’s dogmatic affiliation to religious or political worldviews, modes of thinking, actions and judgements (77). In doing so, he is the first in the collection to clearly outline the notion of “ideology.” To give flesh to his theoretical argument and to illustrate the connection between ideology and hermeneutics, Virk concentrates on Wayne Booth’s *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (1988). In his monograph, Booth re-evaluates the literary reception of Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* and François Rabelais’s *Gargantua and Pantagruel* in a contemporary context. Both works have recently received severe backlash for being racist or patronising towards women, respectively. Virk notes that Booth’s use of “ideological criticism” reveals that values are already “present in the work itself” and “are only actualized by the reader in his or her own way” (79). Virk also insists on Booth’s argument, according to which aesthetic evaluation is intrinsically linked with ethical conduct. In every literary work, Virk explains, there are “situations that are ethically controversial from our current point of view or from that of our current ideology” (80).

Valerio Massimo De Angelis examines the identification of the ideology seeping through both the form and the content of a given text. He goes back to the fundamental question of “who has the authority to speak and write for whom?” (92). In his scope of investigation, he chooses to concentrate on the danger of the “essentialist ideology” that represents individuals or collectives of individuals in literature as the supreme cultural authority for their culture. He first refers to Suman Gupta’s definition of “identity politics” as being the assumption that

“only those who can identify themselves with or are identified with a particular identity-based collective can authentically and authoritatively assume the political position appropriate to that particular collective” (89). De Angelis then argues that literary “individual creativity” can easily be subverted and perceived as “a tool to express the identity of the group,” thus investing the writer with “the supreme cultural authority of representing the values of the whole community to which s/he belongs” (90). The readers understand that thanks to both concepts, De Angelis illustrates the extent to which identitarian theories, such as race, sexuality, class, or ethnicity, all serve the dominant culture in its attempts to maintain groups of individuals in precise social hierarchies. Thus, De Angelis warns the readers against literary theories based on “ideologies of identity” because “they run the risk of fetishizing the text as something with a ‘meaning of its own,’” restricting the text to “one correct meaning, and only one critical way to assess it” (95). Finally, De Angelis concentrates on a subcategory of ideology of identity, namely “ideology of ethnicity.” A clear example of this is the debate following the translations of black African American poet Amanda Gorman. Readers and critics requested that her poems be (re-)translated by black translators, which led to the withdrawal from the market of some published translations. Moreover, some publishing houses were accused of reverse racism. Here, De Angelis shows that “ideology of ethnicity actually endorses a policy of censorship” (103).

In his essay, William J. Kennedy presents a historical overview of critical theory since the 1970s. He begins by ascertaining that both structuralism and deconstruction “outline methods of interpretation that serve a designated ideology” rather than simply present said ideology because they are both “anti-historic” (109). In other words, they are not subjected to the ideological tendencies of a given period and therefore can be transposed into any given context, and hence ideology. Structuralism is only concerned with the analysed text *as is*, that is “as an immanent analysis of a single text” regardless of the system in which it is historically found (110). Whereas deconstruction re-evaluates the binary logic of identity “by arguing that structural dissonance always already undermines the sustainability of absolute logic” (110). Kennedy advances, as a response to these theories, three of what he calls “ideological communities”: Post-Colonialism, New Historicism, and Neo-Marxism. He then turns to detailing the theories of Theodor W. Adorno and Hans-Georg Gadamer, focusing on their aversion to ideology. Adorno believed

that the “truth content of an artwork” depends on its process, time and history (116). Said differently, both the content and the form of a piece of art are marked by its “social and historical character” (116). In the logic of negative capability, art is inscribed into ideology but functions in opposition. On the other hand, Kennedy explains that Gadamer’s antipathy to ideology is characterised by an understanding of a “multi-dimensional” and “multi-layered” notion of truth that can only be accessed thanks to a deeply organic process (116).

Haun Saussy approaches ideology via Louis Althusser’s theory of “interpellation,” which entails that ideology hails the individual into a predetermined place of subjecthood (123). In other words, whether it be within the context of one’s family, one’s job, or any other social relationship, ideology calls the individual out and offers that individual a specific identity to fulfil, making everyone a subject of ideology. This, Saussy reveals using Michel Lee’s argument, corresponds to a negation of the individual: there are “only subjects, who come into being when they are hailed or interpellated by ideology” (125). With this premise, Saussy identifies a “strange loop.” Using Judith Butler’s example, he explains to his readers that, for a subject to be called out – that is, given a name – there needs to be a subject that already ticks all the boxes of that name. In other words, a name creates what it names, but can only name what has already been created.

Anne Tomiche’s essay focuses on the presence of ideology in gender studies. She compares the debates on “gender ideology” that have taken place in the Anglo-Saxon world and those in France. On the French front, Tomiche denounces Nathalie Heinich’s war against “feminist activism,” in which “deconstruction,” “wokeism,” “cultural studies,” “decolonial thought,” “gender theory,” and “ecofeminism” all get confused (172; my translation). Tomiche also relates Sonia Erikainen’s denunciation of “gender ideology” on the basis of its supposed refutation of “biological sex” (173). She first deconstructs the expression “anti-gender,” which consists of “a rejection and denunciation of ‘gender’ for the sake of a fight against a dangerous ideology” (174; my translation). While the term “gender” entered the English vocabulary fairly early, especially compared to “genre” in French, Tomiche nevertheless illustrates how American Catholics and Evangelists were at the forefront of the “anti-gender movement” contesting a so-called “gender ideology” (176; my translation). Then, she tackles the conceptualisation of gender as “going against nature.” This views gender as “a strategy to attack the notion

of family that can only be based on a heterosexual model” (178; my translation). Such a theory wishes to “discredit the ‘gender’ category because it is considered an ideology” imposing a certain set of values on heteronormativity (180; my translation). Finally, Tomiche deconstructs “gender-critical feminism” as a concept that considers only biological women in the name of purity. By examining “gender-critical feminism” as an ideology that pretends to defend women from a biological point of view, Tomiche shows that those who are quick to accuse gender studies of following a perverted ideology actually let themselves be influenced by an ideology of their own.

Thanks to his analysis of Hindi poetry, E. V. Ramakrishnan comments upon the reception of and resistance to the ideology of “making it new” inherited from Western Modernism, which he qualifies as “an aesthetic practice [...] embody[ing] a critique of Enlightenment modernity” (211). After chronicling the emergence of “modernity-modernism” as a literary theory in the Indian subcontinent, Ramakrishnan develops Kumaran Asan’s critique of the authoritarian impulse in India, directly inherited from Western, British colonisation. Through his poetry, Asan denounces a political conservatism that relegated “large sections of [the Indian population] to silence” (215). According to Ramakrishnan, Asan’s ability to distance himself from everyday struggle allows him to maintain a critical gaze towards the social and political tensions in his country. Ramakrishnan successfully differentiates Indian modernism from Western modernism. Indeed, since modernism in the subcontinent truly emerged at the end of the colonial era, the Indian branch “does not share the metropolitan aspirations of its European counterparts” (216). However, while resisting the Western modernist ideology, Indian modernism – especially in poetry – nevertheless grounds itself in the modernist experience of social conflict and political struggle. In order to illustrate Indian modernist poetry, Ramakrishnan refers to *Taar Saptak*, an anthology edited by Agyea in 1943, which marks the beginning of the Hindi modernist movement in poetry. Together with his own poetry collection, *Trishanku* (1945), Agyea develops an aesthetic grounded in an “ahistorical, psychological domain, which retreats into ‘bunkers of individualism’ and results in reinforcing the status-quo [*sic*]” (217). This high modernist approach was crucial to the development of Hindi “new poetry.” Because old poetic media no longer addressed the new generation’s disillusionment and exasperation, Hindi “new poetry” incorporated Western modernism’s disruptive impact. By the 1970s,

Ramakrishnan explains, India faced a new crisis of ideas and values, which conditioned the appearance of a newer generation of modernist poets. These poets responded to the political and social struggles of their time. These examples enable Ramakrishnan to clarify the extent to which the “indigenous narrative in India enabled poetry to develop greater self-reflexivity regarding its critical function in society and art” (223).

Dong Yang looks at the philosophy of Li Zehou, a Chinese scholar whose work was pivotal for the Chinese “New Enlightenment” in the 1980s. Yang qualifies Li’s philosophical system as a “heretical rendition of Marxist humanism” mixed with “Kantian transcendental metaphysics” and a Confucian notion of the primacy of emotion (225). Yang proposes to understand Li’s philosophy as an aesthetic theory able to give a corrective to the ideologically driven class conflict and violent struggle resulting from the Chinese Cultural Revolution. The aim is to provide a “depoliticized politics” in order to rebuild a new apolitical power system (226). Yang underlines Li’s emphasis on “the concepts of harmony, beauty, freedom, and the sublime” (226). Following the philosophical lineage of Duns Scotus, Baruch Spinoza, and Gilles Deleuze, Li’s theory seeks an “expansion of Kantian and Marxist conceptions of time and space” but, nevertheless, “refuses to posit a higher realm beyond aesthetics which for him *is* the univocal plane of pure immanence” (227; original emphasis). Yang further explains that Li formulated a new aesthetically inclined philosophical theory of subjectivity out of the ruins of a preceding ideological disturbance. At its core, Li’s aesthetic allows “the subject to reach back to its preoriginary ontological position, thereby acknowledging the Gestalt isomorphism between human and nature” (229). This entails that human beings are both “concrete and abstract, particular and universal, empirical and transcendental, emotional and rational” (229). In other words, Li is interested in a sphere that unites and encompasses individual essences and qualities and allows them to coexist in both virtual and actual forms. Yang then illustrates how Li’s alternative sphere serves as “an invisible critique that negates the revolutionary ideology” and recommends that his readers understand it as a political strategy (240).

Monica Schmitz-Emans reflects on the literary theories of the Fantastic and Fantasy genres to assess their affinity with ideology based on the relationship with or reaction to prior cultural knowledge of the real, the (super-)natural, and the otherworldly. She begins her argument with a consideration of Ann Radcliffe’s essay “On the Supernatural in Poetry” (Radcliffe) as one of the first texts to theoretically discuss

Fantastic literature as a genre, specifically the Gothic novel. Schmitz-Emans considers it an important text because it defines terms like “natural,” “supernatural,” “reality,” and even the notions of “good” and “evil” (259). She then continues to describe the intrinsic link between the Fantastic and ideology throughout the ages. First, she explores Lars Gustafsson’s anti-fantastic ideologies, which are classical positivism and classical Marxism, insofar as they are “systems of thought that presuppose the ability to form and control the world” (261). She, then, moves to the French theories of the Fantastic, which view the genre as a literary form that “plays with fear” (265) or generates a “disturbance of reason” (266). Schmitz-Emans further identifies a point of convergence between Roger Caillois, Louis Vax, and Tzvetan Todorov, namely the “distinction between the natural and the supernatural” (269). She contrasts these scholars’ theories with the Post-Todorovian ones regarding the “variability of what is considered ‘real’ and accepted as ‘natural’” (269). Schmitz-Emans argues that because the Fantasy genre proposes an emancipation from the factual, it is considered critical of ideology. But, on the other hand, if it is interpreted as an escape from reality, taking refuge in literary imagination, it can easily fall back into the ideological. In fact, since it situates itself as a response to a natural order, it is subject to ideology.

In her contribution to this volume, Subha Chakraborty Dasgupta investigates the Post-Colonial turn in Bengali literary studies and its ties to ideology. She formulates her argument around the Marxist critic Debes Ray’s analysis of the incorporation and exhibition of the ideology of colonisation in Bengali literature. The latter’s approach is characterised by “an all-encompassing postcolonial ideological perspective” (277). Dasgupta particularly insists on Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of the novel and the influence it had on Ray. What particularly struck Ray was that “Bakhtin was not drawing a line between early narratives and the modern novel, but taking up the aesthetic experience of modern novels, and then trying to find correspondences in early literature” (281). Thanks to Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay’s scholarship, Dasgupta explains Ray’s critique of the Bengali novel’s alienation from its indigenous form due to its being conditioned by the ideology of the West. She also notes that Ray constructed a theory centred on a post-colonial ideology in order to free the authors’ creative impulse from foreign systems. This enabled him and possibly other authors “to bring a new direction to his own creative endeavors” (287). In his latest production, *Upanyaser Bibidh Sankat* (2018), Ray recognised that the Bengali novel had “freed itself

from outside influences” (287). Dasgupta thus points out that “writing in one’s own language as a subject of imperialism is in itself a sign of resistance,” which initiates a process of healing (288).

Notwithstanding the quality of the scholarship reviewed above, I would wish to share two major issues I detected in this collection of essays. First, the delineation between the two parts is somewhat blurry. The readers are constantly left wondering why the editors chose to put a given essay in the theoretical part and not in the more practical part, or *vice versa*. As a result, the conversation between the two parts occurs very rarely, if ever. It would have been perhaps pedagogically clearer to further separate the theory from the rest and make the practical essays use the theories laid out in the first part in the fashion of a one-to-one dialogue. Perhaps this would also have solved my second issue, namely the lack of a clear definition of “ideology” that would have been the backbone of the book. It is true that the book’s blurb proposes a definition: “a system of ideas in criticism and theory.” But does that definition of ideology suffice to hold the argument of a multi-voiced book? I am afraid it is not. And if the editors find a certain common thread in all the essays of the collection, they should have probably made it transpire more in the introduction and the conclusion. While some other contributors define the specific understanding of “ideology” needed for their argument – see, for example, Virk or De Angelis – only Schmitz-Emans provides the readers with a clear reflection on the term “ideology.” In her essay, she defines “ideology” as a “system of basic assumptions about the ‘world’ that are not subject to further critical scrutiny, including their ethical and political implications. Ideologies are not only based on conceptual systems, they often also refer to assumed ontological structures; they often postulate the existence of orders [...] as well as the validity of ethical-political value systems” (257). The lack of a clear delineation of the book’s argument also explains why the notion of pedagogy, mentioned as a key concept of Part II, is almost absent in the volume; only Figueira and Schmitz-Emans consider the issue.

Thanks to *Criticism, Literary Theory and Ideology*, however, the readers learn to question and investigate the notion of “ideology” that seeps into literary theory, on the one hand, and different genres of literature or cultural production, on the other. Readers are encouraged to revisit the works of major literary theorists, such as Terry Eagleton, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Mikhail Bakhtin, Roland Barthes, Gilles Deleuze, Judith Butler, and Hans-Georg Gadamer, whose critiques are

re-evaluated through the contributors' scope of analysis. The collection also offers intriguing interpretations by critics worldwide, particularly from countries often left unheard, most likely due to ideology. Summing up, with this new collection of essays, Figueira and Bessière propose a fresh and multi-faceted reflection on the power and nature of literature, although some areas will still require further critical scrutiny.

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COMPTES RENDUS / BOOK REVIEWS

Bernard Dieterle, Manfred Engel, Laura Vordermayer, eds. *Making – or not Making – Sense of Dreams/Trouver – ou non – un sens au rêve*

**Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2024. Pp. 479.
ISBN: 9783826087387**

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Making – or Not Making – Sense of Dreams, edited by Bernard Dieterle, Manfred Engel, and Laura Vordermayer (Königshausen & Neumann, 2024), provides a wide-ranging interdisciplinary exploration of how dreams are interpreted – or deliberately left *uninterpreted* – across various cultural and artistic contexts. As the ninth volume in the Cultural Dream Studies series, this 480-page edited collection comprises 19 chapters (mainly written in English, with several in German and French). These chapters either delve into the persistent endeavour to decode the enigmatic nature of dreams in order to “make sense” of them; or they explore approaches that embrace the dream’s inherent ambiguity and resistance to conventional understanding by foregrounding the enjoyment of the aesthetics and otherness of the dream. The collection features a diverse range of case studies spanning literature, film, music, and visual arts, drawing from a multitude of cultures, genres, and historical periods. These range from premodern Chinese literature to modernist dream reports to contemporary European novels, artwork, and opera. Through these varied analyses, the contributors investigate how dreams are artistically mediated in diverse cultural texts and contexts, as well as the extent to which they are made sense of or are intentionally left uninterpreted. This approach underscores the dual nature of dreams as

both a source of profound insight and an embodiment of the irrational, ambiguous, and playful.

While dream interpretation in the wake of Freud's *Traumdeutung* (1900) tended to focus on deciphering (making sense of) the *latent* dream content, i.e. the subconscious meaning supposedly disguised by the dream as remembered and narrated, from the mid-twentieth century onwards cognitive dream researchers, philosophers, and literary scholars became increasingly interested in precisely the 'otherness' of the *manifest* dream, i.e. the elements that constitute its bizarreness, and in exploring how the dream experience might be recreated and conveyed aesthetically. The present collection might arguably have benefitted from considering this corpus of work, notably Bert O. States' three important monographs exploring the relationship between dream and literary art published in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as more recent studies providing insight into what Manfred Engel, in his opening chapter, calls "the dream effect". This term, aptly coined by Engel with reference to Roland Barthes' "reality effect", refers to the translation of dream elements in literary and visual texts that allow the reader or viewer to experience the aesthetics of dream. Or as Engel puts it, the dream effect is "the result of the combination of all literary devices which serve to make a fictional dream appear as oneirically plausible" (23). Engel offers several case studies, ranging from Charles Sorel to Gustave Flaubert, in which the "aesthetic dream experience", conveyed in different ways and to different effect, takes precedence over what he calls "the obsession with meaning" (23).

Engel's opening essay sets the tone for the collection's first seven chapters grouped together under the heading *Not Making Sense of Dreams / Le rêve dépourvu de sens*. These contributions explore representations of dreams that resist interpretation. Thus, following Engel's systematic analysis of the "dream effect", Bernard Dieterle's contribution "Cultiver le rêve insensé" offers an analysis of what he calls "the oneiric senseless" (79) in examples from English nonsense literature, French Surrealism, and the Viennese neo-avantgarde. In doing so Dieterle argues that texts by Lewis Carroll, André Breton, and H.C. Artmann reject meaning in favour of imaginary worlds characterised by nonsense and absurdity, and that they are appealing precisely because they lack meaning and defy interpretation. Likewise, Franz Hinterfeder-Emde's chapter *Senseless Dreams, Free Senses* provides a compelling and original analysis of selected texts by Natsume Sōkesi and Robert Walser, whose dream

representations convey synaesthetic experiences, thereby focussing on sense *perception* rather than intellectual sense-making. Hinterfeder-Emde's approach is particularly striking as his is the only chapter in the book drawing on neurological research, which arguably strengthens his case that dreams can make sense by releasing the dreamer/reader "from a rational-centred into a multi-dimensional reality" (131). The following chapter, Josef Hrdlička's *The Dream as an Encounter and an Event*, focuses on Czech author Richard Weiner's *Lazebník* (The Barber, 1929), outlining Weiner's own dream theory which contends that, while dreams may not be meaningless per se, their meaning inheres in the dreamer's experience of the dream as an event, and does not require further interpretation. Yet another example of dream representations that resist meaning-making is provided by Laura Vordermayer who, in her exploration of autobiographical dream reports by Henri Michaux and H.C. Artmann, demonstrates how these texts, despite incorporating interpretation in their dream narratives, ultimately highlight the dream's aesthetic pleasure "compared to which every interpretation falls short" (166). The final two chapters of the first section expand the range of case studies to visual art and music. Claire Gantet looks at illustrations of dreams from the period between 1500 to 1840 and concludes that dreams were increasingly depicted not as single images but as "enigmatic stories" (170) and in analogy to novels. Finally, Hendrik Rungelrath's contribution provides a comparative analysis of Richard Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman* (1840) and contemporary Austrian composer Christian Ofenbauer's *Szene Penthesilea Ein Traum* (1999/2000), which shows that, while the first contains a narrated dream that is made sense of by the characters within the text, the latter aims to convey the "strangeness" and ambiguity of the dramatized dream, leaving the interpretation (or lack thereof) to the audience.

The ambiguity of the dream, and the challenges this provides for meaning-making, are explored in more depth in the second section, *Dealing with the Ambiguities of Dreams / Prendre la mesure des ambiguïtés du rêve*, which comprises twelve chapters and thus makes up the better part of the volume. While these chapters continue to focus on a broad variety of (mainly literary) texts from diverse cultural contexts, they are loosely connected by their aim to explore the dream's potential for political, social, and philosophical critique, facilitated despite – or in some cases precisely because of – its ambiguity. The first contribution by Jutta Heinz focuses on the ways in which philosophical texts by Denis

Diderot and Jean-Jacques Rousseau incorporate dreams to integrate ambiguity into philosophical methods and modes of argumentation. The next chapter introduces the reader to a technique of dream interpretation specific to premodern China, in which visual elements of the dream are translated into Chinese characters and subsequently interpreted in an effort to “impose some sense and order on erratic dream material” (249) – an endeavour that can also fail as some dreams seem to resist coherent and meaningful interpretation. The next three chapters focus on German-speaking literature. Ricarda Schmidt explores the diverse functions of dreams in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s four novels, ranging from a means of characterization to the creation of structural coherence and communication between narrator and reader and, ultimately, a highly symbolic, mythological experience in Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*. The next chapter, by Juliane Blank, looks at *Walpurgisnachtsträume*, focussing on two early twentieth-century texts by Heinrich Zschokke and Gustav Meyrin respectively, both of which feature dreams occurring during Walpurgis Night when supernatural forces, often associated with dreams, take over. As Blank’s analysis shows, the ambiguous dream representations, depicted as encounters with the devil in both texts, can be interpreted psychologically, as highlighting repressed drives and wishes, thereby destabilising the political, moral, and narrative order presented in the texts. Yet a different approach is provided by Iris Schäfer’s exploration of texts by Lou Andreas-Salomé, in which the ambiguity of dreams is linked to the liminal state of adolescence in Salomé’s fictional texts as well as her own life. This chapter ties in well with Jana Pape’s analysis of adolescent dreams in Angela Carter’s early novels *Love* and *The Magic Toyshop*, in which the protagonists’ contradictory and ambivalent coming-of-age experiences in a repressive society are mirrored and visualized in their dreams. Both chapters provide valuable explorations of dreams related to specific life stages, an arguably under-researched theme in cultural dream studies. The psychological readings employed in the contributions by Blank and Pape also tie in with Till Speicher’s chapter, which offers a comparative reading of depression as represented in three texts by Alfred Kubin, Sylvia Plath, and Terézia Mora. As Speicher contends, all three texts use dream representations to convey and express otherwise inaccessible experiences of depression while also critiquing societal norms and patterns that leave no room for deviating perceptions and voices. Other contributions to the volume focus on topics as diverse as collective national dreams in Chinese utopian

novels, which threaten to erase individual dream narratives (Johannes D. Kaminski); trauma and dreams in Anna Segher's *Der Ausflug der toten Mädchen* and two of its audio books (Caroline Frank); strategies of handling ambiguity in autobiographical dream reports by Walter Benjamin, Theodor W. Adorno, and Meret Oppenheim (Constantin Houy); the oneiric aesthetics and socio-political criticism in postcolonial African novels (Tumba Shango Lokoho); and finally the dreamlike aesthetics in two print portfolios by Max Klinger and Max Beckmann which blur the boundaries between waking and dreaming (Elena Chiara Maltry).

As this brief outline has shown, the contributors to this volume employ a variety of approaches in their analyses of a broad range of texts from different historical and cultural contexts. The inclusion of non-European (especially Chinese, Japanese, and African) texts and traditions as well as less explored artforms such as illustrations and opera is to be commended. The volume's strength clearly lies in this diversity, which, however, might also constitute its main weakness. While the individual chapters provide largely compelling readings of both better and lesser-known texts, the editors might have considered helping their readers to "make sense" of the array of chapters by offering a somewhat clearer order (chronological, thematic or geographical?) beyond the two main sections, and by highlighting connections between the at times arbitrarily ordered chapters. An index and a comprehensive bibliography in addition to the footnotes would also have made sense in a volume of this scope. These minor quibbles aside, *Making–or Not Making– Sense of Dreams* is no doubt a valuable contribution to the ever-expanding field of cultural dream studies as well as a testament to the sheer abundance, unruliness, and diversity of dream representations as forms of psychological, social, and aesthetic expression.

**Valentine Dusseuil et Stéphanie Gehanne-Gavoty,
dir. *Idées et Formes de la satire au XVIII^e siècle***

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Ce volume de 272 pages propose un parcours stimulant à travers l'univers et les usages de la satire au XVIII^e siècle. La satire est protéiforme, se déploie dans tous les domaines, prend toutes sortes de cibles, elle est à la fois un genre, une modalité, un registre, dont la poétique est intégrée dans les textes (elle est définie, entre autres acceptions, comme la critique des mauvais livres). Dans une introduction panoramique, les éditrices rappellent les traits définitoires de leur objet labile : un ancrage référentiel fort, une dimension agressive (persiflage, cruauté), une intention correctrice et moraliste, le rire. Le XVIII^e siècle est une période de crise pour la satire, non pas le moment d'un déclin mais plutôt celui d'une reconfiguration et de déplacements afin d'adapter la satire au changement des mentalités et des valeurs. Les 12 contributions, signées par certains des meilleurs spécialistes de la satire, sont réparties en trois sections et s'attachent à cerner les contours de cette notion, désignée tour à tour, selon les ouvrages et les époques comme un « genre » en crise, une « modalité » à visée politique ou un « registre » (mais aussi un « style » ou un « esprit »...). Les trois sections équilibrées (I. La satire versifiée en crise. II. Les ambivalences du satirique. III. La satire dans l'espace public, la scène et la rue), examinent des aspects complémentaires afin de tenter de cartographier ces mouvants territoires de la satire. Doté de deux index (des noms et des titres), l'ouvrage propose une série d'études de cas sur des formes et conceptions possibles de la satire au XVIII^e siècle. Outre le

genre antique de la satire versifiée et l'attaque *ad hominem* (la satire étant pour Bayle par exemple l'exact équivalent du « libelle diffamatoire ») qui sont condamnés par l'esprit du temps, le XVIII^e siècle explore aussi ses modalités rhapsodiques et bigarrées. L'introduction propose une synthèse des travaux sur la satire au XVIII^e siècle et de l'actualité de la recherche.

Si le XVIII^e siècle remet en question certains aspects de la satire c'est parce qu'elle contrevient aux règles de la bienséance et de la douceur : la part empoisonnée de la satire suscite une forme de méfiance et en fait un instrument délicat à la fois à manier et à juger d'autant que, pour les hommes des Lumières, elle tend à devenir « une forme privilégiée de l'expression réactionnaire dans les années 1760–1770 » (18), ce qui accentue son discrédit.

Les contributions de la première section analysent l'apparent déclin de la satire en vers au XVIII^e siècle à travers trois articles. Pascal Debailly nuance ce déclin en montrant les survivances de la satire versifiée dans les années 1770 et dans la « guerre des satires » qui manifeste une résurgence du genre entre la Révolution et le Consulat, l'an VIII étant à la fois une année faste pour la satire et son coup d'arrêt. Dimitri Albanese, à partir des cas de Jean-Baptiste Rousseau et de Voltaire, articule l'héritage satirique à une forme de libertinage du XVII^e siècle, caractérisé par une veine grossière et s'appuyant sur l'évocation du bas corporel. Sarah Patané (qui analyse l'*Anti-Lucretius* du cardinal de Polignac) illustre les survivances et la fécondité de la forme réinvestie dans les débats et querelles littéraires des Lumières. La 2^e section explore les « ambivalences du satirique » en s'intéressant aux nombreuses contradictions d'un genre de comique qui prétend s'adoucir et se policer, conduisant les auteurs à certaines contradictions logiques. Béatrice Guion s'intéresse à la dimension de critique littéraire, centrale dans la longue tradition métalittéraire et critique de la satire et elle détaille le processus de transformation du genre en registre et le déclin de la satire lucilienne, les Lumières prétendant préférer le sel au fiel. Fabrice Chassot analyse l'évolution complexe et nuancée des rapports entre satire et misanthropie pour des Lumières qui prônent la civilité et condamnent le mépris de la vie et le cynisme. Le personnage d'Alceste de Molière est analysé comme « le ferment d'une réflexion critique sur la satire et son héritage » (118). Sont ensuite analysées les *personae* de spectateurs misanthropes des périodiques de Van Effen et Marivaux qui réinventent une satire empathique, idéalement débarrassée des passions et des vices. Fabrice Chassot termine son parcours avec le cas de Fougeret de Monbron et la démystification radicale de son *Cosmopolite*,

déambulateur satirique. Marc Hersant part du mépris de Voltaire pour la « canaille satirique » pour se concentrer sur le texte le plus féroce de cet auteur, les *Lettres sur la Nouvelle Héloïse* publiées en 1761. Tout en pratiquant lui-même une critique violente de la religion et de Rousseau, Voltaire prétend parler « de plus haut », et au rebours des vils insectes piquants qu'il voit dans les écrivains satiriques (donnant ainsi à la satire une définition très restrictive), il se campe fermement quant à lui dans l'éthos d'un fier guerrier combattant pour des valeurs nobles et des idéaux. Stephanie Gehanne-Gavoty s'intéresse au combat entre jésuites et jansénistes et prend pour objet un texte lié à l'« affaire Clémentine » : *Le Tartuffe épistolaire démasqué* d'un jeune jésuite, l'abbé Bonnau, publié en 1777 qui répond aux *Lettres intéressantes du pape Clément* publiées en 1776 par Caraccioli. Stéphanie Gehanne-Gavoty livre une analyse précise de ce texte satirique brillant qui décortique lui-même le texte de Caraccioli, en une cascade d'écrits métalittéraires. L'esprit satirique des philosophes a « déteint sur les tenants de l'idéologie opposée » et l'autrice examine les aménagements nécessaires dont doivent rendre compte les auteurs polémistes chrétiens, l'esprit de la satire étant éloigné *a priori* de l'esprit de religion. La référence à Pascal étant fort délicate à manier pour les jésuites, ils lui préfèrent l'« esprit de persiflage » et l'autorité de Saint Jérôme. La 3^e section ouvre largement la pratique satirique à l'espace public et à une extériorité théâtralisée, qu'il s'agisse de comédie (Marc Martinez sur la scène anglaise du milieu du XVIII^e siècle, Gabriele Vickerman-Ribémont), d'écrits de déambulations (*Promenades de Le Noble pour Juliette Fabre*, *Tableau de Paris chez L-F. Mercier pour Charles Vincent*) ou d'estampes satiriques en lien avec les pièces de Beaumarchais (ou directement contre sa personne) et de caricatures de l'actualité sous la Révolution qui reprennent la figure d'Arlequin, pour Virginie Yvernault.

Le volume est donc utile et précieux en ce qu'il propose un large panorama des usages et des transformations de la satire au XVIII^e siècle. Elle y apparaît comme un retour du refoulé agressif et libertin, toujours un peu en décalage par rapport aux idéaux et aux principes qu'elle professe ou prétend défendre. Le titre de la deuxième section pourrait décrire toutes les contributions composant le volume, tant la satire et l'expression satirique sont éminemment et structurellement ambivalentes au XVIII^e siècle et l'objet de constantes redéfinitions.

**Collectif des chercheurs de la SIEDS 2019,
dir. *Participation, collaboration, association :
communauté, échanges, politiques, et
philosophies au XVIII^e siècle. Communities,
Exchanges, Politics, and Philosophies in the
Eighteenth Century***

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Ce volume est issu du séminaire international des jeunes chercheurs de la SIEDS (Société Internationale d'Etude du Dix-huitième Siècle), qui s'est tenu à Newcastle upon Tyne en juillet 2019, en prélude au Congrès des Lumières d'Edimbourg. Le thème est délimité par ces trois mots : participation, collaboration et association. Les douze contributions qui ont été retenues ont investi ce thème selon différentes approches, qui tiennent à l'ancrage disciplinaire des auteurs : les historiens ont davantage travaillé les notions de réseau, sociabilité et mécénat, tandis que les philosophes et les littéraires ont cherché dans leurs corpus des correspondants thématiques ou notionnels de ces logiques associatives ou participatives.

Le livre, divisé en quatre sections – politique, culture de l'imprimé, échanges sociaux et philosophie –, respecte scrupuleusement la règle de l'emploi parallèle des deux langues, anglais et français, figurant dans les statuts de la SIEDS. Ainsi les préface, introduction et épilogue sont-ils rédigés dans les deux langues. Les essais, majoritairement en anglais, sont

précédés d'un résumé et suivis d'une analyse proposée par le discutant de la communication. Une bibliographie, récapitulant les références convoquées par l'ensemble des contributions, et un index concluent cet ouvrage, composé avec le plus grand soin.

Stephen Griffin, en s'appuyant sur des sources archivistiques, documente l'étonnant parcours d'Owen O'Rourke, un Irlandais qui, dix ans après être entré au service du duc Léopold de Lorraine, s'impose, entre 1727 et 1743, comme un agent diplomatique de premier plan, au point de jonction entre Vienne, Versailles et la Lorraine. Sa correspondance et celle de la famille de son épouse, Catherine de Beauvau, mettent en lumière à la fois la solidarité des liens familiaux et la convergence des intérêts individuels. O'Rourke a profité de cette position stratégique pour placer ses proches dans des emplois protégés en France. En retour, son influence auprès du prétendant au trône et sa présence à Vienne ont permis aux Beauvau d'étendre la sphère de leurs intérêts en Autriche et dans l'Eglise catholique. Cette histoire, transrégionale et transnationale, laisse clairement transparaître les logiques d'association et permet de cartographier précisément les stratégies d'alliance.

Angelika Blinda étudie le curieux destin de la noblesse polonaise en exil en France consécutivement à l'échec de la Confédération de Bar, créée pour lutter contre l'influence russe en Pologne et contre le personnage qui en est l'incarnation, le roi Stanislas Poniatowski. Elle se concentre sur le rôle joué par Teofila Sapieha et son réseau. Cette étude se veut donc une contribution à la place des femmes dans la société de cour et à l'influence qu'elles y exercent. A cet égard, le rôle de Sapieha au sein de la communauté polonaise en exil est significatif. Par sa correspondance, son activité d'animation dans les cercles, l'accueil qu'elle ménage aux réfugiés, les arbitrages qu'elle rend dans les disputes, sa participation enfin à la rédaction d'écrits politiques, elle s'impose comme une figure de tout premier plan. On est notamment frappé par sa collaboration avec Wielhorski, un autre confédéré, lui-même directement lié à Rousseau et Mably. Cette étude, qui vient combler un manque historiographique, se veut aussi une étude de cas utile en ce qu'elle éclaire le processus de constitution d'un réseau.

Les prestigieuses académies romaines – l'*Accademia di San Luca*, fondée en 1391, l'*Accademia dell'Arcadia*, qui date de 1690 –, connaissent à partir de 1700 un nouveau développement. Ginevra Odone s'attache à montrer qu'elles deviennent, entre les mains des papes successifs, un instrument de l'influence politique et culturelle de Rome à l'échelle

européenne. Leur composition suit les évolutions de la diplomatie. Ainsi d'illustres Espagnols y font leur entrée au cours de la seconde moitié du XVIII^e siècle. *L'Accadia* apparaît particulièrement comme un fidèle reflet des évolutions de la politique pontificale au cours du siècle.

La seconde partie de l'ouvrage, consacrée à la culture de l'imprimé, s'ouvre avec l'étude de Noelia Lopez-Souto, qui s'intéresse à un cas d'association transnationale, la collaboration entre le diplomate espagnol José Nicolas de Azara et le typographe italien Giambattista Bodoni. La copieuse correspondance entre les deux hommes, qui s'étend sur trente ans, de leur rencontre à Parme en 1773 jusqu'à la mort d'Azara en 1804, est la principale source de cet essai. Elle foisonne de références culturelles, historiques et politiques. Lopez-Souto met à jour l'émergence de nouvelles formes d'expression littéraire à travers la collaboration entre mécène et artiste. Elle insiste sur la dimension internationale de cette collaboration, qui dépasse les frontières politiques et linguistiques et apparaît ainsi comme le creuset d'une culture authentiquement européenne.

Une collaboration analogue a été nécessaire pour réaliser l'ambition d'une Bible illustrée de l'ampleur de celle imaginée par le libraire londonien Thomas Macklin à la fin du XVIII^e siècle. La Bible illustrée, en six volumes in-folio, qui aujourd'hui porte son nom, est le fruit d'un réseau de collaborateurs, incluant une vingtaine d'artistes renommés. L'étude, menée par Naomi Billingsley, se concentre sur cinq d'entre eux et examine de près la dynamique d'association entre artiste et éditeur. Si cette entreprise éditoriale fut assurément un succès artistique, elle se conclut hélas par un retentissant échec commercial.

Proposant une lecture plus conceptuelle, voire métaphorique, des notions de participation, collaboration et association, l'étude de Corrina Radioff s'intéresse à une habitude adoptée par les auteurs de romans anglais au milieu du XVIII^e siècle, qui consiste à faire précéder chaque chapitre d'une mention épigraphique tirée d'un ouvrage à caractère moral. Un type nouveau d'association s'opère ainsi entre le texte allographe et le texte autographe. Cette pratique paratextuelle, précisément étudiée sur un corpus, qu'on jugera peut-être trop restreint, de trois romans, amène à s'interroger sur le contrôle de l'activité interprétative du lecteur. Orientée par ces citations, celle-ci semble devoir se conformer à l'intention éthique sous-jacente à ce type de production littéraire.

Dans la section des « échanges sociaux », une autre forme d'expression artistique est étudiée par Renée Vulto : la chanson populaire est aux

Pays-Bas une pratique communautaire, liée aux festivités et événements publics. Elle n'est pas seulement un loisir, mais recouvre des implications politiques et sociales fortes. Elle vise en particulier à renforcer le sentiment d'appartenance à une communauté et touche à la représentation des identités nationales. Des recueils sont édités au XVIII^e siècle, avec une intention souvent idéologique : il s'agit d'encourager le patriotisme au sein de mouvements de citoyens, comme la garde civile de Leyde. L'étude de cas prête une attention particulière à la dimension matérielle du chant et à l'implication effective des participants. L'approche combine donc analyse musicale et analyse sociale.

Le partage et la circulation des savoirs médicaux dans la culture populaire à la charnière des XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles sont examinés par Katherine Aske. Celle-ci s'intéresse précisément au soin de la peau, et s'appuie principalement sur le premier traité anglais de dermatologie, le *De Morbis Cutaneis* de Daniel Turner (1714). Elle met en évidence les échanges collaboratifs entre culture professionnelle et culture populaire en matière de médecine, se demandant dans quelle mesure l'emploi de traitements similaires et le développement d'un langage médical partagé révèlent l'existence d'une collaboration qui transcende les frontières de classe et d'éducation. Ce qui apparaît cependant au terme de l'étude est une délicate compatibilité d'intérêts : d'un côté, les marchands placent leurs perspectives de profit devant les impératifs de sécurité sanitaire ; de l'autre, le coût élevé des onguents commercialisés incite les patients les moins aisés à se tourner vers une médecine domestique. Les autorités médicales, pour détourner les gens de pratiques d'auto-médication qui peuvent s'avérer dangereuses, adoptent un type de communication, qui sans révéler leurs secrets, combat les remèdes de bonne femme. Le choix des mots à cet égard est décisif. Aske montre l'existence d'une langue vernaculaire en matière de savoir médical, comprise par tous, quel que soit le niveau d'études, et qui prouve la conjonction entre les différents types d'imprimés alors en circulation.

Restant dans cette même période de la fin du XVII^e siècle et du début du XVIII^e, Elena Lioznova s'intéresse au rôle joué par quelques personnalités dans l'évolution et l'expansion des églises de la Nouvelle-Angleterre, en une époque où la religion, qui prétend exercer une influence hégémonique sur les individus et les groupes, doit faire face à la propagation des idées des Lumières et à l'émergence d'une rationalité scientifique. La figure du révérend Cotton Mather apparaît comme un exemple de choix pour illustrer le compromis entre science et religion.

Ce savant universel, auteur de plus de 400 ouvrages couvrant tous les domaines de la connaissance, s'est en particulier impliqué dans les débats autour du newtonianisme. Son livre *The Christian Philosopher* (1721) peut être lu comme une tentative de réappropriation des lois de la physique newtonienne par la théologie chrétienne. Convaincu que les nouvelles approches scientifiques peuvent aider à prouver la vérité des énoncés bibliques, Matter pose le principe de non-contradiction entre science et religion. Les découvertes les plus récentes de la philosophie naturelle doivent selon lui renforcer l'orientation puritaine de la Nouvelle-Angleterre. Lioznova montre que par son engagement dans les cercles intellectuels et religieux de son temps, Matter a concouru à l'essor de l'épistémologie des Lumières. Une telle conclusion eût gagné à être replacée dans le contexte des « Lumières religieuses », notamment étudiées par David Sorkin et Ulrich Lehner.

La dernière section, sobrement intitulée « Philosophie », fait une place à la pensée politique de Rousseau. Celle-ci a dès l'origine été située dans la tradition jusnaturaliste : le contrat social est le prolongement du droit naturel. Lucas Ribeiro montre que l'interprétation de Charles Vaughan en 1915 marque une rupture : Rousseau aurait rejeté les fondements de la loi naturelle. A cette lecture s'oppose celle de Robert Derathé, dont l'ouvrage date de 1950, et non de 1995, comme semble l'indiquer une note de bas de page (216). On regrette par parenthèses que le contexte de cette dispute n'ait pas été posé, et que les protagonistes n'aient pas été présentés. Cela eût grandement facilité la perception des enjeux de ce débat. En interrogeant les liens entre contractualisme et loi naturelle, Ribeiro pose la question, cruciale, de la garantie apportée au pacte politique. Rousseau présente le contrat social comme une alternative à la loi naturelle, et confie au souverain, considéré comme entité politique unifiée, l'autorité nécessaire pour subsumer la liberté de l'individu. Ribeiro apporte un éclairage décisif en reliant la question de la liberté à celle de la république : il s'aligne sur la thèse qui voit en Rousseau un pionnier de la doctrine politique républicaine.

La littérature utopique, qu'elle tire vers l'imaginaire, avec une dominante narrative, ou vers le politique, avec une dominante discursive, connaît une fortune exceptionnelle au XVIII^e siècle. Alex Bellemare, à partir d'un corpus constitué de quelques titres de Rétif de la Bretonne et de Morelly, s'efforce de problématiser la tension entre le collectif et l'individuel. Il s'interroge en effet sur la manière de penser la communauté parfaite ou les moyens d'une possible amélioration de l'individu. Les

raisons du rapprochement de ces deux auteurs sont trop sommairement énoncées : ce sont tous deux des auteurs « mineurs », notion sujette à débat qu'il convenait d'explicitier ; ils « résistent le plus souvent aux classifications » (233). La pensée de Rétif étant elle-même passablement éclectique et d'une cohérence délicate, il était quelque peu risqué d'en tenter la comparaison avec un auteur lui aussi difficile et complexe. On découvre cependant d'intéressants points de convergence entre ces deux auteurs, pourtant si différents par leur formation et leur parcours. L'un et l'autre revisitent le genre de l'utopie politique en y transposant les interrogations propres à leur temps, tirant bénéfice des récentes découvertes ou spéculations dans les sciences de la vie, de l'apport des savoirs pré-anthropologiques offerts par les récits de voyage, du renouveau de la philosophie politique et économique et de la redéfinition de la cité idéale.

Dans un autre registre, l'œuvre de Sade offre un exemple de thématization de la notion d'association sous la forme de la société criminelle, ce qui sonne paradoxalement quand on songe aux libertins sadiens et à leur caractère foncièrement individualiste, voire égoïste au sens propre du terme. Pourtant Natalia L. Zorrilla montre que la sexualité de ces derniers s'accommode d'une vie collective. Elle explore le fonctionnement des sociétés criminelles sadiennes, et interroge la dialectique entre l'individu et le collectif. On est particulièrement intéressé par l'analyse de ce régime d'association sous l'angle de la théorie politique, de Platon à Diderot. Zorrilla explore également les solidarités interpersonnelles, introduisant les notions d'amitié et de trahison. Le détournement du vocabulaire religieux, habituel chez Sade, trouve un sens nouveau dans ce contexte : à la sociabilité évangélique, structurée par le commandement d'amour, répond une sociabilité perverse qui voue un culte au libertinage ; à l'initiation chrétienne se substitue une série de rites de passage introduisant les participants à un nouveau mode d'existence. Cette contribution permet de relancer à nouveaux frais la réflexion sur les fondements moraux de la théorie du contrat social, et de considérer sous un angle neuf la dialectique entre solitude et communauté. Le XVIII^e siècle, siècle de toutes les sociabilités, l'est aussi de ces sociabilités inverses, car perverses, que constituent les sociétés libertines.

L'épilogue, qui fait écho aux pages de l'introduction, évoque le contexte de la pandémie de Coronavirus qui a sévi quelques mois seulement après ce séminaire de Newcastle upon Tyne. Cet événement amène les auteurs à s'interroger sur l'avenir du monde académique : la généralisation d'outils

de communication à distance va sans doute nous conduire à repenser les notions de participation et de collaboration en matière de recherche collective. Cet ouvrage, qui est le fruit d'une manifestation en présentiel, a été en grande partie élaboré à distance. Comme le siècle qui a été la matière des différentes contributions, il se situe à la charnière de deux mondes.

Tilliette, Marie-Agathe, *Figures de marginaux dans le roman historique européen (1814–1836)*

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L'ouvrage de Marie-Agathe Tilliette, issu de sa thèse de littérature comparée, s'intéresse à un genre quelque peu délaissé par la critique universitaire, celui du roman historique. Pourtant, ce genre encore très populaire aujourd'hui constitue l'une des innovations littéraires les plus marquantes du XIX^e siècle, comme le rappelle l'introduction de l'ouvrage (qui pastiche avec humour *l'incipit* de *Notre-Dame de Paris*), nous plongeant d'emblée dans l'événement constitué par la publication, le 7 juillet 1814, du *Waverley* de Walter Scott, premier d'une longue série de romans historiques. L'objet de l'étude menée par Marie-Agathe Tilliette est constitué plus précisément de cette population « de gueux, de vagabonds, de Bohémiennes, de brigands, de sorcières, de gibiers de potence en tous genres » (9) qui peuplent ces romans.

L'empan chronologique choisi correspond à la première vague de romans historiques, placée sous l'égide de Walter Scott, ce qui amène l'autrice à analyser un corpus quadrilingue (allemand, anglais, français et italien) d'une cinquantaine de romans historiques comportant des figures marginales.

L'ouvrage se structure en quatre parties et dix chapitres, la première partie « Roman historique et marginalité » étant consacrée aux enjeux théoriques (littéraires, historiques, sociologiques), la deuxième « Personnages, figures, types » centrée sur le personnage marginal, la

troisième, intitulée « Ambivalence des marges » s'interroge sur le rapport entre peuple et marges et entre nation et marges, enfin, la quatrième partie, « Fascination des limites », conclusive, s'empare des enjeux idéologiques de la marginalité.

La première partie propose tout d'abord une belle synthèse sur le roman historique. La question de la place de Walter Scott dans l'invention du roman historique est discutée, notamment à la lumière de la critique allemande. Il s'agit également de s'atteler aux épineuses questions de définition de ce « mauvais genre » qu'est le roman historique, dans sa version romantique. Ce chapitre propose un balayage des principales problématiques liées au roman historique et la naissance de ce dernier est replacée dans le contexte de développement de l'identité nationale de chaque pays. L'ouvrage souligne la dimension patriotique du genre, surtout en Italie et en Allemagne, ainsi qu'une forme de paradoxe : l'idée nationale n'empêche pas les romans historiques de s'intéresser à l'histoire d'autres nations, notamment sous l'influence de Scott, au point que « L'Écosse devient un paradigme identitaire, aisément repris et adapté » (82). De manière logique, le chapitre suivant vient éclairer les liens entre marginalité et roman historique. Il s'agit là de questionner une rencontre, celle entre le peuple et ses marges, une période historique, celle du premier XIX^e siècle, et celle d'un genre romanesque. En effet, si le peuple, sous différentes formes, fait son entrée dans le roman historique, on y trouve aussi un « en-deça du peuple », avec des figures marginales que l'autrice s'attache à définir comme « descendants des gueux médiévaux, des fous shakespeariens ou encore des sauvages de toutes les entreprises de conquête » (129). Cette partie s'appuie également sur l'analyse des discours sociaux et politiques sur le paupérisme, les « nouveaux barbares » (article de Girardin sur les Canuts par exemple) ou ceux qui théorisent une forme de biologisation de la pauvreté.

La deuxième partie s'emploie à élaborer une typologie de ces figures marginales, en distinguant huit types différents : bandits, bohémiens, mendiants, fous, sorciers, ermites, saltimbanques, Juifs. La réflexion se nourrit de références sociologiques qui permettent de montrer comment ces marginaux sont à la fois héritiers d'une longue tradition et porteurs d'enjeux propres au XIX^e siècle. La dimension poétique est également prise en compte dans le chapitre « Un certain air de famille », ainsi que la tradition iconographique, permettant d'élaborer un type esthétique du brigand. Les chapitres de cette deuxième partie sont nourris d'analyses

tout à fait passionnantes sur le rôle des astrologues et des bouffons, sur les marginaux comme paradigmes de la contre-société, sur la poétique du foisonnement et du grouillement, ainsi que sur la spatialisation des marges. Cette partie s'intéresse également au rôle actantiel des personnages marginaux et aux enjeux sociologiques portés par ceux-ci, en s'appuyant notamment sur les apports des *subaltern studies*. Cette analyse permet de revenir sur une spécificité du roman historique, et de souligner les liens entre ce sous-genre romanesque et les figures marginales : « si l'on considère les marginaux, de manière générale, comme des symptômes d'une forme de dysharmonie sociale, il semble plausible de suggérer que la représentation des époques troublées (guerres, épidémies, émeutes, etc.) sera un terrain favorable à leur apparition – cette hypothèse, considérée à rebours, permet en outre d'expliquer la récurrence des figures marginales dans les romans historiques puisque les époques de crise ou de transition sont particulièrement exploitées par la fiction. » (292). Les personnages marginaux ont ainsi, bien au-delà de leur simple rôle narratif, une fonction importante dans la représentation historique.

La troisième partie, « Ambivalence des marges », s'intéresse à la dimension historique, anthropologique et sociologique des marges. On y trouve une belle étude onomastique (dans *Notre-Dame de Paris* notamment), ainsi que l'exploration de l'instabilité de genre, le rapport à la religion et la criminalité. Marie-Agathe Tilliette rappelle en effet qu'on trouve de nombreux bandits et brigands dans le corpus et que toutes les catégories marginales représentées sont frappées par le soupçon d'illégalité voire d'immoralité. Posant la question de l'enjeu social de ces figures, elle précise qu'« il n'y a que rarement, dans les romans historiques, de pensée sociale développée qui expliquerait la déchéance sociale et la chute dans la criminalité » ; cependant, ces figures sont « des éléments de perturbation de l'ordre social » (345). La dimension potentiellement insurrectionnelle et émeutière de ces marges est également explorée ainsi que l'idéalisation de la liberté des vagabonds, dotée d'une éventuelle dimension spirituelle, qui fonctionne comme une caution morale pour le reste de la société. On peut souligner également tout l'intérêt des analyses sur la primitivité (359-65). Les figures marginales sont porteuses d'un passé, de ce qui est en train de disparaître, ce qui est intrinsèquement lié à la problématique du roman historique, notamment chez Walter Scott. Il s'agit également de réfléchir aux rapports des marginaux avec l'idée de nationalité et à la représentation de cet « inquiétant internationalisme des gueux »

(343) qui voit dans les marges une forme de nation dans la nation. L'autrice analyse notamment très bien, à la lumière de la sociologie, comment les bohémiens constituent une population inassimilable, tout comme les Juifs. Elle établit également un lien entre représentation de la marginalité et imaginaire du monde colonial, posant une hypothèse intéressante sur le parallèle entre le rôle narratif des marginaux et celui des territoires coloniaux (423). Cette partie s'achève sur le rôle mémoriel des marginaux, plus proches des temps primitifs et porteur des « échos des voix du passé ».

La quatrième partie, « Fascination des limites », analyse le rôle « disruptif » du marginal. Les personnages en marge, fous, juifs ou autres exclus apparaissent en effet comme le support d'une mise en question des normes sociales. On peut voir par exemple comment les personnages du Juif Isaac et de sa fille Rébecca dans le roman *Ivanhoé* jouent le rôle de norme critique vis-à-vis des valeurs chevaleresques. En s'appuyant sur la notion de carnavalesque théorisée par Bakhtine, Marie-Agathe Tilliette évoque l'identité incomplète et indistincte des marginaux. La chapitre intitulé « Le temps des marginaux » développe différents aspects très intéressants dans la perspective du roman historique : tout d'abord, la question des origines, qui comme le rappelle Marie-Agathe Tilliette, rencontre « une problématique fondamentale du XIX^e siècle, hanté par l'énigme des commencements. ». S'appuyant sur l'approche démographique des personnages de fiction théorisée par Françoise Lavocat, elle montre que ces personnages sont particulièrement exposés à la mort. L'idée que certains romanciers se présentent comme de véritables « justiciers historiques » (547) est fructueuse, tout comme l'analyse de l'immortalité des bandits (notamment p. 563, où l'on voit bien le paradoxe d'un roman qui participe de cette héroïsation, tout en s'en défendant). La fin de la quatrième partie travaille sur les notions de liminarité et de limitrophie, avec de belles pages sur les personnages limitrophes « garde-frontières de l'univers fictionnel » (598), et l'invitation faite au lecteur à « compenser par sa propre activité imaginative » la « dissonance narrative liée aux personnages secondaires » (605).

Il s'agit donc d'un ouvrage passionnant et riche d'enseignements sur le roman historique, le roman européen de la première moitié du XIX^e siècle, les représentations romanesques du peuple, des figures marginales et plus largement de l'histoire. C'est aussi un ouvrage qui apporte une contribution solide au domaine des études consacrées au personnage romanesque, ici plus spécifiquement dans le cadre du roman

historique. La très riche bibliographie (p. 625-678) constitue une mine pour les chercheurs, et l'ampleur du corpus étudié permet un accès à de nombreux romans historiques anglo-saxons, allemand, italiens ou français, pour certains peu connus ou non traduits en français. Ajoutons que ces presque 700 pages sont écrites dans un style constamment précis et élégant, mis au service d'analyses toujours stimulantes.

**Nicolas Aude, Victoire Feuillebois, Karen Haddad,
dir. *Spectres de Dostoïevski***

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Cet ouvrage collectif de 287 pages dirigé par Nicolas Aude, Victoire Feuillebois et Karen Haddad est paru chez Classiques Garnier dans la collection « Perspectives comparatistes ». Outre l'introduction et quinze articles, il comporte une bibliographie, un index des auteurs cités et un résumé des articles. Cet ouvrage rassemble les actes du colloque du même nom organisé par l'Université de Strasbourg et l'Université de Paris Nanterre en octobre 2021. Il y a une vingtaine d'années, un autre colloque avait interrogé la récurrence des fantômes, spectres et revenants sur la scène occidentale de l'Antiquité à nos jours, les actes étant publiés sous le titre *Dramaturgies de l'ombre* par Françoise Lavocat et François Lecercle aux Presses universitaires de Rennes en 2005. Il s'agissait alors de retracer à travers les communications publiées quelques grandes étapes de la fortune scénique en Occident des fantômes. La démarche de Nicolas Aude, Victoire Feuillebois et Karen Haddad recentre l'intérêt sur le seul Dostoïevski et fait jouer tous les sens du mot « spectre » pour se pencher sur l'imaginaire et les représentations littéraires du spectre chez Dostoïevski et l'intertextualité proprement spectrale de Dostoïevski lui-même et de ses œuvres comme le précise la 4^e de couverture. Dans le sillage de Jacques Derrida notant à propos de l'héritage de Marx l'ambiguïté du génitif, l'appel à communications du colloque soulignait la qualité éminemment spectrale de l'œuvre de Dostoïevski et orientait les propositions dans les deux perspectives ouvertes par le terme « spectre », la

perspective fantastique, celle des fantômes, doubles et autres hantant les œuvres de Dostoïevski, et la perspective mémorielle qui, depuis la fin du XIX^e siècle, ne cesse de convoquer, ne serait-ce que par l'intertextualité, l'ombre fantomatique de Dostoïevski, et fait de l'auteur russe un élément majeur complexe de la mémoire littéraire mondiale en raison de la réception spécifique qui lui est réservée dans la littérature, la critique et les arts. En ce sens, le motif du spectre ou plus largement l'imaginaire spectral s'affranchit de sa dimension thématique et devient un marqueur dostoïevskien permettant de retracer les multiples réappropriations intertextuelles, philosophiques ou intermédiales de l'auteur russe et de son oeuvre. Les études de réception existantes sur Dostoïevski s'en trouvent, grâce à cet ouvrage, si ce n'est renouvelées, dûment complétées par cette approche qui fait jouer les deux aspects fantastique et mémoriel qu'appelle le spectre.

Cette double dimension du spectre, fantastique et mémorielle, s'est déployée, lors de la publication des actes, en cinq sections dont je ne citerai que les sous-titres fonctionnels qui, jouxtant les belles formules ou expressions trouvées, me semblent plus à même de restituer la logique d'ensemble de l'ouvrage : « Modalités du spectre », « Spécificités de l'intertextualité dostoïevskienne », « Échos européens », « La hantise des "maudites questions" », « Perspectives intermédiales ». Cette logique se trouve fermement retracée dans l'introduction d'une quinzaine de pages signée par les trois éditeurs. Le propos introductif, d'une clarté remarquable, rappelle l'objectif ambitieux du colloque et construit une réflexion dense, exigeante, d'autant plus essentielle que les différents textes rassemblés, de qualité variable comme c'est souvent le cas dans les actes de colloque, la diluent inmanquablement, chaque réflexion se présentant comme un îlot indépendant, fragmentaire et souvent monographique au sein de cette vaste étude sur la nature spectrale de l'œuvre de Dostoïevski déterminant sa réception transnationale et intermediale. Sans doute ne fait-on que souligner là une difficulté inhérente à la publication des actes de colloque qui doit composer avec une parcellisation de la pensée, et donc de la lecture ultérieure, faute de sutures entre les différents textes. Si l'on peine parfois à voir comment s'articulent certains textes à la problématique spectrale, le propos liminaire ressaisit remarquablement ces études isolées et les situe dans une perspective plus large dont la cohérence est clairement formulée, laissant entrevoir ainsi les lignes de force qui déterminent l'imaginaire spectral dostoïevskien et sa réception mondiale, à travers des études essentiellement monographiques portant

sur Houellebecq (Karen Haddad), László Krasznahorkai (Tatiana Victoroff), Nabokov (Isabelle Poulin), Toni Morrison (Aline Lebel), Viktor Chklovski (Jasmine Jacq) que l'on peut lire comme emblématiques de cette réception dostoïevskienne. Au détour des textes, sont évoqués également Faulkner (Aline Lebel) ou Viktor Pelevine (Nicolas Aude). L'introduction ouvre encore la réflexion qui évoque Blanchot, Bakhtine, Kristeva, Valéri Podoroga, Coetzee, ou encore l'invasion actuelle de l'Ukraine par la Russie comme la résurgence du panslavisme imprégné de religiosité que professait Dostoïevski, preuve s'il en est de l'empan comme de la fécondité de la réception dostoïevskienne que cet ouvrage a le mérite de mettre en lumière en évoquant différents aspects articulés sur la labilité de la notion même de spectre que l'on fait jouer à plusieurs niveaux : de la biographie de l'écrivain aux traces laissées dans la mémoire des lecteurs de Dostoïevski, en passant par les mots pour dire le spectre ou les scènes matricielles.

Il y a certes une forme d'outrecuidance à discuter de l'architecture d'ensemble d'un ouvrage publié, fruit de solides réflexions destinées à estomper l'hétérogénéité inévitable des communications données lors d'un colloque afin de les inscrire dans une perspective commune. Et en ce sens, l'introduction des trois éditeurs du texte est un modèle du genre, proposant une réflexion élégante, scientifiquement nourrie, cherchant à éclairer les usages faits par chaque auteur de la notion de spectre. Il n'en reste pas moins que l'équilibre un peu trop parfait – certes légitimé par le propos introductif – des cinq sections, chacune accueillant trois textes, interroge la cohérence des unités de sens ainsi produites qui semblent parfois artificielles. J'en vois deux exemples manifestes. La première section tout d'abord. Présentée comme les « seuils du texte » dans l'introduction, cette première section est intitulée « Ce qui hante l'œuvre, modalités du spectre » dans la table des matières. Elle réunit trois textes extrêmement différents dans leur objet comme dans leur méthode, l'un portant sur le rapport de l'écrivain à ses propres fantômes (Jean-Louis Backès), le second proposant un relevé textométrique du vocabulaire spectral dans les romans et nouvelles de Dostoïevski (Michel Niqueux), le dernier, assez confus, relisant les usages de ce qui est appelé « l'idée dostoïevskienne » dans les travaux du philosophe Valéri Podoroga (Ioulia Podoroga). Cet assemblage hétéroclite peine à convaincre le lecteur de sa pertinence. Par ailleurs, on ne peut que regretter l'exploitation succincte des relevés textométriques qui donnent lieu à un paragraphe conclusif pour le moins frustrant en raison de la brièveté des hypothèses

formulées. Le second exemple de ce lissage du sens apparaît dans la section 3 consacrée aux « Échos européens », étrangement nommés « Spectres européens » dans l'introduction, alors même qu'il s'agit, du moins pour les articles passionnants de Karen Haddad et de Tatiana Victoroff, d'une intertextualité plus ou moins affichée avec Dostoïevski et son œuvre, tandis que le propos d'Olga Voltchek porte sur le traitement de la figure de Napoléon dans les romans de Dostoïevski. Le propos liminaire oppose, en les réunissant toutefois dans une même section, le « spectre de Napoléon » qui relève de la mythocritique et les « spectres de Dostoïevski », autrement dit l'intertextualité dostoïevskienne spécifique chez deux auteurs contemporains, Michel Houellebecq et László Krasznahorkai. Au demeurant, la distinction entre la troisième section et la quatrième « La hantise des "maudites questions" », orientée sur les enjeux éthiques (section se doublant de critères géographiques puisque les réflexions d'Isabelle Poulin et d'Aline Lebel portent sur des auteurs du continent américain) interroge car c'est bien d'intertextualité dont il est question, le texte dostoïevskien fonctionnant comme la matrice, ou l'hypotexte du texte second, déterminant ainsi cet effet de hantise que l'ouvrage *Spectres de Dostoïevski* tente de cerner. C'est le cas de la très belle étude proposée par Aline Lebel sur *Beloved* de Toni Morrison (située dans la quatrième section) qui reprend et dialogue avec le motif dostoïevskien central de la souffrance des enfants.

D'autres hiatus apparaissent à la lecture de l'ouvrage, notamment la divergence entre les mots introductifs à propos de l'étude de Sergueï Fokine qui mettent en avant le « texte fantôme » de Karl Marx (*Le Capital*, 1867) alors que celui-ci n'est ni cité ni mentionné dans l'article de Sergueï Fokine intitulé « le Spectre du Capital dans la vie et l'œuvre de l'écrivain-prolétaire », le mot de « Capital » renvoyant semble-t-il pour lui aux préoccupations économiques au sens large qui ont traversé la vie et l'écriture de Dostoïevski. De la même manière, on s'interroge sur la place de la réflexion de Philippe Forest à propos de la circulation de la fameuse phrase des *Frères Karamazov* sur la souffrance des enfants qui se trouve intercalée entre deux études sur les effets intertextuels de hantise chez Nabokov et Toni Morrison. Sans doute faut-il voir dans ces brouillages des limites entre les différentes sections un effet de la plasticité de la notion de spectre qui invite sans cesse le lecteur à repenser et reconfigurer l'ensemble proposé. Au demeurant, ces remarques liées au genre très spécifique que représente la publication des actes de colloque ne doivent pas estomper l'excellence de certaines communications qui font de

cet ouvrage un apport passionnant aux études traitant de la réception dostoïevskienne. La dernière section sur les « Perspectives intermédiales » (Jasmine Jacq, Floriane Toussaint et Nicolas Aude) complète d'ailleurs brillamment ces travaux.

Un dernier mot me semble nécessaire à propos des aspects formels de cette publication dont la qualité me semble par ailleurs indéniable. Il convient de mettre au crédit des éditeurs un souci tout scientifique de restituer les textes originaux, qu'il s'agisse des titres des œuvres mentionnées, comme des citations. C'est absolument essentiel lorsqu'il est question de notions : le terme russe permet de mieux comprendre les choix de traduction et les réflexions engagées. Mais peut-être aurait-il suffi d'une note introductive pour mentionner les titres originaux des œuvres de Dostoïevski, sans cesse repris en cyrillique entre crochets à la suite de leur traduction française. On s'interroge également sur l'usage des italiques pour le texte original anglais de Toni Morrison ou de Nabokov, alors que les extraits de Dostoïevski n'y ont pas droit en cyrillique. Par ailleurs, et on ne saurait le reprocher aux auteurs comme aux éditeurs dont ce n'est pas le rôle, les éditions Garnier Flammarion gagneraient à se doter de relecteurs capables de traquer coquilles (l'orthographe hésitante de Melchior de Vogüé par exemple) et maladresses de traduction.

**Christine Le Quellec Cottier et Antonio Rodriguez,
dir. *Le Primitivisme des avant-gardes littéraires***

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Issu du séminaire international de recherche « Primitivismes et modernités littéraires et ^eXX siècle » qui s'est tenu du 7 au 11 septembre 2020 à Leysin, l'ouvrage dirigé par Christine Le Quellec Cottier et Antonio Rodriguez constitue une somme importante sur les enjeux théoriques et critiques de la notion de primitivisme littéraire. Le volume réunit douze articles répartis en deux axes : le premier interroge les usages, les définitions et les paradoxes de la notion tandis que le second s'organise autour d'études de cas couvrant plusieurs périodes et plusieurs zones géographiques. L'ouvrage est complété par une préface qui mène une réflexion approfondie sur la question, soulignant les problématiques soulevées par la notion de « primitivisme ». L'étude en effet affronte les difficultés d'un tel sujet : le contexte du colonialisme, le risque d'appropriation culturelle, la confusion entre « primitivisme » et « primitif », mais aussi la complexité d'une notion qui recouvre des objets et domaines variés. Il faut donc, selon les auteurs, éviter trois écueils, l'homogénéisation, la généralisation et la théorisation décontextualisée. La notion doit en effet être étudiée dans un effort de contextualisation constant, et ancrée dans un imaginaire historique, géographique, social et esthétique. Pour ce faire, le volume s'appuie sur les études récentes qui permettent une réévaluation de la notion de primitivisme, dégagée de ses présupposés colonialistes notamment. Outre la diversité des articles qui permettent de dégager toute la complexité et la diversité de la notion,

les apports de la critique moderne constituent l'un des points forts de l'ouvrage. Les études sociologiques de contexte, l'approche transmédiatic et l'approche transculturelle sont convoquées par les différents auteurs.

Il s'agit également de dégager la spécificité du primitivisme littéraire par rapport au primitivisme artistique, plus étudié. Le rapport complexe à des écrits originaux disparus, le lien à l'oralité et le dépassement de la hiérarchie des genres, ouvrent à la voie à des innovations esthétiques qui ont marqué l'histoire littéraire et caractérisé la modernité. Le primitivisme n'est pas envisagé comme un archaïsme, mais comme un écart, qu'il soit culturel ou chronologique, dans la relation à l'espace, au temps, à l'esthétique ou à l'axiologie. Si le primitivisme peut apparaître comme une construction critique parfois contestable, l'étude s'attache donc à montrer son intérêt pour comprendre l'avant-garde moderniste, sans toutefois en effacer les ambiguïtés.

La première partie, intitulée « Les paradoxes du primitivisme littéraire », regroupe des articles qui envisagent, via l'étude de différentes formes et aspects du primitivisme, la dimension paradoxale d'une modernité qui s'affiche à rebours du monde contemporain. Isabelle Krzykowski s'attache à montrer l'écart temporel qui caractérise les avant-gardes. Le primitivisme apparaît en effet comme un instrument pour sortir de la linéarité et du paradigme du progrès, et proposer ainsi une nouvelle manière de penser le temps. C'est également un moyen d'envisager une autre histoire littéraire, un autre rapport au monde et à la connaissance, fondé sur l'émotion et non plus sur la raison héritée des Lumières. Antonio Rodriguez interroge quant à lui l'espace, son approche sociologique mettant en avant la notion de réseau. Les écrivains modernistes appartiennent au même réseau que les milieux de l'art qui se caractérisent par leur dimension internationale. L'écart ici est décentrement par le refus du canon national, même si, dans un deuxième temps, autour des années 1916-1921, le développement de l'industrie culturelle standardise le primitivisme qui s'éloigne des milieux de l'art pour investir le roman et le cinéma. Les modalités du primitivisme dépendent ainsi des réseaux et du contexte culturel. Emilien Sermier creuse l'écart entre la conception de la modernité comme littérature-texte, notion théorisée par Alain Vaillant, et celle des avant-gardes qui paradoxalement retournent à la littérature-discours en travaillant l'oralité. Il met ainsi en exergue le travail sur le mélange des genres autour de la figure du conteur et de l'épopée. La distinction qu'il opère entre l'oral, lié davantage au sociolecte, et le vocal, autour de la voix qui incarne le poète,

montre bien comment des poètes comme Apollinaire, Cendrars, Max Jacob ou Victor Segalen reviennent à l'âge du pré-imprimé pour refonder une modernité détachée des codifications esthétiques. Autre écart, celui envisagé par Nadejda Magnenat entre « haute » et « basse culture », c'est-à-dire entre la poésie et le « cinéma primitif », au sens où cet art naissant n'est pas encore légitimé et institutionnalisé. Les écrits de Pierre Reverdy, mais aussi d'autres poètes comme Apollinaire ou Christian Salmon laissent transparaître l'influence de cette forme particulière d'expressivité dans une dynamique intermédiaire. Christine Le Quellec enfin distingue plusieurs primitivismes qui coexistent dans un rapport complexe entre la forme et la fonction des textes littéraires. Le premier se construit, comme l'a montré Isabelle Krzykowski, en-dehors de la temporalité linéaire et de la perception rationnelle, dans une approche mystique et magique de la fonction du poète. Le second, dans le contexte de l'art industriel, retourne à l'exotisme, la dimension magique laissant la place à l'énergie et à l'intensité de l'homme moderne dans une société techniciste. La première partie se clôt par un entretien avec Souleymane Bachir Diagne, spécialiste de Senghor, autour des écarts entre intentions des artistes et réception contemporaine. Le chercheur insiste sur la nécessité d'adopter une approche critique du concept de primitivisme en le replaçant dans son contexte et en interrogeant les termes et leurs connotations. Outre l'étude de thématiques spécifiques, les auteurs de la première partie interrogent en effet la notion de primitivisme sous plusieurs angles. Isabelle Krzykowski revient sur l'apparition des termes « primitivisme » et « primitif » et sur leur utilisation, concluant que la notion n'a pas fait l'objet d'un travail de théorisation de la part des mouvements concernés, mais qu'elle a été forgée *a posteriori* par la critique, ce qui n'empêche pas la pertinence de son utilisation pour caractériser les avant-gardes. Reprenant les théories d'historiens de l'art comme Jean-Luc Aka-Evy ou Robert Goldwater, Nadejda Magnenat rappelle que la notion de primitivisme est avant tout une construction socio-historique dans laquelle il faut distinguer la perspective des acteurs et des théoriciens.

La seconde partie, « De Walt Whitman à Julien Blaine », présente six études de cas qui couvrent les XIX^e et XX^e siècles à partir de plusieurs zones géographiques. Bacary Sarr analyse la façon dont les écrivains utilisent le discours ethnographique sur l'Afrique, pour légitimer et défendre le peuple noir dans le cas de Senghor, et dans le contexte d'une recherche de renouveau poétique pour Cendrars et Carl Einstein. Tous trois reprennent les ambiguïtés d'une pensée essentialiste sur l'Afrique.

Jehanne Denogent déconstruit la réception des *Poèmes nègres* de Tristan Tzara en montrant comment le travail d'édition d'Henri Béhar, puis de Marc Dachy ont infléchi le sens de l'œuvre en effaçant la démarche scientifique de Tzara et en gommant le contexte social et culturel qui donnait tout son sens à un projet avant tout fondé sur les sources documentaires et sur l'oralité. Delphine Rumeau s'intéresse au continent américain qui lui aussi a influencé le primitivisme littéraire européen à travers l'œuvre de Longfellow, qui propose une approche romantique et thématique, et celle de Whitman, plus complexe, qui illustre une attitude du « primitif » dans un rapport originel et immédiat au monde, se constituant ainsi comme modèle de poésie primitive moderne. Laura Laborie rapproche le primitivisme de Ramuz de la phénoménologie de Merleau-Ponty. L'importance de la perception, la présence au monde avant tout processus rationnel, la conception du langage comme geste et chair, la mise en avant d'une intériorité non pensée rapprochent le primitivisme littéraire de l'expérience phénoménologique. En étudiant les performances des artistes femmes du xx^e siècle, Estela Ocampo montre comment la vision coloniale du « primitif » qui unit le sexuel, l'animal et le féminin se renverse dans la revendication féministe d'un primitivisme comme pouvoir créateur qui nourrit des questionnements esthétiques et sociaux. L'ouvrage se clôt avec le développement de Serge Linarès autour des recherches de Michaux, Dotremont et Blaine sur les écritures archaïques, les traditions idéogrammatiques et les expérimentations typographiques, envisageant ainsi un primitivisme de l'écriture au sens premier. Fondés sur des approches comparatistes ou interdisciplinaires, les articles de cette deuxième partie permettent de déplacer le regard pour envisager la question sous un angle nouveau.

La variété des approches et des domaines font ainsi de l'ouvrage une référence pour les études sur le primitivisme littéraire. Le volume est d'ailleurs très référencé avec une bibliographie à la fin de chaque article. Peut-être peut-on regretter l'absence d'une bibliographie d'ensemble organisée. La multiplicité des points de vue, la dimension comparatiste, intermédiaire et pluridisciplinaire permettent, de façon nuancée, de montrer toute la richesse et la complexité de la notion sans tenter de la simplifier ou de la figer. Si le découpage entre les deux parties peut paraître quelque peu artificiel, c'est justement parce que les auteurs abordent tous la complexité de la notion à partir d'un corpus d'étude qui nourrit leur réflexion. Dans leur préface, les deux auteurs montrent bien l'intérêt d'une telle approche pour envisager les avant-gardes et leurs

prolongements tout au long du xx^e siècle. Loin d'être une esthétique figée, le primitivisme apparaît davantage comme une dynamique de création aux expressions variées, qui ouvre la littérature sur les autres arts et sur le monde, fondant la modernité sur le refus des normes et du carcan de la société contemporaine.

**Laurent Dubreuil. *L'élargissement francophone :
Dix interventions critiques***

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Le volume rassemble dix textes de Laurent Dubreuil rédigés en anglais ou en français, entre 2010 et 2021, la plupart inédits. Les sujets des différents chapitres et leur traitement, à la structuration souvent impressionniste, montrent la porosité entre l'activité universitaire et l'acuité créatrice de l'auteur, tout comme ils ne cachent rien des faiblesses que le chercheur reconnaît au discours de la critique en général et de la critique francophoniste en particulier. Les textes en anglais ont été traduits en français par Ninon Chavoz qui signe un avant-propos très éclairant. Pour elle, la présente publication constituerait le dernier volet de ce qui pourrait s'appeler la « trilogie francophone de Laurent Dubreuil », le premier étant assuré par « L'empire du langage » (2008), le second par « L'empire de la littérature », un ouvrage collectif publié en 2016 qui cherchait à « penser l'indiscipline francophone avec Laurent Dubreuil ». Mais surtout le livre offre à un lecteur qui ne le connaîtrait pas encore un bon point d'entrée synthétique dans le travail de Laurent Dubreuil autour de la question suivante : comment penser l'après-postcolonial en francophonie littéraire et dépasser l'enlisement des griefs et des dénégations dans lequel se noie la critique universitaire ? La réponse se dévoilera progressivement dans les trois parties de l'ouvrage avec comme fil d'Ariane la notion d'« élargissement ».

La première partie – *Histoires ou méthodes* – fixe un certain nombre de critères méthodologiques à visée « élargissante ». Le premier d'entre

eux pose la nécessité de différencier l'histoire de la littérature et l'histoire littéraire. Les deux disciplines n'ont pas les mêmes objectifs ni les mêmes objets. L'histoire littéraire – qui intéresse Dubreuil – ne veut pas retenir du texte son seul aspect documentaire. Sa temporalité et son historicité doivent se concevoir de manière non linéaire et non circulaire. C'est pourquoi les notions d' « anachronisme » et d' « événement » seront convoquées – ensemble – pour appréhender le fait littéraire. Le deuxième point de réflexion de méthode présentée dans le chapitre un de la première partie est la question toujours irrésolue de la meilleure appellation des textes écrits en français. Dubreuil retient en l'état l'étiquette de littérature « francophone », avec une acception bien plus large, qui englobe la littérature franco-française et toutes les littératures périphériques ou postcoloniales. Ces deux premiers constats méthodologiques permettent de comprendre ce que devrait être l'histoire littéraire francophone, sa « mellontologie », pour reprendre le terme de Dubreuil (41). L'histoire littéraire francophone devrait se donner pour mission de repenser les modes de circulation des textes en français dans le temps et l'espace dans une perspective décloisonnante, ouverte : « Elle engagerait une autre façon de faire de l'histoire, et de s'en défaire, depuis l'abîme historique d'anachroniques événements » (41).

La deuxième partie, la plus imposante en nombre de chapitres, intitulée *Répertoire d'objets poétiques*, démontre l'applicabilité de la « mellontologie » à la francophonie littéraire et illustre les modalités d'appréhension des textes francophones à partir d'un corpus faisant dialoguer des auteurs de différents espaces et de différentes époques. Ninon Chavoz parlait dans son avant-propos d'une lecture « romantique » des littératures francophones par Dubreuil. Et il n'est pas anodin de rappeler le rôle émancipateur que Léopold Sedar Senghor reconnaissait à Victor Hugo et aux romantiques dans « Le français, langue de culture » (*Esprit*, novembre 1962), texte fameux qui marque la résurgence du terme « francophonie » créé par le géographe Onésime Reclus à la fin du XIX^e siècle. Les romantiques ont osé dans leur création « mettre un bonnet rouge au vieux dictionnaire », ont participé à cet élargissement de la langue et des inspirations en littérature, élargissement à la source même de ce qu'est la francophonie littéraire. Les contributions de la deuxième partie font se rencontrer autour de la question de la race des poètes, d'abord, Baudelaire et des poètes « francophones » : le Belge Emile Verhaeren et le Haïtien Paul Lochard. Le deuxième texte de cette partie questionne l'ambiguïté du nativisme des premiers textes de Senghor et de Césaire

louant tous les deux « un lyrisme nègre ». Il pointe « les contradictions d'un unitarisme théorique à tendances essentialistes » et « une envie, plus tard réalisée, d'ouvrir les attributs de cette essence à l'échange » (80), puis met en lumière les connivences dans les processus d'écriture et de réécriture du *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* de Césaire (le texte a connu quatre versions de 1939 à 1956) avec les *Cinq grandes odes* de Claudel. Le rapprochement de *L'aimance* et *Amour bilingue* d'Abdelkebir Khatibi sont au centre de la réflexion de la troisième contribution. Si la pratique de l'énallage entre le tutoiement et le vouvoiement inscrit *L'aimance* dans la tradition de l'écrivain médiéval Bernard de Ventadour, mais aussi de Racine ou Marmontel, et illustre par là un « nouveau mode courtois » qui « surjoue le français » (96) et recourt à un vocabulaire « gentiment désuet » (100), la lecture d'*Amour bilingue*, en relation avec les énallages de *Thomas l'obscur* de Maurice Blanchot, permet de saisir que la question centrale de la « bilangue » est déjà présente dans les deux textes de Khatibi. L'attention de Dubreuil se porte sur diverses productions culturelles des banlieues dans la quatrième contribution et concrétise là, dans le champ de la réflexion francophone, ce que j'aurais envie d'appeler un élargissement synchronique intérieur, via par exemple la tchatte d'un Djamel Debbouze ou d'une Faïza Guène. Éminemment politique, la conception de la banlieue et les discours qui en émanent conduisent le chapitre suivant de cette partie au rapport que l'art entretient avec la société. Le problème sera traité par la comparaison de deux films, *Vénus noire* d'Abdellatif Kechiche et *Des hommes et des dieux* de Xavier Beauvois. Les deux réalisateurs revisitent la colonisation selon le principe de ce que Dubreuil appelle le « réalisme citoyen » qui s'articule dans un double mouvement de dépolitisation et repolitisation, très conventionnel et *in fine* aux antipodes de ce que devrait apporter l'art dans le récit historique. Le dernier chapitre de cette partie vérifie comment la trilogie de pièces écrites en créole par l'écrivain haïtien Félix Morisseau-Leroy (*Antigôn*, *Wa Kreyon* et *Pèp la*) expose l'ambiguïté étymologique et sociologique du « tyran », dans une relecture transhistorique de la pièce de Sophocle, nourrie d'autres réécritures comme celle de Jean Anouilh notamment.

Dans la dernière partie, *Alter-Identitaires*, l'élargissement est pensé à partir d'une argumentation originale sur la réhabilitation de la notion d'universalisme qui permet de dépasser « le périmètre des situations historiques et politiques par quoi nous consentons trop souvent à nous laisser déterminer » (169). Laurent Dubreuil, avec une provocation assumée, rappelle la défiance légitime et la méfiance excessive des théories

universitaires anti et postcoloniales et celles des « politiques d'identité » à l'encontre de l'universalisme. L'avant-dernier chapitre du livre, intitulé « Général, singulier, universel », s'oppose à la posture universaliste androcentrique que Gaytari Spivak prête à Baudelaire dans son poème « Le cygne » qui réduirait la femme noire à une figure vague, elle-même emblématique d'une évocation condescendante de la « superbe Afrique ». Mais pour Dubreuil, cette acception de l'universalisme renvoie à un particularisme se prenant pour une généralité (159). Il renverse la charge contre l'universalisme en démontrant que le système d'échos du poème de Baudelaire permet, au contraire, d'inscrire la femme noire dans un universel d'expériences d'exils au cœur même du sens profond du poème. Et c'est la même visée particularisante de l'universalisme que la dernière contribution de l'ouvrage dénonce dans le chef des défenseurs des politiques d'identité, à la lumière des polémiques autour du spectacle des *Suppliantes* mis en scène par Phillippe Brunet et interdit de représentation à la Sorbonne, suite à l'onde de chocs provoquée par les contestations d'associations combattant la négrophobie.

Au total, le livre offre une proposition d'approche nouvelle et déhiérarchisante des littératures et productions culturelles des mondes francophones, en les inscrivant dans la densité et la multitude des connexions possibles de l'espace-temps.

Fritz Peter Kirsch. *Sur les francophonies et leurs littératures. Approches interculturelles*

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Cet ouvrage composé par Fritz Peter Kirsch, philologue et comparatiste à l'Université de Vienne, se donne pour ambition de constituer un savoir nouveau sur les littératures francophones dans une approche interdisciplinaire. Au carrefour de l'histoire littéraire, des études culturelles et des lettres comparées, l'auteur vise à interroger les liens entre les notions d'interculturel et de transculturel et les usages qui peuvent en être faits pour l'analyse de son objet et des rapports de forces inhérents aux francophonies. Une originalité de l'ouvrage tient au fait que l'auteur accorde une place importante à la littérature française ainsi qu'à la diversité culturelle et linguistique au sein de l'Hexagone, en ne faisant ainsi pas du concept de francophonie une notion désignant les littératures périphériques de langue française comme cela peut souvent être le cas dans ce champ de recherche. Ce recueil d'articles, constitué en un volume de quatre parties, donne l'avantage d'un éventail relativement large d'études de cas allant du Moyen Âge à la fin du XX^e siècle.

Après une esquisse critique de l'historiographie littéraire, un premier abord permet de saisir les intentions de l'auteur, son utilisation du concept d'interculturalité et sa complémentarité avec le transculturel au regard de la littérature de langue française en Algérie et en exil, en passant par l'œuvre d'Albert Camus et de Mohammed Dib. En effet, l'Algérie littéraire du milieu du XX^e siècle est pour l'auteur un exemple probant d'une situation à la fois inter- et transculturelle. Si les deux écrivains partagent un certain

détachement de cultures qualifiées par l'auteur comme « sphériques », c'est pour se situer dans un « entre-deux » transculturel qui effacerait les limites spatiales et rendrait caduques les oppositions classiques, le concept d'interculturalité complétant l'approche par l'analyse des métissages et des conditions sociales de production de ces littératures. L'œuvre de Camus est observée essentiellement en contexte interculturel, Kirsch interrogeant si celui-ci peut être appréhendé comme un écrivain français ou algérien et en faisant la démonstration de l'Algérie comme un centre littéraire et non une périphérie. À partir de cette démonstration, le théâtre de Dib est quant à lui observé en contexte transculturel et comparé aux littératures migrantes du Québec ainsi qu'à l'œuvre d'Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. Ici le transculturel permet à l'auteur de saisir l'écriture migrante de Dib dans une sorte de troisième voie quant à l'opposition entre l'attachement au pays d'origine et l'assimilation à un nouveau contexte d'écriture.

Une seconde partie s'ouvre sur la métaphore de l'anamorphose en peinture, prenant appui sur le tableau *Les Ambassadeurs* de Hans Holbein le Jeune, afin d'éclairer comment « colonisateurs et colonisés s'influencent mutuellement » (86) mais également afin d'intégrer la vision du lecteur analysant à l'interprétation. Se penchant sur la littérature française à partir de la tension entre ce que Kirsch nomme « littérature universelle et littératures connexes », ce chapitre lui permet de déployer une grille d'analyse qui emprunte à l'étude du processus de civilisation chez Norbert Elias, depuis le héros gascon du XVII^e siècle jusqu'à Michel Houellebecq en passant par Hugo et les « petits romantiques », Rousseau et l'Abbé Fabre, à partir des oppositions entre civilisation et barbarie, centre et périphérie, tradition et modernité. Comme l'avait observé Elias, l'histoire littéraire apporte ici un angle de vue complémentaire à l'étude du rationalisme et des standards de la société polie des XVIII^e et XIX^e siècles, dans ses liens avec la colonisation et les questions linguistiques propre à la France. Ici, une grande attention est portée à la langue occitane ainsi qu'au rapport de complémentarité entre la littérature française et la littérature occitane dans la France interculturelle du Moyen Âge jusqu'au Félibrige. D'une tradition de recherche germanique, l'auteur apporte ici à l'étude de la littérature française un point de vue original avec une approche romanistique, mais reste quelque peu dans une doxa lettrée qui emprunte aux études littéraires anglo-saxonnes et qui demeure notamment marquée par l'idée d'universalisme. L'auteur prend cependant le parti du pluriel sur le singulier pour aborder l'hétérogénéité des littératures francophones. Le lecteur restera étonné de la critique d'ethnocentrisme et d'eurocentrisme

adressée par l'auteur à l'œuvre de Jacques Dubois, ou bien celle d'une vision téléologique des travaux de Pierre Bourdieu et Niklas Luhmann, là où l'étude du processus de civilisation selon Elias prend pour lui une part aussi importante pour l'analyse littéraire.

Une troisième partie du livre se consacre à saisir la littérature d'Oc en contexte francophone, dans ses rapports de force avec le centre parisien et le monolinguisme français. Là où, pendant l'Ancien Régime, Paris et Versailles imposent « l'idéal de l'honnête homme » et les standards linguistiques dominants, l'auteur s'intéresse aux influences réciproques et à la conciliation de ces standards avec la tradition propre à cette culture régionale minoritaire. Toujours dans une démarche comparatiste, l'interculturel y éclaire les interactions entre les cultures nationale et régionale en France à travers divers exemples, le cas de l'Occitanie étant présenté par l'auteur comme « presque sans liens essentiels et durables avec quelque extérieur » (160) mais marqué par la dialectique avec la culture du centre parisien. Toujours dans la tension entre tradition et modernité, nature et civilisation, de l'Occitanie des troubadours en contexte européen à Frédéric Mistral et Joseph d'Arbaud, de l'occitanisme de Robert Lafont répondant à Jean-Paul Sartre en passant par les mythes littéraires qui ont marqué l'Europe du XIX^e siècle, Franz Peter Kirsch avertit le lecteur de la division du travail universitaire entre les études sur la langue d'une part et sur la littérature d'autre part ou encore de la division entre médiévistes et modernistes. Observant une certaine convergence entre les intérêts de dominants contestés et ceux de résistants minoritaires, il plaide pour une « justice interculturelle » qui ne se fonderait pas dans une littérature-monde en français (d'après le titre du célèbre manifeste de 2007, cf. infra) mais par la « formation rhizomatique » (Deleuze) d'échanges entre les langues et les écrivains (171). Ce cadre d'analyse poststructuraliste est en effet présent tout au long de l'ouvrage, articulé à la réflexion sur le concept de transculturel mais qui n'aboutit pas à interroger la notion de culture transnationale, ce que nous regrettons.

Enfin, une quatrième partie accorde davantage d'attention aux cadres institutionnels linguistiques à partir, par exemple, de la non-ratification par la France de la Charte européenne des langues régionales ou minoritaires de 1992, déclarée incompatible avec la Constitution française. En effet, si le mouvement régionaliste de la fin du XX^e siècle s'est heurté à la suspicion de séparatisme et aux craintes de l'hégémonie de la langue anglaise sur le français, les littératures françaises ont connu une importante contestation de la norme de l'universel et du traditionalisme centraliste. L'émancipation

des « altérités marginales » est notamment lue avec le concept de polycentrisme emprunté au spécialiste des littératures francophones Michel Beniamino, contre l'idée de monocentrisme européen. Mais l'auteur offre ici de dépasser le propos habituel pour observer la standardisation d'une culture francophone autonome ailleurs qu'à Paris. Ainsi, un regard sur le « traditionalisme conservateur québécois » (241), la « négritude conformiste » (242) ou bien encore un questionnement sur « l'inappropriation » du terme de « belgitude » s'articule au débat autour des revendications du manifeste *Pour une littérature-monde en français*, paru en mars 2007, débat portant sur l'« attitude critique à l'égard de la France » du manifeste, où la francophonie est vue comme un reste de la colonisation, et également critique de l'universalisme et du formalisme propres à la littérature française contemporaine. Ces aspects débouchent sur des questions de définition de la francophonie, qui ne se sont pas posées avant mais seront reprises plus loin dans l'ouvrage. C'est également une réflexion inédite sur la littérature acadienne, souvent considéré comme le « parent pauvre » des études sur le français hors de France, qui permet à l'auteur de réinterroger la *Weltliteratur*, par le biais d'une comparaison avec la littérature occitane. Entre, d'un côté, le repli identitaire et héroïque d'une littérature en voie d'affirmation et, de l'autre côté, l'alternative déconstructiviste qui se risque à un relativisme mondialiste, Kirsch avertit là encore le lecteur de l'écueil d'un nouveau type de *Weltliteratur*, interrogeant la possibilité d'une solution intermédiaire, toujours dans le cadre éliasiens et guidé par l'interculturel. Ces considérations sont articulées à un travail sur la notion de transversalité, qui permet à l'auteur de pronostiquer « l'augmentation progressive des rapports directs, pour ainsi dire transversaux, entre les littératures francophones » (255), l'auteur citant pour exemple les relations littéraires entre la Caraïbe francophone et le Maghreb. Dans cet effort de conjecture d'un « paysage littéraire intercontinental » qui ne passerait pas par le centre, nous restons étonnée que l'auteur, considérant la littérature comme un système autonome de normes et de valeurs, ne fasse ici aucune référence aux travaux de Pascale Casanova, notamment pour ce qui est de ses usages de périphérie et de polycentrisme et en particulier pour la « justice interculturelle » qu'il défend. Avec cet essai d'histoire littéraire, d'une grande richesse encyclopédique et qui revendique d'aller au-delà des études particularisantes notamment par le comparatisme, l'analyse des rapports de force inhérents à la langue et à la littérature gagnerait alors à dépasser le champ des *cultural studies* et à se poursuivre dans un dialogue plus resserré avec la sociologie et l'anthropologie.

**Markus Messling. *L'Universel après
l'universalisme. Des littératures francophones du
contemporain.* Traduit de l'allemand par Olivier
Mannoni**

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L'ouvrage du professeur de littérature romane et comparée et d'études culturelles Markus Messling, initialement publié en Allemagne en 2019 et traduit par Olivier Mannoni, part d'un constat : aujourd'hui, nous sommes confrontés au « paradoxe de devoir justifier l'universalité parce qu'on n'arrive pas à produire justice et légitimité sans elle dans la société mondiale, mais de ne plus pouvoir réduire cette universalité à un concept, de devoir d'abord la fabriquer » (44). La littérature ne peut évidemment résoudre cette question d'ordre philosophique mais elle rend visibles les problèmes qui caractérisent les processus de négociation accompagnant l'implosion de l'universalisme et la quête d'un nouvel universel. Elle participe ainsi à la formation d'une nouvelle conscience du monde et ce sont ces tentatives que Messling entreprend de présenter.

Après une courte préface de Souleymane Bachir Diagne plaidant, à la suite de Maurice Merleau-Ponty, pour un « universel latéral » voire multilatéral, opposé à « l'universel de surplomb » qui a longtemps été l'apanage de l'Europe, Markus Messling s'interroge sur ce qui reste des idéaux républicains « Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité » au XXI^e siècle, à l'ère post-coloniale. A cet effet, il présente et analyse les œuvres de neuf

auteur.e.s contemporain.e.s de langue française. Ces études sont issues d'un cycle de conférences qui s'est tenu à la ifa-Galerie de Berlin en 2017, elles ont été revues pour la publication et mises en perspective grâce à une introduction très dense et intéressante qui en définit les grands enjeux.

L'ouvrage relève des études culturelles plutôt que des études philologiques dans la mesure où l'on n'y trouve pas d'analyses de détail mais des confrontations entre les postures auctoriales et les thématiques des œuvres. Il relève aussi moins des études de littérature comparée que des travaux sur le corpus de langue française puisqu'y sont analysés uniquement les livres d'auteur.e.s francophones – l'adjectif « francophone » étant ici à prendre au sens général d'écrivain.e de langue française, issu.e ou non de l'Hexagone. L'ouvrage milite ainsi pour une approche transculturelle refusant d'accorder une priorité aux textes du Centre français par rapport à ce qui est souvent et injustement considéré comme une Périphérie.

L'introduction insiste sur la nécessité et les capacités des littératures francophones à figurer une nouvelle universalité, dégagee des présupposés d'un universalisme qui a été discrédité par l'impérialisme colonial. Bien entendu, les auteur.e.s étudié.e.s dans cet essai ne s'engagent pas tou.te.s directement et explicitement dans la critique et la reconfiguration de cet universel d'un type inédit, mais leurs œuvres se laissent toutes saisir en tant que commentaires, implicites (le plus souvent) ou non, de la devise fondant l'universalisme français, « Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité ». Les trois parties de l'essai s'ordonnent ainsi selon ce trio de valeurs, mais en commençant par l'égalité, dans la mesure où la modernité a débuté avec l'exigence d'égalité, car, selon Markus Messling, « seule la justification matérialiste de l'égalité de tous les hommes, fondée sur le droit naturel, a en effet radicalement remis en cause le modèle généalogique d'une représentation aristocratique des idéaux » (73). Dès lors, c'est dans leurs dialogues et leurs frictions avec l'idéal égalitariste que vont être lues les œuvres de Michel Houellebecq, Mathias Enard et Camille de Toledo. L'essai propose une analyse de la « mélancolie des hommes blancs de plus de 40 ans » (titre de la partie consacrée à l'égalité, on pourrait aussi parler de « boomers »), montrant comment ces œuvres articulent, chacune d'une façon différente, une expérience de la perte relevant d'un « profond pessimisme anthropologique » (56) et placée sous le signe de la mélancolie européenne. En l'occurrence, le plus pessimiste (celui, aussi, qui a la plus forte notoriété en Allemagne) s'avère être Michel Houellebecq. Celui-ci, prophète du déclin (selon la formule d'Alex Rühle) décrit depuis des

années « les effets du néolibéralisme sur les forces qui assurent le liant de la société » (91). Enard et de Toledo illustrent, quant à eux, un savoir politique pertinent sur les potentiels de narration du monde à notre époque de transition.

La deuxième partie, « Liberté », aborde les œuvres d'Alexis Jenni, Kossi Efoui et Wajdi Mouawad, chez qui les dynamiques émancipatoires vont de pair avec une violence délétaire. Dans *L'Art français de la guerre* (prix Goncourt 2011), Alexis Jenni cherche à comprendre la France par le biais de l'histoire de ses guerres récentes, les conflits coloniaux. Les œuvres du Togolais Kossi Efoui, singulièrement *L'Ombre des choses à venir* (2011) et *Solo d'un revenant* (2008), font de notre époque celle d'un progrès douteux, reproduisant les présupposés des discours impériaux. Trois aspects y sont particulièrement mis en évidence, la représentation de l'Afrique comme continent de la « nature », la simplification des réalités socio-culturelles africaines et l'effacement des sujets classés selon le langage de l'administration coloniale. Il s'agit alors pour l'auteur de contester « une tradition, celle du rationalisme linguistique, sans laquelle l'impérialisme français n'est pas compréhensible dans sa particularité. » (205). (Markus Messling remarque qu'il ne s'agit cependant pas de la défense d'une langue nationale supposée spécifique ou d'un combat conceptuel entre des langues : « il s'agit de mettre en doute l'idée que la langue [...] puisse même être utilisée comme média de la réconciliation » (205). A l'instar de Jenni, Efoui ne vise pas simplement à raconter l'histoire autrement, mais à « la révéler en ce qu'elle est conditionnée par l'usage historique du langage. » L'étude de l'œuvre de Wajdi Mouawad suit, quant à elle, la biographie de l'auteur, du Liban de l'enfance jusqu'à la France en passant par le Québec, avec un fil directeur, le récit *L'Amour* qui raconte « le besoin existentiel de reconquérir le langage », puis le théâtre francophone dont l'inspiration lui est venue en exil.

La troisième partie, « Fraternité », s'attache aux « possibilités d'un nouveau « nous » (tel est son sous-titre) et examine les œuvres de Shumona Sinha, Édouard Glissant et Léonora Miano. *Assommons les pauvres !* (2011) de Sinha dévoile l'inhumanité d'un système qui gère les réfugiés en fonction de critères restrictifs, avant que l'autrice, dans les deux œuvres suivantes, ne renvoie à un dilemme typique de notre époque : « nous nous trouvons aujourd'hui face au dilemme consistant à reconnaître leur droit aux récits singuliers sans abandonner une mise en perspective universelle du monde, fondamentale pour l'organisation de la société mondiale selon des questions de droit et de justice » (248). Édouard Glissant a cherché,

lui, à « étendre la diversité dans l'esprit d'une téléologie de l'ouverture pour en créer une nouvelle conscience de l'universel » (249). L'essai étudie ainsi la pensée archipélique cultivée par l'Antillais, pensée qui ne rassemble pas tout systématiquement pour le ramener à l'unité du concept mais qui fait son affaire de l'incompatibilité et de la non-simultanéité, du chaos du monde en somme, « parce qu'elle conçoit la culture comme un processus constant d'échange et de créolisation » (251). Enfin, l'approche de l'œuvre de Léonora Miano est centrée sur le roman *La Saison de l'ombre* (2013), qui est mis en relation avec l'essai *Habiter la frontière* (2012), où Markus Messling reconnaît la genèse d'un « nous » de la solidarité qui intègre tant la force destructrice de la modernité que ses possibilités émancipatrices. Les trois auteur.e.s, selon différentes stratégies d'écriture, se saisissent dès lors de la problématique de la fraternité et, plus largement, de la solidarité à l'échelle internationale.

L'essai tend ainsi à valoriser les dynamiques constructives qui refusent de se soumettre à une mélancolie n'ouvrant sur rien sinon sur un discours de vexation narcissique, pour interroger les ressources et possibilités d'un universel à venir. Il éclaire la conscience spécifique, que l'on trouve aujourd'hui, dans la communauté des locuteurs francophones, du délitement de la légitimité européenne occidentale. Toutefois, les œuvres peuvent bien constituer comme des sismographes de notre présent en crise et dresser des généalogies critiques de la modernité européenne, elles relèvent aussi d'un engagement prospectif dont Markus Messling explore les traces. En ce sens, il insiste sur une politique du roman ouvrant à un discours sur notre avenir commun qui mérite d'être étudiée de près. Il montre la richesse de ce domaine et encourage d'autres recherches abordant les textes dans leurs dimensions stylistiques et de poétique, prolongeant et confirmant cette approche passionnante des relations entre la littérature contemporaine et l'universel.

**Sebastian Mitchell. *Utopia and its Discontents.*
*Plato to Atwood***

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**Jukka Mikkonen. *Philosophy, Literature and
Understanding. On Reading and Cognition***

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If density of argument is a mark of the depth and vigour of literary studies and the philosophy of literature, then these two books demonstrate its quickened form. Different in purpose, distinct in approach and central concerns, and stylistically and tonally contrastive, *Utopia and its Discontents* is breathtaking in its timescape – indeed, from Athens in the 4th Century BCE to Canada in the 21st Century CE – and coruscating and dexterous in prose that visually portrays its “erewhons”, to employ Samuel Butler’s anagram; whilst *Philosophy, Literature and Understanding* is scrupulous in its detail, qualified in its arguments, self-interrogating of its author, and evidentiary of futures. The range of utopias and the quarry of literary philosophy in these two volumes are impressive. Neither is a mere survey. Rather, the former comprises close readings and detailed exegesis of the prominent texts in the primarily English-speaking eu-topic corpus; the latter evinces an analytical, yet finely nuanced, ever-probing inquiry.

In the studies of utopian promise and its failures, Mitchell notes that literal or cultural production does not transform societies or nations even when their narrative worlds progress, so that poverty and inequality are vanquished, and the reign of justice, harmony, and love is inaugurated in a perduring eschatological *shalom*. Literature is not, nor should it be, one concurs, ideologically captive. On the contrary, the writer's nightmarishly obdurate blank sheet which is transformed into a story constitutes an "aesthetic space" for the textual portrayals of thematic action, in the Aristotelian sense of *praxis* (*Poetics* 1149b 24–25), of characterisation and plot, of dramatic confrontations and reconsiderations, of an entertainment that entertains and also gadflies (to advert to Socrates) in its questionings, its moral promises, its unsettling strange-familiars that destabilise the text and the reader, as its shuttle looms between reading the reader and writing the reader. Well, perhaps wishfully, in its finer forms, if such an evaluative interposition may be permitted. If these attributes are evident in the literary, then they are instructive (suppositions that Mikkonen examines); if instructive, then demonstrated more especially in its malevolent counter-voices and discontents in "ustopic" and dystopic narrative worlds (as Mitchell evinces). But to oppose literature's entrapment to causes and factional sloganeering, and to propose that it inquires of the aboutnesses of being human are views that are not without their derisive and, on occasions, corrosively dismissive dissenters. What, then, is literature's vocation? What is it called to do? What is its *work*? Is it to evoke *une jouissance artistique*, to contend or to support social and political imaginaries, to innovatively recast the established internal schematics of plot and characterisation, to challenge heteronormative sexual and gender definitions, to reconfigure spatial and temporal devices, to neotericise narration and focalisation, or merely to facsimilise traditional literary forms by obeying the protocols of received conventions?

An answer is provided by a fictional first-year undergraduate, who is reading English at Trinity College, Dublin, in a recent novel acclaimed by a range of British publications from the *Spectator* and *Daily Telegraph* through *The Economist* to the *Guardian* and the *Times Literary Supplement*. "One night the library started closing just as he", Connell, one of Sally Rooney's two protagonists in *Normal People* (2018), "reached the passage in *Emma* when it seems like Mr Knightley is going to marry Harriet, and he had to close the book and walk home in a state of strange emotional agitation. He's amused at himself, getting wrapped up in the drama of

novels like that. It feels intellectually unserious to concern himself with fictional people But there it is: literature moves him”, and he realises that “the same imagination he uses as a reader is necessary to understand real people also, and to be intimate with them” (68–69). A lapidary summary, one suggests, that scaffolds Jukka Mikkonen’s *Philosophy, Literature and Understanding. On Reading and Cognition*, with its defence of literature (Chapter One), its vocative to the reader’s imagination (Chapter Two) in narratives (Chapter Three) that ostend modes of companionable sympathy, of “understanding” the self and the other, and of scrutinising these construals of comprehension (Chapter Four), and all of which are evident in the fictional Connell’s and, to some extent, the real readers’ responses of “emotional agitation” or being “move[d]” (Chapter Five).

Mikkonen’s introductory chapter highlights literary scholarship’s more recent offensive within the academy by claiming to enhance the humanities in ways that are absent from the other disciplines. Perhaps, in recension, one may propose that the act of reading and the study of literature disclose human truths and the truths of being human in imaginative narrative worlds of the subjunctive and the optative moods by establishing “possible worlds” that recur to, and subtly persuade or forcibly coerce transformations in, the historical present of the scholar and the reader. Although there are variations on this theme, some fairly radical, Mikkonen considers the approach of the analytic philosopher, which evokes Descartes’s *homo cogitans*. Thus, the meaning of the said and the written, and of the truth of propositions, are scrutinised. But inhibited are the range of metaphorical connotations that inhabit literature with a visionary resourcefulness that are implicit in its multivalent literary conceits. Lately, however, *cogito*’s increasingly dusty, yet persistently dualistic, conception of the human has been placed under renewed pressure, as cognition itself is redefined. Mikkonen’s aim is to probe the cognitive value of literature not *in se*, but in the way in which it may enhance understanding. His treatise may be read as an invitation to journey on a cite- (rather than site-) specific tour through an impressive range of philosophical and literary research, highlighting, reflecting, and contesting the purposes and work of literature, its inciting pleasures and its indicting reproaches. In an essay that includes in its title, “understanding” and “cognition”, the philosopher necessarily seeks definitional clarity about “cognition” and its contribution to, and distinction from, “understanding”. Previously, logicians considered

cognitive language as semantic bearers and instrumental language as interpretive – person-oriented – communication. However, as the Nobel laureate, Daniel Kahneman (*Thinking* 50-51), has demonstrated with regard to strategic decision-making, intelligent activity is not without its bodily conditioning; and Fraser Watts (*Embodied Spirituality* 92; & *passim*), with reference to religion and spirituality, has employed dual modes of cognising: not merely “abstract and linguistic” but also “intuitive and relational”. Indeed, “‘cognition’ is on the move”, asserts Mikkonen (7; and also cites Terrence Cave, n. 36¹), and it is evident in the 4E formula: “cognition is embodied, embedded, enactive, and extended” (7; Watts *Embodied Spirituality* 4).

Appropriated in this sense, one could say that cognitive permission has been granted to examine the role of imagination in reading literature, and how it inscribes an intricate complexity. For not only are there ways of imagining within fiction, there also are ways of imagining fiction. *Within* Jane Austen’s fictional world of *Emma*, Connell responds with his imagination, and it is *within* the fictional world of Connell reading *Emma* that Rooney (*Normal People*) imagines Connell reading *Emma*. In contrast, *without* Rooney’s, and, indeed, Jane Austen’s fictional worlds, the reader reads of Connell’s imagination at work, imagines Connell reading, imagines the image in the literary description, imagines the images in the wider context of Connell’s fictional arena, imagines inter-textual allusions, and also considers imaginatively the impress of all of these images upon oneself in the present and in the past images of one’s memory. And these successions, quite probably, continue to unfold, because literature’s seams are deep, and they retain the nuggets of self- and other-disclosive images that reading wrests. Fictional works can also foreground specific modes of imagining, and through which the implied author compels one’s reading – or, perhaps, one of one’s readings, because they also open other levels of imaginative earnest. In Damon Galgut’s recent Booker Prize winning novel, *The Promise* (2021), reading is authorially circumscribed by two modes of imagining. As usual, the story within is readerly-imagined; but it is also captured by a sweeping and swooping, often snooping, even voiced, external cinematographic panning that unreliably comments upon, and questions, the activities

¹ With reference to Mikkonen’s succeeding note (121 n. 36), the cartons of various foods frequently advertise their products as sources of cognitive enhancement.

of the characters with, on occasions, a derisive irony. Although not new, such a device interpolates an additional level of reader imagining, and then, of course, opens further levels of the reader's imagination. The interposition of such a upodiegetic lens conscripts an attentiveness to focalisation, to register the verbs of perception through which "seeing" shifts, and which requires the reader to shift in order, imaginatively, "to see", to follow the action. Consequently, additional reader images are *embedded* in character *embodiment*. They *actively extend* meaning through deliberative reader *cognition*, and complexify thought. Definitive conclusions about the action of any one novel are challenged. Thus, cognition is psychosomatically configured, and understanding haltingly advances, is amended and revised, and contributes a multivalency to the text, context, self and other, as Mikkonen proposes in the closing chapter.

Narrative conduits these multifarious imaginative portrayals of character in time and space. And to understand these fictions of locative spatial and temporal characterisation requires acknowledging their density, probing their "thickness", the descriptive and the evaluative intertwined. Mikkonen's third chapter refers to the prevalent convictions within various disciplines of the humanities that human persons are stories. A not unfamiliar experience – whether at drinks during a conference, in an interview or group exchange – is the (somewhat intrusive) pressured invitation "to say something about yourself", to disclose "who you are". When inescapable, with embarrassment, one replies by telling a story of oneself, which is not *the* story of oneself, in a narrative that is selective, amnesiac, emended and addended, redacted and repeatedly edited and airbrushed. Is there not, then, a resemblance between these stories of oneself and the stories in fiction? To some extent, indeed. But there are also differences. In fiction, deliberative authorial control, although constrained by plot and the actions of characters, eludes readers as human persons even when they find themselves reflected by narrators and focalisers that tergiversate and vary in reliability. Human persons are not obturated knowns that may be identified even in the most definitively drawn of characters. Rather, they remain shaded unknown knowns whether living, or, in fact, deceased. Consider that the reader of a biography of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing or Karl Marx knows each somewhat better than even their most intimate contemporaries did. And yet, if "real-life narratives and literary narratives are ... different", then they may not be "radically different", because it is also the case that the "tendency to give our experiences, memories and plans a story form"

(48–49) without effecting closure also may be mirrored in novels. One continues to study literature precisely because the covers of books do not dispose of fictive lives. Even within a novel, “the sense of an ending” does not necessarily find its *terminus* within fiction or within the fictional work one is reading, to contest Kermode and Lamarque (48). Although a reader may concede that, to some degree, one may know a fictional character with a trammelled knowledge that eludes one’s own life; nevertheless, this knowledge itself may be revisited and reinterpreted. Likewise, self-understanding may retain contrary convictions in a tensile Keatsian “negative capability”, which processes links and forges chains of relations by deliberating upon possible futures to one’s present, and also revisits one’s past and inflects it with different futures (“Oh, now I know why I travelled to Paris last year, although then I thought it was because ...”, a statement which itself reveals that what I thought I knew I did not know; that, in fact, I was ignorant, but now I understand both my ignorance and my reason for travelling to Paris). Understanding oneself, in this mode, is implicit in human personhood, and it may be descried in fiction, evident in and felt by Connell when reading *Emma*, and experienced in and understood by the reader reading about Connell reading *Emma* (in this respect, importantly, 51–54).

From imaginative complexity in Chapter Two, through critical notions of narrative selves that breach the definitional limits of knowledge and probe the layered striations of self-understanding in Chapter Three, Mikkonen turns to cognition in Chapter Four: What, if anything, does modernist fiction teach readers about the mind? For, in spite of its strong claims to facilitate epistemological insights, Mikkonen highlights opposing views that emphasise the confusions sown by literature, of the destabilizing undecidability of form, plot, and characterisation, and of the *aporiai* within the minds of characters. Rather than contest or condone the perplexities that plague narrative worlds and also unsettle the mental states of their readers, Mikkonen (80–83) asks whether life’s ordinariness is not an attempt to conceal its fundamental entangled and riotous disorder. If this may be so, then literature may reflect and refract it instructively. As a consequence, cognitive ability and knowledge acquisition would be accompanied by an epistemological humility – a kind of Anselmian literary *fides quaerens intellectum* – and literature would portray the seeking and searching nature of being human and undermine assertive ideological dogmatism. Thus, cognition ought not to recur to Descartes without challenge and revision, without, at least, its

“4Es”. Significantly, Mikkonen (115–16) wishes to remind philosophers that literature places cognitive benefits as ancillary to understanding and to intimations of possible understanding (51–52), which, sometimes, but not always, emerge from multiple readings and reflective attention.

Is there “evidence,” the title of the concluding chapter, of the effects of literature in the lives of readers? If the more stringent claims for the cognitive benefits of literature have been found wanting, then its personally oriented, and difficult to define, aesthetic value cannot be ignored. Appropriating the philosophical distinction between the “objectivist meaning” and the “relational significance” of literature, Mikkonen (115; original emphasis) advances the view that “literary cognition ... be understood as relational” and that literature advances the skill of relational understanding which “unlike knowledge ... is a *property of a person*”.

All too briefly, one may conclude by returning to Mitchell’s rich and informative utopic explorations, and to observe their cognitive, aesthetic, or neo-cognitive modes of renovating and refining what it means to be human and a person amongst persons. Do they present “objective meanings”, or do they convey “relational significances” (Mikkonen, *supra*)? The texts examined are not all literary fiction. If More’s *Utopia* and Plato’s *Republic* reside more comfortably within political philosophy, then Swift novels could be housed in the discomfort of “misanthropic studies” (*v.* Gibson *Misanthropy*); Atwood could be located in both, and Carlyle, Huxley, and Orwell in critical and political theory, and sociology. Regardless, they share the form of their content: story. And their stories stimulate the reader’s imagination in narratives that contend thought and challenge received conceptions of privacy and sociality. Even though a patent dogmatism seems apparent in some of these texts, Mitchell’s perspicacity repeatedly invokes amendments and re-opens an aesthetic writerly space for readers who, rather than document instructive objective meaning, may inscribe ways of thinking more skilfully about being human in a world in which self- and other-understanding is relational.

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Kitty Millet. *Kabbalah and Literature*

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L'enquête que nous propose ici Kitty Millet, professeur de littératures juives comparées et d'études de l'Holocauste à la *San Francisco State University*, USA, s'avère d'emblée fascinante. Le binôme qui lui fournit son intitulé pourrait de prime abord donner à penser qu'il y serait question de recenser pour analyse dans le corpus littéraire contemporain les occurrences plus ou moins erratiques de thèmes, de symboles, sinon d'éléments lexicaux s'originant dans cette nébuleuse lointaine que constitue pour le grand public des lecteurs, même juifs, l'univers kabbalistique. On disposerait ainsi d'un catalogue permettant de profiler, dans un second temps de la recherche, les contours d'un kabbalisme comme province, ou mode, littéraire. Un peu à la manière dont l'inventaire des odalisques, narguileh et autres minarets permet d'offrir une chair toute fantasmagorique à la fuite dans l'exotisme que l'on nomme Orientalisme.

Le propos de l'ouvrage est autrement essentiel. Loin de nous arracher au labyrinthe de la condition humaine contemporaine, le rapprochement de l'expérience socio-historique et langagière de la mystique juive et du plus vif de l'effort d'expression qui anime quelques représentants de crête de la littérature moderne nous donne à en découvrir dans leurs fort complexes modalités les enjeux proprement ontologiques. Ou, si l'on veut, se risque à jeter quelque lumière diffractée, quelque intelligibilité hautement paradoxale, sur notre temps suspendu entre globalisation et dislocation, entre unité entrevue et fragmentation subie.

En amont de cette recherche d'ordre scientifique, et lui fournissant en quelque sorte son socle problématique, se placent les intuitions et les études de deux savants dont la présence s'avère constamment inspirante à l'orée de ces pages. Erich Auerbach, dans l'essai initial de son *Mimésis* (1946), avait magistralement mis en lumière la tension sur laquelle s'établit dès l'aurore la littérature d'Occident entre deux modes de l'*imitation* du monde humain. Il y comparait le « sacrifice d'Isaac » dans la *Genèse* biblique (que la tradition juive nomme « ligotage d'Isaac ») et l'épisode de l'*Odyssée* d'Homère où sa vieille servante reconnaît Ulysse de retour de Troie. Et là où le poète grec offrait l'image d'un monde plein, témoignait d'une phénoménalité en somme resplendissante, littéralement sans faille, le Texte donné au Sināï s'avérait tout fait d'aspérités, lacuneux, ultimement énigmatique. Et pour faire sens imposait donc une quête exégétique créatrice. C'est dans le droit fil de cette exigence intrinsèque – que le judaïsme a comprise comme sa plus haute vocation – que sa littérature classique a élaboré le *midrash* où, à côté de l'interprétation de la Loi dans son aspect normatif (*halakha*), se déploie dans la *aggada* sa soif de comprendre, son imaginaire, son sens de la *poiésis*, son goût de la spéculation, invariablement compris comme mise au jour des richesses inépuisables de la Donation originaire.

L'œuvre de Gershom Scholem, initiateur des études modernes sur la Kabbale, fournit quant à elle, à partir notamment de ses *Grands courants de la mystique juive* (1941), les conditions érudites d'une intelligence historique en profondeur d'un phénomène que la science du XIX^e siècle, toute à son rationalisme, avait soigneusement contourné. Il révèle sa mystique comme un facteur essentiel de la survie spirituelle du peuple juif. L'effort interprétatif de celle-ci, accessible dans la vaste littérature qu'elle déploie, transfigure toutes les dimensions du *midrash*. La scrutation de la Lettre s'ouvre à des spéculations gnostiques (mystique de la lettre, des nombres, des *Sfrot*, de la *Création*...) qui débouchent pour les élus sur la contemplation des *mystères de la Torah*, qui confèrent une signifiante et donc une vitalité renouvelée au quotidien de la vie juive exotérique. Cette réémergence du mythe au cœur du judaïsme, une complète assumption de la complexité dialectique de ses symboles leur confèrent une puissance proprement détonante lorsque, à partir du XVI^e siècle (les Juifs sont chassés d'Espagne en 1492), la contingence historique les réinstalle tragiquement au cœur de l'expérience première du peuple : l'épreuve de l'Exil et l'aspiration à la Rédemption. Les thèmes majeurs de la Kabbale ont touché les couches populaires et, conjoints à l'expérience

déchirante du marranisme, informent, bien au-delà des cercles lettrés, les explosions d'enthousiasme messianique (Shabtaï Tsvi, Jakob Frank...) dont l'anomisme ultime contribue à disloquer la société traditionnelle, fracture l'identité juive et, ce faisant, lui ménage dans la douleur l'une de ses entrées majeures, encore que difficilement avouées, dans la modernité. *Denkender Geschichtsschreiber* (l'expression est empruntée à Hegel), Scholem, alors que la nouvelle société juive se construit en Palestine, ne peut qu'être presque douloureusement conscient de la portée de cette ambiguïté historique. Comme en témoignent entre autres, notamment, ses captivants échanges épistolaires avec Walter Benjamin.

L'histoire a donc jeté sur la Kabbale comme phénomène socio-religieux global des lumières décisives. Elles permettent notamment de l'appréhender en toute rigueur, par-delà sa dimension mythico-mystique, comme une ample production littéraire, toute entière impulsée par l'interrogation ardente de la Lettre évoquée plus haut, dont elle marque une *akmé*, et éperdument tendue vers ces objets ultimes dans lesquels s'entrevoient, au lendemain de tout déchirement psychique et social, les merveilles de l'Eden.

Plinement informée des découvertes de cette érudition pensante, Kitty Millet a une longue pratique des mystiques juifs. Son savoir pourrait bien procéder de l'Arbre de Vie auquel ils lui ont ouvert l'accès ! Elle a perçu dans toute sa vivacité la dialectique de dislocation-restructuration du langage au sein de laquelle ils évoluent. Mesuré ce qu'il en découle pour l'invention du monde, la mimésis singulière, qu'ils déploient. Et elle ne perd jamais de vue le potentiel de contestation de l'autorité et de la Loi quasi consubstantiel à une saisie du réel humain et cosmique comme non rédimé, mais en travail d'unification, dominante dans la Kabbale récente.

C'est dire si elle est équipée pour instruire, avec *Kabbalah and Literature*, au plus grand profit de la science de la littérature, le dossier de la présence paradoxale, mais heuristiquement féconde, de la Kabbale comme mode d'intellection du monde dans la pratique de l'écriture à l'âge d'après la religion. Ce qui vaut au lecteur ébloui une profusion d'analyses pointues riches en aperçus et rapprochements parlants des créations d'un large spectre d'auteurs, canoniques ou moins en vue. Elles travaillent à rendre compte des références explicites – thématiques, imaginaires - de ces modernes à l'univers de la Tradition, mais tout autant sinon plus à mettre à jour les connexions souterraines, la mémoire enfouie, le pathos originel qui les solidarisent dans les profondeurs, plus ou moins sciemment pour chaque créateur, avec le *conatus essendi* qui

animait celle-ci. Car il se profile bien, pour Kitty Millet, une Kabbale séculière, qui sait réinventer dans l'incertitude, la violence, l'incohérence tragique du présent, une fois décidément ruiné le confort précaire d'une inscription au cœur d'une identité instituée, le dire tout à tour lacuneux, indirect, allusif, railleur, blanc, où le côtoiement des abîmes n'estompe jamais la lancinante, l'anxieuse expectative, et nostalgie, du Sens. On reconnaît là le récit – une littérature – informé ultimement par la temporalité messianique.

Un premier volet de l'ouvrage, en cinq chapitres, s'ouvre dans l'ombre portée de l'*Elisha ben Avouya*, le drame dans lequel Jacob Gordin (en 1906) revisite d'un œil moderne, c'est-à-dire décidément marqué, entre autres, par le traumatisme du messianisme hérétique la légende talmudique des « Quatre qui entrèrent au Paradis ». Elisha, l'« Autre », s'y arrache à l'obédience d'une Loi « devenue incompréhensible » et, en libre penseur, s'engage, en rupture avec la communauté, sur une voie, une « autre voie » mais qui reste pleine expectative de la Rédemption, mais d'une autre Rédemption.

Les livres de Jacob, le grand roman de la Polonaise Olga Tokarczuk (2014), est tout infus de l'expérience du nihilisme mystique frankiste qui va marquer jusqu'à des profondeurs restées à ce jour mal évaluées la judaïcité notamment ashkenaze. Les *Paroles du Seigneur*, de Frank, ne formulent-elles pas de la manière la plus brutale, au sein de sa secte, les incidences ultimes pour la collectivité de l'intuition kabbalistique selon laquelle « la Loi se réalise dans sa transgression » ?

Avec Jonas Wehle, pivot du Cercle (frankiste) de Prague, s'élabore une pratique de lecture et d'écriture de textes philosophiques innovants, où les doctrines de Frank permettent de repenser par la logique de l'apostasie caractéristique de l'âge messianique le mouvement même de la haute culture européenne (Kant, Mendelsohn, Hegel), non moins que de comprendre pour ce qu'elles sont les amples perturbations socio-historiques où s'ouvre, pour l'Humanité entière, la perspective de la libération.

Comment saisir la tonalité si caractéristique tant de l'ironie que du lyrisme de Heinrich Heine, Juif converti, son investissement de la poésie comme « texte renouvelé », en quelque sorte forme textuelle de la rédemption du poète-prophète et de son dire au-delà du judaïsme historique, si l'on méconnaît sa proximité familiale avec le milieu frankiste ?

Quant à Franz Kafka, dès 1915 dans *Devant la Loi*, Kitty Millet nous le montre entrevoyant une « kabbale séculière » (1922) où l'échec de l'hérésie frankiste à sauver l'homme moyen, méditée à travers la figure aggadique de l'hérétique Elisha ben Avouya (« l'Autre »), lui impose l'écriture comme unique possibilité de rédemption pour le Juif moderne.

Autre écho de l'ébranlement nihiliste, *La Rue des crocodiles* (*Les Boutiques de cannelle*), que Bruno Schulz publie en Pologne en 1934, campe la figure du Père, marchand prospère et demiurge surhumain expérimentateur flottant entre être et néant, réel et imaginaire, dont le Fils-narrateur présente les créations comme une hérésie animée par « la défense de la poésie », cette Poésie seule à même d'arracher le monde à l'informe (« Golem ») pour une nouvelle création. La révélation par le Père d'un *Second Livre de la Genèse* ne fait que paraphraser la vanité de ses efforts.

La seconde partie de l'ouvrage s'attache, en quatre chapitres, à élucider le processus par lequel la transformation – kabbalistique – des paradis d'arrière-monde « en transcendance textuelle engage une phénoménologie de la lettre sans précédent dans la fiction moderne » (19)¹ et « illustre la manière dont rédemption et transcendance deviennent des effets de la lecture et de l'écriture. Ils posent des thèses variées sur la création, la révélation et la rédemption, alors même que les Juifs entrent dans l'histoire et abandonnent la Thora » (19).

Le Bruno Schulz de *Le Sanatorium sous le signe du sablier* (1937) montre son narrateur à la recherche, émanant de lui-même, issue d'un Livre manquant, d'une textualité propre à assurer sa rédemption.

L'étude de *L'Alef*, de Jorge Luis Borges (1945), médite l'assertion de l'auteur que toute tentative d'ancrer l'écriture dans l'écrit ne peut que déboucher sur l'hérésie. « La révélation de l'écriture se produit hors de tout témoignage laissé dans le temps et l'espace, de tout texte écrit » (20).

Les Messies de la dramaturge française Liliane Atlan (1969), l'installation *Communautés perdues* de l'Israélien Romy Achituv (2007) et *La Découverte du Ciel* du Néerlandais Harry Mulisch (1992), sont rapprochées et distinguées comme trois phénoménologies de la Lettre, trois méditations sur l'exil des lettres hébraïques de ce monde frappé par la Shoah et l'aptitude de la Kabbale à ouvrir encore un chemin vers un Dieu caché ou absent.

¹ Toutes les traductions françaises sont de l'auteur de ce compte rendu.

La passionnante étude consacrée à l'œuvre de Paul Celan suit celle-ci dans ce qui se révèle un mouvement de rejet de la Kabbale hérétique et de sa compréhension mondaine de la Rédemption pour renouer ultimement avec le projet orthodoxe « d'autres chants au-delà de l'humanité » (21). Au-delà de tout non-sens apparent de la parole, censé traduire l'incompréhensibilité du monde, la permutation des lettres, pense Kitty Millet, « offre au poète la possibilité d'une restauration non seulement à l'écriture juive, mais aussi au Dieu caché » (21). Ne parvient-on pas, « avec Celan, à un moment où la permutation des lettres permet au poète de produire un psaume extérieur à l'existence humaine, un chant audible par ceux qu'il a perdu pendant la Shoah » (21)?

On n'a fait là qu'évoquer, dans une vue on ne peut plus cavalière, et sans prétendre fournir ne serait-ce qu'une esquisse de table des matières, quelques grandes allées de la recherche. Une fois le terrain approché, l'érudition et la subtilité de Kitty Millet en révèlent avec brio à son lecteur la diabolique complexité. L'exploration à laquelle elle nous convie s'avère assurément touffue. C'est que l'esthétique même – la perception de l'expérience signifiante – dont elle éclaire quelques productions marquantes ne peut manquer de multiplier silences plus ou moins entendus, allusions, non-dits révélateurs, mais aussi fulgurances paradoxales, promesses du bout des lèvres, cris d'effroi étouffés. Elle traduit ce faisant dans la singularité historique de chaque œuvre examinée ce que recèle d'existentiellement irréductible, d'inachèvement irrémédiable, l'éveil que chaque créateur opère par sa lecture du monde et de soi comme arcanes. Mais, tous à leur manière, ceux que Kitty Millet nous invite à relire ou à découvrir ont connu, pris dans les affres de l'écriture, la douleur et l'extase, le déchirement, mais aussi son contemporain : un pressentiment insistant de cette Réconciliation à laquelle ils se refusent à renoncer.

C'est ainsi que, dans les propres mots de l'auteur, et pour résumer sobrement les enjeux autour desquels se construit son étude : « L'ontologie de la littérature s'est trouvée transformée, révélée et étendue par l'absorption de ces *signifiants sans signifiés* propres à la Kabbale, parce qu'elle implique l'obligation de continuer à écrire des récits *incomplets* de l'existence au-delà de la phénoménalité. Les lacunes, les blancs littéraires témoignent d'une voie imaginable, encore qu'au-delà de la perception humaine. Il faut avoir à l'esprit cet échafaudage cognitif, paradoxe intérieur de la littérature, pour saisir pourquoi Kabbale et littérature doivent compter pour la modernité » (21).

Kevin Potter. *Poetics of the Migrant: Migrant Literature and the Politics of Motion*

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In an era characterised by unprecedented mobility and shifting borders, migrant literature emerges as a vital site where movement, affect, and agency intersect to reshape our understanding of identity and sovereignty. Through the innovative lens of kinopolitics and kinopoetics, Kevin Potter's *Poetics of the Migrant: Migrant Literature and the Politics of Motion* challenges static notions of nationhood, positioning the migrant figure as an active agent of transformation within socio-political, cultural, and literary landscapes. As such, it invites a re-evaluation of migration not as a crisis of borders, but as a dynamic force and a restoration of agency that manifests vividly within the narratives we tell – narratives that recalibrate the very fabric of cultural and political life through breaking down stereotypes of migrant disempowerment and alienation.

Potter opens this work with an overview of the political ramifications of the rise of nationalist sentiments and anti-immigrant rhetoric, particularly in terms of its potential for reinforcing the idea of borders as essential for national integrity. Coining the term “poetics of contagion” to describe this discourse, Potter utilizes the evocative analogy of the immigrant as an invasive entity, a foreign invasion that threatens to destabilise the body/country's autonomy and integrity (Potter 7), to illustrate the threat of migration to the place-based paradigm evoked by certain political ideologies. However, the innovative application of Thomas Nail's concept of kinopolitics and Potter's interpretation of

kinopoetics challenges such traditional narratives of marginalisation by reframing our understanding of migration and the migrant experience and focusing on active migrant agency and the conceptualisation of the migrant as the primary constitutive figure of social history.

Poetics of the Migrant is divided into two main sections. Part I consists of two chapters in which Potter lays the groundwork for his literary analysis and close readings of representative migrant literary texts in Part II. The first chapter, “How Kinopoetics Works”, surveys the theoretical collectives that constitute kinopoetics, setting up a framework in which Potter positions movement as central to understanding migration and literature. Potter first traces the historical development of the term ‘poetics’ from Aristotle to contemporary critical theory, particularly post-colonialism. A central precursor to kinopoetics lies in decolonisation, which offers a counter-poetics to the hegemony of the Western canon and gives precedence to ‘place’ and ‘identity’ over the ‘national’. Thus, by first breaking down poetics into its most basic components, Potter cleverly constructs a definition of kinopoetics as, “an approach toward migrant literature that activates and affirms movement...a way of looking at and analysing the text that recognises the creative and productive role of the migrant in shaping the social, political, spatial, or linguistic world in which they enter” (Potter 47-8). This is then linked to Nail’s theories on kinopolitics as the counter-history of ‘social motion’, and further typologies such as political and economic kinopower, enabling Potter to characterise four migrant archetypes: the nomad, the barbarian, the vagabond, and the proletariat.

Furthermore, this section outlines the emergence of affect theory in the late twentieth century, which shifts focus from linguistic signification to bodily experiences and emotions and helps shape political subjectivity and relationality. By integrating the critical theories of thinkers like Antonio Negri, Sara Ahmed, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Jacques Rancière, Potter explores how the relationship between affect, knowledge, and movement is crucial for understanding social dynamics and allows for an epistemological reshaping of societal hierarchies and borders through art and literature.

The second chapter, entitled “Movement Interventions”, locates kinopoetics within a broader tradition of movement-based politics while also exploring the dimensions that dominate the study of migrant literature. Firstly, Potter critiques the dominant paradigms that idealise sovereignty, citizenship, and statehood, labelling this the ‘sedentarist

metaphysics' that dominates migration discourse. For example, he considers how a Marxist interpretation of the historical development of political economy, while limited, can still be adopted to understand the dynamics of migration and the socio-political landscape shaped by colonialism and capitalism. Potter then engages with the existing traditions of migrant literature, introducing a typology of 'poetics of migration' that challenges the centrality of states and citizenship in literary studies. For example, Potter's analysis of the poetics of relation is linked to the poem "Back to Africa" by Louise Bennett, which introduces the possibility of a fluid and multi-dimensional identity for a migrant subject. Potter also analyses A. K. Ramanujan's poem "Waterfalls in a Bank" to illustrate how minor literature highlights the political implications of migration, emphasising the interconnectedness of personal and collective histories, and how this applies to migration, transnational, and diasporic literatures. Finally, through his close reading of Patel's "The Making (Migrant Song)", Potter explores how the poetics of migritude can serve as a methodology for analysing migrant literature as it emphasises the importance of self-representation and collective memory through its empowerment of migrant voices and celebration of the complexities of migrant identity.

This chapter then proposes a philosophy of movement to extend and modify postcolonial theory. Potter first explores what he dubs "the Holy Trinity" of postcolonial theory – Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha – and how their contributions address the complexities of identity and representation. For example, he indicates Said's concern with identity construction and his critique of essentialism in both *Culture and Imperialism* and *Orientalism*, which reduces the Other to objecthood and, through Orientalist stereotypes, perpetuates colonial power dynamics. He then highlights how Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" challenges assumptions about representation and subjectivity and critiques the assumption of a coherent subaltern subject in Marxist discourse. Finally, Potter illustrates how Bhabha's concept of hybridity offers a framework for understanding identity as a process of co-construction and challenging colonial authority and essentialist stereotypes. Potter then addresses these foundational theories, making an argument for a reassessment of postcolonial theory through the concept of movement and an emphasis on the importance of mobility in understanding migrant subjectivity. Potter concludes that a movement-oriented philosophy such as kinopoetics helps resolve some of the tensions

within existing paradigms as it re-envision the migrant as an affirmative figure, challenging traditional notions of identity.

In Part II of the book, Potter presents a topology of kinopoetics, classifying three main categories that constitute the three chapters in this section: destructive, wandering, and stuttering kinopoetics. Each is aligned with certain migrant archetypes delineated in Part I (the migrant as nomad, barbarian, and vagabond) and Potter provides insightful close readings of various texts to illustrate how these types manifest in literature.

“Destructive Kinopoetics” is the title of Chapter 3, and it explores how migrant authors utilise Magic Realism to explore the complexities of identity, belonging, and the socio-political challenges faced by migrants through juxtaposing different realities. Through close readings of Mohsin Hamid’s *Exit West* and Chitra Banerjee Divakruni’s *The Mistress of Spice*, Potter illustrates how the genre allows for the exploration of fragmented identities and cultural dislocation. This analysis presents two different sides of nomadic existence that nonetheless highlight the transformative power of migrants and nomadic figures in literature by investigating the ability of these characters to disrupt established norms and create new narratives that challenge dominant discourse.

Chapter 4, entitled “Wandering Kinopoetics”, examines how the vagabond figure navigates urban spaces and challenges established power structures, highlighting the interplay between agency, material forces, and subjectivity. This concept emphasizes the transformative potential of movement and the agency of imagination in shaping urban realities. Potter’s analysis of Teju Cole’s *Open City* and Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* reveals how these and similar texts create focalised migrant figures that reconstruct urban, metropolitan settings and reimagine social settings to liberate themselves from hostile, exclusionary constructions. The vagabond is thus conceptualised as a unique kinopolitical figure who experiences varying forces of mobility and immobility within these urban settings. Both *Open City* and *Brick Lane* illustrate how micro-politics of suspicion shape the experiences of the protagonists. These dynamics reveal the everyday surveillance and control faced by immigrants in urban settings and their challenge to broader societal structures as a reclamation of agency in the face of oppression.

The fifth chapter of *Poetics of the Migrant* is entitled “Stuttering Kinopoetics” and presents a unique examination of how migrant writers utilize stuttering and creative language forms to challenge dominant linguistic norms and assert their identities. Here, the figure of the

migrant as barbarian represents a historical context of inferiority and exclusion, often linked to language and cultural identity. Potter illustrates how this figure is associated with the experiences of slaves and refugees, highlighting the political implications of language and speech. Stuttering kinopoetics involves playful experimentation with language, reflecting this facet of immigrant experience, exemplified here in John Agard's poem, "Listen Mr Oxford Don" and Linton Kwesi Johnson's "New Craas Massakah", both of which challenge the conventions of standard English. Potter explores how the historical relationship between language, power, race, and linguistic competence is often tied to social status and political representation, and how this dynamic continues to affect contemporary discussions around immigration and language education. Stuttering kinopoetics thus indicates how movement and resistance can transform the boundaries of communication, allowing for the articulation of collective identities that challenge the political structures enforcing inferiority and silence.

In his "Conclusion" to *Poetics of the Migrant*, Potter considers the implications of positioning the migrant text as a kinetic cultural object that is not, "confined to the geographical, national or cultural status of its author" (Potter 343), but rather, moves and thus creates conditions for solidarity. This section highlights the importance of the intersectionality of race, gender, and class in analyzing migrant narratives. Potter also reaffirms the affective dimensions of migrant literature that serve as a medium for expressing the emotional landscape of migration, which is often marked by themes of loss, longing, and resilience. This section emphasises the need for a critical analysis that recognises the agency of migrant texts in shaping social and political discourse. Potter argues that kinopoetics can be applied to a wider range of texts, enhancing understanding of movement and identity, and focusing on the potential of migrant literature to challenge power structures. This conclusion ends by inviting further exploration of kinopoetics, suggesting that future scholarship should expand even beyond migrant literatures, to ensure a critical analysis in which, "no one is illegible" (Potter 349).

Poetics of the Migrant is a seminal work that provides key insights into how kinopoetics functions as a transformative lens that reconfigures traditional literary and political frameworks. Migration is reimagined as a generative force rather than a crisis, emphasizing movement, affect, and agency. Potter's originality lies in how he effectively combines theoretical engagement with an in-depth literary analysis of diverse

texts. The intellectual rigour and innovative typologies of destructive, wandering, and stuttering kinopoetics places this book as a forerunner in this field, especially in how Potter succeeds in elevating migrant voices and repositioning them within socio-political discourse. While *Poetics of the Migrant* is rooted in literary and philosophical discourse, pointing to a potential gap between the theoretical reimagining of the migrant figure and the material conditions and structures governing migration, Potter addresses this through his suggestions for a future scholarship that would expand the framework of kinopoetics beyond literature. Thereby, the broader implications of this work can be seen in how it inspires the reimagining of migration not as exclusion, but as a mode of creativity, resistance, and redefinition.

**Johanna Sellman. *Arabic Exile Literature in Europe:
Defamiliarizing Forced Migration***

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Prenant appui sur un appareil théorique conséquent, cet ouvrage analyse les différents procédés de « défamiliarisation » mis en œuvre dans la littérature arabe de la migration forcée. Johanna Sellman s'y réfère en premier lieu aux formalistes russes, pour qui l'art accentue notre prise de conscience du familier en ralentissant et en mettant à distance la perception. Pour illustrer l'emploi de ce procédé dans la littérature du XX^e siècle, Sellman donne l'exemple très pertinent du dramaturge Berthold Brecht qui, nous le soulignons, mettait en garde les spectateurs de ses pièces de s'immerger totalement dans la représentation théâtrale au risque de l'« esthétiser ». En partant de ce concept de défamiliarisation, Johanna Sellman se propose d'étudier la manière dont certaines œuvres littéraires réimaginent les catégories de frontière et de citoyenneté qui accompagnent le phénomène de la migration forcée. Son étude est articulée autour des questionnements suivants : premièrement, comment

la narration littéraire qui fait usage de modes non réalistes contribue-t-elle à la réflexion plus large autour des espaces liminaires produits par les politiques de contrôle des frontières et par la migration forcée ? Deuxièmement, de quelle manière ces nouveaux modes d'écriture transforment-ils les *topoi* et les styles qui ont caractérisé la littérature arabe de l'exil durant le XX^e siècle ? Troisièmement, comment cette littérature parvient-elle à inciter le lecteur/public à repenser l'idée d'appartenance en dehors des conceptions des frontières et de la citoyenneté véhiculées par l'appareil médiatico-politique ? Enfin, de manière plus générale, quelles sont les caractéristiques esthétiques et les enjeux de la littérature arabe contemporaine de la migration forcée ?

Pour répondre à ces questions, Johanna Sellman choisit un vaste corpus de romans, nouvelles et pièces de théâtre écrits à partir du tournant des années 1990, donc de la guerre du Golfe, puis des années post 2011, avec les soulèvements arabes et les mouvements migratoires qui s'ensuivent. Une partie de ces récits fait état de voyages traversant des espaces intermédiaires entre pays d'origine et pays d'accueil, une autre partie se situe dans les pays européens d'accueil, notamment les pays d'Europe du Nord, l'Allemagne, la France et l'Angleterre. Ils sont écrits par des auteurs originaires notamment de Syrie, d'Irak, d'Algérie et du Maroc, en arabe et/ou dans les langues des pays d'accueil, mais la chercheuse ne précise malheureusement pas toujours la langue originale des œuvres. Une seule chose est à déplorer concernant le choix du corpus : l'absence du Soudan. En effet, s'il est vrai que Sellman fait référence au roman de Tayyeb Salih *Mawsim al-hijra ilā al-shamāl* (*Saison de la migration vers le nord*), publié en 1966, la littérature soudanaise contemporaine qui pourtant traite les questions de la guerre et de la migration est totalement absente de cette étude.

Dans le premier chapitre, la chercheuse montre la manière dont ces œuvres ont redessiné les formes et les contenus de la littérature arabe de l'exil depuis les années 1990 à aujourd'hui. En effet, la caractéristique qui unit toute cette production en dépit de sa diversité, c'est son éloignement du style réaliste, documentaire, voire autobiographique qui caractérisait la littérature arabe de l'exil de la période antérieure. Les auteurs de ces œuvres empruntent d'autres modes narratifs permettant soit de rendre compte d'univers dystopiques – comme la science-fiction ou le fantasy – soit, comme le réalisme magique, de remettre en question les récits nationaux dominants autour de la question migratoire. Ce chapitre analyse la manière dont la littérature arabe de l'exil (*adab al-manfā*) – qui traverse tout le XX^e siècle et qui trouve son apogée dans la vision

post-coloniale du chef-d'œuvre de Tayyeb Salih *Mawsim al-hijra ilā al-shamāl*—prend la forme, au XXI^e siècle, d'une littérature de la migration forcée (*tahjīr*) dans laquelle le post-colonial assume de nouvelles formes. Pour justifier la légitimité du recours à une approche post-coloniale dans l'étude de ce corpus, Sellman s'appuie sur l'anthropologue des migrations Michel Agier qui affirme que les inégalités dans l'accès aux ressources et à la mobilité auxquelles on assiste au XXI^e siècle sont la conséquence d'inégalités qui remontent à la période coloniale (Agier *La Condition cosmopolite*). C'est également le point de vue de l'universitaire américano-égyptien Wail Hassan, que Sellman cite à plusieurs reprises, et pour qui tant que les effets du colonialisme continuent d'exister, la catégorie du post-colonial reste une grille d'analyse pertinente. Cependant, si nous ne pouvons pas faire abstraction des rapports de domination qui sont à l'origine des migrations contemporaines vers l'Europe, nous sommes loin, dans les textes choisis par Johanna Sellman, des catégories à la fois binaires et ambivalentes d'Est/Ouest ou de Nord/Sud qui caractérisent la vision orientaliste durant tout le XIX^e et une partie du XX^e siècle.¹ En même temps qu'ils s'éloignent des catégorisations orientalistes, ces récits contemporains de la migration forcée déconstruisent la distinction entre l'exilé en tant que créateur et personnage littéraire et le réfugié en tant que sujet subissant passivement des conditions historiques et politiques.

Dans le deuxième chapitre, Johanna Sellman aborde la littérature dite « *harraga* » qui a pour objet le voyage clandestin à travers la Méditerranée. Construits autour de récits individuels dans lesquels le réalisme se mêle avec le conte, des romans tels que *Titānikāt Ifriqiyya* (*Titanics africains*, 2008) de l'Erythréen Abu Bakar Khaal se situent en contrepoint des images diffusées par les médias qui montrent des masses de corps indiscernables les uns des autres et banalisent ainsi la violence de leur mort. Ces textes, nous dit Sellman, pastichent une double tradition, celle du conte d'une part, et celle de la littérature de voyage d'autre part. Mais s'il est vrai qu'ils réactualisent le genre médiéval des *Mille et Une Nuits* par la place qui est accordée à l'art de conter dans la tentative de survie des personnages, ils s'installent en rupture avec la littérature arabe de voyage des XIX^e et XX^e siècles qui concevait l'Europe comme un modèle voire un *eldorado*.

¹ Ces catégories se reflètent dans les œuvres de fiction étudiée par Rasheed El-Enany dans *Arab Representations of the Occident: East-West Encounters in Arabic Fiction* cité par Sellman, et plus récemment par Lorenzo Casini dans son ouvrage *Occidentalism and the Egyptian Novel*.

Johanna Sellman s'appuie dans son analyse de ces textes sur la riche réflexion menée par des sociologues et des philosophes sur la valeur différentielle de la vie à partir de l'expérience des camps de concentration nazis puis des guerres post-modernes (guerres du Golfe). Elle cite à ce propos les travaux de Judith Butler autour des « vies dignes/pas dignes d'être pleurées » (*grievable/non grievable lives*) (Butler *Frames of War*), tandis que dans un chapitre ultérieur elle renvoie au concept similaire de « vie nue » (*nuda vita*, traduit par d'autres par *bare life*) développé par Giorgio Agamben. Par ce concept, le philosophe italien définissait l'état des victimes du système concentrationnaire nazi ; celles dont la vie n'est ni celle de l'être humain par excellence doté de langage – l'être humain citoyen (*bios* pour les Grecs) – ni celle de l'être vivant en général (*zoe* en grec). Il s'agit d'un *vita sacer* (« vie sacrée/sacrifiable » dans le sens du droit romain, c'est-à-dire « qui appartient aux dieux »), dont le meurtre est rendu licite par une violence, structurelle à la loi divine, et qui s'exerce en dehors du droit des humains (Agamben *Homo Sacer*). Agamben a servi de référence aux chercheurs qui s'intéressent à la littérature irakienne de la guerre à cause des rapprochements que l'on peut effectuer entre les victimes de la tragédie nazi et celles de ce que l'on a appelé, au début des années 2000, la « guerre contre le terrorisme » en Irak.

Le troisième chapitre se penche justement sur la littérature irakienne, et plus précisément celle qui a pour objet la migration forcée, en se focalisant sur un genre qui a été appelé « réalisme de cauchemar » et qui est représenté par le nouvelliste Hassan Blasim. Ce genre appartient à la tendance plus générale d'une « esthétique de l'horreur »² qui caractérise la littérature irakienne post 2003 (c'est-à-dire après l'invasion américaine de l'Irak).

En partant de la redéfinition de l'idée de frontière dans le monde global proposée par l'anthropologue Michel Agier, Johanna Sellman explique que les textes de Blasim prennent place dans des espaces situés « en dehors » du temps et du lieu historiquement et politiquement définis, comme par exemple l'espace virtuel du jeu vidéo, et subvertissent les hiérarchies entre original et traduction, ainsi qu'entre digital et imprimé. Les personnages de Blasim effectuent un « piratage » (*qaršana*) des frontières par le biais du digital, mais également en changeant de forme, en se transformant en animal, pour échapper aux contrôles, avec le recours à la polysémie du terme arabe *waḥsh(a)*, qui renvoie à la fois à la « bête sauvage » et à la

² Sellman cite à ce propos Haytham Bahooora, « Writing the Dismembered Nation : The Aesthetics of Horror in Iraqi Narratives of War ».

« solitude » que vit l'individu exposé à la précarité de la migration forcée. C'est le cas dans la nouvelle *Ādat al-ta'arri al-sayyi'a* (*La mauvaise habitude de se déshabiller*, 2009) très largement commentée par Johanna Sellman, dans laquelle l'omniprésence du loup dans la vie du personnage Salman est la métaphore de l'état à la fois de sauvagerie et de solitude auquel est exposé le migrant. L'analyse de Sellman fait apparaître clairement l'écart entre la littérature arabe d'avant et après les années 1990, puisque la réflexion sur la condition existentielle prend le dessus, dans cette dernière, sur la critique politique. Pour illustrer ce dernier propos, nous pouvons évoquer la magistrale nouvelle *Al-khid'a* (*L'imposture*), dans laquelle l'Égyptien Yusuf Idris décrivait, en 1971, une tête de « chameau » (*jamal*) qui poursuit le protagoniste en tout lieu et situation, y compris les plus intimes. Contrairement au loup qui symbolise chez Blasim une condition existentielle, la tête de chameau d'Idriss est une métaphore du régime de Nasser (dont le prénom, *Jamāl*, rappelle – à une voyelle longue près – le mot « chameau ») après la crise de 1967.

En dépit de la richesse de ce chapitre, nous y regrettons néanmoins l'absence de référence, à titre comparatif, à Sinan Antoon, l'un des auteurs irakiens qui a le plus employé la dystopie, le macabre et le *gore*, ainsi que le cauchemar, pour exprimer l'indicibilité de la violence qui se déploie depuis des décennies sur le sol irakien.

L'autrice consacre ensuite un quatrième chapitre à la question du multilinguisme, de la traduction ou de son échec, ou encore de l'inversion de hiérarchie entre traduction et original. Le roman *Taḥta samā' Kubinhāghin* (*Sous le ciel de Copenhague*, 2010) de la jeune écrivaine irakienne Hawra al-Nadawi aborde la question de la langue de l'écriture comme moyen d'accéder à la reconnaissance en tant qu'écrivain exilé. Née en Suède d'une famille de réfugiés irakiens, la narratrice de ce roman, Huda, écrit en suédois et envoie à un traducteur arabophone son roman afin qu'il le traduise et qu'elle puisse ainsi être reconnue dans le champ littéraire arabe. La position de Huda est significative de l'état d'entre deux dont témoignent tous ces textes, puisqu'elle se sent écartelée entre une origine irakienne qu'elle ne sent pas complètement sienne et la volonté d'être considérée comme un acteur légitime du champ littéraire arabophone³.

³ A l'inverse de ce qui se passe dans *Āzif al-ghuyūm* de l'Irakien Ali Bader, où le protagoniste, un artiste cosmopolite, aspire à se libérer de son identité de réfugié pour accéder à une reconnaissance universelle (voir à ce propos Annamaria Bianco, "In Quest of the Virtuous City : Coexistence and In-Hospitality in Ali Bader's *Āzif al-ghuyūm*").

Le cinquième chapitre est consacré à la scène littéraire arabe à Berlin depuis 2015-2016, c'est-à-dire depuis l'arrivée d'un million de réfugiés syriens en Allemagne. Johanna Sellman essaye d'y montrer de quelle manière les espaces artistiques créatifs, collaboratifs et multilingues qui se créent dans cette ville contribuent à redéfinir les représentations dominantes de la migration forcée. Encore une fois, l'idée étant de rendre visible une violence qui a été banalisée en raison de sa surmédiation. La scène berlinoise est un terrain particulièrement favorable au développement d'expériences artistiques innovantes, du fait de l'absence d'une scène culturelle dominante qui imposerait ses propres critères esthétiques aux nouveaux arrivés.

Le chapitre prend en considération à la fois l'écriture fictionnelle et dramatique, avec une attention particulière à cette dernière. Sellman analyse notamment la pièce d'inspiration brechtienne de Ziad Alwan *Please repeat after me* (2018), caractérisée par la mise en scène délibérée d'erreurs successives et par plusieurs procédés d'interférences de genres artistiques – le documentaire, le conte, la danse, le chant – mis en scène par des personnages à l'identité de genre non binaire, dans le but de montrer l'impossibilité de montrer une image de soi authentique.

Le sixième et dernier chapitre de l'ouvrage rend compte de la situation particulière de Londres et Paris, destinations européennes de l'exil depuis la fin de la période coloniale. Johanna Sellman y analyse comment la littérature arabe produite à partir de ces capitales appréhende la question migratoire. En ce qui concerne Paris, elle se concentre sur deux choses en particulier : premièrement, elle montre à travers les exemples de la Syrienne Samar Yazbek et de la Libanaise Hoda Barakat⁴, que les auteurs arabophones résidant depuis longtemps dans ces capitales, de par leur position de prestige et leur production consacrée dont pays d'origine et pays de résidence se disputent la paternité, sont en mesure d'utiliser leur capital de notoriété pour apporter une contribution importante à la représentation de la migration forcée. Deuxièmement, elle montre la continuité entre la littérature dite « de banlieue » et celle de la migration forcée en prenant comme exemple le roman *La géographie du danger* (2006) de l'Algérien Hamid Skif, qui se structure autour

⁴ Voir à propos du roman *Barīd al-Layl* (*Courrier de Nuit*, 2017) : Annamaria Bianco, « Au crépuscule de l'humanité : incommunicabilité, hospitalité et violence dans *Courrier de nuit* de Hoda Barakat .

de l'idée de la dangerosité de l'espace public pour le migrant. Dans ce texte, la « géographie du danger » de l'espace public est directement proportionnelle à la « géographie de la peur » ressentie par le narrateur qui s'imagine devenir un cafard pour échapper au danger qui le guette dans un espace urbain hostile. Ce *topos* kafkaïen sera repris aussi, deux ans plus tard, par le Libano-canadien Rawi Hage dans son roman de la migration *Cockroach*⁵, que Sellman ne cite pas.

Quant à Londres, capitale culturelle mondiale et ville qui depuis de nombreuses décennies héberge écrivains, journalistes et médias arabes, Sellman note que plusieurs œuvres théâtrales ou narratives ayant pour objet la migration forcée ont pu accéder à une audience/lectorat international *via* ses nombreuses salles de théâtre et ses maisons d'édition.

Cette étude s'appuie sur un très vaste appareil méthodologique et conceptuel autour des thèmes de la migration, de l'exil et des frontières. Le riche corpus sélectionné par l'autrice remet en question les modèles d'appartenance et de citoyenneté fondés sur les frontières étatiques à travers plusieurs procédés :

- le choix d'espaces situés en dehors d'une définition politique de la citoyenneté, des espaces d'entre-deux – aux frontières, entre les frontières, ou dans un milieu naturel dont les animaux sauvages sont les seuls habitants – qui définissent d'autres types d'appartenance. C'est le cas par exemple de la nouvelle de l'Irakien Ibrahim Ahmad *Lāji' 'ind al-Iskīmū (Réfugié chez les Esquimaux, 1994)* où l'action se situe dans l'Arctique, ou du roman de l'Erythréen Abu Bakar Khaal *Titānikāt Ifriqiyya* qui se déroule en partie dans le désert libyen et en pleine mer Méditerranée.
- la description d'espaces imaginaires et irréels, souvent cauchemardesques.
- le choix d'une identité fluide qui s'oppose aux identités homogènes, figées et polarisées qui émergent du discours politique sur le fait migratoire. Cette fluidité se traduit par l'effacement des frontières non seulement géographiques mais aussi entre les corps, entre les genres, entre les espèces, ainsi qu'entre les langues.

Dès son introduction, Johanna Sellman affirme que, même si cette littérature ne se définit pas comme engagée, elle finit par l'être de fait

⁵ Voir Dima Samaha, *Le pays envolé. Romans libanais de l'émigration (1998–2012)*.

par tous ces procédés qui fonctionnent comme une « écriture contre » (*writing back*). Nous la rejoignons dans cette affirmation car, comme le suggère Stuart Hall en parlant de la littérature post-coloniale, « l'écrivain diasporique offre la perspective d'une fluidité de l'identité, d'une position de sujet en constante évolution, tant sur le plan géographique qu'ontologique », constituant ainsi un « entre-deux déstructuré et non essentialiste » qui « promeut l'énergie et le pouvoir résidant dans l'hybride, et casse la fixité » (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin *The Empire Writes Back* 218).

Ainsi, par ses questionnements autour des frontières et des migrations, cette littérature s'inscrit dans le champ des « *border studies* » et doit être lue à la lumière et en complément du matériel fourni par ce champ d'études contemporain. Non pas parce qu'elle posséderait une dimension documentaire et anthropologique, mais parce qu'elle permet d'envisager, par des manières alternatives et opposées aux formes dominantes, les notions de frontière et de citoyenneté.

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**Zhanghui Yang. *Convergence of East-West Poetics:
Williams's Negotiation with the Chinese
Landscape Tradition***

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Following in the path of several critical studies from the 1990s into the twenty-first century, Zhanghui Yang here explores William Carlos Williams's encounter with Chinese landscape tradition, at least in the form of poetry within that tradition. Framed as a series of "negotiations," the encounters extend from Williams's early introduction to Chinese poetry, mediated by the writings and tutelage of Ezra Pound and Pound's volume of poems titled *Cathay* in 1915 and Pound's presentation of the studies of Ernest Fenollosa, to his working through of a romantic/modernist dialectic in the poetry of his work in the 1920s, and later in the writing of the long poetic sequence, *Paterson*, Book Five (1958), *Pictures from Breughel* (1962) and his final collaboration with David Rafael Wang [aka Wand], a protégé of Pound, in the collaborative translation of the poems comprising "The Cassia Tree" (published posthumously in 1966, rpt. In *The Collected Poems, Volume II, 1939–1962*: 359–76). The term "negotiation" is appropriate, in contrast to "influence," because Williams's encounters are deliberate explorations of craft and the implications of craft, and of the effects of the manipulations of language learned through conscious appropriation. Williams was not fluent in Chinese and did not adopt or pretend to adopt aspects of Chinese culture or letters such as Confucian political philosophy (as did Pound and Wang) or

“religious” orientation, such as Buddhism or Daoism. As Yang puts it, “Williams...seems to confine his contact with China merely to Chinese poetry, particularly that dealing with landscape and personal emotions” (11). The “Chinese landscape tradition” invoked in the title is therefore narrowed to a small, but nevertheless significant, window of exposure. In contrast to Williams’s relationship to Spanish and other European languages, where he had some immersive experience of the language and cultural heritage, nearly all of Williams’s experiences with China and Chinese culture were accomplished through poetry and guided by others possessing deeper intercultural experience and authority. Nevertheless, his encounters with Chinese poetry were highly important to his poetic practice and in some cases produced distinctive results.

Previous studies, especially those by Zhaoming Qian (particularly in *Orientalism and Modernism: The Legacy of China in Pound and Williams* [1995]), have demonstrated that Williams explored the resources of Chinese verse, through intermediaries, to make innovations in the arrangement and style of his American language poems (distancing them from the habitual diction and cadences of English poetry). Instances include, most obviously, Williams’s “The Widow’s Lament in Springtime” and the unduly neglected “Portrait of the Author,” both from *Sour Grapes* [1921]. In poems such as these, Yang argues, Williams was especially drawn to the emotional spirit of “lamentation” and the scene of “landscape” as a locus for experimentation with the interplay between the subjectivity of the speaker of the poem and qualities inherent or absent from the landscape. The legacy of Ernest Fenollosa is a particular focus for the treatment of Western poetry on the cusp of transition from romantic to modern modes of representation and, in Yang’s interpretation, a movement from a modality involving the ego and the “human motive” acting upon the scene and one in which the composition of the scene speaks, as it were, for itself. In relation to Qian, Yang asserts that his own “analysis goes further...to explore the aesthetic principles of painterly silence....” (32). The idea of the scene speaking for itself derives in Yang’s interpretation from Pound’s dissemination of Fenollosa’s theory of the Chinese written character as “capable of telling of itself and inducing meaning as well as presenting the movement of nature” (53). Additionally, Yang relies upon James J. Y. Liu’s *The Art of Chinese Poetry* [1962] and Adele Austin Rickett’s earlier study *Wang Kuo-wei’s Jen-chien Tz’u-hua: A Study in Chinese Literary Criticism* [1977] to construct the framework of “Chinese Landscape Tradition.” Thus, the very broad field of Chinese landscape painting and Chinese

landscape poetry and the historically intimate connection between them is given a particular historical and philosophical inflection, not the least because Wang Kuo-wei's [Guowei's] esthetic philosophy in *Jen-chien T'zu-hua* was influenced by his study of Western philosophers such as Kant and Schopenhauer, not in Europe, but in Japan (see Rickett, in her section on "Western Influences," 12-19). Yang is quite explicit regarding his layering of critical apparatus, so that, if renderings of his evolving theses on Williams's "negotiations" may sound simplistic they are so only in relation to the richly suggestive context of analysis from which they derive. If they ultimately sound like renderings of Western idealist or transcendental poetics, it is because the transfer of ideas on the proximal edge of this cultural exchange works both ways.

Regarding the phases of Williams's interaction with Chinese landscape esthetics, Yang argues that there are three relevant phases:

- (1) "...the first phase occurred no later than 1915 – at least one year earlier than [Zhaoming] Qian's 1916 theory – since the year 1915 witnessed the publication of Pound's *Cathay*, which communicates Chinese landscape poets' serene manner in expressing the emotions of grief and sorrow to Williams, thus making the poet's landscape poetry infused with emotion quite implicit...."; while,
- (2) "Analysis of Bai Juyi's literary figure Yang Guifei in Williams's 'Portrait of the Author' uncovers the poet's second phase that involved accessing Chinese landscape esthetics in which the esthetic principles of the pictorial manner, the Daoist sense of wholeness, and the Daoist sense of non-discrimination play a role in Williams's transformation to a Modernist poet, whose mode of landscape turns writing to landscape without self...."; and,
- (3) "...analysis of Chinese landscape esthetics in Williams's late works discloses...the poet's third phase of accessing Chinese landscape poetry from 1957 to 1962...."

(*Convergence* 32)

The mention of "serene manner" and "landscape without self" in Yang's summary (as well as "painterly silence" further on in the same passage) is critical as it refers to what he takes to be the erasure or disappearance of the lyrical "I" in poetic description and creates unmarked absence of subjective mediation, allied on this account to Williams's dictum "no ideas but in things." In the third chapter, "Inheritance and Innovation: Self and Landscape in Williams Poetry" (58-98), Yang situates this discussion

of the progress of Williams's practice by recalling M.H. Abrams's seminal essay "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric" (first published in 1965) and subsequent American and English critics working within the field of English language poetry, romantic to modern. Triangulating among Williams's poetry, major works of British romantic poetry (such as Keats's odes), and examples of Chinese landscape poetry, Yang offers fresh and stimulating constructions of East-West poetic relations, and yet *so much depends upon* whether Williams's reduction of poetic utterances to description in which the grammatical or stylistic intercession of the "I" is suppressed really is equivalent to the "serene manner" of painting the Chinese poetic tradition, as depicted in the following example:

When Yuke was painting bamboo,
 He saw bamboo without seeing himself.
 Not only did he see none of himself,
 But trance-like, he forgot his own body.

(from "Three Poems of Yuke's Bamboo Painting in
 Cao Puzhui's Collection," c. 1087; quoted in Rong Ou,
 "Traditional Chinese Painting: An Intermedial Play of
 Sister Arts Since the Eleventh Century" 510)

This passage is of a complex lineage characteristic of Chinese landscape poems, though the images assert an action on the part of the artist that subverts lineage or patrimony in the phrase "he saw none of himself." One question is whether the disappearance of the self in the artistic action is actually equivalent or only analogous to the absenting of self that occurs in the creation of the typical autonomous modernist work, whether in painting or in poetry. Another is the degree to which, in comparison to the painter, the poet can express what the critic Jonathan Bate describes in considering Western nature poetry, as "the silence of the place" (*The Song of the Earth* 145). At least to some extent, our answers to the question affect the burden of subsequent chapters in Yang's analysis of Williams's ekphrastic poems in *Pictures from Breughel* and in his reading of the long poetic sequence *Paterson*, especially Book Five of that long poem. Not the least pressing irony countering an idealized reading of Williams's "Portrait of the Author" is that the poet-figure can be read as the portrait of a drunken and/or narcissistic failed poet drowning and thus erasing himself not in transcendence but in the waters of a spring freshet, unlike the painter who is able to see "bamboo without seeing himself" through the purification of acts of attention.

Ultimately, Yang is interested in going beyond the level of comparative readings of poems and the work of Williams as a singular poet to construe a comparative poetics of landscape poetry and painting, East and West, which is rooted in and revealed through his reading of Williams's achievement in his later poetry and a select few examples of Chinese landscape art, specifically as interpreted by Wang Guowei [Kuo-wei]. While the analysis of earlier poems depends upon the observation of patterns of relationships between speaking and seeing and the scene or screen that is invoked in the poem, Yang's approach to these later poems depends on the creation of bridges from one cultural-poetic domain to another, for which he appears to find a metaphor in the bridge across the chasm of the Passaic River at the Great Falls in the anecdote about Sam Patch's intervention and "the starting point of [his] career as a [famous] jumper" in Book One of *Paterson* (12). The critical saltations of chapters 5 and 6 involve several flurries of citation of terminology from various sources – e.g., sense and permutations of the word *jing* – that produce conceptual oppositions organized around a common ground such as "space of frustration" and "space of completion" premised on the metaphor of the textual construction of "space" (155). Yang cites as central to his thesis regarding the construction of the oppositions on a unified if undefined ground the work of Henri LeFevre in *The Production of Space* (1974). As an example of the argument building typical of *Convergence*, Yang connects the paradigm of unity-in-opposition here back to the oppositions Meyer Abrams intuited in English Romantic poetry and those inherent in Wang Guowei's esthetics which are in turn indebted to Schopenhauer. There is a concentric expansion in the progress of implication from chapter to chapter in *Convergence*, but ultimately it seems that these concentric circles are closed. One is not surprised that one of the articulations of the bridgework, a quotation from John Liu, is phrased in a manner that with only slight differences in idiom could be attributed in English to either Wordsworth or Williams (or others, such as Coleridge):

A poet does not take experience as the content of his poem and put it into a form; he is prompted by some experience, be it an emotion, a thought, an event, to write, and while he is searching for the right words, the right pattern of sounds and sequence of images, the original experience is transformed into something new – the poem. When the reader reads it, the process is repeated in his mind, and the world of that poem is renewed. (*The Art of Chinese Poetry* 96; quoted in Yang 161)

The ideal presupposed by this model of the communication of “an emotion, a thought, an event” from poet to reader is the lack of noise or distortion – the silence – implied by the discovery of “right words” as right strokes either in the representation in painting or in verbal description. At the same time, it would seem that “serenity” or “silence” remain in a transcendent realm upon which any “emotion,” “thought” or “event” however slight or minimal – the lifting of a leaf on an unfelt breeze, for instance – is a perturbation or provocation of response. In the Western canon, that tension between silence and painful/pleasurable thought is part of the structure of a poem like Keat’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn” and it becomes the model for ekphrastic poetry as it allegorizes the work of art. Yang makes this work the explicit theme of his concluding comparison of Williams’s poem “The Hunters in the Snow” and the painting by Peter Breughel the Elder that inspired it with the anonymous painting and accompanying poem by the Tang dynasty poet Liu Zongyuan, “The River Snow” (187). The demonstration is instructive, as is the fact that it depends upon the return to the consideration of explicitly ekphrastic work, in which the action in either case is essentially or inherently ekphrastic. In portions of Yang’s exposition throughout the book one feels the pressure of an abstractness in the need of grounding in the fullness of the Chinese landscape tradition, namely the essential or inherent connection of poems not just to painting in general but of specific poems to specific paintings. Nevertheless, to the degree that Yang has tried to find a significant point of contact to demonstrate the “convergence of East-West poetics,” he has done well to choose Williams’s poetry – which he reads ably – as that point of contact.

With respect to its contribution to the study of Williams’s poetry itself, *Convergence* may prove to be seminal. Much as Julio Marzan’s book *The Spanish American Roots of William Carlos Williams* [1994] broke through a general reticence on the part of critics and literary historians to perceive and account for the influence of his inheritance of Spanish on Williams’s work, so may *Convergence* convince the critical community, where it is not already so inclined, to perceive the importance of Williams’s conscious and deliberate engagement with Chinese literary tradition. Beyond that, *Convergence* contains timely suggestions for a more expansive cross-cultural study of ekphrastic poetry, East and West, at a critical moment for eco-poetics and our understanding of poetic discourse itself.

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Zhang, Yingjin, ed. *A World History of Chinese Literature* (1st ed.)

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Ce volume de 30 chapitres constitue le dernier projet de Zhang Yingjin (1957–2022), l'un des chercheurs les plus créatifs et audacieux dans le domaine des études chinoises contemporaines. Le travail monumental¹ de Zhang pour repenser les productions culturelles chinoises en des termes comparatifs et resituer la Chine sur la carte littéraire et cinématographique du monde force l'admiration, et continue d'inspirer les générations qu'il a formées. Le paradigme de la « polylocalité » (*polyvocality*), central dans toute son œuvre, lui a permis d'analyser avec originalité et érudition les dynamiques du cinéma et de la littérature chinois et sinophones, qu'il percevait comme des espaces publics de représentation et d'opposition, au sens du philosophe et sociologue Henri Lefebvre. Son dernier ouvrage, dont la publication posthume est aussi un hommage, se situe dans cette volonté de décloisonner les études chinoises et de construire une histoire de la littérature chinoise ancrée dans un monde marqué par les échanges, les circulations et les transferts intellectuels.

¹ Voir notamment ses ouvrages majeurs: *The City in Modern Chinese Literature and Film: Configurations of Space, Time, and Gender*; *Screening China: Critical Interventions, Cinematic Reconfigurations, and the Transnational Imaginary in Contemporary Chinese Cinema*; *Chinese National Cinema*; et *Cinema, Space, and Polylocality in a Globalizing China*.

A World History of Chinese Literature réunit parmi les plus grands noms des études littéraires chinoises, principalement (19 chapitres tout de même) en Amérique du Nord où Zhang était lui-même basé, mais aussi en Europe et en Asie-Pacifique. Construit en huit parties, y compris une première partie de deux chapitres introductifs, l'ouvrage entend la littérature chinoise au sens large, incluant la littérature sinophone (de Chine, Taiwan ou Hong Kong) mais aussi celles des auteurs chinois écrivant en anglais ou celle des Yi, un groupe ethnique du sud-ouest de la Chine de langue tibéto-birmane. De même, les chapitres couvrent un large panel de sujets et de genres, des questions *queer* et de genre à l'écologie, de la littérature de reportage à la cyberlittérature en passant par la science-fiction et la littérature de cape et d'épée. Cette diversité peut être quelque peu déconcertante pour un lectorat non initié à la littérature chinoise ; elle démontre néanmoins la richesse du domaine et la grande ouverture d'esprit de l'éditeur, Zhang Yingjin. Celui-ci admet dans son introduction générale (chapitre 1) que le domaine de « la littérature comparative, en tant que discipline respectée, n'offre plus d'incitation majeure aux chercheurs de littérature chinoise moderne » (4). En revanche, la notion très anglo-saxonne de *world literature*, ou « littérature-monde », qui désigne des œuvres transfrontalières, semble plus indiquée à Zhang pour traiter de littérature chinoise comme une *pratique* plutôt que comme un concept (5).

C'est dans cette optique que la seconde partie de l'ouvrage est consacrée à la réception et à la relecture de la littérature chinoise en occident – en l'occurrence ici, en Allemagne (chapitre 3), en France (chapitre 4), en Nouvelle-Zélande, au Canada et au Royaume-Uni (chapitre 5) et aux États-Unis (chapitre 6). Cette partie attire notamment notre attention sur le rôle de la poésie chinoise classique comme vecteur de connexion entre la littérature chinoise et le reste du monde.

La troisième partie, en miroir, est consacrée à la façon dont les auteurs chinois naviguent dans l'espace littéraire international. Tandis que le chapitre 7 met à l'honneur un auteur sino-américain et son écriture « transfrontalière » (*border-crossing*), Wong Chin Foo, le cosmopolitisme des écrivains sous la première République de Chine (entre la chute de l'empire Qing en 1911 et la création de la République populaire de Chine en 1949) est souligné dans le chapitre 8, mettant en évidence le rôle ambigu du Japon dans la formation des écrivains du début du vingtième siècle. Le chapitre 9 se détache en ce qu'il s'intéresse à l'institutionnalisation d'une certaine littérature chinoise à travers

la création de musées qui mettent en avant des auteurs particuliers, et notamment ceux de la première partie du vingtième siècle évoqués dans le chapitre précédent.

La quatrième partie explore le monde sinophone en général, et ses périphéries. La littérature de l'ethnie Yi est abordée dans un chapitre court et dense (chapitre 10), qui relate comment des auteurs ont redécouvert et valorisé la langue et l'écriture yi à partir des années 1980, même si la majorité utilise aujourd'hui le chinois dans leurs écrits. Ce chapitre aurait peut-être mérité d'être mieux connecté au reste de l'ouvrage, ou complété par d'autres chapitres sur des littératures produites dans les régions périphériques de la Chine par des ethnies comme les Tibétains, les Mongols ou les Ouïghours. Ceci aurait permis d'inscrire la littérature yi dans une perspective plus large de littérature non-han (n'appartenant pas à la majorité ethnique han de langue chinoise) mais en partie sinophone. Le chapitre suivant (11) est consacré à l'écriture *queer* chez l'autrice hongkongaise Wong Bik-wan, suivi d'un panorama de la littérature taiwanaise dans toute sa complexité (chapitre 12), de son héritage colonial japonais à sa réorientation postcoloniale qui vise à réintégrer les textes aborigènes dans le canon taiwanais. Le chapitre 13 nous dirige vers des questions écologiques en Asie du Sud-Est, et se focalise sur la forêt tropicale comme un trope littéraire encore peu exploré dans la littérature sinophone.

La cinquième partie, composée de quatre chapitres, s'intéresse aux genres littéraires, notamment à l'adaptation littéraire et théâtrale de légendes orales (chapitre 14) ou à la littérature de reportage, qui se réinvente dans les années 1990 sous forme de documentaire littéraire ou filmique (chapitre 15). Cette partie aborde également la science-fiction, lue d'abord sous l'angle de l'intertextualité comme un modèle de littérature-monde (chapitre 16), puis en lien avec le courant écocritique (chapitre 17).

La sixième partie revient sur la question du translinguisme ou de littératures qui traversent les frontières nationales et linguistiques au cours du vingtième et au début du vingt-et-unième siècles. Chaque chapitre est centré sur un auteur ou une autrice en particulier. Le chapitre 18 traite d'une comédie romantique de Su Manchu librement inspirée de traductions de textes littéraires européens. Le chapitre 19 est consacré à un auteur singulièrement créatif, Qian Zhongshu, et au dialogue qu'il amorce dans ses œuvres entre littératures chinoise et européenne. Le chapitre 20, quant à lui, souligne la porosité entre littérature et politique à travers le cas de l'autrice Zhang Ailing, célèbre pour ses écrits anti-communistes

pendant la Guerre froide. Au contraire, les romans de cape et d'épée de Jin Yong, au cœur du chapitre 21, ont transcendé les distances géographiques et politiques pour créer un monde qui réunit des lecteurs de tous horizons. Enfin, le chapitre 22 aborde l'écriture de Yan Lianke, auteur contemporain qui n'hésite pas à aborder des thèmes dits « sensibles » en Chine (les maladies industrielles dues aux polluants des usines, le SIDA, la mémoire empêchée de la Grande famine dans les années 1960...) à travers des « imaginaires hétérotopiques » au sens foucauldien.

La septième partie consacre quatre chapitres aux questions de genre : les (crises de) masculinités (chapitre 23), la remise en question des rôles sociaux genrés en première partie du vingtième siècle (chapitre 24), la femme comme trope littéraire au cours du siècle passé et en particulier pendant les années maoïstes (chapitre 25) et l'écriture féminine néo-réaliste qui critique l'amnésie culturelle de la période post-maoïste (chapitre 26).

Enfin, la huitième et dernière partie examine les questions de traduction à travers le cas des traductions des *1001 nuits* en Chine au début du vingtième siècle (chapitre 27). Interviennent également des discussions sur la transmédialité : le lyrisme des « films poésies » actuels en Chine d'une part (chapitre 28), les arts performatifs et la littérature d'autre part (chapitre 29). L'ouvrage conclut sur un phénomène de taille en Chine contemporaine : la cyberlittérature ou les fictions créées et partagées en ligne (chapitre 30).

Ce volumineux ouvrage offre donc un très large panel de perspectives qui intéresseront des lectorats divers. Certains de ces chapitres peuvent aisément faire office d'essais introductifs pour une classe de littérature chinoise, comme le chapitre sur la littérature à Taiwan ou sur la littérature de reportage. D'autres offrent des analyses originales sur des auteurs et autrices plus au moins conventionnels (ou largement étudiés) comme Su Manchu, Zhang Ailing, Jing Yong ou Yan Lianke. Tous les chapitres partagent une énergie et une profondeur dans l'analyse de cas d'études inspirants, qui, sous la plume et la direction de Zhang Yingjin, donnent à l'ouvrage une valeur unique.

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John Thieme. *Anthropocene Realism: Fiction in the Age of Climate Change*

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What is understood as “reality” in a time and place marked by the eco-catastrophes of the Anthropocene? This is the simple but important question John Thieme’s *Anthropocene Realism: Fiction in the Age of Climate Change* (2023) is asking by engaging with the genre of realism in contemporary literature from around the globe, that is, literature that deals with some aspect of the Anthropocene kaleidoscope – especially with climate change. It is an especially important question, I think, because of the ongoing ubiquity of the realist genre in the world literature marketplace. Examining these dominant forms of what is today considered ‘realist’, in other words, can help us identify in what ways our *zeitgeist* is shifting transculturally, while also providing local perspectives on this global mode of storytelling. In Thieme’s words, they help us “attest to realism’s vital role in communicating the present-day urgency of the crisis” (5). But deeper than that, the ongoing persistence of the realist genre also testifies to the fact that the effects of climate change are “anything but abstract and intangible anymore” (6) (as had been proposed by Timothy Morton with the notion of climate change as a ‘hyperobject’ (2013) for instance.

Anthropocene Realism speaks to the literary debate that emerged about 10 years ago in Ecocriticism – prominently centred around Amitav Ghosh’s assertion in *Derangement of Scales* (2016), centered around the question of whether realism could live up to the task of narrating climate change, predominantly because it rests on an anthropocentric world view. While

Ghosh initially expressed anxiety as to whether climate heating can be narrated on a human scale, many scholars responded to this claim by drawing attention to the fact that the Anthropocene has in fact been very *productive* for writers, and that literature is conspicuously *good* at engaging with different species and scales – even in the supposedly anthropocentric realist mode. In fact, Ghosh explored this question himself in his brilliant novel *Gun Island* (2019), also astutely analyzed by Thieme, in which the novelist “provides at least a partial answer to the difficulties that Ghosh suggest face literary novelists, since it finds him moving between realism and fabulation” (8). This immense productivity for writers in the Anthropocene is confirmed by the novels selected in Thieme’s study. Whether explicitly engaging with climate change or not, the proliferation of novel realisms testifies to the ongoing sophistication and importance of the genre.

To go back to the initial question posed at the beginning of this review of what constitutes this new ‘normal’, the new ‘reality’ in the Anthropocene, Thieme’s short answer seems to be: many conventions have changed in the realist novel. The genre is also increasingly hybrid, so Thieme proposes, especially in comparison to its heyday in 18th, 19th and 20th century Europe. Whose perspectives are taken as ‘normal,’ and what environmental phenomena are considered socially realistic, Thieme shows, is quickly changing. This can be observed in genre norms that have changed significantly: from anthropocentric towards more-than-human focalization; from eventual closure towards openness and uncertainty; from an affirmation of social order towards social upheaval; from the probable towards the improbable; from the foregrounding of everyday mundane details towards the unsettling and unprecedented. These changes, as Thieme argues, “upend the very notion of a stable social order and unsettle epistemological assumptions about the situations of human and more-than-human life on earth” (29).

The long, and more complicated answer is, as Thieme suggests, that conventional realism, which peaked in the eighteenth and nineteenth-century European novel, has *always* incorporated all of the above supposed contemporary novelties: unusual focalization, unsettled endings, meta-historical awareness, and inclusion of the extraordinary and improbable – albeit in more subtle ways that are especially interesting to observe in hindsight. Thieme here quotes Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* and Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations* as examples of novels that very much contain meta-historical and meta-narratological awareness, as well as the improbable (8).

While Thieme engages with this point in the introduction, however, it is the attention to literary conventions and changes in form that is the focus of his illuminating book. In twelve chapters dedicated to twelve realist novels and twelve different modes from around the world – most of them considered classics of environmental literature – Thieme dedicates much thoughtfulness and care to observing “a range of realist modes, some of which are conventional, some of which are innovative and some of which are a mixture of the two,” including “metajournalistic reporting (Helon Habila’s *Oil on Water*; 2010), a multi-generational saga (Annie Proulx’s *Barkskins*; 2016), comic realism (Ian McEwan’s *Solar*; 2010), visceral realism (Liz Jensen’s *The Rapture*), testimony (Indra Sinha’s *Animal’s People*; 2007), encyclopaedic realism (Richard Powers’s *The Overstory*) and Nordic noir (Antti Tuomainen’s *The Healer*; 2010; trans. 2013)” (4). These various modes, Thieme concludes, “extend the bounds of realism, to a point where it is perhaps more appropriate to speak of a plurality of realisms, or a ‘new realism’, a form of fiction that subscribes to the conventions of realism (...), but finds them stretched to breaking point and in some cases brings them into dialogue with other fictional modes” (5).

These insights are highly interesting, the texts well-curated (there are a variety of Anthropocene ‘themes’ that cannot be reduced to climate change), and, importantly, the book is very accessibly written.

One unfortunate neglect, however, lies in further addressing the relevance of precisely such a *planetary* curation; of illuminating the globally comparative aspect of the study; and of investigating the role that various languages play here. As Thieme’s study discusses ten Anglophone novels and two examples of translated fiction (from Finnish and Chinese), with virtually no reasoning for this selection, I was left wondering what justifies this uneven distribution of original languages. Why is the Anglophone world given such a prominent status, if the aim is to have a globally comparative study of something as intercultural as the Anthropocene? What also remained open is the transcultural aspect: if realism was especially flourishing in Europe--Thieme now observes a “plurality of realisms” – could the realist genre perhaps speak to *multiple modernities*,¹ as well as to the mobility of cultures, especially to and

¹ As S. M. Eisenstadt has argued in *Multiple Modernities* (2000), although most cultures were shaped by the project of modernisation, globalised modernity looks different everywhere and has brought about distinctive inflections. Nevertheless, there are some commonalities to be found across the modern world, as Eisenstadt

from the Global South? Although Thieme briefly addresses imperialism as a common denominator and critique of the Anthropocene debate in the conclusion, there is little else that seems to tie all of these texts together other than general themes of the Anthropocene. The legacy of imperialism, colonization and global inequality that inevitably shape the Anglosphere, then, seems to remain somewhat of an afterthought. A deeper reflection on how and what went into the selection of texts could also have helped clarify the ‘so-what’ question that, to my mind, especially needs to be asked of genre studies. This is not because genre studies are not important – I would be remiss to suggest this as a literary scholar – but because they perhaps tend to remain obscure to the interest of the general public, as, at first glance, they might seem to speak to a highly specialised audience only.

The book also omits scholarship on Anthropocene Realism that has emerged in the past ten years or so, especially by Adeline Johns-Putra, Kate Marshall or Adrian Ivakhiv. Johns-Putra’s excellent article “Climate and History in the Anthropocene: Realist Narrative and the Framing of Time” (2013), for instance, would have been a valuable essay to converse with, as it argues that the Anthropocene “invites a new realism that, first, would solicit the reader’s attention, initially with conventional norms and practices, but eventually with a jolt out of convention and thus out of a unified sense of history; this new realism would, second, enables not just an awareness of other forms of history but a snapshot of the impossibly complex patterning of their co-existence” (262). It is this notion of a “unified sense of history” versus “other forms of history” that is highly relevant for a globally comparative study such as Thieme’s. Moreover, Marshall’s 2015 article “What Are the Novels of the Anthropocene? American Fiction in Geological Time” (among others of hers) observed that realist novels in the Anthropocene require an internal critique of realism—again, a highly important point also raised in Thieme’s analyses.

Change is, and has always been, inevitable, but also hard to fathom. What literature and the reflection on literature offers is also the other pole to change: that which remains. *Anthropocene Realism*’s merit lies,

argues: the sense of human agency and autonomy; a future orientation (as in the expectation of increasing prosperity and well-being); high reflexivity about social and political order; a multiplicity of visions, social roles and belonging; and the notion of human mastery of nature, including human nature (40–43).

above all, in the close readings of the twelve novels, which are highly readable and will provide important reference points, I am certain, for students and scholars alike grappling with this “everything change” of the Anthropocene.

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Russell McDougall, John C. Ryan, and Pauline Reynolds, eds. *Postcolonial Literatures of Climate Change*

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Postcolonial Literatures of Climate Change collects articles focusing on various parts of the (mostly anglophone) world – Australia, Nauru, Aotearoa New Zealand, Hawai‘i, the Caribbean, Malaysia, the Canadian Arctic region, Antarctica, India, Nigeria, and Egypt – in order to decentre western readings of climate change as a pre-traumatic event and to create a conversation between universal, local and Indigenous modes of knowledge on the issue of environmental disasters. The Covid-19 pandemic constitutes the background of this book, a parenthesis in world history which paralysed the world for several months, killing more than 7.1 million people. Highlighting the fragility of humans as a species and the difficulty for their political regimes to face, master and solve a microbiological disruption, this historical period also put forth the interconnections between human, non-human and more-than-human forms of health. In this context, this anthology of ecocritical texts intends to address the epistemic violence perpetrated by environmental science when assumed to be universal and therefore valid for all, regardless of their cultures, languages, gender, ethnicity, social class, abilities, and age. The anthology, dedicated to Geoffrey V. Davis (1943–2018) who contributed to the second chapter of the volume, opens with a poem by Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner (Marshallese), “Dear Matefele Peinam” (xvi–xix),

dedicated to her daughter born in the United States while in exile from their motherland due to nuclear colonialism. This poem reads as a communal promise to the next generation to protect them from further “natural” disasters.

In Chapter 1, Russell McDougall, John C. Ryan and Pauline Reynolds offer an introduction to postcolonial literatures of climate change that highlights the deleterious impact climate change has on First Peoples, inviting postcolonial researchers to engage with Indigenous studies and decolonial theories. They recontextualize climate change as a global threat and not as a pre-traumatic event, and as an epistemological crisis which requires new tools, new vocabulary, and new genres to contain its reality, its disorders and its chronic damage on humans, non-humans and more-than-humans. Indigenous epistemologies are valued for their ethics of care, reciprocity and kinship, counterbalancing western caveats which led to the current crisis and still dominate the mainstream discourse in environmental studies. Decentring anthropocentric understandings of “natural” disasters, the authors invite readers to reconsider their positionality with regard to fabricated dichotomies like nature/culture or humans/non-humans, and to devise culturally respectful reading methodologies to better apprehend texts testifying to global warming. Listening to a plurality of experiences and accepting differences in artistic forms and content are presented as problem-solving skills at a time of grand scientific, social, economic, and political derangements: “We are climate change; we invented it, and we are fighting for control of its narrative as the reality itself affects us. We are the agents of change – its origins, its pace – and ultimately, we hold within our grasp all the possibilities of its denouement” (45).

In “‘The Imagining of Possibilities’: Writers as Activists” (56–92), Geoffrey V. Davis gives readers his thoughts on writers’ role within their society in the Anthropocene. For him, writers have a moral obligation to tackle climate change issues in their fiction and non-fiction. They also have to confront these matters in their personal and public lives to ascertain that people at large are aware of these problems which directly affect their lives and environment. Referring to the work of three Indian writers: Ganesh Devy, Arundhati Roy and Amitav Ghosh, and two Nigerian writers: Ken Saro-Wiwa and Helon Habila, Davis argues for a climate change literature which functions as a counterpower to disinformation, capitalist greed and (neo-)colonial discourse. He sheds light on Devy’s non-violent fight for the Adivasis’ rights, cultures and arts

in India, Roy's battles against super-dams, Saro-Wiwa's campaign in the Niger Delta to protect it from oil companies, Habila's petrofiction and its denunciation of dictatorships, and Ghosh's defence of the poorest in Asia against human-made global warming. Ghosh's *Great Derangement* (2016) is lauded as a wake-up call for writers to invest in ecofiction and for the general public to collectively act for the environment. Davis yet ends his article on the urgency of the cause as today's small victories to preserve local habitats and ecosystems will remain short-lived if fossil fuels are not banned (87).

Chris Prentice's article, "River Writing: Culture, Law and Poetics" (93-119), analyses the relations between humans, non-humans and more-than-humans. She especially observes how the *whakapepeha* (proverb, in the Māori language), "ko au te awa, ko te awa ko au" – approximately translated as: "I am the river, the river is me" – is applied in Te Awa Tupua Act, which gave the Whanganui River access to the status of personhood in Aotearoa New Zealand law in 2017. Her corpus is composed of two poems by Hone Tuwhare, "Rain" and "The River is an Island" as well as the novel *Carpentaria* by Alexis Wright. Her analysis is based on the acknowledgment that Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia are "settler-invader colonies" (94), investigating how climate change and colonialism are imbricated. Focusing on translation issues, Prentice notes how Māori and English interpretations of the Whanganui River as a person (English) and as a *tupuna* (ancestor, in Te Reo Māori) convey different worldviews and modes of being with the environment. She highlights how *whakapapa* (genealogy, family history, relating humans with non-humans and more-than-humans until the Creation Time in the Māori conception of spacetime) as an epistemology can be used to combat climate change in Aotearoa. Her reading of Tuwhare's poems enable her to "decentre human sovereignty" (105) while Wright's novel provides her with another temporality, that of the Rainbow Serpent and "cyclical reversibility" (113), to question the linear timeframe of western climate science.

In "Which Island, What Home? Plantation Ecologies and Climate Change in Australia and Nauru" (120–34), Paul Sharrad concentrates on refugee narratives and phosphate mining in Nauru as well as Nauru's political and economic relationship with Australia, its former coloniser. Sarcasm pervades the text, denoting the numerous paradoxes endured by the inhabitants of this Pacific Island once called "Pleasant Island," as it now looks like an uninhabitable rock desert, its landscape having been

acidified and dehumanised by the phosphate industry. Sharrad defines “plantation ecologies” as exploiting and exporting human resources and raw materials for financial profits: “raw materials from colonies or the global South generally, being shipped for processing to imperial centres and the global North” (122). Using the logic of island internment, he analyses Nauruan politics of settling refugee camps for Australia while 80% of their territory is hostile to human and non-human life. In the poems of *Pinnacles*, Makerita Va'ai (Samoan) focuses on the import of freshwater to survive on the island and the health issues related to the dust of phosphate mining. Australia's ambiguous attitude towards refugees is also questioned in terms of climate disasters (130). Sharrad's text brilliantly articulates how climate change and colonialism are deeply entangled and how plantation economies affect ecosystems and the labour force, jeopardizing human and non-human health for capital accumulation.

In Chapter 5, “Island Life and Wild Time: Crossing into Country in Tim Winton's *Island Home*” (135-61), Stephen Harris analyses Tim Winton's *Island Home* (2015), which was presented as a “landscape memoir” in lieu of life writing. This hybrid genre “challenges the conventions of memoir as a genre of non-fiction” (142). Other scholars have tried to classify this literary form born out of a desire to testify to climate change effects in Australia under other labels, such as ecobiography, ecomimesis, and new nature writing. However, Harris notes the overarching power of the writer's eye in his text. Indeed, he emphasizes the importance of seeing the land as an opportunity for Australians to change their colonially inflected gaze on Country and on natural resources. By challenging his contemporaries' frame of mind, which regards nature as a commodity and land as real estate, Winton challenges the dearth of environmental policies in Australia. Harris does not hesitate to highlight how some aspects of Winton's theory on the environment can sound patronizing and “priestly” (142) at times. Yet, he also shows that the writer's faith in the powers of imagination can be beneficial in a country that struggles to admit their settler colonialism and to accept the presence of Aboriginal cultures and knowledge amidst a white Anglo-mainstream society. This reading of Winton's memoir reminds me of Ralph Waldo Emerson's transcendental approach to wilderness and Alison Ravenscroft's study *Postcolonial Eye* (Ravenscroft), in which she explains how photos were used to impose colonists' gaze on Aborigines during the colonial era.

In “Islands Within Islands: Climate Change and the Deep Time Narratives of the Southern Beech” (162–91), John C. Ryan examines deep time narratives told by *Nothofagus*, found in Southern countries like Antarctica, Argentina, Chile, Aotearoa New Zealand, Kanaky New Caledonia, New Guinea and Australia. Commonly called “false beech,” this tree looks like the beech existing in the North without being related to it, as it constitutes a remnant of Gondwanan history. Its appearance in distant lands led scientists such as Charles Darwin to formulate the hypothesis that South America and Oceania had once been one land. The objective of the article is to “develop (...) a Gondwanan approach to the postcolonial environmental humanities through the deep time narratives of the southern beech (botanical genus *Nothofagus*)” (164). The corpus encompasses poems by two Pākehā New Zealanders: James K. Baxter and Ruth Dallas, two non-Indigenous Chileans, Pablo Neruda and Gabriela Mistral, and two Papua New Guineans, Peter Kama Kerpi and Steven Edmund Winduo. Comparing these texts enables Ryan to analyse the paradox of *Nothofagus* narratives as these trees have survived an ancient supercontinent while having their species endangered by the current anthropogenic climate crisis. A Māori perspective on these trees could perhaps have been included in the analysis to better apprehend the notion of kinship otherwise mentioned in Ryan’s article.

In “Refashioning Futures with Sargassum: A Caribbean Poetics of Hope” (192–218), Kasia Mika and Sally Stainier work on the recent invasion of sargassum (seaweed) in the Caribbean, its impact on people’s health and economy, as well as on the local biodiversity. From the start, they highlight the social disparity resulting from “natural” disasters: “events are natural but disasters are human: a singly Category 5 hurricane will hit several communities differently depending on their governance style, preparedness levels, health infrastructures, housing regulations and environmental health” (194). Influenced by Caribbean thinkers Edouard Glissant, Kamau Brathwaite, Sylvia Wynter, and Louis-Philippe Dalembert, the two scholars intend to formulate “the sargassum’s right to opacity” (196) as a form of resistance. Sargassum is growing due to increased temperature in the ocean and pollution (199). Their toxicity is affecting the health sector, technological equipment, schools, tourism, and the energy field, as some projects aim at using these algae to produce electricity (204). Yet, a poetics of hope pervades the texts of the corpus, as the writers decolonize their islands from the western binaries of opposites,

highlighting the limits of western progress, and embracing floating sargassum as a vehicle with and through which to reimagine human and non-human relations in the Caribbean.

In Chapter 8, “‘Kāne and Kanaloa Are Coming’: Contemporary Hawaiian Poetry and Climate Change” (219-50), renowned Craig Santos Perez (Chamorro) debunks contradictory myths formulated by colonial powers about Pacific Islands and Pacific Islanders to justify colonial expansion, the militarization of the Pacific Ocean and nuclear testing. He deplores the facts that Indigenous Hawai‘ians’ viewpoints on their own land remain marginalised, as they are not often taken into account by policymakers, especially when dealing with so-called “natural” catastrophes. Although authorities recognise the devastation sea level rise will trigger in this state (i.e. “the predicted global sea level rise will be 3.2 feet” before the end of the 21st century (222)), their response to climate change lacks a diversity of opinions and methodologies. Using translation studies, the poet reinscribes Hawai‘ian cli-po – a neologism he coins to refer to “climate change poetry” (235) – into the millennial literary history of the Pacific. The corpus selected is composed of “Kanaloa ‘Ai Moku” by David Keali‘i Mackenzie, “Moa Space Foa Ramble” by Joe Balaz and “Water Remembers” by Brandy Nālani McDougall. Santos Perez’s beautifully detailed analysis sheds light on a Hawai‘ian ethics of care for the Earth and the ocean which can be applied to counter carbon colonialism and adapt to climate changes.

In “Monsoonal memories and the ‘Reliable Water’: Reading Climate Change in Selected Malayan Literature” (251–80), Agnes S. K. Yeow analyses how Malayan authors Shirley Geok-lin Lim, Muhammad Haji Salleh and K. S. Manian represent the monsoonal seasons in Malaysia, a country which promotes a progressist move towards eco-friendly energies while being deeply inscribed in fossil fuel history. Her article contributes to energy humanities, as it emphasizes the paradoxical situation of this country in the climate crisis narrative and analyses the poetics of hydro-poetics in healing humans, non-humans and more-than-humans. Focusing on climate injustice and environmental trauma, Yeow’s analysis investigates how the disorders brought about by the two annual monsoons nurture the collective imagination. In Malay, homeland is called *tanahair*, which means “landwater” (258). Water is perceived as reliable while its pollution indicates corruption (259). Yet, due to climate change, water is losing its quality, as shown in “socio-climatic literature” (260). The Malay diaspora also invests in the monsoonal metaphor, which evokes

migration and memories (263). Sea level rise is apprehended as a force of destruction in this part of the world where land and sea are deeply connected.

In “Aswan High Dam and Haggag Oddoul’s *Stories from Old Nubia: Redefining the Line between Immediate Catastrophe and Slow Violence*” (281-310), Amany Dahab presents the dystopic side of mega-dams, often presented as solutions for a greener future, when their ecological impact proves otherwise (299-300). She takes the example of the Aswan High Dam, constructed by Nasser, on the Nile River, affecting its flow, its ecosystem and the Nubian people who historically lived by its riverbed. Nubian literature notes how this people’s division and displacement in two countries, Egypt and Sudan, uprooted them from their meaning-making relation with the Nile River and its surrounding fertile land. In her analysis of *Nights of Musk: Stories from Old Nubia* by Haggag Oddoul, Dahab looks for signs of climate change in the stories to determine how the dam’s damage was recorded in the 1980s. Basing her argument on Rob Nixon’s concept of slow violence and especially his observations on “dam wars” (287), she shows how Nasser’s nationalist discourse justifying the implementation of the Aswan High Dam at the risk of erasing ancient Nubian civilisation further marginalised this people, as their removal was promoted as a way to improve their lifestyle, making of them “developmental refugees” (288). Oddoul’s fiction contests this paradoxical terminology by voicing the desolation of this community facing concrete buildings and sterile land, yearning for their homeland (293). Dahab argues against the “colonial ideology of development” (305), which western countries continue to impose to the global South to financially benefit from “green” energies, actually contributing to carbon and greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere.

In Chapter 11, “Caring for the Future: Climate Change, Kinship and Inuit Knowledge” (311–33), Renée Hulan indicates that Canadian literary fiction rarely tackles climate change issues (311) and that Indigenous epistemologies are still too often doubted in academia (313). To tackle the “Arcticide,” she turns to a corpus mixing genres and media, analysing works by Inuit artists Tanya Tagaq and Zacharias Kunuk. Inuit *Quajimajatuqangit* (Inuit traditional knowledge) is commodified in non-Indigenous Canadians’ quest for authenticity – a threat that is answered by Inuits’ ethics of “walking the border between two worlds,” which enables them to resist against objectification and past-ification (315). The ban of seal hunting triggered by decades of animal rights’ campaigns in

the West was met with strong disapproval in the Canadian Arctic, as the economy of Inuit communities has long been based on the production of seal meat and seal fur. Tagaq's art challenges the western dichotomy between humans and non-humans based on a separation between culture and nature. Indeed, she promotes seal hunting as a form of self/seal-respect and self/seal-care: "The seal hunt embodies the spiritual and material connections between Inuit and the animals they eat" (321). By contrast, Hulan shows that Donna Haraway appropriates and distorts Tagaq's activism in "The Camille Stories: Children of Compost" in *Staying with the Trouble*. By reinscribing the kinship existing between humans and animals in an unchallenged colonial narrative in which Inuit are represented as a pre-historical and dying people, Haraway reproduces the settler colonial narrative in which Indigenous women's systemic disappearance goes unnoticed. Their murders are presented as unmourned. Hulan therefore offers nuances and cautions against some ecofeminist theories produced by white women from the West.

In "Fictional Representations of Antarctic Tourism and Climate Change: To the Ends of the World" (334–60), Hanne E. F. Nielsen investigates the representation of Antarctica as a white desert, now that it has become a touristic hub for sensation-seekers. Influenced by Edward Said's theory of Orientalism, Nielsen questions the western projections and desires on this uninhabited Southern land, except for scientific purposes. The article especially analyses *The Lamentations of Zeno* by Ilija Trojanow (Bulgarian-German) "to interrogate the representation of south polar tourism in narrative and the implications of presenting the human/ice relationship in fiction" (336). During the "Heroic Era" (1890s–1922), western explorers forged a colonial gaze on Antarctic ice, represented as a pure and white virgin (348–49). Nielsen further develops this feminization of Antarctica in western imagination by adding that "Antarctica is not immune to racialized discourse" either (344). The myth of white supremacy dominating the imaginary of Antarctica is visible in *Elizabeth Costello* by J. M. Coetzee, which can be read as a critique of South Africa's politics of Apartheid. In her novel, Trojanow questions the tourists' gaze and their subsequent inaction in favour of the environment as well as the impact human pollution has on a no man's land, and the counterproductive grief some activists feel in front of global warming.

The last chapter, Elizabeth Leane's enticing article "Ice Islands of the Anthropocene: The Cultural Meanings of Antarctic Bergs" (361–82),

challenges the collective imagination on icebergs, made of awe, fears, and a clear lack of knowledge. Based on the author's teaching in the Postgraduate Certificate in Antarctic Studies at the University of Canterbury and her subsequent stay in a research station, New Zealand's Scott Base, in Ross Island, this article not only highlights how clichés on this region are constructed but also questions the author's own feelings of inability and inadequacy to witness and communicate what remains a unique and pristine environment. While 90% of icebergs are formed in Antarctica, the literature on ice islands mostly describes those shifting in the Northern hemisphere. Metaphors and abstract theories invade the language of bergs, as shown by the narrations of iceberg A68's route in the international press (2017–2021). Leane then analyses four ice narratives: *Nanny and the Iceberg* by Ariel Dorfmann (Chilean-American), *Ice: A Love Story* by Louis Nowra (non-Indigenous Australian), "The Purity of Ice" by Witi Ihimaera (Māori New Zealander) and *Voyage of the Iceberg* by Richard Brown (non-Indigenous American). These stories inspire Leane to creatively write the "cryptobiography" of A68 (377) as, confronted to climate change disorders, "we must try to understand how we tell their stories, and continue to look for new ways to do so" (379).

This anthology became my trustful companion as I was teaching an undergraduate course on Commonwealth studies at the University of Lorraine. It provided me with a mine of information on blue humanities, extractivist criticism, settler colonialism, environmental racism, Indigenous epistemologies, ecofiction and ecocide. As a scholar in Pacific studies, I admit that I revelled in the fact that five articles are dedicated to Oceania, a part of the world that too often remains neglected in postcolonial studies, as it is deemed far away from northern centres of power. However, this region dominates the headlines in the news because of the sea level rise, tsunami risks, earthquakes, ocean acidification, coral survival, but also because the legal and political consequences of climate change fuel debates on climate refugees, Indigeneity, personhood and citizenship. In my opinion, this study offers a worthy complement to Christine Marcandier's monograph, *L'écopoétique* (Mercandier), which especially examines the Francophone context, while mentioning the legacy of American and British ecocriticism. I therefore strongly recommend *Postcolonial Literatures of Climate Change* to any scholar interested in environmental studies, post- and de-colonialism, as well as philosophy.

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Hsinya Huang and Chia-hua Lin, eds. *Pacific Literatures as World Literature*

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In 2018, Marshall Islander poet Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner sailed from Majuro Atoll to Enewetak Atoll to perform her poem “Anointed” atop the Runit Dome, a concrete cupola under which the US government buried massive amounts of lethal radioactive waste created by their nuclear testing in the 1950s and 60s. Jetñil-Kijiner’s strikingly effective work of eco-poetic activism was subsequently broadcast worldwide on YouTube in a beautifully shot video by Dan Lin, depicting the poet standing defiantly on the concrete dome, performing her writing to highlight that what was once an idyllic, productive island home for its Indigenous people, is now an insidious symbol of imperialist ecocide. Now that rising oceans threaten to crack the dome and release the radioactive waste into the ocean, the dome is a particularly potent symbol of environmental crisis. Jetñil-Kijiner is one of many inspirational Pacific writers examined in *Pacific Literatures as World Literature*, a collection of essays that foregrounds Pacific literature as central to planetary environmental concerns.

The book has its origins in a 2009 seminar on Pacific cultural production taught in Taiwan by Rob Wilson and Chadwick Allen (16), both influential leaders in postcolonial, Oceanic and Indigenous literatures. It is one of the latest volumes in Bloomsbury’s “Literatures as World Literatures” series, edited by Thomas O. Beebe, which aims

to expand understanding and address the gaps in the study of world literatures. Engaging with the literatures of the Pacific region – with its nearly 30,000 islands, over 1,200 languages and diversity of cultural traditions – matches perfectly with the series' mission to “foster scholarly writing that approaches more closely the polyphonic, multiperspectival nature of world literature” (ii). Even today, many years after the publication of foundational works by scholars like Epeli Hau'ofa, Albert Wendt, Teresia Teaiwa, Rob Wilson and Michelle Keown, Pacific literature is often overlooked in authoritative literary histories and anthologies.

Pacific Literatures as World Literature features twelve essays organized into three parts, the first focusing on colonialism in the Pacific, the second on Indigenous resistance, and the final part on the ocean and ecology. These themes blend into each other throughout the book, which examines a wide range of Pacific literature including Indigenous poetry from Guåhan (Guam), Hawai'i, the Marshall Islands and Taiwan, Japanese eco-travel writing, traditional narratives of the Ainu (Indigenous people of northern Japan), and contemporary fiction from Australia, the United States and Aotearoa.

The foreword by Syaman Ranpongan, an aboriginal writer from the Taiwanese island Pongso no Tao (Orchid Island), perfectly sets the tone for the project of this book: “Only when I am in the ocean, and when I feel the elegance of my body in it, do I gain deep understanding of the oceanic literature of my people” (xi). The centrality of the natural world to Pacific literature resonates throughout this volume, from the liquid expanse of the ocean to the majestic mountains of Taiwan.

The introduction written by the editors Hsinya Huang and Chia-hua Lin skilfully conceptualizes this book's re-worlding project, which highlights the effectiveness of literature as activism, resistance and decolonization. The book certainly delivers on the editors' proposed re-imagining of the Pacific beyond the “Euro-American/continent-centered framework” (4). They contest the Eurocentrism that has dominated literary studies in the past, foreshadowing the book's focus on Indigenous ecopoetics and “non-anthropocentric way[s] of reading” (7). Inspired by Chadwick Allen's trans-Indigenous methodology, they foreground Indigenous writers and their dynamic responses to imperialist efforts to dominate Pacific discourses, “bring[ing] oceanic imaginaries to the core of re-mapping world literature” (9). The editors dedicate their book to the late Paul Lyons, formerly Professor of Postcolonial Literatures at the University of Hawai'i, recognizing his vast contribution

as a pioneer of Pacific Studies (10). Lyons' essay in Part One provides a powerful reading of one of Pacific Studies' most influential scholars Epeli Hau'ofa.

Pacific Literatures as World Literature provides extensive evidence of the historic and ongoing exploitation of defenceless Pacific Islands by all-powerful industrialised nations. As Hau'ofa recognized in *We are the Ocean* (2008), the Pacific has long been a dumping ground for the waste generated by industrial nations and their military forces (46). The first part provides historical and theoretical context that informs the rest of the book, beginning with John R. Eperjesi's chapter on the significance of the scientific expedition led by Navy Lieutenant Charles Wilkes (1838–1842) in establishing American military bases throughout the Pacific. Eperesi analyses the archives created by the Wilkes Expedition to illustrate that “Wilkes's obsessive, micrological surveying practices” (23) identified exceptional harbours in the Pacific, laying the foundations for American commerce, military bases and the colonization of Guam, Hawai'i, the Marshall Islands, the Philippines and Eastern Sāmoa. Eperesi accentuates the functions of surveying, charting and mapping in cataloguing and ultimately controlling territory. Paul Lyons' essay “Epeli Hau'ofa's Pronouns” elegantly expands many of the themes of the book. He examines how Hau'ofa's use of plural pronouns in his most influential writings relates to possession and dispossession in the contemporary Pacific, acting as a “drum refrain” (47) throughout his work. Lyons demonstrates that “the concept of an inclusive ‘our’ in Oceania is mediated by histories of displacement and dispossession” (43). He reflects on how three contemporary Pacific poets – Craig Santos Perez, Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner and Juliana Spahr – engage with Hau'ofa's aesthetics and continue his use of possessive pronouns as a linguistic and critical strategy in their writing. Thus Lyons powerfully sums up Hau'ofa's massive intellectual and creative legacy, highlighting the connections between his seminal writings and younger generations of Pacific writers.

In the third chapter in this first part, Chia-li Kao focusses on the Japanese naturalist Tadao Kano's “ecocentric” travel writings about his journeys in the mountains of Taiwan. Taiwan was colonized by Japan in 1895 and remained under Japanese rule until 1945. Despite Kano's conventional scientific training, Kao argues that his deep respect for nature based in traditional Japanese aesthetics and theology “circumvent[s] dominant Japanese colonial ideology” (64). Kao demonstrates how Kano's writings embrace a holistic view of nature by blending the personal, the

scientific, the creative and the spiritual. Kao provides a fresh, multi-layered perspective on a writer from a colonial culture, arguing that his writings “do not reflect the common colonial imagination,” in which “Taiwan’s mountains and its Aboriginal people” are seen as “barbaric” (59).

Kano’s respect and humility in the face of nature is a stark contrast to the USA’s violent desecration of the natural environment of Guåhan (Guam). Guåhan was Spain’s first colony in the Pacific in 1564, remaining under Spanish rule until becoming a territory of the United States after the Spanish-American war in 1898, with a brief but destructive period of Japanese occupation during the second world war. In his chapter, Craig Santos Perez recounts this history and its traumatic impact on Guåhan’s Indigenous people the CHamoru. Perez focuses on the book *Mariquita, a Tragedy of Guam* (1986) by CHamoru writer Chris Perez Howard, the first Indigenous text from Guåhan to be widely circulated internationally, putting it into conversation with more recent CHamoru poetry by Melvin Won Pat-Borja and Kisha Borja-Quichocho-Calvo. Based on the tragic death of his mother during the Japanese occupation, Perez Howard’s book uses the specificity of his mother’s story to reflect “the sad history of the occupation of Guam” (70). Perez powerfully illustrates how *Mariquita* “offers a profound and emotional critique of Japanese and American imperialism on Guåhan” (72). He argues that “literature is a form of cultural memory” (70) and therefore has significant impact as “decolonial critique” (72). This point is reinforced by the work of Won Pat-Borja, who performed his poetry at a public hearing in protest at proposed military expansion in 2010. Perez recounts how Won Pat-Borja’s powerful poem “No Deal” provoked cheering in the audience at the hearing and provided hope for the CHamoru people in the face of ongoing oppression by the United States occupation. Similarly, Borja Quichocho-Calvo used poetry as testimony at another hearing to re-label “Liberation Day” (the annual celebration of the return of the US military in 1944) as “Re-occupation Day.” Perez argues that the performances by these poets were more effective than other testimonies because “their recitations were more rhythmic and rhetorically compelling” (79), accentuating the central contribution of the CHamoru creative community to activist politics in Guåhan.

Craig Santos Perez provides a bridge to the second part of the book, which expands his emphasis on Indigenous literature as political resistance. The opening chapter by Anna Erzsebet Szucs provides a detailed analysis

of Perez's poetry series *from unincorporated territory* (2008–2017). Like the writers he discusses in the previous chapter, Perez's poetry performs a decolonizing and activist function. Like Eperjesi, Perez draws attention to the link between the Western process of mapping and the militarization of the Pacific. Szucs emphasizes how Perez's poetry ironically engages with maps on which Guåhan is either invisible or mis-named. The concept of mapping is also central to the following chapter by Chia-hua Lin, where the focus shifts from Guåhan to Hawai'i. Lin analyses poems by Albert Wendt and Brandy Nāalani McDougall, making connections with a wetlands restoration project near the University of Hawai'i at Manoa, which she considers "to be a physical/embodied mapping" (101). Just as Szucs celebrates the CHamoro Indigenous method of navigation called "song mapping" (95), Lin explains how Kānaka Maoli map using their mo'olelo (Indigenous Hawaiian narratives), which "capture the depth of a place" (103), as opposed to the superficiality of Western cartography, which results in the "objectification and commodification of the environment" (102). Lin analyses Wendt's painted poem of the Mānoa Valley, demonstrating how it reinforces the depth of kinship between Kanaka Maoli, their land (āina) and staple food (kalo). Lin draws on her own experience of a work-day at Ka Papa Lo'i O Kanewai, a restored kalo garden with traditional irrigation ditches, to demonstrate how Indigenous agriculture and water management systems work in harmony with the environment and create a sustainable ecology. Lin highlights the vital role of mo'olelo in sustaining Hawaiian culture and ecology and argues that the "Kānaka Maoli worldview and traditional knowledge are crucial in a time of global environmental crisis" (113). Environmental issues are also central in the chapter by Hsinya Huang focusing on the eco-poetry of Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner. Huang provides an account of US nuclear testing in the Marshall Islands, which has resulted in "irreversible environmental contamination and indefinite displacement of the islanders" (121). Huang reveals how Jetñil-Kijiner's poetry examines the nuclear legacy of the islands and interrogates the status of contaminated islands that can no longer be called "home", also acting as a form of resistance against the nuclear militarization of the Pacific region. Huang powerfully illustrates the impact of Jetñil-Kijiner's poetry, affirming the resistance of Indigenous cultures who "refuse to leave or vanish" (131).

Hitoshi Oshima's essay shifts the geographical focus to northern Japan and the "cultural genocide" (135) of the Indigenous Ainu people who were colonised by the Japanese in the late 19th century. Oshima's

concise analysis of Ainu divine songs published in 1923 shows how the translation of oral storytelling into literary form can preserve linguistic virtuosity and compelling narratives that give fascinating insights into Indigenous ecological worldviews based on the interconnection between humans and other creatures and things.

Part Three begins with Rob Wilson's brilliantly concise overview of competitive imperialism in the Pacific from the US annexation of Hawai'i to Obama's 2011 "Pacific Pivot" (149). He sums up the enormity of environmental devastation in the Pacific, most potently symbolized by the obscene plastic mass of the Great Pacific Garbage patch, and tragically tangible in the gradual submersion of the island nation of Tuvalu as a result of climate change. Wilson skilfully weaves together concise readings of a range of Pacific writing from Brandy Nālani McDougall's ocean-soaked poetry to Jack Kerouac's first novel *The Sea is My Brother* as examples of a "blue poetics of 'oceanic becoming'" (153). Kathryn Yalan Chang's essay examines how poetry has been utilized in a collection edited by Sheng Wu and Mingyi Wu as resistance to the environmental destruction and public health problems caused by the expansion of petrochemical companies in Taiwan. In her essay on de-colonizing literature in Australia, Iris Ralph curiously overlooks Indigenous writing and focusses on the work of settler authors Ray Lawler and Tim Winton. While she creates a compelling analysis of Winton's critique of the whaling industry in his novel *Shallows*, the connection between the colonial practice of blackbirding and the urban adventures of two sugarcane cutters in Lawler's *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* seems tenuous to me. Whales and whaling are also central to Joni Adamson's essay which provides a rich comparison between Nicki Caro's film adaptation of Māori novelist Witi Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider* and Chickasaw writer Linda Hogan's novel *People of the Whale*. Drawing on the notions of multispecies ethnography and Indigenous cosmopolitics, Adamson argues that the "transformational characters" (208) in these works emphasize the interconnectedness of multispecies communities.

While some essays in this book have previously been published elsewhere, there is immense value in bringing them together in one substantial volume with such a wide-ranging geopolitical focus. The volume is unified by the valuable connections made between de-colonising and eco-critical literature and the significance of Oceania to the planet as a whole. In citing marine microbiologist Ed DeLong's argument "Earth is a misnomer. The planet should be called Ocean"

(149), Rob Wilson reinforces the central significance of the oceans to all life on earth. The relevance of Oceanic literature in today's troubled world is striking, as is the pertinence of Indigenous worldviews and non-exploitative, sustainable cultural practices. Read together, these essays emphasize the global significance of Oceania – historically, politically, economically, strategically – and the vital role of literature in contesting Anthropocentric ideologies and ecocidal policies that have brought the planet to the threshold of environmental catastrophe. The “Literatures as World Literatures” series acknowledges that in addressing the gaps in world literature, “[t]he majority of critical work, the filling in of what has been traced, lies ahead of us”.(ii) *Pacific Literatures as World Literature* fills in some of these gaps in this ongoing project and admirably leads the way towards the future of a more inclusive literary studies discipline.

Bhavya Tiwari and David Damrosch, eds. *World Literature and Postcolonial Studies*

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The discrete categories of “World Literature” and “Postcolonial Studies” in the collection’s title invite the reader, from the onset, to wonder why “Postcolonial *Literatures*” is ousted by “Postcolonial Studies.” Aren’t we comparing apples and oranges? The answer may lie in the cubic imbrication of, with the French exception of Pascale Casanova, two mostly American-based trios: the troika which allegedly launched “Postcolonial Studies” in the 1980s – Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha – and this other one – David Damrosch, Pascale Casanova, Franco Moretti in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century. This triangulation is traceable throughout this collection of ten essays which David Damrosch and Bhavya Tiwari conceive of in their Introduction as “interanimations” (1).

Such conciliatory attempts at interanimating or even reanimating, i.e. resuscitating fields that have been declared dead or dying partly emanated from the proceedings of the Institute of World Literature Conference in Tokyo in 2018. Discussion was ignited by Pheng Cheah whose *What Is a World? On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature* (2016) is a witty rebuke to David Damrosch’s foundational book, *What is World Literature?* (2003). It is therefore fitting that “the World” as “universal human intercourse” (8) be featured inaugurally in an edited transcript of the “Conversation” that took place between Damrosch and Cheah, incidentally a student of Benedict Anderson’s. While Cheah concedes being heir to the hegemonic lineage of Goethe’s quasi-spiritualist project

of *Weltliteratur*, he casts postcolonial literature as “an exemplary case of world literature” in that “it seeks to participate in worldling processes” (10) presumably with a nod to Edward Said’s use of “worldliness” in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983).

In his *Conversation with David Damrosch*, Cheah also chastises Emily Apter’s *Against World Literature* (2013) and *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World Literature* (2015) by the Warwick Research Collective for conceiving of Literature as an inexorable conduit for Global Capitalism. The Warwick Collective’s current project to deploy further ammunition towards a “Red World Literature” taking into account working class writing would probably irritate Cheah even more. Cheah does not mention Eric Auerbach’s seminal 1969 essay on “Philology and *Weltliteratur*” but, tellingly, its publication is concurrent with Marxist novelist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s, lo Liyong’s and Anyumbe’s original rallying call to foreground African languages at the expense of English in post-independent Kenya. It is also no wonder that Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s 2012 call for *Globalectics* starts with an endorsement of Auerbach’s pronouncement that “our philological home is the earth, it can no longer be the nation” (Auerbach 1). Such attempts at “worldling” literature have however been viewed by postcolonialist critics as a depoliticization of postcolonial theory.

The phrase “Comparative Literature,” whose comparatist methodology was born out of *Weltliteratur*, holds pride of place in the first two essays (by Blaž Zabel and Byron Byrne-Taylor respectively) on two figures on the edge of Empire: Hutcheson Macauley Posnett, the author of the 1886 book, *Comparative Literature*, who gave the discipline its name and whose Irishness locates him on the margins of the British Empire, and Immanuel Kant whose 1784 essay “What is Enlightenment?” was shaped by his subaltern status in the Russian Empire. However, can we call Posnett and Kant “postcolonial” before the letter? Almost but not quite. Although Zabel acknowledges Posnett’s “cosmopolitan humanity” (44) and the breadth of Posnett’s literary federation ranging from Native American poetry to Chinese literature, Posnett’s model of evolution identified national literature as “the highest stage of literary development” (39). Admittedly, this is hard to reconcile with Posnett’s support of Home Rule (that is, against Irish separatism) and the postcolonialist sense of a “disjuncture” (Appadurai) between the nation (as initially a language-based identity) and the state as well as Homi K. Bhabha’s ‘cultural hybrids’ transcending the notion of nation. However, Posnett remains sympathetic to the literatures of the

world rather than to the 'World Literature' of a dispersed literary elite. Likewise, Taylor's reinstatement of Kant as a "colonized inhabitant" (53) in occupied Königsberg provides a cautionary tale as Kant's un-enlightened statements about "The Negroes of Africa" lacking feeling and intelligence (65) considerably enfeeble his pseudo-postcolonial stance.

European peripheries are then explored through Coral Lumbley's essay on premodern traditions through a study of the Medieval Welsh *Mabinogion* and its English translation by Lady Charlotte Guest, and Vedran Ćatović's essay on Bosnia under Ottoman and then Austria-Hungarian rule in Bosnian-born Croat Nobel Prize winner Ivo Andrić. However, Andrić's focus on the "small town" of Travnik as the locus of Damroschian "localised globalism" (99) occludes, by Ćatović's own reckoning, "the subject of colonialism with an aim to righteously resist the presence of the hegemonic empire" (96). Andrić even describes the cosmopolitan comfort of Bosnians who had embraced Islam under Ottoman rule, which again, by Ćatović's own admission, "curtails the applicability of a clearcut postcolonial paradigm" (97). Likewise, Lumbley wishes, in the wake of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's *The Postcolonial Middle Ages* (2000) as well as Kathleen Davis and Nadia Altschul's *Medievalisms in the Postcolonial World* (2010), to move forward the idea of the literature of ancient Britons displaced by Anglo-Saxon settlement as Welsh "postcolonial world literature." But can one claim that Welsh literature was "always already postcolonial" (72) solely through its co-optation into an English "imagined community"?

South-south literary relations are then examined in four essays: Shaden M. Tageldin's essay on how Rabindranath Tagore's visit to Egypt in the mid-1920s caused the advent of "comparative literature" in Egypt; Ben Holgate's essay on Australian novelist Richard Flanagan; Nathanael Pree's contribution on competing imperialisms in Australian novelist Alex Miller compared to W.G. Sebald; and Daniel Behar's essay on the role of translated poetry in a major Syrian journal.

Tageldin asks: "is there a *world literature* that is not always already a comparative literature?" (109). He provides part of the answer in locating "the Problem of World Literature at the Hinge of Afroeurasia," which hints at cross-cultural encounters. In Port Saïd in 1926, Egyptian *littérateur* Ahmad Zaki Abū Shādī met the Bengali polymath Tagore, which inspired Abū Shādī to write his 1928 essay on *al-adab-al-'alami* (world literature) in Arabic, a decade before his other essay on comparative literature. As it turns out, Abū Shādī ventriloquized as his own parts of the English translation by British scholar Isabel T. Lublin

of an 1869 study of German national literature by Hermann Kluge but, barring allegations of plagiarism, Abū Shādī's use of "world literature" seems to come from Tagore's 1907 lecture in Calcutta, *Bishwasabitya*, translated from the Bengali as "World Literature," as relayed to Abū Shādī during his Egyptian spree. However, Abū Shādī soon came to realize that Tagore knew no Arabic-language poets so that World Literature worked only one way along an East-West divide. The final irony rests with the Sorbonne-trained Egyptian comparatist Muhammad Ghunaymi Hilāl who credits Tagore, not his compatriot Abū Shādī, with pioneering the discipline of Comparative Literature. Because of its re-routing through India and Egypt, this essay is one of the most compelling attempts to bridge World Literature and postcolonial studies, possibly because it traces a meandering genealogy within the Global South.

As readers near the end of the volume, they get closer to the postcolonial by considering the collapse of the East-West dichotomy, already dismantled through previous routes like the silk roads. *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, Richard Flanagan's 2013 novel, is such a route. Holgate accounts for the Australian protagonist's forced labor as a Prisoner of War on the Thai-Burma 'Death Railway' in the Japanese penal colony. While the approach owes a lot to Moretti's idea of "literary maps" as Holgate refers the reader to an intersectional graph of three empires – the British, the Dutch, and the Japanese empires, he also usefully builds on Lauren Doyle's "inter-imperial" identities (2014), thereby dissolving "arbitrary Orientalist boundaries between 'East' and 'West'" (149). Along the same re-routing lines, Nathanael Pree, using Michael Rothberg's "multidirectional memory" (2009), pores on "acts of remembrance" of colonialism in English-born Australian writer Alex Miller and the German-born, English novelist W.G. Sebald. These mnemonic acts help Pree retrace intertextual trajectories through Brussels (Joseph Conrad's "whited sepulchre" in *Heart of Darkness*), Indigenous Australia, and the eroded coast of East Anglia studded with "African masks" and "safari trophies" (qtd 135). Daniel Behar examines a state-owned Syrian journal, *Al-Adab Al-Ajanbiyya* (Foreign Literatures, 1974-2005) inspired by periodicals in Soviet Bloc countries. Behar attempts to unearth autonomous artistic voices in a Journal rooted in an Arab-socialist culture that served as a platform for "literary translation and world literature during Hafez al-Asad's reign in power (1970–2000)" (172). Such artistic autonomy is achieved through translation, albeit bowdlerized as in Lawrence Ferlinghetti's Beatnik-inflected *Coney Island*

of the Mind (1958) or the writing of Bulgarian poets such as Hristo Botev, hallowed with saintly martyrdom under Ottoman occupation, or Nikola Vaptsarov for his communist resistance to the pro-fascist Bulgarian regime during the Second World War. Behar concludes on the future of Syrian literature as World Literature while “transforming the mundane materiality of postcolonial existence into poetic being” (195).

The last two essays deal with multilingualism with Bhavya Tiwari’s plea for a “comparative, translational, provincial, multilingual, and worldly” approach (199) to the Indian novel in English and in other languages such as Hindi in post-millennial India, and Mtylda Figlerowicz’s analysis of three novels written in Spanish, Mayan, and Basque. All three novels – Ramon Saizarbitoria’s Basque *Hamaika pauso* (Countless Steps, 1995); Roberto Bolaño’s Spanish *2666* (2004), Sol Ceh Moo’s Mayan *Sujuy k’iin* (Unspoiled Day 2011) – all display a shaky, multilingual scaffold, yet foreground “ultramajor literatures” such as Mayan writing within the already “minor literature” of Mexico (217) or Basque which is not a nation-state language. The minority languages featured in this volume such as Welsh, *ekavica* (a dialect predominant in Serbia), or Basque point to the demoticism that I find lacking in World Literature. But these minority languages are all European. Tiwari fills the gap by gesturing towards other languages than English in Indian literature and by tackling “call-centre literature” in “text-message” style (203). Also, the collection’s cover illustration of a bespectacled bookseller (looking directly at the camera) and his wares on College Street in Kolkata, which boasts the world’s largest market for used books, might gesture towards this demotic outlook.

“Including the postcolonial” in Lumbley’s essay (75), as well as in most essays in this collection, confirms a recurrent bias according to which the field of postcolonial literature is subservient to that of World Literature. The two should reach “a middle ground” (Behar 171) in order for postcolonial literature not to remain “a case of world literature” (Cheah 10). Tiwari even identifies “a moment” – the publication of Marxist critic Fredric Jameson’s “Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational capitalism” (1986) – when postcolonial theory transforms into Anglophone World Literature (210). The assumption is that postcolonial literatures have a subaltern status to that of World Literature, which has a *world*, let alone a globe. This may be due to the perception of postcolonial theory as an exclusively “Anglo-American” field (e.g. Tiwari, 200) which prevails at the expense of postcolonial *literatures* and the way they became an object of scientific scrutiny. Tellingly, the fact that *Weltliteratur* has

ignored colonialism led to a parting of ways and may explain the birth of postcolonial literature in its early guise, Commonwealth Literature and its corollary theories. One must remember that the ancestor to postcolonial literary studies, which was then called Commonwealth Literature, was inaugurated in 1967 at the University of Leeds, where ACLALS, the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, was also founded, in the aftermath of the independence of 'third-world' nation-states. Moreover, 1967 is also the year when "postcolonialism" enters the *MLA International Bibliography*. In 1967, Gayatri Spivak was getting her doctorate from Cornell under the supervision of the Belgian-born Paul de Man. In 1967, in the aftermath of the six-day war between Israel and its Arab neighbors, Edward Said was busy revising the Israel-Palestinian conflict for the benefit of American news media. In 1967, Homi K. Bhabha was eighteen years old and ready to embark on a B.A. at the University of Mumbai. None of them knew of or, if they knew, never acknowledged the roots of what was to become "postcolonial theory," which they claim theirs or was foisted upon them.

The collection's lead editor, Bhavya Tiwari, is optimistic in her plea to restore the "good old word *comparativism*" (202), which helps dissolve tensions between World Literature and postcolonial theory and "go beyond English" (212) and envisage a "post-postcolonial world literature" (212). However, as Robert J. C. Young and others have emphasized many a time, *historicity* is what differentiates postcolonial literature from World Literature. And that historicity involves a grappling with colonialism and its after-effects as well as its present-day avatars. It remains that Tiwari and Damrosch's wish for increased "intersections of postcolonial and world literary studies" (5) cannot result in World Literature's quasi-chemical adsorption whereby the postcolonial molecules would adhere to the 'solid surface' of World Literature. And if they ever were to do so, they would not disappear without a quantic fight.

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Isabelle Durand est professeure de littérature comparée à l'Université de Bretagne Sud (Lorient) et s'intéresse particulièrement aux rapports entre littérature et histoire. Elle a publié *Le Moyen Âge des romantiques* (2001), *Images du Moyen Âge* (dir., 2007), *Le roman historique* (2008), *Charlemagne, empereur et mythe d'Occident* (en collaboration avec Bernard Ribémont, Klincksieck, 2009), *Le roman de la Révolution. L'écriture romanesque des révolutions de Victor Hugo à George Orwell* (2012) ainsi que des articles en relation avec ces différentes problématiques. Ses recherches s'orientent également vers les figures mythiques, issues de l'imaginaire et de l'histoire, transformées par la littérature, tout particulièrement le roman.

Manfred Engel, currently Professor Emeritus of Modern German Literature, Saarland University, Saarbrücken, Germany, held professorships in Hagen and Oxford, was co-director of the ICLA Research-Committee “DreamCultures: Cultural and Literary History of the Dream” (www.dreamcultures.org). Selected publications include: *Rilke-Handbuch* (co-ed. with Dorothea Lauterbach, 2004); *Kafka-Handbuch* (co-ed. with Bernd Auerochs, 2010); *Making – or Not Making – Sense of Dreams* (co-ed. with Bernard Dieterle and Laura Vordermayer, 2024).

Frank England studied theology, literary theory and art history. He is an honorary research associate at the University of Cape Town, South Africa and has authored *Fictions of God* (2020).

Vanessa Frangville est professeure en Etudes chinoises à l'Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB), fondatrice du centre de recherche sur l'Asie de l'est à l'ULB (EASt). Elle a été directrice de la Maison des sciences humaines de l'ULB de 2023 à 2025. Ses principaux domaines de recherche sont les politiques ethniques en Chine, l'analyse des productions culturelles et artistiques des non-Han en Chine et dans la diaspora.

Jeanne E. Glesener is Associate Professor of Luxembourgish Literature at the University of Luxembourg. She is a member of the Coordinating Committee for the Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages (CHLEL) of the AILC / ICLA. Her areas of research are multilingual Luxembourgish literature and small literatures in Europe. Her recent publications include *Le corps à l'œuvre. Créer, vivre, interagir* (2024) with Paul Dirckx and Bruno Trentini; *European Literatures of Military Occupation. Shared Experience, Shifting Boundaries, and Aesthetic Affections* (2024), with Matthias Buschmeier; *Weltliteratur und Kleine Literaturen* (2022), with Oliver Kohns and *Le milieu littéraire et ses représentations* (2022) with Carole Bisenius-Penin.

Anthony Glinoyer est professeur à l'université de Sherbrooke (Québec). Ses travaux ont porté principalement sur l'histoire de l'édition, sur l'étude des représentations de la vie littéraire et sur les groupes d'écrivains et d'artistes du XIX^e siècle à nos jours. Son dernier livre est sorti en 2024 sous le titre *Être éditeur. Histoire, discours, imaginaires*. Il est co-directeur du Groupe de recherches et d'études sur le livre au Québec (GRÉLQ) et dirige la revue *Mémoires du livre / Studies in Book Culture*.

Mathieu Govaerts is a PhD candidate at the Université libre de Bruxelles under the supervision of Dr Franca Bellarsi and at the University of Cambridge under the supervision of Prof. Alex Houen. He now dedicates himself to research in the fields of Beat literature, English Romanticism, and their confluences, especially with regard to eco-spirituality. His thesis is tentatively entitled "From Spinozist Ecosophy to Buddhist Eco-Spirituality: The Beat Generation's Neo-Romantic Nature Philosophy." His first published article, "The Threshold of Ecstasy: Is 'Siesta in Xbalba' Another 'Mont Blanc'?" is available in the 2024 issue of *Recherche littéraire / Literary Research*.

Stephen Hahn is Emeritus professor of English at William Paterson University (Wayne, NJ). He currently teaches on the faculty of the Maine Coastal Senior College (Newcastle, ME, USA). He serves on the executive council of the William Carlos Williams Society and the editorial advisory board of the William Carlos Williams Review. He has published a number of essays on the poetry of William Carlos Williams, most recently on the theme of aging in his work. He is currently working on Williams's prose writing of the mid-1920s to 1930s.

Marko Juvan, MAE, is Senior Researcher at the ZRC SAZU Institute of Slovenian Literature and Literary Studies, Professor of Literary Theory at the University of Ljubljana, and principal investigator of an EU-funded research project at Lucian Blaga University in Sibiu. His recent publications include the books *Worlding a Peripheral Literature* (2019) and *Zadnja sezona modernizma in maj'68* (*The Last Season of Modernism and May '68*, Ljubljana, 2023) as well as edited volumes such as *World Literatures From the Nineteenth to the Twenty-First Century* (2013) and *Prostori slovenske književnosti* (*The Spaces of Slovenian Literature*, 2016).

Alexia Kalantzis est docteure en littérature française et comparée et enseigne à l'université Paris Cité. Ses recherches portent sur les liens entre le symbolisme et les avant-gardes, ainsi que sur les circulations et traductions dans les périodiques artistiques et littéraires (domaines français, allemand, italien et anglais). Elle a récemment co-dirigé avec Evanghelia Stead un numéro de la *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, « 'Petites revues', grande presse et édition à la fin du xix^e siècle » (2020) et anime le séminaire PÉLiAS (Périodiques, Littérature, Arts, Sciences) depuis 2018.

Benedikts Kalnačs is Senior Researcher at the Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, University of Latvia, Riga. He is a member of the publications committee for the Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages (CHLEL) series of the AILC / ICLA. Principal research areas are 19th and 20th century Latvian literature, comparative literature, and postcolonial studies. Recent publications include: *The Politics of Literary History: Literary Historiography in Russia, Latvia, the Czech Republic and Finland after 1990* (ed., with Liisa Steinby, Mikhail Oshukov, and Viola Parente-Čapková, 2024) and *A New History of Latvian Literature: The Long Nineteenth Century* (ed., with Pauls Daija, 2022).

Léa Koenig mène des recherches doctorales sur les enjeux internationaux des évolutions au sein de la presse culturelle dans l'espace francophone européen sous la co-direction de Dominique Marchetti (Centre européen de sociologie et de science politique, CNRS) et de Paul Dirx (Université de Lille). Elle est chargée de cours à l'Université de Lorraine et à Science Po, où elle enseigne la sociologie et l'anthropologie. Elle a participé au projet Coréage (Corps des écrivains et des artistes : génétique et esthétique, Université de Lorraine, 2020–2022). Ses recherches sont articulées à des

projets artistiques. En 2023, elle a réalisé *Nakautuat*, un film sur une communauté autochtone au Canada.

Florence Magnot-Ogilvy est professeure à l'Université Rennes 2 et se spécialise dans la littérature française du XVIII^e siècle. Parmi ses publications, on peut citer *La Pauvreté au féminin. Mendiante et pauvresses dans la fiction des XVIII^e et XIX^e siècles* (avec Stéphane Pujol, 2024), ainsi que *Spectres de la faim* (2024).

Buata B. Malela est enseignant-chercheur à l'Université de Mayotte et membre du laboratoire RIRRA21 de l'Université de Montpellier Paul-Valéry. Ses travaux portent sur les littératures francophones (Europe, Afrique, Antilles, océan Indien) et les musiques populaires urbaines contemporaines. Il s'intéresse particulièrement aux discours littéraires et culturels francophones et a notamment publié *Les Écrivains afro-antillais à Paris (1920–1960) : Stratégies et postures identitaires* (2008) ; *Aimé Césaire et la relecture de la colonialité du pouvoir* (2019) ; *La Réinvention de l'écrivain francophone contemporain*, (2019) ; *Édouard Glissant. Du poète au penseur* (2020) ; ainsi que *Les voix de l'archipel. Une histoire littéraire des Comores* (2024).

Carsten Meiner is Professor of French literature at the university of Copenhagen in the department of English, German and romance studies. He specializes in French literary history with a particular interest in places, spaces and topoi and their historical literary roles. His recent publications include. *The Literary Beach. The History and Aesthetics of a Modern Topos* (2024).

Jean-Marc Moura est professeur émérite de littératures francophones et de littérature comparée à l'Université de Paris Nanterre et membre honoraire de l'Institut Universitaire de France. Ses travaux portent sur l'exotisme, les lettres francophones et postcoloniales, l'humour en littérature et la littérature mondiale. Il a récemment publié *La Totalité littéraire. Théories et enjeux de la littérature mondiale* (2023). En collaboration avec Chloé Chaudet et Stefania Cubeddu-Proux, il a co-dirigé le volume *L'Atlantique littéraire au féminin* (2021). Avec Chloé Chaudet et José Luis Jobim, il a co-dirigé *Questions comparatistes vues du Sud* (2024).

Marcella Rubino est maîtresse de conférences en langue et littérature arabes à l'Inalco de Paris, où elle coordonne la L1 d'arabe. Elle préside le

comité de pilotage du programme des Bourses arabisantes. Ses recherches portent sur le roman arabe contemporain, en particulier égyptien, irakien et soudanais. Elle est également traductrice littéraire. Elle a publié notamment : *Religion et violence dans l'oeuvre de Yusuf Zaydan* (2023) et *Les Noyées du Nil*, une traduction du roman de Hammour Ziada (2022).

Niklas Salmose is Professor of Literatures in English at Linnaeus University, Sweden. He is a member of The Linnaeus University Centre of Intermedial and Multimodal Studies. His research revolves around nostalgia, intermediality, ecocriticism, F. Scott Fitzgerald and modernism. His latest publications are *F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Composite Biography* (2024), *Intermedial Ecocriticism: The Climate Crisis Through Art and Media* (co-written with Jørgen Bruhn, 2024), *Mediations of Nostalgia: Experience, Intermediality, Aesthetics* (2025), and *Gatsby@100* (co-edited with David Rennie, 2025).

Christophe Schuwey est maître de conférences en humanités numériques et histoire du livre à l'Université de Bretagne Sud. Ses recherches portent sur le marketing et la littérature du XVII^e siècle, la circulation de l'information et son contrôle étatique dans l'Ancien régime, ainsi que sur les transferts culturels entre la France et l'Angleterre. Il est l'auteur d'*Un entrepreneur des lettres au XVII^e siècle* (2020), de *L'Atlas Molière* (2022) ainsi que de *La Bruyère et le livre* (à paraître). Il est également un théoricien et un praticien des humanités numériques, et a publié dans ce domaine *Interfaces : l'apport des humanités numériques à la littérature* (2019).

Diana Shahin is a postgraduate researcher with a PhD in English from the University of Birmingham. Her area of research includes the portrayal of Arabs in Anglophone literature and the application of postcolonial, cross-cultural and feminist theories in research that can contribute to a better understanding of the representation of female identity in Arab countries and diaspora. Her most recent work, a PhD thesis entitled "Breaking Out of the House of Silence: Female Voices and Trauma in Arab Women's Anglophone Fiction," investigates the communicative functions of female silence in contemporary Arab women's fiction.

Michaela Schrage-Früh is Associate Professor in German Studies and Director of the Centre for European Studies at the University of Limerick,

Ireland. Her research interests include German and comparative literature, cultural dream studies, and cultural ageing studies. She is the author of *Philosophy, Dreaming and the Literary Imagination* (2016) and co-editor, with Hannah Ahlheim, of volume 5 (The Modern Age, 1860–1945) of *The Cultural History of Sleep and Dreaming* (2026).

Chantal Zabus is Professor of Comparative Postcolonial and Gender Studies at the University Sorbonne Paris Nord, France and affiliated with the Paris-based CEPED (UMR 196) Research Centre on the Global South. She is the author of four monographs and is currently working on *POST-I.D.: Literatures of Relationality in the Anthropocene*. Her last collection, co-edited with Chris Dunton, *TransAfrica: The Languages of Post-Queerness*, came out in March 2025 with Bloomsbury. She is the Editor-in-Chief of the first journal on postcolonial studies online, *Postcolonial Text* (www.postcolonial.org).

Literary Research Stylesheet

SUBMISSIONS IN ENGLISH

1. General Formatting

All works should be submitted in Microsoft Word or .rtf format. Images should be sent preferably in jpeg format with a minimum quality of 300 dpi. Please use Times New Roman font throughout the text, size 12 point, and 1.5 line spacing.

Indent each new paragraph; do not insert a blank line between paragraphs.

The first page should feature the title of the submission, an approximately 250-word abstract in English, and 5 to 6 keywords in English. Please send a short biography in a different file.

2. Spelling Conventions

Submissions in English must choose British or American spelling (e.g. “-ize” vs “-ise”) conventions and follow them consistently throughout.

Use only **one space** after periods and colons. Do not capitalise the word following colons.

Numbers up to twenty should be written out in full. After twenty, please use figures.

Centuries should be written out in full as well. For decades, give full number: 1930s (not 30s or '30s, “thirties,” or “Thirties”).

3. In-text Citations

Please place the quoted passage/word(s) within double quotation marks. Reference the name and the page reference(s) of the author(s) within parenthesis. Examples:

It was perhaps first put into circulation 30 years ago by Salman Rushdie in his observation that “having been borne across the world, we are translated men” (Rushdie 17).

Intersectionality has been accused of breaking “groups into even-smaller sub-groups” (Collins and Bilge 127).

In case of several sources by the same author(s), indicate in the parenthesis the first word or group of words of the work cited. Books are italicised; articles are placed within double quotation marks:

(Hall *Theorizing* 244)

(Hall “Cultural” 235; qtd. in Smith 257)

(Fairbank *Trade and Diplomacy* 27)

Please **indent** quotes of 5 lines and more.

Indicate **n.p.** in case of no pagination. Ellipses in quotes are marked by [...].

Please do not use “*Id.*,” “*Ibid.*,” “*Op.cit.*” and other similar abbreviations to refer to a previously cited source. For clarification’s sake, please **repeat the source** (name and/or title).

Footnotes are for additional comments only and should be used sparingly. Do not use endnotes.

4. List of Works Cited

The list of works cited appears at the end of the article (not in the notes). The works are sorted in alphabetical order by author and in chronological order of publication in the case of several sources by the same author(s). The first and last names of all authors should be included in full.

For sources written in **French**: use “et” to associate two or several co-authors/co-editors, and “dir.” to refer to the editor(s).

For formatting and punctuation standards, please see the following examples:

Books:

Alayrac-Fielding, Vanessa. *La Chine dans l’imaginaire anglais des Lumières, 1685–1798*. Paris : Presses de l’Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2016.

- Deleuze, Gilles et Félix Guattari. *Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure*. Paris: Minuit, 1975.
- Brown, Wendy. *States of Inquiry: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.
- Parker, Richard and Peter Aggleton. *Culture, Society and Sexuality: A Reader*. London: University College London Press, 1999.
- Lahiri, Jhumpa. *In Other Words*. Trans. Ann Goldstein. London: Bloomsbury, 2015.

Edited Books:

- Alayrac-Fielding, Vanessa, dir. *Rêver la Chine. Chinoiseries et regards croisés entre la Chine et l'Europe aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles*. Tourcoing : Invenit, 2017.
- Dominguez Leiva, Antonio et Muriel Détrie, dir. *Le Supplice oriental dans la littérature et les arts*. Dijon : Éditions du Murmure, 2005.
- Carroll, John B., ed. *Language, Thought, Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1956.
- Maryks, Robert A. and Jonathan Wright, eds. *Jesuit Survival and Restoration: A Global History, 1773–1900*. Leiden: Brill, 2014.

Book Chapters:

- Marx, Jacques. « La Chine des physiocrates ». *Le Mythe de la Chine impériale*. Dir. Colette Camelin et Philippe Postel. Paris : Honoré Champion, 2013. 23–58.
- Hall, Stuart. “Cultural Identity and Diaspora.” *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*. Ed. Jonathan Rutherford. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990. 222–37.
- Rattansi, Ali. “Just Framing: Ethnicities and Racisms in a ‘Postmodern’ Framework.” *Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics*. Eds. Linda Nicholson and Steven Seidman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. 250–86.

The name of publishers is written in full:

Berkeley: University of California Press

Journal Articles:

- Moura, Jean-Marc. « Anti-utopie et péril jaune au tournant du siècle. Quelques exemples romanesques ». *Orients extrêmes. Les carnets de l'exotisme* 15–16 (1995) : 83–92.
- Ibrahim, Hanan. “The Question of Arab ‘Identity’ in Amin Maalouf’s *Les Désorientés*.” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 54.6 (2018): 835–47.
- O’Brien, Michelle. “English as Racial Embodiment in Shirley Lim’s *Joss and Gold*.” *Postcolonial Text* 12.2 (2017): 1–19. <http://postcolonial.org/index.php/pct/article/view/2176/2087>. Accessed 15 Aug. 2020.

Normes de présentation de *Recherche littéraire*

SOUMISSIONS EN FRANCAIS

1. Présentation et mise en page

Tous les manuscrits doivent être soumis au format Microsoft Word ou .rtf. Les images doivent être envoyées de préférence au format jpeg avec une qualité minimale de 300 dpi. Veuillez utiliser la police Times New Roman dans tout le texte, taille 12 points et interligne 1,5.

Chaque nouveau paragraphe doit être mis en retrait ; n'insérez pas de ligne vide entre les paragraphes.

Sur la première page doivent figurer le titre de l'article (et sa traduction en anglais), un résumé d'environ 250 mots et 5 ou 6 mots-clés, le tout en français et en anglais. Une courte biographie en français devra être envoyée séparément.

2. Conventions orthographiques

Les nombres jusqu'à vingt doivent être écrits en toutes lettres. Après vingt, veuillez utiliser des chiffres.

Les siècles sont écrits en chiffres romains (« XX^e siècle »). Pour les décennies, indiquez le nombre complet : « les années 1930 » (et non « les années 30 »).

Le mot suivant deux points ne prend pas de majuscule.

3. Citations dans le corps du texte

Placez le(s) passage(s) cité(s) entre guillemets. Faites référence au(x) nom(s) et à la /aux page(s) entre parenthèses. Exemples :

La Loubère (1642-1729), envoyé extraordinaire de Louis XIV auprès du roi du Siam : « Un Ambassadeur par tout l'Orient n'est autre qu'un messenger de

Roy : il ne représente point son Maistre. On l'honore peu à comparaison des respects, qu'on porte à la lettre de créance, dont il est porteur » (La Loubère 327-28).

« Tout peut coexister avec tout », proclamait crânement Haroldo de Campos dans l'une de ces formules incisives qui ont fait sa réputation (Campos « Da razão antropofágica » 244)

En cas de plusieurs sources du/de la/des même(s) auteur-e-s, indiquez entre parenthèses le premier mot ou groupe de mots de l'ouvrage cité. Les livres apparaissent en italique ; les articles sont placés entre guillemets :

(Hall *Theorizing* 244)

(Hall "Cultural" 235; cité dans Smith 257)

(Fairbank *Trade and Diplomacy* 27)

Les citations de 5 lignes et plus sont mises en **retrait**.

L'absence de pagination est indiquée par **n.p.** Les ellipses dans les citations sont marquées par [...].

Veillez ne pas utiliser « *Id.* », « *Ibid.* », « *Op.cit.* » et autres abréviations similaires pour faire référence à une source précédemment citée. Pour des raisons de clarté, veuillez **répéter la source** comme décrit ci-dessus (nom, titre si nécessaire, et page).

Les **notes de bas de page** sont uniquement destinées à des commentaires supplémentaires et doivent être utilisées avec parcimonie. N'utilisez pas de notes de fin.

4. Bibliographie

La liste des ouvrages cités figure en fin d'article (et non dans les notes). Les ouvrages sont triés par ordre alphabétique des auteur-e-s et par ordre chronologique de parution en cas de plusieurs sources par le/la/les même-s auteur-e-s. Tous les noms et prénoms sont repris dans leur intégralité.

Dans les sources en français, « et » associe deux ou plusieurs contributeur-e-s ; « dir. » se réfère au(x) rédacteur(s). Inversement, « and » et « ed./eds » sont utilisés pour les sources rédigées en anglais.

Pour les normes de présentation et ponctuation, veuillez consulter les exemples ci-dessous :

Livres (à seul·e auteur·e ou avec co-auteur·e·s) :

- Alayrac-Fielding, Vanessa. *La Chine dans l'imaginaire anglais des Lumières, 1685–1798*. Paris : Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2016.
- Deleuze, Gilles et Félix Guattari. *Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure*. Paris: Minuit, 1975.
- Brown, Wendy. *States of Inquiry: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.
- Parker, Richard and Peter Aggleton. *Culture, Society and Sexuality: A Reader*. London: University College London Press, 1999.
- Lahiri, Jhumpa. *In Other Words*. Trad. Ann Goldstein. London: Bloomsbury, 2015.

Ouvrages collectifs :

- Alayrac-Fielding, Vanessa, dir. *Rêver la Chine. Chinoiseries et regards croisés entre la Chine et l'Europe aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles*. Tourcoing : Invenit, 2017.
- Dominguez Leiva, Antonio et Muriel Détrie, dir. *Le Supplice oriental dans la littérature et les arts*. Dijon : Éditions du Murmure, 2005.
- Carroll, John B., ed. *Language, Thought, Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1956.
- Maryks, Robert A. and Jonathan Wright, eds. *Jesuit Survival and Restoration: A Global History, 1773–1900*. Leiden: Brill, 2014.

Chapitre de livre :

- Marx, Jacques. « La Chine des physiocrates ». *Le Mythe de la Chine impériale*. Dir. Colette Camelin et Philippe Postel. Paris : Honoré Champion, 2013. 23–58.
- Hall, Stuart. “Cultural Identity and Diaspora.” *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*. Ed. Jonathan Rutherford. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990. 222–37.
- Rattansi, Ali. “Just Framing: Ethnicities and Racisms in a ‘Postmodern’ Framework.” *Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics*. Eds. Linda Nicholson and Steven Seidman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. 250–86.

Le nom des éditeurs est écrit en toutes lettres :

University of California Press ; Presses Universitaires de France

Article dans une revue périodique :

Moura, Jean-Marc. « Anti-utopie et péril jaune au tournant du siècle.

Quelques exemples romanesques ». *Orients extrêmes. Les carnets de l'exotisme* 15–16 (1995) : 83–92.

Ibrahim, Hanan. “The Question of Arab ‘Identity’ in Amin Maalouf’s *Les Désorientés*.” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 54.6 (2018): 835–47.

O’Brien, Michelle. “English as Racial Embodiment in Shirley Lim’s *Joss and Gold*.” *Postcolonial Text* 12.2 (2017): 1–19. <http://postcolonial.org/index.php/pct/article/view/2176/2087>. Accessed 15 Aug. 2020.

BRÈVE PRÉSENTATION DE L'AILC

Fondée en 1955, l'Association Internationale de Littérature Comparée (AILC) offre un lieu d'accueil à tou-te-s les comparatistes dans le monde et encourage les échanges et la coopération entre les comparatistes, tant à un niveau individuel que par l'intermédiaire de la collaboration avec diverses associations nationales de littérature comparée. Dans ce but, l'Association promeut les études littéraires au-delà des frontières de langues et des traditions littéraires nationales, entre les cultures et les régions du monde, entre les disciplines et les orientations théoriques, et à travers les genres, les périodes historiques et les médias. Sa vision large de la recherche comparatiste s'étend à l'étude de sites de la différence comme la race, le genre, la sexualité, la classe sociale, l'ethnicité et la religion, à la fois dans les textes et dans l'univers quotidien.

L'Association vise à être inclusive et est ouverte à tou-te-s celles et ceux qui s'intéressent à la littérature comparée, y compris les écrivain-e-s et les artistes. Elle encourage la participation d'étudiant-e-s de master et doctorat et de jeunes chercheuses et chercheurs en début de carrière.

L'Association organise un Congrès mondial tous les trois ans. Elle supervise et apporte son soutien à des comités de recherche qui reflètent les intérêts actuels des membres et qui se réunissent plus régulièrement pour mettre en œuvre des programmes conduisant à des publications dans des périodiques et des livres. La revue annuelle de l'Association, *Recherche littéraire / Literary Research* publie des essais de recherche et propose des comptes rendus d'un grand nombre de travaux scientifiques dans le domaine.

ICLA MISSION STATEMENT

Founded in 1955, the International Comparative Literature Association (ICLA) offers a home to all comparatists in the world and encourages exchange and cooperation among comparatists, both individually and through the collaboration of various national comparative literature associations. To that end, the Association promotes literary studies beyond the boundaries of languages and national literary traditions, cultures and world regions, among disciplines and theoretical orientations, and across genres, historical periods, and media. Its broad view of comparative research extends to the study of sites of difference such as race gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, and religion in both texts and the everyday world.

The Association aims to be inclusive and is open to anyone with an academic interest in comparative literature, including writers and artists. It welcomes the participation of graduate students and early-career scholars. The Association organizes a world congress every three years. It also oversees and supports research committees that reflect the membership's current interests and meet more regularly to pursue an agenda leading to publications in journals and books. The Association's annual journal *Recherche littéraire / Literary Research* publishes research essays and reviews a wide range of scholarship in the field.

**Comités de recherche de l'AILC /
ICLA Research Committees
(2022–2025)**

**I. COMITÉS DE RECHERCHE PERMANENTS/
STANDING RESEARCH COMMITTEES**

**Comité de recherche sur les littératures et cultures de l'Asie du Sud/
Research Committee on South Asian Literatures and Cultures**

Co-directeur/Co-chair: E.V. Ramakrishnan, Central University of
Gujarat (India)

Evrama51@gmail.com

**Comité de recherche sur les études comparatistes de genre/
Research Committee on Comparative Gender Studies**

Présidente/President: Tegan Zimmerman, Saint Mary's University/
Mount Saint Vincent University (Canada)

Tegan@ualberta.ca

**Comité de recherche sur l'histoire comparée des littératures de l'Asie
orientale/ Research Committee on the Comparative History of East
Asian Literatures**

Directeur/Chair: Haun Saussy, University of Chicago (USA)

hsaussy@uchicago.edu

Comité de recherche sur l'histoire comparée des littératures en langues européennes (CHLEL)/Research Committee on Comparative Histories of Literature in European Languages (CHLEL)

Présidente/President: Helga Mitterbauer, Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB, Belgium)

Helga.Mitterbauer@ulb.be

For additional information about CHLEL, please consult:

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